

**DOES THE STEREOTYPE FIT?
NGO/GOVERNMENT RELATIONS
IN MALAWI**

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Abstract

This study focuses on gaining an understanding of the relationship between NGOs and the government of Malawi at an administrative level. Though this relationship is integral to the success of the NGO's mission, from the literature it is apparent that this is often a difficult one. The study was conducted through interviews with NGO personnel, which were analyzed using narrative inquiry. The author obtained a clearer understanding of the situation in Malawi through the eyes of practitioners in the country and their views of the good and the bad in the relationship, as well as possible solutions to problems.

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List of Abbreviations

CONGOMA	Council for Non-Governmental Organizations in Malawi
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRSO	Grass Roots Support Organization
GVH	Group Village Headman
MCP	Malawi Congress Party
MOU	Memoranda of Understanding
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SWAp	Sector-Wide Approach
TA	Traditional Authority
UDF	United Democratic Front
UN	United Nations
VAT	Value Added Tax

Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play an important role throughout the world, but especially in the developing world where they have a key role in aiding development and the provision of basic human needs. The World Bank defines NGOs as: Private organizations that pursue activities to promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, relieve suffering or undertake community development. NGOs often differ from other organizations in the sense that they tend to operate independent from government, are value-based and are generally guided by principles of community and cooperation (World Bank, 2009).

While there are some very large, well known, international NGOs, the majority are smaller, locally based groups (Teegen, Doh, & Vachani, 2004). One relatively common view of NGOs sees them as civil society actors, as opposed to private businesses which are active in the private sector¹ and government which acts in the public sector². Civil society is the voluntary coming together of people with similar moral and intellectual beliefs who engage in collective action (Teegen et al., 2004).

There are several ways in which NGOs can be classified. The most basic and common breakdown is into operational (“design and implementation of development-related projects”) and advocacy (promote causes and “influence policies and practices”) (World Bank, 2009). A further possible breakdown is into four categories: charitable, service, participatory and empowering (Global Development Research Center, 2009) which are defined in Table 1 on pg. 2.

¹ The private sector of a nation’s economy consists of those entities which are not controlled by the state (Webster’s Online Dictionary, 2011 a). The private sector is profit driven, not socially driven. (Salter, 2003)

² The public sector is that part of economic and administrative life that deals with the delivery of goods and services by and for the government, whether national, regional or local/municipal (Webster’s Online Dictionary, 2011 b).

Table 1: Global Development Research Center NGO Categories

Charitable	Top-down paternalistic service with little participation by the beneficiaries
Service	Provision of services with some local involvement
Participatory	Self help projects with high local involvement
Empowering	Teaching of underprivileged people and promoting awareness of their rights

Global Development Research Center, 2009

NGOs are often created to correct perceived problems; when civil society feels that neither the government nor private enterprise is filling a specific need they take the lead through the formation of NGOs to solve these problems. NGOs play a critical role throughout most of Africa where they have significant involvement in not just the development of countries, but in some instances have actually been integrated into the countries' infrastructure (Hearn, 1998). Most African countries were colonized during the late 1800s and only gained their independence between 1950 and 1980, with the exception of Namibia and Eritrea which remained colonized by fellow African nations. This change of government thrust power into the hands of new leaders, who usually were elected based on their standing in the liberation movements, such as Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe (BBC News, 2008) and Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya (BBC News, 2009). While Africa is a land of vast resources, many of the countries have had political problems and Sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region in the world containing 34 of the 50 least developed countries (UN-OHRLLS, 2006). There are many political, social and economic reasons that have combined to make this area of the world so poor, but the result is a great need for the services that NGOs can provide.

NGOs in Africa face a variety of demands placed on them by not just the people they are there to serve (clients), but also donors³ as well as local governments (see Figure 1). This means that while many of them are there with a specific mission in mind, employees have to be concerned about much more than simply carrying out the NGO's mission. NGOs have to balance the interests of these three critical stakeholders⁴, without allowing this to hinder their mission.



Figure 1: NGO's Primary Stakeholders

There is often a stereotype in the literature attributed to the NGO/government relationship when looking at third world or developing world governments. One often reads of the myriad of problems in this relationship, and the struggle that NGOs have to go through in order to get their jobs done. Often one also gets this perception from media, but how true is this stereotype in Malawi?

³ Donors refer to agencies, governments or individuals that supply monetary or technical assistance and have the power to choose whom to provide with their assistance.

⁴ A stakeholder is any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives (Freeman, 1984).

Problem Statement

There has been much research conducted on the NGO's relationships with their stakeholders, many of which have been conducted as case studies of specific projects or countries (Goldsmith, 2000). The relationship⁵ between NGOs and governments is extremely important for both the NGO community and governments of the countries in which they are working. Theoretically both sides are trying to work for the benefit of the people and thus would be expected to work together; however, this relationship has often been an unharmonious one (Bratton, 1989) due to a variety of issues such as unhappiness over how aid is disbursed (Green, Shaw, Dimmock, & Conn, 2002), perceived over-regulation of NGOs (Batley, 2006; Gugerty, 2008), and a distrust of the influence of foreign bodies on the actions of NGOs (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Hearn, 2007; Tvedt, 2006). This is an important relationship to study as there are a lot more complexities to the relationship than simply dividing up the tasks that need to be taken care of depending on each group's capabilities (Bebbington & Farrington, 1993).

Africa is a continent that has much to offer, but has been slow to capitalize on its vast resources. African countries have struggled through a variety of political, economic and ethnic problems. Economies in many African countries have struggled in recent decades, which can be put down to a variety of reasons such as corruption (Doh et al., 2003; Tangri & Mwenda, 2006) and poor management (Richardson, 2007). When one discusses African issues it is pertinent to separate the continent into regions. The continent can be divided by geographic areas; however, the most significant cultural,

⁵ NGOs are major contributors to the development process in some countries, and in other countries they act more in opposition to the government. There are several factors that affect how well governments and NGOs can work together, and these factors determine the productivity (or lack thereof) of the relationship between the two (Clark, 1993).

religious and ethnic dividing line in Africa is between North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2007 a). Emblematic of this is Transparency International separating their Africa and the Middle East section into “Sub-Saharan Africa” and “North Africa and the Middle East” (Transparency International, 2011 a). North Africa is largely Arabic but has a significant Mediterranean influence and has for the most part escaped the political turmoil that has beset most of Africa, as demonstrated by none of the North African countries having a new ruler since 1999⁶ (CIA, 2010)⁷. “While Sub-Saharan Africa has almost twice as many Christians as Muslims, on the African continent as a whole the two faiths are roughly balanced, with 400 to 500 million followers each”, illustrating how large a Muslim presence there is in North Africa (The Pew Forum, 2010, p. ii). Sub-Saharan Africa covers a vast swathe of the continent (see Figure 2)

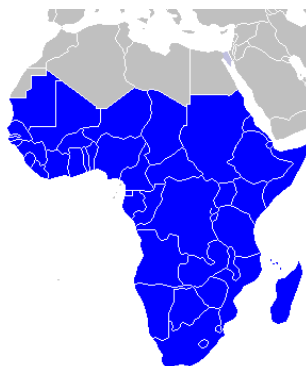


Figure 2: Map of Sub-Saharan Africa (Wikipedia, 2011)

and can be further broken down into West and Central Africa which is mostly French speaking and into East and Southern Africa which was largely colonized by the British. The wide range of political, economic and social problems throughout the continent has

⁶ Until recent events in early 2011

⁷ (CIA, 2010 a; CIA, 2010 b; CIA, 2010 c; CIA, 2010 e, CIA, 2010 f)

created a variety of different problems for each country, leading to a large variety in the types of NGOs acting throughout Africa.

Sub-Saharan Africa, being home to many of the poorest countries in the world⁸, has a large number of NGOs operating within it. The number of NGOs and the variety of governments throughout the region lend themselves to this type of study. A study that analyses the issues in that interaction, but focuses on one country as the interaction can be significantly different in a neighboring country. The majority of studies have been conducted in more accessible and developed countries such as Kenya and South Africa, whilst West Africa is where most of the Francophone research has been focused. Throughout the region there are a variety of different governments such as benign dictatorships, military dictatorships, single party states, multi party states and some that are still ruled by Kings. Construction of African states – they were partitioned by European powers, with most of the new borders being created at the Berlin Conference in 1885 – means that many different tribes can be housed within one nation's borders and at the same time one tribe can be spread over many nations (Amadife & Warhola, 1993; Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2007 b). There is a strong sense of ancestry meaning that leaders of tribes still have significant power over a population, even if this power is not manifested at state level. This leads to a difficult political environment in many Sub-Saharan countries (Østby, Nordås, & Rød, 2009) with power struggles occurring in many areas as evidenced in the 2007 elections in Kenya where ethnic loyalties led to a mass uprising following disputed elections.

This paper will research the relationship between NGOs and the government of Malawi from an NGO perspective in a local context. This is an important, pertinent issue

⁸ 32 of the 38 highly indebted countries (HIPC) are in Africa (Transparency International, 2011 b)

in Malawi where there are a large number of NGOs. Malawi is situated in Southern Africa and is bordered by Tanzania, Zambia and Mozambique. A small, but densely populated land-locked country, Malawi only gained independence from the British colonizers on the 6th of July, 1964 through a relatively peaceful handover of power. After independence Malawi was ruled by Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, through the Malawi Congress Party (MCP), as a single party state until the first multi-party democratic elections were held in 1994 (Englund, 2002). Bakili Mulizi from the opposition United Democratic Front (UDF) gained power and ruled for two successive terms until 2004 when his successor, Dr. Bingu wa Mutharika, was elected and has subsequently also ruled for two successive terms (World Bank, 2010).

While the political scene has been more peaceful than those of many developing nations, elections are often fraught with accusations of cheating as evidenced by Malawi being placed 85th out of 178 countries in the 2010 Corruption Perceptions Index⁹ (Transparency International, 2010). The relative peace in Malawi is a situation not common throughout Africa, if not most of the developing world, where power struggles have often escalated into rebellions, separatist movements or military coups (Transparency International, 2011 b). While some developing countries have had a stable political environment for some length of time, few sub-Saharan nations have had such a peaceful political system (McGowan, 2003) for such a long time as Malawi, which has escaped political turmoil since independence in 1964. This was borne out during the handover of power from the “President for Life”, Dr. Banda, who held a nationwide

⁹ Though this is not solely representative of the government, and also reflects on society in general.

referendum which led to the first multiparty elections¹⁰ and his eventual removal from power (Englund, 2002). Though there may have been fraudulent activity during the elections, and elections since, and though the government can sometimes be heavy handed in its use of the police (BBC News, 2001 b), there has been relatively little violence in the 46 years since independence¹¹. In fact Malawi was ranked at 51st in the 2010 Global Peace Index Rankings (p. 10) making it the 6th highest ranked African nation and 4th in Sub-Saharan Africa (Global Peace Index, 2010, p. 17).

While the political side, though the political parties tend to be continuously changing (Englund, 2002), has been relatively stable, the same cannot be said for the economic fortunes of the country. Despite significant economic growth in recent times, Malawi remains one of the poorest countries in the world which led to them obtaining debt relief through the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative and the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative in August 2006 (Malawi Government, 2009). This has aided the high current GDP growth rate of 5.9% (World Bank 2010), which is also due in part to a GDP per capita that is still only \$900, ranking Malawi 218th out of 228 countries (CIA, 2010 d). There is also a significant segregation of wealth, which leads to the bottom 10% of the population having a consumption percentage of 3% as opposed to the top 10% who consume 31.9% (CIA, 2010 d). This poor state of affairs coupled with a government inability to provide the basic infrastructure needed throughout the country has led to the need for both NGOs and donor agencies within Malawi. The NGOs provide assistance with healthcare provision, disease prevention, water supply and agriculture amongst other

¹⁰ Due to external pressure, including donors withholding funds, and constant political realignment, MCP was eventually pressured into multiparty elections (McCracken, 1998).

¹¹ Lwanda (2006) makes it appear that rather than physical violence, economic threats were of more use to politicians and their parties.

needs. Donors deal primarily in distribution of financial aid, which also plays a significant role in the government's budget, with the government having to factor in where aid will probably be given before planning which sectors to disburse their money to (Malawi Government, 2009). In the *Annual Debt and Aid Report* (Malawi Government, 2009) there is mention that the government believes that the donors are not "recognizing [the donor's] comparative advantages" (p. 15) due to having too many projects with little coordination. As mentioned aid is a significant portion of the government's funding, with just over US\$ 807 million being disbursed in the 2008/2009 fiscal year (p. 4). The importance of NGOs to Malawi is not to be understated with 257 NGOs registered and "paid up" with CONGOMA¹², demonstrating the number of NGOs active in the country (CONGOMA, 2010 a). Most likely there are also other NGOs not registered with CONGOMA or smaller operations that escape notice, which could significantly increase the number of NGOs operating in Malawi.

Donors often prefer funding projects through NGOs rather than through governments due to perceived greater efficiencies (Bratton, 1989; Stewart, 1997). This, however, is not always the case (Atack, 1999; Bebbington & Farrington, 1993) and can lead to greater tension between NGOs and the government who would rather the money be channeled through them. These are just some of the factors of conflict that have been ascertained from the literature; however there are many more possible areas of conflict between NGOs and governments and it would be interesting to see how the unique political and economic situation in Malawi affects these areas of potential conflict.

¹² CONGOMA is the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi designated as the coordinating body for all non-governmental organisations in Malawi. It is a membership organisation with the goal of ensuring effective coordination and collaboration of all the NGOs and other developmental partners including government. (CONGOMA, 2011)

Literature Review

This literature review will firstly address the history of NGOs in Africa and then look at NGOs' relationships with their key stakeholders. These are two areas that are extremely important when investigating why NGOs are present in Africa as well as how their work is perceived both inside and outside of Africa.

NGO History in Africa

The history of NGOs in Africa is inextricably linked to the questions surrounding aid¹³, with NGOs becoming “deeply institutionalized within the aid system” (Hearn, 2007, p. 1097). Since the 1970s and 1980s they have been the primary vehicle for aid, which has had a direct effect on the number of NGOs present, and the role they perform, in the region. Increasingly this money is provided less by private individuals, and more so by large agencies or foreign governments. From the literature it seems that though NGOs may stay true to their original goals, these goals are often perceived to be the desires of outside parties and are not necessarily in line with local government interests (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Galvin & Habib, 2003; Hearn, 2007; Tvedt, 2002, 2006). Aid distribution rationale or patterns in Africa can be broken down by decade, following the end of World War II (Moyo, 2009).

The Cold War.

Following the end of World War II, a global power struggle between the United States and its allies and the Soviet Union began. This battle was originally played out in Europe as both sides used their economic and military might in an attempt to gain allegiance from various countries. Both sides also looked at other areas of the world

¹³ Aid is given as a combination of development aid, emergency assistance, and financial and foreign policy initiatives (Tvedt, 2006)

where they thought they could gain influence, mainly through economic strategies. These efforts were primarily concentrated in Asia, Latin America and Africa (Lancaster, 2000). Many of these countries were less economically developed so they were willing to accept money and advice from foreign governments. During this time aid was often given to these countries with little attention paid as to who was receiving the money or what was being done with it, solely in an effort to gain allegiance (Dunning, 2004). Developing countries in Africa were quick to accept the aid which often came with no strings attached and with low interest rates (Moyo, 2009).

1960s – Industry and Infrastructure.

Following World War II empires created around the world were being broken apart. Colonizers throughout Africa had belatedly tried to create an infrastructure for the populace before they granted independence, but for the majority of their rule many of the services and privileges had only been extended to the colonizers (Bratton, 1989; Manji & O’Coill, 2002). The new governments now found themselves in control, but with very little structure created outside the main cities. Though the countries were independent, they were still quite dependent on their former colonizers for support, both material and political. Foreign governments still caught up in the Cold War invested large sums of money to aid their former colonies, but also to retain their obedience. By the start of the 1960s Africa had already received \$100 million in aid (Moyo, 2009). This initial funding went to assisting in the creation of infrastructure and industry in these newly independent countries.

1970s – Oil and Poverty.

Originally developed countries tended to be the suppliers of monetary aid to African nations. However in 1973 oil prices jumped and oil producing nations deposited their profits with international banks. These banks offered low interest rate loans to Africa that saw an opportunity to take out these new loans, and use them to pay off the previous ones (Hertz, 2004).

At the same time as their governments were taking out these loans, their populations were suffering under increased commodity prices, and the aid focus turned from infrastructural development to combating poverty (Laird, 2007; Moyo, 2009). The World Bank's policy became funding aimed at reducing poverty, and countries such as the United States (USAID, 2010) soon had a similar approach in effect. It was also during this decade that The World Bank overtook bilateral loans from other countries as the largest source of aid to Africa.

1980s/1990s – Governance Structures.

The world entered the 1980s on the heels of another oil crisis, but this time banks raised interest rates. Many African countries now had sizeable loans to pay back so when banks raised the rates, the amount needed to service that debt suddenly became too much of a burden for these countries whose economies were already struggling under the recession (Jackson, 1985; Moyo, 2009).

In 1982 Mexico, followed swiftly by several African nations, announced that they would be unable to make their payments (Alexander, 1985). The donors realized that this problem needed to be solved before everyone defaulted on their loans and brought about the collapse of the world financial system. The loans were restructured by the IMF and

donor countries which prevented the debtor countries from defaulting. However, the debt remained (Hertz, 2004).

Donors to Africa struggled to understand why their aid was not having the same economic effect it was having in parts of Asia and the Americas¹⁴. They decided that African governance structures were the problem and that these needed to be restructured, such as reducing government size and decentralization. This involvement by donors in the way a government runs itself came to be known as the New Policy Agenda (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). The New Policy Agenda is one of a number of facets of the NGO/donor relationship. Though this paper is focused on the NGO/Government relationship, it is important to have an understanding of the other key relationships for NGOs (donors and clients), as these relationships play into and affect the relationship of NGOs with the government.

Key Stakeholder Relationships

NGOs play an important role throughout the world; they fill a niche in the interaction between the state and private enterprise, and conduct a balancing act to keep both sides in check (Teegen et al., 2004). However, they also have a balancing act to play in terms of their three main stakeholders: Clients, donors and the government. Some studies have focused on the relationships between the stakeholders, but much of the NGO literature has focused on specific issues that the researcher has identified such as NGO legitimacy (Atack, 1999), or has been a case study of a single developmental project such as Hill, Nel, and Illegner's (2007) study of an irrigation scheme in Malawi.

¹⁴ A study by Ndambenia and Njoupouognigni (2010) on the effects of foreign aid and direct investment found that there was little economic growth generated in Sub-Saharan Africa and concluded that it's "better to focus on internal factors rather than external factors to boost economic growth" (pg. 39).

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of NGOs worldwide in the past few decades, which can be tied to a few causes, most notably that of donors channeling money through NGOs rather than governments (Aldashev & Verdier, 2010; Edwards & Hulme, 1996). This redirection of funding has become one of the main causes of friction between NGOs and governments (Galvin & Habib, 2003). Governments have many duties to their citizens, such as the provision of services and development of the country. NGOs are typically focused on one area, such as HIV/Aids or agriculture, but this innate focus does not necessarily make their operations more efficient than those of the government (Bebbington & Farrington, 1993).

Sub-Saharan Africa is a prime area for NGO activity, with a wide variety of societal, developmental, human rights and health issues to be tackled. The role of NGOs in this part of the world is constantly under scrutiny, both by governments and donors. Though the reputation of NGOs is that they can co-ordinate small scale projects better and more efficiently than most governments (Lockwood, 2005), they can also be guilty of mismanagement and political interference (Edwards & Hulme, 1996; Tvedt, 2002). This section examines the literature regarding NGO relationships with their key stakeholders, beginning with the relationship with clients, followed by donors, and finally the relationship with governments. The literature on these relationships will be discussed with a focus on sub-Saharan Africa but will also draw upon experiences from other areas of the world, as some aspects of NGO-stakeholder relationships are the same worldwide.

Clients

Much of the work that NGOs do in the third world is developmental. They get involved in many types of projects such as education, health and infrastructure-building. A sampling of the literature provides articles dealing with health issues afflicting sub-Saharan Africa such as HIV/Aids (Nair & Campbell, 2008; Pfeiffer et al., 2008), the service afforded by the healthcare providers (Green et al., 2002; Hearn, 1998; Hymer, 1972) and accountability issues in education (Sauder, 2001). Many case studies in the literature are also focused on the infrastructure of the countries, most commonly water provision (Hill et al, 2007), which is a critical resource in such an agrarian part of the world. As much of the work that NGOs do is aimed at the people who require this help, or these services, the citizens of third world countries can be considered the clients.

The majority of NGOs can be split up in to two main groups, advocacy and operational. Advocacy NGOs work on behalf of others, speaking out for those who are unable to and representing those without a voice. Operational NGOs focus on providing goods and services to those who are not provided for by the state or by private enterprise. There is also a third type of NGO, the hybrid NGO, which is an NGO that fulfills both types of jobs (Teegen et al., 2004). Much of the literature focuses on operational NGOs . This could be for a few reasons such as governmental pressure on advocacy NGOs in sub-Saharan Africa (Bratton, 1989); another reason could be that the need for development is deemed more pressing than dealing with social issues, and therefore there are more operational NGOs than those engaged in advocacy. There are several important aspects to the relationship between NGOs and their clients that can be drawn out of the literature. The two most important aspects of the relationship that were studied were local

or grassroots involvement and the importance of support organizations to the success of NGO operations.

Local Involvement.

The importance of local involvement in NGO projects is highlighted in several papers. They emphasize the need for locals to be considered and consulted, to be involved in the projects, and to be educated in these projects so they can become self sustaining in the long term.

The issue of local clients being considered and consulted was an important point touched upon in a study of the politics of cross-border conservation areas and the increasing power of the NGOs involved in these projects (Duffy, 2006). While such conservation areas can be beneficial to the clients surrounding the areas, there are often times when locals are not considered or approached for their thoughts, such as when “30,000 Mozambican villagers living in the proposed transfrontier park only heard of it when 30 elephants were delivered from South Africa” (Duffy, 2006, p. 102). Subsequent to this event a survey was carried out finding that 40% of the villagers living in the proposed park were not even aware that it was to become one. In this case the NGO had hired a consultancy firm to carry out their community consultation efforts, but fired the firm after it was revealed to be a scam (Duffy, 2006). While developmental NGOs may attempt to improve the economies of the countries and lives of the locals through these initiatives, they have to be mindful of how they are affecting these people’s lives as well. In the case of the park mentioned in Duffy’s study he concluded that the NGOs and governments were not taking into consideration the clients and were just acting in their own self interest in a bid to realize the money that would be gained from such ventures.

In contrast to these problems are those experienced in the study by Galvin and Habib (2003). They look at water provision and the effect of South Africa's decentralization policies on these projects. Decentralization is understood to mean bringing "development closer to the people" and "promoting participatory approaches" (Galvin & Habib, 2003, p. 865). Donors promote decentralization as they see it as key to creating a strong democracy by empowering local citizens through localized governments with their own powers. Localized governments come with their own set of problems, but are expected to be more in tune with the local population and therefore more able to service their needs.

Another important method of local involvement with NGOs is through grassroots organizations. Grassroots organizations are local¹⁵ organizations that can be used to facilitate the sustainability¹⁶ of a project. They can either be current organizations or organizations specifically formed from the local clientele to ensure the long term potential of the project (Brown & Ashman, 1996). Brown and Ashman observed a range of NGO led projects in Africa and Asia and then assessed the "success" of these projects by looking at their "reach" and "sustainability". As they point out in their research, measurement of success is a problem area, and itself a thorny issue between donors and NGOs. It is difficult to quantify the success of a project using these scales (reach and sustainability) as some projects may be designed to be of a smaller scale and are therefore easier to maintain than a large complex project. Brown and Ashman then compared the success of the projects with a number of variables, among them grassroots involvement. They include grassroots organizational involvement as a hallmark of sustainability. In

¹⁵ Local as opposed to regional or national organizations

¹⁶ Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. (UN Documents, 1987)

their agricultural case study in Malawi of a cooperative of small-scale irrigation farmers, Hill et al. (2007) found that the long term success of a project is determined by the ability of the project to keep going once the NGO pulls out.

Support Organizations.

Another local contribution to NGO projects is not just in the form of grassroots organizations, but also grassroots support organizations (GRSOs). GRSOs are distinct from grassroots organizations in that grassroots organizations could include local organizations that operate like NGOs such as a local women's empowerment group, whereas GRSOs refers to organizations that provide services to the NGOs. These organizations can aid NGOs by strengthening human and organizational capacities, mobilizing resources, providing information and intellectual resources, and building alliances of mutual support and bridging to other sectors (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002). So for example this could take the form of an agency that consults on local agricultural projects; they could provide local knowledge or contacts that could assist in the project. GRSOs lend support primarily to grassroots organizations, but also support the NGO effort as well.

The support organizations can be roughly broken down into five categories: Human and organizational development agencies, financial resource organizations, research and information institutes, organizations that assist in building alliances, and intersectoral bridging organizations (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002). By the late 1990s there were more than 50,000 GRSOs operating throughout the developing world (Fisher, 2003). Fisher surmised that many GRSOs are not just being established by wealthy individuals, but also by professionals and intellectuals. Many of those who turn to this

type of work do so as they see the state's developmental work as insufficient (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002). This disapproving stand towards governments can make the government wary of them and Fisher (2003) mentions that in South Asia they are considered to be a threat by the national security departments. They take on a type of advocacy NGO role which can put them into trouble with the government. At the same time, in some African countries, governments are happy for the advocacy stands taken by GRSOs on controversial issues such as female genital mutilation (Fisher, 2003). This enables social action to be taken without the government being seen as the main protagonist of the actions, which may not necessarily be favorably perceived by their voting public.

Support organizations play an integral role in the facilitation of NGO activities. Brown and Kalegaonkar (2002) mention the possible benefits a support organization can bring to an NGO such as the addition of managerial and organizational skills, government contacts or simply another way for NGOs to gain public support. NGOs come in a variety of sizes and the large ones may have their own departments to support their main administrative functions; however many of the smaller NGOs have neither the money nor resources to use on these support functions, so they depend on outside organizations to assist them in these areas.

Donors

The relationship between donors and NGOs is a complicated one. Over the last few decades, the financial and other aid flowing from the developed world to the developing one has shifted from being routed through governments to being routed through NGOs. For example, the World Bank channeled 6% of their projects through NGOs between 1973 and 1988; this figure had increased to 50% by 1994 (Aldashev & Verdier, 2010). This increase in funding has corresponded with a rapid increase in the number of NGOs worldwide. This rapid proliferation of NGOs can be attributed to two factors: The increased money coming in (Edwards & Hulme, 1996), and the fact that we live in a globalized world which can rapidly escalate a local problem into a global problem (Teegen et al., 2004). In a globalized environment, the most important issues in the NGO/donor relationship are fundraising, accountability and dependency.

Fundraising.

Since NGOs are not profit generating organizations, fundraising plays a crucial role. Historically NGOs received much of their funding through private donation but increasingly they are getting funding from donors including both governments and agencies¹⁷ (Aldashev & Verdier, 2010). Aldashev and Verdier investigated the intricacies of this fundraising area, specifically concentrating on how NGOs divided up their time between fundraising and working on projects. They found that many NGOs attempted to horizontally differentiate themselves to try and create a niche which would attract private donations. When there was a fixed amount of donor income then there would be a lot of competition between NGOs, meaning more time was spent on fundraising efforts.

¹⁷ Donor agencies are organizations through which development funds are appropriated. They come in three forms: government aid departments, multilateral agencies and charitable organizations. (SIL International, 1998)

However in a market which was “endogenous” then NGOs would work together to keep encouraging donations and there would be less time spent on fundraising. The increasingly large role that donor aid plays in NGO funding has created a dependency on that aid for the NGOs to operate (Edwards & Hulme, 1996). While fundraising is an important facet of the NGO/donor relationship, it creates a much larger issue, which is probably one of the most difficult for NGOs to handle, that of accountability.

Accountability.

Accountability is a difficult problem for NGOs. Given that they are created to fill a social need, it would make sense that they should be accountable to those whose need they are filling, their clients. However with so much money flowing into the developing world through NGOs from donors, they also have to be mindful about what the donors want. With individual donations this was not so complicated; people chose to give money to organizations that fit their desires, and they trusted NGOs to do what was needed with the money. Now donor agencies and governments are investing such huge sums of money that they need, and want, to see results. This in itself is one of the problems, as success in the developmental projects that are regularly undertaken by NGOs is difficult to measure (Brown & Ashman, 1996). Often donors require quantifiable results, and therefore NGOs need to concern themselves with reaching larger numbers of people even if this makes a project less successful.

The policies that donors want the NGOs to follow can come into conflict with NGO visions. As Bebbington and Farrington (1993) observe there can be a clash of ideologies. The NGO objectives would seem to suggest that enabling and teaching local clients to establish and operate their own projects should be the main goal. However

donors (and governments) often expect NGOs to implement rather than facilitate, leading to legitimacy issues. Legitimacy is important for NGOs. It can be broken down into four criteria: Representativeness¹⁸, distinctive values¹⁹, effectiveness²⁰ and empowerment²¹ (Atack, 1999). NGOs need to gain the trust of their fellow NGOs, the governments in whose country they work and most importantly that of the clients they serve. However NGOs' legitimacy can be threatened by the impact that donors are seen to be having on their policies.

Donor agendas are the primary reason that accountability is a problem. Donors can approach aid as a tool to be used to coerce governments into acting the way they want. The New Policy Agenda (Edwards & Hulme, 1996) is a recent term that has been used to describe donor policies in the developing world, and will be further elaborated on in the next section, but donor policies have been affecting developing countries for a long time. Lockwood (2005) discusses the aid policies and their effect on the developing world; he also makes a mention of donor interference in local governance. Some donors have attempted to make the state operations smaller, such as the policies mentioned in Kenya where the government role in healthcare has been reduced in the face of what is perceived as a better system of church and private healthcare (Hearn, 1998). Initially donors tried this approach in developing countries where governments and their policies were seen as corrupt and inefficient, so donors tried to reduce the size and influence of the government. Now they have realized that this policy is not having the desired effect and instead they are trying to reform poor governance structures (Lockwood, 2005;

¹⁸ NGO standards of transparency, accountability and participation (Atack, 1999).

¹⁹ NGO values are distinct from those of the private or public sector and are based around principles of volunteerism (Atack, 1999).

²⁰ Effectiveness in achieving development goals (Atack, 1999).

²¹ Giving people control of their own lives (Atack, 1999).

Moyo, 2009). Some donors pursue developmental aid out of altruism, but some are also acting in their own self interest, knowing that encouraging economic growth in other parts of the world will be beneficial for their home economies (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002). Another approach is “conditional aid,” which Lockwood (2005) reports has little effect. Governments that are given aid on condition that they change practices make either a small, ineffectual effort or do nothing at all. In the end many of the developing countries are so dependent on conditional aid that the donors cannot refrain from giving the aid even when the conditions are not met.

New Policy Agenda.

The New Policy Agenda was originally identified by Edwards and Hulme (1996), who address the motivations of donor agencies in their aid distribution. They separated donor policies into two major strands: economic and political. Through their economic²² and political policies the donor agencies are seen to be trying to impose Western ideals and social norms on the developing world²³. They seek to promote capitalism by encouraging a market based model and private enterprise through reducing government size and decentralization, policies that have both been promoted throughout Africa by donors (Laird, 2007; Lockwood, 2005). Donors have increasingly seen NGOs (and not developing country governments) as the best actors to achieve these aims. Economically, NGOs are seen as being the best market-based providers of social welfare services at the lowest price and highest quality. Politically, NGOs have been used to promote democratization and counteract state power through their role in civil society (Hearn,

²² Economic policies such as those described in the Washington Consensus (Williamson, 2004).

²³ It should be noted that it is not solely Western governments that seek to influence developing country politics through the use of NGOs as cited in a paper by Ozaki (2005) about the use of NGOs by the Japanese government.

1998). As stated by Anderson and Van Crowder (2000) “Present thinking about governments stresses the needs to decentralize and devolve, to downsize, cut costs and become more efficient, and to liberalize relations with other actors” (p.373). Edwards and Hulme (1996) conclude that this policy provides both threats and opportunities for NGOs: Opportunities such as increased funding which allows them to increase and enhance their projects, but threats such as decreased legitimacy in the eyes of governments and publics of the countries they are operating in.

International Aid.

Foreign donor and government assistance, while usually made in the name of helping developing countries move forwards, can also be one of the factors holding them back (Hertz, 2004; Moyo, 2009). Aid is given as a combination of development aid, emergency assistance, and financial and foreign policy initiatives (Tvedt, 2006). While Tvedt says the aid system should not be perceived as a new Western imperialism, it could be looked at as such, economically (Lwanda, 2006). One example is the actions of China (Bello, 2007). The Western countries have already spread their reach into the developing world and now the Chinese are reaching out too. China has seized on the economic importance of Africa, illustrated by president Hu Jintao making three visits there in his first four years in office (Bello, 2007). China has promised large amounts of economic aid to African countries with little regard for the nature of the regimes they are dealing with. They import uranium from Zimbabwe and oil from Sudan (Bello, 2007), two of the most controversial African governments, and help prevent international action being taken against these regimes through their power in international bodies. China recognizes the importance of getting deeply rooted in these countries as they develop so that once

they are able to realize their potential, the Chinese will be able to rely on their goodwill to secure resource contracts (Kurlantzick, 2007), as they are doing right now. This view is overtly anti-Chinese with other researchers of the opinion that Chinese investments in Africa create greater benefits than Western aid investments (Sautman & Hairong, 2007). Aid tends to be given freely with few strings attached and they also support Africa internationally backing their claims for debt cancellation and an expanded UN Security Council (Tull, 2006).

Western Colonialism?.

The aid channeled through NGOs has been criticized as being a method of keeping the African nations under Western (or Northern) control.²⁴ NGOs have a central role in development and have become “deeply institutionalized within the aid system” (Hearn, 2007, p.1097). According to the Comprador Theory, the Southern “bourgeoisie” are dependent on the international bourgeoisie for their resources and their position. So the Southern bourgeoisie act in the interests of international capitalism against the interests of their fellow citizens (Hearn, 2007). This allows the foreign nations to continue their colonialism through the use of the NGOs. The NGOs are in control of the influx of money into Africa and the African states are heavily dependent on these NGOs as their aid dependency, poverty and indebtedness grows. Therefore the privileged people of the African countries realize that this is where they can put their education and position to use, and make quick and relatively easy money through working for or starting up their own NGOs (Hearn, 2007). According to Comprador theory it is through these methods that the foreign governments can manipulate their former colonies.

²⁴ Some authors use a geographic generalization for the developed/developing country divide, usually referring to the Western countries, and occasionally to the Northern hemisphere, as the source of aid.

A final backdrop to NGO activities in Africa and their relationship with donor organizations is the continent's spiraling debt, which is well publicized thanks to the attention of popular media figures such as Bono. The debt means that while African nations are trying to develop their own societies, they are also paying out large sums of money every year to service this debt, which only exacerbates their problems (Hertz, 2004). Though there have been many public campaigns such as "Make Poverty History", these problems cannot be solved simply by throwing money at them (Lockwood, 2005). It has been seen that while aid can promote economic growth in Africa, giving more aid does not necessarily lead to an increase in growth rates or a reduction in poverty (Busumtwi-Sam, 2002). While there are several government and institutional changes that could surely increase the effects of aid on the developing world, a view espoused by some academics is that the aid is less of a help than a hindrance. Aid maintains Africa's dependence on the goodwill of foreign donors, and fosters other ills such as corruption. It also hinders local economies when local businesses do not have a chance to grow, unable to charge for their goods when those same goods are freely available as aid (Moyo, 2009). There is no easy solution, but even the practitioners do not seem to know which way to go. A good example of this is Oxfam International, who released a paper calling for more aid while simultaneously recognizing the problems with aid and the dangers of aid dependency (Oxfam International, 2010).

Government

The relationship between NGOs and the government of the country that they are active in is probably the most important relationship for the NGOs in terms of their ability to pursue their objectives. To this end cooperation with the government is essential

in establishing the possibility of a project's success, as grassroots involvement was in ensuring the project's continued success. There are several facets to the NGO/government relationship that appear in the literature including government capabilities, NGO/government cooperation, infrastructure development, NGO/government conflict, policy making and regulation of NGOs.

Government Capabilities.

In some cases the reasons that NGOs have such a large role to play not just in development, but also as active participants in a country's infrastructure, is due to the failure of government in its duties to its people (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002). In these cases, the problems within government have led to the extension of NGO roles that originally started as providing services and advocacy for people who were disregarded. Now NGOs are accepted as actors in political, economic and social arenas in the developing world (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002). Governments in developing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, despite in some cases a lot of effort, have shown a lack of ability to create sustained rural development. There has been much central planning and investment in health and education but many of these efforts have fallen through (Bratton, 1989; Moyo, 2009). Governments have been forced to accept that these problems are beyond their abilities and rely on the assistance of NGOs and other organizations such as church hospitals to create meaningful development and rural infrastructure (Bratton, 1989). Privatization is an option that some governments have followed but can often lead to local citizens being priced out of these basic necessities. Bryce (2009) posits that governments can never have the full faith of their people as their decisions will always be unpopular to some segment of the population. However through

active interaction with NGOs this distrust of government can be to some extent reduced, creating a better working atmosphere for the government as well as the NGOs.

NGO/Government Cooperation.

There have been ups and downs in governmental and NGO cooperation wherever NGOs have operated. In most situations, significant and lasting development can only be created through cooperation between the two. NGOs may be better equipped to kick start development because much of the international funding is channeled through them, but governments are the ones with the power to make the development sustainable. One of an NGO's objectives is to empower local populations, which can often cause conflict with the government due to a need for hierarchies which preserve order. What NGOs need to do is find a way to support the government in its developmental efforts, while not compromising the NGO's legitimacy in the eyes of the public (Atack, 1999).

Government involvement is often difficult to control for NGOs. Officially governments in developing countries often espouse partnerships with NGOs as well as private enterprise; however the way they behave in practice is not always in line with their official stance (Batley, 2006). One way of negating the possibility of governmental interference is to draw up contracts beforehand that will stipulate the involvement of both parties, and the expectations of what each will provide. Who is supposed to provide what resources can often be a point of contention in these partnerships and a strong contract can prevent any miscommunications or attempts to not fulfill duties to the project (Batley, 2006). As Batley concludes, expecting governments to participate in development simply because of their public statements is unrealistic. They are often willing to offer public support, but operational support must be secured through strict

contracts which specify each party's obligations. Despite all the potential problems that stem from this partnership, governments and non-state providers can combine to great effect when the partnership is effectively managed.

Infrastructure Development.

Two areas of infrastructure that seem to have been concentrated on by NGO literature are healthcare and water, regarding issues such as HIV/aids and irrigation for agriculture. Diseases are far more prevalent and devastating in the developing world than they are in the developed and water distribution is a large problem, not just because a clean, regular water supply is necessary to a basic standard of living, but also since most of these countries depend heavily upon agriculture and need a regular water supply. These are often issues which developing countries' infrastructures cannot cope with, and therefore NGOs try to provide assistance to the government.

One important issue when it comes to governments in sub-Saharan Africa and healthcare is the involvement of the Christian missionaries. Traditionally religious missions played a significant role in healthcare in the region, especially during colonial times when there was little development and little provision of services for locals (Bratton, 1989). In these times Christian missionary organizations were virtually the only providers of healthcare in rural regions. Even today they are probably the most widely involved type of NGO in the health sector throughout Africa, even though when the missionary churches became indigenized in the mid 1900's they lost a lot of financial support from abroad. In the early 1990s the WHO and World Bank both advocated policies for governments that would reform the health sector, encouraging them to utilize all services available to them including the religious missions and private healthcare

(Green et al., 2002). How to integrate these services into state healthcare is a problem that has to be solved by the respective governments. In Kenya, under a lot of pressure from US donors, the government has taken a backseat in curative healthcare and concentrated on preventative healthcare. They have attempted to integrate both church and private health service providers as the primary curative care providers, as donors think that they are more suited to the task than governments (Hearn, 1998). There have been complications in the integration of the missions into the national health system throughout Africa. These stem from differing objectives, funding issues, and government regulations and standards (Green et al., 2002). What is needed is for a collaborative environment, free of any rivalry and with obligations strictly outlined as alluded to in the last section.

The other important area is water provision, which faces similar problems to healthcare. Private providers are often too expensive, and the government finds itself unable to extend service throughout the country for economic reasons. As with healthcare, it is important for the government and NGOs to create a cohesive partnership (Bebbington & Farrington, 1993). NGO projects can be learned from by government departments as well as being used by the government to spread their reach to previously unreached areas, as has happened in South Africa (Galvin & Habib, 2003) where NGOs and the government have worked together to establish greater water supplies for rural areas. This was a prime example where there were a lot of problems with the relationship, but the work they have performed together has still been mostly successful. The problem of not including government was alluded to in the case study on an agricultural project in Malawi, where the NGO was depending upon grassroots organizations to run the project

after they pulled out, as there had been little or no cooperation with the government (Hill et al., 2007).

NGO/Government Conflict.

The relationship between the two parties is essential to the long term success of any NGO project, but there are many hurdles that have to be overcome such as differing perspectives between both sides, power inequalities, and cultural and value differences (Brown & Ashman, 1996). As evidenced in the health sector there can often be a strong rivalry between the two sides. The government is supposed to be providing the services, and though it is not always able to, government employees are mindful of this (Batley, 2006; Bratton, 1989; Galvin & Habib, 2003). Rivalry between the two sides can result in a poor overall product, and the inability to optimize their meager resources.

Much of the government distrust of NGOs stems from the NGOs' dependence on funds from donors and foreign governments. Governments are wary of foreign interference and this could generate a distrust of NGOs, as in the transfrontier conservation area project in Zimbabwe (Duffy, 2006). This is largely due to the perceived political and economic agendas of the donors and the NGOs they act through, as in South Africa where donors were more concerned with strengthening local government to decentralize power than with the water projects which are supposed to be the reason NGOs are active in those areas (Galvin & Habib, 2003; Tvedt, 2002). Governments are also wary of NGOs as social action programs, as many local NGOs are created in response to government failures. NGOs are generally attempting to empower the people and this is also seen as a threat to government (Bebbington & Farrington, 1993; Fisher, 2003). This fear of local empowerment is only compounded by the NGOs' attempts to

create grassroots organizations which give local communities a mechanism with which to organize themselves. Governments are fearful of these local organizations, knowing that their own power developed from similar roots (Bratton, 1989).

In many African countries there is a pressure on civil society to conform and cooperate, which can hinder NGO operations. In some regions uncooperative NGOs can be shut down or taken over by the state to make sure they conform to the state-led agendas, especially in militant states (Dorman, 2006). However though governments have the ability to disrupt NGO activity, grassroots organizations are often harder to control. Unlike NGOs, grassroots organizations can thrive under repressive as well as non-repressive regimes, and once they gain a foothold they rapidly proliferate (Fisher, 2003). Much of the NGO-government conflict stems from two causes: A desire by NGOs to be included in policy decision making and a desire by the government to exert control over the NGOs.

Policy making.

NGOs often want to be involved in developmental policy decision making; however governments are reluctant to include them because they are wary of the agendas of the NGOs and their donors. Involving NGOs in policy decisions can be fruitful for governments when it generates more trust from the populace in the governments, but this can only happen if the NGOs are seen to be unbiased (Bryce, 2009).

In the developing world there are a lot of policy discussions, both formal and informal, between NGOs and governments (Batley, 2006). Informal discussions can lead to problems as agreements can be changed simply on the whim of a government or due to governmental upheaval. While formal policy dialogue is also subject to governmental

upheaval, there is much more protection afforded to the NGOs through formal policies. There are three limiting factors on formal policy dialogue: First, policy discussions often take place at the beginning of projects and are not ongoing throughout the implementation of the project; second, NGOs do not often get much input into the policy discussions; and third, large NGOs are often the only ones involved (Batley, 2006).

The problems with including NGOs and donors in policy decisions can be seen in two cases in South Africa and Kenya. In South Africa the NGOs and donors are using their projects to further decentralize the government (Galvin & Habib, 2003), while in Kenya they have forced the government to change their healthcare structure (Hearn, 1998). These are two clear examples of why governments are reluctant to include NGOs and donors in policy decisions. Although NGOs possess technical capacities and knowledge and an ability to inspire trust in the government, governments are still reluctant because of questions about the motives and desires of NGOs and donors.

Regulation of NGOs.

As NGOs gain a foothold within developing countries and gain more power, governments seek to establish some control over them through regulation. There are two broad types of regulations: those that enable governments to establish some control over NGOs and their activities, and those that attempt to ensure that NGOs operate more efficiently (Batley, 2006). Batley is referring to rules that are put in place to prevent NGOs engaging in competition with state-owned companies for the first type, and for the latter he is referring to regulations that attempt to increase cohesion between NGOs, as well as between NGOs and government actors.

NGOs are often loathe to succumb to government regulation and governments are often unable to enforce any regulations that they seek to impose on the NGOs (Gugerty, 2008). Governments may lack the capabilities to keep track of NGOs and their operations. Often the only occasion for governments to regulate the NGOs is upon their entry into the country (Batley, 2006). Batley states that regulations on operations such as health and education are usually employed upon entry, but subsequently they are less scrutinized. Registration is usually the only way that governments keep track of these organizations, and the rules can sometimes be used to ensure that NGOs do not present competition to the public services already in place. However, over-regulation can lead to smaller providers ignoring the regulations as they know that the government is unlikely to catch and penalize them (Batley, 2006). Interestingly Batley posits that no regulation is often preferable to poor regulation.

To avoid heavy handed government regulation it is often advisable for NGOs to pursue some attempt at self-regulation; this also adds to their legitimacy in the eyes of the public. Gugerty (2008) describes three methods of self-regulation: National self-regulatory guilds, voluntary “clubs”, and a voluntary code. These methods tend to have differing amounts of NGO participation and effectiveness. The problems with voluntary “clubs” were illustrated by the Council for Social Welfare Services in Malawi, which was established in an attempt to prevent overlap and encourage cooperation between NGOs in the field. Simukonda (1992) reported that there was little actual cooperation between NGOs, and the organization suffered from a lack of funding, two problems synonymous with attempts to self-regulate NGOs.

Summary

There are three main stakeholders with whom NGOs have relationships: Clients, donors, and governments. The clients are the main beneficiaries of NGO action, and as NGOs are formed to fulfill clients' needs, they should be considered an NGO's most important stakeholder. The literature showed that in practice this often was not the case, and that government and donors could be considered just as important, if not more so. The donors are also an extremely important stakeholder for NGOs, primarily for the funding they provide, which is what gives the donors their influence over NGO policies. Here, there was a significant amount of literature to suggest the importance and the controversial nature of this relationship. The third relationship is between the NGOs and the governments of the states they are active in. While clients are the subject of NGOs' stated objectives, and donors are integral to their ability to sustain their operations, governments are the stakeholder that has the most power over how NGOs conduct their operations. Donors can place pressure on NGOs, but other donors can be found; however if NGOs want to conduct operations in a country, they have to ensure that they maintain the goodwill of the government. The key areas identified in this relationship were: Government capabilities, NGO/government cooperation, infrastructural development, NGO/government conflict, policy making, and regulation.

The literature points out that while NGO employees are often technically sound and have experience that can be brought to bear in situations that they will face in these developing countries, their diplomatic skills will also be tested. For NGO managers, knowledge of the different factors affecting their key stakeholder relationships is integral to their ability to perform their work. They need to be mindful of the different

sensibilities of their stakeholders and how their relationship with one stakeholder will affect their relationships with another. Through the study of these relationships researchers enable all the actors in these stakeholder relationships to be better prepared to deal with each other, and to be mindful of the consequences.

While clients arguably should be the most important stakeholder for NGOs, there is little attention paid to them in the literature outside of case studies and grassroots organizational research. This may be due to the relatively low power of this group as opposed to the power of donors and governments. There was a differentiation in some of the literature between Northern and Southern NGOs, but there seemed to be little research on the difference between international and local NGOs, in terms of capabilities and power in the different stakeholder relationships. Finally, while there was some mention of the countries and ideological backgrounds from which the donors come, there was very little attention given to how the different ideologies of the government could affect the key stakeholder relationships.

Research Question

The subject that is being researched is the relationship between NGOs and the government of Malawi.

This is an important area to study, as greater understanding of the relationship can help both NGOs and governments to create structures and processes that can increase cooperation between the two entities. There has been a great deal of money thrown at development in Africa through NGOs, but without a good working partnership between these two entities that money is wasted. It is a partnership whose importance has been recognized by not only the participants, but also by the donors (Bräutigam & Segarra, 2007). While there is potential for problems between the two, as shown in the literature, it is important that they work together for the betterment of the country. Through better understanding their relationship and seeing how theory meets the practical experiences, practitioners in Malawi can foster an improved working relationship between these two partners in development. This can lead to better coordination between the two parties and therefore a more effective use of all the resources being pushed into the country.

There is a growing appreciation for the role of qualitative studies amongst international business scholars (Søderberg, 2006). This study takes a little used approach in the area of NGO research, letting the narratives speak for themselves through the methodology of narrative inquiry. Additionally many of the studies are conducted from one of two distinct points of views. There are on the one side “Western” perspectives which seek to impose Western theories and ideas on African settings (Zoogah, 2008). The other perspective tends to be that of African or nationalist scholars or commentators who are often defensive of their governments and are unhappy with foreign influence.

This often can typify the relationship between large Western NGOs and the African governments with which they interact. This study will take the middle ground (facilitated through the author's background as a Malawian resident) by considering Western theories, while examining on the ground accounts of NGOs working in Malawi and taking into account local sensibilities, in an effort to understand the intricacies of the NGO/government relationship in Malawi. The study will be conducted from the NGO's point of view, and a variety of different NGOs will be looked at to see whether the same relationship with government is had by all.

There were several reasons why Malawi was chosen as the site of this study. For one, there is the author's personal knowledge that enables contacts to be made in the NGO sector. There are also many NGOs situated in Malawi, which enables a diverse sampling of NGOs which play a significant role in the development and infrastructure of the country. Another reason is that Malawi has a relatively unique political situation in comparison to many third world governments. It is run as a multi-party democracy that has avoided military conflict since achieving its independence in 1984. This political situation makes it one of a handful of Sub-Saharan countries that have been stable since independence. The unique situation that is found in Malawi, with a stable government structure and a large number of NGOs, makes it an intriguing opportunity for a study that could provide beneficial results for all the parties involved.

Methodology

As the goal of this thesis was to search for a greater understanding of the NGO/government relationship in Malawi it was felt that the best method to do this was to create a narrative tapestry through personal interviews with NGO practitioners. Boje (2001) and Brown (2006) described how the multiple narratives which the participant authors provide create a collective identity that is complex, fragmented, non-linear and heterogeneous in nature. They were discussing organizational narratives, but for the purpose of this research the “collective story” (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008, p. 213) constructed by NGO employees creates a picture of the environment existing in Malawi for NGOs. As mentioned these narratives will be heterogeneous, which in itself is the beauty of qualitative research. It does not attempt to bring together all the opinions of the participants and say therefore this is the overwhelming belief; to the contrary it creates a wide and varied picture of the phenomenon being studied which more accurately captures the attitudes of those involved. While both qualitative and quantitative methods have different uses and benefits, narrative analysis provides an additional way to view the phenomenon (Brown, 2006). Narrative analysis was chosen as this method can give a great depth of understanding from the subject’s point of view (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). It is useful in both encouraging participation by subjects wanting to share their stories, as well as providing direct experiences from practitioners that could be useful in increasing the understanding of other practitioners in the area. This method appreciates the role that narratives play in communication, giving the opportunity for greater interpretation, understanding and sharing of knowledge. Stories give a greater depth of

knowledge that allows the reader to do some interpretation themselves, while also being more memorable (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

An inductive theme analysis (Boje, 2001) was conducted for the literature review providing the most common viewpoints regarding this area of study. This formed the basis for the semi-structured interviews, and was later used as the basis for the analysis of the narratives. Semi-structured interviews are interviews that are not simply question and answer, but allow the interview subject to lead the interview and allow follow up questions from the interviewer to further develop the interviewee's ideas. However they also provide some structure to the interview which was useful in this case, as NGO/government relationship could be taken to mean anything. Providing some guidance in terms of what aspects of the relationship were being observed, enabled the interviewees to focus their thoughts and stories and understand what the study was about.

There are many different ways of analyzing narratives, this was an analysis of meaning of the narratives (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). This paper wanted to investigate participants' experiences rather than how they constructed those experiences²⁵ or how they conveyed those ideas²⁶. The analysis was focused on the themes and ideas contained within their narratives; this forms an open, many-voiced web of stories. It is possible for authors of qualitative studies to inject themselves into their analyses. It was the concerted effort of this author not to do so, to try and provide a simple report of the ideas that were conveyed by the interviewees.

It was decided to concentrate only on the NGO side of the relationship and not interview government officials for a variety of reasons. There are language problems

²⁵ Analysis of structure (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

²⁶ Analysis of performance (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008).

such as the difficulty of obtaining a translator or ensuring that there is a complete understanding of the questions posed by the interviewer, though this problem is not as significant due to Malawi having been colonized by the British. English is widespread throughout the country, especially with those who go on to further education. There might also be the danger of making NGO respondents wary of their responses if they feel that there could be government scrutiny of what they say. Government has been known to throw out foreign nationals for speaking negatively about the government, most recently the British ambassador in 2011. In a desire to ensure that there was no scrutiny of possible interviewees used for this study, and therefore preserve anonymity, government employees were not questioned. Lastly, there is a desire to concentrate on the NGO side of the relationship where this research could conceivably spark some introspection and change²⁷.

The interview subjects came from a variety of NGOs which were categorized according to the Global Development Research Center NGO categories²⁸ as well as the World Bank categories²⁹. The subjects were of a wide age range, although specific ages were not sought. The subjects were a mixture of both males and females and from a variety of countries in Africa, Europe and North America (though all spoke English well). A brief summary of the participants is included in Table 2 on pg. 42.

²⁷ Some of the interviewees had connections with government through consultancy roles, sometimes appearing to be more in line with the government line than NGOs, this also provided added balance against the NGO-centric perspective.

²⁸ Charitable, service, participatory and empowering (defined in Table 1, pg. 2)

²⁹ Advocacy and operational (defined on pg. 1)

Table 2: Participant Summary

Nationality	Operational/ Advocacy	Service/ Participatory/ Empowering/ Charitable	Time in Malawi
British	95% operational	Mainly service, but incorporates all types.	18 years
British	Operational	Service, participatory and empowering	14 years
British	Operational	Charitable Participatory	7 years
European*	Operational	Participatory	10 years
German	Advocacy	Service and empowering	5 years
Malawian	Hybrid**	Mainly empowering, but incorporates all types	3 years
Sri Lankan	Operational	Charitable	3/4 years
Zimbabwean	Operational	Participatory	2 years

* Respondent did not specify a country

** Hybrid refers to a combination of operational and advocacy as mentioned on page 15

Human Subjects approval from the University of Lethbridge had been received prior to contact with subjects being established. This ensured the safety of the interviewees and controls in place to protect their anonymity conformed to the regulations of the university. The research subjects were found through personal contacts; it was not intended that any of them would be personally known to the researcher, though a few were able to draw personal connections. Convenience snowball sampling was used as approaching subjects through personal contacts increases their faith in the process that will be used, as well as creating a more open environment for them to air their views

without being worried about how the data will be handled³⁰. This method of approaching subjects through personal contacts is acceptable and widely used in qualitative research, where the focus is on the depth of information gained rather than making a statistical generalization (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). The majority of subjects were approached through personal contacts, with some contacts being suggested by others who had been approached to be interviewed. The Malawian phone book was used for verifying that contacts obtained worked for a certified NGO³¹. All subjects had to be presently employed or previously employed by an NGO in Malawi. The intention was to conduct eight to twelve interviews. Due to the difficulties of obtaining research participants in another country interviews were eventually conducted with eight subjects³², despite the best efforts of several contacts in Malawi. This was considered a sufficient number of interviews as there is a significant depth of understanding gained from each individual interview when using the narrative analysis methodology as illustrated by other studies using this methodology with few participants (Adib & Guerrier, 2003; Hopkinson, 2003; Söderberg, 2006). The interviewees could be considered representative of the larger NGOs based in Malawi, although there was a bias towards international NGOs³³. As suggested by one interviewee there is not a strong civil society in Malawi, which leads to

³⁰ It is worth noting that one interview subject who was reached through another interview subject, seemed less talkative and more careful about his answers, indicating the importance of trust and personal connection in this method.

³¹ This was considered a method of clarification that would include all NGOs that have significant operations in Malawi. The CONGOMA list referred to on pg. 9, though more appropriate, was not used as CONGOMA's website was down for a significant amount of time during the writing of this thesis, including while the interviewee's organizations were being corroborated. Also members on that list have to be "paid up" which means organizations that did not pay their dues would not be included, further eliminating other NGOs from the list.

³² "Cold calling" NGOs was not considered a suitable method for approaching subjects as with the methodology in place a trusting, open atmosphere of conversation was needed, which might not have been achievable with interview subjects who had no knowledge of the individual collecting the information.

³³ Interviewees indicated that there was no difference in attitude from government towards large NGOs versus small NGOs. Many, including those from "small" NGOs, indicated that all government cared about was the quality of work put out.

a smaller assortment of local NGOs. Opportunities for further education can be limited due to financial restrictions, and the opportunity for funding is not always there as much of the funding for NGOs comes from outside the country. All these factors combine to create an environment difficult for local NGOs to prosper in. This is why the majority of interviews were with larger, international NGOs. The NGOs comprised a range of sectors with the majority being in healthcare and agriculture.

Once the subjects were contacted they were sent the interview package through e-mail as that was the most reliable way to ensure that the packages were received. The interview packages consisted of the letter of invitation, letter of consent and interview protocol (see appendices 1, 2 and 3, respectively). The letter of invitation gave a broad outline of the study and a brief description of the interview process. The letter of consent informed the subjects of their rights as participants such as the right to withdraw, as well as explaining the processes in place to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Finally, the interview protocol gave a brief outline of the interview to give the participants an idea of the type of questions they would receive and also so that they had time to think about their answers. Subjects were asked to return the signed letter of consent as an e-mail attachment if they wished to participate or if they were unable to do so, to indicate their acceptance through an e-mail³⁴.

When the interview was planned, every effort was made to ensure that the questions were unbiased. The interviewer had conducted interviews of a similar nature during a research methods class in the Masters of Science (Management) program, and therefore had prior experience in the methodology. The interviewer experienced both

³⁴ Several subjects did not reply with consent indicated; however, each participant's consent was confirmed and recorded before each interview.

good and bad interviews in the class which helped to prepare him for situations that could arise. The interviewer also had experience dealing with technical problems during the previous study, which was thought to be extremely likely during this research. These fears turned out to be justified, though all interviews were successfully completed through persistence and the goodwill of the interviewees who accepted the difficulties of conducting phone interviews with Malawi.

An interview protocol had been constructed which encompassed the broad areas that the researcher wanted to enquire about. The protocol was broken up into three sections and the approximate time that should be spent on each section was noted to ensure that the interviews would concentrate on the main areas of the study and that the subjects would not be required for longer than an hour. The first section (background) was kept to approximately 10 minutes as the objective was to understand the background of the subject, and to gain an understanding of their experiences. There were also some cultural identification questions included. The second section (government interaction) lasted approximately 30 minutes during which the subject was asked to recount stories of government interaction, which would be delved into more deeply through probing questions by the interviewer. The last section (general comments) lasted approximately 20 minutes. This section was afforded a significant portion of the interview to ensure that the subjects were able to convey their thoughts on the government of Malawi's administration of NGOs, the work of NGOs in Malawi and any final thoughts they had on the NGO/government relationship in Malawi. While the government interaction section would be used for the majority of the analysis and supporting quotes, the final section sought to ensure that the opinions and thoughts of the subject were fully understood,

minimizing the risk that any narratives could be misinterpreted by the researcher. When finished the interviews ranged from 42 minutes to 1 hour and 14 minutes though the time committed by the interview subjects was typically longer than the interview time, as due to technical issues the interviews were sometimes cut off in the middle or started later than arranged. While specific areas of interest were targeted by the interviewer, the interview was semi structured so that it was the interviewee's stories that came through. Interviewees varied, with some having many stories ready to tell while others depended more upon the interviewer to prompt them with questions.

Interviews were conducted using "Skype", calling from Edmonton, Canada to local numbers in Malawi. Interviews were scheduled at a time and place convenient for the subjects and were intended to last approximately one hour. At the beginning of each interview it was confirmed that the subjects had read and understood the letter of consent, and agreed to participate. Interviews were recorded both on the interviewer's laptop as well as on a digital voice recorder to ensure that there were no recording accidents (as happened on one occasion when the backup recording proved invaluable). The quality of playback of both recorders was tested prior to the interviews; however, though the recorders were suitable the quality of the phone lines sometimes made deciphering the conversation difficult. Interviews were stored on the researcher's laptop until they were sent for transcription. The transcription was conducted through University of Lethbridge sourced transcriptionists, who did a good job with the transcripts as the quality of the recordings did not make the process easy. This led to a couple of occasions when minor parts of the interview were lost as neither interviewer nor transcriptionist could decipher the recording and the interviewee could not remember what was said. All subjects were

e-mailed their transcript upon transcription to ensure that the transcript accurately portrayed their thoughts. On some occasions the interviewee clarified what they wanted to say and this was then edited into the transcript using the interviewee's words. No distinction was made in the final transcripts between the edited text and the original because these transcripts were sent to interviewees so they could convey exactly what they meant to say. Indicating what had been changed would have been contradictory to the idea of giving them final approval of what they wanted to convey. Once the transcripts were done all data was kept at the University of Lethbridge campus in Edmonton (upon completion of the project all data that had been collected was sent down to be stored at the University of Lethbridge campus in Lethbridge). The only persons with access to the recordings were the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and the transcriber. The only persons with access to the transcripts were the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and the subject.

Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis and the main bulk of the analysis was performed on the second and third sections of the interview. First the researcher went through the interview transcripts making notes regarding ideas that interviewees were conveying and noting when ideas were in relation to themes that had appeared in the literature review as well as ideas that had not been mentioned in the literature at all. Then looking for correlations in stories and similar ideas that appeared in different interviews, the researcher coded the transcripts using these "themes". All notes and ideas were passed on to the supervisor who provided further insight to the proceedings as well as corroborating or asking for clarification of the researcher's findings. Contradictory statements found in the transcripts were included in the analysis and unique or

“interesting” observations were also noted. The researcher observed the answers in conjunction with the cultural identifiers to see if there was any correlation.

Thematic analysis was used as it provided a good method for bringing together the data in a coherent and concise way. Each individual interview had significant information, which for a more detailed and lengthy study could have provided masses of data, but for a study of this scope and length would have been too vast. Another benefit of thematic analysis is that the narrative methodology depends on the subjective view of those interviewed. Looking only at collective thoughts rather than individual ideas limited the effects of personal bias of interviewees.

As indicated previously the interview protocol was based on the analysis of the literature on NGO/government relations. The stories obtained from the interviewees were then compared with the literature to establish a refined view of this relationship in Malawi.

Analysis

As mentioned previously (in the methods section) an inductive theme analysis of the literature review was used to provide the main themes for the semi structured interviews. This also provided the basis for the analysis of the interviews as many of the interviewees used these as prompts of areas to discuss. These themes were:

- Funding source for NGO and its impact on the NGO/government relationship
- Government administrative capacity in terms of managing the NGO sector
- The regulatory framework in place for the NGO sector
- Turnover in terms of governments and personnel within the government and NGOs
- Government support for NGO operations and vice versa
- General interviewee opinions on NGOs activities in Malawi

The last theme (opinions of NGOs) was largely drawn towards the end of interviews when interviewees were asked for their personal opinions on NGO activities in Malawi.

While this wasn't a theme drawn from the literature, it was felt this was an important question that allowed interviewees to air their feelings without being subject to any specific question such as how the operations were financed or regulated. This enabled the author to discover areas that might not have otherwise been explored through the interview. Additionally two prominent subthemes emerged from the interviews:

- The role of religious organizations³⁵ in the NGO sector and Malawian infrastructure
- The importance of personal relationships in Malawi

While these eight themes will form the basis for the analysis, it is important to point out a theme considered important in the literature, but which was given little weight by the interviewees. Interference by foreign organizations in local government activities and policy making was not a significant issue; NGOs were sometimes involved but at the behest of government, not due to foreign pressures.

Funding source

Funding from Malawian Government.

To the question of whether any funding was provided by the Malawian government to their organizations, all the subjects answered no. However as mentioned by a couple of respondents there is tax relief:

The governments in almost all the places that we work in provide us with tax relief. So if we import a vehicle, or computers etc., for [our] use, we do not pay tax, so this is a contribution from the government. (interviewee 1)

This being said the tax relief issue is under review:

In fact it's [government of Malawi] been trying to remove all tax exemptions, I think for two reasons. One is that it increases its revenue collection. If it can tax, if it can charge duty on assets bought by NGOs, if it can charge VAT on services procured from NGOs, then their tax revenue goes up...The other reason of course is that by providing exemptions... it allows other people to sneak through them. (interviewee 4)

None of the organizations had obtained any funding from the Malawian government and all were quick to answer no. Hardly any thought to mention tax relief as a source of government "funding". In one instance interviewee 8 mentioned his organization being

³⁵ Religious organizations refers to any religious bodies with influence in Malawi; the majority of the interviewees seemed to take this to mean the Catholic church or other Christian denominations which have a significant presence in Malawi.

given an office on government premises, which again could be considered a source of government funding.

One important fact to point out in the seemingly small amount of Malawian financing to NGOs is that of independence:

... though sometimes we feel it would be nice to have some sort of [Malawian government funding]. But we've also always thought we should be independent...you know whoever pays the piper, can to some extent call the tune. So particularly an advocacy organization, it would be quite compromising to have government funding. (interviewee 4)

This is something that it is important to establish. Despite what seems like no financial support from the local government, were there funding available many organizations might deem it unwise to accept it. As mentioned in the literature and by interviewee 3, funding often comes with strings attached. And as pointed out by interviewee 4 it would be difficult for an organization to take funding from a government when they have an advocacy program that could come into conflict with the government; it would have the potential to undermine their advocacy efforts or could have an impact on their reputation with those they are trying to advocate for. This issue of independence is very important to NGOs:

...when you have private donations, that gives you a certain flexibility, and you can basically say to somebody who's trying to influence your organization, 'go away, leave me alone, I don't need your resources, I have my own.' (interviewee 3)

Government Resentment?.

One topic that came out of the literature was the possibility of government resentment that money for development was given to NGOs rather than being passed through state coffers. From the interviewees there was a mixed response to this idea:

Government already had resentment, not in all places but in central places, they had resentment because they think that the NGOs are getting money from the donors that should be channeled through them. (interviewee 1)

No, it's not like that... if the government is having a problem with a donor, they have to sit down and discuss that particular issue, not to affect development. (interviewee 6)

Though the government may want the money being channeled through them, some interviewees felt that the government just did not have the capacity to manage the funds:

They often complained that the money should come to them, but they often don't have the capacity to manage it...I remember the funds that came from [a donor] were about 10% of my portfolio, but about 40% of my workload...it was just a real hassle managing the money. (interviewee 3)

It was pointed out that one reason the funding source can affect relationships with government is not due to the fact that the money is being channeled directly through NGOs, but rather because of the conditions under which that money is given:

Often there are strings attached. You don't get the funds for nothing, you have to do certain things, and that's the same for most donors. (interviewee 3)

Some interviewees suggested that the government was fine with the way the money came in, understanding that it had to be channeled through NGOs, and were satisfied as long as they got a piece of it:

...the government kind of accepted that, they would welcome the opportunity to take part in the money through giving them allowances for events that we might involve them in, (interviewee 2)

If you're working with a government ministry, so that resource is being fired into the ministry, I think you can often get away with it. And then you have these...things called SWAps, (interview 3)

SWAp (Sector-Wide Approach).

The SWAp is an important aid model that to the knowledge of the interviewees had been implemented in the health sector and was beginning to be used in the agriculture sector too:

...the stakeholders including donors, international NGOs, local NGOs, government get together and coordinate and develop a single program. Many of the donors are actually giving their money to government and pooling their money with government in the

sector...[donor organizations] are all pooling resources with government resources and it's all being spent through government budget and government systems. They're really closely working with government. Where all the money is through government...It's a team effort, joint accountability...governments are leading, but then there are joint meetings with donors, of which the donors have the opportunity to influence the way things are done. (interviewee 2)

As mentioned earlier by interviewee 3, government is easier to deal with if the money is passed through their systems. There are both good and bad sides to this:

...[SWAps] given the Ministry of Health certainly, more confidence that they are steering the ship, rather than the donors steering the ship. (interviewee 5)

...financial accounting and transparency can often be pretty poor, (interviewee 2)

donors are quite wary of even SWAps, because it's putting their money directly basically into the treasury if you like and they're well aware of that of course, and we're all well aware that that opens it up to, not necessarily to corruption and fraud...but to the fact that things passed don't get implemented. And this has been very evident with [a donor for aid projects]. Malawi has an award every year from [the donor]. They put in a proposal for funding, etc., etc. And I can remember several years ago... the nutrition sector had just not spent a huge amount of the money that had been allocated for nutrition, mostly due to lack of human resources, but not totally. And [the donor], you know they were refusing to give any more money for nutrition because the last year's lot hadn't been used. (interviewee 5)

The SWAp is an important aid approach because it not only gives the government confidence in their control of the project, it also should lead to a more coordinated effort as the money is being managed by one source rather than a multitude of organizations getting their own funding and doing whatever they want with it. However as pointed out there are problems that donors have with giving the ministries control of the money: potential financial accounting irregularities, transparency and their capacity to manage said money.

Government Administrative Capacity

NGO Management.

One of the interesting points to come out of the literature was that of government capacity. Through the New Policy Agenda, governments in the

developing world had been coerced into downsizing and devolution processes. The impact of these processes were borne out by the interviewees who talked about the strength of local government procedures in Malawi as well as the inability of government to handle all the demands placed upon them:

Within the [a Ministry in the Malawi government] there are probably about 15 different donors, and about 50 or more international NGOs that are doing activities in the health centre and every single one of those may call on senior members of staff to come along for meetings, workshops and so on, and they draw on those senior people's time. (interviewee 2)

The above example is just one of the several interviewees who spoke of the lack of ability of government to deal with all the draws there are on their time. This was not solely attributed to the government, but also to NGOs who are disempowering the government by "throwing their money around" (interviewee 2). A couple of interviewees spoke of the need for a body through which all NGO government queries could be directed, which seemingly should be the role of CONGOMA³⁶, but as will be discussed later this has not happened.

Regulatory.

Regulation will be discussed in greater depth later; however in terms of government capacity there are also problems here. As mentioned previously CONGOMA, which should be playing a role in NGO regulation, is struggling to find its purpose (interviewee 8).

...the government is understaffed, many of the technical positions are vacant... the government struggles really to even keep up with its own, on top of its own work, let alone to regulate the NGOs. (interviewee 4)

that took a long time but we kind of got on with our programs anyway before that was fully registered. (interviewee 2)

³⁶ CONGOMA is the Council for Non-Governmental Organisations in Malawi designated as the coordinating body for all non-governmental organisations in Malawi. It is a membership organisation with the goal of ensuring effective coordination and collaboration of all the NGOs and other developmental partners including government. (CONGOMA, 2010 b)

Another point made was that the bureaucracy of the government could often make processes quite slow, leading to NGOs just “getting on with it”, without everything being in place.

Malawian and...southern Africans are very bureaucratic. (interviewee 1)

Not only is there limited capacity, but also very long bureaucratic processes as illustrated by several stories by interviewee 4 about the interviewee’s organization attempting to obtain tax-exempt status, clearing goods at customs and obtaining land for projects. These all come together to create a difficult environment for organizations that are used to working under tight time constraints.

As pointed out in the previous section too, even though at times government may complain about the way funding is directed through NGOs, they don’t have the capacity to manage all the reporting that comes along with this. When the funding was given to government, as related by interviewee 5, there were occasions where they hadn’t even utilized their allocation and were subsequently denied funding the next year.

Regulatory Framework

Though the bureaucracy can at times be slow moving and seem laborious, the framework that was described as being in place by the interviewees made the system for regulating NGOs seem well structured. As pointed out by a couple of interviewees, although the whole system sounds very structured, it does not always work out that way.

Local Government.

The local framework sounds very well organized, ensuring that NGOs do their jobs, where they are required:

There is a very very strict protocol when you go and work in any rural area. You have to meet the man in charge from the Government and get his blessing, before you can go to visit any of their projects... there is a protocol. You have to go. (interviewee 1)

I also go to the field, to monitor our projects, I have to pass through the [District Commissioner]'s office, and if he or she is available, we can go together, if not I can just pass by to give a briefing... for you to operate in a district, you need to have a district meeting where you are going to share information about your project... when we are doing monitoring or implementation, at the village level we have got different government facilities there, you have to be working with them. (interviewee 6)

The last statement by interviewee 6 brings to light the importance of working closely with the local government employees. While it can be time consuming it is also very helpful:

I: Say you're running a project in an area, right? Does the government ever come and say 'we want you to run this a different way'?

R: No. That won't happen because they would have participated in the proposal development, and when you receive money you have to conduct a meeting where we call everyone in that district, so we call a meeting in areas where you would be working in. (interviewee 6)

I think it makes it very easy to implement a project, that sort of arrangement...It is very easy to create, a very conducive environment for proper implementation of programs. (interviewee 6)

Those visits were useful because once you develop relationships, it expedites your work, it eases your work because they help you. (interviewee 1)

These visits with local officials proved useful to NGO employees who built relationships with these people. Some of these officials were genuinely interested in their work and could aid NGO operations by providing staff with technical expertise or other resources. Also they are generally from the region and therefore knew the area and the people (interviewee 1).

R: ...in each district, there's going to be a district action plan. So when you are gathering information, you must keep to the district action plan...

I: So this district action plan, who comes up with it?

R: It is local. You know the government they've got... these decentralisation policies. (interviewee 6)

There is a structured development plan for each district that has been arrived at by senior local officials. The reporting to local officials when visiting projects, and their

involvement in the project proposal stage, ensures that any projects are following this plan, so that the projects are locally relevant.

Central Government.

When commencing operations as an NGO in Malawi, organizations have to get registered as an NGO with the government, and subsequently are supposed to register as an NGO with CONGOMA (the regulatory board). The process that has to be undertaken seemed to have some diverse explanations leading to the conclusion that it may not be a particularly well structured process. This conclusion is supported by the earlier quote from interviewee 2 stating that the processes were slow and NGOs often just got on with their work. Several interviewees mentioned working closely with Ministries and having to set up Memoranda of Understanding's (MOU's) with these Ministries or indeed that some organizations set up their own MOU's with government (interviewee 4).

On the whole process itself:

[Government] set up this law...and eventually once you have done it, you begin to wonder well what was the value of doing that? So it's not brilliant but it's legislation...what would be very good is government was taking advantage of all this information about who was registering and then demanding to know exactly what each of those registering organization is doing from time to time. (interviewee 2)

But, that process of registration is a little bit, it's somewhat more recent. It's only been out for the last few years, and it doesn't really give you any benefits. I think it was brought in as a way to simply keep track of, and control over perhaps the NGOs which were proliferating here. (interviewee 4)

So it seems that government put in the registration procedures with a desire to keep tabs on NGO operations, but perhaps has not got the system fully organized yet. That being said there was an example of a database being kept by the Ministry of Agriculture (interviewee 5) which perhaps indicates how this information being gathered could be put to use.

Some of the interviewees seemed to consider it the job of the coordinating Ministry to keep an eye on the NGO's activities. Despite the bureaucracy and lethargy that sometimes comes with government projects, interviewees recognized the need for oversight:

...the government has to ensure that there is structured oversight of NGO activities. This ensures that donor dollars are properly spent for planned activities, and that there is development of the country. This also makes sure that NGOs are held accountable. The problem is when government oversight is not properly structured and open to interpretation, In such instances, it becomes an impediment. (interviewee 1)

I wouldn't say that you're really overseen by government officials. No, you work really hand-in-hand with them, and most of the monitoring and evaluation of a program will probably be initiated by the NGO. (interviewee 5)

As identified by interviewee 1, government should be conducting some oversight of NGO operations. Some of the interviewees stated that their meetings with government officials were when they reported on their activities, but there were few mentions of government actively checking on NGOs and their activities. As stated before however, this is partly related to government capacities:

Probably they should have been [monitoring], but they really didn't have the capacity to do that (interviewee 2)

It is important that some monitoring of NGOs is in place however:

NGOs quite like Malawi, and donors quite like Malawi. It tends to adopt projects on a fairly pro-forma basis; ie. the NGO comes with a project, and then, the approval is basically pretty easy to get, you just start. Not many projects are stopped by the government because it doesn't like them... So as a result you get NGOs coming in with all sorts of ideas, and they all do their projects, and to some extent confuse people on the ground. (interviewee 4)

With such an influx of NGOs, it is important that the government monitors them, not just to ensure the quality of their work, but also so that the work of these NGOs can be coordinated:

If you can imagine just taking the area of agriculture, [interviewee's NGO] could be working in one area, promoting certain practices; then you have [another NGO] arrive in the same area which is promoting something else different, and then [a third NGO] arrives and promotes something – it's our own strategy. (interviewee 4)

If the government goes in and has an idea of what everyone is doing, it can ensure that they all are working cohesively and according to the strategies that the government has laid out for long term development.

Lastly it is important to ensure that any legislation regarding NGOs is up to date and relevant for the present environment in the country:

...we actually need to work to make sure that [the regulations are] up to date. And sometimes because of a lot of areas of focus as a government, it may not update the framework in a valid time...most of the frameworks were devised maybe a long time ago, maybe 20 years, 30 years ago. The environment in which organizations are operating has changed over the years... it needs to be updated to ensure that it remains present with the current realities. (interviewee 8)

CONGOMA.

CONGOMA is the board that theoretically should be addressing the needs of NGOs. CONGOMA is supposed to advocate for the needs of NGOs as well as regulating the NGOs. However, CONGOMA has had to deal with capacity problems and staff turnover which has all contributed to it “never really finding its purpose” (interviewee 4).

One of the problems for CONGOMA is that:

...the international NGOs are so dominant here they tend to ignore [CONGOMA], it's easy to go direct to the people concerned rather than to go through a local NGO itself, which CONGOMA is, which is struggling for funds from the same donors.

As stated when discussing government's capacity problems, NGOs are very powerful especially with the amount of money they control, so small local NGO bodies such as CONGOMA can be financed by the same NGOs who completely circumvent it when they need anything. Not all NGOs will do so, as stated by interviewee 6, whose organization obviously went through the correct procedures:

...if there is an issue that you'd want to put up close to the government as NGOs, it has to go via [CONGOMA]. (interviewee 6)

One of the problems that has affected the vision of CONGOMA is turnover, which is also a problem that affects government, as well as NGOs.

Turnover

The subject of turnover was a theme that emerged through the interviews as an important aspect in the relationship between NGOs and government. There was no specific timeframe suggested for what constituted too short a stay in a position; rather this idea of leaving a job earlier than might otherwise have been the case came from the interviewees' answers.

Personnel.

There is high turnover among very qualified staff. Those with a long-term vision, the expectation of free scholarships or those with political ambitions stay in government. (interviewee 1)

Turnover of government personnel is a significant issue in Malawi. Many people in the civil service will choose to stick with government, especially if they have long term political ambitions or a desire to obtain government funding for studying, but many others are drawn away from government which can be very damaging, in terms of the costs of training and the relationships that had been built.

I'm working with one Ministry or another, if someone's moving to another Ministry, then I have to build new relationships with whoever is now my counterpart. (interviewee 2)

The building of relationships is critical to NGO activity in Malawi, as will be highlighted later. Ministerial turnover is something which can have a significant impact on this ability to build relationships.

I find it very frustrating that the human resources department in government would not promote someone without moving them from one location to another. So if you got someone who is doing particularly well in one location, you're going to lose them. (interviewee 2)

...certainly after the last Presidential election, you know different people were appointed to different Ministries and things; I mean sometimes that can be a good thing, because you might have somebody who's not particularly effective, and they get shuffled out and somebody who's better comes in. Or it may work the other, it may work the other way around... Very often the person doesn't seem to have any particular qualification, (interviewee 5)

...we've just lost a guy in the Ministry of Agriculture, he's moved to the Department of Energy...So, we've lost him. He has a lot of in-house, institutional knowledge, and now he's on power. (interviewee 3)

As illustrated the turnover can have both positive and negative consequences.

Sometimes there are people who are doing more harm than good, so getting moved on makes everything work better; on the other hand the turnover can also happen when people are doing very well at their jobs and are moved somewhere else. There is undoubtedly functional turnover in any government, but it can make it very difficult for these relationships to be formed. Another reason for turnover of government employees is their being "poached" by NGOs, donors, or indeed the private sector:

NGOs and donors would poach from government. So the good people in government who are barely motivated to stay there because the pay isn't particularly good, would sometimes be poached to join international organizations where the pay is much better. (interviewee 2)

...private agencies and donors like [two donors] they would always try to poach or try to attract competent government employees. (interviewee 1)

Of course this isn't to say that all staff can be tempted away by money, or solely hang on because of scholarship desires. Some people stay because they really believe in what they are doing:

But in general those who really had a mission remained with their missions. (interviewee 1)

...you can work with some government people who are absolutely outstanding. They're excellent, they're visionary, they're good managers, but they're few and far between. They're often underpaid, under-supported, and they have to be very dedicated. (interviewee 3)

This turnover is not solely limited to the government, but includes the NGOs, donors and the regulatory body, CONGOMA.

...many of the country directors of international NGOs don't have enough basic understanding of what makes that particular country tick, and often sadly they're on a personal career path. That means that they are going to be moving out of the country they've just moved into three or four years tops. (interviewee 2)

...the NGO community as a whole, CONGOMA staff-changes and so-on, had completely forgotten why the NGO law was going through it in the first place, and didn't lobby for the tax changes and so on. (interviewee 4)

This illustrates two of the problems that can result from the constant turnover in the aid driven sector of NGO activity in Malawi. The turnover can have effects on the long term plans and visions of agencies, as evidenced by the NGOs and CONGOMA forgetting about what they were trying to get out of the process.

Perhaps even more problematic is understanding a country and the way it works:

I mean I have been here for 9 years and I feel I am still learning....generally by the time you are ready to leave you are just beginning to get an insight into what it really takes to be successful. (interviewee 2)

Policies.

When interviewees were asked whether they had experienced policy changes towards NGOs during their time in Malawi, the majority said there was nothing noticeable.

I: Did you find that there was any change in...the way that you had to deal with Government.

R: You know when the Government changes the top leadership changes but the bureaucrats remain the same. (interviewee 1)

I think it's like any civil service in any country, where the civil service actually runs the Ministries, and it's just the...top political appointees that move around (interviewee 5)

The bureaucracy for the most part remains the same, so there is not much of a changing in attitudes towards NGOs or in the daily interactions that NGOs have with employees in Ministries. One interviewee, though, spoke of the government recognizing the increasing importance of the NGO sector:

...a lot when it comes to policy changes hasn't been done over the years. However, recently the current government we've seen, the government is taking a stand of establishing a special office to actually support NGOs and the President having a special assistant to NGOs. That probably indicates that the government ...recognizes that the NGO sector is also another important arm... (interviewee 8)

Another interviewee talked about the change of government policy in general after the previous government:

...[previously] policy in government followed political authority. In other words decisions were made primarily to benefit people rather than in the interest of the country...That's changed since, after the Mutharika administration is now far more focused on decisions for the benefit of the country and less so for the interest of individuals. (interviewee 2)

And another spoke of the poor definition of policies:

...often in my experience policy is often not clearly defined, and it's changeable. But, it's also, it can be very, I think the word is "wooly." It's not very specific, it's very generic. (interviewee 3)

Overall it seems that the policies of government towards NGOs are not too changeable, though this perception could be attributed to the policies not being clearly defined so any relationships that an NGO develops are more down to personal relationships than to government policies with regards to NGOs.

Government Support

The support of government is critical to the success of NGO activities in their country.

Local Government.

NGOs work very closely with local government officials. As mentioned under "Regulatory framework – local government", NGO employees are required to call on the local officials when they wish to visit their projects. There is a strict protocol for how business is handled in the local areas and there is high involvement by local officials in project proposals, ensuring local buy in.

Those visits were useful because once you develop relationships, it expedites your work, it eases your work because they help you... Some government officials are genuinely interested, and those people would ask you about the progress being made in the project. They also offer to help with technical expertise; for instance, they would release their agriculture, health staff etc., to provide technical guidance. (interviewee 1)

...if you are implementing a [health related] program...you will be working with the District hospital, you'll be working with the Health Centres within your target area, you'll be using some of the staff, because you'll be training them and they'll be participating in the activities because after all, all NGOs have a capacity-building, skills building side to them...you work really hand-in-hand with them, and most of the monitoring and evaluation of a program will probably be initiated by the NGO, but in partnership with Health. (interviewee 5)

...the extension staff do know very well that they are integral very often to the implementation of a program... (interviewee 5)

These drop-ins serve the dual purpose of keeping government up to date on NGO activities, but more importantly are a means for NGOs to obtain local assistance, not just in the form of resources but also knowledge. The work with NGOs is also valuable for local staff in giving them further training and experiences that they might not otherwise get.

Local officials are also very important in the conception and proposal stages of a project.

When you are developing a proposal...A government has to say there is food insecurity in a given [Traditional Authority]... there are a number of TAs within that district. Then you go down to the TA, and the TA will tell you that the problem is in this [Group Village Headman]...Then you go to the respective GVH...as well as the village headman, so that they are able to gather the information. (interviewee 6)

...you wouldn't want to create a project for the people, but the people have to identify the project that they want...so there's ownership from the people (interviewee 6)

As stated in the earlier "Regulatory framework", local buy in is considered very important by NGOs. The processes in place ensure that this should be happening wherever NGOs are instituting projects, which also guarantees local assistance as they feel like they have some sort of role and ownership of the project.

I: ...did you find that they were very helpful...

R: In general in the rural areas yes, but not in the cities...Because the Government employees are poorly paid. They feel they are making a lot of sacrifices for minimum

pay, and they feel that NGO workers are riding nice cars and highly paid, and they are coming to dictate to them how things should be run, which is not always the case but that is the perception... in the rural areas they can actually see the benefits of the NGOs' work. (interviewee 1)

This is an interesting distinction according to this interviewee between local officials in rural areas as opposed to those in cities. Much of the NGOs' work is carried out in the rural areas so there may be different perceptions of them in different areas of the country, which can have an impact on the way they are treated by officials.

Of course working for government – working with government partners, because you're working with all the district government and partners at the same time, can be hugely frustrating, because they won't turn up for meetings, or they say they'll turn up and they won't turn up, or they haven't got transport to meet you or something... (interviewee 5)

While the framework created sounds very sensible there are also issues when working at the local level. Apart from problems such as those mentioned by interviewee 5, the bureaucracy can at times mean that there is more time spent talking than acting (interviewee 3), which can be difficult to adjust to for NGO employees.

Central Government.

I: ...how do you feel about government involvement as a whole in the NGO sector?

R: Generally I feel that...It is very supportive. (interviewee 6)

By African government standards, I'd say Malawi's actually quite easy. (interviewee 3)

Though not all responses were as positive as that of interviewee 6, there was a variety of discussion on government support and involvement in the sector.

...if you have a stand-alone project which has a project implementation unit, often the government is not that happy about that, because it's operating outside of its remit. (interviewee 3)

While government and NGOs are often heavily involved together, when NGOs choose to go it alone this can lead to disharmony in their relationship with government.

As mentioned in earlier quotes by interviewees, NGOs have to give government and locals a sense of ownership in these projects which can increase both their participation and interest in a project. This is part of the reason that local involvement in the proposal stages is so important.

...NGOs provide very good services, but in many cases government guys will just sit back and let the NGOs do the job, and often it's all too easy to just let an NGO do the work. (interviewee 3)

When you get government interested and involved they can be very helpful;

R: ...because of our collaboration at district level, we then find it very easy to invite say a Minister.

I: You find it very easy?

R: Very easy, because it would be the same district to say 'You know we are supposed to have this briefing today,' he will be at the meeting. So we have to ask him 'Can you invite the Minister to come?' (interviewee 6)

Yeah sure, they actually accept our ideas, for your information even just recently...we had an activity...this was a highly advocacy activity. Most cases the government do not want to associate with the campaigns, the highly advocacy issues, especially where you want to criticize the policies. But then in that case we actually invited the Minister of Trade because once they have a say they are more willing to accept anything from us. It was really a success. (interviewee 8)

...we had a video documentary, which was also an advocacy tool but we incorporated all of them as interviews in key Ministries. Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Trade, Ministry of Youth, all those featured ... they're actually on the forefront of the change in some of the areas. (interviewee 8)

This shows that government is very willing to get involved with organizations. It is a good example of a few interviewees' views that it is far too easy for NGOs to call on the government's limited resources and time, but also demonstrative of their willingness to get involved with the NGO community and their support for said community.

...there's something called the [health related program]...that's where donors and government guys meet once a month, and that was an extremely good forum led by the Ministry of Health, for people to sit down and talk to each other, exchange information, and to synergize, and coordinate programs, and I think that that's an absolute must. (interviewee 3)

They come to us for policy. Probably the most, we interact the most at their initiation, is we've got to the place now through our advocacy, where they're more proactive, and they actually come and ask us what we think about a certain issue. (interviewee 4)

...they'll invite people to work, sit on the working group who they perceive as being experienced in the country and technically competent... NGOs accept that if they've got senior technical staff in certain areas, part of their job description will be working with government on these sorts of things; (interviewee 5)

Many interviewees suggested that the government was very willing to include them in committees discussing national policy, if there was expertise that was perceived. They reported increased NGO involvement during national crises, but in the course of regular operations it sounded like the government was very willing to listen and consider NGO opinions. This helps "synergize" efforts as stated by interviewee 3 and ensures that everyone's on the same page, while still maintaining a feeling of government leadership.

The importance of NGOs and governments working cohesively together was underlined during the 2001 food crisis in Malawi:

... all of the NGOs, and the various departments of government that were working within the Emergency... they would meet regularly, twice a month actually... many NGOs are already working in districts, so they have got structures within districts already; they have got their offices there...they've probably got transport there...particularly in an emergency, you've got a coverage of the country of government partners, because all the NGOs are partners to the government... it works actually really, really well because we had really good coverage (interviewee 5)

An issue with government and NGOs working together is that of per diems, or having to pay to get things done:

...there's a huge problem here with per diems, because you know NGOs pay per diems to government staff or whatever to attend...because they want them to attend a training.... (interviewee 5)

...over the course of the last few years [several NGOs] have had massive fraud-type things where government staff have been involved as well as the NGO staff, where there've been supposed to be going to a training, and therefore there's a certain number of allowances paid, and everybody pays everybody's allowances, but nobody actually goes to the training...(interviewee 5)

A lot of the workshops put on are attended because of the funding provided.

...in the ministries...you don't get a sense of efficiency and busyness and initiative and those sort of things, you feel that people are there, and they're earning their salary, but they're not going to do anything else over and above that. (interviewee 5)

The need to give people incentives to carry out their work properly and well can be frustrating to some NGO personnel. However not all civil employees are like that; as suggested in earlier quotes some NGO personnel find employees who are very dedicated and enthusiastic about the work being done.

Opinions on NGOs

There were a variety of opinions on NGOs, their actions in Malawi and their relationship with the government, both positive and negative. Before getting into this section it is important to point out that there are more negative reflections than positive; this stems from the fact that most of the interviewees were reflecting on NGO activity in the country critically. There are many other positive NGO traits as described in previous sections regarding willingness to cooperate with government.

Positive.

Some people felt that NGOs were doing a good job in Malawi:

...of course there is always room for improvement, but in general I think they do fine.
(interviewee 1)

I think they do as much as they can. (interviewee 7)

I: Do you think they optimize their abilities?

R: Yes. (interviewee 5)

Some felt that NGOs do “as much as they can”, making the best of their limited resources and the environment in Malawi:

I should believe that there is efficient use of money... I feel the funds are getting to the beneficiaries. (interviewee 6)

Another stated that NGOs are reasonably well run, and that they have to be:

Because they're reporting to donors, so they have to have fairly good systems of management and financial accountability... On the whole I'd say most NGOs are reasonably well run. (interviewee 3)

The responsibility that NGOs have to their donors makes them have to be well run and use their resources appropriately. As mentioned before there is a lot of bureaucracy surrounding donor funds (interviewee 3), which increases the probability that everything is done appropriately.

Negative.

One of the criticisms leveled against the NGOs operating in Malawi was the sustainability of their projects, with many doubting the long term planning behind these projects:

[NGOs come and start projects] and the benefits of those might be immediate in terms of the fact that perhaps...some children are saved from malnutrition or something like that, but when the NGO pulls out its money, what is left? What is left often is children who are now getting malnourished again because the program that was there didn't have any sustainable benefits and a government who had lost some time because they were servicing these NGOs in one way or another. (interviewee 2)

...we may be selling seed to people, high quality seed, on the basis that they must then pay for it, so that the thing self-perpetuates. Whereas [another NGO] might come and say "Well we'll just give you seed because you're poor and you're underfed", "so we'll just give out the seed." So...the projects are in conflict. (interviewee 4)

[Small NGOs come and create projects] without thinking about sustainability and development, and prevention, and dependability, because as you know we have a huge dependency syndrome here because people expect handouts. And a lot of that has come from that sort of thing... the larger NGOs care very much about dependency...because it really...can affect your implementation...communities will be expecting all their farming inputs, their seeds and their implements and all the rest of it, because they received it in the past. So I think most of the big, international experienced NGOs are very careful, about dependency and about sustainability, and about undermining community systems. (interviewee 5)

I think [sustainability's] one of the big problems, a lot of projects here start, they have a say two-year, three-year horizon...the project objectives are a bit top down...they've got indicators to achieve, so they have to achieve those to show the donor that they actually did anything...and then of course after 3 years the donor is interested in something else. And of course a lot of the projects here, I'm sure the indicators show positive results, which is one of those things where when you compare the results and the indicators together, you'd expect that the country was progressing dramatically, which of course isn't quite the case on the ground. (interviewee 4)

[Interviewee's organization] did a survey of some communities they had been working with for 20 years; building schools, providing good water systems, helping the communities get organized etcetera, etcetera, but putting in a lot of money in these communities. They measured the impact...of where those communities were compared to some other communities that had no help from [organization]...and the [organization's]

communities at the end of 20 years were doing worse. They might have got a new school, they might have gotten new wells, but in terms of their empowerment and their sort of ability to fix their own problems, they were worse off. (interviewee 2)

Sustainability is obviously a key issue for many of those interviewed. One differentiated between the smaller NGOs and the bigger ones, saying that larger NGOs were very concerned about these issues. Another pointed out that NGOs come in and throw their money around, getting the government to cater to them and then leave after their project is done. In the meantime the government has lost time that it could have been spending on the issue, and its long term plans may be adversely affected by the short term NGO projects. Interviewee 4 pointed out the conflict that NGOs can come into with their different programs and varying methods of approach to local problems. As was pointed out in the 'Funding source' section, NGOs are very dependent on donors. Donors give them money for a specific project and they have to get on with it. The indicators set up for the project may show that their aims were achieved; however NGOs/donors do not always have a full understanding of how to tackle the issue and therefore their projects may not be getting at the cause of the problem as exemplified by the story about interviewee 2's organization's work.

... just bad project design by the donor. Of course the NGO's going to take the money and do that best it can... a lot of the donors don't really have a clue what's going on internally. I mean it's surprising, you talk to some of the donor staff and they...have a very false picture of what happening within government. (interviewee 4)

...another factor in terms of achieving sustainable development is that often international NGOs don't understand the Malawian concepts well enough...They don't employ enough anthropologists, people who understand local culture. Prepared to listen and find out...why do some things work and some things don't...these people, they're used to coming into a country assessing the situation and recommending the best course of action. In practice, many of the country directors of international NGOs don't have enough basic understanding of what makes that particular country tick. (interviewee 2)

This is an important point, about gaining an understanding of the country one's working in. As will be pointed out in the next section, relationships are one very

important factor in getting things done in Malawi. If NGO employees don't have a good understanding of how things get done in Malawi, it is very difficult for them, no matter how good they might be at their job. The lack of cultural understanding was emphasized in the interviews. All interviewees were asked about any cross cultural training they had received for their roles in Malawi. Some spoke of no training, while a few mentioned some training which lasted at most one week. Some spoke of not having any need to be trained as they had already been working abroad:

R: ...how do you understand a culture of the country you are moving into? I mean I have been here for 9 years and I feel I am still learning.

I: Right, why do you feel that they don't do this? Do you think that they feel like, ok you've worked abroad in...Japan and Southeast Asia and all over the world, so you will be able to adapt and adjust?

R: Absolutely, that's the sort of mindset (interviewee 2)

One of the other important issues that reflected negatively on NGO activity in Malawi was their drain on government resources as mentioned earlier during the 'Government capacity' section. This issue was reflected on extensively there, but it is important to point out that it is a significant criticism and opinion on NGO activity in Malawi.

Reflections.

One of the big issues regarding NGO activity in Malawi is that of coordination of their activities and also coordination with government plans. As mentioned previously, NGOs are given funds to carry out projects that often have different methods or aims. This can lead to problems such as the aforementioned sustainability and competition which is in no one's best interests:

...there's a huge problem here with per diems...because they want them to attend a training but there's not a sort of a level playing field, so some NGOs can afford more and some NGOs can afford less, and if you're in the same area as one that affords more than you do, people won't go to your training, they'll go to somebody else's training; and there's sort of competition there which is totally detrimental. (interviewee 5)

As mentioned this type of competition or lack of coordination is detrimental to the long term development efforts. This is not solely an NGO issue as many interviewees said that government needed to take a role in coordination of NGOs. There were a variety of views here from using the type of mechanism that CONGOMA should be, to government forcing NGOs to get together and come forward with proposals of how their projects will work side by side. This would not only lead to a more coordinated effort but cause less of a draw on the limited government resources:

[Interviewee's organization] not being particularly good at coordinating with government, so I think we flaunted our own guidelines to some extent carried...on with it. Certainly we coordinated with the local level, but not as much as we should have done at central. (interviewee 2)

... you must be registered with the Ministry, and once a month, there is an organized meeting with the ministry, and that the ministry demands a coordinated body, an NGO-coordinated body, and that only 1 or 2 representatives present information to the government...those 2 representatives are responsible for corralling and managing all the various NGOs beneath them. So that you cut through all this repetition of talking to say 10 or 15 NGOs, where you'd really only be talking to one secretariat, and all those NGOs report to that secretariat. (interviewee 3)

I think that sometimes governments are...very happy to see us divided, and not working as one. 'Cause I think there are many benefits to seeing us working in differing sectors, and...not really communicating very well with each other... [if they coordinate, NGOs] may have a much stronger bargaining position, and also there may not be quite so many workshops and per diems, and multiplicative trainings. (interviewee 3)

The last interviewee points out some of the reasons why sometimes governments can make little effort to fix the flaws in the system. However many of the interviewees seemed to think that government has to take the lead in ensuring the system works efficiently and giving a sense of direction:

I think the relationship would improve actually, or the optimization of resources and all those things would improve if the government actually took the lead...The real driver is the country's own determination to get there. So I think if, if Malawi was more determined... if it led the agenda, and then the NGOs would fit it in with that... But in the current environment [NGOs are] fairly free to do what they like. Which as I said can actually be part of the problem as well, because...then you have all sorts of people doing whatever is the flavour of the month, and the development, the rural areas are their playground. (interviewee 4)

...NGOs and the government probably they are all working towards a common goal and mostly it's the government which actually issues the demands, the masterpiece for the goal for that particular country and NGOs actually complementing the efforts of that government. (interviewee 8)

Government exerting its power for the betterment of the country was exemplified through a story discussing why NGOs choose certain locations:

... there are favourite districts for NGOs to work in, like for example Ntchisi and Dowa, places which are about an hour from Lilongwe so all their officers can live in Lilongwe in comfort, and travel out to the field... around Blantyre as well, you know, Chiradzulu and Chikwawa are favourite districts...if you're not careful, those places don't do so well because NGOs have their own agendas... if the Ministry, or the government has a very good handle of who's working where on what they can say, as they have done to some NGOs here, "sorry, you're going to have to work in Chitipa and Neno district, because there ain't many NGOs working there, and they need that sort of stuff there." (interviewee 5)

A final issue with Malawi that was pointed out is the strength of civil society inside the country:

...in general civil society is weak in Malawi because of the history, because of Banda. And the people also because of their cultural background are not encouraged to raise their voice...there are NGOs, there are local ones and national ones, also, but they are not very strong... (interviewee 7)

Religious Organizations

They have a very important role to play because as a church they are part of the civil society and in most cases, even history has indicated that where the church came in on an issue which is very controversial like in Malawi probably a change will be effected. (interviewee 8)

As mentioned in the literature, and reiterated by the interviewees, religious organizations have a significant impact and role to play in the sector. In many cases they are long established organizations with deep roots in the community.

I actually have personal respect for some of the churches which have been here many years, because they actually work with the community over lifetimes. You know the school system here...the mission hospitals and things like that are vital in the health sector. The kind of development, which has been growing steadily in Malawi, because back in the 90s there were very few NGOs who were out here in the one party state. (interviewee 4)

The interviewee stresses the importance of religious missions, not just for their roles in communities and the infrastructure in present times, but also before the

country had their first democratic elections and before NGOs started flooding into the country. The longevity of their missions in Africa has enabled them as stated by the interviewee to establish themselves in the community and also focus on the long term rather than short term as many NGOs or donors can.

...a church is always important because they have a very large beneficiary base. The church has very close ties with the local population, so if the church and [interviewee's organization] develops a project together, there is a lot of buy in. (interviewee 1)

This quote reiterates the integration of the religious missions into the community and also the influence they have over the local population.

Relationships

Relationships play a “fundamental” role in Malawian society:

...society here works on relationships...it's a cultural thing... It's basically how everything works in the society. You attend your neighbour's funeral. More people attend their neighbour's funeral, even if they don't really know them... it's an important fact of relationships...People connect to you...it's fundamental to things here. The western society is very individualistic, and the society here is much more communal. (interviewee 4)

I think, you have to do an awful lot of talking...A lot of meeting, a lot of discussion. Your government colleagues do have to feel very comfortable with what you're going to do with them is what they want. And if they don't feel as though they have ownership of that, that's when you have the “sit back and let them get on with it” sort of mentality... you've got to get loyalty. (interviewee 3)

...it's important to understand that relationships are actually the most important thing when dealing with an African government...They're more important than the facts of the case, or anything, the facts are often manipulated to accommodate the relationship and if you want to get something big done...you certainly need to develop the relationship with the people who will do that for you...You are not just going to walk in and expect, or make an application, and expect something to be approved, simply on technical merit. (interviewee 4)

...it's never really easy working with most African governments. They're often very slow...very inefficient. And, they're well-meaning in many cases, but it's not that easy. It depends on your network and contacts again. (interviewee 3)

Both these interviewees who had been in Malawi for a number of years, as well as many of the others, stressed the need to develop relationships with officials, and the benefits these relationships could bring:

...if the relationship is there, it could be a social connection, having a relative or whatever. If that is there, actually, things can happen incredibly quickly, perhaps much more quickly than in they would in a western government...Because somebody just picks up the papers, from within the Ministry and walks them around the system. You actually find that in 2 hours something is approved and everything's finished which, could've actually taken 6 months according to a normal process. (interviewee 4)

Despite complaints about the often slow working of the government bureaucracy, these relationships can often help to smooth over issues. It's a way of doing business that is widely accepted in Malawi:

... the issue of relationships, I think, developing connections, is critical...Now, I think what happens in most NGOs, is that those, particularly NGOs that are setting up from outside, you need local staff...people on your payroll basically who develop or have those relationships. So if it's procurement, or people in the administrative department, who have friends with...the revenue authority, who can make sure things do get pushed through and cleared, and don't get stuck. (interviewee 4)

We wrote to the Ministry of Finance seeking tax-exempt status for [our NGO], and I then had a couple of meetings with people internally... Unfortunately we were not covered by that scenario... working through the Director of Revenue... He would say one thing to us directly, and then you'd find out he's saying another thing internally. But we knew this because we had a contact in the Ministry...who was actually related to one of our staff members. In the end we ended up having to develop strategies based on the information from the relative, who would call their sister here at the office... without doing anything improper. (interviewee 4)

The importance of developing these relationships, or acquiring staff that have these relationships, was mentioned by the interviewee. There are different approaches that can be taken:

One is to get somebody, you make contact and develop a relationship with somebody low, a lower-ranking person within the system, or the Ministry you're dealing with, and that person then pushes things internally for you. But that may or may not work depending what your issue is. The other way is, is to develop a relationship with somebody who's right at the top, so that that person then gives direction, and generally of course everybody follows the orders... which works the best...depends on the issue at hand. (interviewee 4)

Sometimes you don't need to start with the Ministers, you find that the most important person is someone on the bottom line of the Ministry itself. So what matters most is to see who within the system influences your work... (interviewee 8)

Relationships can prove useful in a myriad of different ways:

Everything is to do with relationships. One reason the [government Minister] was receptive to us was because we got involved with the church who knew the chief of party who asked the [government Minister] to see us, so then everybody became friends. (interviewee 1)

This quote serves to illustrate the importance of personal relationships in African culture. It also highlighted the importance of religion and religious organizations in this part of Africa, as mentioned in the previous section. “Everything is to do with relationships”, it is how business gets done, and the understanding of this is what helps create a successful NGO employee.

Discussion

The analysis section outlined the main themes and ideas that were expressed by the interviewees. In this section the author will endeavor to combine the findings in the analysis with the academic literature summarized in the literature review.

Some of the significant issues from the literature review were:

- Funding - The source of NGO funding and the impact that this funding has on the NGO/government relationship
- Local involvement and understanding – The necessity of local involvement and an understanding of the nature of the country
- The New Policy Agenda – The attempt by outside entities to affect the internal policies and development of Malawi
- NGO/government cooperation – The different ways in which the two bodies work together
- The regulatory structure – The regulatory structure in place regarding NGO registry and actions in Malawi
- Policy making – The integration of NGO expertise into government policy discussion
- Advocacy – The role and acceptance of advocacy organizations in Malawi

These themes will form the basis of this discussion, revolving around how the answers obtained from interviewees supported or conflicted with the conclusions of the literature. Finally there will also be a critical analysis of the literature review regarding ways of thinking that were brought into question by this study.

Funding

The funding source is extremely important to NGOs as it has an impact on their credibility and reputation (Atack, 1999) as well as impacting the projects they carry out and the amount of discretion they have in regards to achieving the goals that are set by the donors (Brown & Ashman, 1996). Funding sources can at times be detrimental to the NGO/government relationship as NGOs can be seen as subject to outside forces, and not necessarily acting in the best interests of the country. The sources of one's funding can also affect the reputation of an NGO amongst the populace of the country.

From the answers to the questions regarding funding sources it was obvious that there was a cross section of NGOs being questioned. There were a variety of sources including donor agencies, governments, religious bodies and private donations. There were a couple of interviewees who mentioned the specific effect that being funded by private donations can have, namely that you're less subjected to oversight and therefore have more flexibility in your ability to implement your projects (Atack, 1999; Bebbington & Farrington, 1993).

Another issue pointed out in the literature (Gugerty, 2008) was that governments were often unhappy with donor money being given to NGOs rather than passing through government systems. However, most interviewees in this study seemed to think that this wasn't an issue. They felt that government understood the way the money would be inserted into the country and that they understood that this money was already earmarked for specific projects by donors, so there was little pressure placed on NGOs to use funding for other purposes.

To be beholden to one's source was something pointed out in the literature as a bone of contention between NGOs and governments (Atack, 1999; Tvedt 2002)). For the most part this did not seem to be an issue in this study, though it was brought up by one interviewee. Interviewees stated that government was happy enough with the way the money was coming into the country as long as they got their share, as mentioned by a couple of interviewees.

To this end the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) is a very important aid model. As mentioned in the analysis, the government needs to feel like they are in control, that they are driving a project. Not only is this important for the government's sensibilities, but it is also important for the long term future of the country as it increases the government's overall capacity (Hearn, 1998). Several interviewees mentioned the government's lack of ability and capacity to deal with such wide scale funding as the NGOs had to. SWAps are an opportunity for the government to practice said skills under the watchful gaze of the donors. Undoubtedly there are misgivings from the donor side; as mentioned there can be issues regarding financial accounting, transparency and corruption (Doh et al., 2003; Tangri & Mwenda, 2006; Richardson, 2007), but these will only get better through processes like these. These issues have been seen as reasons for not providing funding directly to the government in the past. However, the approach taken in Malawi seems to be a progressive one. Donors do not seem to be giving unchecked control of funds to the government, but given the confidence shown by donors in channeling the funds through government in the first place, the government may be inspired to improve the aforementioned problems and lead to a better financial management environment in Malawi. The only way that the situation will improve, is if the government is given the

chance, training and motivation to do so, and SWAps seem like the ideal platform to do this with. Obviously there is a lot of money tied up in this process as Health and Agriculture are two of the biggest sectors; however the size and prominence of these sectors may lead to better practices being enacted by the government. The trust shown in government by channeling funds through them conflicts with the attitude shown by donors towards government in the literature, where governments were found to be unhappy about how the money was channeled. As mentioned several times in the analysis, when belief is shown in the government it can inspire them to higher levels of performance.

Funding sources are important for NGOs, not just because of the potential strings attached or their ability to be innovative, but also to the perception of the organization. None of the NGOs questioned had received money from the government and there are a couple of reasons why this is so. Firstly Malawi is the country receiving the aid, and very little of that aid is channeled through the government so it doesn't have much to give out to other causes. Secondly the issue of how an organization is perceived by the populace as mentioned both in the literature (Gugerty, 2008) and a couple of interviews is extremely important. Some of these organizations were advocacy organizations for whom it would have been difficult to receive assistance from the government while still advocating on the behalf of their clients. Interestingly government assistance didn't seem to be an issue for one organization which worked very closely with the government but still seemed to have a strong advocacy platform (interview 8). It is important to point out that though many of the interviewees said they received no funding from the government, a couple mentioned that they get tax concessions, while another NGO operated out of

government premises. There was also the case of interviewee 7's organization which also was on government premises and was said to be treated as a government office, which would have entitled it to use of government resources.

Overall the funding source is a very important factor in a Malawian NGO's ability to perform their jobs, as mentioned in the literature. The source can have a significant impact on the policies of the NGOs. While this issue was not investigated or brought up by the interviewees, the government does not seem to treat NGOs as instruments of foreign governments. In this study, based on the eight interviews, it was concluded that funding sources and the way money is channeled is not a big issue in Malawi, contrary to what the literature infers. The government understands and respects how the money is handled, and accepts the status quo as long as they are included in the disbursement of said money.

Local Involvement and Understanding

Local involvement is integral to the end goals of NGO work in developing countries. As mentioned by Duffy (2006) consultation with locals is important to ensure that a project is headed in the right direction. It also has a direct impact on the sustainability of a project (Brown & Ashman, 1996) with local buy in aiding this. As stated by Hill et al. (2007), the long term success of a project is determined by its ability to keep going once the NGO has pulled out. To this end grassroots organizations play an integral role (Brown & Ashman, 1996); these organizations if brought in and made a part of the project, can see that it carries on once the NGO pulls out. Lastly, support organizations are integral to the success of a project (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002) with their knowledge of local processes and relationships.

Many of the ideas from the literature were borne out by the answers of interviewees. The processes set in place by the Malawi government, both local and central, led to a process that encourages local involvement. Government outlines its strategic objectives which are chosen in consultation with local officials. Local officials are also heavily involved in proposal development as outlined by interviewee 6. These officials are a mixture of government and traditional leaders who have a greater understanding of local needs and resources, and who can be invaluable allies in NGO projects. The process outlined by interviewee 6, and the comments by other interviewees, suggest that the establishment of strong relationships with local officials goes a long way to easing the implementation of a project. While there are protocols that can be time consuming, such as having to meet district officials whenever going out to visit a project, the benefit in terms of relationship building seems to be invaluable. As outlined in the analysis section, relationships make everything a smoother process in Malawi, and the structure of project development and implementation in Malawi lends itself to this development of relationships.

Sustainability is a key issue for NGOs, reflected in the number of interviewees who brought up issues regarding sustainability despite it not being included in the prompting questions. Sustainability is tied to the amount of local buy in, and inclusion of local organizations in the project. Most importantly though is the planning of the NGOs (and donors) behind the project.

There are a couple of issues surrounding sustainability as brought up most prominently by interviewee 2 who spoke of the issues of turnover and having an understanding of the country. Initially when turnover was included as part of the

questions it was in terms of changing government and ministers. However the question was left open ended and some respondents talked about turnover in terms of NGOs and their employees. Turnover is very important in relation to sustainability issues; not only does it impact on the time people have to understand the culture they're working in, but it also has a direct impact on the way people are planning. As mentioned by interviewee 2 NGO employees often are on a personal career path, and the countries they pass through are often staging posts on their way to bigger and better things. Many NGO employees tend to be moving on every 3 or 4 years, which all impacts on the planning.

When working in a country it is important to gain an understanding of the conditions there. Unfortunately this can be difficult when there are consistent changes on both sides of the NGO/government relationship. Not only can it be difficult to build up relationships, but also for foreign NGO personnel it can be difficult to gain an understanding of how things work in a country. This is also a key point with regards to donors, who have a direct impact on the goals and way a project is run but often have little experience or understanding of the local conditions. This point is well illustrated by the World Bank, one of Africa's biggest donors, who had just 267 "professional level and internationally recruited staff" in field offices in Africa by 2010 (World Bank, 2011). One key point related to understanding of the local culture was the amount of cross-cultural training NGO employees received before starting in Malawi.

As mentioned in the analysis there was little training given to employees to prepare them for the culture they were entering. There is a mindset that many of these employees having worked in developing nations before, know how to work in any developing nation. There are cultural nuances that have to be taken into account in each

different country (Hofstede, 1983); for example Malawi might be considered more feminine than masculine³⁷ as relationship building is very important whereas in other countries creating a competitive work environment may produce better results. This point was emphasized by interviewee 4, that NGO employees have to adapt, and if they are unable to then they often just get fed up and leave because they can't get anything done.

Relationship building is key to getting work done in Malawi as stated by several of the interviewees, be it relationships with local officials, senior government officials or even third parties that can influence processes. There were various examples stated in the analysis such as having employees with relations in government ministries, or ministers having a strong relationship with their Church who were then asked to aid an NGO's cause, or simply building a relationship with local officials who then offered help for the project. Building relationships is crucial to getting things done, especially, as interviewee 5 stated, in a country where there isn't a high motivation by civil employees to go beyond their duties. The bureaucracy can be cumbersome and slow moving, and building these relationships helps to not only get things done, but also to speed them up. As put by interviewee 3, there's often criticism of government officials saying they won't do anything unless they're paid to do it; however if an effort is made to make them feel involved and an integral part of what's going on, then they're just as hard working and productive as anyone. Getting anything done in Malawi seems to come down to this ability to manage people through your relationships with them.

The importance of relationships is what makes support organizations so useful to NGOs. As mentioned by Brown and Kalegaonkar (2002) support organizations have an integral role in the support of NGO operations. In Malawi the importance of relationships

³⁷ In terms of Hofstede's masculinity vs femininity dimension

underscores this need. There were a couple of good examples of this by interviewee 4 who described having to get goods into the country, and the need to have someone “connected” to help the process along. This is not perceived as corruption or doing anything illegal, but government processes in Malawi can often take significant time, so employing someone with connections can help move the process along much faster than it would happen otherwise. Another example of using support organizations was in regards to purchasing land for projects. Malawi’s land registration process is a long, drawn out process that can be more expensive than the actual cost of the land. In the case of interviewee 4’s organization they employed an agent who took care of the whole process for them, who had the connections and knew the procedures, thereby allowing them to get on with their actual work while expediting the process.

The New Policy Agenda

Through their identification of the New Policy Agenda, Edwards and Hulme (1996) criticize the motivations of donors in their aid to developing countries. The donors have used aid as a tool to put forward their political and economic agendas, such as implementing market based economies and promoting of decentralization policies (Laird, 2007; Lockwood, 2005). NGOs have been seen as the best vehicle for donors to use to get those policies enacted in developing countries (Hearn, 1998).

The New Policy Agenda does not seem to be a significant issue between the NGOs and government in Malawi. While this was not a specific question included in the interview, from the answers given it didn’t seem that there was any tension there. All interviewees were questioned on whether there were any issues created between their organizations and the government due to their funding sources, and all stated that there

were none. That being said there was significant decentralization of power (decentralization is a government restructuring promoted by donors in developing countries (Lockwood, 2005; Moyo, 2009)), which was evident from interviewees talking of the processes involved with carrying out work locally in Malawi. Many interviewees talked of the importance of working in conjunction with local officials in their work, both to help their project along and because it was a government requirement. Interviewee 6 also alluded to how much involvement there was at a local government level in the project conception (as demonstrated in the previous section). It would be speculation to assume that decentralization was due to policies and pressure by NGOs and donors, but as pointed out in the New Policy Agenda, this is one of the main aims of foreign entities in developing countries.

There was one example given of the Danish embassy being evicted from Malawi under the previous regime due to the Danes claiming financial mismanagement by the Malawian government and asking for audits of the accounts (interviewee 2). This was actually a member of the Danish Delegation, who had questioned how funds were being used during a time when funding was withheld from the country by various donors amid questions about economic management (BBC News a, 2001). However, these issues arose under the previous regime. While there will always be questions of how money is being managed, not just by government, but both sides, the atmosphere overall as described by the interviewees is one of cooperation with both groups working well together.

One other possible example of the New Policy Agenda in action is in regards to interviewee 7's organization. This was an organization whose aims displeased the

government, and subsequently their operations had achieved little due to government opposition. The interviewee had tried to get support for their cause at a convention and after she had left a major international donor became involved to back the cause that the government didn't want. How this situation played out is unknown; the organization is still in existence, but if the international donor is still backing it or if the government has loosened its reins on it is unclear.

Overall, however, there is little evidence in this study to back the New Policy Agenda theories. Some foreign agents in developing countries may have an agenda aside from their humanitarian concerns, but there were no significant allusions to this made by the interviewees. Though no one from government was included in the study, some of the interviewees worked extremely closely with the government and could be seen to consider themselves on the side of the government by their choice of words, so they could be taken to represent government views as well.

NGO/Government Cooperation

NGO services in many cases have had to be incorporated into basic infrastructural services in the developing world because government services are not accessible enough in rural areas (Brown & Kalegaonkar, 2002). This is not for lack of central planning, but rather lack of ability in terms of resources, and governments have had to accept that NGOs may be the best means of providing these services (Bratton, 1989), not least due to the prompting of the World Health Organization and World Bank who have actively promoted alternative providers of infrastructural services (Green et al., 2002). Green et al. (2002) posited that this had often led to complications in coordination between the different providers, and could often lead to competition.

In Malawi there seemed to be a desire for the two bodies to work together, without necessarily ever reaching the desired results. Interviewees remarked that there was a significant government bureaucracy which had both positive sides and negative. The large government means that even though there can be significant turnover at a ministerial level, operations can largely carry on without them. Some ministers get more involved than others, but they don't always have an expertise in the ministry they are assigned to. Therefore it's usually the principal secretary who gets more involved, a post at which there is considerably less turnover. So despite the turnover that occurs at higher levels, the lower levels stay relatively stable so NGO and government employees have an opportunity to develop their relationships. On the other hand the large nature of the bureaucracy means that it tends to be very slow moving. As noted previously, some interviewees commented on the seeming inefficiencies of operating through government. One interviewee even remarked that their organization put in the registration papers, but didn't wait until they received approval before just getting on with their work. Another commented on how the slow moving machinations of government can similarly cause smaller NGOs to just get on with their work, and not bother trying to coordinate with government.

Coordination is very important. While there are inevitably duplications of service, it would seem to be in both parties' best interest for a strong, cohesive partnership to be established. This study found widely varying views as to how this should be achieved. Some felt it should be the role of CONGOMA to coordinate NGOs and be used as an interface between NGOs and the government. Others felt that the government needed to take a stronger lead themselves in creating proper strategies and guidelines, and ensure

that NGOs followed these. There was even one view that government should be more confident in the power they have over NGOs, and insist that they come together themselves and coordinate themselves, and then approach government with their plans. Overall, interviewees reported a mixture of these 3 processes going on depending on which organization you are, and which sector you work in.

There does seem to be good government cooperation in several sectors of the basic infrastructure including health and agriculture. There might be factors such as competition between different agencies involved, but none of this was mentioned by interviewees. Overall it seemed like NGOs and the government were working well together. The lack of a central strategy is probably detrimental to the situation, but in cases where there is more of a strategy involved, NGOs appear happy to follow the government's plans while the government is willing to involve them in discussions on the strategies. Evidence of their cooperation was shown during the food crisis of 2001/2002 (BBC News, 2002). During this time many NGOs and donors were pulled into discussions with high ranking government officials on how to best combat the problems. During the height of the crisis discussions were taking places as often as every 2 weeks (interviewee 1). The reach of NGOs, as mentioned in the literature, was demonstrated through the government's reach into the local communities being extended through the use of NGOs in different areas, who already had offices and equipment set up throughout the country (interviewee 5). Combining the government resources with the resources of NGOs in all the different provinces, the food problems were gradually diminished due to the combined efforts of both parties.

The Regulatory Structure

Batley (2006) says that in public governments will often promote NGO/government partnerships, but in practice they aren't so forthcoming. He says that the way to counteract this for NGOs is to make sure that contracts are drawn up at the start of the partnership outlining both parties' duties in the projects, so each knows their obligations and has documentation to fall back on if these obligations aren't met.

Registration processes are also an important part of an NGO/government partnership and are an integral part of regulating NGOs. There are two reasons for governments to regulate NGOs: to enable governments to establish control over NGOs, and to ensure that NGOs operate efficiently (Batley 2006). Batley also discusses regulation as a method of ensuring NGOs do not come into competition with state-owned companies. This is not relevant to Malawi, which has privatized the majority of state-owned companies since the exit of Dr. Banda from power in 1994. NGOs dislike being subjected to government regulations and the government is often unable to enforce said regulations (Gugerty, 2008). Over-regulation can be a problem as bigger NGOs are often concentrated on, allowing smaller NGOs to proceed with their activities unobserved. For some of these reasons it can be better to have no regulation than to have poor regulations (Batley, 2006). Gugerty (2008) thinks that it is often better for NGOs if they self-regulate; this avoids heavy handed government regulations and helps increase their legitimacy in the eyes of the public.

Memorandums of understanding (MOUs) seem to be a tricky issue in Malawian relations with NGOs. MOUs are typically set up outlining responsibilities of each party and are a sort of contract between NGOs and government, similar to the ideas described

by Batley (2006). Though it is getting harder to get these (interviewee 3), often NGOs or donors set up their own memorandums with the government or relevant ministries to aid their own operations. These MOUs are in place for some of the larger organizations and countries, but not for many others. This can lead to a tricky environment where each organization has to negotiate its own understanding with the government. It would seem to make more sense to have an established set of rules that everyone is bound to follow. In Malawi this is not the case and everyone is left to try and organize their own understandings with the government, as shown in interviewee 4's attempts to gain tax exemption. CONGOMA would seem to be the important player here, the body that should be negotiating on behalf of NGOs for their rights. However, as stated by interviewee 4, they lost their way with constant staff changes, and bigger NGOs tend to circumvent any type of processes set up because they can get direct access to higher levels of government. This is an important point; while not really a bone of contention between NGOs and the government, from the interviewee's point of view the access of NGOs to government officials was detrimental to government efforts. It draws on a limited government capacity and also means that they spend a lot of time servicing NGO needs rather than generating government programs to tackle the same issues. This was one issue raised, that NGOs can actually set back government efforts (or those of fellow NGOs) because they go in with their own method which could be opposite to the government plans. Without clear guidance and regulation, this situation will continue to exist.

There are two types of regulation that shall be discussed: self-regulation and government regulation. In regards to self-regulation, as reported by the interviewees,

NGOs appear to have done a poor job. It was acknowledged by a few interviewees that some organizations come into the country and just get on with their work without bothering to even attempt to coordinate their efforts with government or other NGOs. Specifically mentioned here were smaller “NGOs” that could often be a handful of people who had obtained funding to come over and do some good. While this can serve a purpose, without proper coordination it can also cause serious problems. As mentioned by interviewee 4, you can often have two organizations with completely different approaches in the same area. This can lead to competition between NGOs as well as having detrimental effects to the development of the area. In interviewee 4’s example one organization had a sustainable solution, while the other organization came in with handouts. People will inevitably take the handouts but in the long run that is unsustainable. It is for this reason that a clear strategy needs to be arrived at by government and NGOs, and that the NGOs be regulated to ensure this strategy is followed. However, as mentioned by interviewee 3, it can sometimes be in government’s interests to keep NGOs divided, so that they obtain maximum benefits for themselves in the form of per diems or multiple training sessions from different organizations.

A strong regulatory framework with guidelines clearly laid out is important for a strong, working NGO sector. As suggested by interviewee 4, relationships in Malawi can often cause the facts of a case to be manipulated. While this may happen anywhere, a clear set of rules would give NGOs recourse if a decision went against them. This was evident in the case of interviewee 7’s organization. This organization was supposed to be set up and working as an NGO. However due to poor leadership and government disapproval the organization was suppressed by government. It was considered and

treated as a part of government, and its activities hindered. If there was a strong set of rules regarding NGO rights then the organization would have had something to fall back on. However, as stated by several interviewees, though all the organizations have to register as NGOs when entering the country, there seems to be no real purpose to this registration. It brings no benefits to the organizations, and the government does not make the use of the information that it could. However, it has to be pointed out that the Ministry of Agriculture has a commendable database that keeps track of all NGOs and their work (interviewee 5), which would seem to be the way that government should use the information. That way it can guide NGO activities and ensure they are in line with its policies. Contrary to Batley's (2006) thoughts, the registration process did not seem to be set up for government to keep an eye on NGOs. None of the interviewees felt that the government was monitoring through the regulations. As remarked by interviewee 8, government can legislate but often finds it difficult to monitor what it legislates due to capacity issues.

When questioned on government reporting requirements the answers were vague. Some spoke of few or no requirements, others spoke of requirements being agreed upon during the project proposal stages, many spoke of duplicating reports to donors for government officials. Though it seems like there is little formal monitoring of NGOs, duplication of reports would be beneficial to both sides, with the government getting information they require and NGO employees not having to spend a lot of time preparing different reports for different bodies. Though there appears to be little formal monitoring, the systems set up for local monitoring seem to help the situation. Meetings with district officials serve to keep them up to date, and by extension their superiors, and involvement

of local officials in proposal stages ensures local buy in and the actual necessity of the project. Also as mentioned there is a strong local set up ensuring that if NGOs are not acting appropriately in areas it should quickly be passed up the chain of command.

Policy Making

According to the literature, policy making is often an area for conflict between NGOs and government. NGOs are eager to be included in policy discussions but government can be wary of their outside agendas as indicated in the New Policy Agenda section. However, involving NGOs can often be a positive move for government as it generates greater belief in government policies by the population (Bryce, 2009). Batley (2006) says that formal policy dialogue has some limiting factors: policy decisions are only made at the start of projects, NGOs do not get much input (as opposed to donors), and large NGOs are the only ones involved. In addition, the policies are often subject to government upheaval.

The policy making environment in Malawi seemed to be very inclusive. Many interviewees talked of being involved in discussion panels, which may not always include senior government officials, but involved officials who were an integral part of the policy formation. There were no comments as to whether this was ongoing or solely at the start of projects, but it seemed there were several discussion panels that were ongoing such as the meetings to discuss nutrition in Malawi. This may be due to, as suggested before, the lack of government wariness over NGO motivations. In addition some of the interviewees had been in Malawi for quite some considerable time, and had probably established their reputations within the NGO sector. Most importantly perhaps, it would help establish the legitimacy and thoroughness of the policies to have recognized NGO

employees involved in the formulation. Not just for the population as suggested by Bryce (2009), but also for the donor community who want to know that their funds are being spent in a responsible manner. Also of note was that policy does not appear to be subject to government upheaval, contrary to Batley (2006), though Malawi has only undergone one change of President since the first multiparty elections. As suggested by several interviewees, though governments and Ministers change, bureaucrats rarely do. In addition as remarked earlier in the paper, the country has been largely stable and though there are inevitable disagreements with donors, the atmosphere between NGOs and government in Malawi seems to be largely affable.

Advocacy

Advocacy NGOs serve an important purpose throughout the world, speaking for those without voices (Doh, 2009). Bratton (1989) suggested that these NGOs found a difficult environment in the developing world where governments are not often open to criticism.

In the introduction it was surmised that categorizing NGOs as advocacy for the purpose of this paper would be little use as there are less likely to be many operating in this environment. Though they were mainly operational NGOs, several interviewees mentioned that their NGOs did have advocacy operations, and one (interviewee 7) was solely advocacy while interviewee 8 was a hybrid organization. This advocacy was typically tied to opportunities for policy discussion with government where they could represent the interests of people they were involved with in their operational arms. From this view there appeared to be a good advocacy environment in Malawi, especially from

the view of interviewee 8 whose organization had gotten significant government involvement in their advocacy causes.

The one case that runs counter to this is that of interviewee 7. They were the only solely advocacy organization and had struggled in Malawi. The interviewee was unable to confirm if they were officially registered as an NGO though it was insisted that they were set up as an NGO, and were supposed to be registered as such. In this case the government had taken on a position which ensured that the organization was unable to fulfill its aims or to speak for those who the organization was supposed to represent. However, since the interviewee had left the organization, more donors had gotten involved in an attempt to exert further pressure on the government.

Overall the advocacy environment in Malawi seems to be fairly productive; however these were interviewees involved in health and agriculture. Advocates for more sensitive social issues, such as gay rights, may not have such an open environment to work in.

Conclusion

From the interviewees some very important points came out. First and foremost was the way that the importance of relationships was repeatedly stressed. Personal relationships are important to conducting work anywhere, but especially so in an environment like Malawi where it is fair to say there is not a well defined structure for the NGO/government relationship. Without this formalized structure that outlines requirements of both parties and their respective duties it can be difficult to get work done; this work can get pushed through subject to personal relationships. A couple of interviewees alluded to the lack of work ethic sometimes apparent with civil service employees; others alluded to the fact that this appearance was sometimes there but that they simply needed to be motivated. Similar to any workforce, it seems that most importantly an NGO employee needs to be a good people manager. If they can manage the people they are working with well and build personal relationships then work can progress as desired. This motivation comes in all sort of forms, most importantly in the form of giving a semblance of control to government employees. It is important to make these partners in development feel actively involved and like they have something to contribute to the project. If they are made to feel like they are simply a labourer they can lapse into being unenthusiastic and fuel the perception that they are just participating for any extra benefits they can obtain in the form of per diems or training sessions.

While NGOs are important for the development of a country, it has to be kept in mind that they are not going to be there forever and sustainable solutions need to be looked for. This can be in the form of grassroots organizations, but in a country like Malawi where civil society has not yet reached a mature stage, government is the best

ally in creating sustainable solutions. To this end the SWAps that have been implemented in the health and agriculture sectors are important models. Aid is a difficult issue in the developing world, because while it is needed it can breed dependency. SWAps are one step in the right direction because they do not cut the much needed aid, but they also push the government and locals to be intricately involved in the aid. With the donors putting large sums of money through government channels, there will be increased scrutiny on what happens with the money. The government will hopefully use this opportunity to shed the spectre of poor financial accounting and corruption that can haunt developing countries. Slowly pushing government and local agencies to take greater control in their own development will give them greater experience and practical training while bringing in the essential local knowledge that NGOs are sometimes lacking.

Issues that seemed to be largely important in the literature were not always as prominent in the Malawian setting. As outlined previously the issue of personal relationships seemed to be the biggest factor in NGO work in Malawi, though this did not merit a mention in the examined NGO/government relationship literature. There was also no evidence of the New Policy Agenda being a factor though this might have been more critically analyzed if donor agency employees had been interviewed. However given the seniority of interviewees and the flexibility of role needed to work in typically small offices in a country with such great needs as Malawi it would be expected that some of the interviewees would have known of these type of issues. Also given the limited number of NGO personnel, and more specifically foreign personnel, there is a strong sense of community which could all contribute to interviewees having greater knowledge than their jobs would perhaps entail.

Perhaps related to the apparent lack of any New Policy Agenda influence in Malawi, there did not seem to be any government tension regarding the way that money was channeled. As mentioned previously the use of SWAps is a positive step for the NGO/government relationship, but this does not appear to have been a bone of contention between the two before the SWAps were implemented. It was generally acknowledged by interviewees that government understood money was earmarked for specific projects and could not be diverted any way they wanted. This did not stop them from trying or requesting on occasion, but it did not appear that there was any retribution or ill feelings if the money wasn't given.

Overall it seemed like there was a positive relationship between the government and the NGOs. Inevitably there are some issues where both parties are unhappy with the other such as when allegations are made about government or when NGOs feel unfairly done by. For the most part though there not only seems to be a stable relationship between the two but also a relationship that is slowly moving forward as indicated by the SWAps. There was also a quote from one interviewee about the increasing recognition of the importance of NGOs by the president who had created an office to deal with them. This leads on to one of the significant issues in the relationship which was also alluded to in a different light in the literature where it was pointed out that some donors had attempted to make developing world governments smaller. This is borne out through the evidence, where from most accounts government seemed to be suffering capacity shortages. This problem is exacerbated by the needs of NGOs who call on government often. As spelt out before relationships are important and this is how business is done in Malawi, but it can also be a very time consuming task which can decrease productivity.

NGOs have considerable access to government employees and it would seem that a body like CONGOMA should be empowered to provide the role it's supposed to. Not only should it be given greater powers, but any organizations calling on government directly should be turned over to CONGOMA who can put forth their causes. This would force larger organizations who sometimes disempower CONGOMA to go through the proper channels. This would give CONGOMA a defined role and a renewed sense of purpose which could see a smoothening and greater efficiency in the relationship between government and NGOs.

This leads to one of the seeming problems regarding the NGO sector in Malawi. Registration seems to be followed for the most part, but it does not seem to be as utilized as it could be. Registration could be used to keep an eye on NGOs and make sure they are doing what they said they would be doing, where they said they'd be doing it. Another suggestion would be for any NGOs registering in the country to be asked what work they want to carry out in the country. Then they would be directed to the relevant Ministries where they can ensure that their aims are cohesive with those of the Ministry and are targeted at the right areas. This would ensure that organizations are not working at cross purposes with each other and also that everyone is working towards a common goal through common methods, therefore not confusing the local population as to the best method going forward. Sometimes the problem in developing countries can be that it's difficult to turn money away, but sometimes it needs to be done as evidenced recently with Madonna in Malawi (The Guardian, 2011). Madonna promised to build a school and then apparently unilaterally decided that she would scrap that school and build several schools around the country. All these plans, while noble, can fly in the face of local

planning. This is similar to an issue pointed out by a couple of interviewees when groups come into countries with small amounts of money that have been raised for a cause, but without working with the local authorities they often just provide a stop gap solution rather than a sustainable one and can in the end do more harm than good.

The method of the investigation overall seemed satisfactory. Some interviewees were verbose and needed little encouragement, while others needed more prompting. While it was intended that the main points for analysis should come out of the data obtained, this was obviously affected by the use of a semi-structured interview. However the questions were needed to give the interviewees some ideas to talk about. If the interviewees had simply been asked to talk about the NGO/government relationship in Malawi, some might have spoken for hours while others might have only talked for 20 minutes. These are very busy individuals who had voluntarily given up their time to aid this study; without any real structure to the interview they may have rushed through their main thoughts in 20 minutes so that they could get back to work or to their limited leisure time. One obvious limitation from the study is that it biases the data towards issues outlined in the literature although there still was sufficient breadth of topic to allow interviewees to come out with different issues such as that of relationships and sustainability. One benefit of this bias is that it provides a good frame for comparison between the issues from the literature and those found through the study in Malawi.

In qualitative studies there is a different set of criteria (from quantitative) for measuring the validity of a study: credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability³⁸. Credibility is established by whether the conclusions of the study would

³⁸ Qualitative validity understanding and definitions drawn from the Qualitative Methods course taught by Dr. Mary Runte as a part of the Masters of Science (management) program at the University of Lethbridge.

be believed by the participants. To this end all interviewees were sent their interviews after they had been transcribed so they could make any amendments if they felt that what they had meant to communicate had not come across right. Only one interviewee made any content changes with others making little grammatical corrections. Transferability regards the ability of the conclusions to be generalized. It had been stated earlier in this paper, and reiterated throughout, that sometimes studies can be too generalized. This study is important in a Malawian context, outside of which it can have a bearing, but cannot be seen as a direct indicator of what will be found in other countries. The methodology however is sound and could be used in other situations. The results may be transferable to other similar settings, but cultural differences even just across the border can make a huge difference to the relationship. How dependable the results are means would the same results be obtained if the study was replicated. The results are obviously based on the viewpoints of the subjects, and due to the methodology chosen will always be subjective to who was interviewed. However this problem was diminished by the use of thematic analysis. All conclusions from the author are backed up by quotations from the interviewees; unfortunately longer stories could not be included in an effort to maintain the subject's anonymity. Lastly confirmability refers to whether the results were corroborated by others. To this end all analysis of the transcripts was conducted in conjunction with the supervisor. All notes and thoughts on transcripts were sent to the supervisor who then provided her thoughts on the validity of these ideas.

There were several improvements that could be made on the study. Firstly the sample size was relatively small, which was suitable for this study, but for a more in depth study it would be apt to take a larger sample. For this study though there were more

than enough interviews to provide a large amount of data to study while encompassing a breadth of the NGO community. If the study had been longer a second shorter follow up interview focusing on issues revealed after studying the first set of interviews could have revealed more information and firmed up the analysis. It would also have been interesting to get more views from local or advocacy organizations as the majority of interviewees were from international and operational NGOs. Another improvement would have been a clearer method of communication with the interviewees which would have ensured no recording or communication issues. The best option would have been face to face interviews which would have enabled the interviewer to pick up body language signals and not just what was said.

There are several avenues for further research:

- This study only had two interviewees from Africa and one from Malawi. This is not as pronounced an issue as it could be because many of the interviewees had spent significant time in Malawi, but it would be interesting to see a comparison between Malawian, African and International NGO staff.
- There was very little training given to foreign staff coming into the country. It would be interesting to study the positive effects that could be gained from more extensive training before relocating NGO staff to Malawi or other countries.
- The breadth of the study could be increased to see if the issues found are similar through Southern Africa, Africa as a whole, or are just found in Malawi.
- A further study could focus on the importance of relationships to NGO employees. While this is obviously an important facet of an NGO employee's

work in Malawi, it wasn't mentioned in the literature reviewed. It would be interesting to see if this was a more widespread phenomenon.

- A sector by sector analysis could be done to see if there are Ministries that work better with NGOs than others, and why this would be.
- A study could be done on the SWAp, and the effect it has had on NGO/government relations.
- Finally, a study could be conducted on the financial backing of NGOs in Malawi, and any possible ulterior motives of these funding sources. This study found no evidence of the New Policy Agenda, but a more in depth exploration might do so.

Overall there is a very positive relationship between NGOs and the government in Malawi. While there are inevitable issues on both sides it seems that there is a productive atmosphere with both sides doing their best to further the development of Malawi. The most pressing concern identified by this study is the regulatory framework, which could be more formalized to benefit both sides. This change would enable government to track and target NGOs where needed, and it would also give NGOs a set of regulations that they can fall back on when they have issues with government. Finally the importance of personal relationships should be underlined one last time, which alludes to an issue of greater importance for NGO employees: The importance of gaining an understanding of the local culture when one goes to work there. While an employee may be very competent at their job and very enthusiastic, if he or she does not understand how things work in that part of the world it can be very difficult to get anything accomplished. From this study it was apparent that there was little cultural training given to NGO employees entering Malawi. Employees should be given a base understanding of the culture when

they arrive in a country which would prove beneficial to the employee, the NGO and the locals that they have to work with.

The importance of NGOs and governments working well together is critical to the successful development of many a third world country. This study outlines several issues that appear in the literature and critiques them with respect to Malawi. Some previous findings were supported, and others less so. In Malawi there seems to be a positive working relationship between NGOs and government, although there are several areas that could be improved on. This study recognizes the importance of the NGO/government relationship, but also appreciates that situations in each different country are unique. Nonetheless it is hoped that this work can serve as an aid in looking at the relationship in Malawi, and when applicable be used in other countries.

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Appendix 1

June 20, 2010

Letter of Invitation

Dear Mr. John Smith,

You are being invited to participate in a research study regarding the relationship between NGOs and the government in Malawi. This study is part of a Master's thesis at the University of Lethbridge. The study will be from the viewpoint of current or former employees of NGOs in Malawi.

This research will require about an hour of your time. During this time, you will be interviewed about your experiences as an NGO employee in your dealings with the government or its employees. The interviews will be conducted over the phone and will be tape-recorded. These interviews will take place at a time and place convenient for you and will be scheduled upon your consent to participate in the study.

The interview may be an enjoyable and rewarding experience, allowing you to share your knowledge and experiences in Malawi. Eventually the study will be written up and published. This publication will enrich the understanding of NGO/government relationships and be beneficial to people searching for further knowledge in this area.

If you wish to participate in this study, please read the letter of consent and sign where indicated. I require consent before I can carry out the interviews. If you are able to scan the letter of consent and e-mail it back to me with your signature that would be preferable. If you are not able to scan the signed letter of consent, an e-mail stating that you have read and understood the letter of consent, and agree to participate in the study would suffice. At the start of the interview it will be confirmed that the letter of consent was read and understood.

If at any time you would like any further information please feel free to contact me at [contact details].

Thank you for your attention to this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Mututantrige Peiris
Master of Science candidate

Appendix 2

June 20, 2010

Letter of Consent

Dear Mr. John Smith,

Your participation in this study on NGO/government relations in Malawi is completely voluntary, and there will be no consequences if you decline to participate or withdraw at any point during the study. There are no anticipated risks related to this research; however if at any time you do not feel comfortable then you would be free to leave the study and any information you had provided would be destroyed. The interview protocol has been attached for your perusal so that you understand what information will be sought from you.

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity and identity. Your name will never be put on record. The only people who will ever hear the recording will be the researcher, the researcher's supervisor and employees of a transcription service based in Canada. The typed interviews will be kept on University of Lethbridge premises throughout the study and only the researcher and the supervisory committee will have access to the transcripts. All information will be destroyed after 5 years time. In addition your interview transcript will be e-mailed to you to ensure that you feel comfortable with the information provided within the transcript.

The results of this study will be published in a Master's thesis and may be published in academic journals in order to add to the body of knowledge on NGO/government relations. The results may also be presented at academic conferences. At no time will any personal details be revealed. The researcher will ensure that there are no identifiable references within the articles.

If you require any further information about this study, would like to speak to the researcher, or would like a copy of the final report please contact Mutuantrige Peiris at [contact details]. If you have any other questions regarding your rights as a participant in this research, you may also contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Lethbridge at [contact details]

I have read (or have been read) the above information regarding this research study on the NGO/government relationship in Malawi, and consent to participate in this study.

_____ (Printed Name)

_____ (Signature)

_____ (Date)

Appendix 3

The NGO/government Relationship in Malawi from an NGO Perspective Interview Protocol

Background (about 10 minutes)

- Personal
 - Name of organization
 - Type of organization; Operational or advocacy? Charitable, service, participatory or empowering?
 - Type of work
 - Funding source
- Participant
 - Education & Training
 - Past experience
 - Cultural background
- Participant's experience with the organization
 - How long have you worked for the organization?
 - How long have you worked in Malawi?
 - Did you receive cross-cultural training for work in Malawi?
 - Explain

Government Interaction (about 30 minutes)

- When do NGOs interact with the government?
 - Funding
 - New project
 - Continuing projects
 - Reporting
 - What is the process?
 - Please explain an instance where you have interacted with the government in your duties in your NGO (for this section I am simply looking for stories about your interaction with government officials)
 - How do you feel about this process?
 - Would you do anything differently next time?
 - Explain
 - Does this experience differ from your experience in dealing with governments other than the Malawi government?
 - Repeat the above for other instances

General Comments (about 20 minutes)

- With regards to how your work is affected what is your opinion of the following:
 - Government involvement
 - Government regulation
 - Turnover of government personnel
 - Government policy changes
 - NGOs in Malawi
 - The NGO/government relationship in Malawi
- Do you have any final comments?

- Galvin, M. and A. Habib (2003). "The politics of decentralisation and donor funding in South Africa's rural water sector." Journal of Southern African Studies 29(4): 865-884.

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