KNOW-HOW3000

Experience

IN DETAIL

Community outreach using Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

HORIZONT3000

AUSTRIAN ORGANISATION
FOR DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Table of Contents

Table of Charts

List of Abbreviations

BOSCO	Battery Operated Systems for Community Outreach
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
UNICEF	UN Children's Emergency Fund
DKA	Development Cooperation Agency of the Catholic Children's Movement of Austria
BBM	Procurement company of MIVA, Austria

1. General Information

BOSCO- Uganda stands for "Battery Operated Systems for Community Outreach- Uganda" (BOSCO) and was initiated under the umbrella of Gulu Archdiocese. It provides innovative ICT (Information and Communication Technology) solutions using a collaborative and web-based approach to foster socio-economic development and peace building in rural communities in Northern Uganda.

Within this document, BOSCO aims at presenting the experience named **"Community outreach and service using Information and Communication Technology"**, made in 2013.

Chart 1 Localization of the experience

2. Context of the Experience

Living in isolation in rural areas exposes the most vulnerable groups to oppression without respect to their human rights. Additionally, many social services are only provided in urban areas creating a big development gap between the urban and rural communities.

There was limited or no use of Information & Communication Technology (ICT) in promoting socio-economic development and peace building in the previously war affected region of Northern Uganda. ICT services were not accessible by the more isolated and vulnerable communities like rural villages, peri-urban settings, youth groups, illiterate/semi-illiterate communities. Social and cultural conflicts e.g. land conflicts were only addressed through face-to-face dialogue which often threatened the witnesses for fear of direct confrontation to the powerful members of society. To this note, the vulnerable communities were often oppressed and had no other platform to raise their concerns. In addition, the youth were not competitive on the job market due to lack of computer knowledge.

An intervention like ICT is not a major priority to government in its role of providing social services. ICT is mainly left to the private sector. The challenge is that the private sector is only attracted to major business centres where there is electricity and a big population to buy the service. Rural areas are therefore left to be served through inventions of charity or non-government organisation.

Against this background, the experience evolved from the communities when they expressed willingness to use fast and private means of communication. During the 2 decades war in Northern Uganda at the era of camp settings of internally displaced persons, the radio was used as a tool to access information. However, communities remained isolated during the communication process given the obstacle experienced in information sharing and exchange between the senders and receivers/audience. Additionally, airing by communities through the radio didn't present a sense of security among some at both individual and community level. The situation made it difficult to openly communicate issues of concerns to the outside world at national, regional and international levels. In order to "Break The Silence" and overcome isolation, BOSCO-Uganda introduced innovative technology with the vision that open and peaceful rural communities are ready to face the challenges and opportunities of the globalized world in the 21st century.

Gender issues were part of the initial challenge. Even with the gradual change in knowledge levels, for socio-cultural reasons, female counterparts still tend to shy away from modern technologies. While there were efforts to ensure increased female self-esteem and participation in development activities, female numbers remain relatively low.

3. Main Characteristics of the Experience

The Main Objective of the practice is to contribute to sustainable community

development and to increase self-esteem for vulnerable and isolated communities.

In order to reach this goal, BOSCO-Uganda is carrying out processes and activities in oder to improve the standard of living and protect human rights through trauma healing, reconciliation, development and leadership. For instance:

1) Use of cell phones and text messaging to report and discuss development issues affecting communities, e.g. participating in Ureport (a UNICEF funded program) where responses on current emerging issues are coordinated at local, national and international levels (Ureport).
2) Build networks of local communities (internal network/ BOSCO-Uganda intranet) that coordinate and discuss pertinent issues. This is a follow-up action of the web 2.0 and office application training with the topics: Internet (Email, Facebook, LinkedIn, BOSCO Wikispaces), intranet (BOSCO Internal Network), Micro Soft (Word, Excel, Publisher & Power Point) and article writing/content.
3) Observation, analysis, continuous dialogues and follow-ups. Based on the feedback from the communities, we are informed about the actual community needs, and re-strategizing is done on an informed basis.

These activities influence people's attitudes and behaviours and promote collaboration among community actors. This includes the creation of relevant knowledge on the internet and internal networks, and the acquisition of necessary skills and capabilities to use the technology in a way that is compatible with the local culture. BOSCO-Uganda believes that Peace Building is proactive and not just the absence of war. We believe that peace begins within a person. Given the fact that we operate in a post conflict setting, it is also important to provide psychosocial support to the people, most of whom are still fearful and encourage reconciliation with the community.

Under the 2011/2012 UNICEF Partnership Cooperation Agreement co-funded by DKA-Austria, frequent field visits by the whole Project Implementation Team were made possible. The continuous discussions with the communities, dialogue and follow-ups led to more enlightenment on the actual needs of communities and the importance of treating each community group differently from the other. Through this cooperation, in partnership with UNICEF, BOSCO-Uganda was also able to develop needs/site assessment tools to guide the process of community groups, who were identified through churches, local governments and other existing community groups. Issues looked at during the assessment process include: management capacity, accessibility, functionality of program activities, community and local government involvement/participation, sustainability plan and demonstration of benefit of the ICT component in boosting the existing program being assessed.

In addition to Maintenance and Management of ICT Equipment Training; and Management & Leadership Training; activities were included such as community mobilisation & Sensitisation, upgrade of existing sites, establishment of new ICT sites, formation of site management committees, follow-up of trained participants and maintenance of ICT sites (constant dialogue and mentoring of young people and communities), development and distribution of IEC materials, quarterly monitoring & evaluation and forum discussions carried out by community users through the BOSCO intranet (Internal Network) and on-line social media like Facebook and LinkedIn.

Communities provide the building for establishing ICT sites. The donor funded equipment (computers, computer accessories, networking equipment, solar panels, batteries etc.) is solar powered. Some of the equipment is procured locally from Gulu District and Kampala City, while some equipment is procured from BBM (Austria), Nairobi and UNICEF suppliers.

A Memorandum of Understanding is signed with each of the ICT Sites as a means to address sustenance of site program results, maintenance of the site equipment and overall sustainability of the program. Each ICT site has a Management Committee with a clear chain of command determined by the community. The management structure varies from site/community to site/community. Maintenance

and Management of ICT equipment trainings are aimed at contributing to the capacity building of communities to be self-reliant when it comes to minor maintenance challenges like trouble shooting etc. Therefore, there is less reporting today and more attempts to address minor management and maintenance issues on their own. Another major turning point was the increase in youth being attracted to use the ICT centres to obtain both knowledge and skills, willing to use their free time to gain skills.

4. Stakeholders and Partners – Roles and Responsibilities

The practice addresses remote communities in the Districts Agago, Pader, Nwoya, Lamwo and Kitgum. The parties and groups involved in the implementation of the practice are BOSCO-Uganda, community partners (groups/ICT sites) and the communities served. The programme intervention components include a needs based approach to Community Development Intervention coupled with mainstreaming of livelihood components into the ICT Programme.

5. Impact of the Experience/ Practice

Using computers provides the opportunity of sharing information without disclosing personal identity, thus more female voices could be attracted.

Additionally, the experience leads to improved life skills in the form of confidence, assertiveness, and self-esteem. In the beginning of the training process, only 15% freely express themselves, but at the end of the training, at least 50% do so. In the case of communicating general program related issues, there has been an improvement from 10% to 55%.

A number of youth who use the ICT centres have gained computer knowledge and skills, and some have obtained jobs following the acquisition of these skills.

Jobs towards ICT centre sustainability and community development were created, including secretarial and printing services,

phone charging services; photography and graphics design.

Through increased self-esteem, groups have also initiated and established credit savings and loan schemes, and some people use the online sharing of information for the marketing of their business enterprises.

6. Lessons Learned and Recommendations

Even with efforts to mainstream livelihood related components into the programme intervention, negative habits and attitude among some community members remain a challenge. Such situations require patience and firmness while gradually addressing issues arising through constant observation, analysis, dialogue and informed decisions.

7. Challenges

Besides the low female participation, another main challenge was that the young people's progress has many times met obstacles brought about by self-interests of some adults including those in key positions. Instead of functioning as mentors, they worked against letting young people (male and female) take the lead in leadership and management

These challenges have been addressed by putting more emphasis on the coordination with and operation through young people managing the ICT Centres, and encouraging the young people to be accountable to their leaders (local government, cultural and religious authorities, parents, teachers, elders etc.). We also focused on creating awareness for the need for adults to operate as mentors and give the young people the opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities/abilities. Ultimately, young people and youth programs can never be a stand-alone. Their success is dependent on the active involvement of different community development players and stakeholders.

Additionally, it is important to stress that acquiring new skills has no age limit. When addressing controversial issues, the elderly have unique and valuable experiences, yet they think that computers are for the new generation.

It is important to sensitise all stakeholders on the benefits of the methodology.

8. Sustainability

The following elements can be identified for the practice to be institutionally, socially, economically and environmentally sustainable:

1) Ensure that each activity implemented is approached towards enhancing community unity and team building among leaders, management and volunteers/ users at the community ICT Sites; as well as among the community in general.

2) Handle each community uniquely from the other, and understand each community's actual needs.

9. Experience Sharing/ Up-scaling

The experience has already been shared with representatives of different institutions that visit BOSCO-Uganda and through other for a.

It could serve as a reference for any organisation working in remote or marginalised regions, and war-affected/ post-conflict areas.

10. Bibliography

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