

## **Ideas for enhanced Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) – Association of Malawians in Scotland (AMS) engagement**

21<sup>st</sup> October 2020

Both the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) and the Association of Malawians in Scotland (AMS) feel there is real opportunity to bring our two networks closer together, with more tangible mutual support and solidarity, while maintaining our functional independence. We had an initial conversation brainstorming ideas on the 20<sup>th</sup> October and will speak again on the 27<sup>th</sup> to hopefully firm things up and decide what best to take forwards.

This document aims to bring together:

- (A) Those ideas we discussed which came from points raised by AMS.
- (B) Those ideas from the SMP for new/further work, which we didn't have time to discuss.
- (C) Existing/past areas of SMP-AMS collaboration and SMP diaspora outreach, which we are keen to continue

A really key point for the SMP is ensuring that members of the Malawi diaspora continue to feel warmly welcome within the SMP itself. While we're delighted to develop an enhanced relationship with AMS, to increase support for Diaspora-specific engagements, we are keen that no one feels this is *instead* of SMP membership. It is really important to the SMP to have 25% of our Board from the Diaspora community, as well as diaspora leadership on forums and committees, and we wouldn't want this to change.

### **(A) Ideas coming from points AMS brought to the discussion for closer SMP-AMS working:**

- (1) **Lobbying and advocacy:** We agreed that the SMP would sound out AMS leadership when potential advocacy points questions were posed of the SMP, so we could better understand views within the AMS membership. While the SMP is instinctively cautious about lobbying the Government of Malawi (in keeping with our principles, we feel it is Malawians that should be lobbying the Government of Malawi, so in most instances differ to colleagues in MaSP) we would be happy to help amplify points where there is a strong consensus across the Malawi diaspora community in Scotland.
- (2) **Malawi High Commission representation in Scotland:** The SMP has always worked closely with the MHC and the Malawi Hon Consul for Scotland. We recognise there is a desire amongst the diaspora to have a more formal diplomatic presence in Scotland to help with practical consular support, such that people don't always have to travel to London to get visas etc. The SMP would be happy to respectfully support AMS' call for enhanced practical consular support in Scotland and we could explore opportunities for the SMP to provide practical support for this. If the Government of Malawi could *not* provide a full-time Scotland-based staff member as the AMS hope, there is some possibility the SMP could:
  - (a) provide a meeting room in the Edinburgh City Chambers, perhaps once a month, so a staff member could fly/train up, have a meeting space in the centre of town for scheduled meetings/visa applications, and then fly back down again to keep costs down for the MHC, or
  - (b) explore whether the SMP could itself offer some sort of front-facing consular administration support, for example, receiving passports, scanning them in, emailing the documents to the MHC for inspection, sticking in visas when approved. This is a similar setup to what the UK Government has, with a third party (TLS) providing these services.

We would only want explore these if we were confident it would not jeopardise our independence from government (functionally and presentationally), and if it had the support of AMS, GoM (including the existing Hon Consul) and SG. Obviously we work very closely with Peter West, the Hon Consul, so would be keen to engage him, and the Malawi High Commission, in dialogue from the very outset if this were an avenue the AMS wanted to explore.

- (3) **Cross Party Group:** AMS mentioned a frustration at the reduced attendance from the diaspora community at the Scottish Parliament's Malawi Cross Party Group. We are both keen to increase this. We suggest we commit to ensuring we email AMS details of all upcoming meetings as soon as we have them, and also aim to have one of the (usually 3-5) meetings each year as being diaspora-led.
- (4) **Supporting diaspora engagement on NGO boards:** We have always valued having c25% diaspora leadership on our own Board and would be very keen to work with AMS to support greater diaspora engagement on our members' Boards. I know this is something AMS is also looking at and keen to support. Perhaps we could work together to put together a campaign. Obviously all legal entities will have clear processes for the election of Board members but I am confident that, working within these, there would be strong appetite for support finding members of the Malawian diaspora with relevant skills sets / expertise to stand for election.
- (5) **Ministerial engagements:** We both agree that it is appropriate that when the SMP has an engagement with a Government of Malawi Minister, that AMS is specifically invited to be involved. This is something we hope we have been doing in recent years but are certainly happy to redouble our commitment in this regard and would be keen to include in any formal SMP-AMS agreement. It is entirely appropriate that members of the diaspora are specifically encouraged to take part in discussions with senior GoM representatives.
- (6) **Governance strengthening:** AMS mentioned the key role of the diaspora in governance strengthening and holding government to account. We absolutely agree. We would be keen to work with AMS on our [Year of Governance Strengthening](#) initiative. This was due to just be 2020 but, given the lost time due to Covid, it will be extended to also include 2021. We feel the President's strong commitment in this area presents a real opportunity for the coming period to engage governance strengthening. He said: *"We want to identify areas of improvement, especially in the area of strengthening our respective governance institutions through shared learning, technical support and infrastructural development."*
- (7) **AMS office:** AMS said that it is actively looking for office facilities. If it would be of use, the SMP would be happy to offer a 'hot desk' in its Edinburgh City Chambers office free of charge. This is something we have in the past offered other NGOs but on a paid basis. We would be happy to offer this to AMS free of charge as part of our diaspora engagement support. There is obviously much uncertainty at present what life will look like when office working returns, and I suspect it will me a number of months before it does, but we are happy to make this offer in principle, as long as it can be made to work with Covid restrictions.
- (8) **Promotion of Umunthu funeral scheme:** We are really happy to continue to promote the Umunthu funeral scheme, with a regular piece in the bulletin and an updated webpage. Please just keep us updated.

**(B) The below are ideas which we are keen to suggest in addition to the above. Unfortunately, we ran out of time last night to discuss as we were keen to listen first.**

- (1) Sustained dialogue:** We are keen to have regular AMS-SMP meetings to keep this really useful dialogue going. Perhaps quarterly meetings, by Zoom initially, in which each side can bring anything to the agenda. These meetings wouldn't replace day-to-day communications but would perhaps provide a useful space for deeper discussions.
- (2) Partnership agreement:** It would be good to have a clear AMS-SMP partnership agreement with perhaps a webpage sharing this information, to help better explain how we work together to support each others' work and highlighting our mutual solidarity while maintaining our independence.
- (3) SMP diaspora membership:** We are keen to increase the number of diaspora members within the SMP and it would be great to work with AMS on this. We cannot legally offer member fee exemptions for anyone based on nationality or ethnicity but I think we could offer fee exemption to anyone that was also a member of AMS. It is quite common to have a 'reciprocal rights' arrangement between two organisations and this would provide us with a way of offering a functional SMP member fee waiver for members of the diaspora without breaking the law – i.e. if someone said they were a member of AMS then they wouldn't have to pay an annual SMP membership fee. We would be happy to enter into this arrangement, perhaps initially for a three year period, which we would hope would also help drive AMS membership, as long as AMS were willing to promote SMP membership.
- (4) Livingstone legacy videos:** We have been working with the David Livingstone Centre to record a number of short videos for inclusion in the revamped David Livingstone Birthplace Centre in Blantyre (Scotland) for when it opens in the Spring of 2021. This would be a formal part of the exhibition: in the biggest room and last room, which would explore the many views on Livingstone's legacy. We are really keen to continue to have strong voices from the diaspora community and are keen to work with AMS on this. Critically, we're not just looking for positive views but are keen to represent *any* views about Livingstone's legacy, good or bad.
- (5) Scotland-Malawi podcast:** We are, hopefully, in the process of commissioning a podcast which will explore themes around the Scotland-Malawi relationship. This will likely take the form of a Scot and a Malawian undertaking a number of Zoom meetings in the coming months with people involved in the bilateral relationship, chatting through various elements/themes. We are really keen to work with AMS on this, with lots of interviews with members of the diaspora, sharing their views.
- (6) [Malawi@COP26](#):** The SMP will work to help support Malawi's involvement at COP26, the global climate conference taking place in November 2021 in Glasgow. We have an [outline strategy](#) from members for this and, from November, we will have monthly planning meetings bringing together all the key agencies in Scotland and Malawi working on climate activism. This is all in line with the priorities set down by the President at the AGM. We have an agreement in principle from the Lord Provost of Glasgow to host a special reception (potentially a half-day event) in the Glasgow City Chambers for the Malawian delegation during COP26, likely including the President. All our work here would be around helping amplify Malawi's voice at COP26, to try and ensure Malawi's interests are best served in securing ambitious new global climate agreements. We are really keen to have active

diaspora engagement in all of this, especially the welcoming of the Malawian delegation to Scotland and would be keen to have AMS involved from the outset.

- (7) **Youth Congress:** We usually have a Youth Congress each year: a one-day event bringing together 200-300 young people across Scotland engaged in Malawi links, usually from across 10-20 Scottish schools. It hasn't been possible to have one this year and it's almost impossible we could have a face-to-face event this financial year. Instead, we are looking at developing a digital alternative, which would likely take place over a number of weeks, with schools being able to opt-in to perhaps a dozen different Malawi workshops. We are really keen to have a twin focus on: Black Lives Matter (see our [statement here](#)) and climate activism. It would be great to develop a series of workshops and lessons with AMS about Malawi's history. We might also be able to find budget to fund AMS members to help deliver this content. It would be great to work with AMS on this.
- (8) **Black History Month:** We want to work over the next 12 months to develop some really good resources, information and events to be have a series of events in Black History Month 2021. These would be for both a general Scottish audience (and beyond), and for delivery in Scottish schools. It would be great to work with AMS on this, including the development of a number of resources and events about Malawian history if this were of interest.

**(C) Finally we're keen to include here details about existing and past diaspora-engagements, which we are keen to keep going and not lose from this conversation:**

- 1) **Independence Day Celebrations:** Every year we have co-funded the AMS-led Malawi Independence Day Celebrations in July. In 2020, for the first time, it wasn't possible to have a face-to-face event, so instead we had a joint digital meeting of the Malawi CPG and APPG but we are keen to re-start this tradition in 2021
- 2) **Chichewa and Culture Courses:** We continue to have 1-2 x six-part Chichewa courses a year which are co-diaspora led, with an AMS member paid to develop and deliver this training. As previously discussed, we are keen to also have less formal 'Chichewa Chats' for intermediate levels, engaging more AMS members, and are still in the process of working out how best this would work.
- 3) **SMP Board, Forums and Committees:** We greatly benefit from having 25% diaspora leadership on our elected Board of Directors and also strong diaspora leadership in our forums and committees. We are keen to continue this and actively encourage and support diaspora members to stand for leadership positions, recognising the unique insight members of the diaspora have.
- 4) **SMP membership:** We have worked hard in the last fifteen years to encourage diaspora involvement in the SMP core membership, actively recruiting around diaspora engagements/events. We continue to feel it is important that members of the diaspora are made to feel welcome and valued within the SMP as they have a unique contribution to make. On a discretionary basis, we have offered fee exemptions to all members of the diaspora who have not paid their SMP membership fees.
- 5) **Music and culture:** We are keen to support performers, musicians and artists within the diaspora community so, wherever possible and appropriate, we employ diaspora performers to take part in our events. This helps bring a fantastic Malawian flavour to our events and helps support diaspora musicians.

- 6) **Malawian students:** Over the last couple of years, responding to requests from Malawian students at our Further and Higher Education Forum, we have helped support Malawian students to find work placements within SMP members.
- 7) **UK Visa support:** We have been active in supporting members of the diaspora with their UK visas and have made a number of significant interventions – some involving many hours/days of SMP time, direct financial costs to the SMP and its staff, and significant investment of political capital to reach resolutions. This has been done on both a planned and an emergency response basis when members of the Diaspora have been stuck between Scotland and Malawi.
- 8) **Engagement in senior Government visits:** We have worked with AMS around every Presidential visit we have had an involvement in and other senior GoM visits. We have always used our leverage to lobby for a private diaspora-only meeting with visiting Presidents and have often been successful in securing this. In the most recent Presidential visit we made clear our disappointment when this meeting was cancelled by the Government of Malawi and we insisted that there was at least an exclusive photo-op with AMS, rescheduling SMP event time for this.
- 9) **Engagement at other high-profile events:** Our standing M.O. is to ensure that AMS is well represented at all high-profile events. So, for example:
  - Our [Member Awards with HRH The Princess Royal](#) had a specific diaspora meet and greet group, for AMS members to meet the Princess and share their views on the relationship.
  - AMS members had special free VIP seats at the [Boy who Harnessed the Wind Premiere](#) in 2019.
  - We ensured that AMS had specific, active involvement at other recent high-profile events, including with [Lazarus](#) (diaspora-led Q&A with Lazarus) and [William Kamkwamba](#) (diaspora co-chaired School Partnership Awards).
- 10) **Promotion of Umunthu:** We have been promoting the Umunthu diaspora funeral scheme and are keen to continue to do so.
- 11) **Diaspora-led Covid fundraising:** We are pleased to have supported diaspora-led Covid-19 fundraising appeals and are keen to continue to support any diaspora work in this area.
- 12) **Malawi-UK Business Group:** In part at the request of the Malawi High Commission and friends in the diaspora, we have actively supported the Malawi-UK Business Group in the last few years: sitting on the Executive, securing political support, securing free event space in London and building the Group's website for free. We are keen to continue to support diaspora-led UK-Malawi business initiatives.
- 13) **Malawi Diaspora Advisory Group:** We have, in the past, had a Malawi Diaspora Advisory Group, meeting with the various diaspora groups. We hired a meeting space in Glasgow on Saturday afternoons as this was deemed most convenient for the diaspora groups and had an open agenda to discuss how best to support active SMP-diaspora engagement. We ran these for a couple of years until attendance dwindled and it was felt from the diaspora community that it was not worth continuing. We would be very happy to restart these, or something similar. We have also, more recently, hosted a group which brought together the Malawian, Rwandan and Zambian diaspora groups to support two-way sharing and mutual support.