

External Assessment of Evidence of the SMP Impact / Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Data

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Introduction

Corra Foundation was approached by the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) and contracted to undertake a short independent review of the SMP 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 logical framework ('logframe') confirmed in 2020 for their funding from Scottish Government.

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 was extended for an additional year to end March 2024. This review was therefore of this extended year of SMP reporting against this logframe¹, which will now be the fourth 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, 2022 and 2023, 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 between Corra and the SMP Chief Executive to understand more about key aspects of the work reported on. These information sources provided the basis for this~~which serves to provide an~~ independent assessment of the evidence provided by SMP in reporting on its progress during the year in question, April 2023-March 2024.

¹ Some minor adjustments had been agreed to logframe indicators as part of the extension agreements and were reviewed by this assessment.

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 meeting held on 25 April 2024 between Stuart Brown, the SMP Chief Executive, and Chrissie Hirst from ~~the Corra Foundation~~).

These primary sources have been complemented by observations on SMP's work from Corra staff working on international issues and participating in occasional SMP-hosted events or reading/viewing SMP-produced material over the last year, ~~as well as~~ 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

As in previous years, 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. All additional information requested for the review was promptly provided.

The assessment prepared by Corra in April 2023 on last year's reporting made a number of general observations regarding the logframe, quantitative evidence requirements and gender and diversity disaggregation, many of which remain relevant and would be useful to reflect on in the development of future similar frameworks.

Assessment of Evidence of Specific Outcomes

This review considers the Impact Statement and each SMP 2020-24 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 4 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 continued to decrease slightly by 67 from last year's 1,304 to 1,237. This notwithstanding However, with the target set at 1,330 this is very nearly achieved and the 'housekeeping' exercise on SMP's membership records had anticipated a slight drop (as discussed in the Business Case for extension), particularly given that secondary contacts are now excluded from this total.²

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 96.5%, exceeding the 80% target; positively, this year sees a much healthier sample size of 86 survey respondents for this indicator.

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. SMP have continued to secure high-level engagement from political leadership in both Scotland and Malawi and cross-party Holyrood participation in events and meetings. Civic leaders from a range of fields have also been involved in a variety of SMP activities, spanning media, academia and the arts. In addition to personal engagement in events, SMP has also collected a very positive range of statements attesting 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 2023-24 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 largely met. While membership numbers dropped by 67 compared to last year this was anticipated following a

² Across the types of membership there are different levels of change: youth membership is up by 10; individual membership and Local Authority membership are down but only by 2; schools are down by 7 and organisational membership by 66. As discussed later in the assessment, there are likely to be external factors constraining schools' ability to participate as active members and so there may well be further drops in school members in the next few years. In terms of organisational members, while this latest decrease in registered members has coincided with the database refresh, it will be worth monitoring organisation member numbers in the post-'housekeeping' period to detect any further changes.

refresh of the member database and the new, lower target agreed with Scottish Government was close to being met. Importantly, SMP members remain extremely positive in their feedback and ratings of the network's support and impact, with this year's survey seeing a larger and healthier sample. The SMP also maintained its record of high-level support and engagement 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 almost all targets under Outcome 1 exceeded. The great majority of members (94%) who responded to the annual survey felt the SMP's work has advanced this outcome, exceeding the 75% target, maintaining the similarly high level achieved last year and achieving a healthy sample size this year. As per the target, nine SMP forums were held, but with attendance of 482 far exceeding the target 150. The nine forums held during the year covered a wide range of thematic areas (faith, health, forestry, renewables, youth and schools, further and higher education, and WASH), an indication of the breadth of interest and activity the SMP is supporting. With most forums held as hybrid events, and a minority as online only, it is positive that SMP is managing to meet a range of member needs for in-person contact and online participation. It is also very interesting to see that the video footage of all forums was subsequently accessed by on average another 20 people following each event.

In relation to Output 1.1 and Member Forums, the gender balance of contributors to the Forums was 62% men and 38% women, so slightly shy of the 60:40 gender balance target. Attendees were more balanced with 54% male, 44% female, and 2% prefer not to say. 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 (82% and 89% 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 dropped from last year, slipping from around a third to a fifth, and with this feedback level a factor to watch in future this is still a reasonable level for evidence of event quality. The number of testimonial or descriptive statements collected from participants regarding the positive impact of SMP Forums on their work also far exceeds the target (43 such testimonies against a target of 15).

In relation to Output 1.2 and a planned target of 32 SMP events and 1,850 attendees, this year's numbers are short with 22 events held engaging 1,103, a similar level to last year. The number of SMP supported/partnered events was 10, attended by over a thousand people and meeting the target which had been revised down in recognition that lower numbers are a more reasonable expectation in the post-pandemic context. Relevant here is that while there were fewer meetings than planned overall, the SMP did organise well-attended meetings responding to new developments (e.g. the April 2023 meeting on responses to Cyclone Freddy, subsequent discussions on food insecurity), indicating that the network has been flexible and responsive to member priorities and delivered events on topics with value for participants. Going forward it may be helpful to consider the post-pandemic shift in ways people now engage with networks and

issues of interest and reflect on whether the current targets for events and online content could benefit from adjustment. While below target this year, there were still between two and three events delivered each month, significantly alongside a far greater level of online engagement than was originally envisaged when this logframe was first drafted. In revisiting annual meeting plans and targets, consultation with SMP members to gauge their interest in types and frequency of events will be important.

Across the total programme of SMP and partnered events, gender balance across all event participation was strong (52% men, 46% women, 2% prefer not to say participants); gender balance across speakers was very close but slightly shy of the target (61% male speakers, slightly up from 58% in 2022-23), so an aspect of meetings to continue to prioritise while planning. Participant feedback on both the quality of the event and its effect on strengthening links with Malawi was 87% and 90% respectively, continuing to exceed the 80% targets; responses were collected from around 15% of attendees, less than last year but still a reasonable proportion. Testimonial statements collected about positive impact on links with Malawi also easily exceed the target, similarly to previous years.

Outcome Indicator 1.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP-hosted activities in 2023-24 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, participant feedback remains overwhelmingly positive – indicating that while less events were held than anticipated, the quality was good and meeting topics indicate SMP is responsive to emerging needs. Gender balance in speakers and participants is either close to or exceeding targets but remains an area for attention when planning events and speaker line-ups. As previous reviews have highlighted, the post-pandemic shift in how people engage has had a significant impact on SMP’s work and seen a change in their programming and offer which is not fully represented in the logframe. Innovative new activity lines (e.g. the second series of the ‘People to People’ podcast) and consistently high figures for online engagement offer additional indications that this outcome continues to be delivered successfully.

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 93%, exceeding the 75% target (and with an improved number of respondents to last year).

All Scottish Government funding announcements for Malawi were promoted by SMP updates, and targets were also far exceeded, with 194 bulletin features (a target of 15) and 147 social media features (a target of 10) of Scottish Government-funded projects and Scottish Government funding opportunities. Targets related to the SMP bulletin are reviewed as overall on track. Relevant here is that the target for recipients was increased for this year to 1,700 and while slightly short this year the number of bulletin recipients has not dropped substantially (1,644

against last year's 1,726). Significantly and in contrast, the number of bulletin opens has increased since last year and continues to far exceed the target (28,724 against a 15,000 target) indicating that the SMP bulletin material and content is valued. All three targets related to the SMP website (page views, new visitors and number of sessions) were significantly exceeded and all increased on last year's figures – further indication that the kind and quality of information SMP is sharing is valued by its audience.

Targets for enquiry handling are reviewed as met: two are significantly exceeded and one just shy. Post-enquiry survey feedback is 77% expressing satisfaction (below the 80% target)³, but 125 enquiries and requests were dealt with (above the 110 target), and more than double the number of statements (21 compared to the target of 10) were collected from those who had received support. The four indicators related to sharing experience and learning across the network all easily exceeded their targets, maintaining the performance record of previous years and particularly positive in a context of fewer SMP events.

Outcome Indicator 2.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2023-24 has contributed to key stakeholders' awareness and understanding of governmental and civil society work with Malawi. The SMP bulletin and website figures continue to evidence these are valued and regularly accessed by readers in Scotland and Malawi, with Scottish Government activity receiving significant coverage. Indicators on member engagement (instances of sharing expertise, uptake of expertise shared and feedback on how it is received) continue to exceed targets.

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 89%, exceeding the 75% target as last year (but positively with a larger survey sample of 86 this year).

With one exception, all targets for social media were exceeded. Facebook 'reach' grew by 67,000 since last year (a bigger growth jump than the last) to 238,191, indicating that the original target of 400,000 'impressions' was exceeded. Instagram and LinkedIn targets were also significantly exceeded, offering evidence of strong performance across a range of social media platforms: SMP Instagram followers again increased by around 200 from last year, while LinkedIn impressions were 58,692 compared to the 20,000 target (approx. 150% above the target this year, compared to 30% above last year). As last year, X (formerly Twitter) impressions are the one social media target which was not met, with 200,060 impressions reflecting a significant shortfall against the

³ The further information provided by SMP on this point indicated that they had responsibly followed up on these responses and that a number of those respondents expressing dissatisfaction are likely to have been opportunistic contacts not currently involved in Malawian and/or Scottish activities.

planned target of 925,000 and linked to limitations on staff time. However, the number of SMP's X/Twitter followers have continued to increase to 7,502 (exceeding the target of 6,250) and this is a good indication that people continue to find SMP's X/Twitter activity valuable and relevant. With inevitable changes in the social media landscape, it would be worth revisiting indicators and targets for this area of work in the next logframe and aligning them more meaningfully with SMP's audience preferences and preferred platform usage (e.g. an observed tendency towards increased use of LinkedIn and reduced use of X/Twitter by the third sector in Scotland).

The production of video content remains an area where the SMP continues to exceed its original targets (now increased in this extension year from 6 to 40 videos produced per year), producing 46 videos with 37,119 YouTube views, far beyond the view target of 520. The local and national media targets⁴ set for SMP advocacy have also been met and exceeded in terms of the number of Malawi features in the Scottish media (at 343, more than double the 160 target).

Outcome Indicator 3.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2023-24 has contributed to public awareness and engagement on the bilateral relationship across Scotland. SMP has continued to exceed almost all of its social media targets. As in previous years, while X (formerly Twitter) targets were not met, SMP material exceeded targets across Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube, in many cases far exceeding them; targets for Malawi features in Scottish media were also more than doubled. With SMP follower numbers also continuing to increase (including in X/Twitter) and high numbers of views of SMP videos continuing, this review judges that SMP's work has clearly continued to enhance public awareness and engagement of and in the bilateral relationship between Scotland and Malawi.

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, though data for five indicators was not available as some activities were not undertaken in the reporting period. This [work undertaken in this](#) year under review was affected by [SMP](#) staffing gaps, and this particular area of work was [inevitably](#) affected by absence of a Youth & Schools Officer for four months (following the last two months of the previous reporting period), inevitably impacting on capacity to deliver work in a range of areas, including youth engagement.

The percentage of members who felt the SMP's work has advanced the outcome was 91%, exceeding the 75% target (and with a healthily higher number of respondents to this survey question than last year). The number of SMP school contacts, 252, was a slight drop from last

⁴ 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.

year's 274 and just shy of the target of 260. However, the number of school points of support during the year was 57, far exceeding the target of 30 and more than tripling the support offered last year. The target for impact statements was also easily exceeded at 18, well beyond the target of 5.

Both planned Schools Forum meetings were held, with total annual attendance at 51, significantly exceeding the target of 30. While 87.5% of participants gave feedback that the meetings were useful in supporting their engagement in Malawi (against a target of 80%), there were relatively few respondents and the review would recommend considering options to encourage a larger proportion of survey responses to gather feedback in future.

No Youth Congress was held in the reporting period so Output 4.3 indicators are not relevant/available; this event is planned for September 2024. The Youth Committee is not currently active, so indicators for Output 4.4 are not relevant/available. The indicator of the number of SMP Youth Members is however 441, an increase on last year and exceeding the target of 375; a note here that the age limits on 'youth' categorisation will see a number of these members shift into normal/adult membership category over the coming period.

While these two activities were not delivered in the reporting period, the SMP has also undertaken new activity not reflected in this logframe which has relevance to youth engagement: the hiring of a number of new interns active on specific initiatives and on global citizenship outreach and engagement through a number of new activities around schools links and visits.

The number of SMP Youth Members is 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. Particularly with new staff appointed, this feels like a useful moment to review work in this area and develop plans which align to the potentially changed needs or capacities in this area; while it will be for SMP to consult its members and confirm, it feels likely that a general context in Scotland of limited school resources (pressure on both budgets and staffing) and reductions to global citizenship education funding may affect programming and realistic targets in this area.

Outcome Indicator 4.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2023-24 has contributed to visible and meaningful youth engagement and leadership. Overall, although some activities were not delivered in this reporting period (the Youth Forum and Youth Committee), the SMP met most targets, with numbers participating in the school forum and school points of support evidencing the continued relevance and appreciation of this area of work. While this does appear to be an area where SMP activity is changing from the plans originally set in 2019, with a drop off in some activity lines, there is also an increase in youth-related work that is not reflected in the current logframe: thoughtful review to adjust plans to current needs and stakeholder realities is recommended.

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 91%, easily exceeding the 75% target (and with a larger proportion of respondents this year). Continuing positive practice from previous years, three network forums were held, both with full attendance of all three networks and thereby meeting planned targets, with examples of collaboration and positive testimonies on co-operation also provided. Similarly to last year, SMP support for information-sharing on the Scottish Government International Development Strategy was provided on 21 occasions (more than double the target of 10), including 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, engaging at 7 points against a target of 3, and has engaged with the Scottish Government Communications team to develop and disseminate material and Scottish Government messaging on two occasions.

The review feels it is also relevant to note that there are a number of additional activities which the SMP has undertaken in the reporting period that are not covered by the current logframe, but which have relevance for this Outcome 5 on mutual understanding. The second series of the 'People to People' podcast, the cultural events discussing various publications or issues with Scottish and Malawian speakers, and the involvement of Malawian perspectives through student participation in global citizenship engagement will all have had relevance for this area of work and advancing this objective.

Outcome Indicator 5.2: The external review of evidence provided concludes that SMP work in 2023-24 has contributed to co-ordination, collaboration and understanding among Scottish international development sector stakeholders active on Malawi. All targets for co-ordination meetings and joint events have been met 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. Also relevant to note in relation to this Outcome 5 on mutual understanding are the number of additional activities SMP has delivered in this last year (e.g. podcasts, Malawian representation in network activities and engagement, cultural events, etc.) which are not captured by this logframe and which have direct relevance for this outcome.

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 outcomes and targets, some slightly adjusted for this 2023-24 extension year,
- continued to support member activity in a wide range of areas and a shift to greater online and digital engagement, and,
- continued to advance exchange on diversity, equity and decolonisation, hosting events and discussion on these topics, supporting research, and initiating new approaches to internships and global citizenship that bring valuable perspectives to network activities in different areas.

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. (While some activities under Outcome 4 were not delivered in the reporting period, the review does not find this concerning when postponement and additional relevant activities are taken into account.) As in previous years, 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.

Last year's review noted staff changes as a significant factor that had affected the SMP's work over the 2022-23 year; these changes continued into 2023-24, and have inevitably been a factor affecting SMP's ability to deliver planned work. With staff knowledge and relationships across the membership being key factors for successfully delivering multiple network functions, and particularly for an organisation with a 'specialist' focus like SMP, investments in staff wellbeing and retention will be worthwhile. In this respect it was very positive to hear that in the context of the cost of living crisis, like many other public bodies and charities in the Scottish third sector, the SMP has recently undertaken a staff salary and increment review.

As discussed in the last review, the SMP is not alone in its position as a third sector organisation with a networking mandate needing to respond to changing needs among its membership. While the pandemic brought a fast change to online meetings, since then there has been a further shift to hybrid meetings. Navigating the appropriate balance between those members keen to return to in-person contact and those who continue to enjoy the flexibility of online participation or post-event video content will be a continuing challenge. Regular consultation and collection of feedback from members on their preferences will be valuable in approaching and tailoring work in different thematic areas, as well as continuing to keep speaker gender balance in mind during event planning.

As highlighted above, the changing context for work with schools and on global citizenship in Scotland will also impact member needs and appetite: these are areas where member consultation would be particularly valuable to ensuring that SMP plans are appropriately aligned.

More broadly, this review also notes positively the SMP's continued work to engage on important and topical issues for the sector, including decolonisation, diversity, equity and inclusion, and climate justice.

Annex 1 – Documentary evidence drawn on for this assessment

SMP Core Funding Proposal 2020-23, 11 Nov 2019

SMP Grant Variation Letter, 20 March 2024

SMP Business Case Narrative for 2023-24 Extension, 7 November 2022

SMP 2023-24 Extension Year Logframe report excel file

SMP 2023-24 Extension Year Narrative report (draft 24 April 2024)

SMP 2023-24 Member survey responses excel file

SMP 2023-24 Event Attendance and Feedback excel file

SMP 2023-24 End of Year report Case study: Post-Cyclone Freddy Disaster Mapping, October 2023

SMP 2023-24 End of Year Report Source Material for indicators 1.1.5, 1.2.5, 2.6.3, and 4.1.4

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

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

SMP 2023-24 End of Year Report Risk Register

About Corra Foundation

Corra Foundation exists to make a difference to the lives of people and communities. It works with others to encourage positive change, opportunity, fairness and growth of aspirations which improve quality of life. Corra wants to see a society in which people create positive change and enjoy fulfilling lives.

In 2020 Corra launched a ten-year strategy. It is long term because making a difference on the big challenges will take time. At its heart is the strong belief that when people find their voice, they unlock the power to make change happen.

Our ways of working

At Corra we have a set of principles that we strive to put into practice across our roles as an employer, independent funder, charity and partner, as well as in our influencing activity.

We will:

- Listen and respond to people, communities and organisations and amplify voices that are less well heard – their wisdom is at the heart of Corra’s approach.
- Build relationships, always working alongside others on the basis of shared power, mutual trust and shared learning.
- Pursue diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), trying to challenge structural discrimination and contribute to radical shifts in the funding sector.
- Be an open, trusting and flexible grant maker.
- Ensure we contribute to tackling climate change, through our investments, operations and grant making and encouraging others to take action alongside us.
- Be bold, taking considered risks and supporting others to do the same.

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