



Developing Strategy across a Federation

Context

This international NGO works through 34 semi-autonomous national offices across Africa. The organisation has flourished and thrived on entrepreneurship and ideas but was also under pressure to balance this with ensuring consistency of operations.

Like all NGOS, it has to demonstrate transparency and accountability to funders. However, evaluating and reporting on impact and outcomes requires investment and there was little funding to cover these administration costs.

The brief was to develop a strategy which effectively involved beneficiaries, staff, funders and partners to consider how to respond to challenges and in doing so, create an ambitious and realistic strategy which had widespread support and delivered real benefit in communities.

Process

Our starting point for this assignment was rigorous research into the sector and issues for other players in the field. Then, using the strategic and international development expertise of a bi-lingual team based in UK and West Africa we developed a highly collaborative and accessible strategy process which invited contributions from communities, beneficiaries, partner organisations, funders, national and regional offices. This included regional consultation sessions, workshops, in-country consultations, surveys, questionnaires, face to face, phone and skype interviews. A network of Strategy Champion volunteers in National Offices acted as a support, sounding board for the consultants commenting on drafts and directing to additional sources of information.

The findings formed the first draft of the strategy which was presented at bi-lingual workshops to staff who explored it, highlighted potential weaknesses and suggested improvements. Following this, the strategy went through several iterations and was finalised at a 3 day international workshop involving staff, funders and key strategic partners.

The strategy incorporated the concerns, ideas and ambitions of many. Using established strategy frameworks these were distilled into a clear direction by the Board and senior team. We then worked with the organisation to flesh out the implications of this strategy to form the framework for their business plan.

Outcome

The final document was warmly received – the investment in consultation and involvement paid off – people really appreciated seeing their perspectives had been considered in the strategy development. The resulting business plan was subsequently implemented.

The CEO commented on our involvement: *“Stella is a committed strategy and change management professional. She has an excellent grasp on the strategic environment for not for profit organisations and was quickly able to identify key opportunities and issues for our organization. Her style is business like whilst being sensitive to the needs of different stakeholders. She managed to involve and consult widely whilst keeping the planning process on track. She is hard-working, flexible and worked closely with the staff team. She has sound research, analytical and report writing skills and excellent facilitation skills”*