

Learning from Each Other

Report of an NGO Consultation on Community Based Approaches to Development

25 November 1996 at Kara Counselling Resource Centre, Lusaka

**Report and Facilitation of Meeting by Richard Holloway of Pact
(Zambia)
Convened and sponsored by UNICEF Zambia**

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Report of an NGO Consultation on Community Based Approaches to Development

In this report materials presented to the Consultation on flip charts are shown in bold and in boxes: materials produced on flip chart during the Consultation are in italics in boxes: points arising from discussions are in plain text:

Preamble

Many NGOs working in Zambia are working with and through community based structures and organisations - particularly (but not exclusively) those working in the fields of Health and Nutrition. There is at present no forum for NGOs working in this way to share their experiences and learn from each others best practices.

At the same time the Government of Zambia, through the Ministry of Health, is also helping to set up community based structures to help it with its work in the fields of Health and Nutrition. The Health Reform Program also talks of partnership between the Government and “patients, health workers, traditional healers, community leaders, **churches, NGOs**, private sector and others to work together to produce better health” (my emphasis). There is at present no forum for NGOs to share their experience with the Ministry of Health of the Government of Zambia and no structure by which NGOs experience can be brought into the policy discussions of the Health Reforms.

In order to try and respond to this lack of consultation both between NGOs, and between the NGOs and the Government, UNICEF decided to invite NGOs who were working through community based approaches to a consultation as a first step. 19 NGOs comprising national, international, Lusaka and non-Lusaka, were invited - of which 17 participated. The consultation was experimental - to see if there was a need for a consultative process to be put in place. The response from the NGOs was that such a process was timely and needed - both a process for NGOs to learn more about each others work, and to develop joint thinking - and a process for NGOs to talk to the Government about what they were doing, and what contribution they could make to development to supplement or complement (and in some cases provide an alternative to) the work of the Government of Zambia.

All present felt that the meeting opened up a new way of relating to each other - one of learning from each other, rather than competing with each other, or criticizing each other, and that this was a trend worth supporting and nurturing.

1. Introduction

Mark Stirling, UNICEF representative, opened the meeting by remarking on the rich experience that NGOs and Churches brought to the field of health and nutrition in particular, and how they had often pioneered community based approaches. There was a need for this experience to be understood and appreciated by the Government, and UNICEF was interested to be a catalyst to bring this about. This was a part of the partnership strategy that the Ministry of Health was already committed to. Moreover GRZ had already expressed the fact that they could not, by themselves, do all the work that needs to be done. It was important for NGOs to reflect on what they had to offer, on their best practices, and together to think how they could present their experiences to Government.

UNICEF itself was well aware of very interesting and important work being done in community approaches to, for example, Malaria prevention, and water supply through WASHE, and to participatory methodologies of getting community involvement, like VIPP. It was sure that there were many more. Organisations had been invited to this consultation in the hope that they could learn from each others best practices and come up with concrete steps to strengthen partnerships between all the important development actors.

2. Purpose and Agenda

The Purpose of the meeting, and the Agenda were introduced.

The Purpose was:

Purpose	
•	for NGOs to learn from each others experience in community based approaches to development
•	for NGOs to consider what they can do to help each other
•	to explore the need for mechanisms to bring NGOs together, explore their best practices, and relate to Government and other partners.

and the Agenda was:

Agenda

- **Introduction to Consultation**
- **Personal Introductions and Expectations**
- **Introduction to Information Markets**
- **Inter NGO Information Market**
- **Clarifications/Comments/Issues/Best practices**
- **Offers and Requests**
- **Lunch**
- **NGO-Govt Information Market**
- **Clarifications/Comments/Issues/Best practices**
- **Moving forward from here**

This was agreed by the participants.

3. Personal Introductions and Expectations

Participants were asked to give their name, organisation and their expectations of the Consultation. The list of Participants is provided at Attachment A. 16 organisations were represented (NB: The invitees in no way represent all the NGOs working in these fields. One of the difficulties for anyone interested in NGOs in Zambia is that there is no data base on NGOs by sub-sector).

The Expectations were basically of three kinds :

Expectations

- ***to share experiences and learn from each other***
- ***to improve networking within the NGO community, and particularly within NGOs working in similar fields***
- ***to get some practical concrete follow-up***

4. Introduction to Information Markets

NGOs needed to share a lot of information between each other in a short space of time. UNICEF had asked participants to come prepared to provide information according to an agreed format, but rather than listen to each other speak in sequence about their organisations, the facilitators had provided two large matrices on the walls: one matrix covering NGO community based work, and the other covering the interaction between NGOs and Government. Each Matrix asked questions and participants were asked to answer the questions on cards which were then stuck onto the appropriate space on the wall chart. The questions asked reflected the format that had been sent out to participants ahead of time.

The questions were

1. What general sector does your NGO work in, what is the name of your project/program within that sector, and where does it operate?

Answers were requested under the sectors of Health, Nutrition, Water & Sanitation, Agriculture, and Other, and operational areas were requested under Provinces (by name) and Districts (by number)

2. What Community Based Organisations do you work with or through?

Answers were requested by Name of the CBO, its average population coverage, how it was managed, its main activities, whether it was staffed by paid employees or volunteers, and whether the funding came from local or external sources.

3. If you work in PHC, what are your activities?

In the particular case of NGOs working in the field of PHC (Primary Health Care), an open question was asked of the activities that came under PHC.

4. What other existing non-government organisations do you work with or through?

Answers were requested at Community, District, Provincial, and national levels.

5. What government structures do you relate to at different levels, and how?

Answers were requested for the following Ministries at Community, District, Provincial, and National levels:

- Ministry of Health,
- Ministry of Community Development and Social Services,
- Ministry of Agriculture,
- Ministry of Energy and Water Development,
- Ministry of Local Government and Housing (to include local government)
- Ministry of Education.

Copies of the responses which were stuck on the wall charts are presented as Attachment B (Inter-NGO) and Attachment C (NGO-Government)

5. Inter-NGO Information Market

5.1. Process

Generally the quality of the information that was surfaced through this exercise was good

and was new to many of the participants. A problem was that project and program names were often couched in very general terms (like Integrated Development Project) which gave no understanding to the other participants about the actual work that was done within that project.

Most of the terms seemed clear and were answered to the point. One difficulty is the large number of acronyms and special terms that NGOs have made up to describe their work which confuses those who are not within that organisation

Participants were asked to answer in respect of the particular community based programs or projects that they were working on so that they could talk about it. In some cases their organisations were working on a number of different programs and not all of the relevant people were present.

The facilitator looked at the answers to the questions horizontally across organisations to try and get some insights into the ways that the NGO sector worked.

5.2. Reflections/Clarifications

Taking the questions in turn

1.1 What general sector does your NGO work in? And what is the name of your project/program within that sector?

The majority of the NGOs programs were in the field of Health (14/16) followed by Water and Sanitation (10/16), Nutrition (9/16) and Agriculture (7/16). The category "Other" covered Infrastructure, Women's Empowerment, Income generation, and Education

It was sometimes difficult to understand what activities NGOs were actually involved in, since the names are not always clear

1.2. Where does it operate?

NGOs projects and program varied between "every province and 53 districts" (Zambian Red Cross) to "1 Province and 1 District" (Mumbwa Nutrition Group). It was unfortunate that the space and layout did not permit participants to clarify in which districts in which provinces they were operating, but the cards showed that, for the most part, NGOs in Zambia (as in many places in the world) operate in small islands of intensive development (e.g. one district in one province), and do not try for systematic coverage of the population over a large area, or seek to go to scale.

This is often a cause for debate with Government who point out that they have to operate in the whole country and do not have the luxury that NGOs have to pick and choose where they will work, or what investment they will make.

2. What Community Based Organisations do you work with or through? What is its

coverage, its management, its activities, its staffing, and funding?

The CBOs were usually NGO specific, and were created by the NGOs. They covered an average population of 2000-5000, were nearly always managed by elected committees, were staffed by a combination of paid and volunteer workers, and were funded by both external and local funds. The answer to question about activities of the NGO was not satisfactory in that participants answered it in different ways - some by technical activity (e.g. immunization) while others answered by methodology (e.g. community mobilization)

3. *If you do PHC, what are the activities of the CBO?*

This produced a number of common denominators (nutrition/FP/Watsan/Immunization), but also a few more singular activities (eye care, garbage collection, AIDS care and prevention)

4. *Do you work with other NGOs? If so, at what levels?*

This produced surprisingly few answers: those that were given showed that NGOs worked together at community and national level, but not much else.

5.3. Issues/Best Practices

After looking at the information displayed on the wall charts, participants started raising questions and issues stimulated by the data generated. In the time available there was only a chance to flag certain topics. Participants agreed that these (and other topics) should be dealt with at greater length in some subsequent meeting.

5.3.1. Why do you work where you work?

There were many answers to this - some very specific to the organisation involved (e.g. CMAZ works where historically there are mission hospitals and clinics), some because they have always been there, and some because of their own criteria for the kind of work they want to do. There did not seem much evidence of a long term plan to work in certain areas for some time, have an impact, and move on, and there was little evidence of a scaling up or consolidation strategy. NGOs were largely dotted here and there throughout Zambia.

PAM pointed out the value of working in the most vulnerable and poorest areas, and that information on such areas is available from the World Food Program who calculate vulnerability for each district in Zambia each year. NGOs should get access to such information.

5.3.2. How are the CBOs formed?

Nearly all of the CBOs that NGOs work with or through were formed by the NGOs themselves. Very few made use of existing traditional structures - and many NGOs

created different committees in the same area. It was reported that the same people are often on a number of NGO and government committees. It was also reported that NGOs create different committees in the same area which creates confusion.

Many NGOs said that there were not many existing indigenous structures through which they could work - which gave rise to the need to start your own structure, but many were aware that the structures only existed as long as the NGO was around to service them. Many participants were aware of the need for the people to “own” the community based organisations, and how difficult this was.

In urban areas (and to a lesser degree in rural areas) existing structures are a residue of the second republic’s political structures, and are heavily (and unhelpfully) politicized.

5.3.3. What are the problems of elected committees?

Participants said that their practice was generally to allow the community to elect the officials they wanted, but others agreed that this often resulted in the committee representing the traditional leaders together with older males. Elections rarely seemed to produce many women office bearers, but this was necessary to make sure that Women’s interests were represented.

Elections also did seem to produce power-hungry people who wanted to use their position on the committee for their own ends

5.3.4. Paid staff and volunteers

There was often a tension in a program between those who gave their time and energy freely as volunteers, and those who were hired by the NGO to do at least some of the same work for a salary, or for some reward. It was necessary to be clear what was expected of each kind of person.

5.3.5. Local and external funding

It was agreed that sustainability is problem with CBOs. If they rely totally on local resources, they may be more sustainable, but they may not be able to do very much , such is the poverty of the majority of the people. More can be achieved with external funding, but the effect is in danger of lasting only as long as the external funds last.

5.3.6. Local inter-NGO collaboration

It was clear that there were few examples of NGOs working together - specialising in complementary fields, or offering specialized expertise. There were a few national level networks, but these did not go down to the field.

6. Requests and Offers

Based on what participants had heard in the discussions, and had seen on the wall charts, they were asked if there was anything they felt proud of which they would like to offer to other NGOs, and alternatively, anything which they were interested in which they would like to request from another NGO. The responses came thick and fast:

Offers	
Organisation	Offer made
CCF	<i>CCF had a network of projects all over Zambia, as shown in the Wall chart. They were clustered, well structured, and had strong beneficiary participation. They offered this structure to any other NGO which wanted to work through a ready made structure</i>
CCF	<i>CCF offered any interested NGO the use of its AIMES (Annual Impact Monitoring and Evaluation System) which had 11 indicators in the field of Health and Education. CCF would help any NGO learn how to use it.</i>
CCF	<i>CCF offered information on its programs to any interested NGO</i>
PPAZ	<i>PPAZ offered to train the Community based agents of any NGO in the fields of Family Planning and Reproductive Health</i>
CMAZ	<i>CMAZ offered to teach/train any NGO in the field in which they had a great deal of experience - Home Based Care.</i>
CMAZ	<i>The Primary Eye Care part of CMAZ offered to provide their expertise to any other NGO in the field of blindness prevention particularly through better nutrition and educational programs</i>
FLMZ	<i>FLMZ offered to train any NGO in scientific family planning methods and Family Life Education for young people</i>
CARE	<i>CARE has been developing expertise in PLA (Participatory Action and Learning - the successor to PRA) particularly in urban settings. They offered to train NGOs in techniques which helped communities to identify and prioritize their own problems.</i>
ZRC	<i>Zambian Red Cross had a nationwide structure of volunteers and branches. It was offering this to NGOs who needed such a structure</i>

Requests

Organisation

Request

PAM	<i>PAM needs NGOs with whom it can work in Western Province in the field of drought rehabilitation - particularly with women</i>
CMAZ	<i>CMAZ requests organisations with experience of organisational and financial sustainability to share this with them</i>
CMAZ	<i>CMAZ requests organisations with experience of IEC Materials (Information, Education and Communication) to share this with them</i>
CCZ	<i>CCZ requests NGOs which already have practical development programs to work with the churches through the CCZ structure</i>
CARE	<i>CARE requests organisations which have viable programs in the field of reproductive health with young people to contact them with a view to mutual exchanges</i>
PLAN	<i>PLAN request help with Strategic Planning and with experience of how to keep volunteers enthusiastic and motivated.</i>
ZRC	<i>Zambian Red Cross requests help in training educators working with street kids to acquire counselling skills particularly in relation to HIV/AIDS</i>
CCF	<i>CCF requests help from an organisation in developing a Resource Centre</i>

The Offers and Requests session revealed which aspects of their organisation that participants considered to be good practice and were willing to extend to others. It was noted that such interchanges were, sadly, rare amongst Zambian NGOs.

7. NGO-Government Information Market

The question was asked:

What government structures do you relate to at different levels? Community? District? Province? National?

7.1. Process/Clarification/Reflection

In comparison with the number of cards posted in the previous exercise, the number of cards in this exercise was small - perhaps signifying that NGOs do not have that many

contacts with government. By far the majority of the relations with the government were with the Ministry of Health - mostly at the Community and District level, but also at National level. Ministries of Education and Community Development/Social Services were next most frequent with again most relations being at community and district levels.

In general there were very few relations between NGOs and Government at the provincial level - which is surprising since it is generally agreed that the Provincial Planning Unit is the body which has the greatest amount of information about what NGOs are doing what in their province.

In general NGOs have the least amount of relations with the Ministry of Local Government and Housing, which is very surprising since this Ministry also comprises the District Councils, and the DDCC (District Development Coordinating Councils) the bodies responsible for coordinating all forms of development in a district.

There were a very large number of acronyms, but these seem well understood by the participants.

The facilitator looked at the answers to the questions horizontally across organisations to try and get some insights into the ways that the NGO sector worked.

7.2. Issues/Best Practice

7.2.1. What are the nature of relations between NMGOs and Government?

Many participants talked of the fact that they needed to have relations with different higher levels of government officials in order to get clearance to work with government officials and structures lower down. Some low level government officials would not work with NGOs unless they brought a letter from their boss allowing them to work with the NGO.

Other participants talked of the relationship being based on resources. In many cases Government has technically sound and competent officials who cannot practice their skills or their trade because the Government has no money to put such people into the field. The NGO often acts as the source of funds to allow such people to do the work they should be doing anyhow if the government had the funds

In other cases the NGO acts as the link to get the government officials linked up to groups which can benefit from their expertise. Because Government officials often do not get into the countryside and do not know what is actually happening, NGOs can usefully update and feed information to Government on the problems that are occurring in the country.

Where there is a government body which has its own resources, but wants to work with an NGO, the NGO is used as a contractor to implement the governments policy and program - they are not invited in to help design a policy or program.

7.2.2. What is the relation between the NGO and the District Council

In most cases surprisingly little: OXFAM spoke about NGOs getting CBOs access to District Council services, particularly in the Copperbelt, but most NGOs do not see the need for relations with Councils. It was pointed out that the DDCCs are empowered to invite NGOs onto their strength, and that this would be useful for many NGOs - they would know more about what is happening in the District, and how they might relate to other players. Since most NGOs have not tried to join the DDCC, the DDCC picks the closest and easiest NGOs, Like the Rotary Club, and the Hope Foundation.

7.2.3. Are NGOs complementary to the Government?

NGOs can take government programs and extend them more widely through NGO structures - this is the supplementary approach. They can do more things than government is able to do, but within the same policy framework as Government - this is the complementary approach. Or, they can do different things from government because they believe that the government policy and practice is not beneficial to the situation of the poor - this is the alternatives approach. For the most part NGOs were playing a complementary role to Government - extending family planning services, PHC, well-drilling, AIDS education etc etc beyond what government can do. There was one interesting alternative approach identified, however. A number of NGOs in the field of agriculture are promoting diversified crops, green manuring, open pollinated seed varieties, and less dependence on maize - something very different from the Ministry of Agriculture's emphasis on maize, fertilizers and hybrid seed.

7.2.4. Does Government take NGOs seriously?

NGOs talked about very good relations with Government at the community level. Government officials are even seconded to work with NGOs. At higher levels the position changes, however - although there is no clear pattern across the board. Senior levels of government have not set up structures whereby NGOs have a place in policy discussions or program design - and NGO input into such fields is thus not consistent and regular. NGOs said that they can get access to high level government officials (note the number of references to PS (Permanent Secretaries), but this is bilateral - there is rarely an opportunity for the NGOs of a particular sector or sub-sector to meet the Government. The one very interesting exception was CMMU which was a technical committee in the field of water and sanitation as a national level. NGOs have a recognized place on this committee and their views are listened to and incorporated into government policy and practice. Many participants commented that there was a need for something like a CMMU in the Ministries of Health, Agriculture, CDSS, LG&H, and Education. There was something called ESIP in the field of Education but it was basically a group that you joined if you had funds for education.

8. Next Steps

Participants had strongly asked for concrete follow-up to this meeting. Some suggestions were:

- 8.1. A report of the meeting to be written up and circulated widely
- 8.2. Networks to be formed of NGOs working in the same sector or sub-sector. The example was given of CHIN (Children in Need) which acts as a network for organisations working with children troubled by AIDs, abuse, and street life. It seemed sensible to form one for NGOs working in PHC
- 8.3. Consultative Fora to be formed for NGOs working in a number of sub-sectors - agriculture, water, sanitation etc. In fact such a consultative forum would be a more structured and sustained version of this meeting which was a consultation of NGOs involved in community based approaches to development
- 8.4. Request the Ministries - particularly the Ministry of Health - to nominate an NGO focal point who would then convene meetings with NGOs. (It was reported that there was one such person with that title, but he/she had spent more time with donors than with NGOs)
- 8.5. A "fair" in which NGOs would display and demonstrate their work to which government officials would be invited in order to educate Government officials about what NGOs actually do - something that many felt they were ignorant of. Again this would be a continuation and expansion of the present meeting.

After discussions around these topics, participants started to think more of the need for NGOs to get their own organisation and information exchange mobilised before approaching government. Suggestions were made for another meeting in which NGOs would go in more depth into the particular problems of community based approaches to development in health, and would invite the Ministry of health to participate in that meeting. Out of such a meeting (in which it was hoped there would be a mutual appreciation of the problems and the comparative advantages Government and NGOs had in different parts of it) would come closer and better relations which would lead, hopefully to some regular structured way for the Ministry of Health to listen to NGOs. There was much discussion as to who would take this idea forward. A representative of the executive committee of NGOCF, Helen Samatabele of PAM, was present and said that the encouragement of sub-fora of NGOs around particular topics was one of the aims of NGOCF. She undertook to take this idea to the NGOCF Executive Committee, and if it was well received, as she was sure it would be, to liaise with UNICEF to set up such a meeting. Some were worried that this was another layer of NGO bureaucracy, but Helen assured them that such a "sub-fora" if set up, did not have to go through the NGOCF. NGOCF would merely be a catalyst to its creation and continuation.

On this note the Consultation disbanded.

Thanks were expressed to Dr. Halima Dao and Dr. Sidhi Moeti of UNICEF Health Section,

and John Chimumbwa of UNICEF Communication Section

Attachment A: Participants List

Person	Title	Organisation	Address
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