

Connecting lives



Eagles permanently breaks dependency mindsets, freeing communities to solve current and future challenges

Welcome to Connecting Lives! Eagles breaks mindsets of dependency, equipping people in Malawi with the skills to transform their own lives. This edition focuses on engaging others to ensure long-term change—through partnership and advocacy. We also provide some striking evidence of the cost-effectiveness of our approach compared to traditional-style development.

*Check out a new video of our work and offset your **carbon emissions** at www.eaglesmalawi.org and please remember to select Malawi Support as your designated charity on smile.amazon.co.uk and Amazon will donate 0.5% of the cost of every eligible purchase you make to Eagles' work.*

27 times more cost-effective

Eagles' recent research (soon to be published in an academic journal) found that our church and community mobilisation (CCM) approach has the same level of positive impact on peoples' lives as a very successful traditional-style project but:

- is 27 times more cost-effective (costs less than 4% of the traditional project)
- equips communities to be four times more confident of solving problems for themselves
- results in more deliberate, direct community action to care for the most vulnerable.

We compared a successful Eagles' project, A* rated by the British government, with some of Eagles' best CCM work. The traditional approach, addressing food insecurity and climate-related disasters, involved donating materials such as water pumps, livestock and seeds, and providing skills-training in areas like village savings.

In contrast, CCM transforms mindsets, equipping people to move from depending on others to working together as local churches and communities. They learn to problem-solve in creative ways using locally available resources.

All the money you give to Malawi Support goes towards this CCM approach. (*cont. p 3*)

Partnering against floods



Youth photographers show people around their exhibition.

In November 2019, a youth group from a village badly hit by cyclone Idai, shared their photos of life after the flood with government officials, representatives from the private sector, traditional chiefs, other NGOs and faith leaders. Eagles hosted the event.

Eagles had previously trained and lent cameras to the young people so the young people could portray the messages and images they wanted others to understand about the impact of climate change on their lives. Eagles' very collaborative approach to advocacy helped to draw in others — much more innovative than the usual approach of just identifying a solution to an issue, then trying to persuade the government (or another group) to take up the idea.

Eagles director, Victor, called on everyone to join hands with the young people to form a partnership that would strengthen flood resilience across the whole district, bringing great changes from small actions.

Hazards like cyclones are unavoidable, but people can put in place measures to reduce the likelihood and mitigate the devastation they cause.

Participants at the event brainstormed the root causes of the damage, which included things like deforestation, bad drainage and not knowing how to build flood-resistant houses.

Considering their own work in the light of the root causes, each group decided what to continue and strengthen, what to stop and what more needed to be done.

They committed to actions, like these:

- From an NGO with expertise in building flood resistant houses:
"I am touched by those mud houses that just collapsed. We will visit that area."
- From a Government official:
"We will really work with communities on these issues: not planting next to the river, building back stronger houses."
- From a faith leader:
"We believe faith comes through hearing God's word. We have a message from creation to care for our world. We will include these messages as we are preaching."



Communities work together to protect themselves from flooding.

Caring for creation

Eagles also works with other faith-based organisations in Malawi to advocate for better environmental policies. For example, we recently won a case in the High Court against single-use plastic bags - now, no new ones will be made.

27 times more cost-effective (cont. from p1)

We carried out participatory research with eight communities, gathering data about changes in their quality of life since the beginning of the CCM and the traditional project. We focused on six areas of change: food security, health, livelihoods, education, caring for the environment and inclusion.

We found that the traditional projects had an impressive impact in the areas of change they directly addressed; but people took little or no action outside the project. CCM communities achieved almost identical progress in quality of life, but without any direct training or material inputs: the communities chose, resourced and implemented all activities themselves. Following the change in mindset, even the poorest villages found the resources to solve many of their challenges or successfully partnered with others.



This suggests that NGOs often have low expectations of what communities can achieve, thus hindering their long-term development. In the words of Victor, Executive Director of Eagles,

“Donating solutions can be as inhibiting to sustained change as donating objects.”

Our research shows that facilitating problem-solving processes is key to long-term success. NGOs need to focus on investing in people rather than investing in things. Rather than just providing more skills-training, they need to challenge how people see themselves and their world.

As one village chief from a CCM community said in the research:

“In the future, our village will be so advanced! If you depend on organisations, they come and go; but if you are self-reliant, you develop yourselves.”

Pastors partner with local government

Inspired by Eagles, some pastors in southern Malawi decided to partner with local community leaders and government officials to improve social justice in their communities.

During the meeting, 25 leaders, including pastors from different denominations, looked together at the Biblical mandate to care for creation and how Joseph prepared Egypt to survive a famine. They then discussed issues in their area, including the long distance to the hospital and secondary school, the high school drop-out rate and the lack of sanitation. They decided to:

- meet again at the end of the month to analyse the causes and identify solutions;
- hold elections to chose a new Village Development Committee to coordinate community activities and liaise with NGOs and local government;
- meet with their MP and local councillors to improve their relationship with them.

One of the village chiefs said, ***“This the best community meeting I have attended so far because it brought us together as leaders of the people from different groupings to talk about the development of our area. This has shown that we love each other and our area.”***

The Group Village Headman declared: ***“We need to be meeting regularly so that we should keep on discussing about development of our area – anytime, the door is open.”***

Faith leaders protect Malawi's children

Recently Eagles took part in a conference called 'Faith for Positive Change for Children', hosted by UNICEF. The aim was for UNICEF and other NGOs to find ways of working collaboratively with faith groups in a sustainable and systemic way.

Eagles joined with 50 other faith leaders, faith-based organisations, government and UNICEF staff. We reflected on the mandate in our sacred texts to protect and value children and the importance of not underestimating or leaving them out. Learning from these, from

our own experience and from external evidence, we developed a 'journey of change' that captured how we can work most effectively together to change attitudes and behaviour. We identified the key as engaging communities in dialogue on the level of their heart and beliefs, as well as head-knowledge.

"The PhD-holders in community knowledge are there in the village, however much research we have done. They must involve us, not us involving them." (Victor, Eagles director)

Not only did we make plans to protect children better in our own work, but we created an inter-faith task force with the other agencies to bring positive change for children throughout Malawi.

"We... commit to a mind and heart change and seek to transform the face of Malawi, with our individual and collective efforts, creating a safe environment for our children and never let them be subjected to any form of abuse anywhere, and by anyone, in Malawi."



Working together to keep the balloon in the air provides a picture of partnering to change attitudes and behaviour that harm children.

Meet Sigere

Eagles Church & Community Mobilisation Facilitator, Northern Malawi

Why did you join Eagles?

Before, I worked on different development projects but did not see much progress until I learned about church and community mobilisation. Unfortunately I did not have time to implement what I learned, but Eagles rescued me and gave me the opportunity to meet churches and discuss the responsibility of churches in their areas.

What do you most enjoy about work?

I most like seeing people and churches being transformed because they have been inspired by what we taught them.

What are the biggest challenges you face?

The high dependence rate among the communities which disturbs the progress of our work. We also have inadequate resources to be used in the most hard-to-reach areas.

Tell us about your family

I am third born in the family of five, married to the most handsome man and blessed with a son. He is called Chris and is now six years old.

