

Volunteering in Malawi Health and Emergency Policy

The Mlambe Project





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Introduction

1. Volunteering in Malawi comes with a level of inherent risk, above that which would be associated with volunteering in the United Kingdom. Volunteers must accept this increased level of risk, and in return, The Mlambe Project must do all it can to protect its volunteers by identifying and mitigating the most serious risks to volunteer health.

Risks

Political

2. Malawi is largely politically stable, but volunteers should check FCO advice at <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/malawi/safety-and-security> before travelling.

Cultural

3. There are significant cultural differences between Malawi and the UK, and volunteers should be aware of these whilst they are in the country. The Mlambe Project is supportive of all volunteers regardless of gender and sexuality, but be aware that homosexual acts are illegal in Malawi.

Drugs

4. Cannabis and other drugs illegal in the UK are also illegal in Malawi. Punishments can be severe, and volunteers are advised to avoid taking any illegal substances.

Crime

5. Malawi is largely safe, but volunteers should take normal precautions not to draw attention to expensive possessions, and maintain good awareness of their surroundings at all times. If put in a situation where threatened with force, volunteers are advised to hand over belongings rather than jeopardise their personal safety.



Road Accidents

6. Roads and road travel in Malawi are dangerous, with road accidents being the leading cause of death for 15-29 year olds. To put this into context, the death rate on Malawi's roads is some 12x higher than in the UK. Volunteers should mitigate these risks by not getting into a vehicle when they suspect the driver to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and not entering a vehicle which is obviously not roadworthy. Seatbelts should always be worn where available. If volunteers are driving themselves, they should ensure that their vehicle is well maintained and that seatbelts are worn at all times.
7. Volunteers should not ride on any kind of motorbike, and should also take extra care of road traffic as a pedestrian.

Other Accidents

8. Concern for Health and Safety is much lower than in the UK, and volunteers should show heightened awareness of their surroundings. Risks are particularly high around construction and industrial sites, and anywhere machinery is in operation.

Health

9. Volunteers should visit a health professional at least 4 weeks before travelling to Malawi. They will be able to advise on current medical risks and the necessary preventative measures. Of particular concern are:
 - a. Malaria
 - Anti malarial medication should be taken preventatively after consultation with a doctor/nurse
 - b. Bilharzia/Schistosomiasis
 - Bilharzia is caught by paddling or swimming in lakes/rivers, so volunteers should avoid contact with non-purified freshwater
 - Once possible infection has occurred, it can be treated with a course of antibiotics
 - c. Giardiasis
 - Giardia is a parasite of the intestine that is spread by water/food contaminated by faecal matter
 - It is important to drink bottled water, or purify water before drinking, and eat food which has been hygienically prepared
 - Giardia can be identified with 'eggy' burps and gas, and diarrhea
 - It can be treated with the antibiotic Tinidazole (or Metronidazole if Tinidazole is not available).



10. Volunteers should also bear in mind that Malawi has one of the highest HIV infection rates in the world, at over 10% of the population - normal precautions should be taken.

Natural Threats

11. Wildlife in Malawi can be dangerous, and should never be approached by volunteers.

- a. Malawi is home to many poisonous species of snake, and care should be taken to avoid them. In the event of being bitten by the snake, remain calm and move as little as possible to avoid spreading venom around the body.
- b. Volunteers should never approach dogs whilst in Malawi, as Rabies is still prevalent and can be transmitted by a bite, scratch, or lick. If bitten or scratched, you should clean the wound under a running tap for 15 minutes, before applying antiseptic cream to the area.

12. In 2015, Malawi was hit by major flooding which killed over 170 people. Volunteers should take normal precautions and follow the advice of local authorities and FCO travel advice.