Summary Note

International Development Programme
Grantee Gathering, 30 January 2013

Plenary Session 1
Learning from international development grant-making: a review of the Baring and John Ellerman Foundations' grant-making
Tina Wallace

Following on from an August 2012 report, this session summarised key reflections on an eight-year grant-making partnership. It outlined the opinions of representatives from both donors, UK grantees, and their African partners, and highlighted a number of important considerations which should feed into future international development funding streams. There seemed to be a general consensus that the BF/JEF programme had been successful thanks to its focus on building relationships based on honesty and trust rather than scrutiny and compliance. NGOs are extremely appreciative of responsive, flexible, and supportive grant-making, especially when donors are willing to let frontline partners lead and shape their own projects, and do not clamour for immediate quantifiable results. Whilst they acknowledge that donors want to be more than just passive enablers, NGOs prefer working within open definitions which leave more scope for local context and long-term change.

The main concerns that emerged generally revolve around maintaining African involvement in the UK-based dialogue, especially once projects are underway. All stakeholders were generally satisfied with the highly-personalised grant-making process, and that productive working relationships developed in this time had a significant on the positive outputs and behaviour of grant recipients. However, African partners seemed to feel slightly frozen out of the dialogue once funding actually came online, and wanted more involvement in capacity building, especially monitoring, analytical discussions, and help with the reporting process. All parties therefore need to take responsibility to ensure a conversation is maintained from receipt of application to the end of the grant. Donors also need to be better at communicating what they expect in the M&E, and offering substantive support to help both UK and African NGOs gather and present this information

There was only a short time available for discussion, but two important points were raised. Firstly, it was suggested that grant-makers should be more self-aware of their approach when offering unrestricted funds. Even when core funding is available, NGOs are reluctant to chase a prize that "seems too good to be true." They worry that a bid for core funding is met with less enthusiasm by trustees, triggers tougher questioning, and that exciting and innovative applications are actually most likely to receive grants. Secondly, NGOs pondered on how much mileage there was to affect the wider donor community with the findings that had been discussed, and whether they should feel confident to drive that conversation.

Counselling in Post-Conflict Situations
Sophie McCann and Annabel Harris – Network for Africa

Network for Africa operate a successful trauma counselling training scheme in Patongo, Northern Uganda, an area blighted by conflict between LRA and Ugandan defence forces. Their counsellors work with adult survivors of genocide and war to address the immediate psycho-social manifestations of trauma and post-traumatic stress. Network for Africa believe this to be a crucial pre-condition if the wider community is to start the process of healing and rebuilding itself. Their talk emphasised the importance of bringing mental health provision to the fore of post-conflict and reconciliation efforts, crucially by allowing local people to take control of the project for themselves. This means it develops organically and is rooted within accepted local culture and tradition, rather than bringing an unsuitable Western approach into a fragile society.

The Network for Africa model engages with pillars of the community, and pays those who are trained up as counsellors a monthly stipend to ensure continuity and expertise stays involved. In 2012 their counsellors helped thousands of people deal with issues surrounding post-conflict trauma, violence, economic security, and HIV/AIDs. Whilst acknowledging that it is difficult to monitor and evaluate immediate impacts, they believe their counsellors have had a substantial impact in tackling unaddressed stigma, isolation, and trauma, and helped reduce levels of violence, alcoholism, and suicide in Patongo. Crucially, the fact that 3300 people have presented at the counselling bases shows a critical nascent demand; people are clearly desperate enough for support that they overcome the taboo surrounding mental health in Uganda, a country with only 32 psychiatrists for 34 million people.

Various points were made in discussion. One strand discussed the variety of stepping-stone options, specifically how the project could be scaled up or out, and integrating counselling in engagement with other community stakeholders, such as the state, police, youth, and family units rather than individuals. Network for Africa were generally keen that their project be seen as the first-step, preparing the groundwork for other work to be conducted successfully at the community level. Some pondered whether counselling, and peer-support in general, could be the missing ingredient that allows other post-conflict development projects to really flourish. There was general agreement that Network for Africa have identified a clear but suppressed need, and have been able to develop a model that goes with the grain of northern Ugandan society and culture to meet it. Some urged a little more caution, unsure whether the Patongo model was one that could be replicated easily in other contexts, and several posed questions about the mechanics, funding, and timescale required to get a counselling project in motion. There were also a few questions about the balance in community engagement, and the extent to which the priority of need was being analysed and imposed by Network for Africa themselves, and whether this was desirable. Nevertheless, there was a clear interest in seeing how counselling and emotional support could play a role in other post-conflict and displacement contexts such as IDP camps.

Social Enterprise
Sally Vivyan – Afrikids

Based in Ghana, the Afrikids network seeks to build a collection of self-supporting social enterprises, with profits channelled into projects that support vulnerable children in the north of the country. They work on the premise that perpetual dependence on aid is not necessary, and progress can be achieved through savvy entrepreneurialism. Afrikids focus on thinking rationally around business ideas, and commit time and effort to implement those which show the most potential to become embedded in the local economy and deliver long-term sustainable profit.

There is a diverse set of businesses contained in the Afrikids portfolio, all of which have to fall within a spectrum of financial viability, socio-ethical responsibility, and environmental sustainability. Their first major project was a medical centre, which delivers treatment free at the point of use, and in turn sources funding from the Ghanaian national health insurance scheme. This has the capacity to turn a £100k profit per annum. Another important enterprise is the Blue Sky Lodge hotel, which is hoping to jump on growing demand for high quality business and tourist accommodation in northern Ghana, and has the potential to make a £265k profit per annum by its fifth year of operation. Finally, they have Energy for Life, a stove distribution business, which will vend cleaner and healthier models of traditional coal cooking pots at subsidised prices, for a potential £136k annual profit.

Although supported by a UK branch, which grew up to support and connect a series of local initiatives, the mechanics of Afrikids is very much a Ghanaian enterprise. Afrikids Ghana own and run the companies, and coordinate the channel between social enterprise profits and charitable ventures. Indeed, it is estimated that the Afrikids operation in Ghana will be fully self-sufficient by 2018, at which point the UK branch will have become redundant and will close down.

The meeting was receptive to the Afrikids model, and very excited about its potential for replication elsewhere in Africa. One question even asked why the organisation did not consider transferring to a new location after 2018, and repeating its success elsewhere. However, the organisation is planning to maintain its consultancy arm, Afrikids Squared, and wants to operate as a driver for broader development policy. Having overcome the internal challenges of funding businesses, finding scale, sourcing effective expertise, and developing a diverse set of skills, they feel that they are ideally situated to lead the future of the NGO/social enterprise model at an advocacy and consultancy level. A major strand of questioning revolved around risk and challenges to the model, and particularly what would happen if a business were to fail and projected income fall dramatically. It was acknowledged that this might prolong the existence of the UK branch, which will only walk away once the cash flow is proven and secure.

Some noted that the Afrikids model is heavily reliant on the relative security and stability of Ghana. It is difficult to see that a hotel, hospital or even distribution business could operate so successfully in a much weaker state such as Somalia or DRC, where high levels of violence, lawlessness, and poor infrastructure are not so conducive to safe and transparent business dealings. This may put a limit on the extent to which social enterprise can drive change in less stable parts of the world.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)
Helen Lindley - Womankind

In recent decades, NGOs have taken a holistic approach to their work, seeking to empower and support beneficiaries whilst simultaneously tackling the social structures that afflict them. The question has been how to track the depth of these changes, and be certain that there is progress being made at every level. Establishing a monitoring and evaluation strategy capable of capturing the overall impact of a holistic strategy has not come easily to many NGOs, and led to an over-reliance on jargon and complex quantitative methods.

This session suggested reorienting a simpler M&E approach around 'changes in people', which could be considered as the fundamental driving force between inputs and outcomes, yet is rarely captured in traditional frameworks. Organisations can look to measure the success of their programme by first identifying the core changes that they need to catalyse in beneficiaries and other stakeholders in order to achieve their desired outcomes. It was suggested these will fall under the following fields: 1) knowledge; 2) attitude; 3) status; 4) behaviour; 5) circumstances. An NGO that aimed to challenge the normalisation of domestic violence in a society might look to encourage changes in a number of stakeholders, such as government, law-enforcement, local communities, abusers and abused. It may be difficult to assess immediate quantifiable successes, but by developing an M&E strategy that monitors a reducing social acceptability of abusive relationships, and growing awareness of the problem, the NGO can be confident it is heading in the right direction and towards long-term emancipatory outcomes. Fairly simple outcome tracking forms can be used at each stage of the project, and deliver a strong indication of the trends and changes that are occurring amongst every stakeholder.

The grantees were encouraged to work in groups and analyse their own projects with these headings in mind. What were the core psychological or material changes that they needed to provoke in their focus constituencies in order to be successful?

Feedback from the groups was both positive and constructive. There were some reservations about accounting for negative reporting under a 'changes in people' framework, and how to develop terminologies and categorisations that are fair criteria for measuring concepts such as 'empowerment'. Similarly, outcome tracking forms are fundamentally reliant on the assumption that meaning is clear, and there is mutual understanding between the stakeholder and the evaluator. Emphasis was put on the importance of communication in this M&E methodology. One closing comment convincingly argued that this could be a useful way to square the circle of obtaining qualitative data with clear quantitative utility, and can usefully demonstrate the added value of a project on wider society.

Liam Orton
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