

Report on The Baring and John Ellerman Foundations' partner meeting in Entebbe, Uganda, November 8 - 12th 2010.

Introduction

This report is intended to provide a short summary of the workshop held in Uganda in late 2010, a pilot project funded by the Foundations. The purposes were to bring all the current African partners together to meet each other to learn about the work they are doing with forcibly displaced people; to critically engage to look at making the work as effective as possible; for the donors and African staff to get to know each other, and to enjoy the experience.

The UK partners were not present, to help to keep costs down and the workshop a manageable size; but several were on the UK steering group planning the workshop and most worked closely with their partners in Africa preparing for the workshop. Most came to a feedback session on 25th January 2011 about the key issues from the event.

The workshop

This exceeded expectations in many ways. 40 people came from UK and 10 countries in Africa. They did not previously know each other, came from widely different contexts, both Francophone and Anglophone Africa, and did very different work. In the event people quickly made friends, opened up, shared ideas and experiences and by the end many said they felt they 'had known each other for years'. They managed the language and cultural divides and found many common threads. There was energy and enthusiasm generated by talking openly about their work, the issues they face and the solutions and different approaches they are trying. The photographs show the enjoyment, energy, warmth and laughter generated through four days.

Some ingredients for the success of the workshop as a learning event

These included:

- The careful preparation, over a year, by staff at the Ellerman Foundation in the UK and Akina Mama wa Afrika in Uganda to ensure that all the logistics were in place and well managed
- Preparation of the programme content and overall structure plus the time for relaxation and leisure events undertaken by the two facilitators, Tim Glass and Tina Wallace, who met monthly for a year
- The inputs and interest of the steering committee in UK
- The venue, which was spacious, light and had a wonderful view of Lake Victoria. There were places for people to work in groups, to chat together, to stroll and take time out
- The venue was close to the airport, keeping travel in Uganda simple
- Handing each session to identified participants to facilitate; they worked together with the presenters to design and deliver the session.
- Using a wide range of methodologies, most of which were participatory and inclusive including powerpoint presentations, personal testimonies, videos, group work, a debate, and an afternoon of theatre for development where people developed role plays in the garden and performed for each other
- Outside speakers coming in to bring new perspectives and experiences

- Providing a relatively open space for participants to stand back from the day to day, reflect on their own work and learn about the work of others, to debate, discuss and engage in critical reflection
- The focus on programme work and how to work with communities
- The time, space and atmosphere for donors and grantees to come together, talk and get to know each other, something not often done in grant making. The agenda was not driven by donor requirements around grants and project cycle management but rather by the realities of what is happening on the ground, giving people the freedom to discuss in ways that they rarely have time or opportunity to do.

The costs

There was a nervousness around the costs of mounting an event in Africa that involved flying people from across the continent, working in two languages with all the expense of interpreters and equipment, and the reality that hotels and hospitality are expensive in Uganda (indeed Africa) if you want to provide a comfortable context that is suitable for a wide range of participants.

In the event the workshop itself cost £1,200 per participant (just over £50,000), plus £6,800 for an initial visit earlier in the year to set things up. It could be done cheaper by using a more basic venue but most of the costs are fixed, e.g. flights, transfers, interpretation, facilitation, transport. While at one stage the organisers felt working bi-lingually was too challenging and costly in the event the work being done in Anglo- and Franco-phone Africa was very different and this made the meeting richer.

The context for the work being done

Every agency represented worked in a unique context; some in refugee camps, others in conflict areas, yet others in cities. Some work in small offices far from capital cities, others work in the heart of their community. While each country context shapes the work in specific ways a number of common strands were identified that are shaping trends currently in Africa. Those that were touched on or discussed in some detail included:

- Land grabbing by e.g. China, Arab countries and India- some for agriculture, some for resource extraction but all deeply worrying for those concerned with displacement. This will start a new wave of forced migration, especially for the poorest
- Weak, often unresponsive (even repressive) or corrupt states, although some local government is seen to effective
- Climate change and its effects including more drought, unpredictable floods and shifting weather patterns
- The rise of religious fundamentalisms, both Christian and Muslim, directly affecting the rights of women, homosexuals and causing rising tensions and conflict.
- Continuing and even deepening poverty in many countries
- The number of elections currently taking place, many not free or fair and the difficulty of achieving peaceful 'regime change', although people hope S Sudan will be the exception
- Growing NGO legislation limiting the space for civil society work
- The recession in Europe and USA and fears around what that might mean for the continuation of aid funding

In contrast to these mega trends most participants felt there are strong and committed groups and movements working for rights, representation, democracy, justice and equality in each country.

The different approaches to achieving change

While all the NGOs represented are working on issues of forcible displacement and building local capacity, whether their own, their partners, CBOs, community groups, women's groups, or individual women and men, the approaches differed greatly.

A few are working on directly improving service delivery e.g. in education, involving local people, building their skills and ability to support their children's education and the school, addressing negative attitudes to educating girls, and lobbying local government for the education resources they are entitled to. Some continue beyond schooling and provide support to girls to get into jobs or businesses.

Others are using legal avenues to gain rights for forcibly displaced people. For some this has involved working at the Africa Commission level e.g. taking a legal case (over 7 years) to challenge a government that forcibly displaced whole communities from their land or working on policies to promote women's rights (The African Women's Protocol). For others this legal work is at the local level – in refugee camps or villages - taking individual cases to the Chiefs or courts to get access to land for women returning from camps or getting redress for those who have experienced violence. They work with both communities and the legal structures to promote respect for people's rights and ensure that the appalling violence many women experience. One camp based agency has focused on building the confidence and skills of young women through informal education and economic activities, as well as encouraging them to join organised groups.

Yet others focused on the role of leaders and the need for leadership training for those seeking the rights of the displaced, especially women. Engaging with existing and traditional leaders as well as community members on their attitudes to the displaced, to gender inequalities and the rights of marginal people were alternative approaches presented.

Some focus tightly while others take a more holistic approach, trying to comprehensively address all the needs of a community, from psychological support through to economic training, provision of education, access to permanent land, health issues and advocacy work. This involves building up community organisations to address each issue and enabling groups to take responsibility for delivering on each issue, be it water, sanitation or literacy.

Others work more directly with people still living under conflict or immediately post-conflict, building organisations and forums where groups can come together to discuss, negotiate and reach new agreements on sharing power, land or other resources. This involves supporting those who have been deeply oppressed, often for centuries, to enable them to see their rights and building organisations able to represent them and negotiate on their behalf with those in power. Some of this work is dangerous and the risks for staff are high. Several try to combine their main approach with developing sustainable livelihoods for displaced or resettled people, in e.g. farming, small crafts and

food processing projects, recognising the deep poverty faced by those they work with. This is an area of challenge for many NGOs.

Several NGOs do awareness-raising using the media, mainly radio; a few use drama and song. Most undertake different kinds of capacity building at the community level and with those responsible for services such as teachers, police, courts, chiefs, through training, workshops, meetings, development of modules and manuals, and information sharing. Some develop their own organisation or the local organisations they work with, through the provision of basic offices and equipment, computers, financial training and by raising the level of skills around project cycle management.

Two issues that people felt needed more attention were how to combat poverty in such difficult and impoverished contexts - some agencies have good experiences and others are finding this a real struggle; and how to deal with the 'culture of poverty' - the lack of confidence, the passivity, the fear –seen in many who have experience displacement, violence or oppression over many years. Overcoming negative attitudes and lack of self belief is often the first hurdle for agencies.

Some common threads that enable or inhibit positive change for displaced people

Several issues were identified by the participants that were seen as seriously challenging positive change or as ingredients for success. This is a snapshot of issues - much time at the workshop was spent exploring these issues in detail including how to promote the rights of women, people's rights to land, their need for education (both formal and informal), the importance of peace and reconciliation skills and addressing conflict, and the need for a holistic and complex approach to the multiple problems caused by displacement.

Challenges that need addressing to enable work to be effective	Factors that positively support positive change
Women's unequal status, their weak position in many communities and traditional attitudes rooted in patriarchy. The challenges of women's lack of confidence, rights and their experience of violence limit what can be achieved for communities	Women's leadership training can yield some good results, at the local and the pan African levels. Working on attitudes and beliefs in communities can bring changes, even if these are slow and girls can be supported into schools
Where governments are absent, weak or hostile to the rights of the displaced this can seriously impede progress	Where local government is supportive and engaged working with government and within local plans can be very beneficial
Dependency and low confidence of the displaced, the stigma they experience can make them hard to work with	Some have found that holistic approaches, addressing all aspects including shelter, food, education, confidence, as well as rights to land, and creating local level organisations can move communities from passive to active participants

Challenges that need addressing to enable work to be effective	Factors that positively support positive change
The marginalisation of displaced people and their lack of voice	Strong charismatic leaders can speak out for them and lead the fight for rights
The lack of basic skills, the loss of education and experience from living in camps – the challenge of ‘lost generations’ and especially the loss of education through displacement	Education is a key lever, especially for girls, and needs to be supported by economic help for families, well supervised teaching, post school support into jobs or businesses, confidence building and shared life long networks for support
The challenges of the weak capacity of people’s own organisations	Different approaches were shared but this was seen as a core challenge for many, that requires a lot of time and work to address
Communities are often divided and lack trust and confidence in leaders. They can be very traditional and opposed to new ideas and approaches, especially around e.g. gender, HIV	Time is needed to build trust. When people oppose ideas from the leaders it is essential to understand why this has happened. Communities need time to engage with new issues and leaders need to invest this time
Once policies are changed or legal cases won –often after many years– governments may ignore the findings and rulings – as experienced by people working on women’s rights, domestic violence and the major land case	NGOs need to invest as much time in follow-up and implementation as lobbying for the changes in the first place. Persistence is needed to engage governments on meeting their obligations; this can sometimes best be done in alliance with others
The challenges of violence against women are many and rooted in culture, upbringing, the family as well as in religion, law	Different approaches are tried by women’s organisations – e.g. reporting violence, using local courts or chiefs or leaders to address violence, community sensitisation - but these are less common in other agencies. Work on violence has to take place at all levels, community to police and courts, as well as national laws and international protocols
How to reach and work with displaced youth?	Only those working in schools and the Girl Guides had much experience of how to reach out to displaced youth and enable them to participate and make their voices heard. Setting up organisations/networks for young people was one good way forward

Powerpoints of each presentation made by the 12 agencies are available from the Baring Foundation, as is the overall programme, a full list of agencies and participants with short biographies of each, and many photographs.

Beyond programme issues

Other issues were raised during the workshop.

There was a session on donors, funding in UK and how money is raised, allowing participants to hear more about philanthropy and ask questions about aid. This was of real interest, especially to participants who have never been to UK. The relative lack of knowledge about the differences between donors, their methodologies and ways of assessing success highlighted a gap in UK-Africa communications that certainly needs addressing.

There was a session on monitoring and evaluation (M &E) with three presentations, one from a participant and two from external speakers, exploring different ways of gathering data and evidence for baselines, monitoring and evaluation. The use of hand held computers for collecting baseline data from communities and promoting their participation; the critical role of audience surveys and listening to audience feedback for those working on radio programmes; and participatory ways of engaging women and men, girls and boys in giving critical feedback to NGOs about their work were presented and generated a lively discussion.

The issue of M&E is one that continues to exercise many NGOs and more time could usefully have been spent on these issues. The need for more training (for some) in participatory and interactive listening and feedback was evident. Over the past few years the focus of many UK donors has shifted from community engagement in M&E towards a focus on numerical reporting using pre-determined indicators. Consequently, many participants were not experienced in participatory approaches and report writing against targets dominated their discussions. Issues of listening, learning and how to understand the value of the work to the local people were of real interest but not as widely known in some NGOs as the latest donor formats. Changing reporting criteria were clearly an issue of concern to many.

A third session focused becoming independent of donor funding by generating income. One agency working on this presented their experience, which caused participants to think, perhaps for the first time, about the limitations of reliance on donor funding and the opportunities that generating their own income might offer them. Many felt their contexts would prevent them taking similar steps at this stage but the 'buzz' the session generated was high.

Finally, there was a presentation on the use of solar power and ways of tackling the realities of environmental depletion including the need for new energy sources for poor people. Again, while many felt unable to go into this now the presentation created a lot of interest and some could see potential for generating sustainable energy for their organisations and the communities.

Highlights

There were many but it would be appropriate to close the report with a few:

- The strong evidence of the power of women's participation and leadership in the work being done
- The many role models found in the group- people who themselves have been displaced, dispossessed, enslaved and now work to help others in that position; the power of their stories

- The many examples of achievements, some big and many small, that different participants shared
- The openness about challenges, disappointments and frustrations of this work, from the small - such as the rains blocking roads, fuel shortages, delays in getting permission to operate -to the major blocks of government resistance, male intransigence, the damage done to people by displacement and their lack of energy, limited funding, high staff turnover
- The professionalism, experience and commitment of those present
- The engagement and enjoyment of the donor staff and trustees who attended
- The real risks people take in doing some of this work
- The power of drama, debate, music and song, and stories in learning
- The risks of relying too much on writing and reports rather than face to face interaction and learning, and how much is 'lost in translation'
- The levels of warmth and laughter, in spite of the difficult conditions people work in, that brought people together
- The meals, events and relaxing times, which enabled people to get to know each other and work hard in the sessions
- The engagement of the hotel staff, the interpreters and the outside speakers in the whole process – it was an event that included everyone
- The positive feedback at the end of the four days, which is attached

The immediate benefits included:

- Significant sharing and learning took place during the week through bringing people together with such a range of divergent experiences
- The different approaches of Francophone and Anglophone Africa meant everyone was exposed to new ideas that normally they cannot easily access
- Many participants grew in confidence during the workshop
- Different skills and capacities were developed through e.g. facilitating sessions, planning events, working on different methodologies for presenting, engaging in drama
- Exposure to a wide range of NGOs, speakers and donors enabled new ways of thinking and discussion to take place

Tina Wallace
17th February 2011.

**Feedback from participants at the end of the workshop,
8-11th November 2010**

The most memorable/important experience for me was....

- Learning about the reality of slavery in modern Africa
- The experience of donors coming to discuss with us (grantees)
- Learning from each other
- The fact that all the presentations focused on the challenges of working to develop communities and to ensure they are involved in change
- Learning about the use of drama in development
- Learning about realities from all over Africa
- The passion of presenters and the real engagement of NGOs with the communities they work with
- Addressing the problems of dependency (of NGOs) through developing sustainable incomes
- The excitement of meeting people away from my home
- Focusing on the rights of women and children
- The exchange of experiences and methods of doing our work
- Working with energy and learning about each other's specialities
- Discovering more about the way donors do their work
- Learning new approaches to communication and working with communities
- The productive and fraternal climate at the workshop
- The wide spread of the sharing
- The passion and commitment everyone showed
- Learning about new ways of supporting the poor, e.g. the goat project of UWESO
- The financial sustainability work of Afrikids
- The way that building our own skills was built in to the programme
- The excitement of the drama work
- The blending of people regardless of their position and experience
- Understanding the value of advocacy
- Being inspired by the learning and reflection
- Learning NGOs can also work for profit to support their work
- The high level of advocacy work being done by participants, from the grassroots through to work with the Africa Commission and international bodies
- The shocking violence experience by women and girls across Africa in the twenty first century
- The generation of solutions by Africans for Africa is a reality