

Worsening Covid Crisis in Malawi: Joint Malawi CPG & APPG with Malawian and Scottish Ministers

Monday 25th January 2021

6-8pm (UK time)

MSPs in attendance

- Dr Alasdair Allan MSP (Chair)
- Elaine Smith MSP
- Jenny Gilruth MSP
- Liam McArthur MSP
- Linda Fabiani MSP

MPs in attendance

- Lord Jack McConnell MP
- Lisa Cameron MP
- Owen Thompson MP
- Patrick Grady MP
- Philippa Whitford MP
- Stephen Doughty MP

Others in attendance

- Dr Antonia Ho
- Dr Arie Glas
- Ms Cathy Ratcliff
- Rt Hon Frank Ross
- Ms Habiba Osman
- Ms Joyce Juma-Phiri
- Hon Khumbize Kandodo Chiponda
- Dr Matthews Mtumbuka
- Prof Mia Crampin
- Nick Dearden

Apologies

- Alexander Stewart MSP
- Alex Cole-Hamilton MSP
- David Mundell MP
- Deidre Brock MP
- Ian Murray MP
- Margaret Ferrier MP
- Oliver Mundell MSP
- Stuart McMillan MSP

The Scottish Parliament's Malawi Cross Party Group and the UK Parliament's All-Party Parliamentary Group on Malawi came together on Monday the 25th of January 2021, for a special joint digital meeting to look specifically at the worsening Covid situation in Malawi and explore what additional support can be offered by the UK and Scotland. This also served as the SMP's 12th Covid-19 Coordination meeting. A recording of the meeting is available on [YouTube](#). Please click the timestamps in the video description or click any of the headings below (highlighted in blue) to navigate to the respective section of the video. The chat log from the meeting can be found [here](#).

MINUTES:

Core Briefing

- [Welcome, introductions and minutes of last meeting - Dr Alasdair Allan MSP, Co-Convenor, Malawi CPG Core Briefing](#)
 - Dr Alasdair Allan MSP (meeting Chair) welcomed attendees. The **minutes of the previous meeting** were **proposed by Dr Tracy Morse** and **seconded by Brian Kerr**, with no actions arising.

- [Covid-19 in Malawi and the Gov. of Malawi's response](#) - Hon Khumbize Kandodo Chiponda, Minister of Health, Gov. of Malawi
 - The meeting was addressed by Hon Khumbize Kandodo Chiponda, who updated MSPs and MPs on the latest situation in Malawi. The Minister's presentation can be found [here](#), and included details of the rising Covid numbers in Malawi and the possible reasons for this, the public health measures being implemented, risk communication and community engagement strategies and the possible areas that need support.
- [The Scottish Government's Covid support for Malawi](#) - Ms Jenny Gilruth MSP, Minister for Europe and International Development, Scottish Government
 - Jenny Gilruth MSP spoke about the Scottish Government's work to date supporting Malawi's Covid-19 response. A key aim of the **Scottish Government's International Development Review** is to re-focus contribution on areas where the biggest difference can be made against the new backdrop of Covid-19, and the Minister shared information on her meetings with the Malawian Government and engagements with other stakeholders, including Malawian civil society. Information was also shared on how the two million pounds allocated to help Covid-19 efforts in Scotland's African partners' countries will be used, including how this could contribute to vaccine access.
- [Malawi's routes to Covid-19 vaccines](#) - Nick Dearden, Director, Global Justice Now, part of 'People's Vaccine Alliance'
 - Nick Dearden spoke about the advocacy work to try and ensure that Malawi receives timely and equitable access to Covid vaccinations. His paper '**Obstacles to equitable access to Covid-19 vaccines – and the part the UK Government is playing in that**' can be found [here](#).
- [Q&A and discussion with these three speakers'](#)
 - **What is the situation in rural areas and what is the attitude towards facemasks?**
 - The President has allocated 1 billion Malawian Kwacha to facilitate mass production of cloth face masks, to be supplied to those in rural areas. Those deemed high risk and schoolchildren are the current priority. The strategy is to produce these masks locally per district, with the Government providing quality control. Those in Malawian prisons are also being given training and equipment for mask production.
 - **Will Malawi have access to the 270 million doses of Covid vaccines secured by African Union / African CDC, which is in addition to the COVAX allocation?**
 - The Malawian Government has not yet received any communication regarding an allocation of the vaccines secured by the African Union.
 - **What work is being done to address fear and misinformation with regards to the Covid-19 vaccine?**
 - It is important that the vaccine is rolled out equally across all countries.

Wider Malawian Perspectives and Sharing

- [Malawian Civic Society](#) - Ms Habiba Osman, Executive Secretary, Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC)
 - Ms Habiba Osman, shared information on the human rights situation on the ground in Malawi. The lack of adherence to Covid safety measures can be traced back to weak civic education and there is need for people and businesses to come together in facing the pandemic. There may be space for the Scottish Government to advise Malawi on how to better disseminate Covid rules and safety information.
- [Malawian Business](#) - Dr Matthews Mtumbuka, CEO, UbuntuNet Alliance

- Dr Matthews Mtumbuka shared his experience as a survivor of Covid-19, having spent ten days in hospital. He praised the dedicated healthcare workers and systems, but raised the need for more resources, primarily oxygen. There also needs to be a focus on getting people to the hospital sooner.
- **Malawian Diaspora - Ms Joyce Juma-Phiri, Chair, Assoc. of Malawians in Scotland**
 - Ms Joyce Juma-Phiri, shared her perspective as a member of the Malawian diaspora living in Scotland. She explained that this is the time for the diaspora to come together and ensure that those on the ground in Malawi have their voices heard. This can help ensure that any aid Scotland sends to Malawi is appropriate, actually needed and properly coordinated.
- **Brief Q&A with these three speakers**
 - **What can be done to address inequalities in terms of different countries receiving the vaccine sooner than others?**
 - Africa must be united in its approach to facing the pandemic.
 - **What measures have been put in place to alleviate the oxygen crisis?**
 - An oxygen plant has been commissioned for the Northern Region, though it is challenging to balance care for Covid patients and patients with other conditions.
 - **How can the idea of vaccination be communicated to people in remote areas, as many are resistant?**
 - There is a national vaccine deployment plan, and community groups and leaders are an important part of spreading awareness of the vaccine's safety and importance.
 - **What training is being given to healthcare workers to prevent them from spreading Covid-19?**
 - All healthcare workers have been given Covid training, both in terms of managing patients and the bodies of those who have died from the disease. For funerals, the mourners attending are a greater risk of spreading Covid than the deceased, and long distance travel to attend funerals is being discouraged.

Examples of Scotland-Malawi Collaborations

- **Healthcare worker study - Dr Antonia Ho, Clinical Senior Lecturer, University of Glasgow**
 - Dr Antonia Ho shared information on the **prospective cohort study to compare SARS-CoV2 exposure in healthcare workers and community members, Blantyre, Malawi**. The study's findings include:
 - High prevalence of SARS-CoV-2 infection in a cohort of healthcare workers and community members in Blantyre, Malawi
 - Majority of patients were asymptomatic or had mild symptoms
 - Individuals that were SARS-CoV-2 PCR positive were more likely to report fever, headache, loss of smell and taste
 - No obvious risk factor for SARS-CoV-2 PCR positivity including HCW status
 - Next step – correlation of symptoms and PCR results with serology
- **Population Sero-surveillance Study - Prof Mia Crampin, Professor of Public Health, University of Glasgow**
 - Prof Mia Crampin shared information on the **SARS-CoV-2 immunoepidemiology study in urban and rural cohort Malawi**. Support is required in the following areas:
 - Pulse oximeter
 - Testing capacity
 - Access to reagents & consumables in-country
 - Cost and logistics of shipping reagents & consumables

- Enhancing the limited sequencing capacity/expertise
- Continue to support Covid-19 research

During a pandemic, research on epidemiology, immunology and genomics are crucial to derive knowledge to inform policy.

- [EMMS International and Mulanje Mission Hospital](#) - Ms Cathy Ratcliff, CEO, EMMS & Dr Arie Glas, Medical Director, Mulanje Mission Hospital
 - Ms Cathy Ratcliff introduced the three projects taking place at Mulanje Mission Hospital:
 - FCDO-funded Chifundo – Palliative care in 4 Central Hospitals + 26 rural, hard-to-reach CHAM facilities, in all districts – adapted for PPE and COVID information, BUT – 3 staff tested positive this month
 - PPE manufacture and purchase by MMH & MDH
 - Tuberculosis detection and WASH in context of Covid-19
 - Dr Arie Glas discussed some of the difficulties encountered with the recent, rapid spread of Covid-19 in Mulanje. He stressed that these difficulties were already present, but have now become more acute. These difficulties manifest in four main areas:
 - Strain on staff
 - Funding complexities
 - Supply chain problems
 - Insufficient infrastructure
- [Discussion: actions and next steps to support Malawi](#) - Mr David Hope-Jones, CEO SMP and Secretariat for CPG & APPG
 - David Hope-Jones summarised the **actions and next steps** to support Malawi in the Covid-19 crisis. The SMP is committed to:
 1. **Practical support as Malawi fights Covid:**
 - 1.1 The SMP will raise awareness of Malawi’s Covid-19 priorities highlighted in the meeting, including by the Minister of Health, and encourage members to support their Malawian partner communities in these areas:
 - I. Increasing healthcare capacity and protecting healthcare staff;
 - II. Increasing access to, and use of, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE);
 - III. Increasing sustainable oxygen production;
 - IV. Supporting mental health;
 - V. Increasing civic information and combating misinformation.
 - 1.2 The SMP will look to influence the UK and Scottish governments, and other prospective funders, to increase support in these priority areas.
 - 1.3 The SMP will promote and support a range of [Malawi Covid appeals](#), including those of its members.
 - 1.4 The SMP will specifically look at the issue of sustainable oxygen generation. Post-meeting note: If there is uptake/buy-in, The SMP will quickly establish a Scotland-Malawi Oxygen Taskforce (SMOT) to harness the expertise across its network. The Taskforce, principally of medical and fundraising experts in Scotland and Malawi, will assess what sort of intervention would most effectively support oxygen supply in Malawi and consider where funds could be secured. *[It is important to emphasise the SMP does not itself have funds, expertise or capacity itself for an operational intervention like this but is able to facilitate discussion and support collaboration if there is drive and leadership from Members].*
 2. **Two-way sharing of information and learning:**

2.1 The SMP will host regular (every 4-6 weeks) Scotland-Malawi Covid Coordination meetings, as it did through March-Oct 2020, to listen to Malawian priorities, share information between members, build new collaborations and mobilize the network in support of Malawi's Covid response. These will include specific areas of focus including: PPE, mental health, civic education, etc.

3. Advocacy for timely and equitable vaccines:

3.1 The SMP will use the all-party political and public support that exists for the Scotland-Malawi friendship to lobby the UK Government to support increased and expedited Covid vaccine access in Malawi, through:

- Noting the proposal from South Africa and India at the World Trade Organisation for a "Waiver from certain provisions of the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) for the prevention, containment and treatment of COVID-19". This proposal is supported by 100 developing countries, including Malawi, and currently opposed by nine countries, including the UK. We will follow the evidence of the need for this waiver, giving support if justified.
- Support for the urgent delivery of the COVAX programme, fighting for equitable global distribution such that vaccines can be made available in Malawi in weeks, not years.
- Support for the WHO's COVID-19 Technology Access Pool (C-TAP), a mechanism that can help foster global sharing and collaboration of expertise

3.2 The SMP will use its Covid Coordination Zoom meetings to share information and updates with the network about Malawi's best route to vaccine access, mobilising members to themselves lobby for urgent action.

- [Meeting close](#)