KNOW-HOW 3000

Learning from failure
IN DETAIL

Teenage mothers recruitment process for livelihood program

HORIZONT 3000

AUSTRIAN ORGANISATION
FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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MCFp	Mathare Children's Fund panairobi
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
GBV	Gender-based Violence

1. General Information

Mathare Childrens Fund panairobi (MCFp) operates in Mathare, one of the oldest slums in Africa, situated in Nairobi, and works in the areas of OVCs (orphans and vulnerable children) and child protection, as well as GBV (gender-based violence) with a bias towards teenage mothers. It also conducts livelihood programmes for youths and women and organizes student councils/ parliaments within schools.

In this document MCFp pretends to present a problematic experience, made between January and March 2014, and the lessons learnt from this experience called "teenage mothers recruitment process for livelihood program". The lack of a rigorous and effective recruitment and selection process often results in picking the wrong target group. A rigorous process helps the organizations to be on the same page with the target group, manage their expectations better and reduces the wastage of resources. Therefore, the experience made by MDFp could be relevant also for other organizations.

Chart 1 Localization of the experience

2. Context of the Experience

Mathare slum is home to over 500,000 people occupying an area of two miles long and one mile wide. Because of congestion, survival is a daily battle for the residents against the backdrop of diseases, crime, prostitution and lawlessness. Most residents are engaged in small-scale petty businesses, either in their makeshift housing structures or on narrow open raw sewer filled alleyways. The over 500,000 residents have no access to basic amenities like clean water, food, clothing, shelter,

healthcare, and even roads that would allow emergency services in the case of a outbreak.

MCFp were recruiting new beneficiaries for their Teenage Mothers program. This program targets young mothers below the age of 20 years with the aim of improving their livelihood situation while creating a forum for them to interact with their children.

Being under pressure to kick-start the programme after receiving the initial funding for the programme, MCFp decided to rely on the referrals done by organizations it networks with and by community leaders. This meant that the staff took on and registered cases to the programme without necessarily doing a background check.

The consequence was "teenage mothers" who were over 25 years, girlfriends/ mistresses of the community leaders and persons who did not have children. They were not part of the most vulnerable teenage mothers. They were women who took up the opportunity to join the programme because it was free and not because they fulfilled the criteria. Additionally, they had expectations that the program could not meet or manage.

As to HIV/Aids and gender Issues, 7 cases had GBV and HIV related problems. MCFp was able to refer them successfully to projects that helped them out and still keeps track of their situation.

3. Main Characteristics of the Experience

MCFp started with an Early Care and Childhood Development Program that was meant to target children below 5 years within Mathare slum. These children are often left to their own devices with no one really taking care of them. In the course of the program, it was realised that there was a need to involve the mothers who happened to be mostly teenage mothers between the ages of 14 and 19 years. Their fathers, who in most cases do exist, shun their parental responsibilities and the mothers, in most cases teenagers, are overwhelmed with their responsibilities of making a living for the two of them. It was also noted that most of these teenage mothers were survivors of GBV.

With this change of concept, MCFp started to engage counterparts in Mathare and its environment to refer cases of teenage mothers. In the meantime the little funds MCFp had were used to engage partners like Mathare Youth Polytechnic to establish a hairdressing class. This bore fruits after MCFp signed a Memorandum of Understanding that would allow 360 teenage mothers to participate in a hairdressing course for 4 years. To ensure that these teenage mothers could study, also required that their children were safe and had at least a meal a day, medical care and counselling sessions among meeting other needs. While this preparation was going on, MCFp felt that they could rely on the referrals and not necessarily engage themselves in the recruitment of clients.

The turning point came in when the "supposed" teenage mothers arrived at the project to embark on their trainings. Drop-out, absenteeism and indiscipline were some of the issues that MCFp staff and staff at Mathare Youth Polytechnic were grappling with. There was also the issue of stipends the participants expected during their training. This idea of a stipend had come from NGOs who held workshops/ seminars with the community members before the 2013 elections in Kenya. There were a lot of peace initiatives targeting the slum community and a lot of money was circulating around. To rectify the situation, MFCp called on the social-workers to do home visits and what was found was that most of the participants were not genuine cases as stipulated verbally. Please note that MCFp did not have a criteria documented and partners were verbally communicated to on what was expected of the clients.

The first intake of 18 clients fell by the wayside leaving only 2 clients who were genuine and committed to the programme. This made the staff of MCFp to sit down and contemplate what happened, where they had gone wrong and what needed to change.

The **main assumption** that led to act in described way, was that the partners that MCFp works with within the networks would be oriented to a common goal and hence would comply with the request to do a due diligence when referring clients. Secondly, the network

relationships imply commitments and responsibilities of the partners involved to act according to the agreements/ requests. For MCFp taking part in various networks means to assume certain responsibilities. These assumptions led the MCFp staff not to do background checks on the clients reffered to the programme. This led to a wastage of time and other resources.

4. Stakeholders and Partners – Roles and Responsibilities

- Teenage mothers: Beneficiaries of the programme; Theire responsibilities included cooking for their own children and those of the other teenage;, ensuring that they go to the trainings; following up on how their children were doing health-wise; and reporting to the staff any issue that might hinder the achievement of the goals that have been set out in the programme.
- Mathare Youth Polytechnic Administration: Ensure the smooth running of the hairdressing department, provision of hairdresser teacher to impart their knowledge to the participants.
- MCFp staff and MCFp Programme Manager: Provision of psycho-social support to the teenage mothers; Coordination and administration of all aspects of the ongoing program including planning, organizing, staffing, leading, controlling program activities and fundraising for the programme.
- Networks/partners: Referral of cases to MCFp for support.
- Donors: Provision of funding to run the programme

5. Reason and Impact of the Negative Experience/ Failure

Among the **reasons for the failure** to happen can be listed:
- Lack of a well-documented criteria to be used for the recruitment of beneficiaries
- Lack of well-drawn structures/strategies for the programme
- Pressure to meet the donor's timeframe
- Overreliance and bilnd trust towards networks/partners without double checking
- Lack of a logical approach for the execution of the programme in the initial stage

As to the **impacts of the problematic practice**, there can be said:

- The wastage of time and resources took a toll on the project. A total of 6 months was wasted on a group of non-genuine clients.
- Also for the target group, it implied a waste of time and resources.
- The lack of synergy was also experienced between the clients and staff.
- MCFp ingnored the power of choice and focus and tried instead to accommodate a multitude of conflicting demands and interests.
- The lack of a working trust with partners that reffered the cases to MCFp also led to measurable change in the network of interactions and committement to the networks for a period of time.
- For the other stakeholders involved, it also meant a lack of placement of their clients in MCFp due to the negative experiences from their referrals.

6. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Key messages that can be drawn from the experience were:

A programme can and will evolve in unexpected ways and it is critical that the project adapts to the circumstances as they occur. The process of execution must be dynamic and adaptive, responding to unanticipated events.

There is a need to seize opportunities, craft skills and build routines, structures, and incentives that help in the execution of a programme while tackling the psychological and interpersonal barriers. Clear responsbilties and processes are a must for effective execution and should be well documented.

There is need for more collaborations and much more information exchange which in turn leads to serendipitous future developments. Consistent briefing to all stakeholders is also a key aspect if working within a network. While processes and structures are important, it also requires these processes to be broken down into essential activities in which all stakeholders can engage in. This helps in demystifying the conceptual idea or programme for everyone involved.

There is need to develop a clear understanding of „what happened", and not of "who did it", when things go wrong. This requires the consistent reporting of failures – small ones and large ones, systematically analyzing them and proactively searching for solutions – *a learning culture*. It is important to not just move on after a failure, but to stop and analyse it in order to discover the wisdom contained in the problem.

In the end, failure is not always bad. In organizational life it is sometimes bad, sometimes inevitable, and sometimes it can even turn out to be good. Failure is a source of learning.

Based on these understandings, **lessons have been drawn for the future work**, such as having a sound strategy before the programme starts, having an implementation model to guide execution thoughts and actions, as well as clearly defining and documenting responsibilities and processes.

For any programme to be executed, it takes time and patience. MCFp has learned to put structures in place before starting with anything else. It has also been noted, that MCFp has learned to negotiate with its donors in times when they feel pressure to deliver services before the preconditions are in place.

As a suggestion to any organization who finds itself in a similar situation, the suggestion is to make a plan, to speak to the different stakeholders, to ensure concrete objectives and targets to be reached, and to agree on guidelines and responsibilities beforehand. Descibed experience could be especially interesting for organisations that work in similar conditions as MCFp, that focus on vulnerable groups within slum communities offering them different interventions.

7. Bibliography

MCFp. (n.d.). *Mathare Children Fund panairobi*. Retrieved October 2015, from
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