

Cross-Party Group on Malawi

Wednesday 17 May 2023

Minutes

Present

MSPs

Alexander Stewart, MSP

Liam McArthur MSP

Invited guests

Dr Blessings Kachale, SCIAF

Atusaye Kayuni, Malawi Fruits

Mercy Sibande, Mamie Martin Fund

DIGITAL:

Fyaupi Mwanfongo, DoDMA

Fedson Chikuse, DoDMA

Madalitso Mwale, DoDMA

Non-MSP Group Members

Ellie McKenzie, SMP

Howard Beck

Katia Mackley, SMP

Mick James

Moirra Dunworth

Dr Peter West

Raymond French

Saf Rahbour

Stuart Brown, SMP

Chad Morse, SMP

Digital

Alan Laverock

Alison Thewliss MP Glasgow Central

Alistair Tough

Andrew Cubie

Angie Wynn

Ben Wilson - SCIAF

C M Allan

Calum Fisher (Neil Bibby MSP)
Caroline Beaton: Kenyawu Kids
Dalitso Muronya
Deborah Dixon
Dezie Trigu
Donald Robertson
Eve Hartswood
Falitsani Kansilanga
Fatou Drammeh UNICEF
Patrick Grady MP
Hannah Wright
Helen Mein
Isobel Bone
Jane Forster
Jennifer Argent
Kenneth Ross
Madalitso Henry
Fyawupi Mwafongo
Margaret Ferrier MP
Natalie Reynolds
Natasha Maluza
Navpreet Juty - Pump Aid
Neil Bibby MSP
Hannah Nicol
Pam Wilson
Ray Baxter
Sheila Brookes
Tanja Hendriks

Apologies

Dr Alasdair Allan MSP
Mark Ruskell MSP
Professor Heather Cubie
Lord McConnell
Deidre Brock MP
Allan Dorans, MP
Marion Fellows MP.

Speaker of Malawi's Parliament, The Rt Hon Speaker Mrs. Catherine Gomezgani Hara MP and 5 Malawian MPs

Welcome, apologies and minutes of last meeting

Alexander welcomed attendees, recognised MSPs in attendance and noted apologies where these had been given. The minutes of the previous CPG were proposed by Dr Peter West and seconded by Moira Dunworth.

Malawi's priorities and needs in the cyclone's aftermath

Colleagues from DoDMA gave an update on the relief response work. The presentation focussed on five points: people & places affected, response plan, early recovery and camp decommissioning, ongoing activities and requirements.

Q by PG What were the UK Government and Scottish Government's offers of support for displaced people?

A: most people had returned to their original communities as they hadn't moved far which meant that they were well integrated in their host communities and could relocate back easily.

Q by MJ What was being done about assuring food security? Was price regulation in the food sector proposed?

A: Food security had been compounded by Freddy as it happened in the lean season where people had already been supported. The Government was regulating a minimum price for maize crop. The government was also boosting Admag to commercialise the sale of maize and to work against informal cross-border sales of maize.

Q by AT There were concerns about accountability and transparency in relation to the funds sought by the Government of Malawi. The National Records and Archives Service in Malawi had produced proposals for addressing these concerns 'Records Management Improvement Programme for Good Governance'. Were parliamentarians and other participants interested in supporting this initiative?

A by AS This was a challenge and a lot of support had been offered to date but more support was needed.

AS thanked DoDMA for participating and sent best wishes for the continuation of the efforts.

Input from Dr Blessings Kachale (SCIAF) who had been in Blantyre when the cyclone hit

Dr Blessings Kachale was in Malawi for SCIAF (International Officer) when the cyclone hit. She lives in Scotland and is part of the Malawian Diaspora network here. Dr Kachale gave a personal account of what it was like experiencing the cyclone first hand, driving through persistent and very heavy rain in Blantyre and on the road driving to Lilongwe, having to make immediate risk assessments for falling branches, avoiding landslides and extremely reduced visibility. Being on site meant that Dr Kachale was able to respond immediately to the emergency through SCIAF.

This 'natural disaster' was really man-made and the frequency/intensity and length of recent disasters experienced by Malawi was beyond the communities to cope as they were still recovering from previous cyclones. Some had not yet relocated and were still in temporary accommodation when this new cyclone hit.

SCIAF in conjunction with Caritas Malawi had been able to provide for immediate needs of the community including handing out of supplies but also arranging for psycho-social counselling as well as providing access to clean water. SCIAF were grateful for the SG's support of the organisation in their efforts.

Speaking as a member of the Diaspora Community in Scotland, AMS (Association of Malawians in Scotland) Dr BK was reported that they had managed to raise funds and help those affected in Malawi immediately.

AS thanked Dr BK for giving a comprehensive outlook.

Q: Were there other organisations in Scotland that were supporting Malawi?

A: Unicef, there was also a comment from Eve Hartswood, an online participant mentioning the partnership between churches in Scotland and Malawi enabling processing and distributing maize from churches in the affected areas.

Malawi Fruits' Development Executive, Atusaye Kayuni on the impact on Agriculture in Malawi and on Malawi Fruits' work.

Atusaye Kayuni reported on the empowerment of women & girls in agriculture through the work of Malawi Fruits. Though not a disaster response organisation Malawi Fruits empowered women and girls economically through modern ways of farming. Currently mainly tomatoes were grown in polytunnels near a woman's home producing a much higher yield than tomatoes grown traditionally using the same amount of fertilizer.

Malawi Fruits were hoping to work with the missing group of farmers who due to the smaller size of farms (between 10-100ha) did not fit into any current categories and to invest on land education farming.

Q: Did the focus on quality and drive to increase yield have an environmental impact?

A: They were constantly monitoring how to achieve quality/quantity with amount of water/fertilizer. Young graduates were mentoring others and based on reduce/reuse/recycle some of the nutrient requirements of plants were given by organic manure.

Q: There were a further £8m pledged from the Scottish Government to tackle climate impacts in Malawi through the Climate Just Communities project. The award of this grant had been anticipated for a long time - we are not clear why the money has not yet started to flow and what is causing the delay. It would be very welcome if the group would query the Scottish Government about this.

A: AS there was obviously a logjam, and this would be investigated.

Q: Which other crops was Malawi fruits hoping to introduce?

A: this would be crops that can either be grown in the polytunnel or traditionally, ideally crops needing a small amount of water to grow.

The Mamie Martin Fund's Country Director, Mercy Sibande, visiting from Malawi speaking of her organisation's work in supporting the secondary education of girls in Malawi.

Mercy Sibande, Companies Director of Mamie Martin Fund in Malawi, spoke of the work of the Mamie Martin Fund empowering girls through secondary education. Without the money provided by the fund many girls would have dropped out of school. Through this work Malawi could be developed as more women and girls were educated. The goal was to see girls through secondary education. By being better educated girls could influence their future by decision making in terms of family planning and understanding issues.

Support was also offered in helping with transport to school as well as providing school materials and reusable sanitary ware. With more girls in education this would take Malawi to another level.

Mercy thanked donors and the Scottish Government and for their support.

Q: Of the 124 girls helped, could they be encouraged to give part of their earnings back in the fund?

A: MD Mamie Martin fund focus was solely funding secondary education. Ex-pupils would get in contact and tell them about how they were helping other girls.

Q: Have relationships been built in school partnerships with Scotland? Some schools realised that a four year partnership with one school and then moving to another proved beneficial as it meant the positive impact was shared.

A: Mamie Martin Fund had many connections and partners in Malawi and needed to assess the benefit to their girls as a priority. Liam added that even raising awareness amongst the schools in Scotland and to ignite ideas might be helpful and that it might be worth tapping into the network through the SMP.

AOB and Close

Thanks from Chair – Alexander Stewart MSP

Alexander thanked speakers, attendees, MSP colleagues, MP of the APPG and the Scotland Malawi Partnership. After the meeting closed, in-person attendees had the opportunity for networking over Malawi gin and tonics or soft drink.