



Youth & Schools Partnership Guide

A Practical Guide

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Foreword: Hon. Agnes Nyalonje, Minister of Education, Malawi

I am delighted to endorse this fully updated Scotland-Malawi School Partnerships Guide, co-produced by the Scotland Malawi Partnership network (SMP) in Scotland and the Malawi Scotland Partnership network (MaSP) in Malawi.

Education has been at the heart of the friendship between our two nations for more than 150 years. This updated Guide takes these educational links into their next chapter, with a strong focus on digitalised cooperation, equality and solidarity.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought many challenges to all of us. It has undoubtedly disrupted many longstanding educational partnerships, as schools, teachers and youth groups have been unable to travel between our two nations. Ours is a people-to-people friendship, so in-person engagements will always have a vital role as we constantly seek to deepen our knowledge and understanding of each other. However, I recognise that with travel suspended, a great many schools and youth groups used this time to think innovatively and to harness the many opportunities in digital communications.

As we hopefully move out of this pandemic, I am keen that we do not forget what we have learned in the last two years, namely: the value of digital communications, especially where in-person visits are not possible. Both Malawi and Scotland are already feeling the impact of climate change and we must all look to how we can reduce our carbon footprint and think differently about how we work. This is why I welcome this updated Guide, which offers advice and practical support, helping connect classrooms digitally as we look for scalable and environmentally sustainable ways of working.

Having previously lived and worked in Edinburgh with my family, I have long been involved in the bilateral relationship and actively engaged in both MaSP and the SMP. I know from this experience that these are values-driven networks: their work is about celebrating, supporting and developing civic partnerships which are underpinned by mutual respect, human solidarity and dignified partnership. Although Scotland is a donor to Malawi, it views Malawi primarily as a friend and a partner. This approach, and these values, are clear throughout this updated Guide.

I am especially pleased that this latest update to the Practical Guide began with MaSP visiting 17 Malawian schools, the length and breadth of the country, and really listening to their experiences, reflections and learning. This is in keeping with our shared values: that representatives in both nations, at every level, are able to feed in their views to help direct the future of our partnership.

I also recognise and value the strong focus in this updated Guide on critical learning, depth of relationships, empathy, inclusivity and mutual understanding. It is clear how committed the SMP and MaSP are to further developing the relationship between Malawi and Scotland by challenging negative stereotypes and actively addressing power imbalances where they appear.

I am keen to thank not only MaSP and the SMP but also the Scottish Government as, without their core funding of both networks, none of this work would have been possible. The intergovernmental links between our two nations are important and highly valued but they are just one component of the diverse and varied bilateral relationship. Our contemporary governmental and parliamentary links sit on a rich history of civic cooperation between churches, universities, colleges, hospitals, communities and, of course, schools and youth groups. With over 200 civic-led educational



partnerships between our two nations, this is perhaps the lifeblood of our nation-to-nation friendship. MaSP and SMP play a crucial role in supporting all these wider links.

The SMP and MaSP are two sides of the same coin: each is set up to coordinate, represent and support the bilateral relationship in their own nation; each brings their own cultural knowledge and understanding; and each holds the other to account. This is an innovative and inspiring model which I hope continues to grow and develop for many years to come.

Supported by this Guide, I look forward to continuing to meet new generations of young Malawians and Scots who have had the opportunity to learn about each other, building friendships and exploring how dignified partnerships such as these really can shape our world.

Hon. Agnes Nyalonje
Minister of Education,
Government of Malawi



THE BASICS

Introduction to 5th Edition (2022):

This Practical Guide to School Partnerships is a collaboration between the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) in Scotland and the Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP) in Malawi. It aims to provide helpful information, advice and support for schools that are looking to be involved in a Scotland-Malawi school partnership. The guide is full of inspiration from real schools and youth clubs who have developed such partnerships, with guidance on how to avoid common pitfalls, signposting to resources, plus advice on partnerships in the digital era.

We don't profess to ourselves be the "experts" but rather we look to collate and share the information, experience and learning from across our two networks. To many of the most important questions in developing a school partnership, there isn't one, single 'right' answer for everyone. Recognising this, we look to share a range of views, approaches and experiences, and hopefully signpost to other useful sources of information. We use quotes, videos and stories from across our membership through the guide to hopefully show the many different, and equally valid, approaches. The Scotland-Malawi landscape is a rich and diverse tapestry: we celebrate this and don't look to try and engineer a one-size fits all approach.

This 5th edition (2022) of the Practical Guide has been informed by many recent developments, including:

- the January 2022 MaSP consultation of Malawi schools with Scottish links, which drew learning from 17 site visits of schools across Malawi.
- the 2020 Scottish Government-funded research by Irma Arts, titled '[Scottish secondary schools and their links with developing countries](#)'
- the 2020 Scottish Government-funded research by Steka Skills and Queen Margaret University, titled '[An Alternative to Voluntourism: How Youth Solidarity Groups in Malawi Empower young Malawians and Scots](#)'
- the Government of Malawi's '[Vision for 2063: An Inclusively Wealthy and Self-reliant Nation](#)'
- updated advice and support from [IDEAS](#), [ScotDec](#) and others in the development education community
- Great new videos and resources from "[Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway](#)", by the Norwegian Students' and Academics' Assistance Fund (SAIH)

It is also informed by feedback from members and partners and, of course, the lived experience of schools and school partnerships through almost two years of the Covid-19 pandemic. While we recognise the great many challenges and setbacks of the COVID-19 pandemic, we value the reflection and learning that has come from a period of sustained digital working. We also welcome the opportunities to challenge norms and dig deeper into our values which have come from the [Black Lives Matter movement](#) and [Scotland hosting COP26](#).

Lots of members and partners have fed into this work but we would specifically like to thank:



- Keith Murphy – Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS
- Fraser Boyd, 25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boys’ Brigade, partnered through the Dunblane-Likhubula Partnership with Likhubula, Mulanje Province
- Ian Mitchell - Beath High School partnered with Mapanga and Njale Primary Schools
- Jennifer Flockhart – ESMS-Ekwendeni School Partnership
- The Watson’s Malawi Partnership
- ScotDEC
- Orbis Expeditions and Diversity Travel
- Max Conway – SMP Youth Committee
- Ryan Ticcioni - SMP Youth Committee
- Amy Blake – CEO of Classrooms for Malawi



What is a School Partnership?

There are a great many hugely successful school partnerships between Scotland and Malawi, with the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) having over 250 school members – roughly equally divided between primary and secondary schools.

The important thing to emphasise is that there isn't one 'right' way to structure a school partnership between Scotland and Malawi but rather lots of different, equally valid, approaches which have been designed or which have developed over time.

Some school links are between individual schools, others involve clusters. Some have never involved any international travel, others have regular one or two-way travel. Some are purely educational, others have more activism built-in from the outset.

A Scotland-Malawi youth or school partnership can:

- Be embedded in, and supportive to your curriculum/activity plan
- Reframe and ignite learning
- Inspire global outlook
- Inspire urgency for positive change
- Develop self-awareness and respect for others
- Develop skills in enquiry and critical thinking on global issues
- Instigate a sense of injustice and commitment to tackling it

Crucially, we see all school partnerships as being two-way educational links, embedded in 'global citizenship'. Whilst there is no one definition for 'global citizenship', [Oxfam](#) offers a useful broad guide to the term:

"Global citizenship is all about encouraging young people to develop the knowledge, skills and values they need to engage with the world. And it's about the belief that we can all make a difference.

Education for global citizenship is not an additional subject - it's a framework for learning, reaching beyond school to the wider community. It can be promoted in class through the existing curriculum or through new initiatives and activities.

The benefits are felt across the school and beyond. Global citizenship helps young people to:

- *Build their own understanding of world events.*
- *Think about their values and what's important to them.*
- *Take learning into the real world.*
- *Challenge ignorance and intolerance.*
- *Get involved in their local, national and global communities.*
- *Develop an argument and voice their opinions.*
- *See that they have power to act and influence the world around them.*

What's more, global citizenship inspires and informs teachers and parents, too. But above all, it shows young people that they have a voice. The world may be changing fast, but they can



make a positive difference - and help build a fairer, safer and more secure world for everyone."

Our sister network, the Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP) see global citizenship as:

"having a commitment for people and to people unrestricted by borders and far beyond race or any physical differences."

ScotDEC (Global Citizenship Education, Scotland) add,

"Global citizenship is a way of living that recognises our world as an increasingly complex web of connections and interdependencies.

When we use a Global Citizenship approach to establishing and sustaining partnerships, we begin from an understanding that relationships between countries are built on historical inequalities and injustices. Challenging colonial structures and working towards a reciprocal partnership based on social justice values, equips young people and practitioners with values, knowledge, attitudes, and skills to enable them to contribute effectively to an interdependent world."



Why establish a youth or school partnership?

Youth and school partnerships can be a great way to inspire global citizenship in young people. They can be a really exciting way for young people to learn from and understand other cultures better and realise the role they play in our global society. Working in partnership between Scotland and Malawi allows schools to bring complex issues alive, with increased meaning and connection to those outside of their own communities and a real desire to learn.

[Education Scotland](#) (a Scottish Government executive agency) is clear about the many benefits of such international links, including:

- improving knowledge and skills across curriculum areas
- challenging stereotypes and prejudices
- making learners aware of the possibilities that exist for learning and work outside Scotland.

International activity allows learners to understand Scotland and its place in the world. Partnerships allow those involved the opportunity to share ideas in pedagogy and the space to reflect on their own practice; and in so doing, improve the quality of learning and teaching. Partnerships can be developed digitally or can also involve face to face meetings between staff and/or learners.

There is a wealth of research that shows international experience develops learners, teachers and schools. In terms of **Excellence and Equity** and **Transforming Learning**.”

Specifically, Education Scotland (which serves as both the support hub for, and inspectorate of, Scottish Schools) identifies the below benefits of school partnerships, for learners, teachers and schools:

Benefits for learners:	Benefits for teachers:	Benefits for schools:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contributes towards improved reading, writing, communication and language skills • Improves the performance and engagement of under-achieving learners • Enhances skills that are relevant in a global economy • Helps improve motivation • Develops core ICT skills • Raises awareness and understanding of different cultures and religions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An important method of professional development • Improves confidence in the classroom and develops leadership skills • Can help improve behaviour of learners in class • Improves stimulation through refreshed content and resources • Promotes knowledge of other countries and cultures • Improves knowledge of global development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helps reduce the performance gap amongst pupils • Builds professional capacity in schools • Makes the curriculum more stimulating and improves ethos around the school • Improves engagement with the local community and partnership working • Helps centres meet the objectives of inspection.



One of our members, 25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boy's Brigade, partnered with Likhubula province in Malawi, reflects that their partnership has been:

“...a great chance for Scots to learn more about themselves and their outlook on life as well as to learn *from* Malawians and Malawi.”

ScotDEC, the Development Education Centre in Edinburgh, says:

“International partnerships can lay the foundation for Global Citizenship. They can inspire young people, and practitioners to create positive social change by increasing understanding that our choices and actions may have repercussions for people and communities both locally and internationally.”



GETTING STARTED

Ask yourself “why?”:

It’s a vital question before you go any further! Partnerships must be positively enabling for both sides.

- Are looking for a holiday, a funding stream, an easy win for your school, or simply to “do good in Malawi”? If so, we wouldn’t recommend setting up a school partnership.
- Are you looking to support global citizenship, working through partnership and solidarity, to support real learning outcomes at both sides? Are you happy to have uncomfortable conversations at times, to reflect on your own privileges, and dedicate yourself towards making it work? If so, we definitely recommend a school partnership.

Penicuik High School, who are partnered with Namadzi CDSS, reflect:

“It is important that [a partnership] is not viewed as an 'add on,' or a 'nice to have,' but something which has a positive influence on the ethos and life of the school.”

It is vitally important that both partners understand why they are taking on the project, and ensure they gather plenty people who also understand this vision. MaSP’s visits to 17 partnership schools in Malawi in January 2022 found some partnerships faced a challenge here. They found a greater,

“Need for awareness of why school partnerships are formed, there was that gap in understanding of the overall existence of a school partnership”

Join the SMP / MaSP

If you are in Scotland, we really recommend you join the Scotland Malawi Partnership for free [here!](#) Once a member, email Luisa Brown, Youth & Schools Officer: luisa@scotland-malawipartnership.org notifying her of your interest in a partnership.

If you are in Malawi, join the Malawi Scotland Partnership for free [here!](#): Once a member, email Ruth Maluwa (Southern Region) on rmaluwa@malawiscotlandpartnership.org or Mtameni Kachusa (Northern Region) on mtamenik@gmail.com notifying them of your interest in a partnership.

As a member, you will have access to a whole network of people with links between our two countries, our regular Youth & School Forums, annual Youth Festival, learning resources, staff support and much, much more!



Establish a working group: staff, young people, community

Too often it's one keen person in a school or youth group who will get a partnership off the ground and the partnership becomes reliant on that one individual. This is no bad thing initially as that enthusiasm can be infectious, but it's vitally important to rally others and build a team or working group across your youth or school community.

Your group can include:

- School leadership teams
- Youth leaders
- Teachers
- Parents/guardian
- Young people
- Wider school/youth community
- Students
- Mother group members

Having a working group helps keep the partnership sustainable and ensure it reflects the whole school or youth group community. It's important to draw on as many diverse experiences as possible.

25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boy's Brigade, partnered with Likhubula province, suggest,

“Give the young people (in both countries) their voice and get their parents involved, too... Give adult leaders clear roles. Don't try to do short-term things anyway; to be sustainable, you have to always think far into the future, and be continually recruiting people who are interested to help build leadership for years to come.”

The group will determine and monitor the objectives and activities of the partnership and hold each other to account. It will be instrumental in setting up your initial Partnership Agreement, reviewing this annually and ensuring it is kept to. You can rotate a coordinator in the group to keep everything moving along.

Max from the SMP Youth Committee adds,

“At our school, the partnership died when the teachers left or lost interest. More people needed to be involved.”

Jennifer Flockhart, from ESMS-Ekwendeni Partnership reflects,

“[our working group] has been a problem for us but difficult to manage with such a big turnover of staff and difficulty in formal communication.”

Inevitably, staff and young people change, having a working group means changeover stays seamless!



Penicuik High School, which is partnered with Namadzi CDSS, advise:

“Partnerships work best when run by committee in order that they do not become reliant on any one individual. Staff in both schools are often subject to change for a variety of reasons. For this to work effectively a strong partnership agreement setting out the terms of the partnership will help to keep everyone moving in the same direction. We need to be accountable to one another about moving the agreed aims forward and maintaining regular communication.”

Our experience is that having appropriate structures is just as important at the Malawian side as the Scottish side. Schools in Malawi often have existing structures like committees and community groups. It's important not to circumvent these, so it's a good idea to start by asking what existing structures and protocols should be followed in Malawi. These groups are often linked to the wider community and if school partnerships bypass these it's all too easy for suspicions or jealousies to build up.

MaSP's visits to 17 partnership schools in Malawi in January 2022 found,

“Partnership committees are key to working partnerships where all parties involved are aware, and run the partnerships (school heads, mother group, community, local chief, teachers and selected pupils).

Teacher transfers affect the overall partnership in cases where the partnership lead leaves with all the information to the transferred schools without leaving the school any basis of continuing the partnership.”

And that this was especially true when,

“schools have no proper committees, and information is limited to just one person”

The positives however are worth nurturing your group for!

The Watson's Malawi Partnership, said,

“We have learned that many hands make light work and are extremely grateful to our network of parents, teachers, community volunteers and friends”



Build a critical understanding;

As outlined in the 'Do No Harm' section, reflecting the findings of the ['School Partnership and school visits in a Global Citizenship Context'](#) report, we recommend teachers and learners invest in building critical understanding of related issues of inequality, power and poverty, before starting a school partnership. Having this understanding will really help establish a strong partnership, getting the core ethos right.

The SMP has a whole suite of resources which schools can either deliver themselves, or which the SMP can offer presenters/facilitators for

Forthcoming SMP critical understanding lessons for upper primary and lower secondary on:

- Power and poverty, a critical understanding
- Use of images and video: the narratives we construct
- Scotland and Malawi: Understanding our shared history
- Partnership vs charity
- Critical dialogue groups (with QMU and StekaSkills)
- Understanding the 'White Savior' complex
- Do No Harm: exploring intended and unintended consequences
- The case for Climate Justice
- Understanding Malawi: its language and culture

UPSKILL WORKING GROUP:

We recommend to spend at least 3 months upskilling staff and your working group to gain a real understanding about partnership working, international development, the sustainable development goals and global citizenship.

- Teacher/Youth Leader training
 - Start with your [Local Development Education Centre](#) for advice
 - Join and explore training and resources in the [IDEAS Network](#)
 - Global Citizenship activities with young people from [Connecting Classrooms bank of resources](#)
 - There are even more resources from [The World's Largest Lesson](#)
- Catch up with the [news](#) in each other's countries
- Attend [SMP](#) / [MaSP](#) events
- Reading, such as Rev Prof Kenneth Ross' excellent book '[Friendship with a Purpose: Malawi and Scotland for Sustainable Development](#)' (2018)
- Learn from other working partnerships for ideas
 - Explore youth and schools' stories in full
 - [Explore the SMP's Schools Membership](#)



St Ronan's Primary School partnered with Thondwe Primary School,

“Each school has their own committee of young people... We share a lot between the two schools, such as talking about our school library and sharing our school values. We also both have school gardens and make good use of that.”



Find a partner:

Let us know when you think you have reached this stage! The SMP and MaSP will then work together to find you a suitable partner.

Whilst we can't guarantee that we'll be able to find you a partner school, we're always happy to try.

To request support in Scotland:

1. Email our Youth & Schools Officer Luisa Brown (luisa@scotland-malawipartnership.org) notifying her of your interest to find a partner
2. Complete a Partner Profile form which asks:
 - a. For detailed information about your school/youth group, and your intentions with a partnership
 - b. and must be written collaboratively with your working group
 - c. This will be used to match you with a suitable partner based on school/group size, activities and interests.
3. Book a Partnership Guide meeting with SMP to ensure all details are understood, alongside our [Partnership Principles](#)
4. Enjoy your partnership introduction! This will be facilitated on the most appropriate medium for both schools, that being either Whatsapp, by email or as far as possible by conversation via video link.

If you are in Malawi, please visit our sister organisation's (the Malawi Scotland Partnership) [website](#).



Partnership agreement:

After introduction your next step, and one of the most important steps in establishing a new school partnership, is to agree a formal Partnership Agreement.

See:

- Partnership Agreement examples [here](#) and [here](#)
- [Blank Partnership Agreement document](#)

Your Partnership Agreement must be:

- set out by *both* schools
- outline your shared objectives and the activities you are interested in undertaking together
- Arise from extended discussions, as the best partnership agreements are built on real mutual understanding and mutual respect

Jennifer Flockhart from ESMS-Ekwendi Partnership mentions,

“When establishing this agreement between schools it is difficult to have an open dialogue but I don’t feel I should write an agreement and ask for them to agree – it should be more collaborative which is not easy.”

One way to go about this is for each youth group or school to fill out a Partnership Agreement individually based on their own terms, then to come together to compare, reflect and amalgamate.

Avoid the temptation to ‘just get it done’, or for one side to draft a complete document and risk the other side saying ‘that’s fine’.

Amy Blake, CEO of Classrooms for Malawi shares,

“Both schools should be fully committed to a long term partnership and should be fully aware of all planned activities and expectations on both teachers and pupils.”

Questions on the Partnership Agreement cover:

- Aims of partnership
- Objectives
 - Long term
 - Short term
- Activities
- Outcomes and how you will measure them
- How you will communicate
- Will you choose to involve money? And how will you critically explore this?
- Will there be visits?
- How will you resolve disagreements?



- Working group members and roles
- How often you will review your working group and Partnership Agreement

Do work with our Partnership Principles checklist at this stage so both schools have a realistic expectation of what a partnership is.

The SMP and MaSP can help deliver sessions in school about partnership vs charity: we have found this really useful at this stage.

Do review your Partnership Agreement every year. Covid-19 has shown how important this step is as it helps to manage expectations when situations unexpectedly change.



Youth Clubs:

There is a difference between how Scotland and Malawi term a youth group. Here is a short summary of each:

In Malawi a Youth Club is often a grouping of young people usually from their teen years to 30 years of age. They are usually formed to combat various social challenges that young people face or to attend to a specific social need. Most Youth Clubs in Malawi deal with issues to deal with Sexual and Reproductive Education and Services, HIV/AIDS, Climate Change and other young people specific topics.

In Scotland, a broad definition of a youth club is a service that brings young people together and contributes towards their personal and social development, and economic wellbeing. Attendees can be anything between the ages of 7-26 years of age but many are in their mid to early teens. Generally, youth work in Scotland aims to inspire better outcomes for young people throughout the rest of their lives. Levels of social inequality in Scotland can be surprising for what may be expected of a developed country and there remains certain levels of poverty around the country. Youth work aims to work towards a fairer, more just world. In this sense, youth groups in Scotland are excellent candidates for partnership working.

If you are a youth group, in either country, SMP and MaSP can also try to match you either with a youth group, organisation or charity dependent on which best matches your service and interests.



Lift off!

Once all the above stages have been agreed and worked through, you are now officially a school partnership through SMP and MaSP!

Don't forget to celebrate your new partnership and promote it to your wider community.

Penicuik High School, partnered with Namadzi CDSS, encourage you to...

“Do it! The bond of friendship and understanding between a partner brings a whole new level of interaction between school communities. It enriches the lives of everyone involved and provides a rich context for us in finding our place as global citizens.”

Here are some ideas:

- Hold a launch event
- Put out photos and images on social media and newsletters
- Email SMP with details and images to share with the membership
- Inform other local schools, local authorities and appropriate organisations

By promoting it to your wider community you may be surprised by who wants to be involved.

George Watson's College recommends:

“Start small and you'll be surprised by how many friends you will make on the way”

You could host an event to launch the partnership that highlights some of the very first activities you will be doing together. SMP and MaSP can support you with materials and ideas.

In Malawi, you can let your local Education Advisors and Managers know that you have started a partnership. This will help your school to get support and connect with other schools and youth groups locally with similar partnerships. By building these connections, you'll find more opportunities arise for you. MaSP are able to help you with this.

In Scotland, it's similarly valuable to inform appropriate structures, including clusters and other local schools.

St Ronan's Primary School, partnered with Thondwe Primary School, share:

“It's well worth doing. If you get the chance to do it, I would urge you to form a partnership.”

Beath High School, partnered with Mapanga and Njale Primary Schools, share:

“There is no doubt that the partnership is worth the time and effort necessary to make it work.”



GETTING IT RIGHT:

'Do No Harm':

There are a huge number of benefits to setting up a school partnership but there are also potential risks. As with all international engagements, it's vital that we ensure school partnerships follow the key principle of 'doing no harm'.

It can be hard to really ensure we're doing no harm because it requires us to step out of our own skin and look holistically at what we're doing, encouraging challenging and uncomfortable feedback, and really scrutinizing what possible unintended consequences there might be behind our good intentions.

This chapter gives advice on what we see as the really key steps to ensuring your partnership 'does no harm'.

The Partnership Principles Checklist

Back in 2012 we asked around 200 Malawian then 200 Scottish organisations what principles made for a successful partnership.

We collated all the answers we received and were excited to find that we were getting the same answers in both Malawi and Scotland, and that these same principles were reinforced by some of the world's leading academics in this field and some of the largest multi-lateral agencies.

From these, we agreed 11 [Scotland-Malawi Partnership Principles](#).

PARTNERSHIP PRINCIPLE CHECKLIST

Planning and implementing together;

Appropriateness;

Respect, trust and mutual understanding;

Transparency and accountability;

No one left behind;

Effectiveness;

Reciprocity;

Sustainability;

Do no Harm;



Interconnectivity;

Parity.

The SMP and all our members are accountable to working within these principles.

Amy Blake, CEO of Classrooms for Malawi comments,

“Sustainable school partnerships work when they are based on equitable relationships with strong foundations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Classrooms for Malawi were able to carry out the planned activities between partner schools without the need for volunteer travel”

We really encourage all school partnerships to commit to working within these principles, ensuring this isn't just a box-ticking or semantic exercise but really drives behaviours, with each side able to challenge the other.

Do embed these Principles within your Partnership Agreement.

Regularly review your Agreement with both partners encouraging honest and challenging feedback on both sides.

Beath High School partnered with Mapanga and Njale Primary Schools,

“We, in Scotland, are always impressed by the creative methods employed by our Malawian friends to overcome day to day problems... There is a great deal of support from our colleagues in Malawi, especially in these pandemic times. The partnership has demonstrated that we are all in this together.”

Critical understandings:

The Scottish Government-commissioned study looking at: [‘School Partnership and school visits in a Global Citizenship Context’](#) reflected that:

“...schools should be aware of and take into account issues of inequality, dependency and reinforcing stereotypes. The research showed that teachers seem to be very aware of issues of inequality and dependency and try to navigate having a relationship based on mutual learning with providing support for their partner school.

This support is often thought through and based on the requests and recommendations of the partner school. However, there can be unintended impacts as well as a feeling of powerlessness in partner schools or organisations that will need to be considered and discussed beforehand.



A potential danger lies in reinforcing narratives and practices that are so common that they are not necessarily questioned. The way visits for example were portrayed in pictures and blogs can paint a narrative of the Scottish pupils “helping” the poor and reinforce certain stereotypes of the African continent.

The drive to improve education in the partner country could obscure the necessity for a critical reflection on development, power and poverty.”

The first of the report’s recommendations is for schools to:

“Start with global learning, not partnerships.

This is a general recommendation for both schools and organisations involved. If the aim is to raise awareness about global issues, partnerships, and specifically peer-to-peer contact, can be a vehicle to start a conversation on these issues, but this will need more than just ‘coming in contact with other cultures’ and asks for the development of critical understanding.

Developing links, organisations and schools should be aware of and take into account issues of inequality, dependency and reinforcing stereotypes.”

The report encourages teachers and learners to invest in building strong foundations, with critical understanding of related issues of inequality, before starting a school partnership. This understanding is perhaps the best preparation for navigating some of the challenges and key decisions which might then come up in a school partnership.

We know that establishing active, critical thinking in sensitive and complex areas such as global inequalities, the structures of power and poverty, and social justice, may seem a daunting proposition for teachers but we (and others) are here to help. There are a whole range of brilliant resources and much support for schools to build these strong foundations of understanding before embarking on a school partnership.

We especially recommend our forthcoming critical learning resources and lesson plans in the following areas (each of these can be delivered by schools themselves or, in many cases, the SMP can arrange a Malawian speaker to deliver the work in person or digitally):

- Power and poverty, a critical understanding
- Use of images and video: the narratives we construct
- Scotland and Malawi: Understanding our shared history
- Partnership vs charity
- Critical dialogue groups (with QMU and StekaSkills)
- Understanding the ‘White Savior’ complex
- Do No Harm: exploring intended and unintended consequences
- The case for Climate Justice
- Understanding Malawi: its language and culture



We also really recommend that schools use the [brilliant “Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway” satirical videos](#), produced by the Norwegian Students’ and Academics’ Assistance Fund (SAIH), as a way of supporting learners to reflect on stereotypes and oversimplifications. These videos include:

- [Corporate video parody](#)
- [Charity single parody](#)
- [Fundraising campaign parody](#)
- [African child actor parody](#) [Language warning]
- [Who wants to be a volunteer parody](#)
- [Social media use parody](#)
- [Fundraising App parody](#)

Dialogue Groups:

The StekaSkills/QMU report ‘[An alternative to voluntourism: how Youth Solidarity Groups in Malawi empower young Malawians and Scots](#)’ paints a powerful picture of how, when you scratch below the surface, some interactions between young Scots and young Malawians can do real damage if not carefully structured. The report includes testimony from young Malawians who had been involved in well-meaning but ill thought through visits, which at times left the Malawians feeling disempowered and disrespected:

“They would bring gifts which they would distribute themselves to who they liked the best and the rest of us didn’t benefit. And often these gifts were things we didn’t need.

They didn’t talk to the older ones who are the same age as them, they just gave toys to the youngest children and took pictures and put them up on Facebook without asking.

I hated their attitudes towards us. I hated them for that. We tried to tell them what to do and not do, but they didn’t listen and just did what they liked.”

The report sets out a technique which groups can use as young Scots and young Malawians meet - Youth Solidarity Dialogue Groups – which ensure power imbalances are addressed by giving ownership and agency to the Malawian participants.

The Youth Solidarity Dialogue Model is specifically designed for young people and works by taking them through stages of building awareness and agency so that they are motivated to try and bring about social change in solidarity with their allies. The first stage is about helping them be critical about circumstances they often accept as ‘normal’ so don’t challenge; the second stage is about becoming brave enough to voice their real opinions with other young people who are very different from themselves; and the third stage is where they have built relationships, see each other as human beings instead of stereotypes and have enough knowledge and motivation to want to bring about change.



The report gives inspiring case studies and helpful, practical advice. We really recommend all those involved in in-person visits between partner schools, or live digital engagements, read the report and then consider adopting the approach. The SMP can offer support, training and advice.

Empathy:

Perhaps the most important skill for any Scotland-Malawi partnership is that of empathy: the ability to see the world from your partners' perspective.

Whenever we're asked about seemingly complex, intractable problems in partnerships, the first thing we try to do is to encourage mutual understanding and empathy. Making time for the simple thought experiment of 'how would I feel if I were at the other side' is the single easiest, and best, way to solve a partnership dilemma. If you're really honest, and unafraid to challenge yourself, you'll often find *you* have the answer.

There are lots of cultural differences between Scotland and Malawi but, transcending all of these, is a shared humanity which unites us. Unless directly proven otherwise, it's always safest to assume that those at the other side of the partnership will have the same emotional response as you, if placed in the same situation.

So keep asking yourself this question, 'how would I feel if it were me', and look to really understand the lives of your partners, their day-to-day challenges, priorities and motivations, as mutual understanding and empathy are the best ways of building a strong foundation for your partnership.

Social Media use:

We really recommend that school members use the excellent ["Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway" social media guide](#), produced by the Norwegian Students' and Academics' Assistance Fund (SAIH).

[Watch their video on social media use](#)

[Read their "How to Communicate the World" Guide](#)

SAIH have four core principles for social media use:

- 1) Promote Dignity
- 2) Gain informed consent
- 3) Question your intentions
- 4) Use your chance – bring down stereotypes



checklist

before you post on social media:

- ✓ Ask yourself: "What is my intention with sharing this post?"
- ✓ Gain informed consent from the person in the picture and/or the caretaker. If you can't explain why you are taking photo, find a translator
- ✓ Know the name and background of the people portrayed
- ✓ Offer the person in the photo a copy
- ✓ Avoid sweeping and simplified generalizations, include informative text with names, place, etc.
- ✓ Be respectful of different cultures and traditions
- ✓ Ask yourself: "Would I have appreciated to be portrayed in the same manner?"
- ✓ Avoid sensitive, vulnerable situations and locations such as hospitals and health clinics
- ✓ Don't portray yourself as the hero in the story conveyed
- ✓ Challenge the perceptions, bring down stereotypes!

Source: ["Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway" social media guide](#)

Common pitfalls

In our 'do no harm' section we've explored some of the risks that could cause youth and school partnerships to inadvertently do real damage, despite the best of intentions. In this section we look to identify some of the common stumbling blocks that school partnerships can come up against and how to try to avoid these.

We recognise that, if we aren't careful, sometimes the benefits of partnership can be hard to realise and we may even inadvertently undermine what we set out to do.

Equal partnerships sound easy on paper but in fact it can be a challenge when we live in such an unequal world.

The ["School Partnership and school visits in a Global Citizenship Context"](#) report flags that,



“there is a risk of reinforcing paternalism and dependency, and pity rather than empathy for the partner country”

Here are some of the risks and issues that partnerships can come up against:

- Disempowering people, by promoting pity for a poorer country
- A focus on charity or aid
- Creating dependence
- Instilling attitudes of ‘feeling bad about our privilege’
- Using ‘othering’ language, of “them” and “us”
- A belief that Scotland has more to give than Malawi
- Cultivating attitudes of superiority or inferiority
- Too heavy a focus on difference
- The reinforcement of harmful stereotypes
- Avoiding issues of global injustice
- Being unwilling to have uncomfortable conversations

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS reflect,

“Having already built a relationship, and also fallen into some of the partnership pitfalls together, we were both keen to look again at how our partnership would operate, and worked to develop our first Partnership Agreement.

Ryan, SMP Youth Committee Member,

“I discovered that in terms of money we really had to think about the effects on the community in Malawi – putting money onto one area can cause jealousy and even violence.

You have to take a stance on the difference between giving gifts, and being asked for things that people really need. Build an understanding between each other.

Don’t reinforce a stereotype of yourself.

Make sure that you understand your partners well enough so that anything you exchange will be useful for each other.”

...and how to avoid them!

- Make sure you really understand each other’s expectations before starting the partnership – specifically whether it is an educational link or whether you will work together on specific projects, and frame your partnership around these
- Recognise and respecting cultural differences
- Identify what you have in common and build a sense of solidarity
- Invest in relationships, really taking time to listen, understand and build friendships
- don’t presume one side has the answers for the other



- Create regular spaces for open discussion and encourage honest feedback
- Recognise power imbalances and work pro-actively to address this
- Have a strong partnership agreement, written together and regularly reviewed
- Have a space for each side to separately share reflections on the extent to which you are living up to your principles, and share the results
- Ask open questions rather than leading questions (for example “what do you think we should do?”, not “would it be useful if we...”)
- Perhaps split the time in meetings, with each side of the partnership having half the time, to include what they want how they want
- Explore using the [Critical Dialogue model](#)
- Recognise the risk that one side might be saying what they think the other *wants* to hear and may be avoiding more honest answers for fear of causing upset or jeopardising the partnership. Combat this by really encouraging and welcoming honesty
- Try to ensure that decisions are jointly made and activities are jointly managed
- Ensure there is transparency and accountability between the partners
- Try to make all opportunities reciprocal
- Explore different types of wealth – not everything is about power and money
- Think critically about your own culture, assumptions and approach
- Create an appropriate space that is not only accessible, but *easy for all* to air grievances



The challenge with charity:

We really believe that youth and school partnerships should be about two-way educational outcomes and global citizenship, rather than mini-development projects. There are a great many risks when youth and school partnerships become too focused on fundraising, charity and projects, not least the risk that a narrative of pity and poverty, or donors and dependence, can undermine a dignified partnership.

The Irma Arts (2020) report highlights that:

“Activities such as fundraising and pupil visits might be more prone to reinforcing stereotypes as they often (unconsciously) reinforce images and narratives of ‘development-as-modernisation’ and the western active agent, helping the poor, passive developing country.”

We strongly recommend that youth and school partnerships are, first and foremost, built as a two-way education link rather than a development initiative.

However, we recognise that there is a gross inequality between Scotland and Malawi, in terms of wealth, power and privilege: we believe extreme poverty is the great moral outrage of our time. We recognise that it can be easy to say that school partnerships should be about education and not development, but hard to reconcile this with the principles we hold dear.

MaSP’s visit to 17 school partnerships in Malawi in January 2022 revealed that,

“it is important for Scottish schools to share their mutual benefits to signify that partnership are not just about donations”

If we believe listening is key to partnership, how should we react when our partners tell us they need help? Is there a risk that teaching global citizenship by highlighting extreme inequalities but then insisting that nothing should be done to challenge and change this very inequality, actually encourages a state of acceptance rather than activism? We recognise these are credible arguments and there is no right answer in this space.

The crucial thing, from our perspective, is that every effort is made to ensure that negative stereotypes are not reinforced and that all activity is contextualised as being part of the overall educational experience.

Beath High School partnered with Mapanga and Njale Primary Schools, add,

“There will always be a perception of the “haves” and “have nots” but a partnership is much more than this. Education is a very powerful tool for the future.”

Pity

Most importantly, as with all Scotland-Malawi interactions, it must be about two-way partnership driven by solidarity, not one-way charity driven by pity. The [Partnership Principles](#) are, therefore,



key. Both sides of the partnership should contribute to the activism and, ideally, both should benefit (albeit likely in different ways) from the partnership.

Our advice

- Start as an educational partnership
- Make sure this is the core of what the relationship is about
- Invest in the early dialogue: a strong partnership agreement and a critical understanding of related issues around poverty and power

If then, later, both sides of the partnership wish to work together on a project which will help the learning experience on both sides, this can then be explored while making clear the main focus remains educational.

Irma Arts (2020) says:

“Most partnerships and visits will include fundraising activities. The literature and partnership guide reviewed suggests to avoid fundraising, however...fundraising can play an important role in supporting partner schools and improve their ability to teach and help pupils.”

We still want to fundraise, how could we do it better?

Your partnership could have both schools or groups involved in fundraising for activities being done together including travel. It is likely that one will raise more than the other, but the main thing is that the project is joint. Do speak with your partners in all cases to see if a fundraising activity is appropriate at all for their local community in either country.

There is a difference between fundraising to provide general aid for a partner school and fundraising to support the partnership itself. For instance, people from both schools can raise funds to cover partnership expenses.

Amy Blake, CEO of Classrooms for Malawi shares,

“Partnerships should be reciprocal and not purely focused on fundraising. Partnerships should be drawn up in collaboration between the two schools and both schools should contribute to the outcomes and outputs. Fundraising can impact on the equity of a partnership, it is important that fundraising campaigns are positive and inclusive”

If you are fundraising, we really recommend you engage the young people in reflections around the language and images you use as part of this. The [‘Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway’ website](#), by the Norwegian Students' and Academics' Assistance Fund (SAIH) is a brilliant resource for this. They have a host of brilliant, funny parody videos exploring themes around negative stereotypes which can be used in lessons with young people, including their ‘Golden/Rusty Radiator Awards’. They also



clearly outline what they see as the best way to communicate in a fundraising campaign in ways which are nuanced, creative and engaging, without using stereotypes.

Assess each other's capacity

In cases where money is involved, schools and youth groups need to assess each other's capacity and ability to manage resources.

There needs to be very careful discussion and clear agreement about the processes that will be followed.

We have seen a number of school partnerships fall apart once money has become involved as trust breaks down and suspicions within the local community arise.

Amy Blake, CEO of Classrooms for Malawi mentions,

“If schools do choose to travel and are fundraising for a trip it is important to be transparent about the total cost of the trip and what % of donations will go toward covering travel costs and what % will go toward activities at the partner school in Malawi.”

It is essential to have funds kept in a recognised group bank account, with all processes clearly agreed, and with the appropriate school/community committees structures used.

The SMP and MaSP are able to give advice and support to school partnership which need to handle funds.

Irma Arts (2020) notes:

“[Whilst] many teachers are aware of the imbalance that can exist between partner schools and do reflect on the equity of their partnership, some were struggling in how to best address these questions.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR WORKING GROUP if considering raising funds:

- How does charitable fundraising affect the equality of the relationship between our partner schools?
- How can your school partnership best manage the tensions between expectations of financial aid and educational aims?
- Does money equal quality work?
- How might raising funds for the partnership affect its wider communities?

Money can easily distort equal partnership and perpetuate longstanding issues of aid, dependency, and power – the very things partnerships exist to try eliminate. It is essential to set out clear expectations in your partnership agreement and regularly revisit this.



MaSP comments:

“It is okay for schools give each other money, however this is not the sole activity in the partnership. Transparency and accountability is highly encouraged to not interfere with the school partnership... It’s complex, but both schools need to understand all money is raised through funding raising or lengthy applications.”

Teacher Caroline Beaton urges:

“funding needs to be less of a focus to make partnership sustainable”

Ian Mitchell of Beath High School believes:

“Partnerships based on trust will continue”

Max, SMP Youth Committee, shared,

“Our school had policy of declining gift requests. If anything was to be given, it was agreed with teachers. “

Ryan, SMP Youth Committee found in his experience,

“In terms of money giving, think about the effects on the wider community in Malawi – it can cause jealousy and even violence.”

Max, SMP Youth Committee, mentions that his,

“People got tired of fundraising where I live, in small Highland community.”

Some points of view from our SMP and MaSP Youth & Schools Forum 2021:

“receiving for free doesn’t work for sustainability”

“fund just a phone for Whatsapp for example”

“funding needs to be an open conversation in your partnership agreement”

Here are more diverse statements, that you could use to provoke discussion:

“Some fundraising will be required no matter what the principles.”

“funding should not be the primary activity”

“there is more benefit in exchanging ideas or challenges”

“focus should be on capacity building for both teachers from both sides”



“Funding is the most important thing! But needs a sustainability plan”

“Don’t think of it as fundraising, make it more intertwined with building bonds and strengthening. Eg. Into an event, create different teams, Malawians can also learn from experience of fundraising.”

“Do sustainable projects like a social enterprise or exchange recipe books to make and sell”

“People donating need to be actively involved in something that connects them to Malawi/Scotland”

“I sold chickens eggs and raised £1000 for my partnership! It could have been something both sides of the partnership could do. Why not choose a fundraising activity both sides can get involved in and have fun?”



PRACTICALITIES:

Communication

It is important to be aware of the realities of life in Malawi.

Only 10% of Malawians have access to grid electricity

and most of those who do have electricity still suffer regular blackouts through 'load shedding' (when there is greater demand on the grid than power available).

Only 0.06% of Malawians have a broadband connection themselves

Only 0.07% a landline

However

52% have a mobile phone

+

16% have access to the internet

[Source: [Worlddata.info](https://www.worlddata.info)]

While electricity, connectivity and bandwidth are real challenges for many in Malawi, it is as often the Malawian school telling us that communication is an issue, as the Scottish side.

MaSP's visits to 17 partnership schools in Malawi in January 2022 found,

"In schools in the rural, access to communication remains a challenge" but that some have benefitted from "solar panels, laptops and internet boxes" from their partners to help with this.

WhatsApp is hugely popular in Malawi. Most youth or school partnership we have spoken to uses this.

Why? It is a relatively cheap and accessible way for people to communicate and can be a great tool in a school partnership as it allows the two-way flow of information, updates, photos and videos.

Facebook is also widely used in Malawi and many school partnerships use this as a way of keeping in touch.

It is important to be aware that mobile phone use, and pricing, is very different in Malawi. Most people buy credit on a 'pay as you go' basis, using scratch card credits bought from street vendors.

Discuss the cost of communication and include in your Partnership Agreement.



Time difference

Think about *when* you will communicate.

Consider the time difference, Malawi is:

- two hours ahead of the UK November -March
- one hour ahead April – September

Also, consider that **the working day typically starts early and finishes earlier in Malawi**. So make sure both of these are factored in when you're choosing when to speak. And don't forget to consider public holidays [in Malawi](#) and [in Scotland](#), which are often not the same.

However you choose to communicate within your partnership, it's good to reach a clear agreement at the outset so each side knows what sort of communication, when and how often, they can expect. Sometimes the simple act of **agreeing a regular time to catch up** (for example, first Tuesday of the month) can be the most significant determinant of whether a partnership will succeed.

MaSP's visits to 17 partnership schools in Malawi in January 2022 found a challenge for some partnerships was,

“Lack of frequent communication - in some cases because Malawian schools often wait to be contacted first and cannot initiate communication”

Irma Arts (2020) emphasises:

“Ensure that teachers keep in touch and develop an understanding of the information channels teachers use and need.”

Beath High School partnered with Mapanga and Njale Primary Schools, also said,

“The greatest challenge is the ability to communicate with each other in an effective manner. Mapanga PS has no electricity and Njale PS has only one computer in the whole school. Email etc is not possible. WhatsApp is the method of choice but data in Malawi is expensive and this adds to the problems.”

St Ronan's Primary School partnered with Thondwe Primary School add,

“Our biggest challenge when our partnership started was communication, but once we had the provision of smartphones and we got onto Whatsapp, what a huge difference it made.”

Curriculum Focus:

We really recommend schools work to embed their partnership into their curriculum rather than seeing it as something entirely distinct from the day-to-day. This helps ensure it's an integral part of



the school day, it maximises the educational outcomes and it helps make the link far more sustainable by engaging teachers and learners across the school.

ScotDEC highlight:

“[Partnerships] open opportunities to decolonise our curriculum and programmes, by enabling diverse perspectives to be explored and valued. This approach builds core skills of creative and critical thinking, builds empathy and develops communication skills, in young people and practitioners.”

The possibilities are endless, particularly given the importance attributed to global citizenship, active learning and the flexibility factor in the Scottish “Curriculum for Excellence” for Scottish schools in particular. By focussing on the educational benefits of your partnership, the relationship between schools is more egalitarian and therefore more likely to endure. The same is true for youth organisations sharing activity plans.

Sharing your curriculums or activity plans is one of the easiest ways to move a partnership forward by finding common areas to work on. This could be in the form of a joint projects or as simple as sharing different approaches to the same topic. Think about using your link to creatively enrich the work you’re already doing in class.

Take a look at Connecting Classrooms Global Learning resources to support your partnership: <https://connecting-classrooms.britishcouncil.org/resources/global-learning-resources>”

Beath High School partnered with Mapanga and Njale Primary Schools mentioned,

“Our Malawian link is used regularly in classes as a teaching point/strategy.”

“If looking to share curriculums, firstly be aware that Malawian primary curriculum is very regimented and different to Scotland. Also consider only sending over educational materials that can be used with the materials your partner has – find your common ground here.

Teacher CPD is also a really good one to share as Malawians have less access to this”

The Watson’s Malawi Partnership inputed that,

“We believe that our relationship with Malawi offers our partner schools useful connections and access to essential material and teacher training, while providing Watson’s students with an interest that could enrich the rest of their lives.”

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS share,



“In Scotland we aim for young people to gain the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for life in the 21st century. A partnership positively contributes towards this alongside contribution to both the 4 capacities and also the 4 contexts for learning.”

Whole youth group or school involvement:

Involving everyone needn't be daunting. Simple WhatsApp exchanges can translate to entire school events or initiatives on both sides which bring every young person, teacher or youth leader into the partnership.

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS said that,

“Small things can enable the partnership to become whole school. This could be, sharing resources, understanding challenges in each country, learning for and with friends.

The Malawi Day in Penicuik High School proved to be a very successful way of promoting and sharing a range of cultural and societal aspects of life in Malawi... ensuring that the whole school is involved in a meaningful way. While steered by a committee, it is important that the partnership is viewed as a whole school collaboration and not just the preserve of a few.”

Beath High School partnered with Mapanga and Njale Primary Schools share,

“The individual events which raised a smile and brought a tear are too numerous to mention but I would draw attention to our distribution of girls underwear at both schools. The smiles on the faces of the girls at both schools show how a small gesture can mean so much!”

Community involvement:

You may also want to reach out beyond the school to engage the wider community. Some of our members have done this very successfully. They have found that this helps grow greater awareness and support for their partnership as well as recruits potential working group members and volunteers to help with events.

We've seen great examples of school links branching out to include the local church, local businesses and the wider community.

A note of caution:

The crucial thing is ensuring that both sides of the partnership are aware of any changes which might affect them and are consulted and engaged throughout.

There have been instances where the original educational, two-way school-to-school link has been lost as the partnership evolved over time to involve wider churches, shifting to more of a one-way charitable model, to the frustration of those in Malawi. This is to be avoided.



Going Digital:

Covid-19 travel restrictions have brought significant disruption to travel between Scotland and Malawi. We recognise this has brought real challenges to school partnerships built around regular reciprocal visits but we also feel it has provided a real opportunity for us all to experiment with different, digital, ways of working.

Example of partnership working during the Covid-19 pandemic:

If we are committed to fighting the climate crisis we must all think about how, post-Covid, we fly less and emit less carbon. So it's really important we don't forget all we have learnt about digital working once travel returns.

New ways of working:

Digital and hybrid meetings have been a revolution for MaSP and the SMP. Gone are the days of Scots sitting round a table in Scotland talking about Malawi, and Malawians in Malawi talking about Scotland. Through Zoom, Teams and Skype we're able to have regular interactions between Scots and Malawians in *all* our events and meetings.

We really encourage school partnerships to embrace digital and actively look at ways of using digital to facilitate regular, sustained conversations between both teachers and learners.

Max, SMP Youth Committee Member, suggests,

“Encourage teachers to use their creative power with digital, and keep the young people and Headteacher equally invested to keep a partnership alive”

Connection and cost:

There are obvious inequalities in terms of digital access, both *within* Malawi and Scotland, and *between* Malawi and Scotland. 4G internet has rolled out with speed across much of Malawi but it is costly and does not cover all parts of the country. Malawi has some of the most costly internet access in the world, so it's important to know both what technology is available and whether it is affordable.

As highlighted in the Communications section, Whatsapp is often the best medium for communicating as it is very accessible on most smartphones and uses less internet data than email.

Live linking:

Where technology allows, school partnerships have found it hugely beneficial to set up live links for young people to engage and interact directly. We recommend that technology is tested in advance and you have a plan 'B' and 'C' ready if plan 'A' doesn't work. For example, if the SMP is hosting a Zoom we would always have the mobile phone numbers of those joining from Malawi so if the connection fails we can fall back to a WhatsApp voice call, or if that fails to a regular telephone call.



The SMP and MaSP can support you in making the most of digital. We can offer support, information and even practical assistance setting up live links with your partner school. Contact us with your requirements and we'll do everything we can to help.

Here's a few hints and tips on how best to use digital, from our members' experience so far:

- Update your Partnership Agreement to include this way of working and how you will use it.
- Use the cheapest platforms especially for the Malawian school: WhatsApp, Facebook etc. Find out what works best for them even though there may not be an ideal solution.
- Share as many pictures as possible of any activity done together, or just any activity in general. WhatsApp is great for sharing images.
- If resources are available, set up channels which students can safely access as well.
- Try one or two whole school collaborative events per year – perhaps with a digital element.
- Class or whole school celebrations can be streamed live on Facebook etc. to be watched live or later.
- Make sure you use a platform which the Scottish school is allowed to use (some Scottish local authorities ban the use of facebook, youtube, etc in schools).
- SMP and MaSP can support schools in both countries on how to share live events online.
- Create personal, individual connections through digital pen pal projects online.
- Have a "Scotland/Malawi partnership updates" section in your school newsletter/mailer.
- Invite and support partners to any digital staff trainings.

The Watson's Malawi Partnership reflect,

"With the collapse of international travel brought on by the pandemic, we have had to find more creative, digital ways to raise awareness and resources for the partnership. These have included tours of Malawi, wine-tasting, horse-racing and auctions – all delivered online!"

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS, share,

"While face to face contact is a very powerful way of building relationships and taking forward joint projects, the [Covid-19 pandemic] has shown us that it is possible to work effectively in a range of different ways. Working towards a digital partnership will mitigate a number of challenges and uncertainties and provide a mechanism for building and maintaining regular connections between staff and students.

For example our joint blog will be developed and regularly updated to share what is happening in each school community.



While there needs to be recognition of the challenges faced in effectively developing a digital partnership, there is great scope to enhance digital literacy skills across both schools.

It is undeniable that meeting face to face may still contribute to our partnership moving forward, however it will no longer be the primary means for planning and developing the partnership”



Sustaining and reflecting:

Beath High School partnered with Mapanga and Njale Primary Schools add,

“The similarities between the two countries are more evident than one might expect and the differences are more in what we do to meet and overcome challenges.”

Partnerships are never “finished”, the very act of reviewing progress, structures and principles, helps keep partnerships fresh, relevant, appropriate and impactful.

We recommend that you:

- Review your Partnership Agreement annually
 - Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS,
“Our partnership agreement has changed and developed since the initial signing in 2017”
- Review the extent to which you are working with the [11 Partnership Principles](#) annually. Best to do this separately and then compare your reflections together, to agree priorities for the coming year.
- Don’t be afraid to ask difficult questions and have them asked of you.
- Keep a routine of sharing updates between each other once your partnership is established.

Measure your success by recording and monitoring:

- Benefits for young people
- Benefits for teachers and youth leaders
- Benefits for the community

Should you come across any problems along the way, you can always get in touch with MaSP or SMP, and we can explore options with you.

Here are some thoughts on sustainability from our members:

St Ronan’s Primary School partnered with Thondwe Primary School, continue to think ahead,

“What does the future hold? Hopefully we will have two way exchanges between teachers, and then hopefully the pupils too at secondary school”

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS focus on Malawi’s priorities,

“The Malawi vision 2063 as set out by the government of Malawi specifically uses the phrase ‘self reliant nation,’ which I feel sets out the stall of both an ethical and



equitable partnership model. Both sides of the partnership would benefit greatly from acting as enablers for one another.”

25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boy’s Brigade partnered with Likhubula province reflect on the momentum and impact,

“We’ve been encouraged by the awards and recognition that our projects have been given by SMP and local politicians... When young people - young adults - still talk about their experience of the partnership five years later and the impact it had on them, that’s when you know it is all worth it, but then you see what difference it’s making in Malawi and it’s so much greater.”

The Watson’s Malawi Partnership share their incredible growth,

“The programme has evolved from being a simple school visit to becoming a registered Scottish Charitable Organisation, espousing the values of the Scotland Malawi Partnership and with Sir Andrew Cubie as our patron... From an educational perspective, George Watson’s College has benefited enormously.”



VISITS

Value of visits:

Friendship and interpersonal connections are at the heart of all Scotland-Malawi partnerships. While the digital revolution has been brilliant in allowing far more scalable and sustainable interactions between Scots and Malawians, it will never entirely replace in-person working.

At an SMP-MaSP Youth & Schools Forum in October 2021, teacher Caroline Beaton said,

“The human - people to people factor is the most important element of any partnership”

The Watson’s Malawi Partnership add,

“The highlight for all of us is being able to visit our partners in Malawi each year to share in their success, identify new opportunities for support and discuss some of the issues that are common to us all.”

25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boy’s Brigade partnered with Likhubula province also said,

“A memory that the boys always highlight is the series of friendly football matches we have played against young people and, indeed, teachers from the schools. They have learned so much about the culture and social issues of Malawi just through this sport.”

Ryan, Youth Committee Member says,

“When you finally meet face to face it is completely different to emails and Zoom.”

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS, share,

“There are a range of ways to get involved in partnership. It is not necessarily always about visits or committing hours and hours to partnership activities...**being involved in a partnership always gives so much more back than you put in.**”

We recommend that partnerships talk together about visits from the outset so expectations are clear.

Considering the Climate

Can it be right to take large groups between Scotland and Malawi as part of educational partnerships if this only worsens the climate crisis which both our nations, but most especially Malawi, is feeling the terrible effects of climate change?



How should one balance the benefits to the individuals and communities involved against the cost to the planet?

There are, we are afraid, no easy answers to these questions and we encourage schools to themselves wrestle these issues, with their partners, to decide what is best for them.

Amy Blake, CEO of Classrooms for Malawi shares,

“If travel is part of your partnerships it is important to calculate the environmental impact of the trip and consider how carbon emissions can be offset.”

We recommend school partnerships keep such questions under close consideration, **weighing up the costs and benefits**, and engaging learners at both sides in this discussion.

Avoid getting into assumed and unquestioned annual routines but rather and regularly check your plans against your shared principles.

If visits are anticipated, we recommend that partnerships talk together about this from the outset so expectations are clear.

It is important to keep reflecting on modes of working, assessing whether visits are required, how often and how to marry this with a shared desire to reduce carbon emissions.

It's great to engage the young people in these crucial discussions, as taking responsibility for these decisions brings excellent learning outcomes.

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS reflect that,

“There's an endless moral debate about whether we should travel to Malawi and what the benefit of that is for us as Scots compared to what the money could do in Malawi. There's a strong case for both and we have to think about that carefully...”

While a future model of partnership may not rely as heavily on face to face visits, up to this point it has been a very important means of involving staff and pupils from across the schools”

25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boy's Brigade partnered with Likhubula province shared,

“...schools may be more and more wary about travelling abroad and with the debate about the worthiness of expensive travel, carbon footprint and 'white saviour' tourism.

We all should do a lot of consideration of the bigger-picture stuff surrounding partnerships.

There are many ways that groups [in Scotland] can support Malawian people in other ways, but the thought of a visit is often a 'hook' to get and keep young people involved.”



There is no solution that fits all, as international travel opportunities and digital alternatives continue to change. We recommend that you openly and regularly reflect on your own ethics, priorities and adaptability as partners. Only you can decide what is right for your partnership, but we fully encourage you to weigh up the pros and cons for both sides.

Digital and in-person travel are not mutually exclusive: it's not one *or* the other. Rather, if you're travelling to Malawi, think about how you can use digital as well, to help more people share that experience with you and learn as you learn. This could be live while you are in Malawi, or it could be a video shared when you return.

As always, think carefully about the narrative you are casting with any digital work: what story are you telling, do you have permission to do so, who is the "hero" of your story, how would you feel if you were depicted in this way? Read our 'Do no Harm' section for more on this. We specifically recommend the ["Radi-Aid" Social Media Guide](#) by the Norwegian Students' and Academics' Assistance Fund (SAIH).

Here is a collection of different points of view on this, from attendees at a SMP-MaSP Youth & School's Forum:

"We need to meet globally periodically, we can't never see each other again"

"The time has come to think tactfully around carbon"

"Air travel is worrying due to the effect it has on environment in developing world"

"Trips are worth it despite the climate, it's a one time thing for so many"

"...trips are key. But they don't need to be so frequent"

"I am surprised some schools go every year"

The Watson's Malawi Partnership commented,

"We recognise the environmental cost of our school trip and work closely with Zomba TREEZ – and increasingly Mulanje Conservation Trust and Kuti Wildlife Reserve – to find meaningful and sustainable ways to off-set our carbon footprint and to protect and improve the environment everywhere."

The Irma Arts report (2020) urges schools to:

"Reflect on the negative (environmental) impacts a visit will have, and if they can be justified."

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS reflect that,



“There’s an endless moral debate about whether we should travel to Malawi and what the benefit of that is for us as Scots compared to what the money could do in Malawi. There’s a strong case for both and we have to think about that carefully... While a future model of partnership may not rely as heavily on face to face visits, up to this point it has been a very important means of involving staff and pupils from across the schools”

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Reciprocal vs one-way

‘Parity’ is a key Partnership Principle for the SMP and MaSP, we therefore actively encourage *reciprocal* visits where there is international travel in a school partnership. It is not always possible for the same numbers to travel each way but we feel it is important to ensure the opportunities are open at both sides of a partnership.

There are of course different practical challenges to consider depending on which way you’re travelling. Those travelling from Malawi to Scotland are often less able to themselves pay for visits, so there may need to be more collective fundraising.

Securing a UK visa, even for a short visit, is a time consuming, invasive and uncertain process. [The SMP can offer real support](#) with this but contact us at the start of the process.

Whichever way you’re travelling, to Scotland or Malawi, is essential you have:

- A clear purpose to the visit and agreed itinerary,
- Appropriate insurance and contingency plans,
- A well thought through plan as to how young people will be supported to interact: we recommend Critical Dialogue Groups
- Practical and safeguarding arrangements in place to ensure a safe and appropriate visit

Max from the SMP Youth Committee comments that,



“I hadn’t considered that reciprocal visits might not happen for other schools! I appreciate it is harder to organise, but I feel it is fairly fundamental to partnership working... Malawians visiting us should be the same numbers as when we go over there.

Also it works best when youth interaction is a key focus for the trip.”

Beath High School partnered with Njale and Mapanga Primary Schools,

“Beath Malawi Partnership has been able to visit our partner schools on four occasions, twice with learners (2016 and 2018) and twice as staff only (2017 and 2019). The highlights of the partnership have undoubtedly been the visits to Malawi. Whilst there, we have been involved in teaching lessons, upgrading classrooms, community activities and cultural exchanges.”

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS reflect,

“Our programme of reciprocal visits have been a hugely successful way in linking both school communities together.

It allowed us both to see both the challenges and opportunities in the education system in each country and gave a foundation for professional dialogue and resource sharing...

Reciprocal visits have been a key mechanism for linking with the communities in both schools.”

Ryan, Youth Committee Member,

“Remember that Scotland has a lot more restrictions on activities that can be carried out, than in Malawi, plan well!”

“It’s important a visit isn’t a one-way deal, and then neither side get to see each other again. Reciprocal visits mean you have more chance of deeply developing your projects together”

Penicuik High School partnered with Namadzi CDSS,

“The 2019 visit from Namadzi to Penicuik The visit from Namadzi to Penicuik followed on fairly directly from our visit to Malawi. It was wonderful to be able to host two members of staff and two students from Namadzi and again provided and opportunity for whole school involvement in the partnership through welcome assemblies and the staff and students from Namadzi participating in classes. There were a range of activities undertaken throughout the week and culminated in Namadzi students participating in the summer music concert.”



Here are some questions you may find useful to lead discussions on approaching visits between Scotland and Malawi:

- Why must this trip happen?
- What could replace it?
- Why does it need to happen right now?
- How will you fairly weigh up the pros of your trip against the cons against the environment?

Inclusivity

We recommend schools think about the inclusivity of school trips:

- Who gets selected for the visit and how?
 - Ryan, SMP Youth Committee Member, “Every year my school reflected on, and changed, how they selected the right people to go, that was really good”
- Is it only learners from richer families that can take part?
 - Ian Mitchell, Beath High School, “We included Scottish pupils from difficult circumstances in our trips. We encourage that it is open to everyone. Take a close look at your funding options and refine who you will bring by interview”
- Who decides what will happen in the visit?
 - Ian Mitchell, Beath High School, “This is often your travel partner, but it could be better though to organise together with your school partners what you are going to do.”

In keeping with our principles, we think it’s essential to think about who might be excluded from any partnership and to work actively to increase diversity, equity and inclusivity.

Preparation:

The SMP recommends that all schools involved in an international visit provide suitable preparation for the young people involved

It is most important to help young people get the most from the visit by developing a critical understanding of poverty and power.

The SMP is able to assist with this.

In her 2020 study into school partnership, Irma Arts noted:

“the question is whether there is a direct link between experiencing life in a developing country and understanding development issues. In the interviews the teachers seem to



assume there was an automatic positive relation between visiting a country (or having a partnership) and understanding sustainable development issues, but as the literature showed, to critically understand global issues would request more than just a personal experience.

Teachers for example described the impact a visit would have on their students for example as having an awareness other might be “worse off” or “appreciate what they have more”. This comes close to Simpson’s (2004) description of explaining poverty through the “lotto-logic” of being “lucky” for where you grow up. This logic does not question underlying systems and structures linked to poverty, and overall does not work towards a critical global citizenship.”

The report also stated:

“Analysing the conversations with Scottish schools and organisations, there seem to be an assumption that having a partnership will make pupils more aware of issues such as poverty, and therefore lead to global learning. However, global learning includes to “think deeply and critically about what is equitable and just, and what will minimise harm to our planet.” (Scotdec 2019) and therefore ask for a critical understanding of social justice. Pupils will not reach this by themselves, therefore pre- and post-sessions for visits are important including discussions on issues such as stereotypes and poverty as well as lessons for pupils exploring social justice and sustainable development.”

If you’re looking for fun, engaging ways of helping young people think critically about their assumptions, we really recommend the brilliant “Radi-Aid: Africa for Norway” satirical videos produced by the Norwegian Students’ and Academics’ Assistance Fund (SAIH). Watch them all at www.radiaid.com.

Supporting peer dialogue:

As noted in our Do No Harm section of this guide, we think it’s vital that young people are supported to have really constructive dialogues with their peers as part of any visit. It’s all too easy to slip into the sort of ‘visit an orphanage’, ‘hold a baby’, ‘paint a school’ type of visit if you’re not careful.

This is sometimes criticised as “voluntourism”. Not only do we feel such visits do not precipitate global citizenship and meaningful educational outcomes, they risk doing real harm.

The Steka Skills and Queen Margaret University report ‘[An Alternative to Voluntourism: How Youth Solidarity Groups in Malawi Empower young Malawians and Scots](#)’ presents a compelling critique of “voluntourism” and sets out a practical way for school groups visiting Malawi to avoid this.

Their ‘critical dialogue model for youth solidarity’ creates a **Malawi-led structure which allows young Scots and young Malawians enter into genuinely respectful dialogue** and a “brave space” through which there can be critical reflection and learning. The report states:

“100% of pupils said it was very important to be challenged by the stories and



discussion. Some found it enlightening, others found it difficult.

Teachers said that the process of problematizing voluntourism should happen before the Scottish school pupils travel to Malawi — indeed before they even start their fundraising.”

We recommend all those organising peer-to-peer in-person contact between learners read this report and consider adopting this approach. The study is evidence-led and has a range of positive case studies showing how young Scots and young Malawians have benefitted from this model.

25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boy’s Brigade partnered with Likhubula province,

“We know it can’t be an Instagram holiday/opportunity and we hope that partnerships will go out of their way to respect local people’s wishes and needs in partnerships... It’s so important that while in Malawi there’s peer-to-peer interaction with young people of similar ages doing the majority of interaction.”

Travel support

We have some excellent travel partners that are very experienced in organising youth and school trips to Malawi.

ORBIS EXPEDITIONS

For travel related support, SMP are happy to recommend [Orbis Expeditions](#) (which is part of the Responsible Safari Company) a long-standing member and partner of SMP, both in Malawi & Scotland.

Orbis Expeditions offer a fully comprehensive list of industry protected travel services, both in UK & Malawi covering:

- Fully bonded flight bookings
- Itinerary planning
- Health & safety management
- Risk Assessments
- Insurances
- Visas
- Vehicle hire
- In-country Guides
- Accommodation bookings
- Educational Global Citizenship project links
- Full in-country operations and logistical support through their sister company, [The Responsible Safari Co.](#) (RSC)

Website: [Orbis Expeditions- Travel to Malawi \(orbis-expeditions.com\)](#)

Contact: info@orbis-expeditions.com

25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boy’s Brigade partnered with Likhubula province used,



“The Responsible Safari Company, with whom we’ve travelled each time, has been amazing. They are a sustainable, respectful organisation with so many years of experience and their local guides, as well as Dom and Kate [from Orbis Expeditions] in the UK, are simply brilliant at organising and keeping to a schedule with all the necessary arrangements.”

25th Stirling (Dunblane) Boy’s Brigade partnered with Likhubula province also share,

“Youth groups are well positioned to facilitate travel and will often be less risk-averse (but still risk-observant) than formal education.”

We are also aware that [Diversity Travel](#) can help organise and lead school trips from Scotland to Malawi. We are in dialogue with Diversity Travel to learn more about their offering.

DIVERSITY STUDY TRIPS

Diversity Study Trips are a new educational offering, which was built on the belief that students really do learn better through experience! We’re ready to help group leaders plan unforgettable field trips for their pupils and students.

Our dedicated Study Trips team is made up of educational travel experts and ex-teachers with a passion for travel.

With this level of expertise, they support group leaders through every step of the trip management process, including:

Planning itineraries tailored to your course requirements and learning objectives

Arranging fully inclusive trips from travel to group friendly accommodation, meals, site visits, hands on workshops, talks by industry experts and much more

Use of suppliers with group experience, pre -audited for health and safety

Detailed trip documentation and vouchers accessible online 24/7 With over 70 years of travel experience between them, the leadership team are well-equipped to provide a seamless trip

Website: <https://www.diversitytravel.com/uk/>

Contact: PAIbrecht@diversitytravel.co.uk



SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS TO TAKE AWAY

14 tips to remember

Here are the key points the SMP are keen readers take from this Guide. We think that following these 14 recommendations will help you develop a strong, sustainable and impactful school partnership.

1. Before starting a school partnership invest in establishing active, **critical thinking** in important related areas such as global inequalities and social justice.
2. With your partner, think about possible **unintended negative consequences** and work to mitigate these as you endeavour to 'do no harm'.
3. Work to build a strong **mutual understanding** with your prospective partner school: the context in which they are working, their expectations and the realities of their lives.
4. Before starting a partnership, invest time in really open, **honest dialogue**, being pro-active to raise the key questions to ensure you really do agree on what the partnership is setting out to achieve and put this down in a simple, jargon-free Partnership Agreement.
5. Hold yourself, and your partnership, accountable to the 11 Scotland-Malawi [Partnership Principles](#), creating space for both you and your partner to separately reflect on whether you are really living up to these principles, then sharing the results with each other.
6. Think innovatively about how you can **use digital technologies** to support sustained dialogue and meaningful two-way educational engagements as part of the partnership, before assuming international travel is the next step.
7. Wherever possible, endeavour to **make international travel a reciprocal opportunity**, available to both sides of the partnership.
8. Where there is international travel, ensure those involved **have appropriate learning, familiarisation and critical thinking** to ensure they get the most from the trip and 'do no harm', and ensure young people are supported to digest, embed and share their learning experiences after the trip.
9. Think critically about **how images and video are used** throughout your partnership and the narrative you are developing for others to consume: ensure you are not unwittingly reinforcing harmful negative stereotype.



10. Do not assume that interactions between young Scots and Malawians will *automatically* achieve the most appropriate learning outcomes, consider a structured '**critical dialogue**' approach which helps ensure a depth of two-way understanding.
11. Ensure your school partnership is, first and foremost, a **two-way educational partnership**, embedded in the curriculum at both sides, rather than a mini development project.
12. Work to **engage teachers and learners across all of both schools** in the partnership and avoid the risk of too much sitting on the shoulders of one or two staff members who will inevitably move on at some point in the future.
13. Regularly **review your partnership** against your Partnership Agreement and the 11 Scotland-Malawi Partnership Principles: don't be afraid of difficult conversations, uncomfortable feedback or the need to evolve your partnership agreement in response to learning and experience.
14. **Become a member of the SMP** and encourage your partner school to be a member of our sister network, MaSP, and use these networks to tap into resources, experience and information, as well as sharing your own learning through these communities of practice.

Final case studies to inspire you!

[Read the full case studies from the partnerships that contributed to our guide on the SMP website!](#)

Below, hear from young voices from Penicuik High School - Namadzi CDSS partnership:

"The relationship between Scotland and Malawi partnership has increased the knowledge of teachers which are improving through their studies which can assist young people to achieve their education", Roureen from Mikombe

"The benefits are that it (partnership) promotes unity between two nations, Malawi and Scotland and it reduces racism between the two countries." Francis from Mikombe

Wanangwa and Innocent from Namadzi after the 2019 reciprocal visit:

"We would like to assure everyone that we have learnt a lot during our visit in Penicuik and this will go a long way to improve the teaching and learning and encouraging all students to work hard in Namadzi. We would also like to thank, in a special way, a trillion times, the beautiful families that hosted us with amazing kindness and comfort. We shall forever cherish the good times we had together."

Anna, a pupil from Penicuik High School said:



"I also really enjoyed all the opportunities I was given with being involved, it allowed me to meet passionate people striving for a better future in Malawi and allowed me to make fantastic connections and friends to this day. Being a part of a partnership with Malawi has shaped my whole life in the most positive way possible and that is something special."

Kate, a pupil from Penicuik High School went on to say:

"I would say my partnership highlights have been mixing and making friends with students in Malawi, learning about their lives and comparing our cultures like what our school days involved, playing rounders with the school, meeting everyone the first time and the school's welcome. The partnership benefitted me by making me more confident by pushing me outside my comfort zone, visiting a place where the culture and climate was different and talking with people who I'd never met before. It shaped my views of the wider world by bringing me out of my bubble and surrounding me with different lifestyles, cultures and issues which opened my eyes to the wider world."