



Frank Kasonga, Director of World Connect Malawi

Basking in the warmth of Africa: SGS Consulting visits Malawi

Our efforts to help build philanthropy infrastructure in the region found us travelling to Malawi in March to meet with among others, World Connect Malawi (WCM). We could not have anticipated that our visit would coincide with Cyclone Freddy which killed over 450 people, and injured and displaced many, many more. Although being in Lilongwe we were out of the direct line of the cyclone, the effects of the inclement weather was certainly a reminder that marginalised communities, already struggling with fragile social and economic systems, can barely survive such climate-related emergencies. Suddenly, our visit took on a new urgency, the two-fold notion of resilience resonating deeply and in a new way.

The ability of African communities to be resilient, to ban together or 'make do' has always been an inherent ingredient in the practice of local giving. But witnessing the destruction caused by Cyclone Freddy was also a reminder that Malawi's resilience to environmental disaster must be strengthened. It ushers in the need for more meaningful dialogue on how vertical and horizontal philanthropy, as well as strong bilateral relationships in Africa could assist countries in the wake of such tragedies.

Within this context, it was, and remains encouraging to witness WCM in the midst of its transition to become a community foundation support organisation (CFSO). A large component of this shift, as we learned in our meeting in Salima, involves WCM mentoring nine CBOs interested in becoming community foundations. Together with WCM's Director, Frank Kasonga, SGS Consulting introduced the concept of community philanthropy, the role of community foundations, as well as the value of CFSOs. It was a vibrant engagement, with group discussions reflecting on the feasibility of the new development model and how the organisations see similarities with the work they currently undertake. WCM and SGS also facilitated a workshop on resource mobilization strategies, and embedding the asset-based development approach.

Recognising the existing financial resources, talents and other non-monetised assets within a community, helps to position that community to take charge of

its own development. It also orients donors towards building on existing community assets and structures as opposed to parachuting inappropriate interventions that are ill-aligned with community priorities. In this way, individuals and groups in communities can mobilise and leverage existing resources with private businesses and local government for sustainable development. In our discussions, the agency and resolve of local village communities was made clear. We saw how communities in Malawi take a lead in their own development, using local assets to embark on initiatives such as building a school block. This seems to be a pervasive quality at village level.



SGS Team with the staff and board members of World Connect Malawi



THREADING TOGETHER COMMUNITY PHILANTHROPY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



Workshop participants in Lilongwe learn about the Regional Resource Hub

The purpose of our visit was two-fold, as we're increasingly appreciating the cross-pollination of ideas between our individual programmes. In addition to championing the practice of community philanthropy, SGS Consulting focuses on strengthening community-based organisations who address issues of social justice. Through our Resource Hub Initiative, we partner with experienced consultants to provide institutional support and capacity building to grassroots organizations that are black-led, women-led, disability-led and youth-led, across the region. Once again, WCM was able to introduce us to CBOs interested in making use of the Resource Hub. A common refrain from CBOs was the need for support around strategic development.

We took the opportunity to briefly introduce the concept of community philanthropy to these CBOs. This type of organic dovetailing within our programmes is proving exciting. Combining community philanthropy and a strategic focus on social justice means we are moving towards a better understanding of how to champion and make real social justice philanthropy. This is the pathway to making much-needed structural changes in vulnerable communities

An information session with consultants provided an opportunity to gauge their appetite to get involved in the Resource Hub Initiative, where they would be linked to specific requests proffered by organisations. They would also be offered a co-learning space to learn and share their experiences for purposes of deepening the consulting practise.



Kgaogelo Mashiloane from SGS Consulting addressing community based organisations in the social justice space

YOUNG, GIFTED & GIVING



Yolisa, Frank and Kgaogelo (left to right)

A highlight of the visit was meeting one of WCM's grantees, the *Luso Langa* Youth Group in Salina. *Luso Langa*, loosely translated as 'my talent', is a reminder of the wellspring of potential inherent in the youth on the continent. Investment in youth development and youth philanthropy is critical if the continent is going to reap its demographic dividend.

Established between 2018/19, *Luso Langa* emerged through a poultry business and has grown to include numerous livelihood activities such as a solar powered incubator. The latter assists the community with cell phone battery charging services, a barber and local market shop, and an adult education centre, among others. The income generated in and by the youth group ensures better sustained livelihoods for not only the young women and men who are member volunteers, but

also for mothers in the community. The money incurred by *Luso Langa* supports school-going members of the organization with school tuition, with two of them recognised for their outstanding academic performance.



The talented members of *Luso Langa*



Youth from Luso Langa

These impressive strides are part of a larger energy and efforts by young people who make a difference in the lives of their communities. It is within these marginal communities with scarce financial resources that a US\$2 000 grant can translate into a chicken run, 24 scholarships for fellow young people, a grocery store, a hair salon, and a solar-powered room/building space for learners to study at night.



Representatives of the nine organisations who attended the Community Foundation Development workshop

Our insight into the work supported by WCM was telescopic, meaning that although our view into their world was particular and brief, it provided a vast look at what exists and could exist. We are certainly cheering WCM's social impact in parts of Malawi and will continue to support their process to establish their independence in Malawi and localise and indigenise their profile and work. Despite or maybe because of the rains and its

resultant devastation, philanthropy in the country known as The Warmth of Africa, is set to grow. Everywhere we looked, the sentiment was prevalent, even in popular culture. Case in point, the lyrics of local Malawian singer Bornface Ndamera: *Chilipo, Chinafunu M'bale - whatever comes, and whatever happens, in life, one will always need a relative.*