Malawi is experiencing a youth bulge. Over half of the country’s population is under the age of 18. In response, following the transition to multi-party democracy in 1994, a large number of youth-serving organizations (YSOs) have been established to impart resources, skills and knowledge. Their ultimate goal is to provide opportunity. But who defines the terms?

My research questions are: Who decides which projects are worth funding and which are not? What happens when in-country fundraising is extremely difficult because the majority of people are poor and the income-earning middle class is very small? And finally, are the needs of young people being properly addressed by YSOs?

This paper will explore how international and national political activity influences the agendas of YSOs. The case study will examine how one particular youth group in Lilongwe is successfully navigating this tumultuous landscape.

The findings demonstrate a multi-layered success strategy. At the primary level, YSOs were created because external funds were available; without these funds, in-country resources would most likely not be available to support their activities at present levels. Inter-organizational competition can be fierce, and success depends on the organization’s ability to adopt to the donor’s needs, the ability to appear professional, fluency in “development speak” and reporting guidelines, and network contacts.

The formula, if there is one, to measure organizational success is not straightforward; it is a complex web of actors and value systems that flow in harmony and contradiction. What is commonly understood but rarely communicated in project proposals, however, is that organizations exist first and foremost to provide employment opportunities for staff and I would argue that they are one of the primary beneficiaries of any project.

For full Thesis, please contact the author at jenikaw@gmail.com

Thank you.