Difficulties encountered with the local ownership of development projects

The example of the LIEN (Local Information and Exchange Networking program) in Burkina Faso.

By

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Development and ICT's in Burkina Faso

Burkina Faso is one of the poorest country in the world.
The situation of ICT's in Burkina Faso is characterized by:

- Lack of infrastructure (only 30.000 computers) and 70.000 phones lines concentrated in few town
- No computers in secondary schools
- Low level of information about ICT's
- High cost of computers and training.

Despite of this bad characteristic, access to job is conditioned by the knowledge on computers and Internet using, so the poor people can't get Internet and computer training courses and use.

It's why few NGO's(North and South) try to create good conditions for people to access an use ICT's at low cost and in good conditions.

L.I.E.N PROGRAM

One of specific project is launched by IICD with it's partners in Burkina Faso (Yam Pukri, an association who is specialized on ICT training for youth, ZCP, in Internet provider, DELGI, governments ICT department, FIAB, an other NGO specialized on local food marketing, and transformation, GTP, Global Teenager Program connected with IICD, SNV, a Dutch NGO).

In spite of very encouraging results over a short period of time (less than one year) , the LIEN program in Burkina Faso, supported by the IICD, has met with difficulties in making the network as effective as we wished it to be. In this paper, I will concentrate on these problems, illustrating that the local take-over of this type of activity can be blocked by many factors.

The aim of the LIEN program is to create an information network for new technologies. It was believed that this would allow us to optimise the use of our scarce ressources and allow members of the network to share their knowledge with others.

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Seen from outside, everything looks perfect, but closer observation indicates that much remains to be done to improve the network.

Currently, there is an association that houses the headquarters of the network (the Yam Pukri Association) and it struggles to keep the network functional and active.

Here, I will outline some of the sticking points that are blocking the development of the network and its complete integration at the local level.

First of all, I'd like to point out that the basic idea that underlies a network is sometimes theoretical :
Indeed, the idea that putting people in contact with different support systems will improve their stock of information is not all that evident. We can ask : *why were these people not previously associated* ? What are their real desires ? These are difficult questions to answer.

Furthermore, while everyone is happy to receive vital information, even people using modern means such as the telephone or the internet are reluctant to give out their own information. And I think that in Europe, the situation is much the same.

Right now, one of the most common criticisms that the members of our network make is that there is no discussion group. This is a bit funny, as the members of the network have each others' e-mail addresses and they could start carrying on discussions that way, rather than waiting around for a forum to be put into place. The members are also in other discussion groups and its' always the same people in all of them. But their arguments still stands, so we'll be putting a forum online.

Traditionally we have a networking concept:
- *One hand can't lift flour on its own*

- *With one hand, it not possible to wash yourself!- It's a group who can put the roof of the house in right place!*

These proverbs helps us to connect with modern networking.

Problems in taking over a local network

The process of creating a viable and durable network is very difficult for a variety of reasons :

The basic concept comes from the outside : the program was proposed to the various members. Many accepted because they had no choice. It must be said that the IICD worked individually with these different members, which facilitated the creation of a network in a short period of time. It's true that « It is the millet that calls the chicken. »

There is a lack of confidence in the project : This is because *the members lack a vision of the future.* They are interested in very short-term benefits, such as how to get the maximum of money from the donors involved. They are not particularly interested in creating something solid that will last long after the donors are gone. Why?

The members are discouraged by their previous experiences :
I notice a lack of enthusiasm at this level. The reason is that many organisations in the South have been disappointed by partners from the North that come just to spend their money and then leave again : they are not very concerned by long-term results. And because « A White is a White », the same thing starts all over again each time. There is never the time to get to know each other, and this is where the problems with confidence start.

For example, look at the case of the ANAIS(African Network for Advisory in Information Strategy) network that was financed by the World Bank with the Fondation du Devenir as supervisor. Currently, nobody is interested by what has become of this network. The website has been static since 2001 and no one is taking care of it. No e-mail contacts are made now, while previously the site received dozens of e-mails each day. The discussion group is dead. I personally have sent information for discussion and nobody reacted. On the other hand, the ANAIS uses the knowledge of the dead network to get other financing for other activities.

The members are already in natural or traditional networks : Each organization naturally works in an environment that can be characterized as a network. Creating a network means creating new partnerships.   It requires that the members have confidence in each other, which is sometimes difficult.

The absence of deeper exchanges between the members of the network :

The process of exchanging information within a network requires that the members are willing to collaborate, even in cases where there is no apparent benefit to doing so.
Why would you want to give helpful information to a competitor ? Or to give out information when you don't feel that it is necessary to do so ?
So, the information that circulates within the network is not necessarily information that has anything to do with the actual purpose of the network. That's how it is at the start of a network and the risk of backsliding afterwards is very high.

The members are in situations of conflict or competition with the outside partner :

Each member wants to have a priviledged status within the network, resulting in a lack of interest in collaborating with others. Working for the expansion of the network becomes like working for the structure that houses the headquarters of the network. And as each member of the network also has a separate project with the same donor, you can imagine the uncomfortable climate .

The position of the coordinator is weakened, as it is not necessary to go through him to reach the principle partner, which is the IICD in this case. So, the coordinator has neither powers of decision, nor of consultation.

The activities that the members wish to undertake are often not in line with the character of the network : This aspect is indirect and it is difficult for partners, for example IICD, to understand that the process is different from the theoretical vision. *Nevertheless, whatever activity is undertaken by the members, we can see it as reinforcing the network, because the activities makes the individual members more visible, and that's really what is wanted.*

Perspectives

Within a network, when the members do their work for the love of it, everything goes perfectly. Under these conditions, the network is a serious commitment and the desire to share knowledge with others is great. There are no mercenary motives behind it. But it's difficult to get these kind of members into a network. It happens, but slowly over time.
Even when the activities of a network are well-funded, tensions quickly arise between the members over the use of the resources. Everybody wants the largest share, so the battle begins and soon the whole project is in a turmoil.
The power of a network lies in the personal commitment of the members and their natural desire to share with others, whether out of necessity (the other needs me just as much as I need him) or out of a love of work.

In the case of our network, I orient myself toward another dynamic.

To consolidate a network we sometimes engage in activities that perhaps have little to do with the exchange of knowledge about ICTs. This is essential because our members want to be a part of a dynamic sphere - that is to say, a well-known structure that everyone respects. They want to develop this, but in their own way.
For an NGO or a business, the more well-known it is, the more business it does. There are cases where promotional activities are undertaken that have nothing to do with the actual area of interest to the organization.   But these activities receive media exposure that puts the organization in the public eye. For example, the members of a network might sweep a street or clean a hospital….

As a second step, the members may sell their skills. At this point, working together reinforces informal exchanges of information and so it continues*. This process is*

sometimes long and difficult. It is also difficult to justify these kinds of activities with donors !

In conclusion, we can say that outside partners should listen to the local structures and discuss things seriously before acting. But of course, the viewpoint of a project is often incompatible with the practice of real development and then everything has to be reconsidered.

What we can do together to make good cooperation?

International cooperation and what it should imply.

Cooperation implies an exchange. It is not unilateral, i.e. it does simply boil down to giving but also learning something. And this should be clear.

If we clearly know what others are coming to give, however we wonder about their true interests in the actions undertaken.

Ownership process of NGOs of the South.

To appropriate an action means to take charge of oneself and to carry out successfully the activity. This implies the following:

Do NGOs of the South trust the projects or are they interested in the money?

If a project is proposed to them on a silver tray, they do not consider the situation with detachment, analyze it and benefit from the opportunity. This is why I am against the funding of organizations which did not make any progress or which do not have any capital in the new activity they are proposed to undertake.

We notice that given the specialization of Institutions of the North, NGOs of the South develop tailor-made projects for funding: this does not mean that they are interested in the field financed, but this is just an opportunity to benefit from funds. We therefore realize that in such a context, ownership is difficult to achieve.

We ask ourselves: "Do NGOs of the North really wish such an ownership, as this might eventually result in their own obsoleteness?"

It happens that NGOs of the North consider the organizations of the South as their private property. So, NGOs of the South cannot make any progress because they are considered as donors' property. As a result, there is no ownership prospect.
I.e you can't do anything without informing the donors even if they don't finance the activity!!!

Ownership does not mean financial and material autonomy.

True ownership is when the organizations of the South can decide by themselves the actions to initiate and the path to follow.

It has always been said to the organizations of the South that they finally have to self-finance their activities and yet this is not possible. As long as the activities are social-oriented, it will be impossible to work for financial autonomy because by so doing, *we will determine the prices of services equal to those on the private market.*
As a result, we become capitalists and we loose our social vocation.

According to me, an autonomous NGO is one that is able to finance its fixed charges (energy, personnel, hiring of buildings). As for the rest, it cannot be autonomous if it wants to be social-oriented. Of course, it can undertake financially profitable activities, but there lies the risk of making a bad mistake.

Which NGO of the North is financially autonomous? Why should we respond to harder principles from the South?

Ownership is not synonymous with speed.

The NGOs of the South are often very young and immature. Therefore, asking them to be perfect and efficient in a very little time is asking too much.

> *There are numerous challenges: effectiveness in the implementation of activities, effectiveness in organization and in businesses. This is too much in a very short term.*

Ownership does not mean absence of errors.

Why are errors not tolerated? Errors are significant because they enhance organizations to find out solutions.

What partnership?

As above-mentioned, partnership implies:

Knowing the other as well as his objectives.

In most of the time, the organizations of the South do not clearly perceive what their partners need: do they really want to work or do they want to develop simple relations, or spend their money and go away? There are so many similar cases where people come to submit wonderful proposals and afterwards, nothing comes out. The NGOs of the South are on the watch. *We often noticed that when you refuse to take money, they are embarrassed and they want to force you to take it.*

Too many organizations from the North come to sell ready made projects to the organization of the South. This results in a complete failure of the dynamics. The tendency is to put everyone in the same basket and not to do a good work.

Last week, an association of the North visit us. This organization came to seek for our collaboration. After reading the documents, we realized that the project was an old one. We therefore wonder why do they seek for our collaboration now?

The product offered was enticing, but we were scared by the procedure: we told them so. Your project is good but we do not know you. We work with people we know. The process is simple. We can get acquainted via emails or mutual visits. We exchange on various subjects and then, we try to carry out an activity together. Finally, we sign an agreement. But, we do not sign an agreement without getting to know each other. Moreover, first to sign a contract shows that there is not a mutual trust.

We asked them to explain the agreement of twenty pages where what only remained to be done was signing. Once, twice, thrice. We told them. We do not understand your paper.
You cannot just mesmerize us with some computers and then get us to sign an agreement. So, we told them: let us take two months in order to know each other and to better understand the project and then we will see.

If we are an exception, other organizations, interested in the material would blindly sign the agreement. As they do not understand the project nor its content, they will fail for sure. Then, the organization will be responsible for this failure.
On the other hand, if the organization decides to work and succeeds in the project, it is the funding organization that is going to benefit from the result.

Any way, we notice that some organizations of the North are not interested at all in the NGOs of the South. They behave as a true dominator and think they are operating on a conquered field. The respect that the NGOs of the South have for them seems to be a submission.

Partnership implies respect for the other and his world perception.

The success of an activity is differently shared by each one. What is often a success for the NGOs of the South is a failure for the others.
We should agree on performance indicators. *We know that the organizations of the North wants quantitative, measurable results and yet development is sometimes non-quantifiable and non-measurable results.*

Many people thus enhance activities to achieve results and after the departure of donors, everything comes at scratch because the rhythm was too much accelerated.

The lack of flexibility is a significant point here. If in a village, people want a mosque and you fund new technologies, you will say that you are not interested. Yet, by meeting their first need, you give an opportunity for better confidence and thus for more innovative projects with a greater chance of success.

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Good partnership does not mean funding big projects

Some funding are so significant that the Southern NGO cannot cope with it and virtually disappears: the organization does not exist any more. The project exists with the partner's logo. This a real danger because the project itself does not exists anymore. It is a total dependence.

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