Northwest University

Impacts of Social Taboos

Fund Development Strategies for an International Nonprofit

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Introduction

As of 2016, there were an estimated 10 million NGOs (non-governmental and nonprofit organizations) worldwide. In 2014, 1.4 billion people donated to NGOs or nonprofit organizations, and it is anticipated that this number will increase to 2.5 billion by 2030. In the United States, one in ten people work for a nonprofit organization, making nonprofits the country's third largest industry (behind retail and manufacturing). In Kenya, NGOs supply 290,000 jobs (Kwame). All of these organizations were created with a problem in mind. They address extreme poverty, global health, climate change, and racial injustice, among many others. Each organization has a specific mission and is working towards a cause. Each organization is also working to capture the attention of potential donors, drawing them in and creating long term connections to the organization. With so many nonprofit organizations in existence, how is this possible? How are all of these nonprofits still afloat with so many options? Can small grassroots organizations survive?

All of these statistics were in the back of my mind as I began fieldwork with Kiwimbi, an international nonprofit organization that partners with underserved communities to create educational opportunities through locally run community centers (Kiwimbi). Kiwimbi is composed of two sister organizations, one (Kiwimbi International) in the United States and the other (Kiwimbi Kenya) in Amagoro, Kenya. Because of this unique structure and the nature of nonprofits worldwide, Kiwimbi faces an uphill battle in expanding and increasing its donor base.

To date, I have only encountered one nonprofit organization with a structure similar to that of Kiwimbi, and even that organization operated at a much larger scale than Kiwimbi. While I was planning this research and thinking about this thesis, the main question I wanted to address was how a small, grassroots nonprofit organization can flourish and expand into something more, with more supporters and more possibilities for its beneficiaries. This would involve diving into research about board roles, fundraising efforts, and sustainable development methods, among other things. Narrowing down each of these things and finding the root cause of Kiwimbi's challenges would be essential in solidifying the direction of this research.

Small nonprofit organizations like Kiwimbi often face many challenges. Sometimes, finding the main problem is a challenge in itself. However, because of the nature of nonprofit organizations, fundraising and expansion are almost always challenges that are faced. Kiwimbi is no exception to this. This thesis will detail my findings as I researched fundraising methods and challenges faced along the way. Through a contextual and objective lens, this research will show that nonprofit expansion is as effective as a board (or employees) is at maintaining relationships and openly soliciting funds from new donors. Theories supporting this claim include the resource dependency theory; social taboos will play a major role as well.

Kiwimbi expressed a number of challenges, all of which related to one major hindrance in their growth. I came to this conclusion using a specific approach to research, knowing that I needed to identify the root cause of their challenges. The researcher's guide to problem solving in Appendix A can be used as a starting point for anyone looking to do similar research, especially those interested in making and implementing changes through action research (Stringer).

Overview of Fieldwork

I was first introduced to Kiwimbi (Kiwimbi International and Kiwimbi Kenya) early in 2018 while I was looking for a summer internship opportunity. My college career center connected me with two alumni who were members of Kiwimbi's board of trustees, and encouraged me to reach out and explore the possibility of interning with the library after concluding a short term study abroad trip in Nairobi. I knew nothing about Amagoro, or what I would be getting myself into, but the possibility of experiencing something so different from anything else I had ever experienced was intriguing. I solidified an internship with the library and set out for Kenya a few months later.

After spending a month in Nairobi, I made my way to Amagoro. During this internship, I learned a lot about the international nonprofit sector and the culture at the library. I spent a lot of time on this trip and in the months following reflecting on my experience. Community development expert Thomas Friedman writes, "...knowledge is only good if you can reflect on it," (6) which is exactly what I did. Being in Kenya for this short amount of time piqued my interest in learning more about nonprofit management and sustainability, particularly within an organization like Kiwimbi, since its structure is so unique. I found myself three years later searching for research opportunities as part of this thesis, which led to the perfect opportunity to understand the only part of Kiwimbi that I hadn't explored before–Kiwimbi International and the board of trustees.

Kiwimbi is a nonprofit organization that aims to create opportunity through education. Kiwimbi has two branches - Kiwimbi Kenya and Kiwimbi International (collectively, *Kiwimbi*). At the time of this research, Kiwimbi Kenya's leadership team consists of thirty eight staff members, four volunteers, and eight board members. Kiwimbi International's board of trustees in the United States contains fourteen members, and there are three staff members. Kiwimbi International is responsible for fundraising and strategic development, while Kiwimbi Kenya creates and executes programs, creates development strategies, and enhances the community.

Kiwimbi Kenya has many different programs at the library each year. They have three vocational programs including tailoring, woodworking, and farming. Each of these teaches students valuable and practical skills that they can use in their future careers. They have painting and ceramics courses as well, and house a small museum showing some of their students' creations. They also provide tutoring lessons during which they provide students with lunch, which is one of their largest programs. Students are divided into small groups for extra instruction in math and English with the goal of increasing their comprehension, which will help them pass their annual exams and move on to higher education. Providing free lunch prevents students from needing to travel home for lunch and offers a nutritious meal for those who may not have lunch available for them at home.

Kiwimbi International also has many annual responsibilities. They are largely responsible for fundraising and strategic development, as well as marketing and overall expansion. They work closely with a few of the leaders in Kenya, including a co-founder and board members. They focus a lot of their attention each year on keeping their donors engaged and providing statistics on students' academic improvements and the overall success of the library and its programs. Kiwimbi International holds an annual gala fundraiser called Karamu, which is where the majority of their funds come from. Ticket sales, auction items, gifts for sale, and raw donations are all ways that the Karamu brings in money. On a more regular basis, Kiwimbi holds smaller, recently virtual events, like a book drive or a walk-a-thon. They have started an event entitled Second Saturday, which occurs on the second Saturday of each month and allows people to interact with Kiwimbi or Kenya surrounding a specific, culturally relevant topic. These include Kenyan authors, Kenyan chefs, and occasionally features some of the board members and staff at Kiwimbi Kenya. These events are often free, but, "...donations are always welcome," (Connell).

Kiwimbi International is composed largely of the members of the board of trustees. It is typical for a nonprofit organization of any size to have a board of trustees. This is generally a group of invested individuals (financially and otherwise) who participate in strategic planning and general organizational oversight. Oftentimes, larger decisions being made must be approved by the board of trustees. These are termed positions, meaning that the members will serve for a certain number of years (three years at Kiwimbi International) and will then rotate off the board or will be elected to remain in their position for another three years (if they wish). Kiwimbi International has staggered member terms so they are limiting the number of members that are rotating off at once and retaining some board experience for new members to learn from.

The research I conducted is primarily qualitative. The goal in doing qualitative research was to "...do research *with* people, not *on* people," as described in Sharan B. Merriam and Elizabeth J. Tisdell's book *Qualitative Research* (64). This research consisted largely of interviews, observations, personal conversations, and text research. I gained my deepest understanding of Kiwimbi through interviews and observations. Anthropologist Seth Holmes highlights the gravity of observations and experiences when he writes, "...'there is a series of phenomena of great importance which cannot possibly be recorded by questioning or computing documents, but have to be observed in their full actuality'," (32). Much of the work done at Kiwimbi can be viewed from a quantitative perspective to evaluate progress in things like student success or donation trends, but viewing this research from a qualitative lens allowed me to look into ways that we can improve as people, as employees, and as members of the board on a personal level. Personal development will be crucial to the success of small grassroots organizations like Kiwimbi.

When I first began thinking about this research, I had a lot of questions (and assumptions) in my head about what I would find. I thought there would be a clear path that leaders of nonprofits could follow to increase their fundraising–that was wrong. I thought that applying for grants would be the easiest way to secure funding, especially in larger amounts–this was also wrong. From this point, I threw out all the assumptions I had and prepared myself to find what I would find and adapt to new information along the way. After all, Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater's book *Fieldworking: Reading and Writing Research* states that, "You'll need to think about how your background can affect what you see in another culture just as it does when you read a written text," (111). Moving forward (in a more contextually-open way), I reverted back to some of my original research questions: how can Kiwimbi grow and expand sustainably? How can they increase donors (and donations), and how can they increase involvement from people in the United States? What do donors in the United States want from their 'giving experience'? I also thought back to my own experiences as a volunteer and donor, and what I would like to see from that perspective.

In looking for answers to these questions, I focused my research on board roles and responsibilities, marketing and outreach strategies, fundraising and development plans, and the impact of events. In addition to addressing these topics through my research with Kiwimbi, I did extensive text research to look for any sector 'norms' or guidelines on how to use these methods to successfully grow a small nonprofit organization. There is little research on organizations like that of Kiwimbi, so I prepared myself to enter uncharted waters (and hopefully produce some beneficial research). Kiwimbi International focuses on most of these things, so I began my research with them.

<u>Context</u>

The board of trustees for Kiwimbi International is responsible for many things, which is to be expected from a nonprofit of this size. There are occasionally advisory boards (within the board of trustees) designed to work towards specific goals, like marketing or fundraising. Aside from these advisory boards, the board tackles all responsibilities as a team. Anyone with expertise relating to the topic at hand will give their advice, and may take the project under their wing based on the needs. For example, one board member wanted to host a golf event as a fundraiser for Kiwimbi. The board decided that they would help where they could, but the responsibility would largely be on him. To accomplish his goal, the event was organized by an external nonprofit and was hosted by Kiwimbi and another organization who would both split the benefits of the event. Other examples include planning professional development events for the board members (such as training), planning fundraising events, and planning campaigns for Kiwimbi. These are often done largely by one or a few people, with consultation from the board members throughout the process.

Kiwimbi's marketing and outreach strategies are directly tied to their fundraising and development plans. The main purpose of their marketing and outreach is to attract and retain donors, who are the main financiers of their organization. In 2020, there were 289 donors, the majority of whom have some connection to one of the board members. These donors are responsible for the roughly $250,000 that Kiwimbi raised that year (*Kiwimbi International Report to the Community*). However, this number has remained relatively static over the past few years. In her book *Strategic Fund Development,* Simone P. Joyaux writes, "Don't ask your board members and other volunteers to trespass on their personal and professional relationships [when fundraising or doing outreach]," (12) but this has worked well for Kiwimbi thus far; most of their supporters have some connection to one of the board members. Much of their marketing has consisted of emails, reports, and social media posts to their existing network of donors and supporters. Emails generally include updates on current programs and information on upcoming events, and reports are sent annually for supporters to see all of the statistics of the organization and the accomplishments Kiwimbi has seen throughout the year. Social media consists largely of facebook and instagram posts, as well as virtual fundraisers (Connell).

Kiwimbi relies on events of all kinds to generate donations throughout the year. Not only are these ways for them to bring in funds, they are also great ways to get more potential supporters involved. Julie Clawson, a social justice advocate, states that, "We want to change the world, but sometimes it's hard to even know where to begin," (14). Kiwimbi uses events as the starting point for people who are looking for ways to make change in the international education system. Events include in person and, as of recently, virtual events, allowing people to participate from wherever they are. These events are largely donor focused but often have a connection to Kiwimbi or Kenyan culture, giving participants a glimpse into what life in rural Kenya is really like.

Typically, Kiwimbi hosts Karamu, their annual fundraising gala. This event is the perfect fusion of Kenyan culture and donor entertainment. The Karamu features a Kenyan style meal, live and silent auctions, and handcrafted items for purchase. There are presentations from Kenyans who travel to the United States to share their experiences and generous donations are made throughout the night. To attend this event, tickets must be purchased to help cover the cost of the event. Tickets have ranged from $75-$150 in the past (lower costs are for students and children). There are smaller events that take place throughout the year as well. During my fieldwork, Kiwimbi held a zumbathon, a walk-a-thon, and a virtual book drive. The zumbathon brought a lot of new traffic and attention to Kiwimbi, but had few direct ties to the organization beyond this. Zumba instructors were from all over the world, but they were not directly tied to Kiwimbi. Tickets were sold to attend this virtual event (around $12 per person), and the proceeds (roughly $2,000) benefited Kiwimbi. The walk-a-thon allowed participants to form teams and donate to participate. The suggested length of the walk was six miles, the average length a Kenyan student walks to and from school each day. Suggested donations started at $25, which was also the minimum cost to form a team, who could join and donate an amount of their choosing. Participants were encouraged to take part all over the country in their favorite places to walk with their friends, spreading the word of Kiwimbi. Finally, the virtual book drive was a simple and effective way for people to support Kiwimbi. Multiple books were available for purchase online, and the books were to be purchased and sent to the library directly. It remained active for a few weeks and the word was spread through Kiwimbi's marketing channels.

These events reveal a key factor in the success of a resource dependent organization; the focus on the donors. Each of the events above allowed donors and supporters to participate in something that connects them to Kenyan culture or Kiwimbi in some way. Throughout the rest of this thesis, we will evaluate resource dependency and nonprofit organizations like Kiwimbi from the perspective of both the donors and the organization's leaders, showing the wants and needs on each side and how they can overlap to further the organization's missions and goals.

<u>Challenges</u>

Board Responsibilities

Board members at Kiwimbi are tasked with many things, including fundraising, outreach, marketing, grant writing, and development. They are also largely responsible for problem solving and innovation. As a small nonprofit, Kiwimbi's board members are very active and represent a large portion of Kiwimbi International. Because of their active involvement, including participation from the co-founders, the board members know Kiwimbi better than anyone else; this means that they know the successes they have and the challenges they face. Many of the challenges faced by Kiwimbi stemmed from the financial responsibilities of the board, largely their lack of confidence in asking individual donors for donations. However, the resulting challenges (creating marketing and development strategies, increasing outreach and fundraising, maintaining donor interest, among others) cannot be ignored. Addressing each of these challenges as their own allows for complete development to take place.

There are many different theories on what responsibilities board members of nonprofit organizations should assume based on size, main funding type, organizational goals, et cetera. The article "Does the Structure and Composition of the Board Matter? The Case of Nonprofit Organizations" states that, "...it is argued that the function of the nonprofit board is to promote the mission and, in doing so, it has responsibilities to a range of constituents including donors, clients, the public taxpayer, and even the staff," (O'Regan and Oster, 206). Overarchingly, the research highlights the role of board members in fundraising and outreach. These tasks are unavoidable by board members of nonprofit organizations, particularly of smaller sizes.

Brown and Guo's article on nonprofit board roles states that, "...Most commonly, executives discussed how board members are useful in 'opening doors'," (Brown and Guo, 539) showing the emphasis on outreach. In another article by Sontag-Padilla et al., we see the connection of the board to fundraising. This article states that, "...there is a significant relationship between the percentage of budgetary funds from individuals within an agency's service area and fundraising requirements for board members," (8). Not only does this tie the board to fundraising initiatives, it also ties the board's fundraising initiatives to the community. Local fundraising efforts are often fruitful for nonprofit organizations. They allow for community members to connect to their community through direct participation, ultimately having an impact in the world (Walters, 16). However, this does vary by the community's socio-economic status. Beyond this, responsibilities will vary by the size of the board.

The article entitled "Russia's Donor Identity Dilemmas and what this Means for the West" narrates very nicely the impact that existing donors can have when they reach out and involve their networks in fundraising for an organization like Kiwimbi. The article states that, "A fruitful exchange between the 'old' and 'new' donors would almost certainly broaden and deepen the common understanding of global development needs and hence fulfill the necessary condition for a common or even cooperative practice, which would conceivably have positive effects," (Bakalova et al. 36). If we consider the board members to be 'old' donors and look at their networks as potential 'new' donors, the board members can show potential new donors the impact they can have if they engage with Kiwimbi. Ultimately, the work Kiwimbi is doing is a small scale of global development. Finding those who are interested in Kiwimbi's goals and showing the importance of the work being done will leave them no choice but to join in as a donor, volunteer, and overall supporter.

Additionally, an organization like Kiwimbi must be sure not to oversaturate their market of donors with requests for donations for different projects. There are always multiple things happening at Kiwimbi, each of which needs funding. Some of these things are longer term projects, while others are shorter term, or 'once and done' type projects. For example, Kiwimbi's lunch program runs every weekday of every year, but they are planning to work on a larger scale project of building a second physical location. The lunch program requires a constant flow of funding, while the creation of a second location would require funds only for construction (until we account for things like staffing, stocking it with supplies, et cetera). In a situation like this, Kiwimbi needs a cohesive strategic plan in order to ensure that they can continue to bring in sufficient funds for both programs simultaneously. An article titled "Resource Mobilisation and Effective Donor Engagement" states that, "The most commonly cited reason for the deceleration of support is donors' need to prioritize competing and urgent needs," (Price and Titulaer, 49). This means that if Kiwimbi plans on reaching out to donors to support their lunch program, and then asks them to donate to construction of a new location, donors may feel that they have to choose between these two issues and fund whichever is most pressing. Creating realistic fundraising plans is key here, and marketing them strategically is what will make them effective amongst existing donors. This is a great opportunity for new donors to engage with a new project and sustain engagement after that project is complete by supporting an existing project.

There is a lot of research that exists about nonprofit fundraising, some of which is cited throughout this paper. A lot of this discourse works to drive organizations away from using strategies like those mentioned previously to secure donations. They feel that personal networks of the board members are not the best avenue to use in securing individual donors, and that finding those who have interests that align with an organization's goals and mission is the best way to go. Kiwimbi has adopted a hybrid of these two theories; ultimately aiming to find people with genuine interests in their organization as donors, but using board members' networks as a starting point. Ethnographer Kirin Narayan states that, "...what works for one person can seem amusingly eccentric to someone else," (114). While this theory may not be supported by many researchers, at the end of the day, fundraising is a very individual act and is a unique journey for each organization. After all, shouldn't the board members have a great interest in the success of Kiwimbi, and won't they likely have family and friends with similar interests? The words of caution against this strategy that can be found in the research may explain the financial plateau that Kiwimbi has experienced in the recent past; expanding your network in this way will only get you so far, unless your board members are working to increase the size of their personal networks as well. It can also restrict an increase in diversity in the network of an organization. Kiwimbi is working to expand into different age groups, socioeconomic classes, and racial identities, which will help them to grow a network of support that is truly diverse and sustainable for years to come.

Fundraising

At their core, nonprofit organizations are multifaceted and diverse in their inputs and outputs. Describing nonprofit organizations, Jang and Feiock state that, "Nonprofit organizations serve various groups in society and rely on multiple sources of funds, including private donations, membership and client fees, private foundations, corporations, and government grants and contracts," (176). To be able to continue providing the numerous programs they provide, they must secure a diverse set of funding. There are many different theories about what type of funding is best for nonprofit organizations, but the research can be conflicting. Each organization needs to decide what is best for it based on their goals, challenges, mission, and capacity. There is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach to fundraising; experimenting with different methods will reveal those that work best.

Kenya is relatively new as an independent nation, not gaining true political freedom until 1963 (*U.S. Department of State*). Prior to this, they were a colonized land and could not build their own foundations for success. They had no autonomy, and have had to adapt to their newfound democracy over the past 60 years. This has come with great challenges, and economic stability is one of them. Social entrepreneurship experts David Bornstein and Susan Davis highlight the challenges of economic stability. They write, “And the funding is unpredictable, often contingent more on politics than performance,” (49). Because of the political influence colonization left, many nonprofits rely on donations, oftentimes from foreign organizations, as their main source of funding. This shows how the impacts of colonialism still exist and present challenges in Kenya today.

An article written by Eve Garrow is a great example of the need for international funding. This article states that, “Nonprofit organizations located in resource-rich locations will have greater access to donations, fees for services, other revenue-generating activities, and government funding. In a poor location, multiple funding opportunities become less available,” (382). Kiwimbi is a result of this economic instability; they are filling the gap in education that the government cannot afford to fund. Rather than looking for internal sources of revenue, Kiwimbi looks for donation sources internationally. The colonial roots of Kenya, along with much of Africa, are important to remember when advocating for fundraising efforts at an organization like Kiwimbi. Showing the difficulties Kenya faces as a result of something beyond their control can make donors feel inclined to support them. Experts on social entrepreneurship, Kelley and Kelley write, “...approaching challenges from a human perspective can yield some of the richest opportunities for change," (19). The same is true in terms of fundraising; viewing the need for funds from a human (or more personal) perspective can help organizations like Kiwimbi when seeking donations.

Kiwimbi International is responsible for the majority of the fundraising operations because, "Fundraising in less-resourced communities can be especially hard when many members of the community have very limited resources to spare," (Sontag-Padilla, et al. Challenges and Promising Practices, 22). Kiwimbi was intentionally structured in the way that it operates to overcome this challenge. It would be difficult for them to grow to the scale that they have grown to today (and continue to grow in the future) if they were relying solely on funding from individuals in Kenya. However, this is challenging because of the nature of giving in the United States. People want to participate in the organization they are supporting, but opportunities to do so are limited. It presents further challenges because there are so few organizations that are structured and operate in this way. People who encounter Kiwimbi may not fully understand this structure, or they may have doubts that what they are funding is actually making a difference. This adds to the hurdle donors in the United States face when deciding what organizations to support.

Much of the research on nonprofit fundraising refutes or provides caution against using grant funding as a main source of funding because of the challenges and restrictions tied to it. Grant funding is often hard to obtain and requires a very specific project, one that is perfectly in line with what the funding is for. Finding a grant for an organization like Kiwimbi, especially a grant in the United States, is near impossible. The international nature of Kiwimbi's fundraising further complicates this. Ellen Karsh and Arlen Sue Fox's book *The Only Grant-Writing Book You'll Ever Need* states that, "Even when funding is available, many not-for-profit organizations–and even government agencies–are afraid of the work involved in obtaining (and reporting on) a federal grant…One research effort demonstrated that federal proposals took more than 80 person-hours to prepare on average, but that *winning* proposals took more than *twice* that amount of staff time," (26). This shows a very real insight into the complexity and involvement necessary in securing grant funding. Kiwimbi has one staff grant writer, who focuses solely on securing grant funding; however, because of the competitive nature of winning grants, and the nature of the organization, it is a very small portion of the funding they secure each year. Kiwimbi has much more success in securing donations from individual donors.

The vast majority of Kiwimbi's funds come from individual donors (Kiwimbi). This has allowed for great success, but has also resulted in a plateau of growth for the organization (Connell). This is because many of the individual donors come from the personal networks of each board member. Many members of the board highlighted the importance of these donors, stating that they were reliable donors because they are invested in the people they care about, who happen to be on the board advocating for this organization (Connell). The board members are responsible for reaching out to their networks whenever the organization is hosting an event or running a fundraising campaign to secure donations, and these people care most about the success of the board members, so they donate to the cause or attend the event. As these people continue to donate and attend events, they will inevitably grow their knowledge of the organization and can in turn grow their interest in the organization. This process takes long periods of time, but it has been one of the most reliable forms of fundraising for Kiwimbi and can result in the most serious interest for future leaders. As the networks of the board members get involved, they can begin to involve their own networks of people, and expansion will continue through this cycle. However, diversifying fundraising is important as well.

Donor Engagement

The structure of an organization like that of Kiwimbi can be very difficult to navigate. There are an infinite number of challenges that can arise when attempting to fund an organization from another continent, particularly when the majority of the funders will never see firsthand what they are funding. Because of this, it is important to think about what the donors want to 'get' out of their donating experience as well as what the organization needs from these donors. Throughout the remainder of this thesis, we will evaluate the challenges and potential solutions through the lens of both the organization and the donors.

Kiwimbi is a resource dependent organization. This means that they rely on donations for the success of their organization (Droll). These are largely individual donations (Kiwimbi). The Article "Nonprofit Organizations Performance and Resource Development Strategies" describes individual donors, stating that, "One important revenue stream for nonprofit organizations is individual philanthropy–the financial and donated gifts and the time and services contributed by volunteers," (Van Slyke and Johnson, 468), meaning that these gifts are given by individual people or families rather than corporations, foundations, or through grants. Resource dependent organizations face a unique set of challenges, such as a constant need for relationship building and maintenance, that other organizations may not face. These challenges are exacerbated by the structure of Kiwimbi, as it is functioning on two different continents. Kiwimbi International is tasked with raising funds for Kiwimbi Kenya in the United States, largely from people who will never see firsthand the effects of their funds and the impact it has on the local Kenyan community, for a number of different projects. Resource dependency theory is a big factor in Kiwimbi's challenges, as it relies on external, individual donations to uphold its day to day operations.

When soliciting new donors, we must take into account the reasons why people give. In his book *The Zero Waste Solution,* Paul Connet writes, “We all need a larger meaning to our work and lives. Money is not enough,” (13). Many donors feel similarly; earning or spending money is not enough, they want to feel fulfilled by the money they are earning or donating. However, donors are not giving money simply to support an organization; they are often giving with ulterior motives. In the article “Donor Dealings: The Impact of International Donor Aid on Sexual and Reproductive Health Services,” Susannah Mayhew writes, “Donors (usually) are not neutral, philanthropic givers of gifts. Donors are subject to national and international political interests that can influence their decisions on program and service support to the detriment of local needs,” (220). Many people donate with the intention of fulfilling themselves and seeing their money going to serve a specific purpose, especially internationally, without considering the true needs of the local population. These donations can cause more harm than they do good; sometimes they can even reverse the effects that beneficial donations are having in a community. For example, donating books written by authors in the United States is a controversial way to be involved at Kiwimbi. The books are helpful in stocking the library and giving kids something to read to better their English, but they also enforce colonialism, showing them that white, western culture is the dominant global culture. This also reduces the success of book sales in the Kenyan economy and provides stories that are not always culturally relevant.

Kiwimbi’s organizational structure presents challenges in fundraising for many reasons. Much of this has to do with the culture surrounding giving in the United States. As donors from the United States, we are so accustomed to organizations catering to us in order to entice us to give to them. We want to be able to actively participate with the organization to fulfill ourselves, whether or not that leads to sustainable change for the organization itself. If this is not possible, we want to participate in something or receive something for our donation. This is something we see from time to time with larger nonprofit organizations; the World Wildlife Fund encourages supporters to donate a certain amount of money by incentivizing with the theoretical adoption of an animal and sending stuffed animals replicating them (Donate + Protect Nature). Similar things are seen with all kinds of nonprofit organizations nationally. However, with an international organization like Kiwimbi, allowing people to participate firsthand with the organization is challenging, as is providing a physical object to incentivize donations. Donors who want to go to the library for a few days want to leave an impact, but that is not sustainable for what they are trying to accomplish. Donors who are not able to travel to Kenya are still looking for a way to participate and feel fulfilled by what they are donating to. Many donors will not donate without receiving something in exchange or being directly asked to donate by someone they care about. Why is this the case? As a culture and society of donors, we need to think carefully about what is most important–our need to feel fulfilled or actually fulfilling the mission of the organization in a sustainable way. Feeling fulfilled for ourselves stems from a place of egocentricity, while trusting an organization to fulfill its mission with its own, local resources is where sustainable change happens.

Further, retaining donors is a challenge that is faced by many nonprofits and NGOs worldwide. An expert on culture studies, Beck states that, "You already feel like a good person so why do *more* good?" (46). This is a common mentality among donors. Oftentimes, individual donors need to see the successful work that an organization is doing, understand how their donation will make an impact, and then decide whether they are going to donate or not. If a donation is made, it leaves the donor with a fulfilling feeling, especially if they receive direct and meaningful thanks from the organization. This fulfilling feeling lasts a while, which makes asking donors for donations more difficult. Timing is key here–if donors think they are being asked for money too frequently, they could abandon donating to the organization altogether. Finding the balance between too short of a time and too long of a time between donations is crucial for a nonprofit to establish in order to effectively maximize donations from their returning individual donors. This is particularly true with an organization like Kiwimbi, trying to retain donors internationally. Cynthia D. Moe-Lobeda, a social justice advocate, writes, “Denial in its varied forms is made easier by the geographic location of privilege,” (96). This reminds us that keeping people engaged is crucial in generating donations. The majority of Kiwimbi’s donors will never see for themselves the work Kiwimbi is doing in person. Thus, it is easy for them to forget about this work, as it is not impacting their local community or their personal lives. Reminding them about the successes of the work being done is necessary to keep them donating. This is another instance when timing is key; finding the balance in sending updates and reports to keep people engaged but not overwhelm them will be critical for organizations to establish. For Kiwimbi, this is direct communication (often emails) no more than once every two weeks, but no less than once every four weeks (Connell).

Considering the culture of giving in the United States makes asking for money even more challenging for an organization like Kiwimbi. Donors who are expecting an experience in return for their donation will be out of luck unless they are willing to make the trek to Kenya (and stay long enough to have a real impact). As a result, the board is trying to discourage such “voluntourism” trips and opt for an experience in the United States instead. However, retaining donors is done best when they have an opportunity to experience what they are engaging in before they commit themselves to the cause. Charles H. Vogl’s book *The Art of Community* states that, “...it’s critical that prospective members are welcome to participate in community behavior before adopting common values," (23). Increasing outreach through events comes into play for Kiwimbi here. The best way for them to introduce new donors to their organization is through local events. Kiwimbi has been working on perfecting this strategy for the past year or so, especially as the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their operation. Living in a virtual world has allowed them to host many events online or encourage people to host their own branch of a larger event in their home community. An example of this is the annual Karamu which has been held virtually for the past two years. The second year of this virtual event, Kiwimbi encouraged attendees to host viewing parties in their homes, focusing on entertainment with music and events for attendees to participate in. The idea here is that hosts would be well connected individuals to the organization and they would invite their friends to these parties, spreading the word to new individuals and collecting a small donation for attending the event. Attendees would be more than willing to gather with their friends who hosted these events, even if a small fee was to be paid in donation to Kiwimbi. Events like these are great ways to introduce lots of new people to the organization; however, the challenge then is finding those who are genuinely interested in the work Kiwimbi is doing. Trying to persuade people that they should be interested in Kiwimbi is not going to create a sustainable individual donor base. Instead, the board should host events like this and search for those who have a genuine interest in nonprofit work, access to education, Kenyan culture, or community development.

It is important that as Kiwimbi gains new donors and participants, they are made aware of productive ways to help, rather than fulfilling their own interests. This goes back to the way supporters want to feel when they are supporting Kiwimbi and the donor mentality in the United States. It also has roots that tie into colonialism. As a nation that is made up of a large number of European descendants, many of us are tied to colonialism in some way. Kenya was a British colony prior to their independence, and since their independence is relatively recent, they are seen by much of the world as struggling and needing help, without any claims to support this. When we, as European descendants, donate to an organization like Kiwimbi, we often feel as though we are helping to 'save' people, viewing them as lesser and ourselves as superior. The book *Theories and Practices of Development* explains this inherent power relation, stating that, "The colonial period may be over in formal political terms, but the inequalities in power and influence remain," (Willis, 26). This ethnocentric view is described as the savior mentality. We donate, feel fulfilled that we helped to save people, and ride this wave of contention for quite some time, until the cycle repeats (we donate again, feel fulfilled for some time, and look for donation opportunities when the feeling fades). Jordan Flaherty's book *No More Heroes* perfectly describes the savior mentality and the problems that result from it. Flaherty writes, "Saviors are not interested in examining their own privilege. We don't want to see that the systems of race and class and gender that keep us in comfort where we are–in the 'right' jobs and neighborhoods and schools–are the same systems that created the problems we say we want to solve," (20-21). Later, he describes much of the charity work that we do as, "...generous on the surface, but with deadly consequences," (21). These quotes encompass the savior mentality and the harm it can cause. Saviors (sometimes called 'white saviors') want to help, but only in a way that is convenient for them. This means that they are not willing to dismantle any of the systemic issues that keep them powerful. This type of help is not productive; it can lead to more harm than good and enables systems of racial privilege.

While helping people sounds good and fulfilling, if it doesn't actually solve any problems, it enables these unproductive systems, harming the stakeholders further in the long run. This predicament happens all over in all kinds of nonprofit situations, and Kiwimbi is not exempt. In an interview, I learned that some Kiwimbi supporters want to go to Kiwimbi in Kenya to work on a short term project, like painting the library, but that is not truly what the organization needs (Rathgeber). Allowing people to do this type of work enables them to feel as though they have made a change, when the reality is that the children that utilize the library need food to eat and books to read, not a fresh coat of paint. If we allow donors and supporters to feel fulfilled by meaningless work, the organization's mission will never be achieved.

The scenario above is complicated further by the potential for bringing in a new long term supporter. Allowing those who want to make physical change to do something like go to Kenya and paint the library may not be immediately beneficial, but it could create a lasting impact on that supporter, keeping them involved long term. They would likely do whatever they needed to for the organization to thrive after an experience like this. This is a cost-benefit situation that nonprofits need to consider. If they play into this mentality, can they shift it to be more productive and sustainable later on? This topic could (and might be) its own research paper, so I will leave it at that; but, it is something for nonprofits to carefully consider.

Social Taboos

One of the biggest (if not the biggest) challenges faced by many nonprofit organizations like Kiwimbi revolves around our cultural and societal taboo that prevents us from speaking openly and comfortably about money. In the United States, we are often told from a young age not to talk about money with anyone outside of our family, as it can be a point of tension between people. This is particularly true with people who have a lot of money or invest in expensive things, almost as if they do not want anyone to know of their assets in fear that it makes them a target of sorts. Donors often do not want organizations they support to know what their finances are like in fear that the organizations will press them for more money. While this is not necessarily a negative, as there are legal ways for organizations to find this information, it would interfere with the fulfilled feeling that donors have after making one donation.

Too often we hear about people doing something good for an organization and then rewarding themselves. Voluntourism trips are a great example of this; justifying a week-long vacation because 4 hours of that trip were spent building an unsustainable school for impoverished children, or something similar. We have discussed this before, and will discuss it again later; the bigger issue here is the taboo around discussing money followed by a culture of egocentricity. These things hinder many organizational leaders from effectively performing their jobs with comfort and confidence. If we spend our entire lives believing that we should not be talking about money, knowing that we exist in a culture where we are first and foremost interested in ourselves, and we enter a role in a nonprofit organization where individual fundraising is one of our primary tasks, how can we expect to yield good results while asking something we are conditioned to believe we should not ask about? Henri J.M. Nouwen's book lists a series of questions surrounding money and states that, "If any of these questions makes us uncomfortable, it may be because talking about money is one of the greatest taboos around," (30). Overcoming this taboo is no small task, especially in an egocentric culture, but doing so will ensure that those working with different organizations on fundraising efforts will be able to do so seamlessly.

Solutions

Each of the challenges faced by Kiwimbi has the potential to be solved. Some of these solutions may be simple, but others will be more complicated. In this section, we will revisit some of the main challenges that Kiwimbi (and many other nonprofits) faces and begin to explore potential solutions or steps in the right direction to solving these problems.

Members of the board of trustees for Kiwimbi International voiced a number of challenges that they faced throughout my time working with them. Some of these challenges included things like feeling stagnant in donor cultivation and overall expansion of reach; others include not having enough funds to continue to expand the physical presence of Kiwimbi in Kenya and beyond. Multiple board members spoke about the future of Kiwimbi having a new location in Kenya and more locations throughout East Africa and out into the Global South. Despite the number of challenges expressed by the board, I believe that all of these challenges boil down to one: the board members do not feel confident asking people for money. Appendix A provides resources on how researchers can narrow down numerous challenges to find the root cause of them all. This was one of the challenges that they voiced to me, and as I looked at all of the challenges expressed, I began to see how they were all connected.

Engaging donors who want to actively participate in an organization is one of the most challenging things about an organization with a structure like that of Kiwimbi. It is important to find a balance between feeding into what the donors want out of their donor experience and what is actually helpful for the organization. This is particularly true with events. Creating events that are catered to donors but still engage with the culture and mission of an organization is a (relatively) simple and effective way to keep people engaged while giving them an activity to do. Kiwimbi has done more and more of this, especially as COVID-19 impacted the ability to host in person events. Virtual events and things that can be done in our everyday lives are some of the most successful ways to engage a new audience, as Kiwimbi has seen through things like their walk-a-thon and zumbathon. Additionally, providing donors with something physical to thank them for their participation ensures that they will participate again in the future. Kiwimbi sends these small tokens of appreciation to supporters of their events and they do not go unnoticed. People love the ability to participate and the ability to receive something in thanks for their participation. Although they are small (and can be inexpensive for the sake of profiting from fundraising efforts), they are an important part of events–especially virtual events.

Another effective way to engage new donors and supporters is through direct links to the organization's mission or goals. For Kiwimbi, this means finding people of Kenyan descent and inviting them to participate in events and the like. Finding others who are passionate about international development, East Africa, child poverty, or education will supplement this. Finding like minded people who can create a genuine, strong bond to Kiwimbi's goals will without a doubt keep people engaged in what an organization is doing.

New donor engagement does not come without marketing and outreach. It is important for organizations of all kinds to be keeping up with the newest marketing and social media tactics to ensure that they are prepared to expand their reach to new generations. Continually developing new marketing and outreach strategies is important as well. If new strategies are not developed, things will become static and organizational growth will be harder to achieve. It is better to stay ahead of this curve than to find yourself playing catch up down the road. Creating outreach and marketing materials that are personal (in any capacity) are one of the best ways to encourage curiosity in an organization. One new strategy that Kiwimbi is implementing is a series of personal stories into their marketing. These stories are often success stories of local students who are at the top of their class or have achieved an academic goal as participants of Kiwimbi. Community development expert Bryant L. Myers' book states that, "The development process is a convergence of stories," (55), which perfectly encapsulates the idea of storytelling as a development strategy. This allows us to feed into what the donors want from their experience as well. If they can see the impact they are having, personally or through a story, they will be more likely to donate freely.

The most crucial thing for an organization of Kiwimbi's size and structure to do is maintain and nurture relationships, with a sustainable future in mind. Strong relationships create a domino effect where passion and awareness trickle down. At Kiwimbi, this stems from the board. Each board member extends knowledge and passion to their personal networks. This allows for a few relationships to create (or find) genuine interest. Nurturing these people will make them begin to feel an alliance with the board member, creating an avenue for them to continue support. Over time, this genuine interest in the organization itself will grow and people will want to become more involved. These relationships are especially important to nurture. Sending personal invitations to events and connecting with these people help to solidify their interest. The more these people are involved, the more likely they are to involve their own personal networks in the organization, and the cycle starts over with this new network. Those with connections to the organization's goals should be targeted in this way as well. This can allow for exponential growth, but it takes a lot of time and commitment. Nurturing these relationships can take years, and the timing needs to be right for people to open their lives for an organization; however, this can also bring on a new generation of leadership and engagement for the organization. The more committed a person is to an organization, the more they'll understand and want to be a part of bigger change. This can bring in new potential future board and staff members, along with a new donor base. While grants and corporate funding are helpful and welcome, in small nonprofits with a mission and structure like that of Kiwimbi, individual donors will make or break the success of the organization.

It is worth mentioning that creating and sustaining strong relationships with individual donors and supporters takes a lot of time and requires invested individuals. Lasting relationships are not built overnight and require attention regularly in order to grow. Similar attention is required in building partnerships with other organizations that may have similar missions or can be a good connection in some way. Although these things take a lot of time and effort, they create some of the most fruitful bonds. Providing training to board members and employees on effective strategies to fundraise and approach asking for donations will help increase the confidence of each board member, allowing them to reach their full potential as an internal supporter. These things are more than worth the effort for the return on investment.

When bringing in new supporters and potential future generations of leaders, it is important for the organization's current leaders to ensure that they begin to instill the things they have learned in others early. This includes anything they have found to be helpful or hurtful, easy or challenging. This is particularly true in terms of asking for money. Sue Annis Hammond's book on appreciative inquiry states that, "...the stress for any new employee is to figure out what the other assumptions are that affect their work," (11). This taboo has a large impact on the way organizations operate, so addressing this early on with the next generation will ensure they are comfortable with such tasks when it comes time for them to fill in larger roles.

One of Kiwimbi's greatest challenges is feeling comfortable asking people directly for money. This is a result of a lasting social taboo that exists in our society. Strengthening our comfort in talking about money will allow people to ask for monetary donations more freely, but this is not the only way to ease the process–nurturing relationships helps to ease this process as well. When relationships begin to strengthen and people feel more connected to an organization, it is much easier to approach them for a donation. With a stronger foundation of what an organization is doing, board members have more of a common ground to use in approaching people for donations. Once strong relationships are built, this can stem from something like simple conversations about the organization's upcoming events. Money comes naturally in situations like this. Telling people exactly what your organization needs can further aid this process.

How do all of these things fit together? They are more connected than they may appear. As we increase our comfort in asking for money and we increase our confidence doing outreach, we will be asking more people for more money. This will be particularly effective once you've found people with direct connections to the organization. As we ask more people for more money, we will be able to reach more of our organization's goals and expansion will come naturally. Expansion can be used as an incentive or talking point when asking people for money. Having a specific project for expansion in mind creates natural flow in conversation and ultimately getting to asking for money. The more an organization expands, the better it can achieve its mission. Ensuring that board members have the tools that they need to ask for money or create new connections at any time is crucial.

When assessing new supporters, we should encourage these people to avoid the savior mentality by informing them upfront what kinds of things are actually beneficial to an organization's success, rather than letting them do things that are fulfilling to them but not sustainable. Similarly, we should discourage them from giving into some of the common mentalities around donating in the United States, like the need to fulfill ourselves through donations and needing to have control in a situation that we do not know everything about. This will give nonprofits room to do work that is truly impactful. Once the right supporters are found, you will be able to play into their individual passions, and they won't hesitate to do whatever is necessary to support your organization in the way that best serves you.

Community Development Principles Applied

As supporters of nonprofit organizations, we need to ensure beyond doubt that we are donating responsibly and contextually. An article entitled "Helping the Burundian People Cope with the Economic Crisis" describes what can happen when aid is not used contextually. The article states that, "European and U.S. donors are regularly blamed for the country's economic and social woes, or even for starting a 'humanitarian war'," ("Helping the Burundian People Cope with the Economic Crisis," 9). This ties back into our colonial roots and the inherent power relations that exist. As a wealthy nation that is part of the 'Global North,' we think we know what is best for those who are living in underdeveloped nations. Imposing our own beliefs on others is not a sustainable solution to development. Rather, this can lead to interdependence and further the development issues at hand. An article by Lear and Sánchez discusses how we can approach development contextually, stating that, "In the first stage, partners must come together to design their shared vision collaboratively…" (241). If we do not listen to the real challenges and appropriate solutions from the context of those experiencing them, development cannot be sustainable.

Putting contextualization at the forefront of research is possible through action research. In his book, Ernest T. Stringer writes, "Action research is a systemic approach to investigation that enables people to find effective solutions to problems they confront in their everyday lives…[it] seeks to engage the complex dynamics involved in any social context," (1). The goal of action research is to make deeper changes to society and social structures rather than simply producing a report of findings from qualitative or quantitative research. Action research makes real changes, creating the perfect opportunity for researchers and supporters to involve local stakeholders in the changes being made. Many of Kiwimbi's programs were founded through action research. As the library grew in success for students in school, they found a need for those who were not in school. Action research revealed that they could meet the needs of these individuals by providing additional training in trades (tailoring, woodworking, farming) that would give these students similar opportunities to succeed. They had the resources to meet the need, which is exactly what they did.

Petra Kuenkel's book on leadership states very clearly what we need to do in order to achieve sustainable development. Kuenkel writes, "An African proverb that has been cited many times in the last few years says, 'If you want to go fast, travel alone; if you want to go far, travel together.' The route to sustainable development is long and winding. We can only travel together," (5). This stands true in most development contexts. If we are working towards sustainable development, contextualization is key. This means involving many local stakeholders and slowing down the process to ensure that things are done in a manner that is most beneficial to these stakeholders. It may be easier to make changes without consulting local stakeholders, but those changes will not always be truly helpful, nor will they withstand the test of time. Only changes made contextually with the inclusion of stakeholders will last.

Copowerment is ever present in nonprofit organizations like Kiwimbi. Copowerment is defined as, "A dynamic of mutual exchange through which both sides of a social equation are made stronger and more effective by the other," (Inslee). This plays largely into the donor-organization relationship. The creation and sustaining of relationships with donors allows copowerment to happen. When relationships form and donations are given, organizations feel empowered to keep working towards their mission and continue reaching out to new potential donors. Donors feel empowered that they were able to contribute to an organization that is making change and therefore will continue to donate to more and more organizations. This cycle continues, and it is infectious. Copowerment creates positivity and motivation for both sides, encouraging them both to do more.

Conclusion

In attempting to work with an organization like Kiwimbi to make impactful changes, we must look first at ourselves. Specifically, we must look at our relationships with the international community, our relationships with race, and our relationships with power structures. All of these come into play when discussing any kind of international development. David Mosse and David Lewis' book *The Aid Effect* states that, "We must first of all stop fooling ourselves and try to deal better with the inherent disjunctures in the webs of relationships," (199). In the context of an organization like Kiwimbi, this means that we need to consider power relations, racial hierarchies, and how these compare to our home countries before we step in to work. It is crucial to consider these things, as they have deep ties to the history of a place like Kenya, and understanding how this history impacts the local population today is the only way to approach change. Kiwimbi's main goal is to have a lasting impact on students, helping them achieve more in school and allowing them to move on to high school and higher education to create a better life for themselves. This cannot be done without addressing the impacts that colonialism has left on the country; the direct links between the English language (as opposed to the native Kiswahili) and a lack of comprehension in school are inadmissible.

Kiwimbi is in a period of transition. They are working to solve problems and adjust to the needs of the environment around them. Their mission has remained the foundation of what they do and remains contextually sound. As they work to expand they will continue to develop strategies for effective marketing and outreach and increase their comfort with directly asking people for money. They are working on expanding through their network of connections to those with interests similar to their goals. While building new relationships and finding new future leaders is important, sustaining existing relationships is crucial as well. Combining these factors will allow for natural expansion.

What can we, as donors and supporters of nonprofit organizations, do from here? Social entrepreneurs Kevin Lynch and Julius Walls Jr. state that, "...we *are* making a difference. But for the most part, when compared to the need, we are doing so in a series of relatively small, usually local, completely fragmented, and mostly inefficient enterprises scattered across the land," (18). As donors and volunteers, we need to carefully research where our time and money is going, ensuring credibility in the organization and the work we are doing to help. We need to look carefully at ourselves to make sure our intent is not to fulfill ourselves but rather to fulfill the mission of the organization. We need to continue our support of organizations we care about unconditionally. We must not limit our support to local ventures; we should instead find things that we truly care about and support those causes worldwide. There is an organization out there for everyone to relate to, we just need to find them, rather than waiting for them to find us.

Further, we must ensure that our actions and our words are aligned and remain dedicated to sustainable development, not simple fixes to the inconveniences of today. Peacemaking expert John Paul Lederach writes, "...quick solutions to deep, social-political problems usually meant lots of good words but no real change," (3). Although it is easiest to want to tackle short term problems, as this results in immediate change, we must stick to sustainable choices. If we say we want to make an impact in the future of an organization, we must ensure the work we are doing will actually do that. That means we cannot skip any steps or take any shortcuts–we can only take the longer, more sustainable route. Organizations need to do this too. Overarchingly, nonprofits are founded on learning and adapting to the needs around them. The only way to ensure success is to constantly work to be better and more sustainable as an organization and for the community and stakeholders you are serving. Fundraising is an individual process for donors and organizations, and it needs to be treated that way. Focusing on people and feeling confident in our work and our ability to fundraise will inevitably lead to success.

Appendix A

Tips and Tricks for Problem Identification

A Researcher's Guide

Table of Contents

Introduction

Many nonprofit organizations face a number of challenges which are often interrelated. Because of this nature, nonprofit leaders can struggle to identify what their main challenges really are. In order to identify and begin to solve the overarching problems an organization has, five steps are to be followed. These steps include gathering information, concluding research and organizing information, identifying overarching issues, creating a plan, and evaluating progress. Following these steps will allow for changes that are both contextual and copowering through encouraging organizational leaders and researchers to consider perspectives other than their own.

The Tips and Tricks for Problem Identification gives researchers the necessary tools to foster a culture of copowerment and contextualization within their host organization by teaching them five main steps used to overcome complex, interrelated problems. This action research guide provides great detail on performing each of the five steps, assisting in finding root problems of an organization and creating contextual and copowering solutions to solve them.

Read through each step in its entirety before attempting to implement any of it on your host organization. It is recommended to read through the entire guide first, and reread each step as you are about to enter that phase of the project or research. Read through each step again as needed during your work, especially if you find yourself stuck. This guide is not a ‘one size fits all’ solution; you will need to modify this to whatever will work best with the circumstances of your organization. There is no single right way to identify and solve a problem, as all problems are different and come with unique challenges.

Five Steps: At a Glance

This tool provides a quick look into each of the five steps outlined in this guide. It gives a bulleted summary of the main points in each step. Use this as a tool as you work through problem identification, especially if you find yourself stuck. This is not an exhaustive list, so be sure you have read through the guide first!

Step 1: Gather Information

- Conduct interviews and observations
- Make no assumptions
- Ask open ended questions
    - Ask 'why?' and have them explain their thought process
- Stay open minded (don't form any opinions - these people have valuable lived experiences)
- Let informants speak - if they get off topic, that's okay! All information is valuable
- Write down everything, positive or negative. It is all helpful
- Build trust with as many people as possible, this gets you more (and more reliable) information
- You are here to connect the dots, not to create new dots

Step 2: Conclude Research and Organize Information

- Code information
    - Group similar pieces of information together
    - Do not oversimplify - it's better to create more categories than to misinterpret data
- Begin to identify overarching problems and draw connections between them

Step 3: Identify the Overarching Issue(s)

- Identify the main problem in each group
- Think critically about whether these issues are related
    - Are some issues the result of another issue? Are they all a result of one issue?
        - This can help you narrow down to the main issue in each group/overall as well

Step 4: Create a Plan

- Work with your main informants and local leaders
- Go through multiple drafts and think of all potential repercussions the plan could have (with your informants)
- Create a realistic and practical timeline to implement this plan based on the organization's current capacity
- Ensure local leaders are equipped to execute this plan

Step 5: Evaluate Progress

- Once changes are implemented, evaluate the timeline in comparison to the execution of the project. Does anything need updating to be more accurate?
- Make any necessary changes to the plan to ensure progress is being made toward goals
- Reflect on progress regularly; be open and honest with yourself about what is working and what needs changes to achieve the best results

Five Steps

Step 1: Gather Information

Gathering information is a crucial first step when identifying a root problem in an organization. Typically, gathering information involves fieldwork-like research. This research should include interviews and observations, and can include things like focus groups, casual conversations, and supplemental text research. The majority of the information you collect will come from interviews and observations. This is when you will get to really connect with the organization and learn what they think their main issues are and what experiences they have had that have led them to believe this. Gather all the information you can, and take note of it objectively. Even things that are seemingly unimportant should be noted; these may play a crucial part in fully understanding the organization later on. Community development expert Thomas Friedman states that, "...talking to another human being is also data," (13). Collecting data in this way will be the driving force of your research.

It is important to ensure that your informants feel heard when they are discussing their experience. This will help build trust, and the more trust you have, the more information you will receive. Getting raw, honest information is essential. As trust builds, informants will likely begin to feel less like they need to tell you what the main problem is, allowing you to identify it for yourself. Instead, they will give you information and opinions on everything they have experienced with the organization, whether it is positive or negative. This is the goal when gathering information; build trust with the organization and your informants, let them tell you their unfiltered experiences, and take detailed, objective notes on what they have to say. DO NOT try to sway them in the direction of what you think the main problem is! You are not a member of the organization, and your job is to look at it as an outsider to connect the dots for them. *You are not here to make new dots*.

You may run into organizational leaders who feel that they know exactly what their issue is. They may be right, but **do not** assume this from the start! Assumptions will derail your research, especially if they are not correct. This is something I encountered while interviewing a leader at Kiwimbi. I asked her if there were any major development challenges that she felt the organization faced over the years, and she responded, "I think it's just the overall challenge, and I think I know the solution…" (Rathgeber), and proceeded to detail a problem and a solution she would like to see. While it is important to hear what she has to say, I continued my research as planned because that is the only way for me, as an outsider, to decipher what the root problem and solution may be.

When completing this step, it is important to think carefully about who your informants are. Diversifying your pool of main informants will likely lead to the best results (and the most useful, overarching information). Having leaders, people who have been with the organization for a long time, people who are newer to the organization, and people at different levels within the organization is important. Attempting to speak with everyone at the organization at least once is ideal, especially in smaller organizations; however, this may not be feasible in larger organizations. In that case, identifying a few informants from all related fields and departments should give you the diversity you are seeking. Targeting leaders in these departments who are well respected and have good relationships with their employees is a great way to start. The number of main informations you have will vary, likely by the size of the organization. There is no requirement for the number you need to have, but it is ideal to have more than one main informant to prevent bias.

Roni Reiter-Palmon and Erika J. Robinson's article "Problem Identification and Construction: What Do We Know, What Is the Future?" highlights many important aspects of problem solving, and encourages creativity in problem solving. This is something to keep in mind when interviewing informants about what they see as the main issues here. It will also be important when you are sifting through data and trying to pinpoint the root problem. The article states that, "Research on problem identification and construction suggests that inducing active engagement in the process results in increased creativity compared with those participants who were not instructed to do so...Specifically, participants in the active engagement manipulation were asked to restate the problem in multiple ways prior to solving it," (44). Restating a problem, without misconstruing the information you have, can allow you to see a problem from a different angle or perspective. This gives you even more information and can lead to a relevant and thoughtful solution. Consider asking your informants to explain themselves in different words, even if you think you understood what they were saying. Having them rethink and clarify their answers will keep them thinking about the problem and open up a door of new potential solutions.

Another tool that can help during research is having a set list of questions that you ask each informant. Asking multiple people the same questions can be illuminating as to whether or not these informants are on the same page, which is especially important when thinking about solving a problem. In three interviews I performed using the same questions, answers to two of the most important questions were all coded in the same category. The first question asked about the organization's biggest challenges, and all three answers had to do with funding and network expansion. When I asked where they think their organization will be in five years, each answer involved expansion of the organization and the creation of multiple locations (Greco; Ouko;

Sengupta). These answers showed me that the informants, all of whom come from different backgrounds and have been with the organization for different lengths of time, are on the same page with what their goals and challenges are. This is a great piece of information to have from the start; if these answers had been different, a lot more work would need to be done to understand these differences and potentially identify more than one root problem.

Further, asking informants to explain their thought process can help you collect information. Social entrepreneurs David and Tom Kelley write, “A series of ‘why?’ questions can brush past surface details and get to the heart of the matter,” (75). This is a strategy that can be used particularly with informants who are not getting directly to the point or have not thought critically about an organization’s issues, asking them to think about and reflect on what they are saying. The more they think about it, the more they will be able to explain their thought process to you, and the sooner they will get to the crux of the issue. However, be sure you have built trust before you prod your informants too much!

This step should take some time. Building trust is not easy to do, especially if you have no prior connections to the organization. The more time you have to do this, and the more time you leave for learning after, the better. This step should take no less than three to four weeks, but will be most successful if it continues for a number of months. Seeing an organization go through an entire year’s worth of projects is very telling.

Step 2: Conclude Research and Organize Information

Upon completion of your research, you will need to organize all of the information you have collected. This means that you will need to look at each piece individually and begin to identify any overarching themes amongst the information. These will be the categories you will use to sort all of the information. These can change (or you can add more) as you go through the data if you are finding that your information changes as you sift through it. The goal here is to identify any overarching themes and use these as your groups for sorting information. However, it is crucial that you do not misconstrue any data while doing this. Misconstruing data will result in problem identification and resolution that is not contextual to the organization. Do not stretch any data to make it fit into a certain category or to fit your assumptions. It is better to have more, smaller categories than a few larger categories if that is what the data requires. Feel free to add new categories as you need. Do not neglect information for the sake of simplifying; some problems will be more complex than others, and they should be treated that way. There may be more than one root problem that needs to be addressed. Keep this in mind while sorting information. It is best to look at everything an informant says as an individual piece of information so that you are not summarizing their experience into one issue, if in fact there are multiple issues at hand.

While sorting your information, everything from every informant should be sorted with the same weight. In other words, things said by leaders should not hold more value than things said by their employees. Leaders may come to you with a problem in mind that they want solved, but this does not mean it is the root problem that needs solving. Often, it is those who are doing more hands-on work that realize what the root issues are. Higher up executives may not know this because they do not experience these things firsthand. It is important to listen to what these leaders have to say, but do not assume that your work here is done just because they tell you about a problem they want solved. Further, it is important that you place your own assumptions aside when sorting and gathering data. You may assume that you’ve figured out the problem just a few days into the research, but there is always more than meets the eye. This is why it is important to allow an extended period of time for research. Do not be blinded by your own thoughts, remain open to what you are hearing and let that drive your research. If you are too caught up in your own assumptions, you may miss the real issue altogether.

Step 3: Identify the Overarching Issue(s)

Once you have sorted through all of your data, the overarching issues will become prevalent. Any smaller issues will likely be the result of one (or a few) root problems, which will be the problem you are looking to identify. Once you have solidified these root problems and have understood how you got to this point, take this information to your main informants. Present it to them and explain how you came to that conclusion. There may be information here that they are not aware of, especially if your main informants are organizational leaders and the root problems were identified largely from information received from their employees. Explaining your approach and thought process here is critical. Allow the informants time to process what you have presented and give any feedback or ask any questions they may have. If they disagree, talk about why they disagree. It’s possible that you missed something, or your informant may need more information about certain aspects of your findings. Take the time to go through this with them. This is crucial to keep the trust that you spent so long building at the beginning stages of your work. Kelley and Kelley state that, “People at every level need to understand how to influence culture and cultivate change,” (182). This is very important in this stage, as identifying the issues with all levels of informants allows them to understand how they play a role in changing these overarching issues moving forward.

Step 4: Create a Plan

With the help of your main informants and the leaders of your organization (whether they were main informants or not), begin to create a detailed plan outlining potential solutions to the identified problems. This will be a long process, with lots of back and forth. You will likely need to create multiple draft ideas, present them to the stakeholders (those who gave you information during your research stage) to see if they could be applied with successful results. These stakeholders will be the key in this stage. They will have important feedback that should be considered when creating new drafts.

When detailing these plans, keep in mind your position as an outsider. The leaders of the organization should also be leaders of this plan, as they know the organization as it is and will know what is feasible for them moving forward. However, as an outsider, you can add a different perspective and ideas that may not have been presented before. Don't be afraid to add this insight! It might just be the trick that the organization needs to move forward. Contextualization and copowerment are important here as well. The organization will need relevant information and they should feel empowered to make these changes. Successfully empowering them will encourage you to keep doing good work.

If you are unsure of how to best suggest change for an organization, it may be helpful to understand the theory behind how the organization operates. Joanne Carman's article "Understanding Evaluation in Nonprofit Organizations" does just this. The main focus of this article is evaluating an organization to ensure that its profits are being put to best use; while this is not always directly related to problem solving, it is still a form of problem solving. This article lists many different theories of nonprofit operation, generally stating what relationships and funding look like in each theory. Understanding these relationships within the organization you are working with can help you provide a contextual and individualized solution to their problem.

A common issue among nonprofits that you may run into is lack of resources and staffing. You may agree upon changes that need to be made with your organization's leaders, but they may not have the capacity to implement these changes. This is something I realized while conducting interviews. One of my organization's board members said, "...we're just not very efficient in getting things done" (Van Abs). Don't let this discourage you! Instead, help your organization leaders create a plan to implement these changes over time. This does not need to happen overnight. They can slowly change their habits and still achieve the same result, it will just take a while longer. This is part of building trust–recognizing when an organization is busy and working with that, rather than forcing your ideal timeline upon them.

Step 5: Evaluate Progress

Once changes have been approved by all parties, they can be implemented. After implementation, they will need to be continually evaluated to ensure they are progressing in the right direction. This should be done over an extended period of time to ensure that both short term and long term impacts are noted. If at any time progress is not being made, alter the plan. This is true for changes that did have a positive impact and came to a plateau as well. If things are not expected to continue creating positive change, a new approach may be needed. The point of problem solving is not to be right on the first try every single time. The point is to solve root problems in an ever changing atmosphere and to give the organization the tools needed to continually navigate the field, alleviating the possibility that any root problem will be ignored long term.

Reflection is an important part of evaluating progress. In his book, Thomas Friedman writes, "...'but knowledge is only good if you can reflect on it'," (6). This is true for problem identification and implementation as well. Once a solution has been implemented, it needs to be carefully tracked and evaluated. Tracking should happen at regular intervals (if not constantly, depending on the project) and the results should be evaluated regularly. If the implemented change is intended to be a long term change (1+ years), then evaluations should happen at least every 3 months during the first year. If the change is shorter term (6 months - 1 year), an evaluation should take place every 4 weeks or so. There is no set standard of evaluation time frames here, you will have to decide what works with your organization based on the project and the timeline that goes with it. This should be decided before any changes are implemented, but can be adjusted as time goes on. If you find yourself needing to look at evaluations more frequently once changes have been made, shorten the amount of time between these reviews. If you have let the project play out for a while and are not seeing the progress you hoped for, you may need to go back to step 4 and create a new plan.

Conclusion

The beauty of this tool is that it can be used for years to come as organizations adapt and change to the world around them. People are constantly changing and our needs as a society change as well, which means that many nonprofit organizations need to adapt to keep up. Once an organization recognizes this, and they have gone through the process with an outside player (the researcher), they will feel much more confident in using this tool to keep up with the world around them moving forward. It is not a perfect match for every organization and every problem that exists, but rather functions as a starting point to get you thinking about your organization's problem and how they can adapt to it. Once organizations, stakeholders, and researchers begin to think constantly and critically about their organization and its work, there is no limit to what they can achieve.

Progress Evaluation Resource

This tool provides a visual glance at a sample progress evaluation resource. This tool is meant to give a starting point for creating an evaluation plan for your organization's project or any changes you plan to implement. These steps are samples; they are not meant to be followed strictly. Rather, they should act as a starting point for you to create a cohesive evaluation plan for your project. This list is not exhaustive; you will need to ensure that your plan works for what you are working towards.

Step 1: Evaluate

- Are we on track with our original goals?
- Is there anything that needs to be delayed or reconsidered on our timeline?

Step 2: Make Changes

- Make any necessary changes that arose during the first evaluation
- Alter the timeline as necessary
- Be sure to remain realistic in your timeline, even if it means extending the entire project
  - It is better to take time and do things well the first time than to suffer through and have more/larger obstacles later

Step 3: Evaluate Again

- Are we still on track with our goals?
- Is there anything new that needs to be delayed or reconsidered?
- Have the things that we previously delayed or reconsidered been resolved?
  - Are these things on track with their new timeline?

Step 4: Make Changes Again

- Make any necessary changes that arose during the second evaluation
- Alter the timeline as necessary
- Be sure to remain realistic in your timeline, even if it means extending the entire project
  - It is still better to take time and do things well in the first stages of the project rather than brushing past problems and addressing them later

These steps should be repeated regularly throughout the beginning stages of a project. You will have to set this schedule with your team and what works best for your goals. Ideally, if you are working on implementing a permanent project, an evaluation will be done every 3-4 months for the first 2-3 years. The frequency can change throughout the project based on the success. Again, this list is not exhaustive, but meant to give you a starting point to work from while creating your own evaluation plan.

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