Malawi Fruits

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?

Malawi Fruits is working in the rural north of Malawi supporting smallholder farmers to grow cash crops in order to be able to fund their families’ education and healthcare needs. Our work is part of a growing body of work focussing on enterprise as a means of development – this seems more satisfactory and is definitely more sustainable than traditional aid models.

We work closely with our partners on the ground to ensure that the needs identification and our methodology is appropriate for the area in which we work. Here in Scotland we make a point of networking with like-minded organisations, learning from each other and sharing best practice. The openness to do this among Scottish organisations is very helpful and commendable.

One of the strengths of Malawi Fruits is the flexibility to allow us to work with private companies both in Scotland and in Malawi. This mixing together of charitable donations, government funding and private enterprise presents some challenges and yet will be an increasing trend over the next decade. It is something that we will all have to adjust to and may require policy change.

We receive funding from the Scottish Government small grants programme and this has been significant in allowing us to scale up the work and build our own capacity as well as that of our partners in Malawi. This funding has also opened up opportunities to discuss our work more widely and has increased our credibility as a relatively young charity.

In terms of contribution, we will be working with 600 farmers and helping 6,000 people by the end of the current grant cycle. These are subsistence farmers many of who have had no cash income before and the work is enabling them to have cash in the household available for education and healthcare needs of family members.

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?

We believe that NGOs which focus on enterprise can multiply the effectiveness of the work they do. Sustainability is much easier to achieve and the work has long term benefits.

The big challenge facing small NGO’s looking to scale up their operations is the difficulty in funding the necessary operations here in Scotland. We want to fundraise, to network, to disseminate and apply learning – but all these activities take time this is the part of the operation which is hardest to fund. Government and other
grants don’t allow for this type of work so funds are being gathered for coal face operations in Malawi while we are restricted in our ability to grow and to tell a good story back home because we can’t fund that.

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

Collaboration and partnership are the key. There are many organisations doing good work but this could be enhanced by working together. While NGO’s are well networked and good at speaking to each other, this feels less true of universities who tend to do their own thing. It would seem sensible to work more closely together and funders can have a say in this by facilitating joint funding arrangements perhaps.

For example, a number of NGO’s are, like us, working in the agriculture sector. There are good educational establishments in Scotland who have much to offer in terms of climate smart thinking, access to soil testing, etc but dialogue is very difficult. This seems a missed opportunity.

Kevin Simpson
Chairman

March 2015