

# Sustainable Finance for Conservation in Africa

## BUILDING CAPACITY OF GRANT RECIPIENTS AND NGO PARTNERS – INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

**By**

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### Introduction

Community members have a wealth of knowledge and information that needs to be compiled and analyzed by them, in order to solve various problems. However, most of the local organizations lack basic skills in situation analysis, project design, implementation and management. Solutions to natural resource management problems are often limited in number unless community members are exposed to alternatives that are used in other parts of the world. Without this exposure, many local organizations consider tree planting the only solution to all environmental problems.

In addition to the lack of skills, most of the local organizations lack the basic systems necessary for the sustainability of the organization itself. In many cases, members of the organization do not have a common vision and if they have a constitution, it was designed by an outsider and is written in a language that most of the members cannot understand. Consequently, members are often not sure about their rights and responsibilities. Financial management systems are often inadequate leading to misappropriation of funds. In many cases, a grant is considered a direct source of income to the leaders of the organization.

In order to develop and implement a successful natural resource management project, funding agencies often provide training and technical assistance to the local organizations. After implementing at least one project, such organizations are usually in better position to design and successfully implement other projects. They can also train other organizations and raise funds from various sources.

The information presented in this paper is based on experiences and lessons learned from the training program that was developed for the Small Grants Program of the USAID-funded Action Program for the Environment (APE) in Uganda. The actual training was conducted from 1998 to 2000.

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## Major Steps in Developing and Implementing a Capacity Building Program

- 1) **Identify partners and NGOs** involved in natural resource management activities. Information about local organizations may be collected from environmental agencies, local leaders and government staff working in the target area. Field visits help to verify the existence and activities of some of the organizations that may not be well known by the local leaders. Develop a database of names of organizations, their location, objectives, activities, membership, and other information that may be relevant to your work.
- 2) **Conduct training needs assessment** to identify the required skills. Select a sample of the organizations in the database. Visit the individual organizations to ascertain the administrative systems in place, and to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the organizations. Hold discussions with group leaders and community members, and use a questionnaire if necessary. Analyze the information collected.
- 3) **Assemble an appropriate team of trainers** based on the required skills that were identified in the training needs assessment. Some members of the team should be able to communicate in the local language. Trainers may be obtained from the following sources: staff of the donor organization; government staff working in the target area, such as the District Environment Officer; hired consultants; staff of environmental agencies that are doing similar work; and members of the local community.
- 4) **Develop a training program** aimed at improving the capacity of a specified number of local NGO members, government staff, and local leaders. Training local leaders and government staff provides a mechanism for training other organizations in future, without the assistance of the donor. The team of trainers develops the training program using the information collected during the training needs assessment. Topics included in the APE training program were:
  - *Overview of environmental issues, natural resource management, causes and remedies of environmental degradation.* This topic exposed the participants to a variety of environmental problems and mitigation measures for the problems.
  - *Environmental Impact Assessment.* A pre-designed environmental screening form was used to guide the participants through the types of impacts they should look out for.
  - *Definition, features, and limitations of Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRA)* The use of PRA was introduced to the participants to enable them promote community participation in identifying and prioritizing problems, identifying solutions, and designing projects.
  - *PRA and the Project Cycle.* Introduction of the project cycle and how PRA can be used at various stages of the cycle. The following PRA techniques were identified and addressed in detail in the classroom and in the field with community members:
    - a) Semi-structured interviews
    - b) Resource and social mapping
    - c) Transect maps
    - d) Seasonal and daily calendars
    - e) Institutional Profiles
    - f) Problem Ranking (preference and pair wise ranking)

- g) Problem Analysis (causes and effects)
- h) Identification of solutions

- *Project Proposal Writing.* Participants discussed the type of information required under the following sections of a project proposal: goal, problem statement, justification, objectives, activities, work plan, and budget. They wrote project proposals using information collected during the PRA field exercises.
  - *Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation.* This topic was meant to give the participants a better understanding of the terms 'monitoring' and 'evaluation', enable them define results and suitable indicators, and develop monitoring and evaluation plans for their projects.
  - *Book-Keeping and Financial management.* Information about the basic financial records that each organization must keep, reasons for recording this information, and the different books and documents required.
  - *Organizational Development* This topic was new to most of the organizations. The training included information and discussion of the following sub-topics: Group Building and Management; Roles of Group Members; Leadership; Conflict Resolution; Decision-Making; Effective Communication; and Development of a Group Constitution.
- 5) Develop Training Materials and Methods** to suit the various topics in the training program. Field exercises with community members were found to be very beneficial to participants. Audio-visual aids and role-plays were also popular. The training program may be broken down into a number of capacity building activities in order to cover the various topics:
- *Non-residential Workshops:* Each workshop may take one or several days. Attendance could be extremely high because there are no costs involved for the participants. However, if the training lasts several days, attendance may not be consistent. Participants may miss some important sessions due to personal problems or responsibilities at home. Training in *Organizational Development* was conducted for 7 local organizations (in 2 districts) that had received funding from APE. Each of the organizations was trained in a 5-day non-residential workshop at a venue in their project area. The training was targeted at all members of the organizations and by the end of the training, a total of 459 members in the 2 districts had benefited from the workshops.
  - *Residential Workshops:* The number of participants is limited by the cost of food and accommodation and the size of the conference room. Attendance is more consistent and punctuality is better because all participants are in the same venue. Concentration on the training is expected to be higher because there is little or no interference from home. Costs may be high because they include: transportation of participants; meals; accommodation; and medical treatment. Residential workshops are suitable when participants are selected from a range of organizations whose geographical location cannot allow the participants to travel daily to and from the workshop venue. These workshops were used whenever the type of training was aimed at a few members of each organization and in cases where uniformity was required. For example, all funded organizations were supposed to develop Monitoring and Evaluation plans using a similar format. Thus, a few leaders from each funded organization were invited

for a residential workshop in their district to ensure that they all received the same training and instructions.

- *On-the-job Training:* Members of an organization can receive training without taking them away from their work. Their day-to-day activities are used for the practical training. It is suitable for: accountants or treasurers; and for practical training in the field, e.g. constructing soil erosion control bands. Government staff and partners from environmental agencies operating in the target area can be very instrumental in providing on-the-job training. They are in position to visit the local organizations on a more regular basis than the funding agency.
  - *Cross Visits:* Groups of farmers visit farms in the same district or another district where farmers have a lot of experience in particular farming methods. During one of the cross visits organized by APE, twenty-five farmers from 4 organizations in eastern Uganda visited farmers in southwestern Uganda for 4 days. The purpose of the cross-visit was to enable them get a better understanding of agro-forestry practices, soil erosion control, and zero grazing. The farmers from eastern Uganda spent two nights in the homes of their hosts and this enabled them to discuss and closely observe the various farming aspects. This close interaction with their hosts encouraged them to implement the farming practices they had studied during the visit because they realized that they did not need much money in order to become better farmers.
  - *In-house Training:* Local organizations occasionally organize their own training sessions, for example, when a member who has received training in a particular topic wants to pass on the information to other group members. Sometimes the organization invites a local expert to address a topic that the funding agency has not considered. For example, local organizations are usually interested in establishing savings and credit schemes because they have seen members of other organization benefiting from them. If their current donor were not involved in savings and credit activities, the local organization would have to organize its own in-house training.
  - *National and International Fora:* They enable the local organizations to: learn from the experiences of other organizations; identify partner organizations for future networking; and identify new sources of funding.
- 6) Develop mechanisms for evaluating the training program.** Part of the evaluation is done by the participants who fill out a questionnaire at the end of each workshop. Evaluation is also done by assessing the quality of work produced by the trainees when they go back to their home areas after the training. The training in *Project Design and Proposal Writing* seemed to be effective because most of the participants were able to produce good quality proposals after the training. In eastern Uganda, over 70% of the participants of a cross-visit implemented at least one farming practice they had seen during the visit.
- 7) Identify follow-up activities** that will re-enforce the skills gained during the training. In most cases, follow up activities include: field visits to assess improvements and weaknesses; additional training activities depending on the weaknesses identified; cross-visits; film shows; and on-the-job training.

## Major Lessons Learned

1. Training is continuous. As you work with the funded organizations, new weaknesses show up and they need to be addressed. Some of the organizations had received training in a few topics before they interacted with APE but they had not improved much. In-depth and frequent training was more beneficial to the organizations.
2. Follow-up of trainees helped to re-enforce the training and by the end of the first year after training, most trainees were able to show at least one improvement on their farms.
3. Continuous interaction with funded organizations gave them enough confidence to write new project proposals that they submitted to other donors.
4. The success of an organization depends greatly on its leadership and the members' awareness of their rights and responsibilities. Four out of seven organizations that received training in *Organizational Development* in eastern Uganda changed their leadership after the training and were more successful in project implementation.
5. Training in *Organizational Development* should be open to all members of the organization. This enabled the members to get a clearer understanding of the qualities of a good leader and his/her responsibilities, and consequently elected better leaders after the training.
6. Concepts that are very clear to funding agencies sometimes appear strange to local organizations. For example:
7. Several local organizations did not understand the importance of consulting the funding agency whenever they wanted to make a change in the budget.
8. Members of the local organizations found it hard to understand why they should contribute part of the total budget. They felt that they were too poor to contribute anything.
9. For quite a long time, several organizations would make records and send them to the funding agency without keeping copies for their organizations. They thought that records were only important to the funding agency.
10. It takes a lot of explanation and regular interaction with the local organizations to get them to understand various concepts. Therefore, training must continue over a long period of time in order to be effective.
11. In cases where government staff, local leaders and leaders of local organizations were trained together, the relationship between them was strengthened and they worked more harmoniously in the communities because they were able to see that they had a common goal.