

CPG on Malawi19th February 2020ATTENDEES

Liam McArthur MSP - Scottish Parliament	Emma Wood - STEKAskills
Maureen Watt MSP – Scottish Parliament	Fiona Greig - Link Community Development International
Harold Kuombola - Link Community Development International	Gemma Burnside - Scotland Malawi Partnership
Kate Sykes - Link Community Development International	Gemma Conley-Smith - Scotland Malawi Partnership
Amy Blake - Classrooms for Malawi	Gift Thompson - STEKAskills
Abigail Maseko - STEKAskills	Heather Cubie - The University of Edinburgh and Scotland Malawi Partnership Board
Alasdair Beaton - Link Community Development International	Iffat Shahnaz
Ali Floyd - Centre for Anti-Infectives Research, University of Dundee	Isabelle Rayner
Andrew Heald - Confederation of Forest Industries	Jamie Newbold - Scotland's Rural College
Angie Wynn - Mamie Martin Fund	Jeremy Bagg - University of Glasgow
Anna Freidenfeld - The University of Edinburgh	Jorge Sequeira
Ayaka Fujiwara	Lillian Owiti - Corra Foundation
Beth Sheehan - Consultant (International Development)	Percy Patrick - SCIAF
Bob Garrow - RS Garrow Ltd	Peter West
Brian Kerr - Soko Fund	Raymond French - University of Edinburgh / Scottish Football Supporters Association
Charles Howie - Malawi Fruits	Silence Chihuri
Christian Cervantes Bautista - The University of Edinburgh	Stuart Brown - Scotland Malawi Partnership
David Hope-Jones - Scotland Malawi Partnership	Thomas Echlin-Harrardine - Whitfield Echlin & Company LLP
Dinna Likonde - University of Glasgow	

Apologies: Linda Fabiani MSP, Jackie Baillie MSP, Elaine Smith MSP, Lorna McDonald, Evelyn Hope, Paul Shaw, William Leschen, Carol Finlay, Ruth Milliken, Joyce Phiri

MINUTES

Meeting Chair **Liam McArthur MSP** welcomed attendees to the CPG on Malawi. Minutes from the previous CPG were proposed by Jeremy Bagg and seconded by Alasdair Beaton. Emma Wood had made one amendment to the minutes in advance of the meeting. There were no further comments.

David Hope-Jones summarised recent events in Malawi with regards to the **nullification of the 21st May 2019 presidential election**, commending the people of Malawi and the independent judiciary on how they handled the situation. He also emphasised the importance of solidarity with those in Malawi during this challenging time. Some attendees noted a sense of positivity and excitement among the people of Malawi.

David also noted that the [Malawi APPG](#) met 10th February and was very successful, with a large number of Scottish MPs and Peers enthusiastically taking part. He also noted the recent appointments of new **International Development Minister, Jenny Gilruth MSP**, and new **Cabinet Secretary responsible for International Development, Michael Russell MSP**. Finally, he reminded attendees that the **Speaker of the Malawi National Assembly, Rt. Hon. Catherine Gotani Hara**, would be visiting Scotland on the 5th and 6th of March to meet with MPs, and the SMP hopes to host a [civic reception](#) on the evening of the 5th with the Speaker and a delegation of approximately a dozen Malawian MPs.

Liam then gave a summary of the 30th January meeting he, **Maureen Watt MSP** and **Linda Fabiani MSP** had with **Deputy Speakers of the Malawi National Assembly, Hon. Madalitso Kazombo** and **Hon. Nkungulu Aisha Mambo Adams**. A major point of discussion was the positive reaction from Parliamentary groups on the role of the Judiciary, and progress is being made that will help the Malawi National Assembly hold the government to account. The Deputy Speakers also noted their aspiration to broadcast assemblies in languages other than English, to make them accessible to more audiences. Credit was given to the SMP for finalising the details of the visit at very short notice, and it was felt that this was a useful precursor to the upcoming visit from the Speaker in March.

Liam welcomed the first speakers, **Malawi Country Director, Harold Kuombola** and **Programme Manager, Kate Sykes** of [Link Community Development International](#). Link was established in 1989 and works in Sub-Saharan Africa, offering innovative, sustainable and low-cost solutions to support governments in their delivery of quality education, primary education in particular. Link was established in Malawi in 2006 through Scottish Government funding, so the Malawi-Scotland bilateral relationship is central to their activity. In Malawi, Link work within the **Ministry of Education, Science and Technology**, and with local schools and communities, in order to integrate innovative practices to ensure high quality education is delivered. The desired overall impact is to improve the life choices of young people in rural areas and communities, not just through education but also broader life skills. Five main strands are used as a basis to achieve these goals and improve learning outcomes:

1. **Strengthen school management**
2. **Promote community engagement**
3. **Support teaching quality**
4. **Challenge inequalities**
5. **Improve learning environments**

In 2015, Link supported the Government of Malawi to create the first [Malawi National Education Standards](#), a set of 25 minimum requirements that were adopted by the Ministry of Education. In addition to producing and rolling out the document, Link aims to provide technical assistance at various levels across Malawian districts and schools. They are also looking at creating a database to gather data on how schools are progressing against the Standards. Support is being given to head teachers so that they can improve the relationship between schools and local communities, and evidence has shown that this has led to higher quality of education. Communities are also being encouraged to hold their schools accountable and ensure they meet the Standards. Methods by which to achieve this include translating policies into local languages, raising awareness of these policies, raising functional literacy levels among those who are no longer at school age and including marginalised sections of the community in school management structures. 200,000 community members have been reached so far and, once they fully understand their roles, they come on board to support the school.

A review took place in 2018, which observed an 88% increase in marginalised people taking part in the school improvement process. A key learning point learned from this data was that involving these groups and making them feel welcome was not as difficult as was previously thought. As a result of this, there was a 500% increase in the number of community members who felt that their school was being well-managed, as well as a 22% increase in pass rates of the leaving exam in the primary schools where Link was working.

In 2018, Link also launched the [TEAM Girl Malawi](#) project (**Transformational Empowerment for Adolescent Marginalised Girl in Malawi**). The project aims to change the lives of some of the most marginalised girls in the communities where Link is working, first by building their building their literacy and numeracy skills, and then by supporting them into a better life path, whether that is back into education, vocational training or safe and fairly paid employment. This is funded by the [DFID Girls' Education Challenge](#), through their [Leave No Girl Behind](#) initiative. The project is currently working with 6000 girls between the ages of 10 and 19, who are facing multiple, intersecting barriers that prevent them from attending school. Link works closely with communities to identify these barriers, that include marriage, pregnancy, childcare, high levels of household responsibilities, poverty and disability. To support these girls in their learning, it is important to take a holistic approach to intervention. An intensive, complimentary basic education programme has been put in place, which is run by community-based facilitators, mostly comprised of young high school graduates. The aim is to re-integrate these girls into primary school or for them to follow a vocational or business path, and also educate them on sexual and reproductive health, as well as their rights and how to advocate for these rights. Work is being done with district governments in regards to improved leadership around girls' education, looking at sustainability and possibly adopting elements of the project on a long-term basis. Work is also being done to address poverty among girls and their families, such as enrolling families on microloan programmes or vocational training. Efforts are being made to make centres are as inclusive as possible, to ensure that girls with disabilities are not excluded. The ultimate aim is that girls will have the knowledge, skills and opportunity to choose their own life path. Some of the positive learnings from the project include the strength of a multi-sector approach, good signs around sustainability and the prospect of a multiplier effect. Challenges include the ongoing learning with regards to barriers and problems facing marginalised girls, and the difficulties reaching them. Poverty is one of the main barriers, resulting in many girls being unable to attend classes due to other responsibilities. There are also high expectations for the facilitators, who are not teachers and require support themselves, but they are still very enthusiastic and committed to the project. Another challenge is presented in reintroducing girls into mainstream school, and work is being done to help primary schools adopt more inclusive practices.

This presentation was followed by a Q&A with Harold and Kate.

- **Ali Floyd** from the [University of Dundee's Wellcome Centre for Anti-Infectives Research](#) mentioned their collaboration with [Girlguiding Dundee](#) on a [Medicine Maker Badge](#), and there may be opportunity for collaboration with Link.
- **Q. Are there any projects dedicated to helping blind or partially sighted children?**
A. The programme is designed to include marginalised people of all categories, and special methods are being developed to work with blind or partially sighted children. Link has partnered with other organisations that have experience working with various disabilities to help with this.
- **Q. Where do the Standards come from? Are these parachuted in, or are they endogenous? It is important for schools to be able to set their own standards.**

A. The programme to develop the Standards was developed over a number of years, with Link working closely in partnership with the Ministry of Education. When Link first joined the programme, there was much work already in place that they could help build upon. Link had also worked with the Ministry 10 years previously, with the Ministry helping them to develop the indicators that would be used in their school review processes. The methods used and knowledge gained then was very useful in developing the standards. The standards are very locally based and Link has drawn on international best practice to support this. The plan is to always work with the communities to ensure their best interests are met.

- **Q. Is the programme based in particular parts of the country?**

A. Link is currently working in 3 districts. The National Education Standards are published by the Malawi Government and, while they do have strong ownership of these, they do not necessarily have the capacity to roll them out effectively. The Standards have been implemented more strongly in areas where Link has been working. The strategy going forward is to work with the Ministry to look at the barriers preventing the Standards from being rolled out, and also increase awareness of the Standards among other NGOs so that they can work within these, rather than using their own systems.

- Fiona Greig of Link Community Development International emphasised the importance of Scottish Government funding in helping Link to embed the Standards.

- **Q. Is there opportunity for partnership with [Mary's Meals](#) in order to help feed pupils who are a part of Link programmes?**

A. Link is not currently partnered with Mary's Meals but this is a good suggestion. There is one district where both organisations are active, so this may be possible. Evidence has shown an increase in attendance at schools that are a part of the Mary's Meals feeding programme.

- **Q. There is a lack of free secondary education in Malawi. Is Link providing any support for young people with regards to transitioning into secondary education?**

A. Free secondary education was introduced in Malawi at the beginning of the last academic year, but there are always costs to education. Link is primarily focussed on primary education at the moment, but they are looking to partner with an institution that would support vocational skills training and the setup of small scale businesses, as well as provide access to loans. There are still more areas that Link could support in future, but more resources would be needed first.

Liam then welcomed the second speaker, **Chief Executive Officer** of [Classrooms for Malawi](#), **Amy Blake**. Classrooms for Malawi began in 2008, when a group of teachers from Glasgow went to Malawi on an exchange programme. While there, they were surprised by the low quality of infrastructure of the school where they were based. After returning to Scotland, they took another group of teachers back to the school in Malawi and this partnership steadily grew larger over the years, eventually including pupils as well as teachers, and also other schools. The organisation was officially established as Classrooms for Malawi in 2012, and recruited Desi, their first Malawian employee. Prior to this, there was no formal structure to recruiting schools, so a structure was developed to help identify priority schools within each of the regions in Malawi. Since 2008, the organisation has built or refurbished 207 classrooms, which has benefitted 16,000 young people who are learning inside these spaces.

Only 35% of children in Malawi complete primary education, and only 20% go on to complete secondary education. The Malawi Government made primary education free in 1994, increasing the number of children in primary education from 1.4 million to 3 million.

However, there was no investment made in the infrastructure to support this. Class sizes are high, with a ratio of 100 pupils to 1 teacher, and many classes need to be held outdoors. In a meeting with the Malawi Minister of Education in November, Amy was informed that 41,000 classrooms would need to be built in order to accommodate all pupils. Amy was recruited in August with the role of growing the organisation and increase the number of classrooms being built or refurbished. £1.2 million has been fundraised, mostly by school pupils in Malawi, and this has been invested directly into Malawi.

Classrooms for Malawi achieves its goals by first identifying the high priority schools, primarily in Blantyre and Mulanje, and work is also being done in the North of Malawi and Ekwendeni. Schools are then matched with a partner in Scotland, which can include schools, community groups and businesses. A needs assessment is then carried out in the Malawian school, looking at aspects such as the building itself, the enrolment rate, the gender ratio and the geography of the area. Desi will talk to the village chief to gain a better understanding of the community and their needs. Classrooms for Malawi works with Malawian contractors or builders to come up with a quotation for the work required, and this is then sent to the Scottish partner alongside the needs assessment. They can then decide if they have the capacity to support this project. This process can take approximately a year, and 9 schools are currently scheduled to go to Malawi in August, who raised the funds for their respective projects within their own communities. Some groups simply send the funds raised to Malawi so that the work can take place, while others send volunteers to Malawi as well to support the builders in their work. In 2019, the organisation worked with 8 schools in Malawi, meaning that 7,873 children are now learning indoors, 3,766 of whom are girls. Other parties also benefit from the buildings, such as church groups, mothers groups and village groups. 151 young people from Scotland parted in volunteering projects in Malawi.

Development of partnerships is also being looked at. Classrooms for Malawi is currently partnered with [Mary's Meals](#), who can implement their feeding programme in the schools after they have been built. [WildHearts](#) provides reusable sanitary pads in three of the schools Classrooms for Malawi has worked with, and they hope to roll this out further next year.

From 2020-2030, the organisation hopes to develop their schools programme, work to promote global citizenship in the context of Malawi, address climate change policies and utilise environmentally and economically sustainable methods of building and advance the operational development of the organisation. As an example of their commitment to sustainability, from 2021, Classrooms for Malawi will be utilising [Durabric](#) from [14Trees](#) in their building projects.

This presentation was followed by a Q&A with Amy.

- **Q. Is work being done with regards to long-term maintenance once a project is complete?**
A. Classrooms for Malawi only works with schools that are already established and follow existing education structures, meaning that there are already teachers etc. in place. At the end of a project, there is a handover where a contract is signed by all relevant parties and maintenance becomes the responsibility of the District Education Manager and various members of the community.
- **Q. How are schools matched with their Scottish partners? Is this based on things such as size and financial need?**

- A. There is high demand in Malawi when compared to possible partners in Scotland. The District Education Managers identify the high priority schools in their districts, and Classrooms for Malawi must identify realistic options for interested partners.
- **Q. Are there staff on the ground in Malawi assessing quality of building work?**
A. Desi is based in Malawi, and contractors have been used to assess building quality previously. The organisation has now moved to 14 Trees, which is a much bigger operation and their support has been excellent. They offer a lot of training for builders, and their £10 million investment from CDC has allowed them to put a lot of money into research and testing to ensure quality of their bricks.
 - **Q. What can be achieved through different levels of investment i.e. how much does a refurbishment cost compared to building a new classroom?**
A. Building from scratch, a 2 classroom block would cost £20,000 and 3 classroom block would cost just under £30,000. Refurbishments can cost £5000-10,000 depending on the needs of the school.
 - **Q. Are latrine facilities being built for the schools?**
A. WASH facilities are included in building projects. For example, Gleniffer High School are currently working on a project to build eight latrines alongside their partner school. Classrooms for Malawi no longer build libraries, nurseries or teacher houses, as these are more difficult to manage and not as sustainable.
 - **Q. Has Classrooms for Malawi worked with, or considered working with hostels, or do they know of any similar organisations that do?**
A. Bearsden Academy worked with a hostel named Ngomi, but this was a refurbishment and not a build. Work is primarily focussed on schools.
 - **Q. Does Classrooms for Malawi have any aspirations to reach out to existing school partnerships and other organisations doing similar building projects to share their experience?**
A. It is important for Classrooms for Malawi to acknowledge their wealth of experience, so that others can both learn from their mistakes and adopt the practices that work. Amy is working closely with the Scotland Malawi Partnership to connect and share learning with the many school partnerships in existence.
 - **Q. Has the programme had any impact on the school building project of the Malawi Government?**
A. Amy does not think so, as the need is too great and the Malawi Government is still looking for other funders.
 - **Peter West emphasised the need for forums where people can celebrate their success, but also have open discussions about and learn from each other's mistakes.**

Liam closed the meeting by thanking the speakers and attendees. Thanks were also given to Lily Humphries for organising the event and the SMP for their support. Liam also noted the dates of the next CPGs as 20th May (later cancelled due to Covid-19), 23rd September and 18th of November. David apologised for the lack of a screen for the speakers to use during their presentations, but confirmed that slides would be made available afterwards. David also thanked all three co-convenors who, at short notice, met with the **Chair of the [CDC](#), Graham Wrigley**, showing enthusiasm and cross-party support for Malawi.

The meeting closed with a round of networking over Malawi G&Ts and soft drinks.