



External Assessment of Evidence of the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) Impact / Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Data, 30 April 2021

Background

Corra Foundation was approached to undertake a short independent review of the Scotland Malawi Partnership's end of year reporting to Scottish Government. This entailed an assessment of the evidence provided by SMP of progress made towards the five new outcomes outlined in the logframe confirmed in 2020.

This review was of the first year of SMP reporting against this new logframe, which includes the following impact goal and five outcome areas (paraphrased):

Impact: "Increased knowledge of, participation in, and impact of Scotland's civic links with Malawi"

- 1. Mutual understanding, co-ordination, effectiveness and impact – through SMP forum meetings, events and partner events.*
- 2. Awareness of work in Malawi – including promotion of Scottish Government funding, external communications through the bulletin and website, responses to external enquiries, and work to share member expertise across the network.*
- 3. Public awareness and engagement on Scotland-Malawi links – including social and print media and video production.*
- 4. Youth engagement and leadership – including schools, youth committee and youth input to SMP decision-making.*
- 5. Co-ordination and collaboration, mutual assistance – looking at work amongst the three core-funded networks and SMP support for non-governmental input into and promotion of the Scottish Government International Development Strategy.*

As in the previous reviews of SMP annual reporting undertaken by Corra in 2019 and 2020, this review does not constitute a full impact assessment. Rather, it is a two- to three-day exercise comprising a desk-top document review and short consultation meeting which serves to provide an independent assessment of the evidence provided by SMP in reporting on its progress during the year in question, April 2020-March 2021.

The assessment is structured around the SMP logframe and comprises a short narrative report commenting on progress by individual indicator and providing inputs for use in the final logframe report. In terms of information sources, the assessment has considered:

- the documents listed in the annex (all provided to Corra by SMP),
- SMP website and social media content, and,

- a discussion on selected issues highlighted by the document review (an online Teams meeting held on 28 April 2021 between David Hope-Jones, the SMP Chief Executive, and Chrissie Hirst from the Corra Foundation).

These primary sources have been complemented by observations on SMP's work from Corra staff working on international issues and participating in occasional SMP-hosted events or reading/viewing SMP-produced material over the last year, and by occasional observations on SMP shared by other stakeholders, many of which are also Scottish Government and Corra grantholders. However, while knowledge and information gained informally through engagement in the Scottish international development sector have inevitably been relevant for this review of the last year, it should be underlined that Corra did not undertake any specific enquiry or interviews with SMP members in order to gather information or evidence for this review of the SMP reporting.

Comments on MEL Framework and Quality of Data

SMP has put effort into collecting and documenting evidence for its reporting against the specified outcomes: documentation was ordered and detailed, with helpful annotations and explanations provided for approaches to calculation.

A general observation from the review would be that the **new logframe** includes 69 indicators which require information collection and evidencing (a significant increase against 36 in the previous logframe). Some of the language used in defining outcomes and indicators would benefit from tighter focus, particularly for indicators where delivery is not dependent on SMP action alone (e.g. 2.1.1, or 4.7.2 and 4.7.3, which with corrected numbering should be 5.3.2 and 5.3.3), and this would assist measurement and evidencing.

The new logframe also includes reference to **types of quantitative evidence** for a number of indicators which could be helpfully clarified. For example, references to “case study testimonial evidence” (Impact indicator 3, Output Indicator 1.1.5, Output Indicator 1.2.5) and “impact statement case studies” (Output Indicator 2.5.3 on enquiries, Output Indicator 2.6.3 on expertise sharing, Output Indicator 4.1.4 from schools), would be more helpfully clarified to ‘testimonial statements’. Equally, references to “case studies” (Output Indicator 4.4.2) and “case study feedback” (Output 4.6.2 - which with corrected numbering should be 5.3.2) would be helpfully clarified to ‘examples’/‘occurrences’ or ‘testimonial statements’. That notwithstanding, the development of detailed case studies, where SMP support for an individual or organisation in particular area is explored and presented in 2-3 pages incorporating stakeholder contributions and perspectives could be a very helpful exercise to complement quantitative reporting and serve as an illustration of how SMP support has assisted positive change, useful for both annual reporting and member communication.

While it is positive to note that **gender disaggregation** has been introduced to some indicators, which was a recommendation from past reviews, it would also be positive to see disaggregated data and targets introduced more widely. Obvious opportunities where this would be relatively straightforward would be for indicators 4.2.2 schools forum attendees, 4.3.2 youth congress attendees, and 4.5.1 youth members. Whether through disaggregation or deeper dives through gathering qualitative data from members, SMP is also encouraged to consider opportunities for gathering feedback on its work from different groups of members, and this could also prove helpful in informing future consideration of diversity and inclusion issues in SMP’s activities.

In terms of **overall member feedback** to the SMP annual survey, the rate of response remains an area to focus on when approaching this survey in 2022. This 2021 survey had a similar rate of response to the 2020 survey¹ and given its value in informing end of year MEL, SMP is encouraged to explore barriers and consider options to encourage, incentivise or facilitate a higher proportion of responses. Additionally, with the shift to online events and engagement, and the challenges and opportunities this brings for gathering member and event participant feedback, SMP is encouraged to consider adjusted approaches to gathering feedback that could be trialled to

¹ In this 2021 SMP member survey, 76 out of 1,272 members responded; in last year’s 2020 survey, 77 out of 1,225 members responded. At around 6% this is a relatively low rate of response.

complement the formal survey tool, particularly for certain groups (e.g. an instant thumbs up/down rating for youth events or content, short online polls for zoom meetings, etc.). The video presentation of a dedicated review of the Youth Festival was a helpful example, and certainly helped to complement the very positive, but relatively limited, participant survey responses on the Festival.²

² While the very high number of 6,475 engagements in Youth Festival activities (9 school resources, 6 events, 3 podcasts, 2 competitions and 1 new social media channel) indicate over 250,000 people were reached, only 38 completed the feedback survey.

Assessment of Evidence of Specific Outcomes

This review considers the Impact Statement and each SMP 2021-23 logframe Outcome below, reviewing and discussing the evidence provided against each indicator, and on that basis noting a summary and colour-coded remark for insertion into the Year 1 logframe report at the appropriate point/indicator.

Review of Impact Statement: Increased knowledge of, participation in, and impact of Scotland's civic links with Malawi

The three other indicators for this Impact Statement were largely met. The number of SMP members, Impact Indicator 1, has increased from the baseline of 1,250 to 1,272, and while this has not reached the milestone target of 1,300 it is still a significant increase, particularly considering the pandemic context. Progress against Impact Indicator 2, the proportion of SMP members completing the annual survey who feel that the SMP has advanced the impact statement, is a solid 100%, exceeding the 80% target. Impact Indicator 3 concerns evidence of key civic and political leaders from across Scotland and Malawi and there is ample evidence of this shared in the reporting, including of very high-level expressions of support and contribution from the First Minister and the President of Malawi, particularly impressive given these leaders' other pressing priorities of pandemic response. Additional evidence presented in other documents on SMP activities and member feedback is largely very positive and does speak to members increasing their knowledge and increasing participation in links, personal contacts and activities related to Malawi.

An overall point to note is that this is a significant achievement given the context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the dramatic effect this has had on most of the SMP members and their engagement with SMP and Malawi. Pandemic restrictions and 'lockdown' will also have impacted the small SMP team who will have been affected in different ways: end of year reporting indicates that no activity areas were allowed to 'fall behind', that SMP swiftly and successfully managed to transition to online engagement, and that in two areas, Covid-19 response and youth work, SMP thematic work has expanded beyond what was originally planned.

Impact Indicator 4: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP's work in 2020-21 has increased knowledge, participation and the impact of Scotland's civic links with Malawi. In this respect the SMP response to Covid-19 is particularly note-worthy: all significant annual targets were met despite the pandemic context and the SMP undertook substantial additional activity to support and inform pandemic response efforts which member feedback indicates was very valuable.

Review of Outcome 1: Maintain mutual understanding, co-ordination, effectiveness and impact as a result of SMP-hosted activities

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees all targets under Outcome 1 exceeded. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 97%, exceeding the 75% target. When pandemic-related restrictions were first imposed in Spring 2020, the SMP managed a swift transition to digital meetings and events, holding its first online meeting on 31 March and hosting events each month since then. As a result, 13 meetings have been held, significantly more than the target of 9, and the digital format has meant that far more people could participate, with 1,320 attending against a target of 150 and a good gender balance across contributors and participants. Participant feedback has also exceeded targets set at 80%, with 94% of respondents giving meetings a positive rating and 95% stating meetings have strengthened their link with Malawi. The number of testimonial statements collected from participants regarding the positive impact of SMP meetings on their work is 28, also exceeding the target of 15. The total annual attendance at SMP events was 1,966, exceeding the 1,850 target, with a further 969 participants in SMP-supported or partnered events; again, gender balance across participants was well within the target range and participant feedback on both the quality of the event and its effect on strengthening links with Malawi was 96%, exceeding the 80% targets. SMP has also collected numerous testimonial statements from members describing the positive impact SMP membership has had on their links with Malawi.

Outcome Indicator 1.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP-hosted activities in 2020-21 have contributed to mutual understanding, co-ordination, effectiveness and impact. Of particular note is the SMP's swift shift to online work and digital engagement which has seen the number of events and participation expand and extend beyond that previously anticipated.

Review of Outcome 2: Maintain awareness and understanding amongst key stakeholders of governmental and civil society work with Malawi

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees almost all targets under Outcome 2 exceeded. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 99%, exceeding the 75% target. All Scottish Government funding announcements for Malawi were promoted by SMP updates, and targets were also exceeded, almost doubled, in relation to the SMP coverage and promotion through the bulletin and social media of Scottish Government-funded projects and Scottish Government funding opportunities. Targets related to the SMP bulletin were also met overall: while the total number of recipients was less than expected for a number of reasons, the target for bulletin opens was exceeded and this does not appear cause for concern, particularly in the context of a greater shift to social media use. Similarly, targets related to the SMP website were met overall: while the number of page views fell below the target, the number of new visitors and sessions both exceeded the targets set, and development of a new website is also in process. Targets for enquiry handling were also exceeded, with numerous statements from enquirers noting how SMP responses had supported their efforts. In relation to sharing across the network, targets have been far exceeded, though the move online will have facilitated this: the fact that SMP events have engaged members on 119 occasions during the year to share experience on different aspects of work with Malawi is an extremely positive indication of

member commitment and engagement, as are the high viewing/engagement figures. The series of online meetings and dedicated webpage organised by SMP to support discussion of Covid-19 and response efforts in Malawi represents an excellent example of the network responding to member needs.

Outcome Indicator 2.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2020-21 has contributed to key stakeholders' awareness and understanding of governmental and civil society work with Malawi. Significantly, the evidence of member engagement indicates that despite the competing priorities and pressures of the pandemic context, members remained committed and eager to sharing and receiving information on others' work through the SMP, not least through the new series of SMP meetings organised to meet the need for exchange on Covid-19.

Review of Outcome 3: Public awareness and engagement across Scotland of the bilateral relationship, the role of government and civil society, and the impact of this work

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees almost all targets under Outcome 3 exceeded, with SMP's work on more innovative online content a particular area of achievement. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 93%, exceeding the 75% target. The range of social media indicators were met or exceeded. Facebook 'impressions' data is no longer available, but the note of 327,517 viewers of SMP Facebook content is very significant, and the range of social media reported on, encompassing Instagram and LinkedIn, reflects the wide range of SMP stakeholders and content which SMP has successfully provided. The production of video content is an area where the SMP has far exceeded its original targets, producing 51 videos rather than the planned 6, and with 17,151 views rather than 480: clearly a successful response to pandemic restrictions which has engaged a very significant number of people. The print media targets³ set for SMP advocacy have been met in terms of tone, but not in terms of number, as the 135 features published were under the 160 target; given the pandemic context and focus of Scottish media over the last year this is understandable and the review does not see this as a cause for concern.

Outcome Indicator 3.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2020-21 has contributed to public awareness and engagement on Malawi across Scotland. While print media coverage has been slightly less than expected, other targets for social media and online activity have been exceeded; video production is an area of particularly high activity which will have contributed to both engagement during the year and future resources for external communications.

³ Indicator 3.3.1 is currently worded in way which could be read as media pieces focussed on Malawi, rather than articles/pieces including coverage of Malawi; particularly given the quite high target of 160 p.a., equivalent of 3 per week, a note that the latter interpretation would be more appropriate and realistic. An additional note, and one which was highlighted in previous reviews, is that while the Scottish media features on Malawi are certainly an interesting indicator in relation to public awareness, the categorisation of "positive" vs "negative" undermines the value of the indicator as discussion of potentially 'negative' topics (e.g. albinism, climate change, etc.) may well be informative, accurate and contribute to informed and constructive public engagement.

Review of Outcome 4: Continued visible and meaningful youth engagement and youth leadership in the bilateral relationship.

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees almost all targets under Outcome 4 exceeded, with SMP's work in this area notable for their impact on the number of people reached. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 95%, exceeding the 75% target. The number of school SMP members, 242, fell below the set target of 260, however given school closures and pressures due to the pandemic this is entirely understandable; the fact that two schools forums were still held during the year, and with greater than expected participation, is notable and a promising indication that SMP will achieve the target by grant end. The number of school points of support exceeded the target, as did the number of young Scots benefitting through their digital engagement with SMP and the number of statements shared on the positive impacts of SMP support and on the value of the school forums. The SMP's youth work has clearly been an area where the shift online has proven less of a barrier and innovative approaches have led to real achievements. Organised in place of the previously planned youth congress for 200, the Youth Festival engaged 6,475 and reached over 250,000 people, receiving positive feedback that exceeded the target. Twice as many Youth Committee meetings were held than planned, with five examples shared of the Committee influencing SMP decision-making (against a target of three) and the number of youth members, 424, also significantly exceeding the target of 375.

Outcome Indicator 4.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2020-21 has contributed to visible and meaningful youth engagement and leadership. Despite pandemic periods of closure and teaching adaptation inevitably and significantly affecting school members' engagement, SMP work in this area has exceeded set targets and seen innovative and participatory approaches pay dividends as youth events reached over 250,000 people.

Review of Outcome 5: A co-ordinated and confident sector with strong collaborations, clear mutual understanding, effective two-way assistance and common objectives, if any, identified

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees all targets under Outcome 5 met or exceeded. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 92%, exceeding the 75% target. Three network forums were held, beyond the target two, all with full attendance, and examples of collaboration and positive testimonies on co-operation all met targets. In relation to SMP support for information-sharing on the Scottish Government International Development Strategy, the number of actions nearly tripled the target and included speaking roles and coverage at events as well as bulletin features. SMP supported six opportunities for input, support and feedback to the Malawi Development Programme in the year, twice the targeted number, and has engaged with the Scottish Government Communications team to exchange and promote material on two occasions.

Outcome Indicator 5.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2020-21 has contributed to co-ordination, collaboration and understanding among Scottish international development sector stakeholders active on Malawi. All targets for co-ordination meetings and joint events have been met, and SMP external events and communications have actively supported input to and discussion of the Scottish Government's international development work and strategy.

Conclusions

This review of the annual report documentation shared by the SMP and additional public sources notes a range of evidence provided to support the conclusion that the SMP has:

- successfully delivered on the pre-set outcome milestones for the 2020-2021 year of implementation,
- been able to meet those milestones despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic which affected both member engagement and staff capacities, and,
- additionally, been able to meaningfully respond to the new needs of members in relation to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This assessment has found good evidence of progress in relation to the logframe for almost all indicators at impact, outcome and output level, with many exceeded and none judged as significantly missed, particularly when performance against complementary indicators is taken into consideration. Detailed consideration of how and whether individual indicators have been met is outlined above by outcome, and that text includes discussion of how the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have affected delivery and measurement. As noted above, the SMP's response to the new restrictions and new needs resulting from the pandemic should be seen as a significant achievement that has helped mutual understanding and assistance among stakeholders in both Malawi and Scotland.

Beyond the conclusions of the review in relation to achievement of grant targets, this review makes a final observation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic and its implications for network events and functioning. Pandemic restrictions over the past year have brought dramatic changes to how SMP members are able to conduct activities and engage in the network. SMP moved its events and work online with laudable speed and this transition should be seen as an important and particular achievement of the 2020-21 period. While online work and engagement has swiftly become the 'new normal', it remains a very significant adjustment and SMP is therefore encouraged to reflect on what the move online means for SMP members' needs and events and participation going forward. Many more people can join events, regardless of membership status, and this brings many positive things, not least greater contacts with those based in Malawi and the involvement of those who might not have been able to travel to in-person meetings. However, and as indicated by some of the feedback shared, this also means that the purpose and function of SMP may not be clear to all now joining SMP events – in a review of feedback comment compilations for example, the few negative points amid the generally very positive feedback recorded mostly reflect frustration born of clearly unrealistic expectations of what SMP can provide. One of the SMP's key challenges, and key strengths, is the breadth of its membership and its ability as an organisation to cater to these very diverse needs: with the shift online, the breadth and diversity of event participation has increased significantly. A year in, and with online events now likely to continue indefinitely as an element of any programme, a suggestion from this review is that this might be a good moment to reflect on the changes the shift to digital events has brought to the kind and types of participation and what that might mean for how SMP advertises, organises and introduces or frames its online events and activity.

Annex 1 - Documentary Evidence drawn on for this assessment

SMP 2020-21 Logframe (completed PY1)

SMP Year End Report Narrative (PY1)

SMP Core Funding Proposal 2020-23, 11 Nov 2019

SMP Covid-19 Strategy v1.5

Membership Needs and Impact Survey 2021 Summary of Results

SMP 2020-21 Impact Statements

SMP AGM 2020 Feedback Report

SMP Enquiry Handling Review

Video presentation of strategic review of Youth Festival by SMP Youth and School Officer

General review of SMP website, www.scotland-malawipartnership.org

Scan of SMP social media platforms – Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, LinkedIn

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