



## ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS/NGOS: 'BRIDGING THE GAP'

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

It has been observed in various Scotland Malawi Partnership (SMP) fora that there often exists a general disconnect between the academic research community and the NGO community<sup>1</sup>. Much of the research undertaken in and with Malawi, including Masters dissertations, PhDs and privately commissioned studies, is not published or publically available; and a lack of time, experience and access provision means many NGOs are not able to tap research which *is* published.

This disconnect often results in:

- Duplication of effort between research projects;
- Missed opportunities to build on others' work;
- Valuable pre-existing data held by NGOs not used;
- Frustration amongst research participants and key contacts in Malawi and Scotland, as successive researchers ask the same or similar questions, not widely disseminating their findings;
- Missed opportunities to use research to inform policy makers, media and the general public;
- Difficulty identifying research gaps for new work.

There are a number of promising opportunities which may help address this seeming disconnect:

- The SMP and its sister organisation in Malawi, the Malawi Scotland Partnership (MaSP), is well networked with 600+ Scottish organisations and key individuals working with Malawi, the further and higher education sector, and policy makers.
- NGOs are increasingly seeing value in ensuring their work is informed by credible, peer-reviewed research.
- Academics are increasingly encouraged by funders to disseminate their findings, pro-actively develop partnerships and find practical applications for their work.
- There is strong interest in Malawi-related research across Scotland, with numerous new Masters and PhD's starting each year.
- Many Scottish universities have or are developing their own international development hubs<sup>2</sup>.
- Organisations such as Scotland's five Development Education Centres are able to support the dissemination of learning to young people across Scotland.
- Organisations such as INTRAC and ELRHA (Enhanced Learning and Research for Humanitarian Assistance) are able to provide advice and support on constructing partnerships between higher education and NGOs.

<sup>1</sup> "NGO community" is used in this summary paper as short-hand for the diverse range of civil society links between Scotland and Malawi, including, *inter alia*: charities, schools, hospitals, churches, businesses, diaspora organisations, environmental groups, cultural bodies, and other community and associational links.

<sup>2</sup> For example, the University of Edinburgh's Global Development Academy; the University of Glasgow's Glasgow Centre for International Development (GCID); and the University of Aberdeen's Centre for Sustainable Economic Development.



The SMP, through its Further and Higher Education Forum, aims to help *bridge the gap* between researchers and the NGO community by:

- (1) Creating a central online hub of all existing Scotland-Malawi research, both published and unpublished;
  - Data would be searchable by university, theme, keyword and Malawian region.
  - Ideally the actual paper would be available on the SMP website. Where this is not possible, the abstract will be given with details on where the paper can be found.
  - Each of the 15 “Areas of Partnership”<sup>3</sup> webpages which the new SMP website (to be launched Sept 2013) will be formed around will have a “Research” section, detailing recent research in this area. This will make it easy to find relevant information.
  - Where possible, contact details for key researchers will be available on the SMP website, making it easier to ask questions, start a dialogue and create new links.
  - The SMP will start collating information on published materials using Google Scholar and universities’ own online research repositories, and then use the FE/HE Forum to help fill gaps.
- (2) Supporting new research:
  - NGOs will be able to suggest areas for new research through the SMP.
  - Researchers will be able to contact relevant NGOs when designing research and seeking data, contacts and practical information.
  - The SMP will disseminate information on funding opportunities for new research.
- (3) Promoting and disseminating new research:
  - As new research is added to the online database by the office this new data is flagged up on the website and an email is automatically sent to all SMP Members working in this area.
  - Opportunities -such as at SMP events and the parliamentary Cross Party Group on Malawi- are offered to present new research to members, public and policy makers.
  - Where appropriate/relevant, to look for opportunities to disseminate research findings to younger audiences, school partnerships, DECs, NGOs doing development education etc.
- (4) Facilitating links and shared learning (data, contacts, practical advice, research findings, etc) within and between academic and NGO communities.
  - Use the SMP Member Database and the new research database to share contact details and connect key individuals.
  - Look into other fora for makings connections (e.g. Linked In groups, SMP online discussion forum, etc).
  - Encourage researchers to become Associate Members and all universities to be active Full Members.

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<sup>3</sup> Agriculture, Business, Culture, Diaspora, Environmental, Faith-based, Further and higher education, Gender, Governance, Health, Local authorities, Primary and secondary education, Sport, Tourism, Water and Youth