

Cross Party Group on Malawi

Tuesday 29th October 2013

18.00 – 20.00

Scottish Parliament, Q1.04

MINUTES

Attendees:

1. Alex Fergusson MSP
2. Claudia Beamish MSP
3. Maureen Watt MSP
4. Linda Fabiani MSP
5. Anthonie Chiu Smit (European Movement)
6. Bob Garrow (RS Garrow Ltd)
7. Charlie Bevan (Scotland Malawi Partnership)
8. Chipiliro Kansilanga (Sunday Times)
9. Colin Cameron (SMP Member)
10. David Hope-Jones (Scotland Malawi Partnership)
11. Geoff Earl (SMP Member)
12. Hayley Nicholson
13. Janey Andrews (Strathclyde University)
14. John Forsyth (Journalist)
15. Joyce Nicol (MMF)
16. Peter West (Honorary Consul)
17. Walter Dunlop SMP Director
18. Wonderful Hunga (Malawi Institute of Journalism)

1. Welcome and minutes from previous meeting

Maureen Watt MSP (MW) welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Apologies were noted from:

Liam McArthur MSP, Rhoda Grant MSP, Siobhan McMohan MSP, Alison Johnstone MSP, Richard Baker MSP, Sarah Boyack MSP, David Stevenson, Isabel Bruce, Ken Ross, Zamiwe Hara, Andrew Parker, Douglas Young, Jack Thompson and Pat Hiddleston.

2. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the 5th June 2013 were accepted as accurate by the group.

3. AGM: Election / confirmation of Office Bearers

The following were elected for office:

Convener: Maureen Watt MSP (Proposed: Peter West, Seconded: Geoff Earl)

Vice-convener: Alex Ferguson MSP (Proposed: Maureen Watt, Seconded: David Hope-Jones).

Liam McArthur MSP, Siobhan MacMohan MSP and Christina McKelvie MSP were also proposed, in absentia, to the role of Vice-Conveners (Proposed: Maureen Watt, Seconded: David Hope-Jones). The SMP will approach to confirm they're happy with this appointment before the next meeting.

Secretary: Scotland Malawi Partnership (Proposed: Geoff Early, Seconded: Peter West)

4. Presentation from Ms Chipiliro Kansilanga and Mr Wonderful Hunga

The meeting focussed on the Malawian media with presentations from Ms Chipiliro Kansilanga and Mr Wonderful Hunga, two key journalists from Malawi. Chipiliro and Wonderful were in Scotland as part of a project funded by the Scottish Government, spending two weeks at Strathclyde University and one at Scotland on Sunday, sharing learning on investigative journalism. Chipiliro and Wonderful presented on the freedom of the press in Malawi, especially in the run up to May's tri-partite elections, and the digitisation of the media in Malawi.

CK began with giving an overview of the media estate in Malawi. It currently has 32 radio stations, 6 TV stations, 13 newspapers and a news agency, however with the granting of new licenses such statistics are evolving. The news houses are typically concentrated in major cities and towns. Radio remains an effective means of reach. The challenge with print media includes:

- High cost
- Low literacy levels
- Poverty
- Language, English
- Poor circulation [advertisements]

The media in Malawi on the whole has a good relationship with other arms of government + NGO's. Online media is booming but there is no regulation. The Malawian Constitution guarantees freedom of expression, freedom of opinion- freedom of the press and the media has seen a decrease in the number of media rights violations under the current administration, in comparison to the previous one.

Regulation and professionalism

The Communications Act 1998 and the Malawi Communications Regulatory Authority seek to regulate the professionalism of the Malawian broadcast industry. Other agencies such as the National Media Institute of Southern Africa, Media Council of Malawi, Journalists Union of Malawi and Malawi Editor's Forum protect the rights and promote the responsibilities of Malawi's journalists.

Major Milestones

CK highlighted a number of major milestones that the media in Malawi has had a role in achieving:

- MACRA issuing of new TV and radio licences
- Repealing of Section 46 of the Penal Code
- Growth of New Media (online + digital)
- Digitization of broadcasting services
- Relative press freedom [publishing without fear]
- Decreased arrests, assaults or injuries.
- Afro barometer-top on freedom of speech

The Watchdog Role

Furthermore the Malawian media has been responsible for some important investigative journalism into:

- Corruption within Malawi Housing Corporation
- Road Traffic Department
- Tobacco smuggling
- Power interconnection deal
- Drug shortage in hospitals
- On-going cash gate scandal

Challenges/threats

Journalists in Malawi have had a number of challenges. While the granting of new licences is opening up public airwaves, in some newrooms there is still a culture of self-censorship linked to political and business interests, which can undermine editorial independence. This can lead to a continued censoring of negative reporting on the central government.

Following CK's overview of the media estate in Malawi, WH went to do explore the questions of whether Malawi's media is ready for tripartite elections in 2014 or not?

His two sides of the argument are outlined below:

YES IT IS	NO IT ISNT
Journalists at liberty to cover campaigns	Have failed to set a clear agenda in addressing key policy areas
Nationwide coverage of parties and candidates through MEC stringers	Duty of balance and impartiality [Public Media]
Special newspaper supplements and radio programs on election coverage	Poor financial resources /Lack of equipment
Extensive voter education and information	Mercenary journalism
-Opinion Polls -Presidential debates [Zodiak]	Gender representation/poor coverage
Specialized media training on elections	

WH then went on to highlight the challenge of gender equality within the media in Malawi. There are few women in the media in senior positions and general news coverage of "women's issues" is slim. In the lead up to the election coverage of female aspiring candidates is limited, and there is an argument that a sexist perspective on President Banda's presidential performance is touting the idea that voting for any female women candidates would be foolish. Much of this emerges from underlining cultural factors and views.

Digital media

WH finally looked at digital media in Malawi. The penetration for digital media tools is below average, and internet usage in 2010 was 4.7% of the population. Access is limited due to high cost and lack of infrastructure however under the current government they have been prioritizing ICT development and introduction of digital to Malawi. The E-Bill was also introduced in 2012 to regulating ICTs.

In terms of social media there are opportunities for greater voter engagement, civic education, drumming up enthusiasm for registration and voting and reaching out to more young people. However there are associated challenges to with digital technology, including no regulation for online news, unauthentic Facebook accounts, false popularity and limited only to internet users.

Going forward

Looking forward WH concluded that the Malawian media remains powerful, effective and relevant however further training of journalists is required and a radical approach to outstanding legislation.

6.55pm Plenary discussion with Ms Chipiliro Kansilanga and Mr Wonderful Hunga

Following the presentation members of the CPG asked questions relating to journalist mentorship programmes, regulation on online media, illegal broadcasters, the recruitment and role of MEC stringers and the culture of per diems among journalist professionals in Malawi.

7.30pm AOB

Alex Fergusson opened an invitation to an evening with the Association of European Parliamentarians with Africa (AWEPA) on 27th November in CR6 of the Scottish Parliament. For those who are interested in attending they are invited to contact Mr Fergusson's office at Alex.Fergusson.msp@scottish.parliament.uk.

Joyce Nicol informed the CPG on the death of Tamara Mhura's mother, the members of the CPG offered their condolences to Tamara and her family at this time.

Date of next meeting: 11th December, 1.30-3pm.

7.45pm Meeting close