vvob education for development Zimbabwe

A VVOB Zimbabwe Quality Education and Vulnerability Programme Learning History on

Integrating Outcome Mapping into our Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation System

2010

PSO capacity building in developing countries

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A CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENTAL PRACTICE CDRA

Compiled by Sandra Hill of CDRA

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"I consider writing as a method of inquiry, a way of finding out about yourself and your topic. Although we usually think about writing as a mode of 'telling' about the social world, writing is not just a mopping up activity…..Writing is also a way of 'knowing' – a method of discovery and analysis. By writing in different ways, we discover new aspects of our topic and our relationship to it. Form and content are inseparable." RICHARDSON CITED IN BOLTON[1]

[1] Gillie Bolton (2001) Reflective Practice: writing and professional development. PCP: London

INTRODUCTION

The stories and reflections contained in this Learning History were collected during an inquiry into the integration of Outcome Mapping into the VVOB Zimbabwe's Quality Education and Vulnerability Programme's Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation System. The inquiry forms part of a much bigger research initiative into quality planning, monitoring and evaluation methodologies, launched by the Development Policy Review Network and PSO in April 2010.

To feed into the research processes it has been agreed to develop four learning histories. Two around the integration of Outcome Mapping in organisation's PM&E systems, one around the use of Logical Framework approaches and one around the use of change stories to follow complex processes of social change.

VVOB is one of the organisations that agreed to develop a learning history around their learning processes and their experiences with Outcome Mapping. [TERMS OF REFERENCE]

But this mini-anthology does more than describe the programme's PM&E system. Instead it offers the reader a generous glimpse into the young life of a pioneer programme, its people, its purpose, its growth process, its field and organisational practice and its principles. Outcome Mapping [OM] does not hog the foreground; it does not dominate the stories which make up this learning history. Just as OM itself is based on an understanding of the complexity of the development process and the impossibility of predicting impact, so it is impossible to isolate the impact of OM on the programme. Rather than simply 'answering the questions', the writers share a little bit of who they are, they share the excitement and challenges of the work they do and take you on some of their learning journeys with them. The answers are made obvious.

The anthology was written in August 2010, during a four-day 'writeshop' – a writing workshop where writing is the key tool of inquiry and reflection. Through writing, our return to an experience is much more vivid as we give detail

Documenting the learning history provides an individual and collective perception of events. People can learn from this individually, as can the team and the whole organisation.

In this way individual learning experiences can be anchored in the organisation as a whole.

[TERMS OF REFERENCE]

The power of learning histories is that they give a realistic picture of an organisational learning and development process; including different perspectives from head office, to field office and partners, from manager to program officer.

[TERMS OF REFERENCE]

to what we remember. By describing the characters involved, the setting, the process *and* the feelings – we bring it alive again. Stories are one way of learning, of making sense of our lives and of our world. When we stop to make sense of a particular experience, writing stories helps to unpack, explore, let go and let come. By this I mean allowing ourselves to be surprised by what we write. Writing in this way can help us by-pass the clever, safe or expected answers – the answers we think others want to hear. It helps us to go behind the 'correct' or 'public' version to find our own voice and to re-look at our own stories, outside of our comfort zone and from different perspectives. Steve Denning, cited in Ramaswamy, Storer & Van Zeyl (2005)[2] points out that not all stories are epics, or grand narratives. This idea is frankly inhibiting and encourages storytelling as competition or performance. While some may be grand, stories are also accounts of the simple things in life and may comprise a single anecdote that holds significance for the writer or teller. Such stories contain the seeds for real learning.

According to the Terms of Reference VVOB Zimbabwe was to embark on an inquiry in order to document the programme's learning journey and experiences of integrating Outcome Mapping. Three key areas of focus were specified:

The learning history will at least address the following three main topics:

- *Outcome mapping and organisational learning*
- *Outcome mapping and partner relations*
- *Outcome mapping and vision on PM&E*

The programme's own particular interest was in looking at how they learn, and they were quite candid about Outcome Mapping being only one influence.

"Outcome Mapping is only one factor influencing who we are and how we do things. It's just one of the variables. "
Hanne Huysmans – Programme Manager

Indeed, as the stories show, while OM provides a framework and practical tools for their formal learning processes, informal learning is the flame which keeps their practice on fire and alive to change. Did Outcome Mapping inspire this culture of learning? Or does it serve a pre-existing commit-

[2] Rohit Ramaswamy, Graeme Storer & Romeck Van Zeyl (2005) *Designing sustainable communities of practice at CARE.* KM4D Journal 1(1). Available on www.km4dev.org/journal

"Outcome Mapping provides not only a guide to essential evaluation map-making, but also a guide to learning and increased effectiveness, and affirmation that being attentive along the journey is as important as, and critical to, arriving at a destination."

Michael Quinn Patton

www.idrc.ca

"Outcome Mapping directs us to pay attention to behaviours and relationships relevant to the changes in conditions we seek to bring about. It gives us a way to make tangible and track the incremental changes in the way people and organisations act relative to the overall direction we want to go in."

Mylks, Smutylo & Reeler

www.barefootguide.org

Writeshops

The overall purpose of a writeshop is to produce the semi-final form of a publication involving a range of participants in a condensed period of time. On a more strategic level, writeshops can serve as an opportunity for action-learning, both on writing skills as well as on the topic itself.

The writeshop process

The writeshop process is highly flexible and should be tailored to suit each particular group and their purpose. In general it includes cyclical phases of writing, presenting for peer review, and reworking. In some instances, members of the group write the first draft of their manuscript before the writeshop, which would then begin with a peer review process. During the VVOB Zimbabwe writeshop however, the learning history was written from blank page to semi final draft and the process included an introduction to basic writing techniques.

ment to learning? These are difficult questions to answer: this programme has used Outcome Mapping since inception, as two VVOB project approaches sought to merge into one programme approach. There has been no Quality Education and Vulnerability Programme without OM. As a methodology it mirrors the programme's view of development, its understanding of how change happens, its recognition of partners and their role – as well as an understanding of their own 'place' as part of the developmental process – and subsequently their role as activists, educators and partners. My overriding sense is that OM serves the programme so well because they are ideologically suited. It may not be the only influence, but it is certainly no appendage either.

The connecting threads, woven throughout all the stories, give an indication of the other powerful factors which influence the programme and make it what it is.

These are:

- The programme is like an onion: it works at many layers. Organisational and field practices are consistent with each other. The programme leads by example and is led by the example of others.
- Ownership is key and evident through all the layers.
- Working on the programme, whether as volunteer or staff member, is not just a job – it's a passion and a vocation.
- Relationships are at the heart of the programme and its practice: relationships within the staff team, relationships between boundary partners, relationships between the staff team and boundary partners, relationships with the donor…
- Seeing possibility and believing in the potential of people is the pulse of a person-centred approach to development – and to the organisation's deliberate investment in learning, local staff, and volunteers.
- Experiential learning and the capacity for introspection characterise the programme's approach to learning.
- The Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation framework is a blend of OM, the Logical Framework Approach and Most Significant Change Story Methodology. This framework lends itself to a flexibility essential to the responsiveness of the organisation.

"We make it work for us!"
Robert Chipimbi – M&E Advisor

"*Outcome Mapping* recognizes that development is essentially about people relating to each other and their environment. The originality of this approach lies in its shift away from assessing the products of a program to focus on changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, and activities in the people, groups, and organizations it works with directly. In doing so, *Outcome Mapping* debunks many of the myths about measuring impact. It will help a program be specific about the actors it targets, the changes it expects to see, and the strategies it employs and, as a result, be more effective in terms of the results it achieves."

www.idrc.ca

Key writeshop principles

- **Writing as a creative process:** Writing as a creative process helps us out of comfortable and stuck ways of seeing and thinking.
- **Writing as a tool of discovery:** Writing is not only a tool for presenting 'information' to others, but also a tool of inquiry and learning.
- **Writing as validation of experiential knowledge:** Practitioners find their own authority on the topic they are writing about.
- **Peer review & learning:** Writeshops are a collaborative endeavour. Writing is shared with and reviewed by other practitioners.
- **Writing to affect others:** Readers are more likely to also learn from the document if it touches their intellect, heart, imagination and will.
- **Authorship:** The document belongs to the writers. While writing may be edited, it should always retain the writer's voice and intention.

- The programme is still in the pioneering phase of its life-cycle. Stories are rich in imagery of pregnancy, birth, and of a-big-happy-family. The strong influence of founder-leaders is prominent.
- And of course, Zimbabwe, the programme's home-country, creates its own contextual soup.

How to read this learning history

The learning history is divided roughly into four sections: In the next section we have tried to give you a picture of the organisation, who it is, where it comes from and what it believes in. In the second section we focus on organisational learning. While the primary link with OM may live in the more formal learning processes, the stories here emphasise informal learning moments and how the two intersect. In the third section we focus on partners and partner relationships, again looking at the influence of OM, and describing how it has both helped and complicated things. In the fourth and final section we look at OM through the lens of the PM&E system.

Contributors: In order of appearance

Michel Triest • Patrick Smet • Robert Chipimbi • Ambrose Chipenzi • Hanne Huysmans • Colbert Mpofu • Beata Chikwanda • Mqaphelisi Sibanda • Placidia Kasere • Margaret Mutsambwa

The writeshop was facilitated, and the learning history edited and compiled by Sandra Hill of the Community Development Resource Association (South Africa).

Terms in the text:

BOUNDARY PARTNER:
Boundary partners are groups and organisations the programme interacts with directly and has opportunity to influence.

SCENARIO:
A detailed workshop script.

SUPPORT TEAM:
VVOB Programme employees who are there to support college activities.

COORDINATOR:
A health and life skills lecturer who is responsible for HIV & AIDS related activities at the College.

CORE TEAM CHAIRPERSON:
A lecturer who coordinates the institutional programme activities. He/She is an entry point for the VVOB Support team.

MANAGEMENT TEAM:
A Programme Committee composed of all Core Team Chairpersons. It meets at least three times a year.

Writeshop contributors and where they fit into VVOB Zimbabwe s organisational structure

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WHO WE ARE – STORIES THAT CAPTURE SOME OF OUR HISTORY AND ESSENCE OF OUR PROGRAMME

This section of our learning history tells the story of how the programme was born. Being born can't be easy, I imagine. And giving birth can be pretty painful. The same can be said about the birth of our programme. What stays with you are not those painful, difficult moments, but rather the intriguing beauty of the baby that was born!

This section will give you an inkling of the values, approaches, intuitions and principles that guide the programme. You'll get a rough sketch of what happens in the programme; the activities. And of who does what: the boundary partners implement; the VVOB team supports. You'll get a first sense of how we learn and grow as a programme, as boundary partners, as the VVOB support team, and as individuals.

From paper to people: a brief account of our history

by Michel Triest, Programme Advisor

The programme I've lost my heart to is situated in Zimbabwe. It was born out of two VVOB projects based here, and out of new thinking from Brussels where our head-office is situated: As from 2008, projects were not wanted anymore, only one holistic programme. OK, maybe it is I who put in the word 'holistic'.

Jan, who was project leader of St²eep (2003-2007) – an environmental education project in three secondary education colleges, was assigned to lay the basis for this new programme in the middle of 2007. The programme was to focus on teacher education and the beneficiaries would be orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC) in Zimbabwe's school system.

Jan organised three workshops with partners, a bit top down with rather homogenous groups, I thought. The first was with the Principals of all 14 teacher training colleges, and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (MHTE). The next two were with college Vice-Principals. Jan used Outcome Mapping, a newer monitoring approach, already tested in St²eep. The advantage of Outcome Mapping is that monitoring is taken into account right from the very beginning. You also know quite precisely who is who: donor, partner, beneficiary etc.

The other project involved in this new programme was ZimPATH (2004-2009) which was about HIV prevention and the project I was in. ZimPATH brought into the mix contacts with all 14 colleges, a focus on the students, and a team of employees trained (by the project) as facilitators. ZimPATH would work as sperm on the egg to generate a beautiful baby, but not just yet.

St²eep and ZimPATH were family, but didn't understand each other. One was saying "but we are thinking the same" while we obviously weren't, the other was withdrawn and kind of a 'rain or thunder cloud'. We went round and round, biting our own tails, and politely sometimes also each others'.

The experienced programme manager Hanne was new in Zimbabwe and new to us. She depended heavily on Jan at first. But the day came when Hanne stopped the endless discussions about who would do what exactly, even though something needed to be on paper. Over a few informal cups of coffee, the insights of St²eep and ZimPATH came closer together. The danger of working mostly with texts and documents was diverted by a well-prepared and heart-warming Orphans and Vulnerable Children One (OVC1) workshop. This brought in 'reality' and content.

At the very start of the programme, Hanne asked that all Belgian and Zimbabwean team members move to the same office complex. It

was a major breakthrough. More frequent meetings and informal contact created opportunity for further listening and encouraged better understanding. The OVC1 led to an OVC2 workshop. Our focus shifted from 'quality education' with OVC in mind to 'vulnerability'.

These two explorative workshops were a major step in our journey. We worked backwards up the chain from vulnerable children to the relationship between them and their teachers, visualising a school-friendly environment. We thought further back to the role model a lecturer is or ought to be to the student-teacher (and even further back to administration's relation-ship to lecturers) and imagined the creation of a college friendly environment. Programme content was developed further with our partners and some local resource persons. It could then be gently injected into the documents which are, of course, also important in a programme. Great that our programme framework, designed largely according to Out-come Mapping, allowed for such flexibility!

During this time the Zimbabwean team members became more prominent. As their strengths, leadership and contributions were increasingly recognised they developed more and more a 'face' of their own. Not only the team coordinator Elizabeth, but now also Robert, Mqapsi and, increasingly Ambrose, were seen as strong and indispensable. Not just implementers, but thinkers, visionaries, people who reinvent ideas for the purpose of the programme and put them into practice too. Strong team members who can mentor newer ones. Zimbabweans, who through their contacts with the colleges make the programme truly Zimbabwean. Our baby is black!

Working together became the combustion engine of the programme, and understanding is far more automatic now. Everyone benefited and grew from our strong team work orientation. And that reinforced the programme with the partners. The team expanded as the multitude and complexity of the tasks increased, and roles changed. We are now 13 Zimbabweans and two Belgians, and also have students on attachment, both from Belgium and Zimbabwe, in the team. Organisationally we have many partners in the colleges. We enjoy flexibility and continuous support from Brussels. That has also made the programme grow. We work together with other organisations. We 'use' local resource persons. We relate with respect to the Ministry, and enjoy their continuous support. Does win-win-win-win exist as a word? Here it is daily practice.

Quality Education and Vulnerability

The programme supports Teacher Education in Zimbabwe, in view of increasing the well-being and development of vulnerable children in the classroom. Vulnerability has many faces in Zimbabwe. Children are made vulnerable by the HIV /AIDS pandemic, which affects their family life in many ways. Poverty makes it difficult for people to make ends meet, and this affects the children too. Going to school, and actually learning something, is not obvious under such circumstances. Children with learning difficulties or a disability often do not have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Early childhood development is generally not considered important. Violence against girls as well as boys in school is becoming a major concern. Environmental issues, such as climate change, waste management, water and sanitation (or the lack of it) are putting a mortgage on the future of Zimbabwe's children. Teachers, lecturers and student teachers are not spared. They also face challenges in their day-to-day lives. How do you deal with your own vulnerability as a teacher? And how do you deal with the many faces of vulnerability that you are confronted with in your classroom?

"If you want the teacher to be caring towards the children and to create a caring environment, the student teacher needs to become caring. Therefore the lecturer needs to be a role model of care towards the student teacher and try to create a caring environment at the college. And Administration towards the lecturers"

Mrs Chikwanda, College Lecturer

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Here is space……..use it please

By Patrick Smet, local consultant

I had been invited to join them as an advisor and our first meeting was almost finished. It had lasted two hours and the six team members looked relieved that it had almost finished. Or maybe not? How long could we go on talking about a scenario (a detailed script) for a workshop? Before dispersing to attend to other duties, one young team member asked if I wanted to join them again at the next meeting, to assist with the process. The others hummed and nodded with approval. With some reluctance, based on learned shyness and not a measure of any unwillingness, I accepted.

"Why don't you join us again at the next meeting?" More than a simple question. Just like a tree needs room to grow tall, so this young man was given room to take initiative. There were no organisational, personal or cultural barriers that prevented him from expressing his request. No vertical structure on thinking or communication. No lack of self confidence and no fear of what other team members might say. No cultural inhibitions in him that made it impossible for a young man to ask something from an older one. Looking back at this brief exchange, I realise Mike was free to ask me that question because there was nothing in him or in the organisation that held him back.

What we do

The Quality Education and Vulnerability Programme works in 6 key result areas through which it supports 14 teacher education colleges to produce supportive teachers with competencies and attitudes to address the needs of all children in order to ensure their development, safety and well-being.

Activities

With a focus on vulnerable children, the programme will direct its activities towards supporting:

1. **co-curricular and community outreach activities** that seek to benefit vulnerable children;
2. **staff development** and curriculum development with a focus on vulnerability issues and relevant teaching methodologies through pre-service and in-service training of lecturers and student teachers;
3. **early childhood development** and training programmes for early childhood para-professionals who do not have academic qualifications but are directly involved in early childhood education programmes;
4. **in-service training of practicing teachers and mentors** of students on teaching practice;
5. **the development of enabling policy frameworks** at the level of teachers colleges (both primary and secondary) and Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education (MoHTE);
6. **developing organisational practices that focus on learning and accountability** by the programme and its local partners.

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Offering and taking opportunity: a story of two colleagues

By Robert Chipimbi, Monitoring & Evaluation Advisor

The delicious and appetizing smell of pizza in an Egyptian restaurant created an amazingly strange work environment for us as we sat to make our final preparations for the following morning's task. We had just ordered our pizza for the evening meal and as we waited, salivating, Jan pulled out his laptop, put it on the table and switched it on.

"Here we go, Mr. Chips," I heard him say, a funny smile on his face. "So, how do we do it tomorrow?" At first, I felt as if he had hit me with a surprise, but a lot more was still coming. He went on to say: "We have done this together several times now, isn't it time you take the lead? Will you present our paper tomorrow?"

I wasn't sure if I had heard him correctly, but I remember just jumping to the offer with a "Yes, I will do it!"

I had worked with Jan on a number of occasions, twice supporting other VVOB programmes in building their M&E system using Outcome Mapping and we had just been to Rome together to provide support on M&E to the International Development Law Organisation [IDLO]. Most of the time, Jan had taken the lead and from these experiences together, I had grown to respect his knowledge, wit and strong facilitation. He was really good! That made me even more nervous: was I ready to take over from him? What if I messed up, how would he react? And what if I did it well – what would his reaction be then? Somewhere, some little voice kept whispering to me saying: "Come on Robert, you can do it!"

We were at a Conference in Cairo on Impact Evaluation; the paper on our experiences with Outcome Mapping in our programme in Zimbabwe had been accepted for presentation. It was a big, high profile conference with over 500 participants all coming with their rich experiences with Monitoring and Evaluation. Some from their undoubtedly strong academic background, while others from their experiences as practitioners. And there we were – to share a story that needed to make sense and keep people in their seats for at least a quarter of an hour!

So we sat in the restaurant, Jan & I, figuring out how the whole thing would go. No matter how used to and experienced you are with a subject, every situation is different and you can never relax – you never stop preparing until you have gone through it! The challenge was for me to put my ideas on the table as I was the one who would stand in front of the group. We tried to picture how it would go: how many people in the room? What would the room size be like? What background material would we give? What if people would get bored and begin to leave the room? How would we do the presentation? Where would Jan be sitting? How much content would we give? What would be interesting for people to hear...?

It was 9.15am at the Seramis Hotel in Cairo, a fresh, cool breeze from the Nile whispering gently through open windows urging people to take their seats. The small room was packed to the brim with close to 50 participants. And there I stood, in front of them all to tell our story – the story I was so passionate about, the story of our experiences in Zimbabwe! Jan sat hidden in the crowd and somewhere in the course of the 20 minute presentation, I caught a glimpse of him wearing a wide smile on his face, his thumbs up, urging me to go on. I ran through the presentation, barely looking at the screen, as most of the information was well registered in my head.

At the end, a swarm of hands shot up – question time. I managed to answer the questions! The smile on Jan's face broadened and he came to give me a congratulatory hug. I knew we had done it! He was clearly proud and he actually said it in words. We could have continued talking about it, but there were people around us asking for our attention: some wanting to hear more, while others wanted our contact details. "Here we go, Mr. Chips," I heard him say, a funny smile on his face.

Believing in our own

By Ambrose Chipenzi, Support Team Member

This week Mugiee (M) – (a student on attachment) speaks to Ambrose Chipenzi (A) – a member of the VVOB Support Team for the Quality Education & Vulnerability Programme.

M: What's your passion in life?

A: Well I always wanted to help others in whateva way I can so really for me its a joy and relief if I manage to make other people smile, but greatest of all is to be part of people's lives and be there in a positive way dat will always inspire them.

M: You have been with the team for many years now…

A: Yes, I'm like the old ornaments adorning a house, if I can put it that way. I joined back in 2004. I was straight out of college and ready to take on the world.

M: But you have stuck it out, what made you stay?

A: I chose this career path coz I wanted to, in life you have to be careful of what you wish for coz it might just come true, and so it did for me I always wished to be a doctor but guess wasn't too intelligent for dat so I always wished to work with people so now the opportunity came but this time as a 'social doctor' so hey I grabbed the chance. But also dat I am always inspired by the fact dat someone (Michel Triest, my boss but he doesn't like to be called dat) saw me, liked me and believed in me (this is one of the secret ingredients to me staying in the job).

M: Any personal successes you would want to share with us about the team?

I feel just being in this team, full of caring dedicated energetic young, old guys is just but a success for me. I am one of the guys who will mentor people when they still new so it's always a joy to see people grow in your hands for example Charlotte joined whilst a cry baby but now going on strong.

M: What has been your greatest challenge?

A: The passing of Elizabeth Chikwanha our support team coordinator was a nose dive for us as she was our mother figure a real pillar of inspiration.

M: Am sorry about dat

A: There was a moment when the size of the team was questioned and there were possibilities to reduce it for the reasons that maybe we don't need so many people whereas we were thinking actually don't we need more people meant we had to prove why we still needed to be intact plus more people.

M: Ahh...We have heard so much about the team; care to fill us in?

A: What have you heard now?? They say don't believe everything you hear but I must say on the Support Team BELIEVE IT!! It's no movie and you can try it at home too!! It's safe! The team is thriving on using their real life experiences and translate this to seeking solutions for some of the challenges faced in education sector together with partners in the colleges, which I must say is always exciting. In our work there is lots of room to make mistakes which we then soften up to say 'ahh…guys suddenly I have a new insight' which really makes the learning environment a pleasure to be in. We believe in giving opportunities which for us helps us build each other as one practices what they know and grows from it.

M: So if this team was a team to be bought would you buy it, if you were a rich man?

A: Mugiee, even if I was the richest man in the world I couldn't buy it I wouldn't afford it how do you buy a FAMILY? its priceless really dat is how I see us as the team really, lots has been put in it in terms of time, energy, opportunities joys and sorrows and resources but we can't translate back to cash now, sorry.

M: And would you bring any changes to it?

A: Well its always changing out of its self really, I think they call it organic growth meant to adapt as per environment, so like for example when we realized that the colleges needed to own more the processes in the colleges we changed our roles from being programme workshop facilitators to being process facilitators and now safe guarding the content and process of a workshop which lead to a natural take ova by the colleges of their activities too.

M: So how do you keep strong as a team now?

A: Every team has to practice and for us the office is our home ground this for us is where ideas are born and supported and our Support Strategies towards the colleges are questioned, and lots of LEARNING occurs here. We have endless discussions on what did we do well? What we have improved? Hence these reflections towards the programme, individuals really has us pumped up as we can't wait to improve when next we get the opportunity and am glad we have the evil eyes of Robert, Mqapsi, Hanne, Michel to guide us in it.

M: So where do you see yourself, the team in a couple of years?

A: Well to be honest haven't had the dream of myself so will tell when I have it but I see the team graduating as an worthwhile investment and the fruits finally payoff. But I see us as an excellence center in Zimbabwe we have done so much already and am sure more still to follow.

M: Any wishes for the programme team?

A: Well I wish to see us growing stronger as a family and serving our partners well and tackling those issues that matter to us most but best of all to see people reach their full potential not only for the team but also for the lecturers we work with and the student teachers we are reaching out to, that they can go out there and be the best thing dat eva happened to the pupils, then we can sit back and relax.

M: Thanks for the wonderful talk, any last words?

A: Well, yes just want people to know when you can believe in someone, then you will build legacies and a better future, thanks.

From: **Robert Chipimbi [robert@vvob.co.zw]**
Sent: **Wed 2010/08/18 03:58 PM**
To: **Sandra Hill [sandra@cdra.org.za]**
Subject: **Boundary partners**

Hi Sandra
Just to clarify, our college based boundary partners are:

1. Co-curricular Student Bodies (made up of peer educator clubs and Environmental Education clubs)*
2. Co-curricular Support Structures (mainly Health & Life Skills Committees headed by a Coordinator and in some cases, these committees work together with Environmental Education committees to support student clubs – the committees are mainly made of lecturers)
3. Early Childhood Education Departments
4. Staff Development Committees
5. College Administrations (comprising members of admin and academic boards)
6. Teaching Practice Departments (TP)**
7. IT Support Structure***

N.B:
*In the first phase of the programme (2008 – 2010), the VVOB support team has been working directly with Student clubs (Co-curricular Student Bodies) supporting them in various ways to carry out activities for themselves as clubs but also for reaching out to the larger body of students. In a way, we were doing part of the work to be done by the Co-curricular Support Structure! And that direct contact with the co-curricular student bodies made them one of our boundary partners. However, in our planning for the second phase (2011 – 2013), Co-curricular Student Bodies will not be our boundary partners anymore – rather, they become boundary partners of the co-curricular support structures. The latter will remain our boundary partner and we will support them to strengthen the co-curricular student bodies.

**In the first phase, TP departments were not identified as a boundary partner. However, they became quite active and we see opportunities to continue working with them as a boundary partner in the second phase of the programme

***IT support structure has been the least active of our identified boundary partners. Because of this combined with strong questions from the donor about the link between IT and vulnerability, we have dropped them from our list of boundary partners in our planning for the second phase.

Outside the colleges, other boundary partners are:

1. Ministry-based: a) Manpower, Planning and Institutional Development (MPID) and b) Computers and Statistical Unit
2. Department of Teacher Education (mainly from the University of Zimbabwe where all the teacher education colleges are accredited. For the second phase, we are planning to work with departments of teacher education or three more universities as boundary partners)

You will notice that the bulk of the programme's work is in the colleges, which makes the college-based partners the busiest in the programme. Both the ministry-based partners and DTE are mainly for support – more at policy level.

Quite complex, isn't it? I hope all this information helps. It took a while for it to become this clear to us, and to boundary partners too, so I can understand it's tricky for you. Please do not hesitate to contact us again for further clarification on any other issue.

Friendly greetings

Robert

SECTION TWO

OUTCOME MAPPING AND ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING

Learning is essential to bringing about change; it is essential to the programme. This section harbours the stories of different players in the programme; stories which tell how each of us experiences learning. Outcome Mapping can help us to learn, yes, but there is more to it than that.

Outcome Mapping as a framework does not automatically stimulate learning and reflection. These processes have to be organised in combination with tools that OM offers, like outcome journals, reflection on organisational practices etc. What does this look like in practice? How did this develop over time? How is this experienced by different stakeholders? [TERMS OF REFERENCE]

How do we learn in the programme? Linking learning with Outcome Mapping and programme design

By Hanne Huysmans, Programme Manager

The stench of fear is oozing off the pages of the summary report by PLAN International, on their findings about abuse in the Zimbabwean schools. In dry figures, which send shivers down my spine, the report talks of the rampant corporal punishment; not constrained by any rules and for things I would not even consider offences. A child gets beaten for having no shoes, for being late, for having a dog-eared exercise book. No questions asked.

How did things get to be this way? Are teachers evil? No, of course they are not. They are doing wonderful things for our children. But they are experiencing many challenges… Many have been reduced to poverty by hyperinflation and the continued economic problems of the country. They have lost some of their standing in the community. They've been the victims of political violence. And let's not forget that many of them have been teaching without materials or text books, having to deal with ever bigger numbers of children in the classrooms, and ever growing numbers of vulnerable children. And, quite crucially, their training may not have prepared them adequately to deal with this reality.

One day, at our offices in Harare, I sat in Michel's office, together with Mqapsi, Robert and Ambrose. We were having a coordination unit meeting about something which was undoubtedly important to the daily management of the programme, but I have forgotten what, overshadowed as it was by Robert's story. Robert spoke about what had been happening to his relative who is training to be a teacher. The relative had to buy manila (stiff cardboard used for making folders, charts or posters) for an assignment from a lecturer, at four times the normal price of a sheet of manila. As students went to pay and collect the sheet, their name was ticked on a list with a mumbled: "don't worry; you will pass your assignment". More stories followed, from others around the table. Of students taught through assignments, lots of them, but no follow-up nor marking by the lecturers. Of students being forced to pay (a lecturer) to have their assignment typed. Of students who get insufficient supervision whilst on teaching practice; so they do as others do: give a child a good slap when it doesn't do what it should. Of female students receiving

proposals from lecturers that really, they can not refuse…

As we sit there, in our coordination unit, I feel it yet again. I want to see teachers who fold the children in their class into their hearts; teachers who put every child's learning at the centre of their profession. Including those children who may not have shoes, who arrive late after having cared for a sick sister; who write their homework on the floor, by the light of one precious candle; and even those children who antagonise, withdraw, challenge. Where is a teacher taught to be so caring? Certainly, the lecturers and teacher education colleges that fold their students into their hearts, and put their students at the centre of learning are going to make a huge difference. We contemplated the role of college managers in creating such a student-friendly, conducive place for learning – and concluded their role is crucial. We agreed that we should put more emphasis on processes that would help managers to reflect on and learn from this, from each other and from the real stories of the students.

Some weeks later, we added just such an opportunity to a steering committee meeting. For just one day, we brought the college vice-principals, their core team chairpersons, and some students from each college together. Together we could reflect on what we liked in school when we were kids, and what we didn't like. And on what colleges are doing to prepare the kind of teachers that we liked when we were young. Stories such as those shared earlier in the coordination unit meeting, were discussed and reflected upon. And I have heard through the grapevine that in some colleges, the vice-principals and principals are taking action, turning their colleges into places where students and their learning take centre stage. I have heard of a principal making students aware of their rights during assembly; of a challenge to the lecturers about the purpose of assignments; of a vice-principal doing all in her power to find assistance for two of her most destitute students. I, together with Zimbabwe's future teachers, may soon no longer smell that stench of fear.

A lot of the learning in the programme happens informally, or at unexpected moments. In my story, Mqapsi, Ambrose, Michel and I, get to hear about a real incident whilst we are having a coordination meeting. In other cases, this happens over a cup of tea between two team members, in the car on the way to somewhere, or over a shared lunch. Such stories also come up during more formal reflection moments: during a reflection meeting after a workshop, in a VVOB support team meeting, or in meetings related to our bi-

Linking formal and informal learning

Monitoring represents a central part of the learning system in our programme. Through monitoring at the level of the programme support activities as well as the level of changes in the direct operational partners and beneficiaries, the programme seeks to learn about the efficiency and relevance of the support that the programme gives to its partners.

Learning in the formal M&E processes is complemented with informal learning moments which involve ongoing informal meetings with the programme support teams to reflect on upcoming issues and ongoing informal conversations with college lecturers and students by support team members during college visits. Various training opportunities both for operational partners and support team members, are part of these informal learning processes.

The programme sees learning as essential in bringing about change.

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annual monitoring system (whether a reflection meeting between boundary partners at a college, or a reflection meeting of the VVOB team about our support in the programme). At such 'moments of insights', whether formal or informal, we may see such a story confirmed or reinforced by other stories. Or the opposite happens, and we begin to see the story as an isolated event. In any case, a more complete picture starts to emerge. Does this picture compel us to do something about it? In my story, it does… And what is it that VVOB can do?

In workshops with boundary partners, we often start with introspection: What would you like to see, say, if you were a student? Is this what is happening at your college? Can you recognise the real situations from the stories? Is this a problem for you? Is it something you want to do something about? And what could you do? As VVOB support team, we are there to support our boundary partners. The boundary partners are the ones that will actually make the difference. They can take action, change their practice, and make a difference in the life of the students, who in turn may make a difference in the life of a child in the classroom one day. The boundary partners will make the decision to act and how to act. And if they need further support from VVOB to make it happen, the support team is there to offer help.

In my story, the time span between that initial coordination unit meeting and the one-day interaction with college vice-principals and students is short; just three to four weeks between them. The way I see it, there are two important things that drive this 'rapid response': The framework that guides our programme allows us to be flexible and responsive. If our framework was predetermining, planning and laying down the track for us, we would not be able to work and respond as we do. But I think that what counts more than anything, is the passion of the people involved. People genuinely care and feel a deep personal connection to what is happening. We do not merely 'do a job' or have an academic interest in this field. A team member picks up a story, people listen to it, and collectively we decide to act upon it. A vice-principal hears a story he recognises, and is determined to do something about it. He shares the story with the principal, and together, they take action. It is this passion that leads to learning that is 'actioned'!

" VVOB will not do research, and share the findings with the partners to say, 'this is how it is'. But the organisation will help colleges to explore a situation and find out for themselves: is this what is happening?"

Placidia Kasere, college lecturer

I see learning as a lifelong journey, sometimes an uphill battle but always exciting. I see learning as a group, but ending up sometimes alone, all through life going on. I see help in others, but no help to do it, you are on your own, you can only rely on yourself at times. There could be down-hills, or difficulties but there is always a higher level at the unset summit. Learning is growing, growing throughout life.

By Patrick Smet

I see learning as sharing experiences when two or more people interact formally or non-formally and this leads to changed behaviour in both parties. I also see learning as acknowledging diversity and that we agree to differ when looking at the same thing.

By Beata Chikwanda

It Goes Both Ways: Four key ingredients to learning as a Support Team Member

By Colbert Mpofu, Support Team Member

I joined the Support Team in May 2010 – that gives me just over three months of working with the programme at the time of writing this reflection. My journey so far can be described as a growth process, characterized by regular learning moments. In an attempt to understand this process I looked at those things that I consider useful for my growth. This is what I found:

Observation and participation
Being a new member of the support team is a complex situation to be in. I was often overwhelmed, and often confused. The sad realization that my previous work experience was valuable but inadequate created a need and desire within me to learn exactly how things are done in the programme. My initial learning strategy was that of observation. Team Members were very busy and were not at all concerned with teaching me how to do things. Instead, their approach, best summed up by my colleague Mike Gumunyu's favourite comment, was: *"keep watching, you will soon understand how to do things."*

Support Team Members learn how to facilitate, how to plan, how to prepare and how to manage outcomes by observing other colleagues' work. In the same month of my joining the team, I was requested to support the planning, preparation and co-facilitation of a workshop, the Programme Makers' Bridge. From observing more experienced Team Members, I understood how the programme is structured and why. I became more familiar with the lingua of the organization. Words such as Core Team, Peer Educators, Boundary Partners, Co-Curricular Student Bodies flashed past me, and slowly began to make sense. Watching others became a key strategy for my growth.

Critical dialogue and friendly feedback
When Support Team Members meet to discuss strategies for pending initiatives, they question each other's intentions. They reflect on each other's work. They critique each other's work. And they praise each other. They often have divergent opinions on how to do things, and in my observation, the stronger voice holds sway. This was totally new for me! How could I critique my superior's work? How possible was it for me, a new member of the team, to reflect on and critique a more experienced member's practice?

It was not until I started to reflect with my colleagues and to question, with the intention of understanding, their practice that I started to gain insights into their work and into the programme. Attending planning meetings, reflection meetings and the weekly team learning meetings became profoundly developmental in my function as a Team Member. More so when I discovered that talking about each other's work helped me to connect with individual Team Members. As I began to reflect, question, critique my colleagues' ways of doing things, I began to appreciate how they worked. Without thinking, I was slowly getting into the same way of doing things because I understood the rationale.

A supportive other
With a less open and less critical work background, I found myself becoming overly sensitive to criticism. My colleague, Mqapsi, took it upon himself to help me overcome this challenge by working closely with me, giving as much praise as criticism about what I do and how I do it. He became a very important mirror for my learning. New Team Members need to have one colleague who can reach them at both a practice and a personal level.

Learning from Boundary Partners
In the second month of joining the Team, I had opportunity to travel with Robert, Charlotte, Margaret and Lilyjoy, to support an Early Childhood and Development (ECD) Department

initiative. While on the road to Masvingo Teachers' College, some 350 Km from Harare, our conversation turned to work. One thing was certain; we would begin by exploring this Boundary Partner's initiative, so that we could fully appreciate their context, needs and ideas and come up with the right support mechanisms for them. The lecturers involved were clear about what they wanted, they had a workshop on plan, had done a context analysis already and knew the type of intervention they needed. They wanted us to support them in their initiative.

Afterwards, when we sat to reflect on the meeting as a Team, I was struck by the realization that my colleagues were taking this experience, of helping a Boundary Partner learn and grow in capacity, as a learning moment for themselves too. It became clear to me that our learning also begins at college, when a Boundary Partner sees a gap in their practice and calls for support. Such an understanding of the learning process was unique to me. The Team calls it the 'bottom up approach'. Certainly, it is the complete reversal of the traditional view of learning that I was used to. My understanding of 'Boundary Partners' grew to encompass them as allies not only in 'doing', but in learning too.

My initial three months in the programme have been rich with the growing understanding of how others do things, with new insights into learning and team work. Unlike a formal classroom situation, there is no master or servant in this learning process. The Support Team learns together, individually and with others in the programme. The most remarkable new meaning of learning for me is, understanding another's way of doing things and supporting that way. The result is learning for both parties. It goes both ways.

I see learning as a give and take process. You already have something that will combine with what others bring. There is need to fuse what you know with what is new and this may lead to you throwing out what you had believed in strongly. Learning is complex but an environment that enables learning will make the experience a pleasure.
By Placidia Kasere

I see learning as a process that needs guidance and self organisation. We need to be conscious of it in order to make it happen. We need to create time to nurture, discover, unfold the things we would have learnt. I have seen that learning comes from different directions and in different ways, be it formally or informally, be it from a professional or from a participant. If you are a true learner you need to be a good listener, observer and a person willing to change. Feedback can only be helpful if we are true to ourselves and open to corrections. What will learning be without an outside eye?
By Mqaphelisi Sibanda

When fascination stood still

By Beata Chikwanda, Support Team Member

I remember the smell of burning incense wafting through the large, cool conference room. I remember the workshop facilitator's painstaking explanation of 'facilitating emergence' in developing communities. I remember her input on giving and receiving feedback in a non threatening way, the guidelines for observing someone facilitate that she outlined. I remember very well just how fascinating it all was…fascinating that is, until we were asked to choose a slot and demonstrate what we had learnt about facilitating emergence ourselves. I was quick to choose the first slot, right after the morning tea break. Almost as quickly, my heart began to pound and my confidence began to fade. This was experiential learning in its true form!

I was on the course as a boundary partner, a college lecturer involved in the programme as a volunteer. We wanted to improve our skills in facilitating development in communities so that our workshops with colleagues and students on campus were more meaningful, more realistic. We wanted to better address the questions that matter for the sustainability and ownership of the programme. So there I was, on a cloudy November morning, ready to facilitate, but feeling very nervous. The beginning was almost a fiasco: I asked a question and nobody responded. I wanted to collapse, but the smile on the workshop facilitator's face was contagious. It helped me pick up the pieces and keep going, heart in my throat. Before I knew it, the 30 minute slot was over and it was time for feedback from the other participants.

Now when I look back at this experience I remember again how important experiential learning is because it is grounded in reality, not theory. I see experiential learning as best if people are to learn well because theory is fantasy and one may make assumptions that are not realistic. The need for continuous learning cannot be sufficiently underscored: one can never say "I know it all".

I see learning as a continuous, on-going experience of doing things, pausing to reflect, asking questions, getting stuck, somehow finding ways out and moving on. I see learning as taking in things from your environment and finding ways to meaningfully work with them and somehow giving back to the environment. It is about sensing how the environment reacts to what we give back after we take from it. Learning is in creating relationships and in sustaining them – through bitter moments, moments of joy, etc.

I see learning as starting from anyone, from anything, from any kind of experience. I see learning in interaction, in confusion, in meaninglessness, and in meaning. I see learning in a closed container – but also in an open one! Learning is from within, but also from without. I see learning in disorder, in chaos, in patterns and in shapes. I see learning as an ongoing, chaotic circle, path of experiences, paths of shared experiences.

By Robert Chipimbi

SECTION THREE

OUTCOME MAPPING AND PARTNER RELATIONS

This section tells stories about the importance of working together; the stories are about relationships between the boundary partners; relationships between the boundary partners in a college; relationships between individuals. And through these stories you may catch a glimpse of what keeps people involved and motivated.

Working together on vision, outcome challenges and progress markers influences the quality and content of partner relations. What kind of changes are experienced by partners and field staff? Were there any hick ups in this process, if yes, what did they look like? [TERMS OF REFERENCE]

Developing Strong and Lasting Partner Relationships Is a Process: Together we are the Solution

By Mqaphelisi Sibanda, Co-Programme Manager

"I'm the coordinator! I was supposed to be the core team chairperson. This is my programme. I worked hard for it." This was how the HIV/AIDS coordinator felt. "Guys let's work together, this is our programme, it's our college and we need to be a team, I want to do this differently not the way the old coordinator used to do it. I want everyone to contribute, to be part of this group. I want us to own this not as individuals but everyone needs to be part of it." This is what the new core team chairperson was advocating. What brought about this situation? Why fighting? Why divided? And how could we turn this energy to a move positive force?

The story goes back to 2007 when VVOB began thinking of working more in the programme approach and less in a projects approach. Different stakeholders were involved in the building up process of the new programme and coordinators were part of this nucleus. Lessons, good practice and partners from the former projects (ZimPATH and St²eep) were taken into the new programme. "At VVOB nothing seems to have changed," said one coordinator, "you still have the same people. Elizabeth, Robert, Ambrose, and Michel are all from ZimPATH. Isn't this now the Support Team of the new programme? Well at our college everything has changed, I'm not the Core Team chairperson of this programme, I have been reduced to just a coordinator" she said furiously.

How we work

The VVOB programme support team works with students, lecturers, college administrations and other partners through building up processes together (not delivering 'packages') – thus capacity development evolves as a long term collaborative learning process that is strongly characterised by a bottom-up participatory approach.

More specifically, the programme seeks to strengthen existing structures in the teacher education system that are crucial in addressing vulnerability issues. These structures include student clubs (e.g. peer educator clubs going into HIV prevention and environment), student support structures such as the Health and Life Skills steering teams, staff development committees, early childhood departments and college administration.

Some of the values or intuitions that guide us in our work: Low cost approach, starting from the 'self' of participants, building up the programme with strong involvement of the beneficiaries, growing through doing and feedback, growing organically, learning from what works, trying to look at things holistically,...

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The programme had become more complex. It had been planned using the Outcome Mapping Methodology and there were five or six boundary partners in each college. The coordinator was part of one of the boundary partners, called the Co-curricular Support Structure. The question that had puzzled everyone in the programme design stage was how the Support Team was going to enter the colleges. Would we communicate with each and every boundary partner or was it preferable to have the entry point with one boundary partner of which the co-curricular support structure was most favoured? However, as events unfolded, it was agreed to set up a structure called the Institutional Core Team. It was the creation of the post of the core team chairperson that changed all the joy, energy and enthusiasm of the planning phase into resentment and fury. In some colleges the College Principals tasked coordinators to lead the Institutional Core Team. In others, where Principals wanted new blood to lead, another person was assigned to the position. Despite some reservations on our part, I thought; "maybe this is one way of College Principals being involved and in charge of the programme." Our respect and willingness to listen to College Principals' wishes was indeed positive for the programme later on.

In some colleges, fire, bullets and chaos were the order of the day. Boundary partners were divided and disconnected. They fought each other and lost focus on and commitment to the programme. One day, during a meeting, a team member stood up and said, "Something needs to be done very soon." He stopped briefly to catch everyone's attention. I looked at him and opened my ears wider in anticipation. "The coordinators and the core team chairpersons are not seeing each other eye to eye. We need to put them together before it's too late", he said. I looked at my colleagues. Stories started popping up as team member after team member shared their own sad experiences and voiced support for his idea. It reminded me of a song by the late Lucky Dube: *"The cats and the dogs have forgiven each other, but why not us?"* It was evident that we needed to act fast.

We took the opportunity of the next Management Team Meeting that was planned with the core team chairpersons. We added an extra day and invited the coordinators to join in too and discuss the new programme and the challenges they were facing; to clarify the roles and functions of the core team chairpersons and those of the coordinators. I remember sitting with Ambrose mapping out the finer details of our meeting plan. In the morning we were ready, confident and eager to engage our partners. But the meeting, not unexpectedly, was explosive, tense and full of fireworks. The very people who were laughing with each during breakfast were almost killing each other by morning tea. I almost called the workshop off……but guess what happened? The platform we had created gave birth to a renewal. "I have poured my heart out, I have said all I wanted to say all along. I am happy now," said one coordinator. "I'm sorry for having reacted the way I did, I never thought that it would offend you. I'm sorry, please forgive me. From today, please let's work together," said another. I couldn't believe my eyes or ears. "Ambrose, is this true or am I dreaming?" I asked in amazement. I saw the partners hugging each other and committing themselves to change their negative attitudes. Again I was reminded of the late Lucky Dube who sang *"We got to come together as one".* Together they planned how they were going to work and support one another. Through talking and self reflection on their own behaviours and actions, members realised that they would achieve more by working together and that they were all valuable in the programme.

Later that month, back in the office at a support team meeting I asked, "How are things out there? Are our partners working well together now?" I saw Ambrose laughing and guess he too was remembering that workshop. Charlotte responded, "Thanks guys, the dust has settled. The coordinator and the core team chairpersons are now the co-pilots of the programme and they are supporting each other very well". Was I hearing correctly? Other members of the team also shared the positive changes they had noticed, but emphasised the need to continue

supporting colleges in building strong relationships amongst themselves. With those developments a new role emerged for the support team. Each support team member was allocated two colleges which they were going to watch over and support. The team members became institutional link persons. What magical value this added to the programme! We created space for dialogue, discovery and, through trust of one another, we gained more. Together we are the Solution.

Little did I know, but just when I thought that college planes were cruising up in the sky, that the fuel was burning well, the cabin pressure was ok, oxygen and food was available, when I thought the co-pilots were in control and everything was ok – the passengers were actually furious, crying: "The core team chairperson and the coordinator are monopolising our programme. They are running it alone and we know nothing about what is happening. We have been reduced to followers only". The boundary partners were complaining bitterly that they had not been involved deeply enough in their programme. I then realised that there were big issues brewing in the Co-curricular Support Structures. As I dug deeper into the issue, I realised that it was not the fault of the co-pilots. The co-pilots thought they were flying the plane well. Oops! I stopped and asked the co-pilots, "Where are you going guys, how much fuel is in the plane, how high are you in the sky, in case of emergency what's the evacuation plan?" Their answer? "We don't know, what we know is to fly the plane. We have our own map (college plan) and we communicate regularly with the support team (the radar I guess)." "But what about your fellow cabin crew, do you consult them?" I asked. "Ask them", they answered. So I opened the cockpit door and entered the cabin. The atmosphere was not all that nice. I smiled and they smiled back. That's when I knew all was not yet lost. I started my talk: "Where are you going?" There was silence. "Where are you coming from?" Again silence. "Where are you now?" Finally one young gentleman stood up and said, "I just travel in this plane, it's a good plane, it helps me develop my facilitation skills, I enjoy the company of my fellow passengers, plus the workshops we do are great, enriching and empowering". While listening to him, I noticed the gaps: this young man was not conscious of his own role in the programme and that he had the potential to make the journey exciting and was a valuable asset to his college. He was literally, just a passenger. As a programme we wanted the boundary partner to be in charge of their own processes. We had trained them how to plan, supported them in reflection and in the preparation of workshop scenarios. Through this encounter we realised that it was important to bring each boundary partner together and have a deep reflection on how we plan, prepare workshops, do reporting and all so on. The cabin crew and passengers, or co-travellers rather, were happier. The seed had been planted. They were now ready to try and take ownership of their own programmes. Responsibilities and expectations of the different people in the plane were clarified and the group left with renewed commitment. This was the volcanic effect of the Programme Makers' Bridge workshop.

As I rest at home one Friday evening, seated on the sofa having my special Pilsener beer, I get a rare phone call from Tarisai, one of our students on attachment: "Bro Mqapsi, what we experience here in Mkoba Teachers' College is great, the local team prepared everything as per what came out of that workshop. The core team chairperson and the coordinator are in the background, it's the other lecturers driving the process, I can't believe it but they are in control, I feel useless in the preparatory meeting. I tried asking challenging questions but they gave convincing responses. I will be more in the background and supportive, I will learn more from them and hopefully will tell you more when I come back." I was almost speechless. I tell him that it's great to hear this good news and say good-bye. Could the other colleges experiencing the same? I pick up my phone again, check my air time and make a few calls to my colleagues in other colleges. The news is great. Together we are the solution.

Learning is how we work

*In which college lecturer, **Placidia Kasere**, reflects on how boundary partners and VVOB work together.*

"Why am I stigmatised?" asked the poet. "Because I am poor? Because I am ill? Because I don't fit your expectations? Because I don't fit this college's mode?" The silence in the hall was deafening. His heart rending poem came after a powerful student drama on discrimination in class and seemed to drive the point home. Raising awareness about stigmatisation and discrimination was the theme of this special assembly and the result of much hard work by the peer educators club.

Given the resistance to forming a support group for HIV positive people at my college, this assembly was nothing short of astounding. With a high level of mistrust and fear of repercussions, lecturers and students alike were not prepared to disclose their status. A way forward had to be found. So we, the steering committee, organised a workshop for students. For two days participants interrogated stigma and discrimination. The atmosphere was relaxed. Everyone was a learner and everyone had something to share. Where was all the joy coming from? Everyone was free to participate and give answers without fear of judgement. The students found that they could listen carefully to other people's stories and learn ways of coping from them. We spent time tackling negative attitudes that lead to discrimination. Some students displayed talents in art, some in song and dance, and some in communicating group feedback. Some were brilliant in acting out situations where discrimination happens and showing how it could be reduced. We all came to see how discrimination is often the result of poor information and lack of understanding. Most students said "We need to understand people with different cultures and situations to those we are familiar and comfortable with. We need to take time to empathise rather than rushing to judge." Ideas for how the peer educators club could tackle these issues on campus were discussed and plans made for the months ahead, beginning with an awareness-raising assembly.

Teacher training colleges and VVOB have a unique relationship: Unlike many other development programmes, the colleges identify the need and communicate it to the VVOB team to engage them in co-planning an intervention workshop. Not the other way round. And college role-players at all levels are involved. Students, lectures and administration meet to discuss a burning need they have identified – in this example, the problems of stigmatisation and discrimination. A detailed work programme is made. Learning comes in moving from ideas to a refined plan of action. This is not done in one meeting but may need several meetings. Behind the scenes of the story told above, the college team called on the VVOB support team to join them in reviewing their plans and a detailed workshop scenario they had prepared. Frank and constructive comments were made in even more meetings until a refined scenario was agreed upon. The lecturers who volunteered to facilitate the workshop scenario mapped out who would do what and even rehearsed their parts. It may be that VVOB already has an appropriate workshop scenario from their work in other colleges. If we choose to use one of their existing scenarios, it is reviewed and internalised. VVOB staff clarify any grey areas and questions the facilitators may have. One or two of their team may also join in the facilitation of the workshop. Here learning happens in that the facilitators each clarify the issues to himself or herself and between themselves as a team, then help the students learn as they take part in the workshop's many participatory activities.

Once the plans are in good shape, the workshop happens. Facilitators take time to infuse an evaluation at the beginning and end of each day. An overall evaluation of facilitation and workshop content is also written by each participant at the end. These are read by facilitators and help them when it comes to filling in the facilitator's reports that are given to VVOB. Monitoring and evaluation done here helps the colleges learn how effective their intervention was and also results in insights into what can be improved for the next time.

From challenge to champion

By Margaret Mutsambwa, college lecturer

"No one is going to disturb my lecture" he muttered after reading the Vice Principal's notice suspending all lectures for first year students in order to make room for a Life Skills Workshop. It was his honour to give these students their first lecture on their first day at college. "No one is going to disturb my lecture", he said again, warning students against absenting themselves. They had not, in his opinion, enrolled at college to waste time on the so called Life Skills Workshops – and he told them so.

On the day of the workshop, I found him in the lecture hall we were to use for the workshop. I was making my last minute rounds before its official opening. The students were already gathering. He seemed ready to make a fight, ready to create a scene in front of them all. Nervously, I slipped out of the hall and consulted with the Vice Principal. We agreed to let it go and allow him to proceed with his lecture. The workshop we rescheduled for later in the day. "No one can stand in the way of my plans" he boasted gloatingly.

As the programme's person on the ground at college, I made sure after that, that all lecturers who were interested could attend the Life Skills Workshops or any of the other workshops we organised. On occasion I heard him chat to colleagues who had attended our workshops, trying to find out what exactly we were doing and what kind of incentives we were being paid to attend; money? t-shirts? caps? I tried to explain it all to him, took pains to provide him with information and encouraged him to even attend a workshop. Then one warm, winter's morning, I noticed him at an Environmental Education Sensitisation Workshop run by the peer educators. As is the norm at our college, many lecturers were there to support the peer educators. They were gathered outside the venue while final preparations were being made inside. At first I thought he was just passing by, or chatting with friends before the workshop began. But no, he was there as a participant.

Since that day, he has never missed a workshop. He is now part and parcel of the other volunteer lecturers who support students in the programme. He is active and leads participants in fruitful discussions on different issues. You can imagine how excited I was when I overheard him say to a friend, "Material gains and money are not everything. What I've gained through my involvement in these workshops goes a long way in making me a better lecturer, and even a better father to my kids."

Question: So many partners; what keeps them involved? Answer: Respect and involvement!

***Beata Chikwanda** shares her insights into working with volunteer partners, having been one herself before joining the programme's support team.*

"Just how do you get lecturers to be in these teams of yours?" Asked a college principal, clearly impressed by the energy and dedication he had witnessed during a meeting we had organised. "Sir" was the humble answer, "these lecturers were chosen because of their passion, dedication and involvement in the activities of the programme."

Yes, many of our boundary partners are passionate about reducing the vulnerability of student teachers and school children. Despite their own heavy workloads, many are dedicated to the programme and highly involved in identifying needs, planning, implementing and monitoring activities. Why? I remember while still a college lecturer I was struck by the respect shown to us by the VVOB support team members. They saw us as having a real contribution to make. They saw us as drivers of change. Not just as something needing fixing. Not as a blank piece of paper to be scribbled all over. Right from the beginning of the new programme we were invited to participate in thinking and planning; to talk about the issues we face as lecturers, about our concerns, about how we see and experience vulnerability, about our understanding of the problems school children, teachers and student teachers are facing. We have opportunity to meet with students in a different way. To meet colleagues across departmental boundaries. Across hierarchies. To engage with college administration. We have real conversations, look at things from different angles and think creatively about what we can do. We identify what we think possible as college staff and our ideas form the bedrock of the programme's plans. It even informs the work of the support team as they plan their support strategies, capacity building workshops and the like around what we need to fulfil our plans. This approach gives real meaning to the word 'respect'.

It also helped me become inspired again. A new vision on education in Zimbabwe began to grow inside me. My dream was to create student friendly colleges that will enhance quality education in schools free from child abuse and neglect. The more involved I became in the programme, the more I learnt about how to put this new vision and inspiration to work. I began to see my own role and that of my colleagues differently. I began to see myself as an agent of change.

I remember while still a lecturer and an extended support team member, my principal asked me in a cross sort of voice; "Are you working for VVOB or this college?" Because he had been involved in the programme's thinking and planning processes, I could remind him that "working for VVOB" meant working for the college! That it was 'our' college's programme I was so busy with, 'our' vision I was pursuing. His endorsement of my involvement was crucial for me to continue.

One lecturer, asked by a colleague, "What are you getting from VVOB that is keeping you so motivated? replied; "I have not been given money, a T-shirt or a token of appreciation, but the knowledge, the skills and the new way of looking at students is mine forever and you cannot take it away from me." Another commented; "Don't worry about giving us T-shirts or incentives, some organisations only come here once a year, but you VVOB, are always with us, we learn together and we get skills, so we are one big family." Respect and involvement is what we give to our partners.

SECTION FOUR

OUTCOME MAPPING AND PLANNING, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Outcome Mapping is not what made us into a learning organisation; but it certainly helped. Monitoring systems can often be seen as dragons, monsters that are imposed upon partners and development organisations by 'higher powers' such as the head office, or the donor. Monitoring is something you do because you have to; for accountability purposes. This section tells the story of how Outcome Mapping has helped to provide a framework in which monitoring can also serve the purpose of learning; followed by planning by the boundary partners and the support team.

Outcome mapping is often presented as a different mindset. A different way of conceiving development, results and your own sphere of influence. Did this also happen in the case of VVOB? What changes are marked? And is there also a different view on PM&E as a whole in the relationship between VVOB and partners? How does outcome mapping relate to the logical framework approach which is also used in the VVOB Zimbabwe programme? What are the challenges and advantages of combining these two methodologies? [TERMS OF REFERENCE]

Breathing life and learning into Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation

By Robert Chipimbi, M&E Advisor

After all the work was done and the atmosphere was heavily pregnant with excitement about the new programme, came the uneasy moment of introducing the Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) system. The uneasiness was not with the 'P' bit of course, but rather with the 'M&E' part of it. Past experiences of traditional approaches to M&E, where M&E is mainly for external funding bodies; concentrates on activity and financial reporting; involves lots of data gathering but little analysis (big reports!); has little to do with learning; does not require stakeholder participation; is not very useful for partners and beneficiaries. It was clear; our partners did not want to go through this kind of dreary experience and wanted a PME system with none of those unpleasant elements. Sound like a tall order? It was. But fortunately, we could achieve it through building our PME system from a careful merger of three approaches, namely the Logical Framework, Outcome Mapping, and the Most Significant Change Story Methodology. With this combination we aim to achieve a fair balance between accountability and learning. How do we do it?

Our reporting framework follows result areas related to the Logical Framework Approach (LFA). We discovered that the data we collect through using OM tools such as outcome journals and strategy journals is more than sufficient for reporting on our result areas. What OM does is to help us get the data we need, with the LFA helping organise it and communicate through a structured report.
By Robert Chipimbi

In our case, as with many other organisations, the donor requires our planning and reporting to follow the Logical Framework Approach. However, we have a lot of freedom on what we can do to make the planning operational, i.e. how we choose to work. And we found Outcome Mapping very helpful in this regard. The methodology helped make clear who our partners are, what changes we would like to see happening at the level of our partners, and who takes responsibility for such changes happening. Most important perhaps, it helped us clarify roles: those of our partners and those of the support team: It helped us to see that the work of the programme is done by what we call boundary partners (in OM speak) and that the VVOB support team's work is to support them.

Thanks to Outcome Mapping, the definition of outcomes was made easy. Outcomes are what our partners begin to do differently as a result of the support they receive from the programme. Identified collectively with partners, the responsibility for monitoring these outcomes is in the hands of our partner. This encourages active participation and ownership of the programme. The basic idea is that they take responsibility for their own work; that they are accountable not only to the programme around them, but also to themselves. So while the programme provides a framework and tools based on OM for how data collection, analysis, reflection and learning could take place, how it happens is ultimately in the hands of the partners themselves.

But it is not only boundary partners engaging in monitoring and learning. The support team regularly reflects on the effectiveness of our strategies, the ways we support boundary partners, to see if what we are doing truly leads to changes in attitudes, knowledge, skills and professional practices. As these support strategies are the actual work of the VVOB support team, the responsibility for monitoring them is in our hands.

We devote one full day, twice a year to the monitoring of our support strategies: all VVOB team members are at the office and the team is divided into three groups, each taking on two result areas of the programme. The groups dig deeper into each result area with the questions like: *i) exactly, what were we busy with in the last 6 months in this result area? ii) How effective were our support strategies towards our partners? iii) What do we need to do differently?* The Outcome Journal – the monitoring tool used by partners in the monitoring of outcomes – has an important section where partners comment on the support strategies. This information helps our learning, planning and the organising of our work.

Outcome journals are used by college based programme core teams to monitor developments or changes in the practices of the programme's partners. Data collection is done through processes of self and peer assessment where monitoring journals are filled in and discussed during monitoring meetings. These meetings are rich learning moments where follow up areas are identified and possible action is suggested.

The programme implements two monitoring cycles every year. The collection of monitoring data is facilitated by monitoring journals. Strategy journals are used by VVOB support team members to collect data on strategies carried out by the programme in support of its partners.

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The day is characterised by an atmosphere of fun, chaos, confusion, and deep questioning... but we always enjoy it. And we always learn.

An interesting question to always reflect on is: "All that work our partners are doing for the programme, all the investment in budget, organising special trainings, etc – what is all that leading to? Are the intended beneficiaries reached through this? Is the programme having an impact?" We recognise in our PME system that impact is an elusive and far off concept. We recognise we can only contribute, but not entirely claim we caused it. Impact is a result of a broad collection of the actions of our partners (outcomes) interacting with a range of factors and actors in the external environment – and sometimes the actions of others we are not directly related to. It is complex. This view of impact and of how change happens is consistent with the whole philosophy of Outcome Mapping, which is why, I think, it works so well for us. We use the Most Significant Change Story Methodology to gather stories from our partners and closest beneficiaries (student-teachers and teachers), stories of change and stories of how they feel the programme is reaching them. These stories help us build a picture of the impact the programme has on beneficiaries.

All the learning from these 'formal' monitoring processes and from informal learning moments which pepper our practice, inform our planning processes. On the one hand ongoing monitoring and learning enables us to be alive and responsive to needs as they arise and to prepare well for our day-to-day work, on the other hand they inform longer term strategic thinking, planning and practice.

And now??

And now it's a completely different story coming from our partners. M&E is not the monster everyone imagined it would be back then: it happens naturally and without any push from the VVOB team. It's not perfect, but it happens. There is growing realisation from the partners that when they fill in the outcome journals, analyse and reflect on lessons learnt, they do it more for their own learning than for VVOB. M&E is viewed as a normal part of their work, thanks to the clarity of roles gained through use of OM. The VVOB team does its part, our partners do theirs and we meet through sharing our learning and strategically plan together how to move on. We believe that monitoring the work we do is as important as doing the work itself!

The students and lecturers who are the immediate beneficiaries of the programme are also involved in the monitoring process. This is done through the collection of stories by the support team members during college visits. The various stories help us to analyse whether the changes that the programme is contributing to at college level are indeed of any relevance or benefit to the students and lecturers.

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When all is said and done, the core team, mandated to spearhead the different VVOB activities within the 14 colleges is responsible to make sure that each boundary partner fills in a monitoring tool, the Outcome Journals, which have different progress markers. By so doing, boundary partners can reflect on their progress and draw learning from there, and re-plan if need be. This reflection process enables institutions to learn and grow. The core team is responsible for compiling a one-page document on monitoring and evaluation of the programme activities. This is done every 6 months.
Margaret Mutsambwa, college lecturer

From: **Robert Chipimbi [robert@vvob.co.zw]**
Sent: **Wed 2010/08/24 05:56 PM**
To: **Sandra Hill [sandra@cdra.org.za]**
Subject: Support Team Monitoring & Learning

Hi Sandra

Back again – was rushing to a meeting, but now I will try to answer your questions about the support team's learning and monitoring processes.

Most of our learning as the support team is learning as we do things. We go through thorough and rigorous processes to discover the needs of our partners (this always together with them) and to work out intervention strategies together. On the way, we see what seems to work and strengthen it. When little accidents happen, we do not despair or sink too much in them. Rather we reflect with the questions like:

a) What is going well and how do we strengthen it?
b) What is not going so well? How do we do it differently?
c) With what is not going well, what is our contribution as the Support Team?

We always try to work from the positive (maybe influenced here by the Appreciative Inquiry Methodology?) as we find this gives us energy, even when things are not so OK. So, most of our spaces for monitoring and learning are meetings we deliberately create – reflection meetings in the course of activities and meetings with the whole team held after activities to share our experiences. We also plan the implementation of our support strategies – bearing what we have learnt in mind. We aim to hold these **reflection meetings** weekly, but in reality, team members are out of the office so often, it may only happen every two or three weeks. While 'official' reflection on our support strategies is done twice a year, these weekly meetings are really important.

Another learning platform is our **Wednesday afternoon team time** – where we share our learning as a team, ideas from books we have read, important experiences that team members went through in their lives, even learning about different ways of achieving 'presence', or learning some new computer skill. Then there is the end of year **team reflection workshop** – another opportunity for learning deeply about our support strategies.

On the other part of your question, about what we use for monitoring our support strategies, we used to work with **strategy journals** in the beginning, but now we work with something a bit different. With strategy journals, team members used to keep essential data about what they were busy with and we would have one day per monitoring cycle where the whole team is at the office and people are divided according to our 6 result areas and would fill in the strategy journal, consulting as much as possible with each other, as with activity reports that are kept in activity reports files. The small team responsible for monitoring would process the data collected, extract lessons learnt and issues needing follow up and would bring these to the team during a half-day set aside to reflect on our support strategies. That would lead to planning of work for the team for the following monitoring cycle.

We have now replaced the strategy journals with **writing on the wall**. Every team member records what they have been busy with on one of the six sheets of paper stuck up on the office wall (1 for each of our 6 result areas) immediately they have finished with it, in order to avoid loss of data. We have people responsible for developing an overview of each result area and compiling a summary of what has been recorded on the wall for use at our reflection workshops, much like the monitoring team did with the information in the strategy journals. They also keep an eye on the wall, making sure it's used and asking questions if people do not record what they did.

Friendly greetings
Robert