

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

27 April 2023

Background

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

Originally expected to be the final year of work, as the logframe covers the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2023, Scottish Government funding has now been extended for an additional year to end March 2024. This review was therefore of the third year of SMP reporting against this logframe, which will now be the third of four years of work towards the following impact goal and five outcome areas:

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

- 1. Maintain mutual understanding, coordination, effectiveness and impact as a result of SMP-hosted activities.*
- 2. Maintain awareness and understanding amongst key stakeholders of governmental and civil society work with Malawi.*
- 3. Public awareness and engagement across Scotland of the bilateral relationship, the role of government and civil society, and the impact of this work.*
- 4. Continued visible and meaningful youth engagement and youth leadership in the bilateral relationship.*
- 5. A co-ordinated and confident sector with strong collaborations, clear mutual understanding, effective two-way assistance and common objectives, if any, identified.”*

As in the previous reviews of SMP annual reporting undertaken by Corra in 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, this review does not constitute a full impact assessment. Rather, it is a two- to three-day exercise comprising a desk-top document review and short consultation meeting which serves to

provide an independent assessment of the evidence provided by SMP in reporting on its progress during the year in question, April 2022-March 2023.

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

- the documents listed in the annex (all provided to Corra by SMP),
- SMP website and social media content, and,
- a discussion on selected issues highlighted by the document review (an online Zoom meeting held on 25 April 2023 between Stewart Brown, the SMP Interim Chief Executive, and Chrissie Hirst from the Corra Foundation).

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

Comments on MEL Framework and Quality of Data

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

The assessment prepared by Corra in April 2022 on last year's reporting made a number of general observations regarding the logframe, quantitative evidence requirements and gender and diversity disaggregation which remain relevant.

The number of respondents to the SMP annual survey was a point highlighted in previous reviews. There was an additional issue with the annual survey this year as it was run in two rounds due to two questions being mistakenly omitted from the first round. While, positively, the first round of the survey saw an increased number of respondents, from last year's 89 to 96, the second round of the survey, including some questions important for logframe indicator data but following soon after the first, only attracted 20 respondents. Errors are inevitable and this does not present a major issue given the range of complementary indicators and data sources. However, the current logframe reliance on annual survey feedback for six indicators does mean that this survey is a source of information for reporting on a number of areas. This review would therefore encourage SMP to continue exploring options to encourage, incentivise or facilitate a higher proportion of member responses, though would also observe that the SMP is not alone and many organisations face similar challenges in gathering detailed service user feedback. In future, it may be wise to

consider complementing the annual survey with other consultation, such as focus group discussion or selected interviews.

Assessment of Evidence of Specific Outcomes

This review considers the Impact Statement and each SMP 2020-23 logframe Outcome below, reviewing and discussing the evidence provided against each indicator, and on that basis noting a summary and colour-coded remark for insertion into the Year 3 logframe report at the appropriate point/indicator.

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

The three indicators for this Impact Statement were largely met. The number of SMP members, Impact Indicator 1, has decreased slightly by 8 from last year's figure of 1,312 to 1,304. While the membership target number for this year of 1,400 has not been achieved, the previous two years saw increases. Additionally, the decreases have been both very slight and also even across all categories of membership (individual, organisational, youth, schools, local authorities), meaning there is no indication of a particular type of member who is no longer being properly served.

Progress against Impact Indicator 2, the proportion of SMP members completing the annual survey who feel that the SMP has advanced the impact statement, is a solid 100%, exceeding the 80% target (although, as noted above, due to survey issues the number of respondents on this question is only 20, relatively low).

Impact Indicator 3 concerns evidence of key civic and political leaders from across Scotland and Malawi and, as in previous years, there is ample evidence of this shared in the reporting: in addition to good and cross-party Holyrood attendance at SMP events and meetings, the SMP have continued to attract support from senior British and Scottish government ministers, including the President of Malawi and Scotland's First Minister, as well as civic figures. Additional evidence presented in other documents on SMP activities and member feedback is largely very positive and does speak to members increasing their knowledge and increasing participation in links, personal contacts and activities related to Malawi.

Impact Indicator 4: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP's work in 2022-23 has increased knowledge, participation and the impact of Scotland's civic links with Malawi. Member feedback remained positive and milestone targets for the year were met – the exception to this was membership numbers, which dropped very slightly by 8 (one or two across each category, namely individual, organisational, school, youth, and local authority, indicating this is not reflective of disappointment with a particular area of SMP's work). The SMP also maintained its record of enthusiastic and high-level support and endorsements from civic and political leaders from both Scotland and Malawi.

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

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees all targets under Outcome 1 exceeded. All members (100%) who responded to the annual survey felt the SMP's work has advanced this outcome, exceeding the 75% target and maintaining the similarly high level achieved last year (although, as noted above, due to survey issues the number of respondents on this question is only 20, relatively low). As per the target, nine SMP forums were held, but with attendance far exceeding that target (508 attendees against a target of 150). A general comment relevant here is a reminder that the SMP held more events in the last year (37 if partnered events are also included), but only formal 'forums' are counted towards Indicator 1.1.1. The SMP has also been adjusting to the new realities of post-pandemic digitalisation and regularly offers hybrid meetings – over half the forums held were hybrid events. Continued use of a range of meeting types (online, hybrid, in person) reflects a constructive and flexible approach to retaining the positive change brought by greater digitalisation – not least a wider range of participants – while balancing the importance of in-person contact for relationship-building and creative collaboration.

In relation to Output 1.1 and Member Forums, the gender balance of contributors to the Forums was 57:43 men:women, an improvement of 10% from last year which is notable and positive. This was again matched by a similarly positive continued participant gender ratio (56:42) that was within the target range. Attendee feedback on the forums (on both the quality of the meeting and its impact on their link with Malawi) was also again overwhelmingly positive and exceeded the targets (93% and 97% respectively of responding attendees describing the meeting as excellent or very good and stating their link with Malawi had been supported/strengthened). The proportion of attendees providing feedback on forums dipped very slightly from last year (down from 37% last year to 34% this year) but still remained over one third, a good level for evidence. The number of testimonial or descriptive statements collected from participants regarding the positive impact of SMP Forums on their work also exceeds the target (24 such testimonies against a target of 15); there is a significant drop off from last year, with 2022-23 returning to around the same level as 2020-2021 (the 2021-22 'bulge' may well have been COP 26-related). Against a planned target of 32 SMP events and 1,850 attendees, this year's numbers are short with 25 events held engaging 1,118. The number of SMP supported/partnered events was 12, also short of the target of 20 partner events, however these did involve 1,452 attendees, which is a significant number. Here, the impact of staff absence, both due to sick leave and turnover, will have been an important factor (confirmed by discussions with the Interim Chief Executive) and the record of events remains impressive for a small team.

In relation to Output 1.2 and the total programme of SMP and partnered events, gender balance across all event participation was strong, and gender balance across speakers was also good and improved from last year (58% male speakers down from 63% in 2021-22), well within the target range. Participant feedback on both the quality of the event and its effect on strengthening links with Malawi was 94% and 96% respectively, exceeding the 80% targets (and improving on the 91% and 95% of last year), and although fewer responses were collected this year the data was provided by nearly a quarter (23%) of attendees so a decent proportion. Testimonial statements

collected about positive impact on links with Malawi also exceed the target, similarly to previous years.

Outcome Indicator 1.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP-hosted activities in 2022-23 have contributed to mutual understanding, co-ordination, effectiveness and impact. While the number of SMP events and corresponding attendees has fallen short of the target, gender balance in speakers and participants has improved and participant feedback remains overwhelmingly positive – indicating that while less events were held than anticipated, the quality was good. Additionally, and with a similar comment to last year, there are important areas of the SMP’s work which developed after the original logframe was finalised and contribute to this outcome while not being directly reflected through the indicators currently set. The SMP work on diversity, equity and inclusion is an important programming element here that has direct relevance for advancing mutual understanding: cultural activities continued during the last year, the new Global Citizenship resources were launched, and further work has been undertaken to expand the ‘People to People’ podcast series. Given this additional activity, and the very high figures for increasing engagement in SMP’s digital media activity, this review does not see signs of a regression in performance against this outcome.

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

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees almost all targets under Outcome 2 exceeded, some very significantly. The percentage of members who felt the SMP’s work has advanced the outcome was 100%, exceeding the 75% target and maintaining the high level achieved last year (although, as noted above, due to survey issues the number of respondents on this question is only 20, relatively low).

All Scottish Government funding announcements for Malawi were promoted by SMP updates, and targets were also exceeded, nearly double and triple the respective targets set, in relation to the SMP coverage and promotion through the bulletin and social media of Scottish Government-funded projects and Scottish Government funding opportunities. Targets related to the SMP bulletin were also met and significantly exceeded, in particular for bulletin recipients (1,726 against a 1,290 target) and opens (26,822 against a 13,500 target); bulletin opens in particular grew significantly against last year (26,822, up from 19,274 in 2021-22, and from 14,165 in 2020-21) indicating that readers remain keen to read the material SMP shares. Similarly, all three targets related to the SMP website (page views, new visitors and number of sessions) were also exceeded, although down from last year when it is likely that activity around COP26 and digital youth festival will have contributed to a bulge in this data for 2021-22.

Two out of three targets for enquiry handling were met, with these indicators particularly affected by the annual survey issues noted above: while those who responded on enquiries were 100% positive (exceeding the 80% target), there were few respondents and this affected the number of statements collected for indicator 2.5.3. The four indicators related to sharing experience and learning across the network all far exceeded their targets, maintaining the performance record of

previous years – a positive and noteworthy achievement given that fewer events were organised in the period.

Outcome Indicator 2.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2022-23 has contributed to key stakeholders' awareness and understanding of governmental and civil society work with Malawi. The SMP bulletin and website figures are evidence these continue to be valued and popular vehicles for dissemination. Similarly, member engagement (instances of sharing expertise, uptake of expertise shared and feedback on how it is received) remains strong and feedback very positive on this core area of network function.

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

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees almost all targets under Outcome 3 exceeded, with SMP continuing to evidence very strong performance on video content and online engagement. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 100%, exceeding the 75% target and maintaining the rate of positive responses from last year (although, as noted above, due to survey issues the number of respondents on this question is only 20, relatively low).

With one exception, all targets for social media were exceeded. Facebook 'reach' grew by 16,554 from last year – 'reach' is being tracked rather than the set target of 'impressions' as that data requires a fee-paying account but is an adequate proxy and there is no indication that SMP Facebook activity is dropping off. Twitter impressions are the one social media target which was not met (the Interim Chief Executive noted in discussions that staffing levels had inevitably impacted activity in this area), however Twitter followers are up by nearly 400 to 7,349 (exceeding the target of 6,250) and this is a good indication that people are finding SMP's Twitter activity valuable and relevant. Instagram and LinkedIn targets were also significantly exceeded, offering evidence of strong performance across a range of social media platforms.

The production of video content remains an area where the SMP has far exceeded its original targets, producing 67 videos rather than the planned 6, and with 57,201 views rather than the 520 envisaged. While views are down from last year's 79,724, it is likely that COP26 activity will have made that a particularly busy year and the high numbers show this is still a valued area where SMP has successfully responded to changing service user preferences. The local and national media targets¹ set for SMP advocacy have been met and exceeded in terms of the number of Malawi features in the Scottish media; again, the higher number of Malawi features in 2021-22 are likely due to COP26 coverage and the lower number this year, 231, still significantly exceeds the target of 160.

¹ As noted previously, Indicator 3.3.1 is currently worded in way which could be read as media pieces focussed on Malawi, rather than articles/pieces including coverage of Malawi; particularly given the quite high target of 160 p.a., equivalent of 3 per week, a note that the latter interpretation would be more appropriate and realistic. An additional note, and one which was highlighted in previous reviews, is that while the Scottish media features on Malawi are certainly an interesting indicator in relation to public awareness, the categorisation of "positive" vs "negative" undermines the value of the indicator as discussion of potentially 'negative' topics (e.g. albinism, climate change, etc.) may well be informative, accurate and contribute to informed and constructive public engagement.

Outcome Indicator 3.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2022-23 has contributed to public awareness and engagement on the bilateral relationship across Scotland. SMP has exceeded many of its social media targets and the data sees this strong online performance held across the 'Big Five' (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, YouTube), with video production and viewing continuing as an area of extremely strong activity that also reflects both continued demand and successful adaptation to evolving audience preferences. Local and national media coverage, only a small part of which is SMP-generated (e.g. *The Scotsman* column) and therefore important evidence of public interest, continues to exceed targets.

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

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees most targets under Outcome 4 met or exceeded. It is relevant to note that staffing gaps in the SMP team particularly affected youth and schools work during the year and reduced activity inevitably affected a number of indicators for this outcome. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 100%, exceeding last year and exceeding the 75% target (although, as noted above, due to survey issues the number of respondents on this question is only 19, relatively low).

The number of SMP school contacts, 274, saw an increase from last year's 243, and exceeded the set target of 260. The number of school points of support during the year however was only 17, significantly less than the planned target of 80. Despite this, the target for impact statements was met and the target for young Scots benefitting from SMP work was easily exceeded (an estimated 50,283 against a target of 40,000), although down from last year's 71,071 due to fewer activities. Both planned Schools Forum meetings were held, with annual attendance at 82, significantly exceeding the target of 30, and almost all giving feedback easily exceeding the 80% target for participant statements of the meeting's value for their engagement with Malawi.

Six meetings of the Youth Committee were held, achieving the set target, and the logframe also offers examples of Committee influence on SMP decision-making. While attendance at the Youth Congress held was less than planned (125 against a target of 200), the feedback exceeded the target with 100% of respondents rating the event as useful for their Malawi engagement. Although Congress attendance was lower than expected, the number of SMP Youth Members is significantly higher than the target (431 against a planned 372), which is a positive indication that this continues to be a valued area of SMP's work.

Outcome Indicator 4.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2022-23 has contributed to visible and meaningful youth engagement and leadership. It is notable that there was comparatively less activity in this area during the year than the previous 2021-22 period; despite this, the majority of targets were achieved and the SMP reached over 50,000 young Scots. As highlighted last year, the SMP has also been undertaking activity relevant to this Outcome which is not reflected in the logframe: building on the MaSP & SMP Partnership Guide launched in late March 2022, SMP brought out a range of new school resources in April and September 2022 that respond to current and important issues for bilateral relationships and work in this thematic area.

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

The evidence provided in SMP reporting sees all targets under Outcome 5 met and most exceeded. The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 100%, maintaining last year's very high levels and exceeding the 75% target (although, as noted above, due to survey issues the number of respondents on this question is only 19, relatively low). Continuing positive practice from previous years, the target number of two network forums were held, both with full attendance of all three networks, with examples of collaboration and positive testimonies on co-operation also provided. In relation to SMP support for information-sharing on the Scottish Government International Development Strategy, the number of actions undertaken, 20, doubled the target through promoting information through newsletter bulletins, awareness raising at meetings and input to policy processes. SMP also exceeded the target of opportunities for input, support and feedback to the Malawi Development Programme, and has engaged with the Scottish Government Communications team to develop and disseminate material and Scottish Government messaging on three occasions.

Outcome Indicator 5.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2022-23 has contributed to co-ordination, collaboration and understanding among Scottish international development sector stakeholders active on Malawi. Targets for co-ordination meetings and joint events have been met or exceeded, and SMP external events and communications have actively supported input to and discussion of the Scottish Government's international development work and strategy – both directly, through meeting participation and newsletter coverage, as well as through work on core principles that will have assisted constructive synergy (e.g. on shifting the power through the SMP 'Summer Sessions').

Conclusions

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

- successfully delivered on the pre-set outcome milestones for the 2022-23 year of implementation,
- been able to respond and adjust to the important changes in how members and stakeholders engage with one another 'post-pandemic' and to the new expectations of networks in relation to digital engagement, and,
- additionally, been able to identify and respond to new developments in public awareness of diversity, equity and decolonisation with new programming and resources.

This assessment has found good evidence of progress in relation to the logframe for almost all indicators at impact, outcome and output level, with many exceeded and none judged as significantly missed, particularly when performance against complementary indicators is taken into consideration. Detailed consideration of how and whether individual indicators have been met is outlined above by outcome, with that text including discussion of additional factors that are likely to have affected delivery, measurement and relevance.

Staff changes, particularly significant when a small team is concerned, have also been an important factor affecting the SMP over the last year. While, as noted above, the SMP's performance against its programme framework remains strong, it may be a useful point to reflect on potential steps to reduce staff turnover and enhance wellbeing as staff retention is particularly important for organisations like the SMP. For network organisations, staff knowledge and relationships across the membership will be key factors in the all-important network functions of signposting, targeted introductions, individual member advice / enquiry support and awareness of member needs to inform programme and activity development and delivery.

The last review shared comments on the new developments in digital participation affecting the SMP's work. These are developments which third sector organisations are continuing to adjust to: understanding and navigating the different ways in which people now want to meet and connect, a dynamic which is still in flux, has presented significant challenges for network organisations such as the SMP. Going forward, it would be helpful to consider the different ways in which members and those interested in Scotland-Malawi links prefer to engage (and for what reasons). As working patterns shift among SMP members and stakeholders, there may be changing and different expectations which have relevance for decisions on allocating resources. The significant and increased uptake of online and video material indicates there is an appetite for SMP 'extra-curricular' input and that this may be an important area to invest in as scheduled events (in or outside working hours) may not meet all stakeholders' needs. As SMP approaches the end of this extended programme framework, it may be helpful to gather information and reflect on how SMP can best support members, what active participation needs are (anticipating these may be different across different groups of members), and understand better what membership and activity targets may be most relevant for future programming.

The review of 2021-2022 also highlighted the importance of two key thematic areas going forward: responding to the climate crisis and continued work on diversity, equity and inclusion. It was very positive to see that the SMP has continued work on both these important areas – notably through the new series of Global Citizenship resources which cover a range of issues, including 'white saviourism' and climate justice. These will inevitably remain focus areas for work in the sector and where the SMP can continue to play a valuable role in facilitating conversations, learning and positive action across its membership and partners.

Annex 1 - Documentary Evidence drawn on for this assessment

SMP Core Funding Proposal 2020-23, 11 Nov 2019

SMP 2022-23 Event Attendance and Feedback excel file

SMP 2022-23 End of Year Report Source Material 1.1.5, 1.2.5, 2.6.3

SMP 2022-23 End of Year Report Poll Reports excel file

SMP 2022-23 End of Year Narrative 24 April 23

SMP 2022-23 End of Year Report Finances excel file

SMP 2022-23 End of Year Report Logframe

SMP 2022-23 End of Year Report Risk Register

SMP 2022-23 End of Year Report Support & Engagement Civic and Political Leaders

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

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

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