Connecting Scotland: how Scottish organisations engage internationally

Christian Aid Scotland

Introduction
Christian Aid is an international development NGO, headquartered in London. It is the agency of 41 churches in Britain and Ireland and is mandated to work on humanitarian relief, development and advocacy for poverty eradication. Its essential purpose is to expose the scandal of poverty, to help in practical ways to root it out from the world, and to challenge and change structures and systems that favour the rich and powerful over the poor and marginalised. It works in 38 countries, solely through local partners, recognising that people are the main agents of change in their own communities, and is a member of the ACT Alliance. Internationally, Christian Aid works in consortia with many other agencies and has a joint Amazon strategy with Oxfam. Its aid is unconditional, freely offered without coercion, regardless of background or belief.

Christian Aid Scotland is the fully devolved expression of Christian Aid in Scotland, registered as a Scottish charity with the Office of the Scottish Charities Regulator. Scottish churches were instrumental in founding Christian Aid 70 years ago after World War II with the initial purpose of assisting European refugees in reconstruction. Soon after the war, Christian Aid offered support to the many thousands of Palestinian refugees, and does so to this day. It expanded its remit to support development work in newly independent nations in Africa and Asia, and to respond to emergencies worldwide. Its commitment to speaking out for justice was an important part of encouraging churches in the anti-apartheid movement. Its concern not just with the consequences of poverty but with its underlying causes led hundreds of thousands of people into a wider trade justice movement, through campaigns like Banking on the Poor, Who Runs the World, Jubilee 2000 and Make Poverty History. It was involved in setting up the DEC, VSO, the Fairtrade Foundation and Divine Chocolate. It has 15 staff in offices in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Perth, and supports a strong grassroots network of 600 local groups, who fundraise, advocate and campaign to overcome global poverty. It is an active member of the Disasters Emergency Committee in Scotland, NIDOS, Scotland-Malawi Partnership, Scottish Fair Trade Forum, Jubilee Scotland, IDEAS and Stop Climate Chaos Scotland.

Christian Aid’s strategic priorities are determined by its corporate strategy, Partnership for Change, which identifies 5 key strategic objectives:

- The power to change institutions
- The right to essential services
- Fair shares in a constrained world
- Equality for all
- Tackling violence and building peace
Its current advocacy priorities are climate change, tax justice and gender justice.

What international activities are happening now in your organisation? Please describe how and why these activities take place. Are other sectors or organisations involved? What do these activities contribute or achieve?

1. Year-round fundraising and campaigning by 600 local groups in every part of Scotland, generating around £7.5 million per annum. This includes fundraising for emergencies, long-term community development and new initiatives; advocacy and campaigning on tax dodging, climate change and gender justice. Christian Aid’s main fundraising event is Christian Aid Week, a week-long, community-based initiative, which raised around £1.5 million in 2014.

2. Supporting Scottish Government-funded programmes. Christian Aid Scotland currently receives funding for four programmes.
   - Through the International Development Fund, Christian Aid Scotland receives funding for work in Malawi on child and maternal health and health governance. These are supported by local church/community partnerships in Scotland, which raise additional funding as outlined in the funding awards, hold local awareness-raising and educational events and receive regular briefings and updates on the partnerships.
   - Christian Aid Scotland receives funding through the IDF for a programme in India and Bangladesh on resilient livelihoods. It has hosted both the Minister for International Development and IDF civil servant visits to these programmes through its India office.
   - Through the Climate Justice Fund, Christian Aid Scotland receives programme funding for work on climate adaptation in Malawi. Scottish community partnerships are providing seed funding for this programme.
   - Christian Aid Scotland promotes and publicises all of these programmes through media visits and coverage, speaking engagements and resources. A photographic exhibition of the work on child and maternal health is currently touring partnership communities across Scotland.

3. Christian Aid Scotland works closely with Scottish churches on strategic and policy issues relating to global economics, climate change and gender justice, and on supporting and influencing the churches’ own global partnerships.

4. Christian Aid Scotland works with decision makers across Scotland, including politicians at Holyrood, Westminster and Brussels. In addition we challenge and collaborate with Scotland's private sector (specifically those with influence beyond Scotland's shores such as multinationals and major investors) in order to bring about changes in their behaviour and to encourage their support on issues such as tax justice and ambitious action on climate change.
Do you think your organisation is effective in participating in international activities? If not, what would help you to make improvements? What prevents you from making improvements now?

The operating environment in Scotland for an international development organisation is in many ways favourable. We enjoy substantial support from the Scottish public (raising 13% of our UK voluntary income here – far higher than the rest of the UK on a per head basis). The media and political environments – while sometimes rightly challenging – are broadly supportive. There is cross-party political support for policies such as the Scottish International Development Fund and the landmark Scottish Climate Act. The concept of Global Citizenship is embedded within the Curriculum for Excellence. In discussions with colleagues and peers who operate in different contexts, we are often reminded not to take such support for granted.

There is also a collective approach across the sector (and beyond) in Scotland that helps effective working. Collaboration between NGOs, wider civil society, government, academia and business is often easy and good.

Certain steps would make this kind of collaborative approach even more effective, however. In terms of what government can do, we have been encouraged by the interest shown by the current Scottish Government, and the opposition parties, in the concept of Policy Coherence in Development (PCD). Such an integrated, cross-government approach to international development has the potential to greatly enhance Scotland’s overall positive impact on international poverty and Christian Aid Scotland would endorse the points made to that effect within the submission from NIDOS on this issue.

What should organisations in Scotland do to be effective internationally? Are you aware of any good examples of this from Scotland or another country?

Many Scottish organisations, including Christian Aid Scotland, have much success in operating overseas. In our case our success/effectiveness (or otherwise) in working overseas is perhaps best evaluated by our partners on the ground - from whom feedback is generally very positive.

In general terms we would observe that Scotland - possibly as a function of its size - is often able to do things slightly differently; more collaboratively, and/or in innovative ways. One example would be a presentation at a UN Climate Summit involving Scottish representatives from an NGO, the business sector and the relevant government minister, all advocating greater ambition on reducing emissions. In many ways this seems unremarkable, yet many delegates commented on the fact they had never before seen a united front on climate change presented by these three sectors in a coordinated way.

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