



IKM Work on Summaries

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	2
Introduction, Mike Powell	3
Review of Summaries as a Communication Tool in the Development Sector, Charles Dhewa	7
Exploration of the Efficacy of Summaries, James Nguo	24

Acknowledgements

As is explained in the introduction, this work had quite a convoluted history. In the first stage IKM was helped by Louise Daniels, then at IDS, who organised the production of summaries and by Deborah Eade, then editor of Development in Practice, Helena Olsson, then in the publishing and information unit of the Nordic Africa Institute and Olivier Sagna, head of the Documentation and Information Centre of CODESRIA who provided material to be summarised and feedback on the summaries.

The second stage, in 2010, involved commissioning the two studies which are published here. The ‘Review of Summaries as a Communication Tool in the Development Sector’ was written by Charles Dhewa , director of Knowledge Transfer Africa, <http://www.knowledgetransafrica.com/> Harare, Zimbabwe. Email: charles@knowledgetransafrica.com

‘The Efficacy of Summaries’ was written by James Nguo, director of the Arid Lands Information Network www.alin.net , in Nairobi, Kenya.

Mike Powell is the director of the IKM Emergent Programme <http://ikmemergent.net> and can be reached at mike@ikmemergent.net

IKM Emergent - Work on Summaries

Introduction

IKM Emergent is a research programme which looks at the use of knowledge by the international development sector as it goes about its business. One aspect of the programme has been consideration of the means used to try and communicate knowledge. This has concentrated on issues of language and on the many challenges involving the effective use of Information and Communications Technologies. However, we did not want to ignore other longstanding issues, one of which has been the poor take up of relevant academic research by development organisations and their stakeholders. The development sector operates within such a wide ranging environment of social partners, geographical locations and scientific and disciplinary boundaries that it is no wonder that the problems in disseminating, accessing and responding to potentially useful information have long been recognised. These problems are many and varied. The pieces of work envisaged here refer to the barriers of communication between academic research or the output of specialist communities of practice and more generalist audiences in the development sector, be they practitioner and policy makers.

Journal articles are the main form of communication of academic findings, particularly of current research. They are normally published in journals linked to specific disciplines. They are written and reviewed according to what can be quite strict conventions, with regard to the writing style and the presentation of evidence, habitual to the discipline concerned.

Most the development workers, by contrast work within a much more complex and varied environment. Let us consider a person, perhaps a policy maker or a programme manager, concerned with agricultural development in a particular country or region. In order to do their job, that person will need to keep abreast of most if not all of the following

- Changes in local political and development policy environments
- Relevant new research on agriculture from the natural sciences
- Relevant new research from rural sociology, sometimes with particular attention to issues such as gender, land rights, clashes between pastoral and cultivation systems
- Emerging environmental or climate change issues which may impact on agriculture or to which agricultural policies might need to respond
- Market and trade information about likely demand
- Changes in organisational theory and practice, including the uses of ICT.
- Monitoring and evaluation findings from current and related work

Such a person will inevitably not have the time or the necessary disciplinary backgrounds to follow original research findings in all these areas. They may also now find themselves culturally alienated from the specialist languages in which journal articles are written (quite apart from the fact that highly relevant articles might be published in one of several natural languages, not all of which is our development worker likely to be able to read). The issue then of how people are able to keep up to date with current research is therefore very live

A number of activities have developed which can in some sense alleviate the problem.

- Occasional thematic or geographically oriented books aim to give an overview of current

issues

- Newsletters, magazines or websites can try to keep identified professional audiences abreast of developments which affect their field
- Research organisations or special interest groups can provide briefings or conference reports which summarise recent research and identify key issues
- On-line communities of practice and specialist bloggers can exchange information and ideas on current research or even co-construct new work through their on-line collaboration. The scale of such actions can however produce new problems of information overload and produce new demands for filters, overviews, summaries etc.
- Each journal article itself should have an abstract, which should be widely available through search mechanisms and which should be written to give a clear idea of what the article is about and whether the reader of the abstract will want to read the whole article.

All of these activities are useful. It could however be argued that none of them give the reader a detailed sense of the content of a particular piece of research and if they do stimulate a desire to actually read the original, the process of getting hold of it can still be a major problem. For this reason IKM became interested in the potential of summaries – of brief descriptions of the main arguments, and findings of an academic paper which could, as a standalone document, provide a good idea of what an article had said. We subsequently discovered that such an idea was already fairly well embedded in medical publishing, another area where specialists in one area need to be able to keep up with research in related fields without having the time to read everything.

IKM's work on summaries to date

IKM was aware of previous work summarising current research initiatives by the ID21 programme at the Institute of Development Studies at Sussex and of interest by Development in Practice journal, in exploring the needs of potential new practitioner audiences. We decided to explore the potential of summaries of journal articles to bridge this gap. By this we meant plain language documents of between 600 and 1,000 words which summarise the key arguments, counter arguments and data provided in any journal article. Whilst a summary should always provide full reference to the original and may encourage people to read it, it should aim to work as a stand-alone document leaving the reader as informed as possible of the content of the original. It would thus offer an additional tool in the channels of communication between formal research and audiences with the potential to apply the research.

IKM thus started a summaries project with four partners, three of which were publishers. For a variety of reasons, involving various forms of organisational change at three of our four partners, it was not been possible to complete this work as originally planned. In addition planned links with intermediaries to ask them to discuss the value of the summaries to their networks of policy-shapers or practitioners were never made. However, a small number of summaries were produced and experience from the limited time in which the project ran did highlight some important issues.

Differences of opinion arose as to the style of summaries. ID21 historically required summarisers to summarise only the material content of any article on the grounds that only a style based on the actual material and written in plain English could guarantee that the summary could be read and understood in the same way by readers across different cultures. One of the contributing editors however felt strongly that writing style and the use of devices such as humour formed part of the content of articles and should thus be re-produced in any summary. She argued that both her

journal and IKM were arguing the importance of cultural context to development knowledge and that to remove it from written content undermined the argument. The ensuing debate suggested some analogies with debates within translation practice between proponents of literal translation and those of the translation of meaning.

One of the reasons we chose publishers as our partners was an assumption that they would have the right to produce derivatives of material they had already published. *Development in Practice* journal, for example, requires authors to sign a copyright agreement which gives the journal such a right. IDS, however, argued that a summary was an entirely separate piece of work, the copyright of which should belong to the publisher of the summary. At the time, this argument was accepted and IDS retained the copyright of the few articles summarised but we do not know if their argument was legally valid. Certainly some material is published – even within the creative commons system – with clauses prohibiting derivative products. It is an issue which requires clarification.

There were issues with authors. DIP regarded it as good practice for their relationships with authors to inform them of what was being planned and would have asked us to stop had any objected. However they did not always have a valid address. For ID21, however, a valid address was very important as they saw one of the main benefits of their summaries being the potential for people interested in the same research areas to contact each other and explore shared interests. There was also the issue of securing the author's approval of the text of the summary. This was part of ID21's normal practice but it accounted for about two thirds of the time they spent on each summary. IKM chose not to go down this route, primarily for reasons of cost. The cost per summary was UK£450 with authorial intervention, £150 without it. We felt that the latter might be an acceptable cost for a journal wanting all its articles disseminated this way but that the former would be prohibitive. We have, however, never carried out any independent quality checks on what was produced or sought the opinion of the authors of the original pieces on the process.

Next Steps

At the time this first phase of work ground to a halt, IKM still believed that summaries might prove to be an effective artefact in helping transfer information and ideas from the academic to the practical arenas. It was no longer possible to run such a significant project over the period of time originally planned. Instead two activities were proposed.

One involved the commissioning of a review of summaries - who has done them, how, in what contexts and with which results. We were very pleased that Charles Dhewa of Knowledge Transfer Africa was able to do this work and his review follows. As far as we were aware, no such review had previously been done in the sector. We think it gives important pointers to the issues, those described above and others, of summarising journal articles. We also asked the author to look at issues involved in summarising discussions within communities of practice. In the event he extended his consideration to a much wider range of summarising activities than we had imagined.

The second involved looking in more detail at the process through which summaries could be produced and received. We commissioned James Nguo, director of the Arid Lands Information Network, which specialises in facilitating knowledge sharing between development practitioners, to investigate the value of different types of summaries to a range of development audiences. He chose two articles, one a 'formal' journal article, published by *Development in Practice*, the other a contribution to ALIN's own more practice oriented journal, the *Baobab*, and had each summarised

by two people, one attached to IDS at Sussex, the other an employee of a Ugandan NGO. He then facilitated discussion of the articles themselves and the summaries with a range of development audiences. His paper does not come up with firm conclusions as to the value of summaries or how best to undertake them (and nor were any expected) but it certainly provides food for thought for anyone interested.

We had hoped to continue the investigations. It would have been interesting to explore feedback from authors. We also wanted to investigate the feasibility of translated summaries as a relatively low cost way of communicating formal knowledge from one linguistic community to another. Unfortunately we never quite found the time or the right connections to do this additional work and all our efforts have led to is the delay in making this original material available, for which we apologise. However, there has been some progress in the intervening time. IKM has now summarised all its own working papers and two other articles of great relevance to the programme. All of these and their French and Spanish translations are available off <http://wiki.ikmemergent.net/index.php/Documents>. With help from Michael David, a radio producer amongst his many talents, we have also explored making brief video clips, including interview material from the authors, on some of the working papers http://digitalstory.ikmemergent.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=138&Itemid=102. Elsewhere, the KM4Dev on-line community, described in Charles Dhewa's paper, has continued to develop its practice of posting really informative summaries of on-line discussions on a particular topic. Another, and really important contribution to thought and practice on knowledge transfer, came from Martha Chinouya, who, realising that the people she had been interviewing for her work on HIV in Zimbabwe would have no interest in reading her reports, explored Shona language theatre and video as ways of communicating her findings back to the audience which had helped create them ([http://wiki.ikmemergent.net/index.php/Knowledges, Dialogue and Translations : shifting the gaze and practice through traducture](http://wiki.ikmemergent.net/index.php/Knowledges,_Dialogue_and_Translations:_shifting_the_gaze_and_practice_through_traducture))

Unfortunately, such real initiative in communicating academic research to practitioner audiences is very rare. One problem is the lack of incentive. Academic journal publishers, even on development topics, sell to academic markets. Academics themselves tend to be esteemed and rewarded on the basis of their academic publications. Who therefore has an incentive to try and communicate their findings to practitioner audiences, even if the research has been funded out of development budgets?

Mike Powell
February 2012.

Review of Summaries as a Communication Tool in the Development Sector

**By Charles Dhewa
Knowledge Transfer Africa
Harare, Zimbabwe**

Email: dhewac@yahoo.co.uk or charlesdhewa7@gmail.com

Table of Contents

Review of Summaries as a Communication Tool in the Development Sector

1.0.	Introduction	9
2.0.	Summary production processes and experiences	9
3.0.	Discussion Thread Summaries	16
4.0.	Analysis and discussion	18
5.0.	Concluding Observations	21
6.0.	References	22

1.0. Introduction

The proliferation of new approaches and innovative ideas for exchanging information and knowledge in the development sector contribute to information overload. Practitioners need new skills to scan, understand and make meaning of diverse inputs. Some of the critical skills emerging from this expansion of information and knowledge include synthesizing and summarizing information. Synthesizers who can bring disparate things together and explainers who can see the complexity but explain it with simplicity, are becoming important knowledge brokers.

This document tries to put a frame around summaries as a communication tool in the development sector. There are much broader types and sizes of summaries as well as diverse contexts in which they are used.

A summary of an academic paper is a plain language document of between 600 and 1,000 words which summarises key arguments, counter arguments and data provided in any journal article, research working paper, report or online discussion. While this particular summary should provide full reference to the original and may encourage people to read it, it aims to work as a stand-alone document leaving the reader as informed as possible of the content of the original paper. It offers an additional tool in the channels of communication between formal research and audiences with the potential for application of research.

Other summaries may or may not even be called summaries, but they can still bridge between research and practice, even if indirectly. Examples include; policy briefs, discussion summaries, event "social reporting" and practitioner stories such as Stories of Change. stories. While this review focuses on summaries of academic papers, we recognize that these other forms can and do provide links between research and practice, but less directly and often with less attention and attribution to the original research.

This review examines examples of summary production processes from a number of contexts and organisations, including: the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC), Eldis, US Department of Agriculture, World Health Organisation and Inside Knowledge Magazine, as well as KM4Dev (summaries of list discussions), Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC), among others.

2.0. Summary production processes and experiences

2.1. Eldis

Eldis is a database and email service of information sources on international development. It aims to share the best knowledge on development, policy, practice and research. "Eldis" was originally an acronym for "Electronic Development and Environment Information System". It is one of a family of knowledge services produced at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, England. Eldis is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

Eldis <http://www.eldis.org> summaries are generally 400 words but longer (1000 words) if there is a complicated message or multiple messages. The summary usually focuses on the conclusion of a

particular paper, written in plain English, short sentences and paragraphs, no superlatives, in the third person. Bullet points are used to bring out or break up text and highlight conclusions / key points / recommendations.

The purpose of a summary is to tell the readers or users, as briefly as possible, whether they should read the whole document. The intention is not to replace the need to read the full text. An average Eldis user might want to know: how any document fits into what they already know. If it offers anything new or different; what changes to current thinking are suggested and what it will help them to do. Most readers are impatient, busy people who want information quickly. They know something of their subject – they do not need general introductions or to read something they already know. In this case the summary is a filter which enables a readers to decided whether to read the whole document or not.

Summarising

Items are summarised with a view to capturing key messages and allowing users to quickly assess relevance. Over the years, Eldis has developed a distinctive abstracting style designed to be clear, direct, and policy focused, cutting through academic jargon and avoiding the ‘publicity speak’ used by publishers to promote their material.

The aim is to turn what are often dry and complex documents into clear and succinct messages. Having high quality summaries means that users can make sense of material easily, see what is of interest, and do not have to waste time visiting other websites and downloading full text documents to check if they are relevant. It also helps to market important material which might otherwise be missed if not presented in an accessible way.

Value to users

In user surveys, conducted by the Eldis team at IDS, several readers cited summaries as what they most like about Eldis. It was also found that 66% of readers who responded to the various user surveys find Eldis summaries very useful; and 33% find them useful. It was also discovered that 76% of summary readers use them as a basis to decide whether to download the full report; 19% read them in place of the paper. Users have informed Eldis that summaries provide a good overview of the document.

Users also value how clear and concise Eldis summaries are (again, from user surveys):

- *“The summaries are concise and clear enough to give the needed gist of their subjects”*
- *“Very high quality. Great variety and depth of material covered. I really like those selections that deal with the MDGs.”*
- *“Easily accessible to diverse audiences (academics and practitioners)”*

Users also said that summaries were informative and helped them to save time and decide whether to download the whole document. The summaries help in highlighting the structure of the whole paper such that by reading it one has a skeleton of the whole paper. Some readers said they frequently cut and paste abstracts of useful reports and distribute those to fellow professionals who always report that it is possible to determine the quality and usefulness of the main report.

Summaries are presented in a format that is easy to get the key findings and conclusions – they are scannable. The way the summary is constructed makes it easy to determine whether the document is useful. Summaries are also helpful for people whose first language is not English and for those with poor internet access. As a product in themselves, summaries are quite handy for re-using in reports. For instance, the content can be used in different ways such as Newsfeeds.

Like all documents featured on Eldis such as research reports, working papers, discussion papers, conference papers, statistics, case studies, policy briefings, manuals and toolkits, summaries are

freely available online through the website <http://www.eldis.org> and CDROM. Permission to use Eldis documents is not sought in advance of publishing a summary but authors and / or publishers are contacted once the summary is live for feedback, marketing and further publishing rights.

Cost of producing a summary

The following table shows a very loose estimate of time needed for each activity with cost calculated on the average day rates for the editors, abstractors and admin staff doing the work. The total cost of producing a summary is GBP 56.04 as shown in the table:

	Eldis	
	Time (Minutes)	Cost (GBP)
Sourcing	30	17.07
Writing	40	11.8
Editing	40	24.38
Administration		2.79
TOTAL	110	56.04

2.2. Governance and Social Development Resource Centre

The Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC)'s document library consists of summaries of a wide range of published and unpublished information. It includes brief, policy-oriented summaries of each document highlighting the major findings and implications in an easy to read format, plus links to the full text online or by document delivery.

Production and managing processes

Documents are identified based on ongoing scoping of online sources and through recommendations in areas of interest to the GSDRC's users. The document is then sent to freelance research assistants who read and summarise the document to a set format and terms of reference. The summary is quality assured by the commissioning editor within the GSDRC team.

The GSDRC is delivered by a consortium led by the University of Birmingham (International Development Department), the Institute of Development Studies and Social Development Direct. The summary process is managed by the University of Birmingham who have developed a roster of freelance research assistants to sub-contract summary writing to. Copyright of the summaries is owned by the University of Birmingham.

The fact that summaries are often linked to higher level topic guides adds to their usefulness. Research assistants are paid to write summaries of documents. However, the GSDRC could not reveal the exact costs for producing a summary due to commercial reasons.

On copyright, GSDRC believes that writing a summary of an article or book chapter constitutes fair use for review, criticism, and academic study. The organisation always provides a full reference; and direct readers to the original work through an existing web link such as the publisher's site. Occasionally if a paper is not already available online or from the British Library of Development Studies it is uploaded to the GSDRC site so that users can refer to it, but only if the copyright – holder provides written permission.

2.3. Inside Knowledge (IK) Magazine

Mark Hammersley, a Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) member, has taught students to elicit, synthesise and document process knowledge as part of a postgraduate knowledge management programme. A couple of publications relating to the methodology used have been produced, for example, a "business" oriented article in Inside Knowledge (IK) Magazine: [http://www.ikmagazine.com/xq/asp/sid.0/articleid.5097FB74-5B35-4F0F-B3BA-D6FFF3C6B365/eTitle.Leveraging the dimensions of K Knowledge Engineering for Web Based Knowledge Management/qx/display.htm](http://www.ikmagazine.com/xq/asp/sid.0/articleid.5097FB74-5B35-4F0F-B3BA-D6FFF3C6B365/eTitle.Leveraging%20the%20dimensions%20of%20K%20Knowledge%20Engineering%20for%20Web%20Based%20Knowledge%20Management/qx/display.htm)) and a more academic oriented one [Milton, N., Shadbolt, N. R., Cottam, H. and Hammersley, M. (1999) Towards a Knowledge Technology for Knowledge Management. International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, 53 (3). pp. 615-64. ISSN 1071-5819].

The motivations were partly academic (to develop and refine a methodology for capturing and publishing knowledge) and partly practical (an engineering company wanted to retain experience of senior technical staff who were due for retirement). The approach of using graduate trainees on a fast track management programme for the company was inspired by a number of factors which include: graduate trainees were relatively cheap (they undertook the work as one of the 3 month assignments which comprised their programme); they were motivated, as was consistently rated as one of the top assignments for management trainees; the knowledge "owners" were not threatened by questions from a very junior colleague - indeed they enjoyed recounting their experience to a highly educated new starter at the company.

However, it was not possible to get the actual costs of using the graduate trainees. It is not known how much use was made of the documents produced. Mark also commissioned summaries of case studies on innovations within development organisations. This was one of the outputs from a process of "deep" knowledge sharing between several agencies whose participation was externally funded and supported at the highest levels of management. The process began with semi-structured conversations (lightly facilitated, spanning 2-3 days) between teams of peers across pairs of organisations, with notes taken by support staff. The experience was rich and fruitful and led to strong collaborative relationships between participants and valuable insights into the similarities and differences in ways of working.

Notes were written and shared among participants. However, the notes were too long and contained errors and misinterpretations by the person tasked with documentation. All the teams met following the process and each team presented highlights of what it had learned. Some did this diligently while others did not. At that meeting a number of "most admired" ways of working were identified and then the top 10 were voted for. A consultant was hired to conduct additional interviews with participants and then wrote these 10 as case studies. Two versions of each case study were produced: a full version for limited distribution and a 1000 word summary for external publication. The intention was that the "full" version should provide enough detail for the practice to be replicated by another organisation and the summary should contain a "taster" sufficient to inspire and motivate readers.

The process took three months (much longer than expected). Despite starting the exercise with Chief Executive Officer (CEO)- level approval for a commitment to enter deep and open sharing (which certainly existed during face-to-face events) and to publish results and findings, there was subsequently considerable reluctance to provide necessary levels of detail to put the cases into writing. Momentum was lost and quite bland short cases were published about one year later. In several instances, organisations refused permission even for limited distribution of the more detailed documents. It is not known why they refused to have this information distributed.

2.4. United States Department of Agriculture (USDA)

The USDA's Economic Research Services (ERS) staff (economists and social scientists) conduct research to inform public and private decision-making on economic and policy issues involving food, farming, natural resources, and rural development. The agency's research program is aimed at the information needs of USDA, other public policy officials, and the research community. ERS information and analysis is also used by the media, trade associations, public interest groups, and the general public. ERS disseminates economic information and research results through an array of outlets. These include:

- 1) Agency-published research reports, market analysis and outlook reports, economic briefs, and data products (all accessible on the Internet, with hard copies available for purchase).
- 2) The in-house magazine, *Amber Waves*, covering the entire range of ERS work and available in print and on the Internet.
- 3) The website (www.ers.usda.gov), which provides access to all ERS products and which links users directly with ERS analysts.
- 4) Articles in professional journals, and papers presented to academic colleagues at conferences and meetings.

All ERS research reports and outlook reports are subject to peer review by subject matter experts. In-house peer-reviewed reports include a summary as part of the official report. A policy on peer review of ERS research reports is found here: <http://www.ers.usda.gov/AboutERS/peerreview.htm>. When staff publish research findings in external publications, such as peer-reviewed or refereed journal articles, they are not compelled to produce a summary of the research as part of the publication process. The production of a summary depends on the policies and procedures of each referred journal or other publication outlet.

The peer review process varies for each series. All reports in each series are included in ERS's peer review agenda for potentially influential scientific information.

ERS research reports—Division management submits ERS research reports, including Economic Briefs, Economic Information Bulletins, and Economic Research Reports, to the ERS Peer Review Council to develop the peer review plan and coordinate the peer review process. Each report submitted to the Peer Review Council is reviewed by a minimum of two academic economists/subject specialists, two economists from ERS, and subject specialists from USDA agencies potentially affected by the research. All reviews are double blind (the reviewers do not know the identity of the report author(s) and the author(s) do not know the names of the reviewers). Review criteria are detailed in request letters sent to each reviewer. Reviewers from outside USDA receive a honorarium for their input.

Outlook Special Reports—Outlook Special Reports deliver time-sensitive information related to the forces shaping commodity markets and trade. These reports provide analysis of commodity market conditions, production, supply, and use, both domestically and internationally. Outlook Special Reports are reviewed by ERS staff, external commodity and market specialists, and subject experts on the World Agricultural Outlook Board.

It has not been possible to get information on any evaluations or the exact cost of producing a summary.

2.5. IAASTD

The International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) was initiated in 2002 by the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) as a global consultative process to determine whether an international assessment of agricultural knowledge, science and technology was needed.

Outputs from this assessment are a Global and five Sub-Global reports; a Global and five Sub-Global Summaries for Decision Makers; and a cross-cutting Synthesis Report with an Executive Summary. The Summaries for Decision Makers and the Synthesis Report specifically provide options for action to governments, international agencies, academia, research organizations and other decision makers around the world.

The reports draw on the work of hundreds of experts from all regions of the world who have participated in the preparation and peer review process. The Executive Summary of the Synthesis Report (36 pages) was approved in detail by Governments attending the IAASTD Intergovernmental Plenary in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2008. This Synthesis Report captures the complexity and diversity of agriculture and agricultural knowledge, science and technology (AKST) across world regions. It is built upon the Global and five Sub-Global reports that provide evidence for the integrated analysis of the main concerns necessary to achieve development and sustainability goals. It is organized in two parts that address the primary animating question: how can AKST be used to reduce hunger and poverty, improve rural livelihoods, and facilitate equitable environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable development? The Summary for Decision Makers, also approved at the Johannesburg meeting, is 48 pages long.

The two summaries, though long, are stand alone communication outputs which capture the most important issues. However, the reports are full of NGO-speak – language which may not be accessible to policy makers and ordinary people. It is easy for the development sector to assume that ordinary people can understand the meaning of phrases like '*equitable and economically sustainable development*'. Issues of jargon should be taken into account when producing a summary that is meant for diverse audiences.

It has not been possible to find out the cost of producing the summaries. However, one could assume that various experts who contributed were financially rewarded, if the task was not part of their daily work. Copyright for the summaries belong to the IAASTD. It has not been possible to get information on how the summaries are used.

2.6. World Health Organization (WHO)

In 2005, the World Health Organization (WHO) in collaboration with the Department of Population and Family Health at Johns Hopkins University, commenced a review of interventions that aim to assist parents of adolescents in developing countries improve adolescent health and development. This effort sought to identify such projects and document the information as summaries. The methodology employed to identify projects included a search of published studies through computerized databases including Pub Med and the Cochrane Library as well as a review of grey literature of international intergovernmental health/development organizations such as the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

Individuals and organizations working in the fields of adolescent reproductive health, substance abuse, violence and mental health were also contacted. Whenever possible, project staff were

interviewed by telephone using a standardized interview guide. Project summaries were drafted and reviewed by project staff.

Challenges in collecting information included the fact that organizations with relevant programming often provided very little detailed information on the internet and/or did not provide up-to-date contact information for people related to the project. In addition, when projects ceased after implementing agencies withdrew support, it was difficult to identify and contact project staff.

Moreover, project staff were occupied with implementation and had little time to contribute to this type of research effort. Finally, language barriers prevented the collection of information from project staff, as well as limiting the review to some specific regions of the world. Ultimately, this effort identified 34 projects around the world. Descriptions of these projects were compiled into a document entitled *Summaries of projects in developing countries assisting the parents of adolescents*. Copyright for the publication belongs to the WHO.

2.7. Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC)

The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change is the leading body for the assessment of climate change, established by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) to provide the world with a clear scientific view on the current state of climate change and its potential environmental and socio-economic consequences.

The IPCC is a scientific body. It reviews and assesses the most recent scientific, technical and socio-economic information produced worldwide relevant to the understanding of climate change. Thousands of scientists from all over the world contribute to the work of the IPCC on a voluntary basis. Review is an essential part of the IPCC process, to ensure an objective and complete assessment of current information. Differing viewpoints existing within the scientific community are reflected in the IPCC reports.

It produces huge documents mainly for specialists with a one page Executive Summary e.g., *Assessment of Observed Changes and Responses in Natural and Managed Systems*. A number of IPCC reports, in particular the Assessments Reports, are published commercially and can be obtained from the publishers or leading book shops. Some full reports and summaries of many reports are translated into the official UN languages and CD-ROMs of the full reports can be downloaded free of charge from the IPCC Secretariat.

Each of the Working Group volumes is composed of individual chapters, an optional Technical Summary and a Summary for Policymakers. Synthesis Reports synthesize materials contained with the Assessments Reports, eventually integrating them with information coming from the Special Reports as well. They are composed of a longer report and a Summary for Policymakers. Each IPCC Assessment and Special Report has a Summary for Policymakers (SPM) which is widely distributed. The SPM text is subject to line by line discussions and approval at a Plenary Session. The SPM has to be consistent with the factual material contained in the full report. Lead Authors of the report participate in the Session to provide explanations and clarifications and assist to ensure consistency between the Summary for Policymakers and the full report.

2.8. Policy Briefs as Summaries

Policy briefs are short documents that present the findings and recommendations of a research project to a non-specialist readership. They are often recommended as a key tool for communicating research findings to policy actors (Young and Quinn, 2007). Among organizations which employ policy briefs to summarise their work is the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). IFPRI produces Policy Briefs of two - four pages long, summarizing research findings and provide an action oriented spin. The Policy Briefs are meant for policy makers and other non-researchers. For example:

<http://www.ifpri.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/publications/bp011.pdf>. Normally the policy brief is written by researchers, with the involvement of IFPRI's Communications Department to help simplify the language for non-researchers. The summaries have a recognizable format in line with the organisation's style. Like any other publication produced by the organisation, copy-right for Policy Briefs is owned by IFPRI. It has not been possible to find the cost of producing a Policy Brief.

2.9. IKM Working Papers

IKM Working Papers comprise a series of publications published by the Information and Knowledge Management (IKM) Research Programme. Some IKM Working Papers are written by IKM Programme members while others have been commissioned from leading experts in a given field.

Each paper has an Executive Summary which tries to capture arguments made in the main documents. Some of the documents are up to 50 pages and the longer the report the longer the Executive Summary. The author's opinion is that for each document, a more detailed summary could be produced as an improvement of the Executive Summary so that readers who do not have time to read the whole 50 page document can glean the major issues from the summary.

The Papers are published and distributed primarily in electronic format via the IKM Emergent website at: www.ikmemergent.net. They are published under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike 3.0 Licence and may be copied freely for research and educational purposes when cited with due acknowledgment.

3.0. Discussion Thread Summaries

In 2004, the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC) supported what was called the "Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) renewal project" of the KM4Dev community. This is essentially the predecessor of the wiki Community Knowledge Base. Four people (Nancy White, Urs Egger, Ben Ramalingam and Lucie Lamoureux) came forward to offer their services to develop summaries of some of interesting and popular discussion threads. This was the original basis for the wiki summary template http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/FAQ_Template still used by KM4dev. This was a time-delimited project and there was an awareness of the need to continue the important task of summarizing discussions.

However, the only current "pull" is to regularly ask those who post questions to "give back" to the community by summarising discussions which they stimulate. This also enables members to see the value of summarising and encourage others so that summarising becomes a regular community practice. The challenges of members volunteering to summarise discussions include

the fact that volunteering and competence are two different things. A volunteer may not articulate underlying issues in detail. A discussion on water issues will definitely need someone who works in the sector to surface important issues that may be of interest to outsiders. The positive thing is that those who volunteer have an opportunity to learn through guidance from those who have done it before. The provided template makes it easy for those keen to summarise discussions.

A Brief history on the project, the template, and the link to Community Knowledge is here:

- * <http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/FAQIntro>
- * http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/FAQ_Template
- * http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Community_Knowledge

3.1. KM4Dev Wiki on Low Bandwidth Design - http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Low-Bandwidth_Design .

This wiki page began as a summary of the discussion thread posted by Carl Jackson to the KM4Dev discussion list. Carl synthesised the thread's main points into a wiki page and this was subsequently significantly expanded and improved by one of the thread contributors, Gabrielle Sani, and with further additions by one of the original thread contributors Christian Kreutz. There have been more than 54 editing contributions to the thread summary from April 2009 to March 2010.

Balance of interests between who 'owns' the thread and acknowledgement

The original contributors demonstrated ownership of the summary and they also cared about the topic enough to write it up and improve upon it. Putting the summary into a wiki enabled this ownership and keen interest to be transparent because of the history feature for edits. It is perhaps reflective of the culture of the KM4Dev community from which this thread and summary emerged that acknowledgement of contributions is expected in principle and volunteered very readily in practice.

Value to end users of having a clear summary

The page views have amounted to 1,927 in less than nine months demonstrating a strong interest in the topic by readers. Carl found the summary useful as it made it possible for him to refer to this resource in other communications and publications in ways that would not have been easy had the thread remained on the discussion list only. The quality of the resource may not have reached this level if it had not been summarised into a collaborative editing tool like the wiki.

The value of the content plus the functionality of a co-created summary motivated people to add to the resource.

For another Community of Practice similar to KM4dev, Mark Hammersley wrote summaries of threads and supported others to do so. The summaries were used in two ways: to publicise and promote the source discussion, eliciting further contributions and disseminating the opinions shared; and to create an archive of key issues for easy reference by future readers. The first summary was one paragraph, for inclusion in a weekly email bulletin (highlighted were a few of the discussion threads in a weekly summary which was distributed to all members including those who had opted out of participation in full email exchanges). Each paragraph mentioned some of the contributions and included a link to view the full discussion thread online. The second type was probably more similar to the KM4dev in that the participants sought to synthesise and structure the content of a mature discussion thread. This required considerable skill and was often a day's work or more.

There were no difficulties regarding copyright but often the editor had to do additional research in

order to fill gaps that became obvious when the synthesis was produced. The work was done by volunteers (as with KM4dev) and quality was quite variable. Importantly, it was discovered that the editors needed to have some understanding of the topic and the target audience. It was so easy to find volunteers (e.g. students) but this did not produce a credible product. People from within the community who were willing to do the work on an unpaid basis were few and far between.

3.2. Outcome Mapping Learning Community (OMLC)

The Outcome Mapping Learning Community is a group of over one thousand members from around the world. It acts largely as a dynamic platform for sharing knowledge and experiences relating to Outcome Mapping - a methodology developed by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) for planning, monitoring and evaluating projects and programmes. Members come together to solve problems, showcase and trade their discoveries and good practices, and to support one another in applying Outcome Mapping.

In order to capture, record and disseminate the knowledge shared through the community, a practice of summarising and synthesising discussions has gained momentum. Examples of summaries are in the [OMLC resource library](#) and discussion collections are located here: <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=256> and <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=139>. These were compiled through a process where individual discussions were summarised by volunteers from the community. Staff member, Simon Hearn and two volunteers reviewed the summaries and picked a number of common themes. The summaries were then synthesised around the themes.

In 2007, the Outcome Mapping Learning Community published a book titled "*Making Outcome Mapping Work: Evolving Experiences From Around the World*". It was a compilation and synthesis of discussions from the OMLC. It proved to be such a key resource for the community that they have decided to follow up with a sequel. This book represents the experiences and knowledge shared by community members between the period Jan – Dec 2007. It has taken the combined effort of a number of community members who volunteered to document, summarise and synthesise a large number of discussions.

The book is divided into two sections. The first section is a series of syntheses which pick up the lessons from the discussions and presents them by topic: OM steps, OM in specific sectors, complimentary tools and approaches, communicating and advocating for OM and complexity and OM. The second section is a collection of twenty discussion summaries, representing a year's worth of knowledge shared among community members. More details: www.outcomemapping.ca.

4.0. Analysis and discussion

Summaries of whatever length are only of any use if they are written in a language understood by the intended audience and made easily available. In the case of journal articles, the route to go is to find out from intended readers and users how they would most like to find out what is in the articles. Eldis has done this with fruitful results as shown in this report. It is easy for producers of articles or summaries to think they know what will be useful, but there really needs to be a pull and not just a push to shape what is produced and how (and in what language) it is delivered. Most of the cases cited have no formal evaluation mechanisms or even informal feedback mechanisms. None have done gap analysis or needs assessments. There is an assumption that what they provide is valuable.

The use of summaries for communicating research information for policy application has to

contend with tensions between scientific knowledge as 'privileged' information and the perceived diluting effects that a democratised knowledge base may introduce (Weingart, 1999). Some fear that the capacity of the current system of communication between researcher and policy communities is inadequate to rule out excessive dilution of scientific knowledge (Clark and Juma, 2002). Moreover, the pluralisation of knowledge in policy can, in fact, cause debate to stagnate rather than encourage it. Policy-makers, constrained by time and overwhelmed by various sources of information, are likely to make a snap decision by selecting the 'evidence' most appropriate to their political leanings (Edwards, 1999). Summaries have to be harnessed together with other communication tools like seminars so that research does not lose its 'purity' when used in the short timeframes of the political sphere.

The methods used by most organizations reviewed in this paper such as Eldis and the Governance and Social Development Resource Centre (GSDRC) indicate the importance of tailoring messages appropriately for audiences such as policy makers. However, the effectiveness of any tool depends on appropriate usage. According to the Editor of *Development in Practice*, Deborah Eade, the usefulness of stand-alone summaries depends very much on the length and complexity as well as the style of the original article. For instance between 33 and 40 per cent of articles published in *Development in Practice* are less than 3000 words long. It would be a waste of time and money to produce a 1000-word precis of such short pieces.

Summarisers aiming to increase uptake of scientific and technological research in development policy need to focus on, and actively address, the communication tensions between policy makers and researchers. Policy makers need data, but they need it in forms that suit their particular needs, contexts and delivered by the right sources for the sake of credibility. The provision of research information alone is not, therefore, sufficient to influence the policy agenda. The value of a summary needs to be viewed not only in terms of presenting quality evidence, but also in translating new knowledge into context-relevant messages and guidance for policy-makers.

What is needed is active mediation and translation among knowledge producers, knowledge brokers and end users, as well as an integrated communications approach that takes into consideration the needs of individuals and organizations.. It is critical to foster close collaboration between researchers, summarisers and policy makers from the outset, rather than disseminating research results at the end of a project. This will also promote understanding of research methods and encourage ownership of the process and results.

Development in Practice full-length articles are 6500 words, and the organisation invests in getting these professionally copy edited so that they are as accessible as possible - getting rid of repetition, unclear expression, unnecessary references and other clutter.

This is absolutely essential for academic and/or less experienced authors.

"If I had to choose between paying for a 1000-word summary (which might still need to be copyedited) and having the original article properly copyedited, I would go for sorting out the original every time. I would also, assuming limited resources, invest as we do in getting the original 100-word abstracts translated into other languages rather than paying for a longer summary, which would then cost ten times more to translate. For us, that would make translation unaffordable. So is it better to have one 1000-word summary in English or four 100-word abstracts in French, Portuguese, Spanish, and another language? Do we really want to reinforce the hegemony of English in development, as is already the case in other fields?" said Deborah.

Peer review processes used by the USDA and IAASTD, while crucial for quality control, may not cater to the interests of ordinary readers and practitioners. Peers tend to build silos among themselves and prevent alternative views from other specialists who are critical in putting the message across. For GSDRC and Eldis, quality control by commissioning editors is

commendable but too much formalisation may hide critical knowledge because editing sometimes cuts out information needed by the audience.

In a case described by Mark Hammersley, above, the process of writing summaries became too long, resulting in disappointing results since those involved lost interest and focus. Information is perishable and thus, taking too long may result in the article being outdated by the time it is published.

Policy Briefs fulfil a crucial summarizing role. However, since they focus on policy makers only, their audience tends to be limited. Many policy makers in developing countries understand policy issues through local vernacular languages. It may be necessary to summarise policy briefs into vernacular languages. This could be done by intermediaries in specific developing countries.

As a formal activity summarising is highly skilled, requiring not just language proficiency, but also technical knowledge in the domain being summarised. Mark's case also adds credence to GSDRC's practice of engaging freelance researchers because summarising is a special skill requiring specialists. It cannot be done by anyone, even if they are trained for some months.

Most organisations that use such services engage specialised commercial agencies for journal articles and books. Informally, and in relation to community conversations such as list-serves, weblogs and so on, the use of "teasers" that point to the original article are probably an easier and more effective way where there are article-length posts. Summarisers and analysts need general writing skills and also the capacity to understand issues to be summarised. In a formal context, it is important to take note of liability issues in accurately summarising material where there may be sensitivities or health/safety issues.

On the other hand, not all articles lend themselves to being summarised. "I once read a summary of an extremely witty and very readable article: the summary captured the arguments accurately enough, but what made the article such a compelling read had been entirely lost in the process to the extent that I could barely recognise it and would not have been remotely attracted to read the original. This would suggest that only the author can summarise their own article - but the best articles have no spare fat to be cut and do really have to be read and enjoyed in their entirety", said Deborah Eade, Editor for Development in Practice.

The case of discussion thread summaries is slightly different from summaries of reports or journals. According to Nancy White, based on some review of the wiki data for KM4Dev in the past, there was a conclusion that many of the page views are not from members. It is important to focus on: form/quality of summary; form /navigation and for instance, inclusion of RSS feeds or something to help make subscribing to new stuff easier; clarity on who the external audiences are, what they need. The end users may not be in and of the community, thus caring little about attribution and contribution (the social and reputational aspects of the summary) while those inside the community may care.

For many KM4Devers, all of KM4Dev information and knowledge is global public goods and should be under the most open licensing possible. What KM4Dev produce is for the public good in spirit and by showing the value we add to the world, we will attract more people who also share those values to KM4Dev and this will help advance the field.

Many organisations in the development sector are harnessing the power of stories and storytelling to summarise development processes and outcomes. A number of organisations have produced 'Stories of Change' to demonstrate impact of their work. Stories have been used to capture, summarise and share experiences in some of the projects associated with IKM. Examples include

digital storytelling in India and community story telling case studies in Costa Rica which have explored community based discussion of major issues such as water management. The stories have been anchored on the knowledge and experience already present within the community.

Due to the oral nature of many African cultures, stories have remained an integral part of passing knowledge to future generations. Whatever we know about the world and ourselves is made up of the stories we tell ourselves and pass on to others. These stories not only describe the world. They literally formulate our identity, our relationship to the world and, ultimately, the way the world relates to us. A story is also used to make a difficult change easier to understand, integrate and accept.

However, for many development practitioners, researchers and academics who have been trained to think analytically and put conclusions as bullet points and pictures into power point presentations, stories require a leap of faith and deep emotion.

In this review, many organisations and respondents, except Eldis, have not been able to provide the cost of producing summaries. One could only surmise that these were produced by internal staff as part of their work. Most organisations do not engage external people on a commercial basis. However, this will be very important because, outsiders bring a third eye and can add value to summaries.

5.0. Concluding Observations

Summaries are crucial to knowledge sharing. They are used as common communication language by many organisations, as this review tries to reveal. Most organisations do not evaluate the effectiveness of their summaries or other communication tools like journal articles. It is important not to limit the analysis to formal research and audiences but also consider informal ways such as story telling because of the way human behaviour works. As Dave Snowden says, “We know more than we can say, we say more than we can write.” Nancy White adds that, “we write informally more than we write formally.” In this vein, there is need to explore what might be involved in using a more narrative, story telling style to communicate the essence of a journal article or research paper.

Context is a key factor. As observed by some colleagues, we need to ask ourselves whether summaries are meant to be public or not. We should also examine issues around costs/benefits from doing a quick summary that is less than complete, but at least done compared to a full, cited and vetted summary - which may not get done. It is not easy to convey the nuances of longer pieces in summaries. In the context of vast amounts of information circulating for which we must all apply our own filters, good summaries of important ideas can play an invaluable role.

While many researchers and development practitioners are torn between seeing the value of knowledge products such as summaries on one side and the extent to which they can live up to their expectations, summaries could help in making a difference. Efforts to use summaries for strengthening researchers’ communication and knowledge brokering skills need to be complemented by efforts to strengthen the institutional capacity of policy agencies to take up research. This includes enhancing individual capacities and skills, as well as developing institutional channels, procedures and incentive structures to promote evidence-informed policy

processes.

Summaries could be an integral part of IKM's Communication Strategy: to develop an elevator pitch – a short overview of an idea for a product, service, or project. This will be important in communicating the complexity of multiple knowledges in the context of the disconnection between policy, practice and academic research in the development sector.

6.0. References

1. Development in Practice - <http://www.developmentinpractice.org>
2. Friedman TL. 2006. *The World is Flat*. Penguin. ISBN 978-0-141-02272-7
3. Governance and Social Development Resource Centre - www.gsdr.org
4. International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD) Agriculture at Crossroads (2009)
5. Id21 – <http://www.eldis.org>
6. IFPRI: <http://www.ifpri.cgiar.org/sites/default/files/publications/bp011.pdf>.
7. IKM Emergent: www.ikmemergent.net
8. Inside Knowledge Magazine: <http://www.ikmagazine.com>
9. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change: <http://www.ipcc.ch>
10. KMeDev Community Knowledge: http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Community_Knowledge
11. KM4Dev Wiki on Low Bandwidth Design - http://wiki.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/Low-Bandwidth_Design .
12. KM Magazine have been produced (see http://www.ikmagazine.com/xq/asp/sid.0/articleid.5097FB74-5B35-4F0F-B3BA-D6FFF3C6B365/eTitle.Leveraging_the_dimensions_of_K_Knowledge_Engineering_for_Web_Based_Knowledge_Management/qx/display.htm)
13. Linking Local Learners <http://www.linkinglearners.net>
14. Making Outcome Mapping Work Volume 2 - Innovations in Participatory Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (2009): <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=256> and <http://www.outcomemapping.ca/resource/resource.php?id=139>.
15. Milton, N., Shadbolt, N. R., Cottam, H. and Hammersley, M. (1999) Towards a Knowledge Technology for Knowledge Management. International Journal of Human-Computer Studies, 53 (3). pp. 615-64. ISSN 1071-5819].
16. ODI Background Note (May 2008) – Policy briefs as a communication tool for development research - www.odi.org.uk/rapid
17. Storytelling: www.storytelling.co.za

18. World Health Organization (2007) Summaries of projects in developing countries assisting the parents of adolescents.

IKM Working Papers

1. *Serafin D. Talisayon (2009) Monitoring and Evaluation in Knowledge Management for Development.*
2. *Laxmi Prasad Pant (2009) Learning networks for bridging knowledge divides in international development: aligning approaches and initiatives.*

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks to the following colleagues for being very generous with ideas: Lucie Lamoureux, Nancy White, Mike Powell, Riff Fullan, Carl Jackson, Mark Hammersley, Valerie Brown, Eva Schiffer, Ueli Scheuermeier, Ewen Leborgne, Simon Hearn , Patrick lambe, Marc Stenlin, Louise Daniel, Steve Crutchfield, Alan Stanley , Dave Snowden, Catherine Fisher , Carla Henry, Sarah Cummings, Deborah Eade, Roxanna Samii, Ian Thorpe, Janet Neubecker, Sarah O'Connor, Pete Cranston, Nadia von Holzen and Jessica Deery.

IKM Emergent

**EXPLORATION OF THE
EFFICACY OF SUMMARIES**

James Nguo

Nairobi, March 2010

Table of Contents

1.0	Background	26
2.0	Sourcing of articles	26
3.0	Summaries.....	26
4.0	Peer group reviews.....	26
5.0	ALIN Community Information Volunteers	27
6.0	Review by senior development workers at ALIN.....	30
7.0	Community Information Facilitators	32
8.0	Preference for Kiswahili	34
9.0	My Own Observations	35
10.0	ANNEX 1 - Articles Chosen	37
11.0	ANNEX 2 - Summaries	45

1. Background

This research was done to test IKM's view that standalone summaries of longer articles might prove an effective artefact is helping the transfer of knowledge from the academic to the practical arena.

The work was based on the work of the Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN) see www.alin.net. ALIN is a network that brings together over 2000 grassroots Community Development Workers in four east African countries to share information and knowledge on development using multimedia tools. It promotes creation and sharing of local content, especially on agriculture and environment, through its community-based *Maarifa* (knowledge) centers, which are established in partnerships with other organizations and feature books, journals, ICT equipment and connectivity.

ALIN focuses on trusted *infomediaries* to act as a reliable source of development information for the communities they serve on a day-to-day basis. *Infomediaries* are the organizations and individuals that provide information to community members out of duty or social responsibility. They are all those women and men who work directly with communities and local groups at the grassroots. They include community mobilizers, health workers, extension workers and community members.

2. Sourcing of articles

The idea was to get articles that were written by authors from different social groups. The articles were to be of interest to the groups served by ALIN in the course of its work. Abstracts were sourced from Development in Practice website. In sourcing for this article, relevance to the area in focus was considered. This yielded an article

“The baobab metaphor for sustainable organisational development at the grassroots” (Buter, 2003).

The other article was picked from a database of articles submitted to ALIN for publication in its journal *Baobab*. The article was written by a senior development practitioner working for a NGO in Uganda. The article entitled *“Facilitating farmer's institutional development: a prerequisite for sustainability of development initiatives”* is based on the experiences in Uganda.

3. Summaries

The summaries were done by an experienced editor working for ALIN's journal, *Baobab* and former id21 Natural Resources editor who is now based in Germany. Each received two original article with instructions to summarise the two articles for publication in a journal that targets grassroots development workers or *infomediaries*.

Each of the articles was summarized once by each of the summarisers for comparison purposes. The former id21 editor is an experienced northern-based summariser who has been working within the publications department of the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) while the *Baobab* editor is a Kenyan-based freelance editor with over fifteen years experience and linked to several development publications including *Baobab*. Both summarisers are trained at the graduate level.

4. Peer group reviews

The research targeted local development workers within the ALIN network who are regular users of summarized information that is disseminated through a regular journal, **Baobab** among other publications.

The development workers who reviewed the summaries were in three categories; Community information Volunteers who carry on dissemination activities on a day-to-day basis at the community level. This group was expected to pick out issues related to clarity of summaries and use of Kiswahili, Community Information Facilitators who were expected to come close to the volunteers in understanding what makes a good summary and senior development workers who were expected to be above the other two groups in understanding and ranking the summaries. Below are the outcomes of the reviews by the groups above.

5. ALIN Community Information Volunteers

ALIN also runs a graduate Youth Volunteer program to facilitate local content development and dissemination, support skills development at the local level and give the volunteers experience they need to enter the job market. In this case the graduates targeted in the peer review have done a one-year internship at ALIN's Maarifa (Knowledge) centres.

Maarifa centers are established by ALIN in collaboration with other partner organizations offering other services to the community. A typical Maarifa center is a space located in a remote setting, which features publications, five or more computers with Internet connectivity. A total of 26 people consisting of the volunteers at the Maarifa centres took part in this review.

a) Method

The participants were divided into six groups consisting of 4 people. They were given the original two articles and four summaries to read and digest overnight. In addition, they were given the set of questions to address after the review of the two articles. Their assignment was to compare the two summaries for each article and comment on.

- a) Whether the summaries contain information that is relevant and of potential direct use
- b) Whether any observations can be made about the pluses or minuses of different summaries
- c) Whether they think there is added value in having the summaries available in the widely spoken Kiswahili language.
- d) Whether they think that having 'expert' information made available in this way is of any real potential benefit to their work and if so, what could be done to make the work better.

The same terms of reference applied to all the volunteers and review groups that took part in the entire research.

b) Observations

Once the 6 groups had read and internalized the four summaries, a plenary discussion was conducted where each of the groups made a presentation with others commenting on the observations. The observations were debated and agreed by all the members of the plenary. The following observations were made for each of the summaries.

One of the most important points about the article on Developing farmers' institutions in Uganda was that it was a 'raw' when it was sent for publication in the Baobab by a high level development worker from Uganda. The main challenge for the summarisers were to pick out the message for development workers and summarise the article in a way that they can comprehend.

Comments on articles on Baobab metaphor article

a) As summarized by former id21 editor

- The title is catchy
- The summary is in point form, simplified and easy to understand.
- It's more detailed in content
- It's good for community
- It has short clearer sentences
- Contains details of the author

b) As summarised by Baobab editor

- The summary reads like a research
- The content is mixed up
- The summary is in long sentences and uses jargons
- It reads like a report
- The paragraphs have too much info

Comments on “Developing farmers’ institutions in Uganda”

c) As summarised by former id21 editor

- The summary is short and precise
- Use of subtitles make easier to read
- Text is well highlighted
- The conclusion is ideal for development workers

d) As summarised by Baobab editor

- The background gives a good introduction to the summary
- The summary is more detailed and understood

Whether summaries are important

Each of the group was asked to present their findings on whether they think that having ‘expert’ information made available in this way is of any real potential benefit to their work and if so, what could be done to make the work better. The following is the common stand by all the groups.

- The summaries are relevant for communities but should omit jargon. They should use simple language and should be shorter
- They should be simple and short
- The information should be simpler for knowledge transfer in a poor reading culture such as East Africa
- The information should be combined with illustrations and examples that are relevant to the community
- There should be continuous but short paragraphs are preferred

Which is a better summary and why?

The volunteers debated on which was a better summary for the Baobab article. Most of the issues are crosscutting between the two summarisers.

The summaries done by former id21 editor were considered better for the following reasons;

- The summariser has highlighted most of the important points
- The summariser has used titles, subtitles and conclusion is easier to understand
- The contact details of the authors are shown

The summaries done by Baobab editor were considered lower in ranking for the following reasons;

- The article is lengthy
- In both articles, the contact details of the author are NOT shown
- There is too much detail in both summaries

6. Review by senior development workers at ALIN

Another peer group consisting of members of ALIN, who also sit in the editorial committee of the Baobab was were given the two summaries to review/ The following are their comments

Comments on the summary of Baobab metaphor

e) As summarised by Baobab editor

- The summary flow is better and one understands that this was a research output.
- The summary structure is not good, needs more subtopics.
- The title is misleading and too long. The author also picked the title as is in the original text hence not being creative.
- The conclusion and lessons learned mixed hence not well analysed for one to pick on specific points for adoption.

f) As summarised by former id21 editor

The pluses

- The introduction is good.
- The title is short and focused showing some innovation by the author to make it clear right from the start.
- This article is nicely summarized though quite general in content.
- The example used of Baobab and Eucalyptus adds value to the content in relation to local context.
- Article is 'eye' friendly with sub topics and use of bullets hence being creative in style.
- The section on Baobab and Eucalyptus is well explained and broken down in sub sections hence making it easy to read and simple to understand.
- There is a good analysis in the conclusion of lessons learnt.
- The author picked the key issues for highlighting in bullet form.

The minuses

- Lack of clarity by the summariser

Comments on “Developing farmers’ institutions in Uganda”-

g) As summarised by Baobab editor

The pluses

- The summary highlights project partners and the project duration.
- Summary includes all CBOs and partners involved in the project.
- The project duration is well articulated.

The minuses

- The title is long and not specific.
- The summary lacks a clear conclusion.
- The text needs subtitles to enhance readability.
- Some sentences are too long making it difficult and boring to read the text.

h) A summarized by former id21 editor

The pluses

- The article is well summarised and interesting to read due to structure and the style of writing.
- The title is catchy, short and specific.
- The content is clear, relevant and good.
- Subtopics nicely done hence being attractive to the eye’.
- The recommendations are specific easily adaptable.

The minuses

- Omissions of some details such as project duration, the names of partners involved. This makes it difficult for an interested reader to make follow up with partners!

7. Community Information Facilitators

These are community-based informediaries who support the work of ALIN's Maarifa centres in close collaboration with the graduate volunteers. These were picked from a Maarifa centre based in Ng'arua, a small settlement in the Kenyan rift valley. The lead people at this Maarifa centre include teachers in the local primary and secondary school.

Comments on articles on Baobab metaphor

- i) As summarized by former id21 editor
 - Summary over shortened
 - The summariser made major omissions such as contact details of the author.
 - The style of summarizing seem also to be the copy-paste one for most of the paragraphs have been picked directly as they are in the original text e.g. paragraph 3 of the summary.
 - The summariser left out some important points
 - Some of the listed examples are not important for development workers.
 - The summariser has not given real life examples when explaining the metaphor

- j) As summarised by Baobab editor
 - The summary seems to have been written by somebody who first read and internalized it and wrote s/he understood from the original text.
 - Some omissions are noted e.g. the summary has left out the point regarding absence of state involvement in rural areas.
 - The summariser failed to acknowledge the source as reflected in the text. where Morgan,1997 has been referred to. This means that the original expected the readers to refer to Morgan but Jolanda has ignored the Importance of this reference.
 - The summary has been reduced and made understandable through the subheadings
 - The subheading on roots and trunks should not have been put as one but separate since each represent an issue.
 - The summary is well understood
 - Also missing in the summary is symbolism of the branches which is key to understanding the "Baobab Metaphor".

- The contacts of the author are included. This provides an opportunity to seek clarification.
- The conclusion has been over shorted reducing the points from 10 to 5

k) Conclusion

The reviewers observed that the summarisers used two different approaches where Summariser 1 (id21 editor) picked and paraphrased what s/he took to be of importance while the other Summariser 2 (Baobab editor) seem to have first read and tried to present whatever s/he thought the text intended to pass in his/her own words.

From the above, the reviews the group concluded that the Baobab editor is better than former id21 editor.

The article has been summarized by Summariser 1 (id21 editor) Summariser 2 (Baobab editor). The following observations were made:

Comments on “Developing farmers’ institutions in Uganda

a) As summarised by former id21 editor

- The introduction and sub-headings facilitate faster understanding of the summary.
- The introduction is well written.
- Omissions of important points are noted in some areas such as dates
- Under his “project objectives and methodology”, the numbering introduced is appealing to the reader as in the original text.
- Some ambiguity in the summarized text.
- Lack of clarity in some areas
- Omission of important points that appeared in the original text
- Distortion of some messages
- Summarizes is precise.
- The writer has omitted all the seven recommendations in the original text.

- The contacts of the author are missing.

b) As summarized by Boabab editor

The following are observations made us:

- The summary is well harmonized and coherent
- Lack of sub headings
- Objectives not highlighted in an orderly manner.
- Some contradiction noted.
- The writer fails to acknowledge some of the CBOs.
- Some details missing in summary
- Some details are missing;

c) Conclusion

It is after considering the above the group concluded that Summariser 2 (Baobab editor) is better than Summariser 1 (former id21 editor)

8. Preference for Kiswahili

Kiswahili is one of the languages that cut across the three east African countries, Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. It is the official language in Tanzania, the national language in Kenya and also in use in Uganda. Each of the group was asked to present their findings on why Kiswahili was preferred/not preferred. The findings were discussed in a plenary and below are the summary.

- Most development workers do not prefer Kiswahili since most of them are used to English.
- Kiswahili is better spoken than read
- Kiswahili introduces jargons and has long sentences
- Kiswahili is complicated has difficult vocabularies
- Most development workers in Kenya use ‘*Sheng*’ (mix of English and Kiswahili).
- Use of Kiswahili in Tanzania is better than English since this is both the official and national language.
- Kiswahili is considered ‘a language of the soldiers’ by Ugandan development workers

- In Kenya, the local daily *'Taifa Leo'* sells very fewer copies compared to the English version of *Daily Nation* by the same publisher
- Participants from Tanzania prefer the text in Swahili as they are used to it. They also find English as difficult and would require a dictionary to read the text.
- A participant from Uganda preferred the text in English as it is the country's official language
- English more popular for developmental workers than Kiswahili among development workers
- Regions should be considered to determine what language to use. In Western Kenya, English is preferred as compared to central, coast and some eastern provinces
- The Ministry of Education, Kenya is considering making Swahili optional in schools.

9. My Own Observations

People chosen

The summarisers chosen understood the target audience well since they have worked with ALIN before. They were made to understand that this is a typical article for publication that needed to be summarized. In these circumstances they understood the need to keep the article brief while maintaining the meaning.

Articles

The two particular articles were picked for summaries due to their relevance in the development context. They represent what consists a typical 'Baobab' journal articles. The source varied from a reputable Oxfam online database while the other article came from the Baobab database. The article from Oxfam database was well polished while the other article was raw research paper. The latter is a better case of an article that needed to be understood and summarized without losing the meaning while the other was polished enough.

Process

The two summarisers were each sent the same set of briefings and the articles were sent to them for summarizing. Each of the two summarisers made at least one contact with the contracting party to clarify the target audience before embarking on the work. The speed of the summarizing varied with the former id21 being the first to finish the summaries

Summaries

The three groups were each given the four summaries and adequate time to review and compare the summaries for relevance, clarity and relevance by potential users among other items. The most unique group among the three was the Community Information Volunteers. This group works on a day-to-day basis with community members and is made up of young professionals. They were a larger group and took keen interest in the summaries. They were divided into six groups and each of

the group's findings were discussed by the plenary. In addition, this group had representation from Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania.

Preference for Kiswahili

Kiswahili is assumed to be the local language in East Africa. However most of the countries such as Uganda prefer English due to the bad experience they had with Swahili-speaking soldiers during the dictatorial regime of Idi Amin Dada. Kiswahili is least used despite the government efforts to teach it in schools. In Kenya, this is the national language and widely spoken across the country. However preference for English books and newspapers is evident since Kiswahili is difficult to read and comprehend.

Tanzania is the only exception in East Africa when it comes to preference for Kiswahili summaries. Tanzania has Kiswahili as the official and national language and has maintained this over the years. Kiswahili is better spoken than read due to the many and difficult vocabularies used. There is also influence from 'Sheng' which is a mix of English and Kiswahili. This has diluted the need and preference for 'real' Kiswahili.

Conclusion

The summaries done by former id21 editor have a better presentation for the target audience. They are better written and feature the following items that I consider important for infomediaries;

- The introduction and sub-headings make the summary better to visualize the messages. This would make them better when looking for a particular item/point in the summary
- The paragraphs are short and clear
- The summariser has also indicated the contact for the author which is an important component of summaries done for infomediaries to make reference when the need arises.

The summaries written by Baobab editor have the following pluses.

- The summariser understood the articles and mainly summarized in her own words.
- The style of presentation was wordier and less appealing to the readers
- The presentation is not as appealing for the target audience.
- Under the project objectives and methodology, the numbering is not as presentable

Both summarisers have left out some details. This could be due to the fact that there was need to make the articles shorter.

10. ANNEX 1

Original articles- 1

The baobab metaphor for sustainable organisational development at the grassroots

This paper summarises part of a research project undertaken in rural Niger. It aims to provide an insight into the development and working of grassroots organisations and the communities in which they operate. Arising from research conducted in five workshops, which involved almost 160 people from 54 community-based organisations, the metaphors of the baobab and eucalyptus trees were found to have strong cultural associations for the participants and helped explain the importance of long-term and deep-rooted interventions rather than short-term and ephemeral projects. This paper also adds to the contemporary debate within development agencies on capacity building of sustainable human development.

Author:

[Buter, Jolander Wilson, John P.](#)

Issue

[Volume 13, Number 1](#)

http://publications.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam/results.asp?TAG=&CID=oxfam&SF19=LCODE&ST19=131903&sf_20=oxfam_archive_flag&st_20=NOT+Y&SORT=SORT_DATE%2Fd&st_01=&sf_01=KEYWORD&st_02=&sf_02=CTITLE&st_03=Buter%2C+Jolander+Wilson%2C+John+P.&sf_03=contributor&SF_04=sort_series&ST_04=&SF_05=CAT_CLASS&ST_05=&SF_06=oxfam_geog_code&ST_06=&st_07=&sf_07=LANGUAGE&st_08=&sf_08=pub_year&SF9=format_code&SF9=format_code&SF9=format_code&SF9=format_code&hidItems

Original articles- 2

Facilitating farmer's institutional development; a precondition for sustainability of development initiatives after scaling out of development projects and programs

Joshua Zake, Program Officer, Environment and Natural resource. Land, land use and Soils program, Environmental Alert, P.O. Box 11259 Kampala, Uganda, Tel: 0412510215; Website: <http://www.entalert.org>; Email: jzake@entalert.org

Abstract

This paper shares experiences of Environmental Alert working with communities in Central Uganda to overcome soil fertility depletion and food insecurity through participatory approaches. It highlights processes and methodology used in facilitating strengthening of farmers' groups into more sustainable community structures called Community Based Organizations (CBOs) with a common community vision of development but also addressing their own challenges with minimum support from outside. It also points out key recommendations for consideration by Research and Development institutions during implementation of their projects and programs for effective scaling out to ensure sustainability of their initiatives.

Background

Land degradation is a major problem in Uganda, contributing to declining agricultural productivity. Various research has indicated significant increase in soil erosion, loss of soil fertility, salinisation, soil compaction and desertification, which are largely due to poor land use and management including: Continuous cultivation and crop harvest (nutrient mining) without due fertility replenishment and conservation; Lack of terraces, and or mulching in plantations resulting in soil erosion; Poor farming methods including inappropriate soil fertility management techniques e.g. monocropping, excessive tillage, uncontrolled burning among others. Consequently, there is a net negative nutrient balance in farming systems with respect to major nutrient (Nitrogen, Phosphorus and Potassium). This has implications such as failure of land and soil to support crop production resulting into low yields, food insecurity and poor livelihoods among smallholder farmers. This also requires proactiveness in addressing these constraints in order for Uganda to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 1 and 7 of Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; and integrating principles of sustainable development into country policies and programmes and reverse loss of environmental resources, respectively.

It's this situation that prompted Environmental Alert (EA) and other like minded partners¹ to pilot a project on sustainable land use, soil and nutrient management i.e. Integrated Nutrient management to attain sustainable productivity increases in East African farming systems (INMASP) in Lukwanga parish, Wakiso district, Central Uganda. The overall objective was to contribute to food security and improved livelihoods of smallholder farmers. The project was implemented through the Farmer Field School (FFS)² among other participatory approaches. The specific objectives included (Zake *et al.*, 2004):

- (i) To increase farmers' capacity and involvement in farming systems analysis (learning and observation) and technology development in FFS aimed at developing integrated Nutrient Management systems;

¹ Including Wageningen University, Makerere University, National Agricultural Research Foundation (Greece), Awassa college of Agriculture (Ethiopia), SOS Sahel (Ethiopia), and ETC East Africa (Kenya) and Wakiso district Local Governments. <http://www.inmasp.nl>

² FFS is a school without walls located at the farmers' field under a tree shed. It comprises of 25-30 farmers who come together to solve a common problem (FAO, 2000).

- (ii) To facilitate large-scale implementation and institutionalization of the FFS approach;
- (iii) To assess the sustainability and productivity of farming systems focusing on technical and social aspects
- (iv) To develop and evaluate appropriate Integrated Nutrient Management technologies for representative farming systems in East Africa;
- (v) To contribute to an enabling policy environment for sustainable land use and soil management.

This project implementation was in line with EA's vision of, *'communities that are free from poverty and hunger and sustainably managing their natural resource base for improved livelihood.'*

Process/methods explored for sustainability of initiative

The project was introduced and popularized to the district leadership during inception meetings. This was followed by training of FFS Facilitators comprising of Local Council Leaders, Sub County policy makers, Agricultural Officer, Community Agricultural Advisors, Representatives from other NGO's working in the area and farmers representatives. These played an important role in mobilising the community to actively participate in the project.

Participatory approaches were employed in all the aspects of project implementation. Farmers were directly involved in decision-making and EA only provided advice on various issues but also technical and financial support. These were depicted during the following activities:

1) FFS sessions

Various FFS sessions were conducted throughout the project period and these were conducted twice in a month except during periods for preparation for establishment of central learning plots and commercial plots. Various issues were addressed during the sessions and they included implementation of the FFS curriculum comprising of training topics such as FFS basic principles and approaches, basic soil science, integrated soil fertility management, interaction between soil, crop and livestock, resource mapping and flows, agro-ecological systems analyses (AESAs), record keeping and management, marketing skills, participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation, revolving funds management, leadership skills, group dynamics and management, farmers rights, obligations of leaders & duty bearers and special topics as selected by farmers for example livestock and manure management and handling, HIV/AIDS, gender.

Apart from implementation of the FFS curriculum, FFS sessions were also used for development and evaluation of appropriate integrated technologies to address soil fertility depletion. Through plenary discussions, farmers and facilitators proposed indigenous knowledge and scientific technologies respectively, which were integrated and evaluated based on available resources and social economic aspects before testing on central learning plots. The agreed upon technologies and farmers practices were established at the central learning plot following season long observations, data collection through AESA and participatory evaluation to determine proven technologies with respect to agreed upon indicators such as crop yields, net profit margins, residual fertility and labor requirements. Some of the proven technologies were application of livestock (especially cattle and poultry) manures, Rhizobia inoculum, inorganic fertilizers or both and in all cases integrated with soil and water conservation trenches for restoration of soil fertility and productivity.

At the end of the trainings, participating farmers graduated and were awarded certificates as Community FFS Facilitators for integrated land use and soil management after attendance and completion of 2 years FFS curriculum. The graduation ceremony was conducted at community level at one of the FFS sites. It was attended by officials from the district and representatives from other R&D institutions. At the ceremony, the farmers were recognized for their dedication to sustainable land use and soil management but also were encouraged to train other farmers given that they were now experts on these issues.

2) Reflections

Reflections were conducted to establish progress in relation to set plans by the FFS and associations, whether they were still on track. They also provided opportunity for identification of constraints or limitations faced by the farmers and subsequent development of practical solutions by the farmers and facilitators for effective performance. They were important tools for visioning for the future by the farmers hence, they were able to reflect on their status before interventions and where they wished to be in the future. Openness and challenging farmers that EA initiatives and support will not be there forever, broadens their interpretation of development beyond EA support. Hence, it motivated them to gunner common voice and support amongst themselves to work on issues affecting them. This further helped them in developing constitutions highlighting their vision, objectives, activities but also rules and regulations embedded in an association constitution to guide day to day running of their organizations *i.e. Agali awamu farmers' development association (ADEFA) and Alinyikira farmers' association (FADEA)*. The farmers should participate effectively during the development of these constitutions to ensure that they own them. Hence as facilitators, your ideas should build on their ideas or suggestions of the farmers and these should be given as proposals towards improving their ideas as opposed to giving them as recommendations or directives. Final decisions on what to take as content in their constitutions is their mandate.

The overall objective of the CBOs is *'to ensure food security and livelihood among communities in Wakiso district through sustainable agriculture and natural resource management.'* Currently they are legal institutions registered with the directorate of community development and National Agricultural Advisory Services secretariat in Wakiso district. This gives them opportunities for support from local government and R&D institutions development programs. Additionally EA has assisted them in developing and documenting their institutional profiles for example constitutions, brochures, headed papers among others. In this process, EA plays the role of facilitating through backstopping and training but final decision making is by the farmers.

3) Networking-creating linkages

Due to the fact that project depended on donor funding and definitely would not continue with similar temple after the end of the project period, EA introduced the CBOs to other R&D institutions operating in the area for support. Secondly, they are invited to various training workshops at local and national levels which are organized by EA. This exposes and builds their capacities in various aspects of development work. In addition, the two CBOs have attended and also hosted visitors and delegates from several international networks and events for instance the Common Wealth Heads of Governments meeting (CHOGM) 2007 in Uganda; World Social Forum 2007 in Kenya; World Environment Day in 2006. At such events the CBOs demonstrate their work and share their experiences with various stakeholders including policy makers, leaders, researchers and extension workers at local, national and international levels.

4) Financial support

Through their dedication, commitment and application of skills they gained from the training, the project participated in the World Energy Globe Awards, 2005 and emerged as winner of the 1st prize under category earth. The Energy Globe Awards is the most prestigious environmental award to projects world wide contributing to improved livelihood and environmental sustainability. The project emerged winner due to demonstration of simple techniques for sustainable land use and soil management. The award included prize funds of 10,000 Euros of which, EA extended 5,000 Euros to the CBOs for utilization to achieve their own goals and activities.

Community Based Organizations (CBOs) activities now

From 2005 to date, the CBOs have been able to undertake the following activities using their own resources were as EA is only backstopping them for technical support:

(i) Training other farmers in community

They have continued to apply the principles of the FFS approach in training other farmers on sustainable land use and soil management and general environment conservation for food security, poverty reduction and improved livelihoods. These trainings are conducted at the central learning plots but also through farmer to farmer extension.

(ii) Credit and saving

They have operational savings accounts in reputable bank on which they deposit membership/subscription fees with a purpose of accumulating savings which they can lend their members at reasonable interest rate (of 10% per annum) and grace period (of 6 months). They also use some of these funds for purchasing improved seeds and fertilizers.

(iii) Commercial plots

They have established commercial plots for crops of their choice e.g. maize, beans, bananas, cassava of about 2 acres for each crop with a purpose of generating more income to the saving and scheme. They pool labor resources in the establishment and management of the plots. They have integrated issues of post harvest handling and storage after an exposure visit to Kawanda Agricultural Research Institute (KARI). To this effect, they have constructed a maize crib to improve post harvest handling for their maize and ensure maximum benefits from sale of the maize. The crib was constructed using locally available resources on farm. It has a capacity of 1.5 tones of maize and it's the first of its kind to be established in Wakiso Sub County.

(iv) Income generating projects

They are implementing various income generating projects among their membership by utilization of energy globe cash prize as a revolving fund. Some of the projects include local poultry management, promotion, piggery production and tree farming for long term investment among others. In addition members borrow some of this money for undertaking income generating activities. They borrow it at an interest rate of 10% and are obliged to pay back after 6 months. These are more farmer friendly borrowing terms as compared to those by other lending institutions which charge interest rates of 20 – 30% per annum and grace period of one week. The revolving fund is entirely managed by the CBOs; EA only provides technical backstopping and conflict resolution in case they arise.

(v) Promoting local innovations in sustainable agriculture

The CBOs are working in collaboration with PROLINNOVA Uganda³ to identify, support and promote local innovations in sustainable agriculture and natural resources management. PROLINNOVA Uganda is piloting the local Innovation Support Fund (LISF) through the CBOs to support local innovators in sustainable agriculture and natural resources management. In this arrangement, the CBOs are managing the administration of the LISF were as PROLINNOVA Uganda is providing technical support.

(vi) Networking with other R&D institutions

The CBOs network with various R&D institutions operating in the area with the objective of acquiring more development skills but also attracting support for implementation of their activities. Some of the R&D institutions include Kawanda Agricultural Research Institute, Buganda Cultural Development Association (BUCADEF), Voluntary Action for development (VAD) and NAADS among others. Through the networks, they participate in advocacy campaigns on land degradation and food insecurity at local, national and international levels; for example they are members of

³ Promoting Local Innovation in ecologically oriented agriculture and natural resources management. It is a global NGO led partnership Programme whose main activities include: identification, documentation and validation of local innovations; information exchange and networking; institutionalization of participatory approaches. Environmental Alert is the Secretariat for PROLINNOVA Uganda. <http://www.prolinnova.net/>

Wakiso District Environmental Civil Society Coalition which has membership of Non Government Organizations working on livelihood and environment issues in Wakiso district. The coalition has an over all objective of advocating for conducive policy and practice changes for sustainable agriculture and natural resource management for improved livelihood in the district.

(vii) Information documentation and dissemination

The CBOs are active members of the Lukwanga Community Knowledge Centre (CKC) located in Lukwanga Parish, Wakiso district. The CKC is an initiative by Environmental Alert in partnership with Arid Lands Information Network (ALIN) a kenyan based organization that empowers communities with information. . The objective of the CKC is to strengthen the capacity of the community members to make informed choices for improved livelihoods through generation, documentation and dissemination of developmental information. CKC constitutes membership from farmers' organizations in Wakiso district in Central Uganda and facilitates information sharing and dissemination of lessons and experiences on environment, sustainable agriculture and other social and development issues among farmers and extension workers at local, national, regional (East and Central Africa) and International levels. Thus it enhances replication and up scaling of technologies/innovations to address constraints or problems related to environment, agriculture and general livelihood issues.

Impact as result of farmer's institutional development

The impact due to farmers' institutional development by EA and partners has taken the following dimensions:

- 1) CBOs are still operational after 2 years of project scaling out
- 2) CBOs have been able to raise income through savings from their membership and commercial crop plots. They use this income to support and sustain their development initiatives.
- 3) CBOs are managing and spearheading their own affairs, EA is only facilitating through technical backstopping and conflict resolutions. For instance, they have community income generating projects among their members e.g. promoting local poultry production where each member is managing a local poultry unit of 20-30 birds and as a result are in position to collect at least 2 trays of eggs per week. This has contributed to adequate nutrition of household members and also additional household income generation.
- 4) Increased civic expression of CBOs for example they were facilitated to dialogue with National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS) officials to address information gaps and challenges in NAADS program implementation in the area. This interaction resulted in positive benefits from NAADS program implementation for instance, the farmers are now more aware about the program and some of their concerns about the program were addressed hence, they have benefited from a piggery enterprise under the program.

Lessons learnt

- a) Farmer's institutional development should be part and parcel of any development initiative and this is the only way farmers would appreciate its importance.
- b) Building on existing social organization structures during project initiation facilitates horizontal learning and sharing of information among farmers organizations at community level.
- c) Holistic approaches during project implementation i.e. avoiding fixed mind or notion and flexibility in taking up emerging issues. This can be through organizing special topics on particular issues or exposure visit to give opportunity for learning from others who have already worked on that issue or creating linkages with other R&D working on those issues

- d) Reflections on sustainability of the initiative after project scaling out should be integrated right from the beginning of project implementation.

Conclusions

From our interactions with farmers of Wakiso district, it's evident beyond reasonable doubt that when given opportunity, training and support, farmers institutions can develop towards managing their own constraints or challenges by taking own decisions based on advice from development workers and partners. Regular backstopping is important since it gives opportunity for following up on what they are doing but also gives opportunities in facilitating them to resolve their conflicts.

Recommendations

Based on EA's experiences in interacting with farmers and their institutions, the following recommendations should be considered by various R&D institutions towards establishment of strong and vibrant farmers' institutions in Uganda:

- (i) Appeal to Government development programs such as Plan for modernization of Agriculture/NAADS, Prosperity for all (*Bonna bagaggawale*) to integrate farmer's institutional development during their implementation. However, this should be part and parcel of any development initiative but not completely an alternative/parallel process.
- (ii) Holistic approaches in implementation of development programs and projects. In this case a particular issue can be an entry point for engaging the community but efforts should be made to address other issues affecting them.
- (iii) Promotion of participatory approaches e.g. the Farmer Field School among others in implementation of program/projects as such approaches give opportunities for integration of farmer's indigenous knowledge and innovations whether in sustainable agriculture, natural resource management or social organization with scientific knowledge, concepts and technologies and overall empowerment of farmers. They help in identification of emerging issues during program/project implementation.
- (iv) There is need for training farmers in proposal development, management of small grants and record keeping and management. This will empower them to manage their own business with minimum support from outside.
- (v) Increasing opportunities for funding frameworks for farmer's institutions in which they are spearheading the management of such funds for sustainable agriculture and natural resource management for food security, poverty reduction and improved livelihoods.
- (vi) Farmers should be sensitized on their rights and obligations but also those of their leaders and duty bearers. This will facilitate their effective participation in development initiatives.
- (vii) Exploring opportunities for networking and linkages for farmers' organizations with other Research and Development players is a precondition for sustainability as these add value in terms of technical and financial support. In addition they provide a platform for farmers to share their experiences and lessons learnt and in the process advocate for issues affecting them.

References:

Energy Globe Awards, 2005. <http://www.energyglobe.at>

Environmental Alert (2006). Land, Land use and Soils issues paper, Land, Land use and Soils' program.

FAO (2000). Food and Agriculture organization of United Nations. Land and Plant Nutrient Management Service, Land and Water Management Division.

- Olson, J., L. Berry, L. (2003). Land degradation in Uganda: its extent and impact
- Stoorvogel, J.J., Smailing, E.M.A., Jansen, B.H., (1993). Calculating Soil Nutrient balances in Africa at different scales 1. Supra-national scale. *Fertiliser Research*. 35; 227-235
- The constitutions of Agali awamu farmers' development association (2004) and Alinyikiira farmers' development association (2004)
- Walaga, C., (1999). Experiences in participatory fertility research and development in Kabalore and Pallisa districts. *Environmental Alert*, Kampala Uganda. Pp 56-66. Participatory soil fertility and land management in Uganda, proceeding of a workshop towards building a participatory soil fertility initiative in Uganda, 1st – 5th May 1999.
- Wortmann, C.S., and Kaizzi, C.K., (1998). Nutrient balances and expected effects of alternative practices in farming systems in Uganda. *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment* 71:115-129
- Zake, J., Walaga, C., Nagawa, F., and De Jager, A., (2003). Analysis of sustainability and productivity of farming systems in Lukwanga parish, Wakiso Sub County, Wakiso District, Uganda. Proceedings of the 21 Conference of the Soil Science Society of East Africa, Sirikwa Hotel, 1-5 December, 2003.
- Zake J., Walaga C, Nagawa, F., and De Jager A., (2004). Soil fertility enhancement with communities through farmer field schools in Wakiso District. A paper presented at promoting local innovations (PROLINOVA) workshop held at ARDC Mukono training of facilitators in participatory innovations development (PID)/participatory technology development (PTD).
- Zake Joshua (2006). Land degradation in Uganda. Issue Brief presented at the Central Region National Land policy Consultative workshop, Rider Hotel 5th -6th October, 2006. Land, land use and Soils program, *Environmental Alert*.

11. ANNEX 2

Summaries under review

a) Trees as metaphors for organisational development by former id21 editor

Niger has one of the lowest human development indices in the world. Population growth and desertification are ongoing challenges. As natural resources become scarcer, rural communities need to change their food security systems, social relationships and legal systems.

Since the 1960s, rural development strategies have promoted membership organisations, such as community-based organisations (CBOs), to help tackle these problems. However, the government has only recognised autonomous rural organisations since 1996, and only those based on a cooperative structure. And while newly created CBOs are initially successful, they often lose much of their strength once external assistance ends.

To improve living conditions in rural areas, there is a need to improve organisational capacities at the grassroots level. For example, CBOs and local grassroots organisations must develop sufficiently to negotiate with external providers, produce regional development policies and finance local development. This requires them to take responsibility for finding the appropriate tools for autonomous and sustainable organisational development, to set their priorities, and to identify sources of support.

Workshops as a research method

This research set out to provide insights into how grassroots CBOs might encourage effective, long-term organisational development and foster capacity building. We developed an action-research approach based on workshops that used proverbs, poems, storytelling, group discussions and role plays. These are highly valued in Niger and provide a valuable insight into endogenous knowledge and culture. They are also important in organisational life and its development.

Using this approach, participants thought about their organisations: how to organise work, how to exercise authority, and how to reward and control people. In particular, participants used proverbs to express what development means to them, and what their organisations need to play a major role in community development. The proverbs encapsulate local attitudes towards many features of organisational life:

- Respecting principles of evaluation and analysis is important to avoid failure and ensure continuous learning.
- Contemporary development issues are not just the mandate of donors, but an indigenous grassroots concern.
- The debate on organisational learning and capacity development is critically relevant to CBOs, not just donor organisations.
- Good development is achieved when food, potable water, health, hygiene, lodging, ownership of arable land, infrastructure, financing and universal education are assured, and when domestic work decreases.
- This is attained when social cohesion, good understanding and good relationships among social groups exist at family, community, and organisational levels.

- Community development succeeds through good leadership, equality and justice, mutual aid, collective activities, initiative, diversity, creativity, courage, and respect for diverse religious beliefs.
- Good development practices in the community should be integrated with organisational development.

Participants concluded that a capable CBO is inextricably linked to sustainable community development – one reflects the other.

The baobab and the eucalyptus

In one workshop, a woman used the tree as a metaphor of an organisation's life and development. Trees provide a metaphor for how Nigeriens see organisational development, capacity development and outside development interventions. This metaphor also illustrates the interrelationship between aid, the environment, organisational capacities, and changes at the grassroots level. This metaphor can be explained by comparing the eucalyptus (red gum) tree with the baobab (monkey bread fruit) tree.

The nature of trees

The baobab has grown for centuries in the Sahel. It has a thick trunk and lives to over 1000 years. In contrast, the eucalyptus is tall, thin and relatively new – it was only introduced to Africa in the early 1900s. This symbolises CBOs' perceptions of donor activities in Niger since the 1950s. They see this development as coming from outside, instead of internally.

Roots and trunks

Eucalyptus trees are thought to impoverish the soil, as the roots collect water and minerals to nourish the leaves and branches. The eucalyptus has many roots and if one root is cut, it soon grows again. Similarly, development interventions are multiple and poor at learning from previous interventions.

The baobab, however, grows several big roots slowly over the centuries. The baobab trunk represents the organisational capacities needed for community development. It symbolises the process of capacity development by experiencing, interpreting, generalising, and applying in a continuous way, which considers the background of the organisation and the community.

Use of the tree

The different uses of each tree symbolise the effects of capacity development on community development. Eucalyptus branches are cut for fuel and building materials. However, the wood is easily attacked by insects and has to be replaced regularly. The baobab tree, by comparison, is a meeting place in a village. The wood is the least useful part; although sometimes used as a material (to make canoes, for example), it is rarely burned as fuel. The metaphor follows that eucalyptus branches are cut down for short-term objectives, then growth resumes; the baobab serves the long-term objectives of community development.

Growth and maturity

Organisational capacity development is essential to an organisation's survival. Trees grow organically, not just at the top, and the growth is not always noticeable; similarly, development affects a whole organisation and changes are not always easy to distinguish. Organisational development has constraints and limitations. Like leaves, flowers and fruits, these come back each

new season and have a positive effect on the overall growth of the tree.

Over time, baobab trees get bigger, their roots get longer and they become more resistant. As the tree matures, the fruit becomes more abundant and the quantity of seeds increases. Maturity is also important in organisational development. Earlier experiences encourage us to take responsibility for our environment and our behaviour. The eucalyptus, on the other hand, matures quickly and does not have a long lifespan.

Conclusions

Because of its cultural associations, this comparison of the eucalyptus and the baobab is easily understood by local people and can encourage the expression of views and feelings. It can facilitate a better positioning of CBOs in community development and strengthen their capacity. This 'baobab model' can assist CBO development, training and evaluation, as well as self-development, learning and change.

Development should begin from where people are: who they are, what they can do, and what they know how to do. People's beliefs, values and norms are at the centre of change. Their culture is also central and should be explored and understood to improve the quality, effectiveness and sustainability of development efforts.

Effective organisational change is complex, slow and difficult to achieve. The emphasis on *process* underlines the importance of considering the open-ended nature of expected outcomes and the need for interventions based on long-term engagements between CBOs and aid agencies.

This research shows:

- Knowledge about organisational cultures can be discovered through proverbs, narratives, stories, metaphors and actual practice.
- The workshop method is effective in fostering organisational development; it encourages the exchange of experiences and cultural knowledge that exist among CBO representatives.
- The tools of organisational development and their evaluation should be based on the knowledge, experiences and development priorities expressed by CBOs.
- CBOs should be viewed as learning organisations that facilitate the learning of all their members and consciously transform themselves and their contexts.
- Attention should be given to the effectiveness of individuals, and to actions that affect an organisation in order to bring about change.

Jolander Buter

Sítio Alportel, CX Postal 20a Alportel, 8150 Sao Bras d'Alportel, Portugal
jolanda.buter@mail.telepac.pt

John P. Wilson

3 The Chase, Clarke Dell, Sheffield S10 2NR, UK
j.p.wilson@sheffield.ac.uk

b) The baobab metaphor for sustainable organisational development at the grassroots by Baobab editor

By: Jolanda Buter and John P. Wilson

Introduction: Niger has one of the lowest human development indices in the world. The on-going processes of population growth and desertification coupled with scarcity of natural resources call for change in terms of local food security systems, social relationships and legal systems, among others. Since the 1960s, membership organisations have been promoted as means for promoting rural development. However, it became increasingly apparent that the development of CBOs should contribute to the emergence of local organisations that are capable of negotiating with external providers to produce regional development policies and/or methods for financing local development. The research findings presented here seek to provide insights into how grassroots CBOs might encourage long-term and effective organisational development and foster capacity building.

Action-research approach: In order to build upon the inherent strengths of the people of Niger, an action-research approach based on workshops was developed. The use of proverbs, poems, storytelling, group discussion, and role-plays allowed the participants to explore their views on organisations, deep-seated beliefs about how work should be organised, how authority should be exercised, and how people should be rewarded and controlled. In particular, the proverbs were used as tools for identifying the meaning of development and organisational capacities, which participants felt are necessary for ensuring their organisations can succeed and play a major role in community development. The proverbs gathered during the workshops encapsulate local attitudes toward and insights into features of organisational life such as vision, strategy, culture, structure, skills, and material resources. The workshops clearly demonstrated that according to Nigerien culture, the debate on organisational learning and organisational capacity development is critically relevant to CBOs and not just to the donor organisations.

Workshop participants indicated that good development is achieved when food, potable water, health, hygiene, shelter, ownership of arable land, infrastructure, financing, and universal education are assured and when domestic work decreases. They felt this can be attained only when *social cohesion, good understanding, and good relationships among the different social groups exist at the family, community, and organisational levels*. They felt that community development succeeds only through good leadership, respect for diversity, the search for equality and justice, mutual aid, collective activities, initiative, diversity, creativity, courage, and respect for diverse religious beliefs. Participants from CBOs suggested that good development practices in the community should be integrated with organisational development. They concluded that a capable CBO is inextricably linked to sustainable community development, one reflecting the other.

The baobab metaphor: During one of the workshops, a woman used the baobab tree as a metaphor of organisational life and development to illustrate the importance of perseverance and learning from experience. Similarly, the metaphor of organism and growth often appears in theories of development and organisational development (Morgan 1997). In Niger, rural people appreciate the regenerative power of trees and make efforts to protect and plant them since they are conscious that if change does not occur soon the desert will consume life. Likewise, strong community organisations are needed to encourage community development.

In terms of organisations as organisms, the local view of capacity development can be captured in the comparison between the eucalyptus or the red gum tree and the baobab or the monkey bread fruit tree. This 'baobab model' can serve to assist in CBO development, training, and evaluation, as

well as in the organic aspects of self-development, learning, and change. A comparison of the roots, trunk, and branches of the two trees illustrates organisational and individual development. The baobab has enormous thick branches, which resemble the roots of a tree planted upside-down. It is an easily recognisable deciduous tree that is widespread throughout the semi-arid regions south of the Sahara. Its height does not usually exceed 20 meters but it reportedly lives over 1000 years. By comparison, the eucalyptus is a tall evergreen tree introduced in Africa in the early 1900s. It grows up to 30–40 meters, but is normally only 20 meters in the Sahel. While the eucalyptus has many roots and grows quickly, in comparison the baobab grows several big roots slowly over the centuries.

The tree trunk represents the organisational capacities needed to serve community development. The introduction of the eucalyptus and the way it is used symbolise the kind of development that has been implemented in Niger by donor organisations since the 1950s and CBOs' perception of development as something coming from outside, instead of being internally generated. The branches symbolise the effects of capacity development on community development, such as access to arable land, health, peace, education, income-generating activities/employment, effective saving and credit systems, potable water, shelter, food, security, and justice. While the branches of the eucalyptus are cut down to serve short-term objectives, and growth resumes, in comparison the baobab is used for a variety of purposes in people's survival strategies and this illustrates the long-term objectives and diversity of community development. Similarly, organisational capacity development is essential to the organisation's survival in adapting to an ever-changing world in which development affects the whole organisation. Maturity is also important in organisational development to serve sustainable community development.

Conclusions: Development should be people-centred; it should explore and understand the local culture in order to improve the quality, effectiveness, and sustainability of initiatives. The workshop method used in this research is an example of an effective tool in fostering organisational development by encouraging the exchange of experiences and cultural knowledge that exist among CBO representatives. The experience suggests that the tools of organisational development and their evaluation should be based on the knowledge, experiences, and development priorities expressed by CBOs themselves, in this context in rural areas of Niger. Local people easily understand the metaphor model and this can encourage the expression of views and feelings, facilitate a better positioning of CBOs in community development and be effective in strengthening their capacity. It illustrates the interrelationship between aid, environment, organisational capacities, and changes at the grassroots level. It also respects the organic and holistic views of villagers, their reality in community development, and CBO life.

c) Developing farmers' institutions in Uganda former id21 editor

Uganda faces many land degradation problems, including increasing soil erosion, declining soil fertility, salinisation, soil compaction and desertification. These are largely due to poor land use and management techniques, including a lack of terraces or mulching in plantations and poor farming methods, such as monocropping and uncontrolled burning. These create a net negative nutrient balance in farming systems, which contributes to declining agricultural productivity, lower yields, food insecurity and poor livelihoods among smallholder farmers.

Integrated nutrient management project

Environmental Alert (EA), a Uganda-based non-governmental organisation, has been working with farmers' groups in Central Uganda to tackle these problems. EA and partners piloted a project on sustainable land use and soil and nutrient management in Lukwanga parish, Wakiso district. The overall project objective was to contribute to food security and improve the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. The project also aimed to strengthen farmers' institutions into more sustainable community-based organisations (CBOs), which can address farming challenges, particularly land degradation, with minimal outside support.

The project used participatory approaches throughout; farmers were directly involved in decision-making, with EA providing advice, technical and financial support. The project was introduced to district leaders during inception meetings. This was followed by the training of Farmer Field School (FFS) facilitators, including local council leaders, community agricultural advisors, and non-governmental (NGO) representatives. These facilitators then mobilised the community to participate in the project.

FFS sessions

FFS sessions were held twice a month during most of the project. FFS are 'schools without walls', where 25-30 farmers meet to solve a common problem. Participants addressed many issues from the FFS curriculum, including soil science, integrated soil fertility management, and leadership skills. Other topics requested by farmers included HIV/AIDS and gender.

FFS sessions were also used to address declining soil fertility. Farmers and facilitators shared indigenous knowledge and scientific technologies, which were integrated and evaluated before being tested on central learning plots. The agreed technologies, such as the application of livestock manure, were combined with soil and water conservation trenches to restore soil fertility.

Reflections

The project team conducted ‘reflection’ exercises to establish progress in relation to project plans. These also provided opportunities to identify farmers’ constraints and limitations, and develop practical solutions. They helped farmers to reflect on their status before interventions, and ‘vision’ where they wished to be in the future. During the reflections, the farmers were reminded that EA support would not continue forever. This motivated them to think about their visions, objectives, activities, and rules and regulations. These became an association constitution to guide the day-to-day running of the farmers’ CBOs.

CBOs

Throughout the project, local farmers’ groups were strengthened into CBOs. The objective of the CBOs was to ensure food security and livelihoods in Wakiso district, through sustainable agriculture and natural resource management. Since 2005, the CBOs have undertaken several activities using their own resources, with technical support from EA. These include:

(i) *Training farmers*: after two years, farmers who completed the FFS curriculum graduated as Community FFS Facilitators for integrated land use and soil management. They were encouraged to train other farmers, as they were now experts. They apply the FFS approach by training other farmers in sustainable land use, soil management and environmental conservation.

(ii) *Credit and savings*: the CBOs have a savings account in which they deposit membership and subscription fees. They lend money to members from a revolving fund, at reasonable interest rates (10% per annum) with a grace period of six months. These terms are better than other lending institutions, which charge 20–30% per annum with a grace period of one week. The CBOs set this fund up with prize money (€5000) from the World Energy Globe Awards, 2005. It is managed by the CBOs, with EA providing technical support and resolving conflicts.

(iii) *Commercial plots*: the CBOs have commercial plots for maize, beans, bananas and cassava. Each plot is about two acres and CBO members share labour. Following an exposure visit to Kawanda Agricultural Research Institute (KARI), they have improved post-harvest handling and storage; for example, they constructed a crib to improve post-harvest maize handling.

(iv) *Income-generating projects*: the CBOs implement projects among their members. For example, each member manages a poultry unit of 20-30 birds and collects at least two trays of eggs per week, which improve household nutrition and provide income. To start these activities, members borrow money from the CBO fund.

(v) *Networking with R&D institutions*: as the initial project funding was limited, EA introduced the CBOs to Research & Development (R&D) institutions operating in the area, to acquire more skills and attract support for future activities. These institutions included KARI, Buganda Cultural Development Association, Voluntary Action for Development and the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS). Through these networks, the CBOs participate in advocacy campaigns on land degradation and food insecurity. For example, they helped to address information gaps and challenges in NAADS programmes in the area.

(vi) *Information documentation and dissemination*: the CBOs are active members of the Lukwanga Community Knowledge Centre (CKC), an initiative by EA in partnership with the Arid Lands Information Network. The CKC facilitates information on the environmental issues, sustainable agriculture and other social and development issues.

Support from EA

The impact on farmers’ institutional development has been successful. The CBOs are still operational two years after the scaling out of the project. They have also raised income from their membership and commercial crop plots. Most importantly, the CBOs are managing their own affairs; EA only provides technical backstopping and resolves conflicts. CBO members also attend training workshops organised by EA, and have hosted visitors and delegates from several

international networks and events, such as the Common Wealth Heads of Governments meeting in 2007.

Conclusions

The project in Wakiso demonstrates that, when given opportunities, training and support, farmers' institutions can develop to manage their own constraints and challenges, and make their own decisions, based on advice from development workers and partners. Regular backstopping is important, since it provides opportunities for following up on what they are doing and helps them to resolve conflicts.

EA recommends that projects to develop farmers' institutions:

- build on existing social institutions; this enables the sharing of information and learning between farmers organisations
- integrate reflections on the project right from the beginning
- use holistic approaches during project implementation, for example avoiding 'fixed mind' notions and having flexibility to take up emerging issues.

R&D institutions can also help to establish strong farmers' institutions in Uganda. They should:

- promote participatory approaches such as FFS, as these create opportunities to integrate farmer's indigenous knowledge and innovations, as well as empowering farmers
- train farmers to manage their own business with minimum support from outside, for example in skills such as proposal development, managing small grants and record keeping
- increase opportunities for farmer's institutions to access funds for sustainable agriculture and natural resource management
- sensitise farmers about their rights and obligations, to facilitate their effective participation in development initiatives
- explore opportunities for networking and linking with farmers' organisations; these add value in terms of technical and financial support, and provide a platform for farmers to share their experiences and lessons learnt, and advocate for the issues affecting them.

Contact

Joshua Zake

Environmental Alert, P.O. Box 11259 Kampala, Uganda

Tel: 0412510215 jzake@envalert.org www.envalert.org

d) Facilitating farmer's institutional development: a prerequisite for sustainability of development initiatives Baobab editor

By Joshua Zake

Background: Land degradation is a major problem in Uganda, where research has indicated significant increase in soil erosion, loss of soil fertility, salinisation, soil compaction and desertification. This has resulted in low yields, food insecurity and poor livelihoods among smallholder farmers. In Lukwanga parish, Wakiso district of Central Uganda, community groups collaborated with Environmental Alert (EA) and other partners to implement a pilot project (2002-2005) aimed at promoting sustainable land use, soil and nutrient management. Other collaborators included Wageningen University, Makerere University, National Agricultural Research Foundation (Greece), Awassa college of Agriculture (Ethiopia); SOS Sahel (Ethiopia), ETC East Africa (Kenya) and Wakiso district Local Government. Activity implementation by Community Based Organizations (CBOs) has continued after project scaling out.

Project objectives and methodology: The overall objective of the initiative was to contribute to food security and improved livelihoods of smallholder farmers by facilitating strengthening of farmers' groups into sustainable CBOs that have a common vision of development and are capable of addressing their own challenges with minimum external support. The project was implemented through the Farmer Field Schools (FFS), a concept initiated by the Food and Agriculture Organization, which it defines as "a school without walls located at the farmer's field under a tree shed". A typical FFS comprises of 20-30 farmers who come together to solve a common problem. Other project objectives included: i) Increasing farmers' capacity and involvement in farming systems analysis and development of integrated nutrient management systems; ii) Facilitating large scale implementation and institutionalization of the FFS approach; iii) Assessing sustainability and productivity of farming systems focusing on technical and social aspects; iv) Developing and evaluating appropriate integrated nutrient management technologies; v) Contributing to an enabling policy and environment for sustainable land use and soil management.

Implementation process and activities: The project was introduced and popularized to the district leadership through inception meetings followed by training of FFS Facilitators who included representatives from farmers' groups, local leadership, policy makers, government and other local development agencies. Participatory approaches were employed in all aspects of project implementation and farmers were directly involved in decision-making while EA provided advice on various issues as well as technical and financial support. Key activities in the implementation process included FFS and reflection sessions, registration, networking/creating linkages and financial support. FFS sessions were conducted twice a month throughout the project period and covered the FFS curriculum, development and evaluation of appropriate integrated technologies for improving soil fertility depletion, among other topics. At the end of the two-year training program, a graduation ceremony attended by community members, district officials and representatives from other rural development agencies was held at the community level. The farmers were awarded certificates as Community FFS Facilitators for integrated land use and soil management.

Reflection sessions were conducted to track progress in implementation of planned FFS activities and to improve effectiveness by identifying and addressing emerging constraints. Reflection sessions also motivated FFS members to jointly articulate and work on issues affecting them and to broaden their interpretation of development, far beyond temporary support by EA. Following training the FFS members developed CBO constitutions highlighting their vision, objectives, activities, rules and regulations while EA assisted them in developing and documenting their institutional profiles. The FFS members formed and legally registered two CBOs named Agali Awamu Farmers Development (ADEFDA) and Alinyiikira Farmers' Association (AFADEA),

respectively. The CBOs enabled the members to obtain support from local government and other institutions and they have hosted visitors and delegates from several international networks. Financial support from EA enabled CBO members to attend various events for instance the Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting (CHOGM) 2007 in Uganda, among others. The CBO members used such opportunities to demonstrate their work and to share experiences with other stakeholders at local, national and international levels. In 2005 the project won 1st prize in the prestigious Energy Globe Awards under category earth. The award included a cash prize of 10,000 Euros, out of which the EA donated 5,000 Euros to the CBOs for activity implementation.

Sustainability indicators: After project phase out the CBOs have continued activity implementation using their own resources and technical backstopping from EA. Current activities include training and capacity building of other community members on sustainable land use and soil management and general environment conservation for food security, poverty reduction and improved livelihoods. The training sessions are conducted at the central learning plots but also through farmer-to-farmer extension. The CBOs operate savings accounts in reputable banks where they deposit membership/subscription fees, which they lend out to members at an interest rate of 10 percent per annum, and a grace period of six months. The members have also used some the funds to purchase improved seeds and fertilizers and to establish two acres of commercial plots where they plant maize, beans, bananas and cassava, among other crops. Using locally available resources they have constructed a maize crib with a capacity of storing 1.5 tones of maize, the first of its kind to be established in Wakiso Sub County.

Impacts and lessons: After several years of project scaling out the CBOs are still operational and the farmers are engaged in activities such as commercial crop production and poultry production. Besides increasing civic awareness among CBO members, the project demonstrated that with appropriate training, support and advice from development agents and partners, farmer's institutions are capable of managing their own constraints or challenges through development of appropriate decision making processes. Key lessons emerging from the project:

- Farmers' institutional development should be part and parcel of any development initiative as this is the only way farmers would appreciate its importance.
- Building on existing social organization structures during project initiation facilitates horizontal learning and sharing of information among farmers' organizations at community level.
- Implementers can improve effectiveness through the use of holistic and flexible approaches that take into consideration the views of community members.
- Implementers need to provide opportunities for sharing and learning and to create linkages with other rural development institutions working on similar issues.
- Reflections on sustainability of initiatives after project scaling out should be integrated from the beginning of project implementation.

REFERENCES

"The baobab metaphor for sustainable organisational development at the grassroots" [Buter, Jolander Wilson, John P., 2003](#), Development in Practice, Volume 13, Number 1, [online] [available at http://publications.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam/search_research.asp?TAG=&CID=ox](http://publications.oxfam.org.uk/oxfam/search_research.asp?TAG=&CID=ox) last accessed 17th Feb 2010.