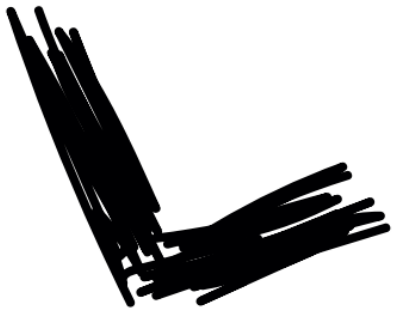Links

Moving from Dependency to Sustainability

Sam Walker

Links Africa Region Coordinator

Personal Background

Sam Walker – 34 – British – sam@linksinternational.org.uk

- UK Physiotherapist (2008-2012)
- Moved to Malawi (2012)
- Managerial role in a Malawian Regional Hospital (2012-2016)
- MSc in International Development - Research on Inclusion (2020)
- Current role - Links' Africa Region Coordinator (2017-)

Website: www.links.charity

- Links HQ Office - Littlehampton, UK
- Links USA Office - Texas, US
- *Links Africa Office - Lilongwe, Malawi*

Our mission is to *connect people, confront poverty* and to *create potential*. We work with partners around the world to provide long-term sustainable solutions and lasting change through focused resourcing and training.

We believe genuine transformation is possible, when we offer fully rounded answers and solutions to the issues that our partners and their communities face.

Links targets, spirit, soul, body and community through five main areas:
- *Faith*
- *Business*
- *Healthcare*
- *Education*
- *Justice*

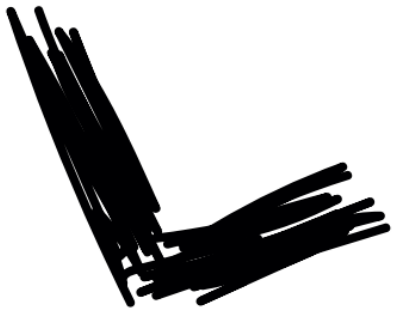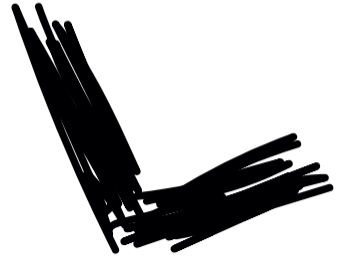# Moving from Dependency to Sustainability

Sam Walker

Links Africa Region Coordinator

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Dependency vs Sustainability

- Development and charity organisations have learnt over the last three decades the importance to include sustainability into their efforts.
- The topic of *sustainability* gathered considerable pace by organisations and government in the 1990s once the silver bullet approaches to development, economics and policies had largely failed.
- Internationally there are many recent examples of this effort being for all:
  - Sustainable Development Goals
  - Paris Climate Agreement
  - Papal Encyclical Laudato si (Pope's manifesto to Equality and Development)
- Despite this concentration on sustainability, agreement is hard to find on the methods to move towards it, what is actually means, and is it even possible.

Sustainable? (Breakout Session 1)

What does sustainability mean to you?
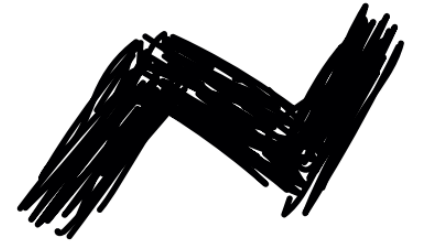
Is your meaning of sustainability achievable?

How would do you measure this sustainability?

Use project or programme examples.

Sustainable?

To maintain.

To break even.

To produce output without ongoing input.

To be self-reliant.

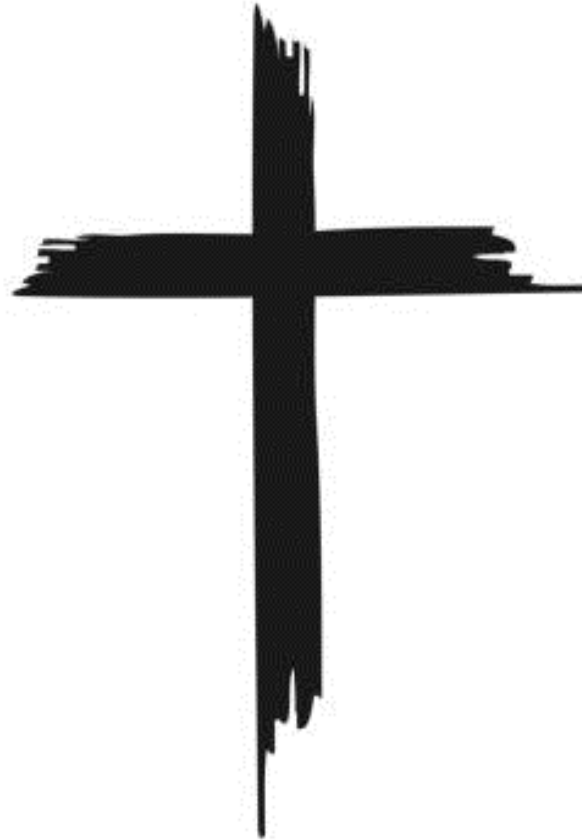*"That mysterious thing we believe will appear one day"*

Or a term we use when "we don't have a plan for what happens after the project!"

"Eden" Sustainability

Relationship with
**God/Purpose**

Relationship with
**Self**

Relationship with
**One Another**

Relationship with the
**Earth**

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Biblical Concept of Sustainability

- Eden was the place and state of ongoing sustainable life.
- This side of new heaven and earth there are cycles, seasons, and hard effort to work to create any sustainability. But *blessing* to create within this fallen state is still present in creation God called *very good*.
- Through Jesus' work on the cross, we are invited back to participate in God's work to restore, renew and reclaim Eden's *life* sustaining principles and rule on earth.
- Overall the *blessing* of sustainability is through unity and togetherness, to live within the *image of God*, to have purpose to rule but through the *Tree of (God's) Life* than the *Tree of (our own) Knowledge*.
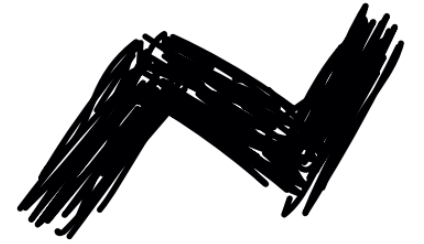
Links' Core Target Areas

- To be sustainable we have to think and plan holistically both within a specific area of development as well as the wider picture of the whole organisation, community or even world.
- Links' has five areas we focus on and then attempt to build in sustainable principles that hopefully cross over into each other as they are carried out in a community:
  - *Faith*
  - *Business*
  - *Healthcare*
  - *Education*
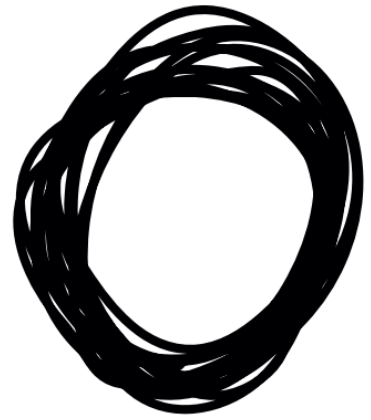 - *Justice*

Target Area – *Faith*

- Christian faith is a big part of what we do and why we do it.
- Partnering with churches and training faith and local community leaders to see God's Kingdom built in their areas.
- Leadership training is vital to healing the broken "Eden" relationships – often focus on character development, as well as leadership skill sets, like communication, decision making.
- Many local leaders have no formal or informal leadership training - learning how managing people and understanding your leadership character can have a long-term impact.
- Faith and local leaders are key to sustaining a vision – biggest changes are where leaders are active and have effective styles.
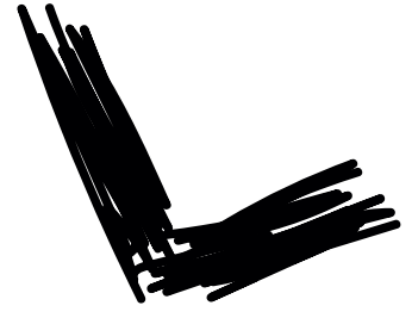
Target Area – *Faith*

Example:
Local chief in central Malawi came to faith and was discipled with leadership training. The transformation to his community was staggering, he started to care for the people in his area, even its environment planting trees, keeping bees and encouraging cleaning of surroundings. Health and education became a community priority. A preschool and primary school was set up and run by the community, as well as a small clinic with committed healthcare volunteers. The chief's servant leadership was the catalyst for all this change.

Target Area – *Business*

- Financial sustainability is key to any organisation or project.
- Links' encourages this in two ways:
  - *Micro-Enterprise Development (MED)*
  - *Large Income Generating Activities (IGA)*
- **MED**: involves the training and setting up of community-led loan communities, who give to borrowers a revolving fund after 1-3 loan cycles. The committee also coach the borrowers they lend to.
- **IGAs:** involves working with a partner to resource a large project that will become financially sustainable, as well as creating ongoing profit that can be used to sustain other community programmes. Examples – farms, shops, rentals, livestock.
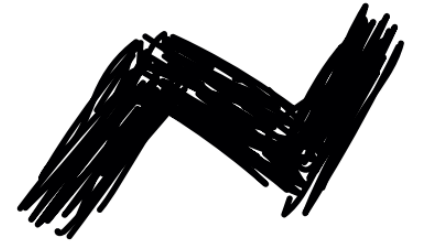
Target Area – *Business*

Examples:

MED committee of 11 members in Malawi has over 200 revolving borrowers, with at least 80 borrowers off loans with established businesses. Administration fee (10%) covers all the costs of running the scheme. Committee have recently independently empowered another committee to start distributing small agribusiness loans.

Solar irrigated farms have become successful IGAs for 5 partner organisations in Malawi and Zambia. The irrigation allows more harvests throughout the year. The sales maintain the farm as well as creating funds for community projects and programmes. In the pandemic one partner was able to self-fund Covid sensitisations.
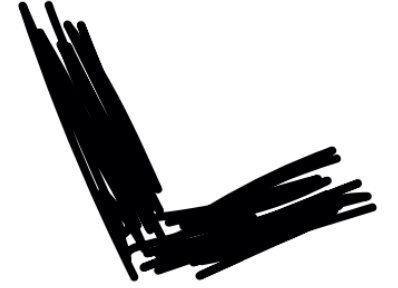
Target Area – *Healthcare*

- Good healthcare is key to a thriving community.
- Clear and effective basic health messages need to be accessible.
- All healthcare projects and programmes are hard to sustain, because of their balance of accessible healthcare and affordability.
- Links uses to main routes to promoting preventative healthcare:
  - Community Healthcare (CHC) Training.
  - Basic Healthcare Resourcing – water filters, moringa trees, mosquito nets.
- *CHC*: involves training up healthcare volunteers to understand 5 core areas **S**anitation, **H**ygiene, **I**mmunisation, **N**utrition, and **E**mpowerment (SHINE Programme). All these areas are key in preventing many diseases. The Empowerment module assists volunteers to train their community and more volunteers.

Target Area – *Healthcare*

Examples:

Water filters and mosquito nets were resourced for partners but through community-led committees who are tasked with selection and maintenance of healthcare items. They also build up a small fee together for future replacements of filters or nets.

In Zambia, an original 6 CHC volunteer groups were trained through the SHINE programme, now this same group has expanded to new communities and set up over 10 new CHC groups. These groups resourced healthcare books and given training on how to use the books. This provides them opportunity to increase their knowledge independently and new training.

Target Area – *Education*

- Education is one of the major keys to ensuring that we win the battle against poverty – and sustaining that battle!
- Links focuses a great deal on empowering people through our training in every target area from healthcare, to justice, to business, to faith.
- Training is often tailormade through ongoing partnership and understanding of a community's, leaders', and volunteers' needs.
- A key element of sustainability in training is the ultimate aim to create Trainer of Trainers modules in each target area – so that those trained can train others to a set level of empowerment.
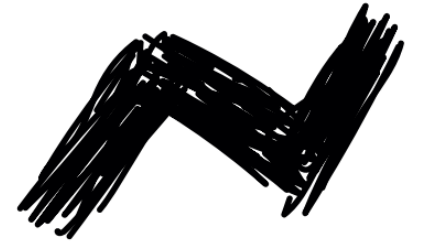- *Examples:* CHC volunteers training, MED committees, Leadership empowerment.

Target Area – *Justice*

- Social justice is at the heart of confronting poverty and realising long-term change in communities.
- The common phase *give a man a fish and you will feed him for a day, teach a man to fish and you will feed him for life,* only becomes true if there are not larger injustices at play. What happens if the local government dam up the river? What happens if waste from mining gold kills the fish?
- When building in sustainability we must look wider at the overall picture – the key power and control elements.
- *Examples:* inclusion sensitisations, leadership training, heart change not just skill training, real participation, diversity in committees i.e. gender, race, tribe, disability, class.

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P's to Planning in Sustainability
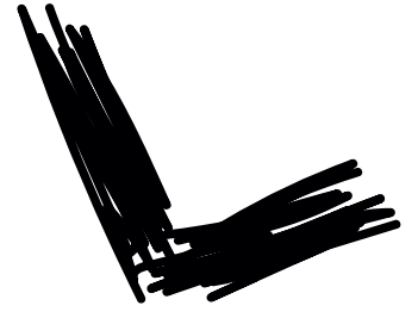
Partnership
Participation
Project or Programme
Progressive

P's to Planning in Sustainability

Partnership

- Relationship building first and for long-term – listen, learn, love.
- Success through working together – come alongside.
- Sharing visions, expectations, experiences early on.
- Observe what broken "Eden" relationships exist in the community.

Partner quote:

When asked by larger organisations, "Who are your donors? Why do all your projects work so well?" Partner replied with, "our programs work because of the way that Links will actually sit with us and train us, not just with programs and ideas, but with genuine love and commitment."
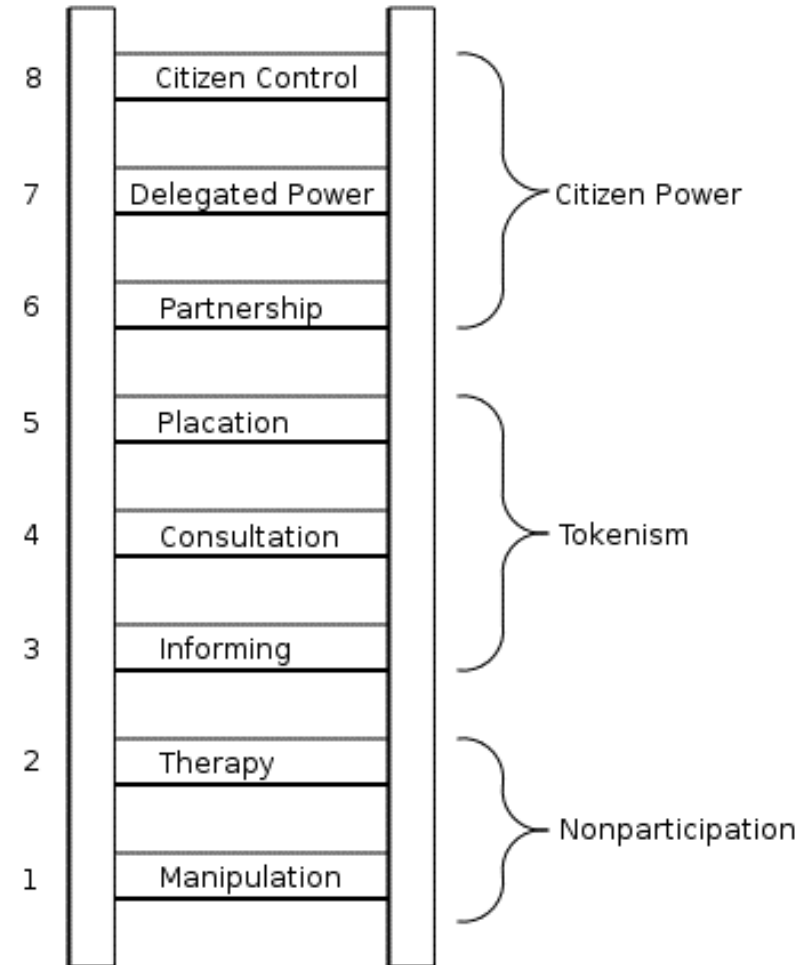
P's to Planning in Sustainability

Participation

- Enabling and building up ownership within projects and programmes.
- Avoid tokenism – build in trust with accountability and let go of control.
- Decision making should be independent – i.e. committees.

Example:

Inclusion of people with disabilities (PWDs) in micro-enterprise programme was low. Creating better access for PWDs into programme came through having PWDs on community-led committees.

8	Citizen Control	
7	Delegated Power	Citizen Power
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	
4	Consultation	Tokenism
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	
1	Manipulation	Nonparticipation

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P's to Planning in Sustainability

Project or Programme

- Type of intervention is important with how sustainability can be built into an organisation.
- Projects: time sensitive, only requiring one off or staggered capital, and the sustainability can be built within itself and controlled through planning.
- Programmes: particularly ongoing relief, outreach, or educational focused ones can be difficult to sustain within themselves – more creativity required.
- Often larger projects that have a community benefit within themselves, like employment, but can also be social enterprises that generate wider income
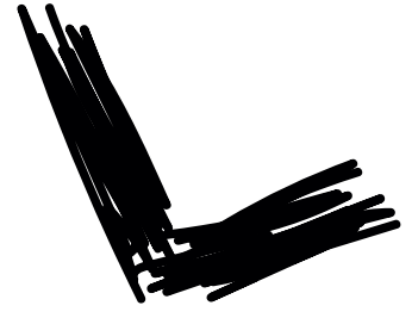
Example:

Education programme: Families of schoolchildren given inputs to grow their own food, but a percentage to be given to the preschool for child's lunch.

P's to Planning in Sustainability

Progressive

- Work in manageable steps – success on small scale.
- Develop progressive asset contribution from community or stakeholders – financial, physical etc.
- Identify key area of sustainability for area or organisation – financial, social, environmental.

Examples:

Partner organisation had some land available already. Set up solar irrigation, started with small area of land, but system could be expanded if successful. Another partner girl empowerment project community had to contribute progressive 40 to 60% of school girl needs over years in form of crop harvest.

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Sustainability P's (Breakout Session 2)

Chose one project/programme:
- **Secondary Schoolgirl Empowerment**
- **Microloan Scheme for Vulnerable Youths**
- **Livestock Rearing (Pig Empowerment)**
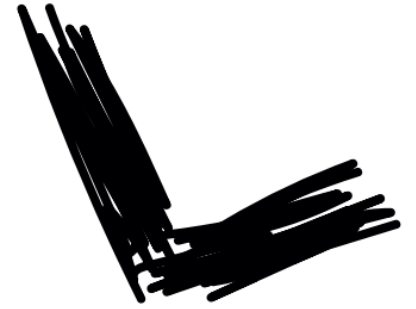- **Community Tree Planting/Reforestation**

Apply the 4 P's to your chosen project/programme:
- **Partnership** – How can you promote partnership?
- **Participation** – How can you ensure best participation?
- **Project or Programme** – Which one? Sustainable ideas?
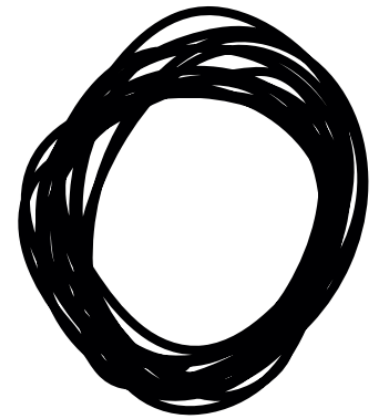- **Progressive** – What steps to build sustainability?

Tools for Building in Sustainability

- Simple tools or activities to try:
  - *Risk Assessment*
  - *Asset Awareness*
  - *Financial Accounting*
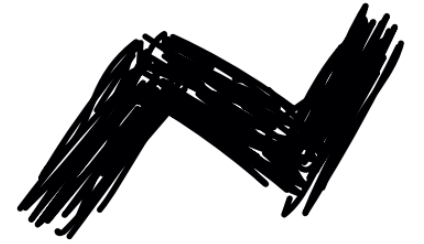
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Tools for Building in Sustainability

- ## *Risk Assessment*
  - *Assessing risks and how to mitigate them will reduce future failures.*

Highlighted Risks	Impact of Risk on Success (Low-Med-High)	Likelihood of Risk Happening (Low-Med-High)	Action(s) to Reduce Risk
Example: Fire Damage of Crops	High	Med	- Fire breaks created - Security against poachers - Community involvement in farm project - Involved local authorities in project

Risk Mitigation (Breakout Session 3)

Discuss three or more possible risks to a solar irrigation system farm project. Project to generate organisation income initially from sales of bananas.

State the risk impact level and the livelihood of risk happening.

Then come up with 2 or more actions to reduce risk happening.

Highlighted Risks	Impact of Risk on Success (Low-Med-High)	Likelihood of Risk Happening (Low-Med-High)	Action(s) to Reduce Risk
Fire Damage of Crops	High	Med	- Fire breaks created - Security against poachers

Tools for Building in Sustainability

- ***Asset Awareness***
  - Great awareness of what assets are available and how they could be maximised will build resilience and reduce vulnerability.
  - Based off the Sustainable Livelihood Approach, assets can be categorised into five useful subsections:
    - ***Physical*** Assets – equipment, buildings, location
    - ***Natural*** Assets – land, vegetation, animals, water
    - ***Social*** Assets – community, authority connections, social groups
    - ***Human*** Assets – labour, skill set, knowledge
    - ***Financial*** Assets – savings, loan access, local support, outside donor
  - Diversity is a key to sustainability.
  - Linking assets is another methods to maximise potential.

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Tools for Building in Sustainability

- ***Financial Accounting***
  - Often neglected part of projects/programmes but vital to planning successful long-term interventions – should be reviewed over time.
  - Simple cashflow projections can help partners or organisations assess the "real" financial sustainability of the project or programme.
  - Splitting capital funding with part grant – part loan can incentivise success of project.
  - Overestimate your costs / Underestimate your income.
  - Identify all potential fixed and variable expenditures – omitting transport could mean the difference between self-sustaining or project stalling!

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