



## MaSP COVID-19 RESPONSE STRATEGY

### Executive Summary

The Covid-19 pandemic presents a significant challenge to Scotland and Malawi, and consequently for the MaSP. We have moved quickly since end of March to disseminate news and information to Members and to prepare ourselves for a period of home-working and working in shifts. So far, our systems are working well, with all staff supported to work from home and face-to-face meetings reduced to a minimum and all member engagements moved to digital platforms: we have already started convening digital forums for Covid-19 information sharing and learning.

MaSP was geared to start the implementation of its new strategic plan from 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2020; however, the coming in of the COVID-19 pandemic makes it necessary for us to change our strategy as we are not able to conduct our core business in the conventional way. While we have endeavored to conduct our meetings virtually, we realize that we need more than that to stay on course as far as achieving our targets within our mandate is concerned. We must think strategically about how we as a national network respond. We are thus thinking afresh regarding what support, services and advice we should most usefully be offering our members in this challenging new reality.

We are operating on the assumption that travel and social distancing restrictions will continue for the foreseeable future, and that most organizations including Government departments and entities will continue to encourage their staff to work from home as Malawi continues to register new cases of COVID-19. This means that the modus operandi that has been adopted by the MaSP so far will continue for a few months, and all engagements will need to remain digital. We hope that key major events in between July and November, including the AGM, Strand meetings, regional engagements and Youth Forums will be able to go ahead as planned – but these assumptions will be kept under review.

This Covid-19 Response Strategy outlines four key strategic priorities which will underpin our work through the coming year:

- **CONTINUITY:** We will adapt and evolve our current work and plans to ensure business continuity, wherever this is desirable, appropriate and possible.

- **SUPPORT:** We will deliver additional, tailored support to those affected by the crisis, including: members, those in Malawi and or Scotland and other relevant partners as well as our staff.
- **INNOVATION:** We recognize that there are many challenges but also opportunities, including developing innovative new digital modes of support, learning and sharing. We will specifically look to develop innovative new services and support for schools and youth groups who have had to cancel their scheduled plans for the year as well as those young people from Scotland and some Malawian schools and organizations who failed to travel to Scotland (from Malawi) and to Malawi (from Scotland)
- **INSPIRATION:** We will look to inspire our members, the public and the media with stories of Scotland-Malawi collaboration, to keep members' spirits up and ensure we remain an outward-looking country, investing in the future of our 160-year old friendship with Scotland.

Rather than update the existing organizational risk register, the situation is so exceptional and far reaching, that the Partnership has developed a new supplementary Covid-19 Risk Register which, like this Strategy, will be made available to the public via our website and all our social media handles. It is important to understand that this is a live document and will thus be updated as and when it becomes necessary.

The Register examines risk across three categories: (1) Risk within the MaSP, where the MaSP has *direct* risk exposure. This is broken down into: (1a) internal risks, (1b) operational risks, and (1c) financial risks; (2) Risk with Members, where the MaSP has *indirect* risk exposure and needs to offer support, and; (3) Risk with Scotland, again, where the MaSP has *indirect* risk exposure. For each, the Register quantifies risk, gives commentary, and identifies mitigating and adaptive actions.

The Risk Register shows that the MaSP has acted quickly and effectively to date to mitigate the worst risk as far as it can be ascertained. It is now well positioned to continue to deliver core services, adapted to this new reality and to coordinate, represent and support Malawi's links with Scotland.

## **Introduction:**

The Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic presents a unique set of challenges for Scotland and Malawi, and the Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP) - as it does for all organizations. The MaSP is keen to respond quickly and effectively to this challenge, making changes to its work based on our best understanding of the needs of our members, the priorities in the bilateral relationship, and our responsibilities to support the national response to this crisis by making ourselves and our services available as and when they may be required.

This document summarizes the key aspects of the MaSP's response to the crisis. It is an exceptional additional layer of planning, within the wider 2020-23 Strategic Plan. This is an evolving document which will be updated through 2020, as the situation evolves.

We hope that by sharing this document publicly, we are able to inform and reassure members, partners and funders, and potentially help our smaller members who are themselves urgently considering how best to respond to this public health crisis.

## **Immediate actions taken in March 2020:**

Between end of March and the start of April, the MaSP took important, urgent steps to prepare for this crisis, including:

1. Developing a ten point plan response strategy and sharing it to the general public
2. Using our bulletin, website and social media handles to disseminate Covid-19 news and updates to members, including information from the Government of Malawi
3. Asking members what support they needed and keeping in regular contact with our key stakeholders.
4. Engaging and sharing with other networks in Malawi and our sister network the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) in Scotland.
5. Conducting a brainstorming event digitally to find out from members the impact of the COVID-19 on their general programming and what plans they have put in place in this regard
6. Moving to home-working and operating in shifts to reduce the numbers of staff at the office and exposure, adopting the necessary technology and systems for remote access to information, emails and other systems.
7. Consulting all staff on the support they need to work in a safe, sustainable and comfortable way from home.
8. Postponing the Youth Climate Leaders End of Year event
9. Moving all meetings and forums to digital platforms.
10. Revising the risk register
11. Commissioned 2019/2020 Audit

## **Operating assumptions:**

This is a difficult and dynamic time, with a high degree of uncertainty in both Scotland and Malawi as to how long current restrictions will be in place for. This

Strategic Plan will be updated as further information becomes apparent but we are working on the operating assumption that:

- (i) Government social distancing restrictions will continue, in some form, until June-August 2020, meaning face-to-face events and engagements will remain impossible or undesirable in this period.
- (ii) MaSP secretariat in Lilongwe and all the CRCs in the north and south will remain open, but staff will work in one week shifts to enable members have access to the facilities. Access will however be restricted to a minimum to protect all people involved. This working modality will be reviewed on a monthly basis in liaison with the Board of Directors
- (iii) Key major events in the year, including the AGM (scheduled for July 2020), Youth Forums and other activities, will be able to go ahead as planned if the situation changes or may be conducted digitally – but this assumption will be kept under review.

### **Strategic priorities:**

Responding to the risks identified in the formal Risk Register, the MaSP's Covid-19 response will be led by four key priorities: **continuity, support, innovation and inspiration.**

### **CONTINUITY:**

**We will adapt and evolve our current work and plans to ensure business continuity, where this desirable, appropriate.**

Specifically, we look to:

- Operate a **remote office**, with all our staff each working from home and in one week shifts and given all appropriate support.
- Publish a detailed and clear **Ten Point Covid-19 Response Plan**, making clear how the MaSP will operate through this more challenging chapter.
- Publish a full **Covid-19 Risk Register**, with a detailed assessment of the direct risks to the MaSP and the indirect risks to our members and their partners in Scotland.
- Migrate our events, forums and other face-to-face engagements to appropriate **digital platforms** while social distancing is required.
- **Build resilience**, as far as is possible, within our current systems, recognizing the high degree of uncertainty which will continue for a number of months.
- Work closely with the **Scottish Government**, sharing this strategy, and offering enhanced support as part of its core funding.
- **De-prioritize certain planned areas of work** for 2020 in order to make capacity for additional Covid-19 areas of work, including the AGM and Strand Meetings
- Continue to strategically prioritize work, potentially reducing other services and activities, if required, in response to reduced capacity and staff sickness

## **SUPPORT:**

**We will deliver support to those affected by the crisis, including: members, those in Scotland, partners, and our own staff.**

For Members we will look to:

- Share our own **Covid-19 Response Strategy and Risk Register** to assist members' own strategic thinking in this area.
- Seek regular information and **feedback from members** as to Covid-19 impact on their work, their priorities and how the MASP can assist.
- Offer support, advice and information relating to homeworking systems and relevant **communications technologies**.
- Host **Covid-19 Zoom meetings**, open to all members, to update on what the MaSP is doing and what we can offer, to listen to our members' experiences and needs, and create a space to share between members.
- Signpost to **funding opportunities** for those affected by Covid-19 and wider sources of information, advice and resources in the sector.
- Promote and support members' own Coronavirus-related **fundraising appeals**.
- Support **coordination and collaboration** between members.
- Map all groups, including schools, due to travel to Scotland who have had **trips postponed or cancelled**, working with group leaders to understand their priorities and explore what useful function the MaSP can offer those affected
- Develop a MaSP Multi-sectoral and integrated response with a highlight of all responses by Members segregated by strands and share these with Government of Malawi, the SG ad other stakeholders as a way of showcasing local COVID-19 solutions as well as raising awareness on the work of the members
- In liaison with the Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP), lobby the Scottish Government to continue Malawi funding and making a positive case that:
  - (a) Funded projects which have to be suspended due to the impact of Covid-19 in Malawi, but can likely be re-started in the future, should have funding paused rather than cancelled.
  - (b) Funded projects should be supported to re-purpose, where possible and appropriate, funds in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, to best achieve the original outcomes.
  - (c) Seek to ensure government is supportive, understanding and flexible, with clear communications to grant-holders.

For those in Scotland we will look to:

- **Disseminate information** about Covid-19 in Malawi through the Bulletin, social media, and a dedicated web-page
- Facilitate support and **two-way sharing** between Scotland and Malawi relating to strategies to fight Covid-19.
- **Share key documents and resources** (including, for example, hand-washing guidance, posters etc.)
- Establish a space for members' partners to **share their own experiences locally**, ensuring we are listening to a range of voices across Malawi and

- Scotland even from the ones who are not part of the partnership both in urban and rural areas
- Raise awareness of **what members are doing** to support Malawi's response to the crisis.
  - Amplify **Malawi-led advice** about how members can support their partners.
  - Establish a dedicated **WhatsApp group** for the sharing of information about Covid-19 spread and the Malawi/Scotland response, amongst key stakeholders active in this area.
  - Host **Covid-19 Zoom meetings**, to share information about the situation in Malawi and Scotland and ask questions to, and connect with, key individuals helping fight the outbreak.
  - Ensure all our work follows the principle of **do no harm**, specifically, ensuring that we are NOT:
    - o confusing, complicating or straying from Government of Malawi and Government of Scotland advice as they manage their national responses;
    - o causing unnecessary or unhelpful alarm or distress, or sharing updates we are not entirely confident are from a credible source;
    - o giving our own (MaSP) medical or other advice where this is beyond our expertise;
    - o forgetting that while there is much that usefully can be shared between Scotland and Malawi, there are significant differences as well - especially in geographies and movements, health systems, demographics, culture and climate - all of which will likely impact on the crisis.

For Staff our underpinning priority remains: to **Develop** MaSP as an organization to support the achievement of SG priorities as well as to set it up as a sustainable organization. In this regard therefore, we will look to:

- Offer **flexibility, understanding and comradery**, recognizing the many practical challenges each team member faces as they balance work alongside family and caring requirements, especially those with children or elderly relatives.
- Providing extra airtime to staff to ensure they have access to internet
- Ensuring that the health insurance is paid on time so that staff have uninterrupted access to the service during this period
- Ensure staff have a **safe, sustainable and comfortable workplace**.
- Offer staff **extra leave** after restrictions have ended, to compensate for public holidays during lockdown, allowing them to recuperate after a sustained period of confinement, stress and homeworking.

## **INNOVATION:**

***We will recognize that this is a fundamental change in landscape, with many challenges but also opportunities, including to develop new digital modes of support.***

Specifically, we look to:

- Create **digital spaces for member-to-member networking and sharing:** moving existing member forums to digital platforms but also exploring new, less formal and more regular interactive digital spaces for sharing.
- Explore digital ways of delivering strand and regional meetings
- Explore a major new initiative looking at **digital expertise sharing** – how the MaSP can encourage members to identify areas where they have valuable experience relating to a Scotland-Malawi link and support them to record short videos sharing this experience.
- Explore developing digital resources and engagements specifically for **schools and young people who were due to travel** to Scotland but have had trips cancelled or postponed. Looking to emulate some of the experiential and learning outcomes they would have gained in Scotland in different forms, and maintaining their interest and engagement for a future visit after travel restrictions have been lifted.
- Explore ways of training our members and staff alike on use of technology platforms like zoom and others to conduct virtual meetings. We noted that most members failed to link into our inaugural virtual meeting because they were unable to use or access zoom

## **INSPIRATION:**

***We will look to inspire our members, the public and the media with stories of Scotland-Malawi collaboration, to keep members' spirits up and ensure we remain an outward-looking country, investing in the future of our 160-year old friendship with Scotland.***

Specifically, we will:

- Encourage members to record and **share their own digital assets** (videos, photos, and short case studies), highlighting what they find most inspiring and uplifting about Scotland-Malawi cooperation.
- Aim to ensure our bulletin and social media feeds **continue to have positive stories**, even through these difficult times.
- Encourage members, especially at a community level, to **keep their Scotland links going**, however possible.
- Aim to keep a steady **drip-feed of good news stories**, even if it is just historic, in our social media and wider media.
- Continue to actively **engage the media**, maintaining public interest, engagement and support, and pro-actively making the inspiring case for Scotland's friendship with Malawi as a defining aspect of Scottish internationalism and identity.
- Inspire the next generation by empowering our youth champions to host virtual meetings around innovation, governance, gender and climate

change issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic. They will also be encouraged to share best practices through video, arts, crafts and photography