

## Collaboration for Clean Water: The Malawi-Scotland Regulatory Partnership

Malawi faces an escalating climate crisis, with severe impacts on the environment, water resources, the economy and health. With a growing population and limited water infrastructure, many Malawians struggle to access safe and reliable water sources. The environmental challenges are compounded by frequent natural disasters, such as the recent Cyclone Freddy, which recently exacerbated a severe cholera outbreak.

The partnership between Malawi and Scotland is a powerful example of international collaboration aimed at addressing critical challenges such as access to clean water and climate resilience. The historical ties and formal agreements between the two Nations, including the [Global Goals Partnership](#), reflect a commitment to shared values and mutual support.

In 2018, following a request from the Government of Malawi for Scottish support in operationalising the [National Water Resources Authority](#) (NWRA) and the [Malawi Environment Protection Authority](#) (MEPA), the Malawi-Scotland Regulatory Partnership (MSRP) was established to bolster Malawi's capacity to manage its water resources effectively. The unique regulator-regulator partnership with the [Scottish Environment Protection Agency](#) aimed to strengthen Malawi's regulatory and institutional frameworks, support evidence and data-driven decision-making, and develop Malawian talent to drive environmental institutions.

The partnership significantly enhanced the capacity of Malawian regulatory bodies, enabling them to operate more effectively and independently. Regulators are now equipped with an understanding of regulation, including monitoring, permitting, licensing, inspections, compliance, enforcement and charging.

Additionally, the MSRP has supported the assessment and redesign of water monitoring assets and gauge reader training, contributing to improved water resource management and climate resilience. A key MSRP delivery partner was the Malawian social enterprise, [BASEflow](#), who aim to increase groundwater sustainability to provide safe, and climate-resilient, access to drinking water in Malawi.



*Image 1: Re-designed climate-resilient handpump*

**BASEflow Team Leader, Muthi Nhlema, reflects on the MSRP:**

*“A lot of what water resources management entails is not necessarily as captivating as a water supply system that reaches thousands of people in need. However, water resources management, in all its “boring glory,” is what guarantees the availability of water for generations to come. The investment and support from MSRP gave us the opportunity to fully understand the condition of Malawi’s water monitoring assets and to formulate targeted interventions that would better position Malawi to address, respond to, and withstand the emerging challenges of climate change.*

*In our focal area of groundwater sustainability, we now have a clearer understanding of the condition of Malawi’s groundwater monitoring wells thanks to the MSRP’s investment in a national assessment. The insights gained through this assessment have formed the foundation for investment planning and improved asset management for the long-term. Using these insights, the Ministry of Water and Sanitation and BASEflow successfully leveraged additional resources to revitalize the groundwater monitoring network through infrastructure development and the integration of modern technology.*

*Beyond these technical milestones, one aspect of MSRP that resonated with me personally was its decolonialised approach to north-south collaboration. At a time when the Global North is grappling with how to respectfully engage the Global South in delivering social change, the MSRP set an example by allowing Malawi, and Malawians, to take the lead in designing and implementing interventions. The Scotland team provided technical advice, drawing from their extensive experience in diverse political economies, while ensuring the relationship was one of equals.*

*This partnership never felt tokenistic but was a genuine effort to share knowledge and experience, enabling Malawi to avoid the same mistakes Scotland made in its own water-futures journey. This underscores the uniqueness of the special relationship between Malawi and Scotland—one built on mutual respect, trust, and shared goals for sustainable water management.”*



Image 2: Knowledge sharing between Scottish and Malawian environmental regulators

The achieved impact of the MSRP is summarised in Box 1 under themes of institutional development, climate change adaptation and resilience and knowledge transfer:

*Box 1: Key areas of MSRP impact*

## Impact of the Malawi-Scotland Regulatory Partnership

### Institutional Development

The NWRA now has over 50 trained staff members leaving a solid foundation for the NWRA's growth and effectiveness as a regulator.

### Climate Change Adaptation and Resilience

Enhanced Malawi's resilience to climate change to ensure sustainable water access during natural disasters.

### Knowledge Transfer & Capacity Building

Facilitated the transfer of environmental regulatory knowledge and tools, enabling Malawian institutions to adopt best practices and improve their operational capabilities.

The MSRP has influenced policy through the development of guidance papers on reforming the Water Resources Act, improving licensing processes, and developing regulatory communication strategies. Through capacity building, knowledge transfer, and policy development, the partnership has laid a strong foundation for sustainable water management, contributing progress towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including SDG6 Clean Water and Sanitation, SDG13: Climate Action, SDG16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions and SDG17: Partnerships for the Goals. As a reciprocal partnership, shared learning between the Nations was achieved, where Scotland can take learnings from hydrological extremes experienced in Malawi to understand potential future climatic conditions.

As we look to the future, continued collaboration and investment are crucial to achieving the SDGs and [Malawi's Vision 2063](#) in the following areas:

- **Climate Resilience:** Implementing and scaling up climate adaptation initiatives, such as raised hand pumps and capping artesian wells, to protect water resources and communities from the impacts of climate change.
- **Community Engagement:** Promoting community-led water management solutions and increasing public awareness of sustainable water practices.
- **Policy Development:** Supporting the development and implementation of policies that promote sustainable water use and protect water resources for future generations.

Moreover, emphasis on developing local talent is needed for sustainable progress. By training Malawian professionals, the partnership ensures that knowledge and skills remain within the country, fostering long-term resilience in environmental governance. Overall, the MSRP is a vital step toward achieving SDG 6 and ensuring equitable access to clean water and sanitation for all Malawians.

The journey of the Malawi-Scotland Regulatory Partnership offers valuable lessons towards a blueprint for future collaborations. We encourage researchers, practitioners and policymakers to further leverage international partnerships to address global water challenges and encourage partnership working that promotes the expertise of organisations and builds institutional capacity in developing nations.



*Image 1: Groundwater gauge reading and data collection*

### **Acknowledgements**

This blog was written by Kerr Adams and Rachel Helliwell (The Hydro Nation International Centre). We give thanks and credit to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency, BASEflow and BAW Consultants for managing and delivering the Malawi-Scotland Regulatory Partnership, and for the achieved impact described in this blog. We thank the National Water Resources Authority, the Malawi Environment Protection Agency and the Government of Malawi's Ministry of Water and Sanitation for their collaboration and contributions towards knowledge sharing throughout the partnership. Finally, we thank the Scottish Government Water Industry Team for funding the Malawi-Scotland Regulatory Partnership.

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