



Sustainability, Development Effectiveness and 'Best Practice'

A Research Paper for the Scotland Malawi Partnership



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Get involved:

www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/get-involved/principles

Planning and implementing together:

- **Whose idea is this?**
- What do you want to achieve, and why?
- Who was involved in the planning?
- How do you communicate with your partners?
- Is this an equitable, and effective two-way dialogue?
- Are roles and responsibilities clear?
- Are expectations clear at both sides?
- Do you have a partnership agreement?
- Who manages the partnership?

Appropriateness:

- **How does it fit within local and governmental priorities?**
- Does this partnership fit within local culture and customs at both ends?

Respect, trust and mutual understanding:

- **How would you feel if you were at the other side of the partnership?**
- How well do you know your partners, and how are you improving your knowledge and understanding?
- What are the biggest issues at each side, and how does the partnership work effectively in this context?
- How is basic human dignity safeguarded?
- How do you know if respect, trust or understanding have been compromised, and what then happens?
- What do you do when the two sides don't agree?

Transparency and Accountability:

- **How are challenges, issues and concerns listened to?**
- How do you share information about your partnership?
- Who is your partnership accountable to?
- How do you communicate with these people?
- If an NGO, have you IATI registered your work?

No one left behind:

- **Who is excluded from your partnership?**
- Who precisely is your partnership with?
- How are the marginalised in the community at both sides engaged?

Effectiveness:

- **How do you know if your partnership is working?**
- Who is involved in evaluating the partnership?
- How do you use your monitoring and evaluation to learn, and develop the partnership?

Reciprocity:

- **What does each side contribute in the partnership?**
- Is it genuinely a two-way partnership?
- Who benefits from the partnership?
- Are opportunities, like travel, open to both sides of the partnership?

Sustainability:

- **How long is your partnership for and what happens when it ends?**
- How can you be sure your partnership isn't creating dependencies?
- Is your partnership building capacity at both sides?

Do no Harm:

- **Could anyone be worse off as a result of your partnership?**
- What impact is your partnership having on: the local economy; gender equality; food security; local culture; climate change; democracy, governance and local planning;
- Are you compliant with all relevant legislation?

Interconnectivity:

- **How do you connect with what others are doing in this area?**
- How do you learn from others and share your experience?
- Are the local diaspora community at both sides engaged?

Parity (equality):

- **Who 'owns' the partnership? Who has the power?**
- How is each side treated through this partnership?
- Who benefits from this partnership?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sustainability has come to occupy a central role in current social, political and economic discourses. In particular, sustainability has been aggressively promoted in the Global South, where previous efforts at development and North-South linking have proven ill-fated. The old development paradigms, based on an endless transfer of aid are growing out of style – both among wealthy countries (where many people are growing frustrated with lack of development progress) and among recipient countries (where many people feel that aid has been a patronizing force that has undermined economic growth, supported corruption, and disempowered communities).

It is in this context that scholars, politicians, development practitioners, and ordinary citizens now look at sustainability as a vital framework for approaching development. Still, for many people sustainability is nothing more than a buzzword, to paraphrase Shakespeare: a tale told by idealists, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. This report aims to reclaim the idea of sustainability, to ground it in more clearly identifiable thematic areas, and to give some concrete suggestions on how best to promote it in the context of Scotland-Malawi links.

The impetus for the present report was a desire by the SMP and its Board to better understand and engage in issues around 'sustainability', 'aid effective—ness' and 'best practice'. It is structured in three main sections: (1) a summary of the relevant academic literature, sector guidance and international frameworks; (2) a presentation of key findings from Member interviews on sustainability and 'best practice'; and (3) a set of recommendations for the SMP on better promoting sustainability, development effectiveness and 'best practice'.

A review of the current literature on sustainability does not reveal a total, overarching consensus on what sustainability entails *per se*. However, several common themes that are seen as inextricably linked with sustainability can be identified:

- Participation
- Local ownership
- Empowerment & solidarity
- Capacity building & leadership
- Transparency & accountability
- Exit strategies
- Private sector engagement

While some of these remain contentious when it comes down to their nuances and their relative importance, as a whole they are seen as centrally relevant to the sustainability debate. This is true for most of the above themes across academia, international frameworks and sector guidance.

In addition to an extended literature review, several semi-structured, qualitative interviews were conducted over the course of the author's research in order to gauge Members' opinions and look at ways forward for Scotland-Malawi linking. The following recurring themes emerged from the interviews:

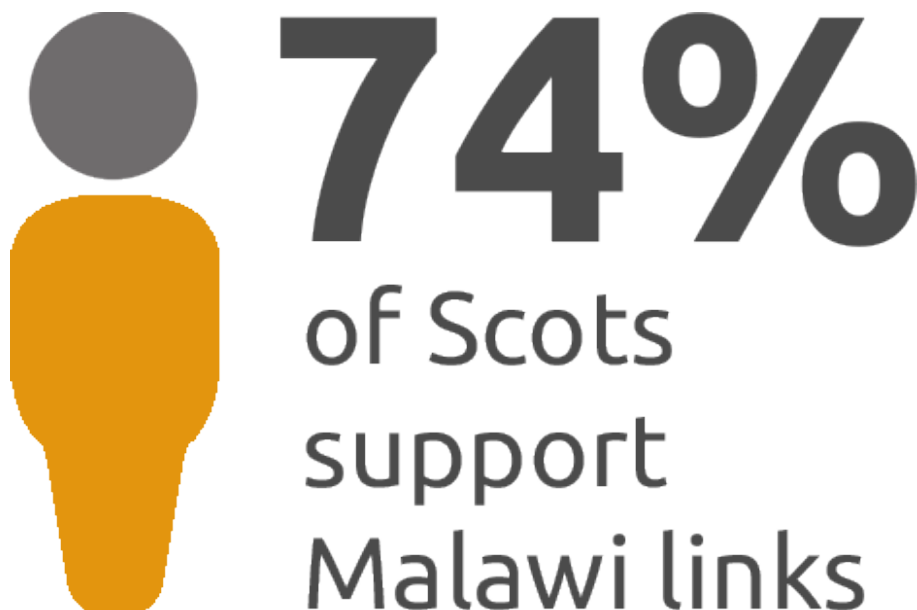
1. Local ownership (including: local decision-making and local 'buy-in')
2. Capacity building (in government, the private sector, and Malawian CSOs)
3. Working genuinely with Malawians (local authorities, government, communities)
4. Collaboration (ie. with other organisations working on the same issue)
5. Rigorous M&E (including looking at past projects)

6. Thorough preliminary research
7. Better alignment (ie. with local/national priorities)
8. Building genuine partnerships
9. Less paternalism and assumptions of what Malawians need
10. Finding local solutions to problems
11. Engaging in more participatory methods
12. Encouraging good governance and strong Malawian leadership (at every level of society)

Very few people – either in scholarly debate or in the sector – disagree fundamentally with the desirability of sustainability and sustainable outcomes. But people are also pragmatic and realistic. They will not dogmatically pursue an agenda that is perceived as ill-defined or overly-idealistic. Thus, the author has concluded with a series of recommendations that it is hoped will be genuinely useful in helping the SMP approach the sustainability issue in a way that is productive, inclusive, and manageable:

- Keep sustainability on the agenda
- Be as relevant and specific as possible when invoking sustainability in its Forums and events
- Maintain a positive and judgement-free environment when addressing sustainability issues
- Consider offering a quick and easy checklist on its website as an entry-point to a more in-depth and focused discussion of sustainability
- Promote transparency and stronger self-evaluation, possibly through the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)
- Get members talking about sustainability and good practice through a collective 'lesson learning' project
- Avoid re-creating the wheel by duplicating the effort of organisations like NIDOS

These recommendations are by no means meant to offer a comprehensive solution to the SMP's sustainability concerns. They will, hopefully, provide a solid foundation for the SMP as it seeks to engage its Members and the Scottish Government in a more drawn-out and productive dialogue around sustainability in the coming years. Sustainability is, after all, not something that one can encapsulate in a single document, but rather a constant consideration as we attempt to better engage in Scotland-Malawi linking.



(1) INTRODUCTION

Over the years sustainability has become an increasingly prominent concept in international aid and development circles. The main usages of “sustainability” have evolved noticeably since its emergence in popular discourse:

1. Traditionally: sustainability invoked to refer to management of natural resources¹
2. Early 1970s: sustainability invoked in terms of pursuing an overall “state of global equilibrium,” where basic material needs are satisfied without risk of “sudden and uncontrolled collapse”²
3. 1987: UN Brundtland Commission describes sustainable development as something “which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”³
4. Early 1990s to present: Ecological considerations dominate, though UN and other international agencies widely recognize sustainable development as having three pillars (environmental, economic, and social) – and some groups make the case for including culture and/or governance as additional pillars⁴

The kind of sustainability being addressed in this report treats sustainability as a fluid concept that means different things to different people, and cuts across various fields. In the initial research stages of this report, sustainability was approached from the perspective of *project* sustainability – that is, asking what makes a project or a link between Scotland and Malawi sustainable. What has become quite clear, however, is that sustainability is not a subject that can be approached in and of itself. Rather, it is a consideration that should be a constant backdrop of our discussions.

This more holistic way of thinking about sustainability is well-reflected in the relevant academic literature, the guidance within the sector, and the responses of SMP members. On the one hand, this may seem daunting or overwhelming – approaching a topic that occupies such a vast terrain and that feeds into and out of many other issues. On the other hand, the diffuse nature of sustainability is also quite useful, as it allows us to break the concept down into specific sub-issues, and address these in turn. Most commonly, these issues include:

- empowerment;
- capacity building;
- local ownership;
- participation; and
- private sector development.

Other major recurring themes include: international solidarity, gender empowerment, building leadership, good governance, and environmental sustainability.

Lastly, in the view of this author, it is important to think of sustainability not just in terms of end goals, but rather in terms of processes. So many successful North-South relationships depend on *how* we engage with our partners, and the relationship between Scotland and Malawi is no different. As one member told me early on in my research, to even use the word 'partnership' with respect to Scotland-Malawi linking may be problematic, owing to the inherent challenges in maintaining a partnership between two nations of noticeably disparate material wealth. Indeed, it can be difficult to move beyond a relationship that has traditionally been quite 'one-way' in nature.

That said, a key part of maintaining a genuine partnership is mutual respect, which entails an appreciation for historical and present contexts. With this respect and perspective, it is possible for Scots and Malawians to share their experiences and knowledge – and to work together genuinely in the pursuit of a more prosperous, healthy and culturally enriching future for all. Seen in this way, the idea of 'partnership', based on respect and mutual understanding, is itself both a process and a goal – as much a core value as a vision. Much in the same way that sustainability should be seen as both a means and an end in international development and North-South linking.



46%

of Scots have
a friend with
a Malawi link

(2) LITERATURE REVIEW

(I) Development Effectiveness and the Aid Critique

In recent years, there has been a move by NGOs and scholars away from the idea of 'aid effectiveness' and towards 'development effectiveness'. Sustainability is one element of this wider debate. When most mainstream commentators on aid effectiveness invoke talk of sustainability, it is usually in the context of sustainable *economic growth*. Aid is seen as either positive or negative insofar as it facilitates such growth. Dambisa Moyo is perhaps the most well-publicized critic of foreign aid to Africa, arguing that aid is patronizing to Africans, that it hinders long-term macro-economic growth, and that it impedes more entrepreneurial avenues to development.⁵ Aid is seen not only as inherently unsustainable as a tool for development, but also as something that prevents sustained economic development from materializing altogether.

While Moyo's sweeping neoliberal prescriptions for Africa have been criticized as being either dangerously misguided or based on selective evidence,⁶ she is not alone in her skepticism about aid. William Easterly has produced a sizable catalogue of aid criticism, taking issue with the negative impacts of aid spending on economic growth – but not dismissing aid altogether, acknowledging its particular usefulness in the areas of health and education.⁷ Nor are aid pessimists limited to the neoliberal camp. Yash Tandon, for instance, has put forward a bold critique of the aid system, advocating not for increased trade with China or neoliberal reform, but rather for countries to undertake a more democratic, grassroots exercise in developmental planning: “Escaping aid dependence is an exercise in political economy; it involves trusting a country's own people to bring about development through proper use and management of its own natural resources, the labour of its workers, farmers and entrepreneurs, and its people's ingenuity.”⁸

“Because aid flows are viewed (rightly so) as permanent income, policymakers have no incentive to look for other, better ways of financing their country's longer-term development.”

Dambisa Moyo

On the other side of the aid debate are authors and activists like Jeffrey Sachs, who have long argued that a “big push” in aid spending has the potential to eliminate extreme poverty within our lifetimes. While Sachs does not treat aid as a panacea, he has argued that it is particularly vital for combating disease, improving education and supporting areas like sustainable agriculture.⁹ This view has resonated with many international NGOs and activists, who see civil society as playing a key role in development outcomes.

Caught between the aid pessimists and aid optimists are a range of scholars who have attempted to quantify the impact of aid on growth and economic development.¹⁰ Given the difficulty in isolating aid as a single variable in macro-economic growth, however, there is no consensus on this issue. Indeed, both sides of the debate on aid effectiveness have offered compelling evidence in support of their claims. One of the only widely agreed observations is that foreign aid is (ironically) more effective where stronger institutions, better infrastructure and 'good governance' exist.¹¹ This is a conundrum of sorts, since the countries which are seen to be in greatest need of foreign assistance are often characterized by weaker institutions, infrastructure and governance.

The above debates are, however, principally concerned with official development assistance (ODA)

and do not adequately address the role of NGOs/CSOs with regards to development effectiveness and sustainability. In fact, a fair deal *has* been written about the role of NGOs with regards to sustainability and aid effectiveness. The difficulty is that the non-governmental sector represents such a vast array of activities and approaches to aid and development that it is difficult to come to any overarching conclusions. The next section provides a synthesis of interpretations of sustainability by scholars, NGOs and international bodies. After this, there is an attempt to break down the idea of 'sustainability' by exploring some of the key concepts *underpinning* it.

(II) Sustainability: Definitions, Contentions, Points of Consensus

Academic Interpretations

Scholars have offered many definitions of sustainability and sustainable development. Lisa Cannon offers four different kinds of sustainability: benefits sustainability, organisational sustainability, financial sustainability, and community sustainability.¹² With respect to NGOs in Malawi, Chiku Malunga sees sustainability as something that is complementary to institutional relevance and legitimacy. The ultimate test of an organisation's sustainability, relevance and legitimacy rests with the community in which it operates. Participation by community members is therefore key.¹³ Still, Alan Fowler offers one of the most flushed out interpretations of NGO sustainability: "Benefits of external inputs must be generated from changes in economic, social, political, environmental and other processes – which continue once external assistance withdraws. To achieve this, the outcomes of an NGDO's [non-governmental development organisation's] activities must merge into ongoing processes rather than clearly stand apart from them, a necessary condition if effects are to be clearly attributed to aid resources... If they do their work properly, NGDO effects cannot be kept separate in order to be measured."¹⁴ For the most part, scholars seem to agree that the fundamental measure of sustainability is whether (and to what degree) the benefits of an intervention or link are maintained without external (ie. Northern) support.

To some degree, the academic interest in North-South relationships is limited in scope. Debates are centred around aid and development relationships, with relatively little said about community partnerships and other links based on cultural exchanges. That said, some academic literature has been produced regarding issues such as tourism and international/educational volunteering.¹⁵ While issues of participation, local ownership, and capacity building might apply to these kinds of relationships, debates about 'exit strategies' and 'withdrawals' do not.¹⁶

Interestingly, when scholars discuss sustainability as a key objective of aid/development projects, voices of dissent and skepticism still emerge. Several writers have taken issue with the recent reverence of sustainability, arguing that the blind pursuit of 'sustainable' solutions can be counterproductive and even damaging. Particularly in the field of health and disease, it is often argued that organisations need to acknowledge that indefinite funding may be the most viable course.¹⁷ Sustainability is a positive aspiration, the argument goes, but it should not be pursued so dogmatically as to preclude any other kinds of relationships or interventions.

International Frameworks

There are many international frameworks, policy papers, and reports on the issue of sustainability and sustainable development. Most of these address sustainable development either in terms of processes or (more often) in terms of results/outcomes. For instance, the South Centre has looked at sustainable development largely in terms of broad issues (food security, poverty eradication, etc.) and in terms of sectors (water, biodiversity, etc.).¹⁸ This is in line with other more environmentally-

focused interpretations of sustainable development, like that of Rio+20.

By contrast, focusing attention on *processes* is much more useful for the third sector, since it is primarily *how* we engage in development that determines sustainability. Following from this, it is possible to extract some broad concepts that occupy a respectable (if not total) level of consensus among key international stakeholders and 'agenda setters'. The table below sets out a list of ten key themes that are raised by a range of prominent organisations in the arena of international development and sustainability¹⁹:

TABLE 1: International 'Consensus' Themes on Sustainability and Development Effectiveness

THEME	PROPONENTS
Participation and empowerment: engaging with citizens (especially women and the poor), civil society and other stakeholders in policy/decision-making processes	BetterAid; Beyond2015; IRF; Open Forum; UN; UNSDSN, WB
Local (ie. national) ownership of the development process	APDev; Beyond2015; BetterAid; HLF; Open Forum; UN; WB
Building the capacity of governments, so they are better <i>able</i> to take ownership and execute sustainable development objectives	APDev; HLF; Open Forum; UN; UNSDSN; WB
Need for greater transparency and accountability (of donors, local governments, NGOs, private sector partners, etc.)	APDev; BetterAid; Beyond2015; HLF; IATI; IRF; Open Forum; UN; UNSDSN; WB
Need for good governance and leadership	APDev; BetterAid; UN; UNSDSN; WB
Need for better data collection, monitoring and evaluation	APDev; BetterAid; HLF; IATI; Open Forum; UN; UNSDSN; WB
Horizontal integration: multi-sector collaboration between public sector, private sector and civil society	APDev; BetterAid; Beyond2015; HLF; IRF; OECD; Open Forum; UN; UNSDSN; WB
Vertical integration: ensuring that development policies are pursued coherently across different levels/branches of government	APDev ⁱ ; BetterAid; HLF; OECD; UNSDSN
Coherence, integration and collaboration at the global level	APDev; BetterAid; Beyond2015; HLF; IATI; IRF; OECD; Open Forum; UN; UNSDSN
Taking a holistic view that encompasses the three pillars of society, environment and economy	BetterAid; Beyond2015; IRF; OECD; Open Forum; UN; UNSDSN; WB

****Key:** **APDev** = Africa Platform for Development Consensus; **BetterAid** = BetterAid platform; **Beyond2015** = Beyond2015; **HLF** = High-Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness; **IATI** = International Aid Transparency Initiative; **IRF** = Independent Research Forum; **OECD** = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; **Open Forum** = Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness; **UN** = United Nations High-Level Panel on the Post-2015 Agenda; **UNSDSN** = UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network; **WB** = World Bank Sustainable Development Network.

With respect to the role of civil society more specifically, the recent report by the UN's Sustainable Development Solutions Network offers some suggestions:

“They [CSOs] can hold both governments and businesses to account in terms of performance and honesty, organize and mobilize communities, deliver services, and promote 'social enterprises' that work on a business model but

ⁱ APDev is specifically interested in *regional* and pan-African integration and policy coherence.

do not pursue profit as their main motive. Another important part of civil society consists of universities, research centers, and expert communities that promote innovation for sustainable development and train future leaders. Of course the growing number civil society organisations and social entrepreneurs also need to commit to transparency and accountability.”²⁰

Sector Guidance

While international frameworks, such as the above, do take into account the role of CSOs/NGOs with regards to sustainable development, these frameworks lack a more nuanced appreciation and understanding of the challenges and opportunities within the third sector. While it is neither possible nor helpful to attempt to summarize or synthesize all the interpretations of sustainability within the sector, it is worth looking at two examples (one global, one in Scotland) as an entry point.

The first example is the widely-supported [Istanbul Principles](#). According to Principle 8 ('Committing to realizing positive sustainable change'): “CSOs achieve sustainable development outcomes by making long-term commitments, working in partnerships, empowering communities and acting in solidarity with affected populations. Positive development change should also be sustained through the complementarity of development actors and a focus on the root causes of inequality, poverty and marginalization.” Major recurring themes include: participation and engagement, better CSO collaboration, engaging with the private sector, better planning, monitoring and evaluating of development activities, capacity building, and education/awareness campaigning.ⁱ



Drawing on the *Istanbul Principles*, NIDOS offers its own interpretation of sustainability: “International development seeks to implement long-term solutions to problems by enabling developing countries and their people to build the capacity needed to develop sustainable solutions to their own problems. A truly sustainable project is one which will be able to carry on indefinitely with no further international aid or support, whether it is financial or otherwise & thus avoids long-term dependency. This is different from useful and long term exchange or trade, etc.”²¹

Many frameworks and publications within the sector prefer to address sustainability not as a whole, but rather *insofar as* it relates to other, more specific issues. As such, the next section outlines and elaborates on eight key concepts pertaining to sustainability, appearing in both academic literature and sector guidance. While these represent a sort of consensus in terms of their importance or relevance, several nuances within each theme clearly remain contentious.

(III) Key Themes Linked with Sustainability

Participation

Like sustainability, 'participation' and 'participatory approaches' have become key considerations in the sector.²² However, many authors stress that organisations must be wary not to approach participation superficially or uncritically.²³ Rakesh Rajani, for instance, cautions CSOs against blindly promoting a “people know best” approach to projects, one that prioritizes processes over results.²⁴

ⁱ For a full summary of Principle 8, refer to 'Appendix B' of this report.

Alan Fowler, who has written extensively on NGOs and development, emphasizes the need for “authentic” participation, as opposed to “co-opted input.”²⁵ In their extensive investigation of how aid recipients' perceive their relationship with donors, Anderson et al note that respondents often felt as though efforts to include local people were somewhat superficial, and that donors did not fully take into account existing local capacities and resources which might have been harnessed.²⁶ Common methods for engaging in participatory aid/development projects include household surveys, focus groups, questionnaires, and community meetings. Importantly, though, these tools ought not to function as “predetermined templates” or “straightjackets”. The authors emphasize the truism that participation leads to ownership, and ownership leads to sustainability. Lastly, many authors have raised the issue of participation in terms of the marginalization of Southern voices in the overarching aid discourses at the global level.²⁷

Local Ownership

Countless scholars, NGOs and intergovernmental bodies highlight local ownership – both at the community and country level – as integral to sustainability.²⁸ Ownership has been singled out as a key principle in the Paris Declaration, the Accra Agenda for Action, and the most recent Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation. In addition, the African Platform for Development Effectiveness frequently cites local country ownership as integral to enhancing aid and development effectiveness.²⁹ This is in line with Riddell's assessment that organisations should 'dovetail' their aid efforts on local government policies, so as to ensure ownership, commitment and sustainability.³⁰ In terms of supporting financially sustainable outcomes, Kremer and Miguel note that local ownership is often interpreted as backing projects that require “only start-up funding and can then continue without external support.”³¹

For Fowler lack of ownership leads inevitably to “stagnation, collapse, and non-sustainability of tangible benefits and other gains.”³² In light of such concerns, Catherine Agg cautions Northern NGOs against 'crowding out' local (Southern) NGOs. This happens when local NGOs are either made redundant or subjected to lasting hierarchical relationships.³³ Another caution comes from David Hirschmann, who worries that the concept of ownership may have become oversimplified in aid circles. He asks whether recipients simply tell donors what they want to hear by presenting the ideas as if coming from their own initiative. Moreover, the author argues that, in some cases, local ownership only masks a greater dependence on aid as the result of a “deeper internalization of donor requirements.” In light of such developments, it is crucial for us to prevent the idea of ownership from turning into a new conditionality of “own it or else.”³⁴ Indeed, organisations like the Canadian Council for International Cooperation propose that we move from a discussion of “ownership” to one of “democratic ownership”, wherein NGOs/CSOs are empowered to act as government watchdogs, supporting Southern partners in putting forward and carrying out their own development plans.³⁵ This conception of democratic ownership is echoed in the Istanbul Principles as well.

“The basis for democratic ownership is that the interests and voices of all citizens are included in national development strategies and that everyone benefits from development results.”

Brian Tomlinson, *Reality of Aid*

Capacity Building

Capacity building is central to ensuring sustainability of projects and development efforts more generally.³⁶ Riddell argues that NGOs working as providers of goods and services seem to be less sustainable than those that work towards local capacity building – though the latter type of work also risks becoming a sort of paternalistic relationship.³⁷ In addition, some authors ask that NGOs be conscious of the non-profit sector's contribution to the 'brain drain'. International NGOs should avoid 'poaching' staff from local institutions. Instead, they should form partnerships wherein they can support capacity building.³⁸ Lack of existing local capacity is often seen as an obstacle to projects, or as a reason for an unsuccessful initiative.³⁹ As such, Hirschmann argues, it is important for an intervention to “be realistic about the existing level of local organisational capacity, and progress in ways that challenge those organisations to improve. It should provide appropriate capacity building programs and it should avoid overloading vulnerable agencies.”⁴⁰ Lastly, Rakesh Rajani warns CSOs against a “depoliticized” capacity building approach that views the capacity challenge as lack of skills or consciousness, disregarding motives, incentives and feasibilities.⁴¹

Exit Strategies

For many, sustainability, local ownership and capacity building are all goals that are geared towards idea of an 'exit strategy'.⁴² Dambisa Moyo has argued that the so-called “culture of aid dependency” has meant that there is “little or no real debate on an exit strategy from the aid quagmire.”⁴³ This concern is raised by several scholars of aid and development,⁴⁴ who argue that unsustainable projects and activities are the result of an unwillingness (by all parties) to confront the issue of donors exiting. As such, donors need to think more about how to make their projects more affordable and manageable, in order to devolve responsibility to local actors.⁴⁵ Often, NGOs will choose an alternative to withdrawal by 'renegotiating' new initiatives with the same local groups. When withdrawal is not taken into account – for example, in order to keep things open-ended, flexible or holistic – “seeds of dependency can be sown, measures of performance do not set parameters for learning, and continuity of resources becomes the guide for action and progress. In short, Fowler writes, “saying goodbye needs to be part of saying hello.”⁴⁶ This is obviously a challenging concept for the SMP and its members, as the Partnership is all about nurturing *lasting* relationships rather than finite encounters. Exit strategies are, therefore, not very (if at all) applicable to community partnerships and cultural/educational exchanges.

Transparency and Accountability

“Unless aid is linked to and assessed in relation to the wider development process, it risks being judged as successful, or unsuccessful, but possibly irrelevant.”

Roger Riddell

Transparency and accountability, which are often bound together, are recurring themes in the sustainability debate. Both concepts feature prominently in the Istanbul Principles, as well as the recent NIDOS Effectiveness Toolkit. **Transparency**, which is often seen as a pre-requisite for accountability, has come to the forefront of the aid effectiveness debate in the form of the [International Aid Transparency Initiative \(IATI\)](#). Transparency has also become increasingly important because of government agencies' requirements for better monitoring and evaluation by grant recipients.

Accountability has come to mean 'mutual accountability' between donors and recipients.

Increasingly, African governments are calling for better mutual accountability standards, such as the [African Peer Review Mechanism \(APRM\)](#).⁴⁷ This is a voluntary initiative started by the AU/NEPAD, and of which Malawi is a member. It addresses four thematic areas: (1) Democracy and Political Governance; (2) Economic Governance; (3) Corporate Governance; and (4) Socio-economic Development. One of the challenges in terms of accountability mechanisms, writes Pomerantz, is that the proliferation of bureaucratic rules and procedures can lead to a breakdown of trust, something that is seen as central to North-South relationships.⁴⁸ Another major challenge rests in measuring sustainable results. Because of an increasing emphasis in the sector on measuring aid against *actual outcomes*, attribution of such outcomes to a single organisation is nearly impossible.⁴⁹

Empowerment and Solidarity

For many, sustainable development is about supporting partners in the pursuit of their own vision of development. Such support is often expressed in terms of things like community empowerment and expressions of solidarity. Indeed, the eighth Istanbul Principle explicitly mentions empowerment and solidarity. For Fowler, empowering people means supporting individuals and groups to make claims on development processes and to put forward their own agendas.⁵⁰ In fact, recipients of aid often consider relationships based on solidarity and empowerment to be more positive than those based on providing 'handouts', since the former offer a more lasting impact and are characterized by respect and dignity. As Anderson et al write: "When aid providers discuss problems and solutions with them [local communities] and suggest new ideas or new ways of doing things, they see these as expressions of caring and collegueship."⁵¹ The challenge in terms of measurement and evaluation is that (as with capacity building) it is very difficult to fit the above issues into "the orthodox aid evaluation toolbox."⁵²

Leadership

Leadership is also frequently cited as an important factor in the sustainable development agenda – one that cuts across many other key elements of sustainability and development effectiveness.⁵³ APDev cites leadership development – in both the public and private sectors – as being strongly linked with things like empowerment, local ownership and institutional capacity. In the context of NGO management in Malawi, Malunga highlights leadership as being a key indicator of effective and sustainable organisations.⁵⁴ Similarly, Leftwich and Hogg stress the need to reconsider the potentially positive role of so-called 'local elites' in the South with respect to the aid effectiveness agenda: "For it is leaders who establish and sustain locally relevant and effective organizations, who negotiate, establish and consolidate over time the fundamental institutions of an effective state, who forge the rules and practices of economic and political governance, and who shape and ensure the implementation of sound and appropriate policies for growth, poverty reduction and social development."⁵⁵ The balance between strong leadership and participatory development remains tricky.

"Africa needs extraordinary leadership. The overwhelming challenges of poverty, disease and conflict require leaders of remarkable vision, ability, and integrity at all levels of society."

Rick James

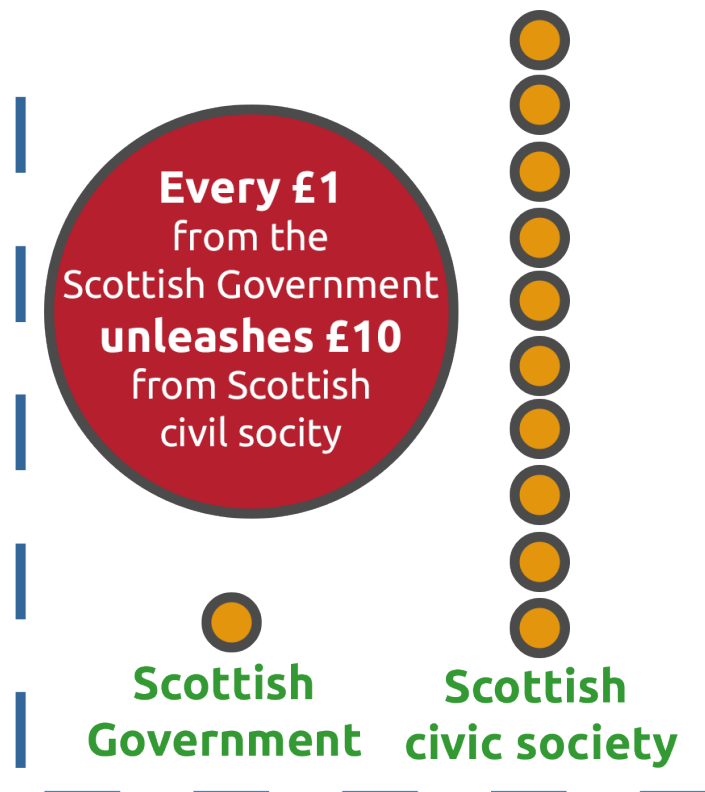
The Private Sector

“We must ensure that the global market is embedded in broadly shared values and practices that reflect global social needs, and that all the world’s people share the benefits of globalization.”

Kofi Annan

Increasingly for CSOs, development agencies and academics, 'sustainable development' has come to be closely associated with the engagement of the private sector.⁵⁶ Former World Bank president, Robert Zoellick, asserted in 2011 that “the time has come to ‘move beyond aid’ to a system in which assistance would be integrated with – and connected to – global growth strategies, fundamentally driven by private investment and entrepreneurship.”⁵⁷ Moreover, the UN's recent report on the post-MDGs puts much faith in the private sector as a key catalyst for sustainable development.⁵⁸ This greater emphasis

on the private sector has been met by unease and a degree of skepticism by some in the third sector who are wary of what they perceive as the revival of risky neoliberal policies.⁵⁹ The growing role of the private sector is, nevertheless, a reality for the development agenda, one that civil society has potential to influence positively. In this light, it is worth considering Alan Fowler's vision for NGOs as “social entrepreneurs” – that is, organisations that act as important value-based mediators between market, state and society.⁶⁰



(3) SUSTAINABILITY AND THE SMP: CONTEXT

(1) The SMP, its Members, and the Scottish Government

As a member-driven umbrella organisation, the Scotland Malawi Partnership faces many challenges with regards to promoting sustainability. On the one hand, the SMP's structure allows for great flexibility and autonomy among members. On the other hand, these same characteristics make it extremely difficult to arrive at a consensus on 'partnership principles', 'best practice' or 'sustainability'. Secondly, although the issues dealt with in this report are centred around the activities of aid/development organisations, only a segment of the SMP's membership is actually comprised of NGOs. Approaching the sustainability debate in a way that is relevant across the membership (to school groups, local councils, associate members, etc.) is an enormous challenge.

Realizing that sustainability means different things to different people, another challenge for the SMP is ensuring that its own discussion around sustainability takes into account the agendas of other key stakeholders – such as the Government of Malawi and the Scottish Government (SG). Indeed, the key concepts outlined in the previous section figure prominently in the SG's policies. One of the key objectives, as outlined in the SG's *International Development Policy*, is to “develop Scotland’s special relationship with Malawi, working with the Government of Malawi to achieve sustainable outcomes.”⁶¹ Other key sustainability themes, such as institutional capacity building and community-led development are also cited in the Policy.

Indeed, sustainability is very much on the SG's radar. The 2012/2013 *Independent Assessment of Scottish Government Malawi and Sub Saharan Africa Development Fund Applications* outlines some key concerns with regards to sustainability criteria. In particular, the assessment highlights **exit strategies** as the weakest component of funding proposals – with only 22% Malawi fund applicants proposing good exit strategies. As the authors go on to state:

“Applicants did not demonstrate sufficient understanding of the issues likely to affect sustainability, and how the interventions proposed to address these. Good exit strategies often focussed on capacity building, introduction of simple technology, and ‘becoming financially sustainable’. Insufficient attention was often given to uptake and maintenance of technology post-project by beneficiaries, details around financial sustainability e.g. evidence of a business plan or market analysis, and integration into existing initiatives or systems (regionally or locally).”⁶²

The assessment identifies other common weaknesses, such as: management of M&E; lesson learning; long-term outcomes; distinguishing between outputs and outcomes; justifying the role of Scottish team members; beneficiaries' representation in decision-making; and the presence of “strong partnerships”. This clear emphasis within the SG on sustainability and sustainability-related issues makes the promotion of such issues all the more important for the SMP and its members.

Lastly, one must point out the Malawian Government's own priorities with respect to national development. The Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (MGDS II) identifies six key thematic areas in this regard: (1) Sustainable Economic Growth; (2) Social Development; (3) Social Support and Disaster Risk Management; (4) Infrastructure Development; (5) Governance; and (6) Gender and Capacity Development.⁶³ It is important to remember that the MGDS II is not just a tool for Malawian policy-makers. Indeed, it was created by the Government of Malawi as a comprehensive reference document for *all* of Malawi's development partners – including civil society organisations, the private sector and bilateral donors.

(II) Internal discussions on sustainability, best practice and “partnership principles”

The SMP has incorporated sustainability explicitly into its vision, which, among other things, aims to “support the development of practical, sustainable solutions.”⁶⁴ More recently, the SMP has expressed interest in engaging in a dialogue with its Members and Malawian partners (notably MaSP) around “partnership principles” – the aim of which is to improve the quality and sustainability of programme delivery amongst Scottish CSOs engaged with Malawi. The idea is that these principles “will compliment rather than duplicate existing best practice resources and guidance within the sector,” particularly NIDOS's *Effectiveness Toolkit*, and that they “will be specifically designed to be applicable, appropriate and accessible to the SMP membership. SMP members will be encouraged and supported to use the principles to facilitate self reflection, shared learning and self improvement.”⁶⁵

In terms of sustainability, more specifically, the SMP and its Board have expressed a desire to better support and promote sustainability amongst the membership. The recent Board Paper on sustainability (which was the impetus for the present report) acknowledges the challenging nature of engaging in a discussion around sustainability and 'best practice'. That said, the Paper argues that the SMP and its Members are in a unique position to address these concerns, because: “(i) Only a minority of our members receive external funding; (ii) Most of our members’ work has been developed from people-to-people links which have existed for many years and which, arguably, have greater longevity and sustainability than traditional grant-funded projects; (iii) Mutuality, reciprocity, sustainability and local ownership are now well established (from consultations in Malawi and Scotland) as fundamental ‘partnership principles’ which underpin and define our members’ work; and (iv) Unlike many large NGOs, the vast majority of our members have named and known partners in Malawi with whom they work.”⁶⁶

In addition, the Board Paper offers some recommendations for avoiding potential pitfalls. These include: (i) having at least as much consultation and dialogue in Malawi as Scotland; (ii) not entering into the dialogue with any “pre-formed assumptions”; (iii) ensuring that the discussion does not feel “critical, imposed or dogmatic”; (iv) using our existing modes of member engagement (eg. Member Forums); (v) ensuring this is not “a one off piece of work but a lasting commitment, which we can come back to repeatedly in years to come”; (vi) being realistic about our staffing and resource capacity in deciding how we take on this dialogue; and (vii) building upon, and being informed by, existing literature and others working in this area.

It is with these things in mind that the author has approached the present discussion of sustainability, best practice and development effectiveness.



(4) SMP MEMBER INTERVIEWS

Methodology, Scope and Limitations

The author, in consultation with the SMP's Principal Officer and Member Services Officer, designed a set of questions for members about sustainability and 'best practice'. The idea was to develop some guidance on how the SMP might engage in upcoming discussions around best practice, aid effectiveness and partnership principles – in particular looking at enhancing Malawian ownership and leadership in projects. The author wanted to brainstorm with interviewees about the potential role for the SMP in promoting (and defining) sustainability in an inclusive and positive way. The aim of these interviews (and the sustainability project more generally) has *not* been to create a rigid doctrine of sustainability, but rather to initiate an ongoing discussion among members, one that will be of genuine use *to* members.

The selection of interviewees was also done in consultation with the SMP staff officers. Due to time constraints, it was necessary to develop some sort of selection criteria for the interviewees. There was a desire to engage with at least one representative from each of the Member Forums (health, water, gender, primary/secondary schools, and higher/further education). In addition, the author wanted interviewees to reflect a fair range of organisational types: established/large, young/small, faith-based, academic, student-led, etc. While there was difficulty soliciting responses from all the Forums in a timely manner, the author feels as though the latter aim (engaging with a range of different organisational types) was indeed met.

The single biggest shortcoming of the methodology was the lack of Malawian input. This was partly because of the logistics of conducting face-to-face interviews in such a short timeframe. It was also due to the fact that at the time of writing, the Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP) was still in the middle of its hiring process. This gap in the methodology of the present report is a limitation, but it is also an opportunity. The author hopes that a parallel study on aid effectiveness and sustainability might be conducted through MaSP by a Malawian post-graduate student. This would be very useful for the Partnership, as we could then compare findings from Scotland and Malawi in order to find common points and key contentions.

In total, 16 individuals from the SMP membership were invited to participate in these interviews, of which 8 were interviewed. In addition, a general call for participation was sent out in several SMP bulletins. At the time of writing, 3 people had yet to respond to emailed questions, and 5 did not respond to requests and/or were unable to participate. The final findings of this report reflect the responses of eight individuals across 6 organisations/institutions, all interviewed between 21 May and 6 June, 2013. All but one of these interviews was conducted in-person, one being done via video call.



300,000
Scots benefit

The infographic features two stylized human figures in grey, one on the left and one on the right, flanking the text. The number '300,000' is written in a large, bold, green font, and the words 'Scots benefit' are written in a bold, dark grey font below it.

Findings from Interviews

This section is organised by key themes. These are elaborated using points and statements from respondents and rated on a scale of 1-5ⁱ based on the frequency with which different respondents cited them. It is worth noting that, sometimes, respondents would cite similar theme, but give alternate reasons or explanations for its value.

94,000
Scots &
198,000
Malawians
involved

ⁱ In the author's view, a rating of '1' should not necessarily be taken to mean that an issue is not important to other individuals/organisations, simply that it is of *particular* importance to at least one respondent. Particularly when attempting to define/frame sustainability, responses were much more individualized. Since interviews were generally limited to 40-45 minutes, there are only so many issues that can be raised in one meeting. It is also possible that some themes were considered by respondents to be too obvious to merit explicit mention.

Q1: What makes a project/link/partnership successful?

RATING	THEME (and SUB-THEMES)	EXPLANATIONS/ EXAMPLES
5	Working genuinely (with Malawians local authorities, government, communities)	<p>“Ensuring that projects are integrated into systems that are already there and... systems that are already known to work, or systems that will help the project become or remain sustainable”</p> <p>Using someone in-country who is already embedded in a long-standing structure</p>
5	Local buy-in (and local ownership/pick-up of an initiative)	<p>Ensuring it before you even write your proposal.</p> <p>Making sure there a local 'ask' for whatever you are providing</p> <p>If you're trying to promote something, making sure there's a local market for it</p>
5	Capacity building	In government, private sector, and Malawian CSOs/partners
4	Good monitoring and evaluation	
4	Collaboration	With other organisations working on the same issue
4	Local decision-making	Northern partners' role is to provide: support, connections, knowledge, resources
4	Preliminary research	<p>Thorough needs assessment is conducted</p> <p>Project is “well researched from the beginning”</p> <p>Using a business model</p>
3	Genuine partnership	<p>Helpful to have a long-standing relationship</p> <p>Should have a relationship based on mutual trust</p> <p>“Everything is down to the relationship you have with your partners... and that's developed by spending time with them, talking to them, and getting to know them... that is what determines whether a program's going to be successful...”</p>
3	Alignment (with local/national priorities)	

3	Finding local solutions and innovative ideas	<p>Locally appropriate technologies</p> <p>Innovations that resonate with people's material needs and local markets. (eg. compost-fertilizer project, focused on income-generation and self-sufficiency)</p> <p>Looking for sensible, low-resource solutions (eg. using post office drop-boxes as anonymous sites for people to get ARV drugs for HIV)</p>
3	Participatory (bottom-up) approach	<p>Don't dictate what a project looks like "based on what seems like a good idea from a theoretical standpoint or a statistical standpoint"</p> <p>Need a lot of emphasis on project design phase, since every community is different</p> <p>Spending time meeting people and stakeholders</p> <p>Development is about working for and through local people</p>
2	Avoiding duplication of effort	
2	Expertise of staff/volunteers	eg. Need to have people in the field who have a commercial background, not just public and third sector experience
2	Private sector engagement	The private sector "has the potential to be extremely beneficial, but it <i>needs</i> to be understood and needs to be better researched"
2	Engage at different levels of society	eg. Community/smallholder, sector-wide, etc.
2	Personal commitment and professionalism	
1	Ensuring longevity of the issue being engaged	Better to have a long-standing interest (by governments, other NGOs, funders)
1	Strong exit strategy	
1	Well-organised project	Especially if it's a big intervention
1	Narrowing one's focus	eg. Working more intensely with fewer people
1	Accountability	<p>External and internal accountability to make sure we meet donor requirements</p> <p>In terms of sustainable outcomes: "Accountability is hugely important for development, and we've got to have something to measure that by..."</p>

Q2: What makes a project/link unsuccessful? What should be avoided?

RATING	THEME (and SUB-THEMES)	EXPLANATIONS/ EXAMPLES
3	Endless shipping or handing out of materials	
3	Working outside the government	Though corruption is certainly a problem
3	Donors assuming they know what local people need	eg. Going in and building boreholes, schools, etc. with no long-term plan Malawians are reluctant to say 'no' when foreigners offer to provide such assistance
2	Working in isolation of other organisations	
2	Day-to-day logistical problems and unknown variables	
1	Using our resources on anything 'tokenistic'	
1	Not asking enough of partners	
1	Not addressing the root causes of poverty, inequality, food insecurity, etc.	

Q3: What needs to change? What are some ways forward for the Scotland-Malawi relationship in the short and long-term?

RATING	THEME (and SUB-THEMES)	EXPLANATIONS/ EXAMPLES
4	Individuals being more honest about what we're trying to achieve	Asking what Malawians get out of a particular relationship "There has to be a realization that when we think we're doing something for Malawi, we're actually doing it for ourselves"
3	Less paternalism, less imperialism	More listening to Malawian partners, asking what they need and how we can help
2	Better thought out volunteer/secondment strategies	Only sending volunteers with some expertise to offer Malawian partners Institutions (eg. NHS) need an internal, unified framework/policy on sending professionals abroad
2	More mutual learning	"There's so much Malawi can teach us in Scotland, in so many different ways..."
2	Development that's driven by the commercial world	Less volunteering abroad – instead look more at tourism
2	Greater focus on M&E	
1	Shared relationship based on justice, equality, mutual enrichment	

Q4: What does sustainability entail? What are its key themes?

RATING	THEME (and SUB-THEMES)	EXPLANATIONS/ EXAMPLES
5	Local ownership	
5	Capacity building	
3	Environmental sustainability as a key element	
3	Good governance and responsive decision-making	<p>eg. In terms of health equity: “Sustainability has to be about aligning the aims of both the policy makers and the grassroots community...”</p> <p>Grassroots need to be able to lobby, leaders need to be able to explain – thus, sustainability is about “communication in the middle”</p>
3	Often a meaningless/empty concept	<p>More of an ideal, meaning everything and nothing at the same time</p> <p>For so many people, it either means financial sustainability (narrow-focused continuation of a project, often) or global sustainability (broad ideal)</p> <p>Impossible to achieve fully: “Basically all we can do is have a clearly defined goal for our program, work hard to achieve it, and then when you stop that program hope that those people are better off than they were at the start...”</p> <p>The whole idea of sustainable economic growth on a global scale is “a nonsense”</p>
2	Making sure programs are manageable	
2	Ensuring the long-term future of a project/initiative	<p>eg. Environmental</p> <p>eg. If it's a product, making sure there's a market for it</p>
2	The business model as a sustainable solution	<p>The 3rd sector is something that's “inherently unsustainable” – you've got all these players working there, you've got unreliable funding, people coming and going, a lot of uncertainty</p> <p>If something starts in the 3rd sector and is successful, it needs to be “pushed out” to the private sector and public sector</p> <p>Example of AfriKids (UK-Ghana charity) that has committed to shutting down UK offices by 2018</p>

1	Empowerment	<p>Empowering local partners to make claims on their government</p> <p>Psycho-social: getting people to have pride in their nation and their own abilities</p>
1	Holistic thinking	<p>When you're doing a project you should <i>consider</i> every part – not provide for every part though</p> <p>Three pillars of sustainability: economy, society, environment</p> <p>The problem with the holistic thinking, though, is it gives rise to an ecosystem approach: risk that it becomes a totality and takes over a country or community</p>
1	Joined-up thinking	<p>Everybody has their own ideas of what's important, so it's a balancing act</p> <p>Conjunctive decision making processes are important – then joined up thinking has to move to implementation (series of plans, metrics, etc.)</p> <p>Getting people and official bodies to work together more (eg. vertical integration is key)</p>
1	Good leadership/management	
1	Maintaining strong networks	
1	Supporting people to use the expertise and tools that they have access to in order to get the end goal that they want	
1	Simply not being dependent on external resources	
1	Having a sustainable <i>interface</i> with the people we work with	

Q5: What existing tools/information on 'best practice' or sustainable development have you come across (if any)? Were/are these helpful? Why or why not?

RATING	TOOL/RESOURCE	EXPLANATIONS
4	NIDOS's effectiveness toolkit (know of it at least)	<p>It's the key one in Scotland, quite good, but things like this are a little "hit and miss" – no telling whether organisations will follow them, so it depends on how much an organisation actually uses it</p> <p>NIDOS framework needs to be pushed more in universities (eg. international volunteering for students) – biggest thing is dissemination of information</p> <p>NIDOS have a great approach, trying to create a common agenda and effectiveness criteria, but it can/should be taken beyond this, to a higher level (global). Difficulty is that it's hard for individuals to remain passionate at those higher levels, so some enthusiasm gets lost – so NIDOS and SMP forums "...have to find a way of synergizing all of that passion, and actually turning it into a more combined vision for Malawi..."</p>
4	Use M&E as a kind of tool	<p>Audits, external reviews, log frames, etc.</p> <p>NGOs are getting better at conducting M&E lately, because it's a requirement for funding</p> <p>Two reasons to do M&E: (1) to satisfy the donor and make sure project is working; (2) to try to learn from experience and your past mistakes... however, there's a conflict between these two, and thus a reluctance to engage in the second</p> <p>Challenge: it's hard to quantify sustainability indicators (eg. capacity building)</p> <p>Shortcoming: M&E doesn't force organisations to go back and look at past projects to see how sustainable they have turned out to be – also, it costs money to do any kind of proper evaluation</p>

3	Don't generally use sustainability and other frameworks	<p>Prefer to stick with internal resources (ethics codes, M&E frameworks, etc.) – tend to shy away from anything that's “too formulaic”</p> <p>Sense that subscribing to a framework is not as important as simply communicating with and listening to one's partners in Malawi – let partners determine what works best</p> <p>Reality on the ground is that it's usually fairly chaotic – you have to adapt your plan as you go</p> <p>Frameworks/principles on sustainability are something our institution lacks (not off the agenda, but not currently a priority either)</p> <p>Have seen some initiative to incorporate some sort of sustainability in our ethics process</p> <p>Implicit assumption that our work/research feeds into sustainable innovations/investments, even if we don't have a framework for sustainable outcomes <i>per se</i></p>
2	Frameworks/tools for the valuation of various things in our projects	<p>eg. Valuation of certain natural resources</p> <p>Often difficult to quantify things, however</p>
1	UN (and other international agencies) policy decisions	<p>Any relevant global conventions in our own field</p> <p>The more Scotland understands the things at those higher, global levels, the more they can accomplish in Malawi</p> <p>Recommendation: send your Principal Officer to the World Bank or UN for some exposure to decision making at that level</p>
1	Tools available through the Business Innovation Facility (funded by DFID) ⁱ	<p>An inclusive business fund: making sure that businesses that want to expand are inclusive in how they go about it</p> <p>Very good tool for learning, especially across countries</p> <p>A lot of networking and sharing experiences: on projects and on countries (eg. politics, finances, etc.)</p>
1	NHS framework for involvement in international development	
1	Research on multi-criteria decision making	

ⁱ See: <http://businessinnovationfacility.org/>

Q6: What sorts of information relating to sustainability would be genuinely useful for the SMP to offer its links with Malawi? How do you feel the SMP could best promote and support sustainability in Scotland-Malawi working?

RATING	INFORMATION/ RESOURCES/ ACTIVITIES	EXPLANATIONS
4	Lesson learning processes	<p>At least for making sure nothing negative comes from a project</p> <p>Encourage revisiting of old projects that have come to an end, and asking tough questions</p> <p>Encourage the donor community to be OK with organisations confronting their mistakes. Governments (and most aid organisations) are “frightened” of saying that something hasn't worked, because they don't want to be perceived as wasting money... But that's what's necessary for learning (eg. one organisation had a great open session about their work in Sri Lanka and looked at their missteps)</p>
3	At the very least, keep sustainability on the agenda of members	<p>Get people talking about it, thinking about it</p> <p>A sustainability framework isn't something you can have a one day session on or something that gets sent out in email, it needs to be actively work-shopped with as many members as possible, or at the AGM itself</p> <p>Maybe just modelling sustainability promotion on SMP's 'Gender Matters' campaign</p>
3	Measures of sustainability	Admittedly very difficult, especially in terms of quantifying things in projects

<p>3</p>	<p>Encouraging SMP members to be OK with confronting the mistakes and shortcomings of some of their projects</p>	<p>Rather than be dogmatic, just be mindful (eg. ask “have you considered the impact of your actions?”)</p> <p>Ask each member to consider for themselves what kind of long-term impact they are having (eg. “is it absolutely necessary to import goods?”)</p> <p>Give a set of questions about your partnership to consider</p> <p>Have something like a monthly mistakes bulletin where everybody reflects on their own challenges... If organisations felt comfortable coming forward, it would be a lot better</p> <p>SMP has all these forums, but people seem to be reluctant, so set aside part of that forum to just confront mistakes and challenges; ask what were your assumptions that maybe affected your project... Hard to facilitate an interaction like that that is <i>blame free</i>, so you need a safe environment</p> <p>We have to be tolerant of each other: “There's no space for a difference of opinion causing hostility”</p> <p>Issues with the status of different stakeholders: sometimes people are competitors, so it's a difficult learning environment... Perhaps having a workshop where people just share some of the good and bad experiences in practice, “so people can understand <i>why</i> good practice can do so much more...”</p> <p>Because you want to have people realize for themselves the benefits of sustainability and good practice</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Definitely still a space for some sort of broad framework</p>	<p>That's what's good about the SG funding: working within themes, but the goals within those themes are broad, which allows a level of flexibility</p> <p>If there's something specific for Scotland and Malawi, it will get noticed more by members and there's a lot of potential (don't be too narrow or too broad in scope – have to maximize the utility and relevance)</p> <p>So many guides out there (unions, schools, NGOs, DFID, etc.), but there is no unifying one: “People will either use the one they have access to and know about, or follow the one that suits what they're already doing”</p>
<p>2</p>	<p>Sustainability checklists</p>	<p>Maybe offering 10 key principles, or something like this</p> <p>Maybe a series of questions: ticking the boxes (can be good to make sure you've thought of everything)</p>

2	No need to reinvent the wheel, just use existing tools	<p>Not sure more documents on sustainability are needed</p> <p>Just subscribe to the existing (and forthcoming) UN guidelines and frameworks in relevant fields: SMP needs to say 'let's rally around these global principles and goals and follow that'... show Members that this is what Malawi will be following, and what the rest of the world will be following, so if you want to make a difference then that's what we need to do</p> <p>NIDOS and SMP and anyone else, we should all be aligned by the end of next year, or at least 2015, with the new MDGs</p>
1	An assessment tool before people start a project	Help people put what they're doing into the context of the Malawian situation, so when people decide to do something, they do it side by side with local actors
1	Need a good process of evaluation	Not just us, but mutual evaluation between Scottish and Malawian partners
1	Keep focusing on avoiding duplication	<p>We concentrate on our own projects so much that we get a bit of "tunnel vision"</p> <p>People are so passionate, "people believe their work is so ultimately important" – but this gets in the way of the actual development they're trying to achieve</p>
1	SMP should just stress importance of working through the local government	
1	More sharing of information and knowledge	
1	If anything, more of a role for the SG in terms of promoting sustainability	Since it is the key funder for a lot of the projects

Discussion/analysis of findings

The responses given by members very much reflect the prevailing scholarly arguments, international frameworks, and sector guidance. This is encouraging, as it demonstrates a certain common awareness of key themes relating to sustainability and good practice. In particular, the following themes/issues were most frequently cited by respondents:

1. Local ownership (including: local decision-making and local 'buy-in')
2. Capacity building (in government, the private sector, and Malawian CSOs)
3. Working genuinely with Malawians (local authorities, government, communities)
4. Collaboration (ie. with other organisations working on the same issue)
5. Rigorous M&E (including looking at past projects)
6. Thorough preliminary research

Other recurring themes include:

1. Better alignment (ie. with local/national priorities)
2. Building genuine partnerships
3. Less paternalism and assumptions of what Malawians need
4. Finding local solutions to problems
5. Engaging in more participatory methods
6. Encouraging good governance and strong Malawian leadership (at every level of society)

These key themes aside, it should come as no surprise that respondents offered a range of unique suggestions and criticisms, many of which are not reflected (at least explicitly) in the mainstream discourses. While these are too many to repeat here, readers of this report are encouraged to look at these seemingly more marginal points in the previous section, and consider them in earnest.

“We are always in a constant process of translating big ideas into concrete practices. And this always involves multiple experiments, learning, failures, mistakes and a constant effort at adapting and refining our methods”

Tracey Strange & Anne Bayley,
OECD

Looking at specific ways forward, in terms of improving sustainability and good practice, seems (perhaps unsurprisingly) to be more complicated. Monitoring and evaluation, in one form or another, were often cited as useful tools for improving an organisation's effectiveness and sustainability. In addition, most respondents were at least aware of NIDOS's work regarding effectiveness and best practice. It may be that continued or increased promotion of the NIDOS Effectiveness Toolkit will lead to a greater awareness and use of this valuable resource in the future. Alternatively, greater dissemination and promotion of key national and international guidance/frameworks (in health, water, education, etc.) may be useful in the various SMP forums.

Lastly, in terms of identifying a role for the SMP, the idea of 'lesson learning' features prominently. While respondents gave slightly different explanations for what such learning might entail, there does seem to be agreement on a few points. Lesson learning, in whatever form it takes:

1. Should entail an openness and willingness of individuals and organisations to reflect critically on their activities;
2. Should take place in a positive, comfortable and judgement-free environment;
3. Should be encouraged by both the SMP *and* funders (mainly the SG); and
4. Should be disassociated from any risk of losing out on future funding.

These ideas will be expanded in the final section.

(5) CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

Following from the comments of the previous section, the author offers the following recommendations for the SMP to consider during its next strategic phase (2014-17):

- Keep sustainability on the agenda: Just like the SMP's Gender Matters campaign, sustainability ought to be something that is considered by every member, in every project, and at every stage of operations. It is not a one-off consideration and cannot be properly addressed with a one-day workshop or a policy brief.
- Be as relevant as possible: The SMP should avoid sounding like a 'broken record' by turning 'sustainability' into an empty mantra. When sustainability is invoked, it should be done in a way that is as specific or concrete as possible in terms of the questions that are asked, the evaluation criteria that are suggested, and/or the examples given. The SMP's Forums may be the ideal platform through which to maximize the utility of sustainability discussions.
- Maintain a positive environment: Members should be encouraged to think about sustainability, about what it looks like and how they can best pursue it. But this cannot be a dogmatic set of rules or criteria.
- Offer an easy tool: Providing a 10-point checklist of questions for members to reflect upon may be useful – if only as an entry-point to thinking more in-depth about sustainability.
- Promote transparency and stronger self-evaluation: The SMP should ask its larger NGO membership – as well as the Scottish Government – whether they have considered (or are planning on) signing up to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). Smaller NGOs may not have the resources or the technical knowledge to implement the [IATI Standard](#), but the SMP and/or NIDOS may be able to provide some support in this regard. This is keeping in mind the current limits of the SMP in terms of staff and resources, of course.
- Get members talking about sustainability and good practice: Most respondents favoured greater lesson learning among the SMP membership. Some respondents raised or supported the idea (with a hint of skepticism) of having some sort of workshop, bulletin or 'therapy session' where members could think about what does/doesn't (or has/hasn't) worked in aid/development projects. One member envisioned this as an opportunity for people to ask themselves critical questions. Others thought of it as a more interactive platform through which to share experiences and understand why a particular project did or did not succeed. Such a platform would also be useful in that Members could undertake a more vivid evaluation of their own projects. Often, M&E reporting (when produced for funders) doesn't necessarily give a proper narrative or context for *why* something wasn't achieved. This may be the value of having learning workshops with the SMP – to avoid reducing project shortcomings to mere statistics. The biggest challenge with respect to implementing this platform is in creating a blame-free environment. It is difficult in any context to rigorously and earnestly confront one's mistakes, shortcomings and assumptions. All the more so when reputations and funding are at stake. If it goes ahead, the format and design of this 'workshop' will be crucial.
- Don't re-create the wheel: The new NIDOS Effectiveness Toolkit is a great resource and should be used and promoted. That said, organisations are only likely to use such a tool insofar as they find it relevant and necessary. Making full use of the Toolkit requires a certain commitment in terms of time, so the trick to promoting it is to get members *genuinely* interested in self-improvement. Other tools may be relevant to members depending on their

area of focus (NHS framework for ID work, Business Innovation Facility, etc). It may be useful to consult with current and former Forum chairs (or even regular attendees) on what are the most established and/or useful frameworks and tools in each field.

The following are 10 template questions that the SMP might want to put to its Members, in order to spur greater self-reflection. These are largely based on responses given during Member interviews and on the available literature. Given their general nature, these questions would be best placed as a resource on the SMP's website, for organisations to use on their own initiative. Pushing such basic/fundamental questions on Members (particularly senior Members and established NGOs) might be perceived as somewhat patronising. Many of these questions are based on responses given during Member interviews, others on the literature.

1. What long-term goals are we and our partners working towards? And how are our core activities contributing to (or potentially obstructing) these long-term goals?
2. What are the root causes of the problems we seek to solve? How might these be addressed?
3. Is there a local need for the service/resource we seek to provide? How was this identified?
4. Who are the relevant stakeholders we should be engaging with? What is the most genuine way of including them in the design, implementation and evaluation of our activities?
5. In what ways can we build capacities of local partners, so that they can take leadership and ownership over a project/link/initiative?
6. Can we see a sustainable solution to the problem we are trying to address? If so, what might that solution look like? If not, are we the best people to tackle this issue, or should we promote other actors to take-up the cause (eg. government, private sector)?
7. What, if anything, are we trying to sustain? (eg. Our organisation? The benefits we produce? Or are we acting as a catalyst for more sustainable communities?)
8. What other actors are currently working in our target area or in our field of interest? Can we collaborate with them?
9. What national and/or international agreements, priorities and frameworks exist with respect to our field? Can we align our efforts with these? If so, what would be the best way to do so?
10. How do we monitor and evaluate our activities? In what ways could we be more rigorous in our monitoring and evaluation? And is it possible to look back at a previous project/link, so as to learn from its successes and shortcomings?

In the interest of offering complementary tools and avoiding duplication, it may ultimately be best for the SMP to simply promote the Open Forum's [guidance questions on the Istanbul Principles \(specifically Principle 8\)](#).

Conclusion

This report has aimed to explore the sustainability debate by bridging the gaps between several arenas: international, academic, and within the international development sector. While these fields may differ in their approach to the sustainability debate, they ultimately demonstrate a surprising degree of agreement regarding the key themes underpinning it – such as local ownership, capacity building and participation (to name a few). The literature review and member interviews have been extremely useful in terms of flushing out these concepts and in giving them meaning and form.

In the end, there probably is no 'best practice' – only better or worse practice. When we talk about 'best practice' in the sector, we are not talking about the 'one best way' to engage, nor a single vision of 'development'. The SMP and its members need not rate their success in terms of the attainment of some overarching ideal of sustainability. Instead, members can pursue whatever sustainability-related goal that they find most appropriate for their own organisations and work towards that. This

report offers a myriad of themes to choose from.

In the end, each person and organisation has their own sense of purpose, their own values and their own unique relationships. This diversity is welcomed, since it is what makes the SMP so vibrant and dynamic. Ultimately, we need to recognize that the realization of lasting development outcomes and strong Scotland-Malawi links – based on mutuality, trust, respect, solidarity, and learning – are just as much about the *process* by which we engage as the end goal. This process is never fully perfected, but is a constant work in progress for both organisations and the individuals whose passion drives them. Deciding how best to continue supporting this process will be both one of the biggest opportunities and biggest challenges for the SMP in the coming years.

Rob Sangster-Poole
July, 2013

Notes

- ¹ Ulrich Grober, *Deep Roots – A Conceptual History of Sustainable Development*, WZB (2007) 29.
- ² Meadows et al, *The Limits to Growth* (London: Potomac Associates, 1972) 158. Cited in Grober, 2007, 6.
- ³ G. H. Brundtland, *Report of the World Commission on environment and development: Our common future*, United Nations, 1987.
- ⁴ See, for instance: Agenda 21 for Culture <<http://agenda21culture.net>>; UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN), *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development: Report for the UN Secretary-General*, United Nations, 2013.
- ⁵ Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid* (London: Penguin, 2009).
- ⁶ Jeffrey Sachs, "Aid Ironies," *Huffington Post*, 2009 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeffrey-sachs/aid-ironies_b_207181.html>; William Willas, "Foreign aid critic spreads theory far and fast" *Financial Times*, 23 May 2009.
- ⁷ William Easterly, *The Elusive Quest For Growth* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001); *The White Man's Burden* (London: Penguin, 2006); *Reinventing Foreign Aid* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).
- ⁸ Yash Tandon, *Ending Aid Dependence* (Pambazuka Press, 2008) 4.
- ⁹ Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty* (London: Penguin, 2006).
- ¹⁰ David Roodman, "The Anarchy of Numbers: Aid, Development, and Cross-Country Empirics," *The World Bank Economic Review* 21:2 (2007); Henrik Hansen & Finn Tarp, "Aid Effectiveness Disputed," *Journal of International Development* 398 (2000); Joseph Wright & Matthew Winters, "The Politics of Effective Foreign Aid," *Annual Review of Political Science* 13:1 (2010).
- ¹¹ Variations of this logic have also been discussed using similar language. For instance, Hansen & Tarp (2000) have made the point that aid is generally more effective in 'a good policy environment'.
- ¹² Lisa Cannon, *Life Beyond Aid: Twenty Strategies to Help Make NGO's Sustainable*. Initiative for Participatory Development (1999) 12-3. Cited in C. Malunga, 2007
- ¹³ Chiku Malunga, *Improving the Effectiveness of Strategic Planning in Local NGOs in Malawi*, Doctorate thesis, University of South Africa (2007).
- ¹⁴ Alan Fowler, *Striking a balance* (London: Earthscan, 1997) 162-3
- ¹⁵ Peter Devereux, "International Volunteering for Development and Sustainability: Outdated Paternalism or a Radical Response to Globalisation?" *Development in Practice* 18:3 (2008); Carlos M. Palacios, "Volunteer tourism, development and education in a postcolonial world: Conceiving global connections beyond aid," *Sustainable Tourism* 18:7 (2010).
- ¹⁶ For some sector guidance on educational and community linking, see the toolkits by UKOWLA and the Africa Unit, included in the Literature Summary section of this report's Appendices.
- ¹⁷ Michael Kremer & Edward Miguel, "The Illusion of Sustainability," in W. Easterly (ed.) *Reinvesting Foreign Aid* (2008); Ann Swidler & Susan Watkins, "Teach a Man to Fish: The Doctrine of Sustainability and Its Effects on Three Strata of Malawian Society," *World Development* 37:7 (2009).
- ¹⁸ South Centre, "Concept Paper by the South Centre on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)" (Geneva: South Centre, 2013).

- ¹⁹ The following publications/institutions form the basis of this 'consensus': **Africa Platform for Development Effectiveness (APDev)**, *African Consensus and Position on Development Effectiveness*, AU/NEPAD, 2011; **BetterAid**, *Development effectiveness in development cooperation: A rights-based perspective*, 2010; **Beyond2015**, "Sustainable Development Goals and the relationship to a post 2015 global development framework," 2012; **High-Level Fora (HLF) on Aid Effectiveness** (2005, 2008, 2011); **Independent Research Forum**, "Post-2015: Framing a new approach to sustainable development," IRF, 2013; **Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness**, *Istanbul Principles*, 2011; Tracey Strange & Anne Bayley, "What is Sustainable Development?" in **OECD** (ed.) *Sustainable Development: Linking Economy, Society, Environment* (2009); **UN**, *A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development*, Report of the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, 2013; **UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network**, *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development: Report for the UN Secretary-General*, 2013; **World Bank Sustainable Development Network**, 2013
<<http://go.worldbank.org/4G5284K5A0>>.
- ²⁰ UN SDSN, 8.
- ²¹ NIDOS, *Effectiveness Toolkit MOT*, Network of International Development Organisations in Scotland, 2013.
- ²² Some UK organisations that emphasize participation in their principles and guidance material include: UKOWLA, NIDOS and Bond. See appendix for more details.
- ²³ Elizabeth Kleemeier, "The Impact of Participation on Sustainability: An Analysis of the Malawi Rural Piped Scheme Program," *World development* 28:5 (2000); Bill Cooke & Uma Kothari, *Participation: The new tyranny?* (Zed Books, 2001).
- ²⁴ Canadian Council for International Cooperation, "Africa-Canada Forum Symposium: Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness" (Ottawa: CCIC, 2007) 3.
- ²⁵ Fowler, 1997, 16.
- ²⁶ Anderson et al, *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid*, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects (2012) 21.
- ²⁷ See, for instance: Andrew Rogerson & Alina Rocha Menocal, "Which Way the Future of Aid? Southern Civil Society Perspectives on Current Debates on Reform to the International Aid System," ODI Working Paper, 2006.
- ²⁸ Phyllis Pomerantz, *Aid effectiveness in Africa: Developing trust between donors and governments* (Lexington Books, 2004) 126; Gibson et al, *The Samaritan's Dilemma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*, HLF-4, 2011; CDA, *Whose Development? Aid Recipient Perspectives on Ownership*, CDA Collaborative Learning Projects, 2004.
- ²⁹ APDev, 2011.
- ³⁰ Roger Riddell, *Does foreign aid really work?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 378.
- ³¹ Kremer & Miguel, 201.
- ³² Fowler, 1997, 104.
- ³³ Catherine Agg, "Winners or losers? NGOs in the current aid paradigm," *Development* 49:2 (2006).
- ³⁴ David Hirschmann, "Aid Dependence, Sustainability and Technical Assistance," *Public Management Review*, 5:2 (2003) 240.
- ³⁵ CCIC, 6.
- ³⁶ Mariam Pal, "Taking Sustainability from Policy to Practice: Bringing Poverty Concerns into the Project Cycle." *Development in Practice* 8:4 (1998); Christina Bermann-Harms & Nora Lester Murad. *Putting the Istanbul Principles into Practice*, Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness, 2011; UK One World Linking Association, *Toolkit for Linking: Opportunities and Challenges*, Produced by UKOWLA/Humanities Education Centre/BUILD, c.2008; APDev, 2011; Cannon, 1999; Martin Barber & Cameron Bowie, "How International NGOs Could Do Less Harm and More Good," *Development in Practice* 18:6 (2008).
- ³⁷ Riddell, 282.
- ³⁸ Chiku Malunga, *An investigation into factors affecting staff turnover amongst professional staff in NGO's in Malawi*, Masters thesis, University of South Africa (2003) 101; Barber & Bowie, 749.
- ³⁹ Kleemeier, 2000.
- ⁴⁰ Hirschmann, 234.
- ⁴¹ CCIC, 3.
- ⁴² APDev, 2011; Pal, 1998.
- ⁴³ Moyo, 44.
- ⁴⁴ Eg. Hirschmann, 2003; Fowler, 1997.

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- ⁴⁵ One interesting case to consider is that of AfriKids, a Ghana/UK charity that works to support vulnerable and disadvantaged children. AfriKids has a vision for sustainability that requires the closure of its UK office by 2018, at which point it hopes to have a series of local income-generating activities up and running to ensure its fund-raising needs. See: <http://www.afrikids.org/sustainability-projects>.
- ⁴⁶ Fowler, 1997, 102.
- ⁴⁷ APDev, 15.
- ⁴⁸ Pomerantz, 21.
- ⁴⁹ Shannon Kindornay, "From Aid to Development Effectiveness: A Working Paper," North-South Institute (2011) 4; Riddell, 266.
- ⁵⁰ Fowler, 1997, 8.
- ⁵¹ Anderson et al, 19; see also: Cannon, 13.
- ⁵² Riddell, 266.
- ⁵³ ActionAid, *Real Aid: Ending Aid Dependency*, ActionAid (2011) 23; Rick James, "Leadership Development Inside-Out in Africa," *Management & Leadership* 18:3 (2008); Malunga, 2009.
- ⁵⁴ Malunga, 2009, 6; see also: Evie Browne, "Change Management for Effective Institutions," Learning Network on Capacity Development – draft discussion paper (2013) 3.
- ⁵⁵ Adrian Leftwich & Steve Hogg, "The Case for Leadership and the Primacy of Politics in Building Effective States, Institutions and Governance for Sustainable Growth and Social Development," DLP (2007) 4.
- ⁵⁶ Bermann-Harms & Murad, 2011; APDev, 3; Easterly, 2008; HLF-4, 2011; April Linton, "Partnering for Sustainability: Business–NGO Alliances in the Coffee Industry," *Development in Practice* 15:3-4 (2005).
- ⁵⁷ Brian Tomlinson, *Aid and the Private Sector: Catalysing Poverty Reduction and Development? Reality of Aid Report* (2012) 146.
- ⁵⁸ United Nations, *A new global partnership: Eradicate poverty and transform economies through sustainable development* (New York: UN, 2013).
- ⁵⁹ See, for example: Brian Tomlinson & Fraser Reilly-King, "The Elusive Quest for Pro-Poor Growth: CIDA," CCIC Discussion Paper, 2011.
- ⁶⁰ Alan Fowler, "NGDO Values and the Fourth Position Futures : Beyond Aid : and the Fourth Position." *Third World Quarterly* 21:4 (2000): 596.
- ⁶¹ Scottish Government, *International Development Policy*, 2008 <<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/05/06144819/0>>.
- ⁶² IOD PARC, *Independent Assessment of Scottish Government Malawi and Sub Saharan Africa Development Fund Applications (2012/2013)*, Report prepared for the Scottish Government (Edinburgh, 2012) 5.
- ⁶³ Government of Malawi, *Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II*, 2012.
- ⁶⁴ SMP, "Strategic Plan 2011-2014," *Scotland Malawi Partnership*, 2011 <<http://www.scotland-malawipartnership.org/documents/65-SMP11-14StrategicPlanv8.4.pdf>>.
- ⁶⁵ David Hope-Jones, "Supporting Best Practice in Scotland-Malawi Links: Strategic Plan (draft 3.0)" Draft paper prepared by the Scotland Malawi Partnership (2012) 1.
- ⁶⁶ David Hope-Jones, "Board paper: Sustainability in International Development," Paper prepared for the Scotland Malawi Partnership (Feb. 2013) 2.

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Appendix A: Pre-Existing Best Practice Resources in the Sectorⁱ

The SMP office has reviewed a significant number of pre-existing best practice resources, looking at synergy, fit and relevance for SMP members. Most best practice literature, handbooks, guides and toolkits are intended for NGOs, providing in-depth measures to assess their effectiveness. Many require a considerable amount of time, human resources and prior knowledge to use, and are hard to apply to less structured groups (community-based groups, faith-based groups, schools, etc).

Most significantly, **NIDOS'** [Aid Effectiveness Toolkit](#) offers very good advice and support for Scottish NGOs engaged in international development. This toolkit was funded by the Scottish Government. We should not be seen to be duplicating it. Rather, we should ensure our best practice engagements compliment the NIDOS toolkit, signposting NGOs (for whom it is designed) directly to the resource, and encouraging other civil society groups (for whom the resource has not been designed) to develop their engagements in a way with compliments the ethos and principles behind the toolkit.

BOND is also in the process of developing a best practice self assessment toolkit which is based around 'capacities' rather than 'principles'. BOND is also separately developing an '[Im-Prove it! Framework](#)' which aims to identify and agree upon common assessment methods for the sector to enable NGOs to assess, manage and report their effectiveness confidently and consistently.

In September 2009 the **Open Forum's Global Assembly** in Istanbul agreed eight principles (the [Istanbul Principles](#)) around the development effectiveness of civil society organisations. These principles are the draft foundation for the Forum's [International Framework on CSO Development Effectiveness](#).

BUILD (Building Understanding through International Development Links) with UKOWLA (UK One World Linking Association) have produced a [Toolkit of Good Practice](#) for international linking which outlines what they feel are the basic principles of community linking.

SCVO has developed a resource called [The Big Picture](#) as a quality improvement framework, written by and for the voluntary sector. It helps charities and social enterprises look at what they are doing and how they do it before making changes to improve quality.

[PQASSO](#) is a quality standard developed for the third sector, by the third sector. PQASSO's flexibility means it can be used by all types of organisations in the sector, including charities, social enterprises, community interest companies and community groups.

In 2010 the Association of Commonwealth Universities' former **African Unit** developed an excellent 'Good Practices in Educational Partnerships Guide' for further and higher education institutions.

Wales Africa Community Linking has established a [UN Gold Star Framework for Good Practice in Community Linking](#), with funding from the Welsh Assembly, to: guide voluntary organisations through the process of developing a north-south partnership; **benchmark**, monitor and evaluate progress; identify **development and support needs**; and **act** as an **assessment criteria** for awards recognition.

ⁱ Copied, with permission, from: David Hope-Jones, "Supporting Best Practice in Scotland-Malawi Links: Strategic Plan (draft 3.0)" Draft paper prepared by the Scotland Malawi Partnership, 2012.

Appendix B: Extended Literature Review Abstracts

Academic Research

Summary: Catherine Agg, “Winners or Losers? NGOs in the Current Aid Paradigm” (2006)

The current structure of international aid is one in which international NGOs (INGOs) not only have disproportionate power over aid funds, but also crowd out space for local (Southern) NGOs. This system builds “lasting hierarchies that seem unquestioned by both donors and INGOs” (p21) and prevents genuine Southern ownership from taking place. As such, the prospect of sustainable development is bleak.

Summary: Mary Anderson, Dayna Brown & Isabella Jean, *Time to Listen: Hearing People on the Receiving End of Aid* (2012)

This report addresses the prevailing culture of aid dependency in the world, and asks recipients of aid how they perceive their relationship with donor organizations. NGOs are criticized for their focus on delivery (rather than building on local capacities), the compulsion to demonstrate 'value for money' in order to secure additional funds, and the treatment of aid recipients as objects (rather than subjects) of assistance. In order to realize local ownership and sustainability, the authors stress the need for donors to move from this paternalistic relationship, to one based on solidarity, respect, patience, empowerment and genuine dialogue.

Summary: Martin Barber & Cameron Bowie, “How International NGOs Could Do Less Harm and More Good,” *Development in Practice* 18:6 (2008)

The authors problematize the past behaviour of international NGOs (INGOs) in terms of their impact on aid (in)effectiveness and offer a set of prescriptions that might reduce the harm that they cause. NGOs are encouraged to look for new ways of assisting national governments to “integrate the voluntary sector into overall national plans for agriculture, health, or education, rather than seeking to 'do their own thing' out of a misplaced desire for 'independence'...” (p750). A set of prescriptions are offered to assist NGOs in pursuing 'good practice'.

Summary: Lisa Cannon, *Life Beyond Aid: Twenty Strategies to Help Make NGO's Sustainable* (1999)

The authors advise that individual organizations should ask themselves a set of reflexive questions to develop their own definitions of what it means to be sustainable. Four different kinds of sustainability are then identified: benefits sustainability; organizational sustainability; financial sustainability; and **community sustainability**. The author's own definition of sustainability is one in which an organization is able to secure/manage sufficient resources to fulfill its mission effectively and consistently over time without excessive dependence on any single source of funding (p5).

Summary: Axel Dreher, Florian Mölders & Peter Nunnenkamp, “Aid Delivery Through Non-governmental Organisations: Does the Aid Channel Matter for the Targeting of Swedish Aid?” *World Economy* 33:2 (2010)

The authors compare aid delivery between Sweden's official development agency (Sida) and Swedish NGOs that receive official funding from the government. The authors ask two main questions in their comparative analysis: first, to what extent is NGO-administered aid unaffected by national self-interests; and second, to what extent do 'poverty-related indicators of need' shape the allocation of

aid? They conclude that “aid delivery through NGOs provides no panacea to improve the effectiveness of aid, for which a needs-based aid allocation represents a necessary, though not sufficient condition” (p168). The authors also suggest that NGOs might work harder to fully disclose “the information required to assess their contribution to promoting economic growth and social development in line with the Millennium Development Goals” (p169).

Summary: William Easterly – *The Elusive Quest For Growth* (2001); *The White Man’s Burden* (2006); *Reinventing Foreign Aid* (2008)

William Easterly calls into question the supposed benefits that aid has brought to the developing world and demands that we consider, above all, the impact (potentially negative) that aid might be having on economic growth. Foreign aid fails largely because organizations don't understand that individuals, governments and businesses respond to incentives. We need to move away from development planning, instead encouraging enterprising individuals to seek out new, innovative and 'home-grown' solutions to poverty. If aid is used, it should be to help individual poor people, not to try and transform entire societies.

Summary: Alan Fowler, *Striking a Balance: A guide to Enhancing the Effectiveness of Non-Governmental Organisations in International Development* (1997)

NGOs should adopt a people-centred approach to development, based around local ownership of development-oriented projects, in order to ensure self-sustaining institutions. This requires an interplay between three things: i) improving people’s well-being and livelihoods 'in sustainable ways'; ii) building up the capacities of community-based organizations; and iii) empowering people to (individually and collectively) make claims on development processes and put forward their own agenda (p8). Fowler also points out that withdrawal is often not seriously considered by NGOs, and that this must become a key consideration in the planning process of projects.

Summary: Alan Fowler, “NGDO Values and the Fourth Position Futures – Beyond Aid” *Third World Quarterly* 21:4 (2000)

Fowler supports the idea that non-governmental development organizations (NGDOs) ought to adopt a “value-based position between state, market and civil society” (p589). NGDOs are encouraged to pursue roles as 'social entrepreneurs' and 'civic innovators', rather than users and distributors of subsidy. These notions can translate into the finding/testing/demonstrating of different ways in which markets and states can better fulfill their obligations to the wider public.

Summary: David Hirschmann, “Aid Dependence, Sustainability and Technical Assistance: Designing a Monitoring and Evaluation System in Tanzania,” *Public Management Review* 5:2 (2003)

The author looks at the effects of aid dependence on the process of designing a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system for local authorities in Tanzania. He is primarily concerned with the way in which the 'aid industry' undermines local institutions, thereby creating the conditions for further foreign assistance. This represents a downward spiral of external dependence. Often, unsustainable projects and activities are the result of an unwillingness (by all parties) to confront the issue of donors exiting. Donors also need to think more about how to make their projects more affordable and manageable, in order to devolve responsibility to local actors.

Summary: Elizabeth Kleemeier, “The Impact of Participation on Sustainability: An Analysis of the Malawi Rural Piped Scheme Program,” *World Development* 28:5 (2000).

This paper explores the assumption that participation and sustainability are crucially linked in development initiatives. The author looks back at the successes and failures of the Malawi rural piped scheme program, arguing that a participatory approach, while useful in some cases, does not necessarily lead to sustainable outcomes in all cases. The author proposes that local organizations might be more sustainable or effective when they have stronger links with “political and administrative centers” (p942). Genuine rural development requires a system of linkages with *effective institutions*.

Summary: Michael Kremer and Edward Miguel, “The Illusion of Sustainability,” in W. Easterly, *Reinvesting Foreign Aid* (2008)

Looking at a deworming project in Kenya, the authors argue that the move towards a more “sustainable” approach does not necessarily lead to positive results. They conclude that in the longer term, “pursuing sustainability leads to failed projects, disillusionment among donors, and the search for the next development panacea. Rather than pursue the illusion of sustainability, development organizations and developing-country governments would be better off rigorously evaluating their projects, ultimately identifying a limited number with high social returns and funding these interventions on an ongoing basis” (p246).

Summary: Chiku Malunga, “Improving the Effectiveness of Strategic Planning in Local NGOs in Malawi” (2007)

This paper investigates the factors influencing the effectiveness of strategic planning processes among local NGOs in Malawi. It demonstrates how lack of independence from donors led to low rates of strategic plan implementation. It suggests that local NGOs: a) make themselves and their services more relevant to both the beneficiaries and the donors; b) develop skills to negotiate with donors for more ‘developmental or good quality funding’; c) identify alternative sources of funding while taking care not to be distracted from their core mandate; and d) invest in the ‘strategic capacity’ of the board, management, donors, consultants and communities to effectively manage the strategic planning process.

Summary: Chiku Malunga, “An investigation into factors affecting staff turnover amongst professional staff in NGO's in Malawi” (2003)

Malunga looks at the impact of high staff turnover on organizational effectiveness among NGOs in Malawi. An acceptable staff turnover rate is between 5-10 years. In Malawi, however, the average rate of turnover is around 18 months. The author argues that the high rate of turnover has implications for the longevity of NGO projects and their overall impact on local communities. It also represents an obstacle to sustainability through the lack of local ownership of projects and local decision-making within organizations.

Summary: Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid* (2009)

Focusing specifically on official development assistance (ODA), *Dead Aid* offers a vehement rejection of the aid industry and its negative impact on genuine economic development in Africa. Moyo raises three overarching objections to aid: it is patronizing to Africans; it has done macroeconomic harm to Africa; and it distracts (or impedes) more entrepreneurial avenues to development. One of Moyo's biggest concerns is that the “culture of aid-dependency” has meant that there is no real debate on an “exit strategy” for donors.

Summary: Mariam Pal, *Taking Sustainability from Policy to Practice: Bringing Poverty Concerns into*

the Project Cycle, *Development in Practice* 8:4 (1998)

The author looks at the connection between sustainability and poverty reduction. A number of ways are given in which a project might be considered sustainable: by ensuring a permanent solution to the problem such that project activities are no longer necessary; by transferring project management to a local group or agency (eg. government); by engaging in activities that are inherently environmentally sustainable; and by promoting activities that enhance a project's social sustainability (p458). Because "sustainability" is ultimately a subjective concept that varies by context, it is important for both the managers and beneficiaries of a project to define it from the outset.

Summary: Phyllis Pomerantz, *Aid Effectiveness in Africa: Developing Trust between Donors and Governments* (2004)

The author lays out a general framework for building more sustainable and lasting relationships between aid donors and recipients. Six key elements are identified for maintaining a trusting relationship between donors and recipients of aid: i) some extent of shared purpose; ii) commitment; iii) reliability; iv) familiarity; v) transparency; and vi) honest and open communication. The pressure faced by donors to hold recipients accountable for the aid they receive can lead to a breakdown of trust, since there is an inverse relationship between rules and trust. This potential breakdown has consequences for the long-term sustainability of development projects, as local ownership is nearly impossible in a top-down, paternalistic framework.

Summary: Roger Riddell, *Does Foreign Aid Really Work?* (2007)

The authors raises several issues with how we measure (or don't measure) aid's effectiveness – both in terms of ODA and aid from NGOs. A monumental problem is the lack of quality data on aid, which makes it impossible to gauge impacts/outcomes of particular projects. Riddell's concern is that, while there is still general support for foreign aid in the North, "aid fatigue" will certainly set in without clear evidence that aid can and does lead to *sustainable* change. The author explores various ways that aid could be a more sustainable 'catalyst for development' at a project or sectoral level.

Summary: Ann Swidler & Susan Watkins, "The Doctrine of Sustainability and its Effects on Three Strata of Malawian Society" (2009)

The authors look at recent funding for 'sustainable' projects in Malawi, and take a rather cynical view of what they call the 'sustainability doctrine'. Looking specifically at organizations dealing with HIV and AIDS, they argue that sustainability has become a sort of dogmatic mantra for international NGOs, one that leads to unpredictable flows of aid money and ill-conceived donor ideas about what kinds of projects will help make local people self-reliant. Long-term sustainability is a good goal, but it should not be pursued so single-mindedly that all other types of aid and development become marginalized in the process.

Summary: Yash Tandon, *Ending Aid Dependence* (2008)

The author presents a radical rejection of the current system of foreign aid, which is seen as a form of patronizing neo-imperialism. Rather than look for specific examples of aid ineffectiveness or dependence on donors, the author looks at the current aid architecture through a broad lens, offering an alternative framework for development. Several factors that cause aid dependence are outlined, as well as a set of general steps to end such dependence.

Sector and International Guidance

Summary: Africa Platform for Development Effectiveness, *African Consensus and Position on Development Effectiveness* (2011)

The Africa Platform for Development Effectiveness (APDev) is an initiative by the African Union and NEPAD to give a common voice to Africa's development perspectives, strategies and policies. Six key elements are identified with respect to attaining inclusive development cooperation: (1) reducing aid dependency; (2) a transformative partnership within Africa; (3) reforming global governance to ensure greater African representation; (4) mutual accountability standards (such as the African Peer Review Mechanism); (5) development policy coherence; and (6) fulfilling delivery of aid commitments to guarantee value-based partnership, national ownership, transparency, increased quality and predictability.

Summary: BOND, *Core principles for assessing effectiveness: A NGO approach to evidencing change, Draft II* (2012)

This document is part of the Bond Effectiveness Programme, which aims to support UK NGOs in improving how they assess, learn from, and demonstrate their effectiveness. This includes three elements: developing a sector-wide framework of indicators, data collection tools, and assessment methods; building knowledge and skills among NGOs; and creating an 'enabling environment' that encourages organizations to improve their effectiveness and transparency. Bond identifies eight core principles for assessing NGO effectiveness: (1) voice; (2) inclusion; (3) transparency; (4) utility; (5) triangulation; (6) comparison; (7) contribution; and (8) appropriateness.

Summary: Canadian Council for International Cooperation, “Africa-Canada Forum: Civil Society and Aid Effectiveness” (2007)

This report addresses the outcomes of the Paris Declaration (the precursor to the recent Busan High-Level Forum), particularly with respect to the role of CSOs in development. It is argued that CSO need to look at the broader macro-economic context of development and form relationships based on solidarity. Long-term sustainability of North-South relationships requires that CSOs live up to their role as agents of social change, rather than act as mere conduits of aid.

Summary: High-Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness – Busan (2011)

The High-Level Fora on Aid Effectiveness represent the increasing coordination between donor and recipient countries on how best to work toward development in the Global South. The shared principles that emerged from Busan are: (1) Ownership of development priorities by developing countries; (2) Focus on results; (3) Inclusive development partnerships; and (4) Transparency and accountability to each other.

Summary: Shannon Kindornay, “From Aid Effectiveness to Development Effectiveness: A Working Paper,” *North-South Institute* (2011)

This paper discusses the recent shift in thinking from *aid effectiveness* to *development effectiveness*. The North-South Institute conceptualizes development effectiveness in four ways: organizational effectiveness; coherence or coordination; development outcomes from aid; and overall development outcomes. These categories form a continuum, moving from narrow understandings (organizational effectiveness) to more broad and complex notions (overall development outcomes).

Summary: NIDOS, Aid Effectiveness Toolkit – MOT (2013)

The NIDOS toolkit offers practical tips for small to medium-sized NGOs to evaluate their effectiveness. The MOT assessment outlines 4 steps to determine whether an organization meets minimum levels of good practice: mission statement guidance; principles of effectiveness; MOT benchmarks; and action planning to meet MOT benchmarks. In terms of the second step, NIDOS proposes that organizations score themselves on ten different principles, drawn largely from the current Istanbul Principles for CSO Effectiveness.

Summary: Open Forum on CSO Effectiveness, *Putting the Istanbul Principles into Practice* (2011)

This document is intended as a 'toolkit' for organizations to apply the Istanbul CSO Development Effectiveness Principles – particularly Principle 8: *Commit to realizing positive sustainable change*. According to this principle, “CSOs achieve sustainable development outcomes by making long-term commitments, working in partnerships, empowering communities and acting in solidarity with affected populations. Positive development change should also be sustained through the complementarity of development actors and a focus on the root causes of inequality, poverty and marginalization.”

Summary: The Africa Unit, *Good Practices in Educational UK-Africa Higher & Further Education Partnerships* (2010)

This guide lays out a framework and guide regarding how to establish and sustain links in the context of higher and further education partnerships. Rather than set out a list of 'objective rules' for a 'good' partnership, this guide offers some basic ideas for partners to consider, with testimony and case studies from several countries, including Malawi. The authors of the guide ask us to consider 10 key 'partnership principles', sustainability being touted as the most important of all.

Summary: UKOWLA, Toolkit for Linking: Opportunities and Challenges

The aim of UKOWLA's toolkit is partly to improve the wider educational value of linking and thereby make links more sustainable. Several key principles should underlie organizational linking: equality, mutuality, reciprocity, honesty, critical thinking, and reflection. On top of these, a substantial commitment (which likely includes a commitment of funding/resources) is also needed. In addition to the above themes, UKOWLA highlights some more general principles of linking. Organizations should also try to make sustainable development a key outcome of linking.

Summary: UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, *An Action Agenda for Sustainable Development* (2013)

After extensive global consultations across 12 thematic areas, the Leadership Council of the SDSN, headed by Jeffrey Sachs, has identified 10 priority challenges for governments, the private sector and civil society to rally behind:

1. End Extreme Poverty Including Hunger
2. Achieve Development within Planetary Boundaries
3. Ensure Effective Learning for All Children and Youth for Life and Livelihood
4. Achieve Gender Equality, Social Inclusion, and Human Rights for All
5. Achieve Health and Well-being at All Ages
6. Improve Agriculture Systems and Raise Rural Prosperity
7. Empower Inclusive, Productive and Resilient Cities

8. Curb Human-Induced Climate Change and Ensure Sustainable Energy
9. Secure Ecosystem Services and Biodiversity, and Ensure Good Management of Water and Other Natural Resources
10. Transform Governance for Sustainable Development

These Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are intended to become key pillars of the post-MDG framework.



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