Malawi Liverpool Wellcome
RESEARCH PROGRAMME

















OUR STRATEGY
2025-2035

Research That Drives Health



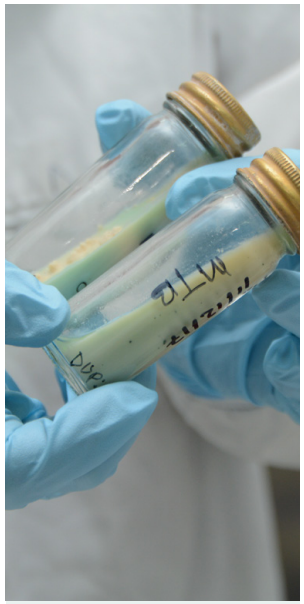
About This Strategy

We are pleased to present this summary of Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Research Programme's (MLW) Institutional Strategy 2025-2035. Drawing on a detailed strategy and supporting analysis, it sets out MLW's strategic direction, external positioning, and operational principles.

The vision, mission, values, strategic priorities, objectives, enablers, governance arrangements, and measures of success described here have been approved by the MLW Governing Council and leadership.

The full strategy – co-developed by MLW leadership – provides the rationale, evidence base, and implementation detail underpinning this summary.

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CHAIRPERSON'S FOREWORD



Professor Macpherson Mallewa
GOVERNING COUNCIL CHAIRPERSON

It is my privilege to introduce our Strategy, which sets out our shared ambition for the years ahead and the governance foundations on which that ambition will be delivered.

As Governing Council, we are committed to providing strategic oversight and robust governance needed to support MLW's continued growth, regional influence and global impact.

Over the past 30 years, MLW has become one of Africa's leading research institutions, deepening our scientific contribution to tackling infectious and non-communicable diseases. This new strategy builds on that foundation, setting out our priorities for strategic pillars, our continued commitment to research responsive to Malawi and the region, and our ambition to deepen impact.

A strategy is only as strong as the governance that carries it forward, and the Council has given close attention to the arrangements needed to translate these ambitions into results.

Partnerships have always been central to our success. Our collaboration with the Government of Malawi, through the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, and with Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHeS), Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) and the University of Liverpool (UoL) remains the bedrock of our work.

Our relationship with Wellcome, as our principal funder has been transformative, not only through sustained investment in our science and people, but also through its confidence in Africa-led research and its support for the long-term, flexible funding that enables the strategic thinking captured in this document.

As we look ahead to the next decade, the Governing Council will ensure that MLW remains ambitious in its science, accountable in its stewardship and firmly rooted in the partnerships that have shaped its success.

We are deeply grateful to our staff, researchers, partners, funders and communities, whose collective contributions have shaped MLW's journey and continue to make our work possible.

DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD



Professor Henry Mwandumba
DIRECTOR

Africa's greatest health challenges deserve Africa-led solutions with global influence.

Our ambition is to establish the Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Research Programme (MLW) as one of Africa's leading health research institutions — advancing scientific discovery, developing future leaders, and generating evidence that shapes policy and improves health outcomes across diverse settings.

For more than three decades, MLW has demonstrated how research rooted in local priorities can deliver impact far beyond Malawi. Through scientific excellence, strong partnerships and a commitment to public benefit, we have strengthened research capacity and contributed to better health nationally, across Africa and globally.

Yet our greatest opportunities lie ahead.

As the health challenges facing Africa continue to evolve, so too must our ambition. The coming decade presents an opportunity to expand MLW's influence on global health through high-quality research, innovation and leadership. By investing in our people, partnerships, infrastructure and long-term sustainability, we will strengthen our capacity to address current and emerging health challenges while translating knowledge into tangible public benefit.

Scientific excellence depends not only on outstanding research and infrastructure, but also on a strong research culture and environment in which people can thrive and realise their full potential. We are committed to fostering an inclusive, values-driven institution that attracts, develops and retains exceptional people, enabling MLW to deliver research of the highest quality and impact.

This strategy is our commitment to that future: a future in which MLW stands among Africa's foremost research institutions, recognised for the quality, relevance and influence of its science. Our ambition is not simply to contribute to the future of global health, but to define it from Africa.

OUR STORY

Who we are

The Malawi Liverpool Wellcome Research Programme (MLW) is an Africa-based research institution delivering world-class science to improve health and wellbeing in Malawi, across Africa and globally.

Since its establishment in 1995, MLW's research portfolio has grown significantly - from its foundations in infectious disease research into a multidisciplinary research institution.

Through close collaborations with the Government of Malawi, Kamuzu University of Health Sciences (KUHeS), Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM), University of Liverpool (UoL), Wellcome, communities and wider partners, we train the next generation of researchers and scientific leaders and work to generate evidence that informs policies, practice and programmes.

Three decades on, MLW is recognized as a highly competitive and respected research institution, with deep roots in Malawi and growing regional and global reach.

CLICK HERE TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR STORY



"Our history provides the foundation; our partnerships strengthen us; and our science continues to shape the future of health."

OUR STORY
Research themes

Our research is grounded in Malawi and the wider region, conducted to international standards of scientific and professional excellence, and designed to inform policy and practice that reaches beyond national boundaries.

We prioritise research questions of regional and global relevance, deepening partnerships with communities, governments, and international collaborators, and investing in researchers and leaders who are equipped to engage with decision-makers and shape policy, guidelines, and practice.

Across six multidisciplinary themes, we generate high-quality evidence to understand health challenges, develop and test solutions, and help translate research into policy, practice and better health outcomes.



VACCINES
Protecting populations through better vaccines

Advancing vaccine research, development and delivery to protect children and high-risk populations, reduce health inequities and inform vaccine policy.

INFECTION BIOLOGY
Understanding infections to strengthen prevention and response



Investigating how infections emerge, spread and interact with people, while using advanced surveillance to detect threats early and inform public health action.

CLINICAL & EXPERIMENTAL MEDICINE
Turning clinical research into better patient outcomes

Conducting patient-centred studies and clinical trials in hospitals and communities to understand disease and develop, evaluate and improve treatments and care.



POPULATION HEALTH
Improving health at population level



Understanding, tracking and reducing the burden of major infectious diseases; including HIV, TB, malaria, schistosomiasis and emerging infections, through population research and surveillance.

MATERNAL, NEONATAL & CHILD HEALTH
Improving health from pregnancy through childhood



Generating evidence and solutions that improve the health and wellbeing of mothers, newborns and children and contribute to healthier families and communities.

SOCIAL SCIENCES & HEALTH SYSTEMS
Understanding people, communities and health systems

Exploring how knowledge, behaviour, social interactions and health systems shape health, helping make interventions and services more effective and responsive.



OUR STORY

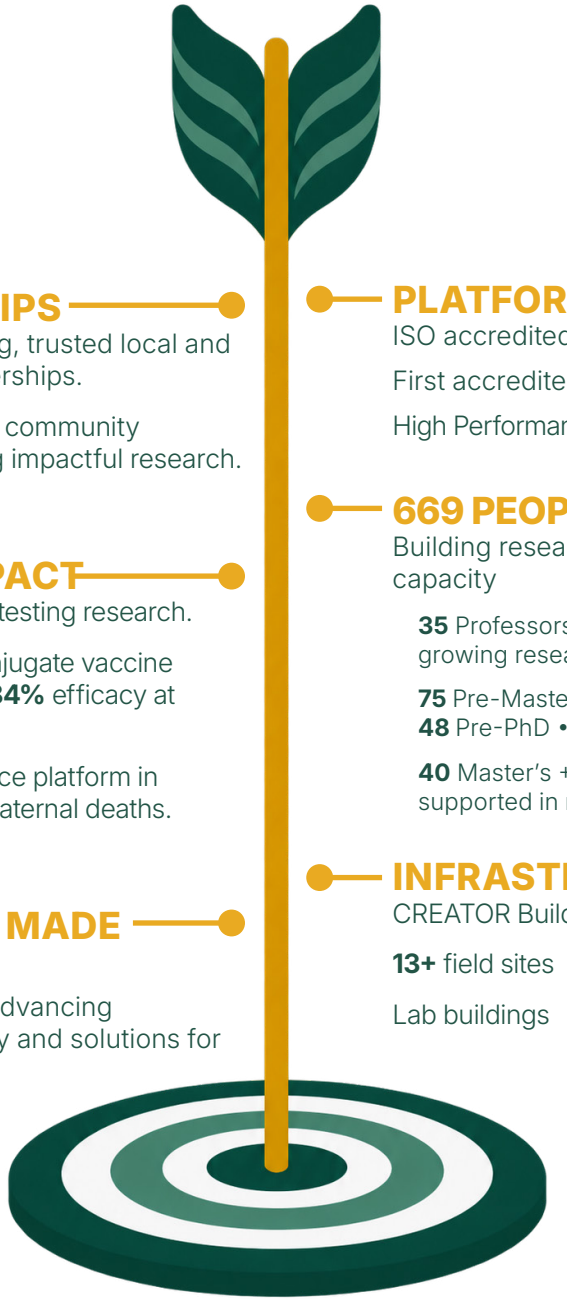
Building on our strengths

Over more than three decades, MLW has built a strong track record of scientific excellence, innovation and impact.

Working with communities, government and partners, our research has helped shape health policy and practice, advance the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease, and strengthen research capacity in Malawi and beyond.

These achievements, together with the capabilities we have built, provide a strong foundation for delivering our ambitions for the next decade.

They demonstrate our ability not only to produce high-quality science, but to translate research into meaningful and lasting impact for people and health systems.



PARTNERSHIPS

30+ years of strong, trusted local and international partnerships.

17+ years of strong community partnerships driving impactful research.

RESEARCH IMPACT

Led first global HIV self-testing research.

First African typhoid conjugate vaccine trial: Demonstrated **81–84%** efficacy at 18–24 months.

First Maternal Surveillance platform in Malawi for monitoring maternal deaths.

INNOVATION MADE IN MALAWI

An Innovation Hub advancing research, technology and solutions for Malawi and beyond.

PLATFORMS

ISO accredited laboratory.

First accredited clinical trials pharmacy in Malawi.

High Performance Computing for large research data.

669 PEOPLE TRAINED

Building research and professional capacity

35 Professors - Developed through our growing research community

75 Pre-Master's • **99** Master's
48 Pre-PhD • **156** PhD • **51** Postdoctoral

40 Master's + **84** Undergrad - Professionals supported in non-medical disciplines

INFRASTRUCTURE

CREATOR Building

13+ field sites

Lab buildings

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Our strategy is anchored in a clear purpose and a disciplined framework for delivery. It sets out our vision, mission, and values, articulates our guiding approach, and defines the overall strategic objective that shapes how we prioritise, partner, invest, and deliver impact over the next decade.



VISION

Africa-based beacon of excellence leading impactful health research that drives innovation, policy, and practice globally.



MISSION

To conduct high-quality research and train the next generation of researchers and leaders to benefit health.



VALUES

Our values define the principles that guide how we work and how we build relationships. They sit at the core of our organisational culture and are embedded in our policies, performance expectations, and governance practices.

EXCELLENCE

We uphold and deliver the highest quality and standards.

In practice, this means we set and uphold high scientific and professional standards, and we expect quality, rigour, and accountability across all areas of delivery.

INTEGRITY

We are professional, honest, transparent, accountable, and fair.

In practice, this means we apply consistent ethical and governance discipline in how we make decisions, manage resources, and deliver on our commitments.

INCLUSIVITY

Everyone belongs, is respected, and valued.

In practice, this means we foster an inclusive organisational culture that values diverse perspectives and enables people to thrive and contribute fully.

PARTNERSHIPS

We achieve more together through shared purpose.

In practice, this means we work in partnership with communities, governments, research collaborators, and other stakeholders, recognising partnerships as central to relevance, credibility, and impact.

WHY THIS STRATEGIC DIRECTION?



The context in which MLW operates is changing. Expectations of health research institutions are rising. Global commitments, including the Sustainable Development Goals and the International Health Regulations, demand research that is rigorous, ethically grounded, and translated into action. At the same time, across Malawi and Africa more broadly, the health landscape is shifting. Communicable diseases remain a significant and persistent challenge, while non-communicable diseases, mental health, antimicrobial resistance, and climate-related risks are growing in scale and complexity, and are increasingly interconnected.

Meeting this combination of rising expectations and changing health needs requires more than support for excellent research programmes. It requires robust platforms to deliver multidisciplinary approaches – underpinned by resilient research support systems – and sustained development of research leadership. This strategy sets out how MLW will respond: focusing our priorities, aligning our resources, and strengthening delivery, so that our science and training continue to deliver measurable impact for Malawi, the region, and the world.

Overall Strategic Objective

Our goal is distinction through science that delivers measurable benefit for Malawi, the region, and Africa more broadly, while contributing to global health policy and practice. We will achieve this by generating high-quality evidence that advances knowledge, strengthens health systems, and reduces the burden of disease, morbidity, and mortality across the populations we serve.

Our overall strategic objective defines the outcomes we aim to achieve and provides a clear basis for organisational focus and oversight. The priorities translate into clear delivery commitments, ensuring that planning, investment, partnership, and performance remain aligned throughout the strategy period.



Through community engagement initiatives we facilitate co-creation of research agenda by researchers and communities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

MLW will deliver distinction over the next decade through four strategic priorities. Each priority is supported by a clear objective and enabled by the institutional foundations that strengthen our culture, partnerships, platforms, and long-term sustainability.



1 **RESEARCH & INNOVATION**

Achieving excellence in research and innovation

2 **SUSTAINABILITY**

Building sustainable foundations for research and innovation excellence

3 **POLICY**

Translating research and evidence into policy, practice and measurable impact

4 **RESEARCH LEADERSHIP**

Building a sustainable pipeline of research leaders for the future



STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1:

Achieving excellence in research and innovation

We will deliver high-quality research on health challenges of major societal importance where MLW can make distinctive contributions, while strengthening scientific capacity in Malawi and the wider region. Our strategy is not to cover every health topic, but to focus on addressing priority research questions at depth, for greater impact. Our research themes provide a structured framework for interdisciplinary collaboration – bringing researchers together across disciplines to foster synergies, and drive scientific and translational innovation from discovery through to evaluation and implementation.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

To identify and prioritise high-impact health challenges across Malawi, Africa and the wider world, delivering innovative research that generates robust evidence to inform decision-making and improve population health.

WHAT THIS PRIORITY MEANS IN PRACTICE

- Building on MLW's strengths in infectious diseases while expanding purposefully into priority emerging areas, guided by the evolving disease burden and national and regional health needs.
- Delivering a focused research portfolio through structured national partnerships – informed by regional and international scientific dialogue, and supported by platforms that enable discovery, translation and implementation.
- Maintaining robust research quality standards through strong ethics, regulatory and compliance systems that safeguard participants and staff, protect data integrity, and uphold our institutional reputation.

> *"Our strategy is not to cover every health topic, but to focus on addressing priority research questions at depth, for greater impact."*

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2:

Enabling institutional sustainability for excellence in research and innovation

We will strengthen the institutional foundations that are critical for sustaining and scaling world-class research over the long term. We will do this by investing in the resilient platforms, robust systems, and stable operating environment that enable MLW to perform consistently in – and adapt to – our complex environment with its changing scientific, funding, and regulatory conditions. This priority ensures the sound governance, disciplined financial management, and sustained advancement of core systems that translate scientific ambition into reliable, long-term impact.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

To maintain an enabling institutional environment that supports high-quality, responsible research and long-term resilience – underpinned by disciplined governance, strong systems and sound financial stewardship.

WHAT THIS PRIORITY MEANS IN PRACTICE

- Strengthening long-term institutional sustainability through diversified funding, enhanced intelligence on funding opportunities and equitable full-cost recovery – under the governance, compliance, and equitable partnership standards that ensure effective stewardship and sustained funder confidence.
- Investing in resilient platforms and systems for research delivery and innovation: including core infrastructure, data and digital capability, and institutional frameworks that support translation, intellectual property management, and partnership with industry and other stakeholders.
- Ensuring institutional resilience through robust monitoring, evaluation, and risk management systems that support organisational learning, enable early identification of risks, and allow timely and effective response to disruption.



The Clinical Research Excellence and Training Open Resource (CREATOR) strengthens our capacity by providing modern infrastructure to enable institutional sustainability for excellence in research and innovation

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3:

Promoting policy relevance and impact

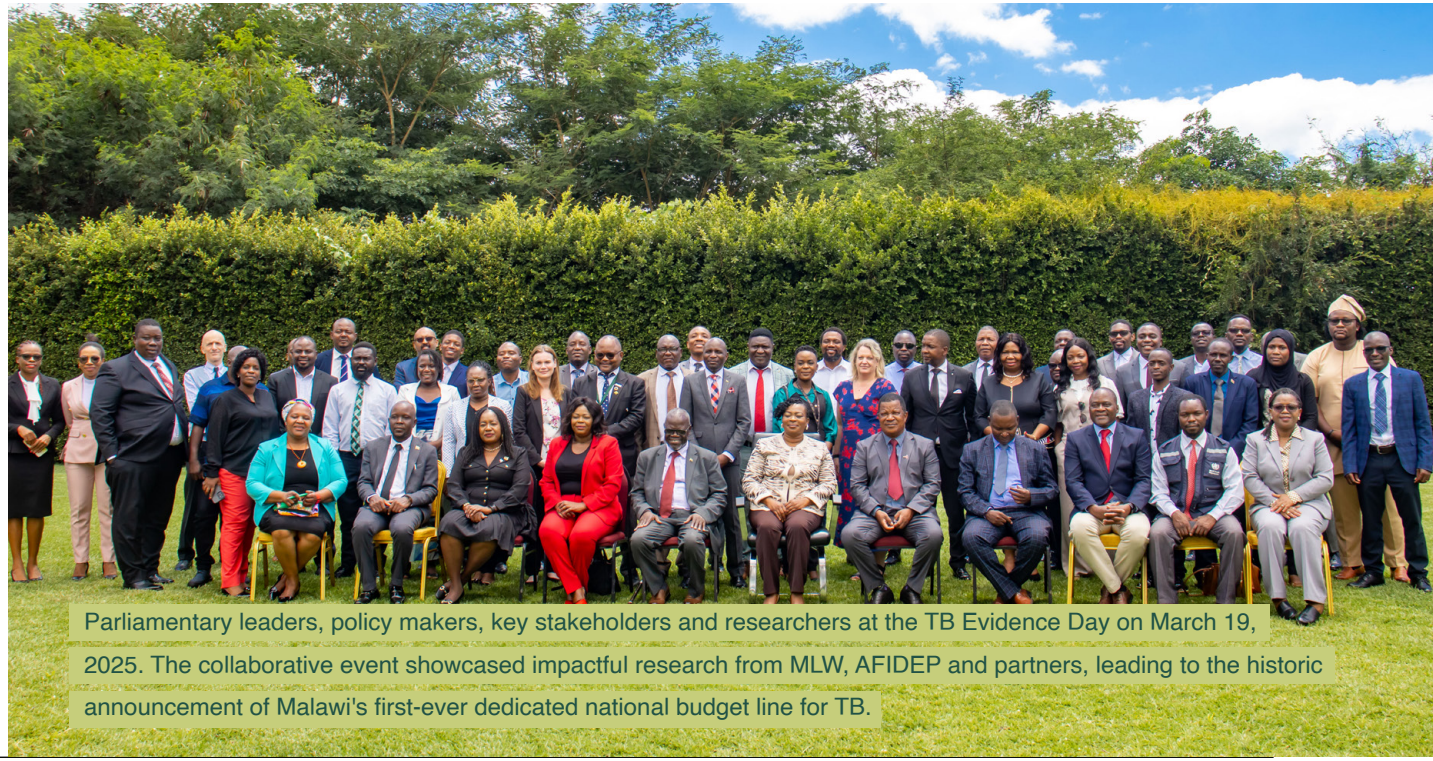
Our research only delivers its full potential when it influences policy and practice in Malawi and beyond, across different settings. We will strengthen our impact by designing policy relevance into our research from the outset. We will support our researchers to engage effectively with decision-makers, and to contribute to policies, guidelines, strategies, and evidence-informed reforms. We will also ensure that the communities we work with shape the questions we ask and the way our findings are communicated and used. Through long-term partnerships with communities, governments, and other stakeholders, this approach will consolidate MLW's role as a trusted source of rigorous evidence, ensuring our science informs decisions and delivers measurable benefits for population health.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

To increase the policy influence of MLW's research by generating and communicating evidence that informs decision-making, policy, and practice at national, regional, and global levels.

WHAT THIS PRIORITY MEANS IN PRACTICE

- Embedding policy relevance from the start of every research project – ensuring that priority-setting, study design, and research outputs are shaped by the decisions they are intended to inform and by the communities these decisions will impact.
- Strengthening sustained policy engagement and researcher capability through purposeful engagement with policy actors, targeted support for policy-facing roles, and partnerships that enable effective contribution to policy, guidelines, and practice.
- Ensuring evidence reaches and influences decision-makers by improving the accessibility, visibility, and timely dissemination of research evidence to policy and practice audiences.



Parliamentary leaders, policy makers, key stakeholders and researchers at the TB Evidence Day on March 19, 2025. The collaborative event showcased impactful research from MLW, AFIDEP and partners, leading to the historic announcement of Malawi's first-ever dedicated national budget line for TB.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4:

Building a sustainable pipelines of research leadership

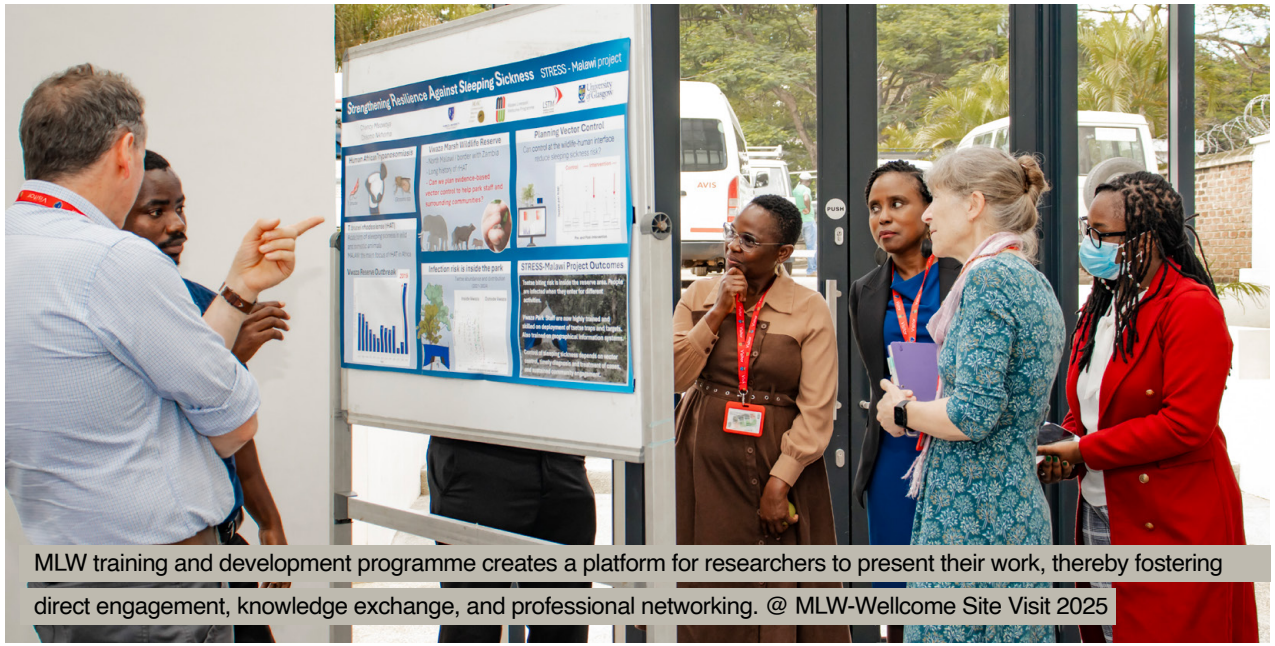
MLW's long-term contribution to health, wellbeing and prosperity depends, above all, on people. We will build a sustainable pipeline of independent researchers, research leaders, and professional specialists to secure the future of our work at MLW and to strengthen health research leadership across the region and beyond. We will deliver structured training, mentorship, and career development pathways that enable progression across scientific and professional roles. In doing so, we will sustain the depth, diversity, and continuity of leadership needed to maintain scientific excellence, attract competitive funding, and deliver impact well beyond the current strategy period.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE

To build a strong, diverse pipeline of research and professional talent – enabling progression to independent and senior leadership roles through structured training, mentorship and career development pathways.

WHAT THIS PRIORITY MEANS IN PRACTICE

- Strengthening training and development pathways across all career stages – providing high-quality supervision, mentorship, and leadership training that enables researchers to progress from early career to independence and senior scientific or professional leadership.
- Sustaining mentorship capacity and leadership continuity by ensuring sufficient senior research and professional leadership to support trainees and emerging leaders, and by promoting equitable access to training and leadership opportunities aligned with MLW's values and workforce priorities.
- Building robust systems and networks for long-term leadership development – improving recruitment, supervision, and progression systems; tracking trainee and alumni outcomes; and expanding national and regional networks that strengthen African research leadership.



MLW training and development programme creates a platform for researchers to present their work, thereby fostering direct engagement, knowledge exchange, and professional networking. @ MLW-Wellcome Site Visit 2025

DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

Scientific distinction requires disciplined execution and the ability to adapt to changing contexts. We will deliver this strategy with clear accountability and active oversight – ensuring that our strategic intent translates into measurable outcomes and sustained impact.

Performance management

The strategy is designed to translate ambition into delivery. Execution will be supported by clear ownership of strategic objectives across senior management, alignment of institutional plans and individual performance expectations with strategic priorities, disciplined prioritisation of activity and resources, and regular review of progress through established governance and management forums.

Progress against the strategy will be reviewed annually, with adjustments as required to maintain momentum, address emerging risks, and respond to changes in the external environment.

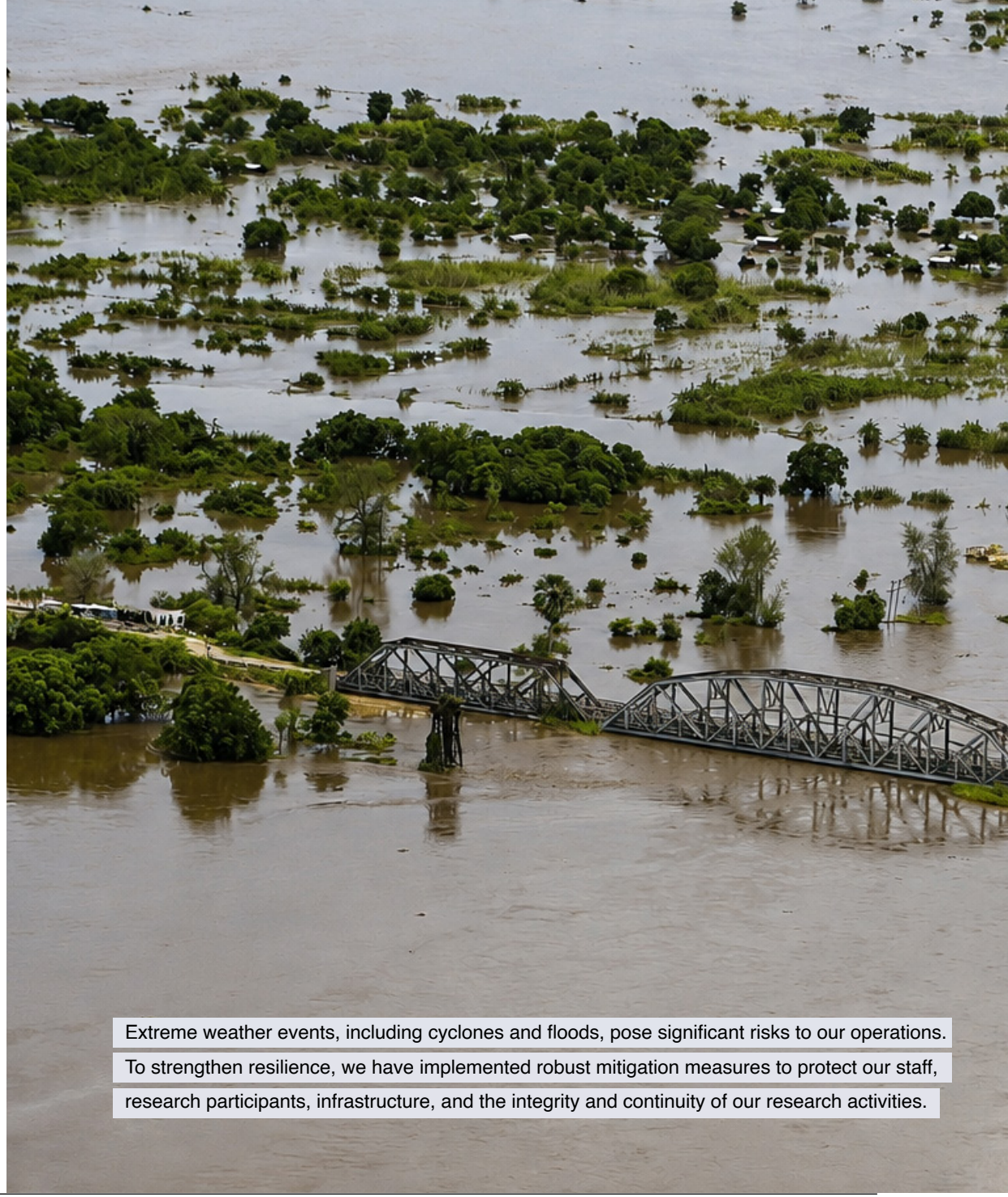


Risk management and resilience

MLW operates in a complex and often unpredictable national and global environment. Delivering this strategy depends on disciplined risk management, sustained institutional resilience and clear governance oversight.

Our principal risk is national macro-economic volatility in Malawi – including fiscal constraint and currency pressures affecting research delivery, workforce stability, infrastructure reliability and international partnerships. We also work under the ongoing potential for disruption from outbreaks, natural disasters, or periods of instability. Beyond Malawi, global funding and geopolitical pressures, shifting funder priorities, and increased competition present ongoing challenges, as do structural, legal, and compliance risks linked to MLW's legal status, regulatory change, and expanding data governance requirements.

We manage these risks through a structural risk management framework with clear ownership and governance oversight of mitigating actions and residual risks. We are strengthening crisis readiness and business continuity arrangements to protect research delivery, staff, participants, and data. Disciplined diversification of funding and research portfolios, and proactive engagement with funders, national stakeholders, and international partners, will sustain confidence in our outputs and secure long-term collaboration. Progress on institutional sustainability and legal autonomy, alongside robust data governance and intellectual property management, will further strengthen our resilience over the strategy period.



Extreme weather events, including cyclones and floods, pose significant risks to our operations. To strengthen resilience, we have implemented robust mitigation measures to protect our staff, research participants, infrastructure, and the integrity and continuity of our research activities.

MEASURING SUCCESS

We will measure progress against this strategy through a coherent set of performance indicators aligned to our four strategic priorities:

- Excellence in research and innovation
- Policy relevance and impact
- Institutional sustainability
- Leadership development.

Performance against these measures will be reviewed regularly through established governance and management processes, enabling informed oversight, timely course-correction, and organizational learning throughout the strategy period.

What success looks like



OUR GOVERNANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

MLW Governing Council

Strategic oversight rests with the MLW Governing Council, which provides guidance and assurance across policy direction, management controls, resource mobilisation, and senior leadership appointments.

Day-to-day delivery of the strategy will be led by the Programme Director, supported by senior leaders responsible for research strategy, research culture, policy engagement, and professional services. Leadership portfolios will be aligned to strategic delivery needs to ensure clear ownership, coordination, and accountability.

Our Council and Executive Leadership Team bring together the expertise, experience and leadership that guide MLW's strategic direction and drive our continued pursuit of excellence and impact.



Macpherson Mallewa
Vice-Chancellor
Kamuzu University of Health Sciences



Julia Kemp
Associate Director, Equitable Research Ecosystems
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David Lalloo
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Director



Neil French
Deputy Director (Research Strategy, Innovations and Academic Standards)



Janelisa Musaya
Deputy Director (Research Culture, Partnerships, and Impact)



Aubrey Chalira
Chief Operating Officer

“We will bring together the expertise, experience and leadership that guide MLW’s strategic direction and drive our continued pursuit of excellence and impact.”



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Malawi Liverpool Wellcome
RESEARCH PROGRAMME

2025-2035 STRATEGY

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