Connecting Scotland – how Scottish organisations engage internationally

Kenyan Women in Scotland Association (KWISA)

Introduction:

Kenyan Women in Scotland Association (KWISA) was founded by a group of Kenyan women who were concerned about the persistent challenges and issues affecting their community that were not being addressed by mainstream policy makers and service providers. KWISA is a diaspora led organisations with members who were born in Kenya, Scotland and other parts of the world but identify their roots as Kenyan.

KWISA’s primary aim is the advancement of Kenya women and their families by giving them space and opportunity to work together and address family, social, economic, civic, gender and cultural and issues that affect their lives.

KWISA is aware that issues that affect Kenyans also affect other Africans and some Scots. Therefore, it works closely with women from other communities and countries to address cross cutting and intersectional issues. While its focus is the Kenyan people in Scotland and in Kenya, KWISA is aware of the importance of solidarity across geographical and ideological divisions for the advancement of all people.

Question 1: What international activities are happening now in your sector and/or organisation? Please describe how and why these activities take place. Are other sectors or organisations involved? What do these activities contribute or achieve?

KWISA has several projects which have both local and international dimension: (i) income generation (co-op/social enterprise, education and employment) (ii) Family wellness: Intergenerational issues, domestic abuse, Female Genital Mutilation, Honour based Violence and Harmful traditional Practices (iii) Civic and political engagement. At the international level KWISA is making a significant contribution in three aspects:

i) Remittances: The value and impact of remittances on development is well documented and Kenyans in Scotland are part of the diaspora community that sends money back home to support families and friends for food, school fees, hospital bills and accommodation. They also support local schools, hospitals, and environmental and conservation projects. Remittances have an immediate and direct impact on development because the money goes directly to the people who need assistance most. Remitting money does not involve complicated grant applications processes or ever-changing themes, criteria and seasons. In addition it is not tied to political conditions, control or preferences.

According to the World Bank, billions of dollars are transferred to developing countries every year: an amount greater than all international aid. In 2011-2012 remittances to Kenya were over $1.8 Billion dollars. We do not have total sum of remittances from Scotland because members send money individually but one example might shed a light of collective action. Last year KWISA supported a young Kenyan woman who climbed Mt Kilimanjaro in November 2014 to raise funds for a project to save elephants and for the Green Belt Movement which plants trees to improve the environment. She raised over £3000 pounds which will make a significant impact.
ii) Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)

African Women Against FGM is a project run by KWISA which engages African women in Scotland in campaign against all forms of FGM. KWISA woman have been involved in campaigns against FGM for many years in Kenya and UK. They have personal knowledge and experience of FGM as they come from practising communities.

The project started out of their concern about the lack of African women’s voices in discussions about FGM and the lack of funding for African diaspora-led campaigns against FGM in Scotland in spite of the fact that FGM affects more African women and girls than any other community. Furthermore, African women objected to the way they were all lumped together as potential perpetrators and whose children were at risk, in spite of the fact that African women in UK and African have been at the front line of FGM struggle for decades without recognition.

KWISA’s FGM campaign is about supporting women who live with consequences of FGM; and to prevent the practice from being passed on to the next generation. KWISA uses the ‘Do No Harm’ approach which aims at stopping FGM without stripping off the dignity, self-respect and integrity African women, and without making victims of FGM ashamed and humiliated. KWISA locates FGM in wide context of violence against women and harmful traditional practices which require action led by the communities affected. KWISA knows that FGM cannot be eradicated in Scotland and Europe without eradicating it at its source and thereby getting rid of the supply line. Their knowledge of customs and traditions gives them an advantage and insight into the campaign. The most recent activities include:

a) FGM Seminar for African women in September 2014 attended by 33 women from 12 African countries living in Scotland
b) Seminar to mark International Day of Zero Tolerance to FGM 2015 attended by 28 women from 10 African countries living in Scotland
c) A working group to take forward recommendation from the seminars is currently set up
d) KWISA has established links with key service providers and professional bodies including the Police, Health and the Scottish Government

iii) Engaging with Post 2015 Sustainable Development Goals:

KWISA participates in discussions about future development goals and pays attention to expectations of how implementation will impact on the poor especially women and children and the disabled people. In particular it wants to make sure that the voices of the diaspora communities are not left out. KWISA follows closely the Kenya 2030 Vision because remittances add value to Government’s development plan.

iv) KWISA is a member of NIDOS and actively contributes to international development discussions and policy.

Question 2 - Do you think your sector and/or organisation is effective in participating in international activities? If not, what would help you to make improvements? What prevents you from making improvements now?

KWISA’s success in participating in international activities comes from its members knowledge and experience of both local and international scene. Apart from the
experience of coming from another country, some of the members have qualifications in international development, international community health, and experience of managing projects for international NGOs, the UN and private companies.

KWISA also has partners in Kenya and is currently exploring links with other countries for its FGM campaigns.

KWISA is also successful because of its principles of inclusiveness and collaboration which recognises diversity and avoids the ‘them and us’ approach. Kenyans share the same aspirations of equality, fairness and justice as the Scots and as a minority community in Scotland KWISA is fully aware of the danger of discrimination and isolation.

KWISA has a unique strategic point as bridge between the people of Scotland and Kenya, and its members have extensive knowledge and experience of social, economic and civic matters in both countries. Therefore KWISA borrows and share ideas from both countries and adds a diaspora perspective on integration and community development. For example celebrating Kenyan independence day with families and friends in Scotland it encourages Kenyan community cohesion and solidarity and promotes great understanding of cultural diversity and strengthens social cohesion with other communities in Scotland.

**What needs improving?** Lack of adequate capacity and resources is the main hindrance. KWISA’s activities are funded by the three women who set it up. They rely on support from family and friends who give time, donations in kind and moral support. Time is a major problem because the women full time jobs and the volunteers are on low income and work long hours. Therefore it is not possible to sustain an effective level of operation and give people the support when they need it.

KWISA is a small organisation without the necessary infrastructure to attract grants from funders in a sector dominated by international NGOS, academic institutions and government departments. The new approach which favour enterprise and business for development is a good idea for removing dependence on aid but without a level playing field and there is danger that small organisations such a KWISA will be left behind again.

**Question 3 - What should organisations in Scotland do to be effective internationally? Are you aware of any good examples of this from Scotland or another country?**

1. Organisations in Scotland could make better use of the diaspora communities in a number of ways:

   a) By treating them as equal partners, (not competitors), who have knowledge and experience about their countries of origin which organisations in Scotland can benefit from: see them as ‘expatriates not migrants’.

   b) Create space for trading or bartering of skills: due to shortage of funding many organisations are reluctant to share resources for free. At the same time diaspora communities complain of being used and exploited by organisations that want to consult them for free. This is an opportunity to bring them together for mutual benefit.

2. ‘Visit Scotland’: Every year families and friends of people from diaspora communities in Scotland come to visit them. They contribute to the economy like other tourists but this is not recognised or valued by Scotland. In addition to
challenges of getting visas they do not feel welcome like visitors from rich countries. This is something Scotland can improve on to ensure that its reputation does not suffer.

3. Lessons from other countries could be applied in Scotland to strengthen communities. KWISA is based on self-help philosophy of ‘chama’ movement in Kenya, which brings people together and organises around common issues affecting individuals, families or communities. This model is not alien to Scotland as there is a tradition of communities pulling together. There are many variations of communities pulling together but working with and learning from people across cultural divide is a good example of how diaspora and local communities can be stronger together instead of competing against each other.

Examples of good practice: We have no resources to carry out extensive research but we compare notes with other diaspora organisations in Wales, England and follow with interest the relationships between diaspora communities and their governments in some European. The major differences tend to be based on history and the reasons for migration and for choosing a particular country. The Welsh Assembly and Scandinavian countries appear to recognise the contribution the African community makes and supports them to overcome the challenges. A capacity building grant for small African led organisations would improve their effectiveness and improve equality.

As such the relationship between diaspora and policy makers including the Government should be reviewed and strengthened. Scotland used to be well known because of its historic links with many countries especially through the Church but the international development policy of focusing on a few poor countries and not on issues that cause poverty has changed that relationship. The Commonwealth Games revived that connection but if nothing is done to ensure that the links with African countries is part of the Games legacy, link will be short lived.

Furthermore Scotland’s reason for international activities should not be purely for economic gain for Scotland as stated in the current policies. It is should for advancement of humanity (including Scots at home) and economic gains should be fair and for all people.

Scotland has a long history with many countries in Africa. In Kenya it started with the missionaries and followed by colonial administration and now upheld by Kenyan diaspora. We have share values in education, culture, faith and a spirit of self-determination. KWISA promotes positive aspects of our culture and draws from the traditions and wisdom of indigenous peoples of the world which strengthens and preserves our identity and history.

Conclusion

In a fast moving and changing landscape small communities everywhere are overlooked but KWISA is aware that its members face the same challenges and aspirations as large communities which include low income, unemployment, housing, family violence and intergeneration issues. Lack of family and absence of self-help groups leads to isolation, stress and depression and poor wellbeing.

As bridge between Scotland and Kenya members of KWISA plays an important role. The remittances are highly valued by their people who hold Scotland in high regard because ‘their people’ live here. They also share knowledge and information gained
in Scotland with counterparts in Kenya and the rest of Africa. The Scottish political system and peaceful elections are always mentioned as example of good governance.

KWISA is aware that people of Scotland care as demonstrated by messages of support in response to the massacre in Garissa a few weeks ago. By promoting cross-cultural communication KWISA increases public knowledge and awareness of common issues that affect all people and this is a good vehicle for peace and harmony.

KWISA believes that a future that is bright for all starts with small groups of people who care.

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