

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

Thousand reasons to be proud of our links to the people of Malawi

Politicians try not to make a habit of agreeing with each other too often, but there's one issue that never fails to attract all-party support in Scotland: the 150-year-old friendship with Malawi which dates back to Dr David Livingstone. The leaders of all four opposition parties in Holyrood joined Dr Alasdair Allan, Scotland's Minister for International Development and Europe, to launch a new report celebrating 1,000 civic links between Scotland and Malawi. These 1,000 people-to-people and community-to-community partnerships are spread across every Holyrood constituency, engaging all 129 MSPs.

Behind each of these 1,000 partnerships – across schools, churches, charities, local authorities, businesses, universities and community groups – are hundreds of Scots and Malawians working together in solidarity and friendship. This isn't a traditional model of international development. It's something distinctly Scottish: a whole-nation approach, underpinned by sense of dignified two-way partnership, not charity.

It's easy to be cynical about links led by churches, schools and community groups but there's strong evidence to suggest these partnerships are having a real impact, in both countries. The University of Edinburgh estimates that there are more than 94,000 Scots involved in links with Malawi, and that these links benefit



Political figures from all the major parties got together to celebrate an enduring partnership between nations, writes **David Hope-Jones**

more than 300,000 Scots and four million Malawians a year.

This is more important than ever, with 6.5m Malawians facing a food crisis caused by the changing climate. Towns and cities across Scotland are working with their partner communities in Malawi to respond to this crisis. The Scottish Government has launched an innovative aid match programme in response to the crisis, committing to match, pound-for-pound, Scottish donations to the special appeals run by Christian Aid Scotland, EMMS International, Oxfam Scotland, and SCIAF.

The Scottish Government's Malawi Development Programme has always prided itself on doing things differently. Over the last decade it has chosen to work actively with and through Scottish civic society to deliver development assistance. This has allowed the Scottish Government to have a disproportionate positive impact in Malawi by building on the generations of friendship, trust and expertise between the two countries. For every pound invested by the Scottish Government in Malawi, almost

£10 of input comes from the people of Scotland.

To help launch the new #1000partnerships report, Dr Allan was joined outside the Scottish Parliament by Ruth Davidson, Kezia Dugdale, Willie Rennie and Patrick Harvie, to meet their own constituents engaged in Malawi links. All five got into the spirit of things, being dressed in traditional Malawian clothing by Malawians living in Scotland.

While not at the photocall, First Minister Nicola Sturgeon said: "This report, produced by the Scottish Government-funded Scotland Malawi Partnership, shows the depth of the enduring relationship we enjoy, with links to Malawi from communities in every part of Scotland."

Scottish Conservatives leader Ruth Davidson said: "The links between Scotland and Malawi are deep, enduring and worthy of celebration. At heart, this is about friendship. Not just between governments, but between two peoples."

Scottish Labour leader Dugdale added: "The increasing number of Scots actively involved in links with



↑ MSPs Alasdair Allan, Patrick Harvie, Ruth Davidson, Kezia Dugdale and Willie

Malawi through our schools and universities through to charities, hospitals and local businesses shows the kindness at the heart of the Scottish character."

And Scottish Lib Dems leader Willie Rennie said: "Through education, communication and engagement we are forging a lasting relationship with

this fascinating and creative country at the heart of Africa. Together Scotland and Malawi can grow and prosper together."

And Greens co-convenor Patrick Harvie said: "Almost every section of Scottish civic life is now involved with Malawi in some way, with record numbers of community groups,

Rennie get a kick out of dressing up in traditional Malawi garb

schools, universities and hospitals actively engaged."

To thank Scotland's political leaders for getting dressed up, each was given a bottle of Malawi Gin, the latest in a line of high-quality Malawian exports finding new markets in Scotland and contributing to sustainable economic development in Malawi.

David Hope-Jones OBE, Principal Officer, Scotland Malawi Partnership. For Malawi videos with the party leaders, see www.tinyurl.com/1000partnerships. For details on 1,000 Malawi links, www.tinyurl.com/HolyroodMalawi. To donate to the Malawi Food Crisis appeals, www.tinyurl.com/Malawifood



Human beings can now be edited ... but we may not like the results

Tweaks to genes raise questions of identity for **Thomas Garnham**

If you modified or edited your genes, would you remain the same person or would you become someone else? Suppose that you changed your appearance or became more intelligent through genetic engineering. A friend might say that you look or seem different, and you might also feel different.

But changing your appearance or becoming more intelligent would not transform you into a completely new person. We would not mourn your death if your appearance changed. And it would be odd to celebrate the birth of a new person if you increased your IQ score. You are the same person now as you were when you were a child, even though your physical and psychological traits have changed.

Yet there is only so much change a

person can undergo before he or she ceases to be who they once were.

For example, it is not implausible to suggest, from a philosophical perspective, that someone with severe dementia which completely transforms his or her character is not the same person he or she used to be when he or she was healthy.

And if a person's genes were edited to such an extent that he or she became a different biological organism, it is open to debate as to whether that person would survive the procedure.

Although it is not currently feasible to bring about such drastic changes to a person through genetic engineering, it is now possible to edit the human genome: the entire genetic heritage of a person. Last

year, a group of Chinese scientists used a new genome editing technology, CrispR/Cas9, on human embryos to successfully switch out a mutated gene responsible for a hereditary blood disorder.

Gene editing technology is still in its infancy and the long-term effects of modifying the genetic make-up of human embryos is still unknown. But once technology is further developed and scientists better understand how genes interact with each other and the environment to express certain traits, it is conceivable that geneticists will be able to make changes to the genetic make-up of a person which will affect the very core of who that person is.

Intuitively, it will be easier to make such identity-affecting modifications

using genome editing technologies on human embryos rather than on human adults. Most changes to the genetic make-up of an embryo will be identity affecting because the changes themselves will fundamentally shape the identity of the person that the embryo will develop into.

To make an analogy, if you change the design of a house right at the beginning of the building work, you will end up with a significantly different house than the one that would have existed had you stuck to the original design. So any time an embryo is genetically modified, we should ask whether the embryo has merely been modified or whether it has actually been transformed into an entirely different embryo. This is literally a matter of life and death when talk-

ing about embryos since the original one would no longer exist; and this is the crux of why so many people find human genome editing morally objectionable.

Human adults, on the other hand, are already fully developed organisms with a robust sense of self. So the extent of genetic modification that is needed to affect the identity of a human adult is likely to be much greater than that of a human embryo. Staying with the earlier analogy, redeveloping a house once it has already been built will not normally transform it into a completely different house. To call it a different house, the original will likely need to be demolished and a new house built in its place.

But genome editing can be a matter

of life and death for adults as well. It is just that adults can survive much more genetic modification than embryos while remaining the same person. Adults would only cease to exist as the persons they are if they experience a transformation similar in magnitude to that of someone who was once healthy but now suffers from severe dementia. Although theoretically possible, such a change brought about by genetic modification is unlikely and extreme.

Of course, there are other reasons people oppose genome editing. Editing the human germline (the genetic material that is passed on to future generations) also opens up the possibility of creating an entirely new species. This may threaten our way of life and even our very existence

as human beings. How salient these concerns about editing the human germline are is currently a matter of speculation. But what is clear now is that genome editing technologies could potentially change our identity as individuals and as a species in profound and fundamental ways.

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