

## **PRESS RELEASE- MOSHI DIALOGUE NOV 8-12, 2009**

**By Joyce Joan Wangui**

### **Towards an effective capacity building relationship for sustainable partnerships**

East African Support Unit for NGO's (EASUN) and PSO, an umbrella of Northern NGOs from Netherlands jointly organized a consultation dubbed the **Moshi Dialogue**, which took place in November 8-12, 2009.

The main aim of the dialogue was, to create a sustainable learning platform between Northern and Southern NGOs as well as build effective capacity building relationships. Also key in the dialogue was the need to examine the factors affecting the effective management of partnership and how obstacles can be transformed into strengths for effective delivery of services to the communities.

With the theme, '**Building our common identity**', participants deliberated on pertinent issues that seek to surface and enact the values that Northern and Southern NGOs claim jointly as Civil Society Organizations. In addition, the dialogue sought to examine appropriate relationships and approaches to sharing knowledge, expertise and material resources and explore essential skills that the North and South need to develop toward becoming ethical leaders capable of building capacities for effective advocacy and developmental service delivery.

From the North, participants were drawn from The Netherlands and Denmark while the South had Tanzanians, Ugandans, Kenyans, South Africans and Malawian. Preparatory meetings preceding the November dialogue were held by both EASUN and PSO in March 2009, respectively, for East African NGOs, and Dutch NGOs affiliated to PSO. Danish networks had their preparatory meeting later in June 2009. On their part, the East African NGOs meeting had deliberated on the need to improve capacity building in order to increase support for strategic qualities related to institutional building, such as value based planning and management, organisational identity and purpose and the confidence to engage in and sustain dialogue in the partnership.

The Moshi gathering noted that in order to manage partnerships effectively, there was need to heighten capacity building of NGOs in the South, build a common identity as Civil Society Organizations from North and South, manage essential areas of commonality such as a specific value base and advocate for human centered development policies and programs partnership management instruments.

During the four-day event, participants engaged in plenary and working group sessions. Some of the key questions forming the plenary included, 1) what are relationships, 2) what is the nature of this dialogue, 3) what is the expected outcome of this dialogue.

Participants were expected to come up with effective ways of forming lasting relationships with their own Southern or Northern partners. To make the dialogue a safe learning platform participants could not be there with their partners. They discussed on the various kinds of relationships that they had and how to improve them. The North

asked of the South to be more clear and transparent while setting goals while the latter ought to know what drives the interests of the North, in such relationships. Often times, the civil society identity of Northern and Southern NGOs is eroded when they are more conscious of their own survival, through funding mechanisms and related use of power, rather than their stated causes and the necessary developmental practices that are more likely to sustain partnership for social development.

Group topics centered on, the strengths and obstacles surrounding the North/South relationships. Participants underscored the various strengths that bind them, including a shared common goal (interest) between North and South, shared commitment, an existence of connectedness, mutual relationships and the will to improve community development. On the other hand, a myriad of challenges was tabled and participants boldly outlined the issues that hinder sustainable partnerships. These include, unequal partnerships, a shift in government policies from the North which the South finds inconvenient, mistrust among Northern and Southern NGOs, cultural differences due to varied backgrounds, poor financial accountability, the recent financial crisis that has forced donors to change their policies overnight, stringent conditions from donors, and lack of transparency.

### **The way forward**

The lengthy discussions, heated debates culminated into a mutual understanding between the North and South. At the end of the four-day dialogue, participants were content that they had made progress as regards to understanding sustainable relationships.

There emerged a feeling of mutual respect between the Northern and Southern organizations, with the two groups consenting to work together as mutual partners and building effective capacity building relationships.

Participants agreed to respect the civil society identity of Northern and Southern NGOs by deviating from their own self interests to the interests of the societies they serve. This would more likely sustain partnership for social development.

The North and South made commitments which they pledged to maintain in future. There was progress in terms of will and decision for some change from both sides. At least the two groups were in a better understanding of each other's struggles as well as strengths. The North appreciated the Southern organisations' struggle, feeling of loss of vision/identity due to donor directions while the South took note of the many strings attached in the donor aid from the North

Among key issues tabled was the need to **'keep the dialogue alive'**. Participants agreed to continue networking online by forming a website that would be updated on a regular basis. Volunteers from both the South and North were mandated to keep track of ongoing discussions and update issues online. By so doing, the dialogue would assume a new level of mutual partnership.

Other issues reached upon included the need to include civil society beneficiaries in future dialogues. The gathering noted that by involving the beneficiaries in meetings, this would enhance a balanced dialogue and a better understanding of their struggles.

The issue of aid mechanisms was also deliberated upon, with participants agreeing to review their stand on aid. The North and South came to a consensus that aid be transformed into investment. They both agreed to revolutionize planning tools and carry out a comprehensive research on aid mechanisms.

The need to fund civic education in communities was cited among the core values of building capacities in such communities.

EASUN and IACD ( the International Association for Community Development) planned to organize a South-South meeting of all stakeholders early next year to reflect on the Moshi Dialogue.

## **North, South NGO's advocate a healthier dialogue**

**By Joyce Joan Wangui, reporting on the Moshi Dialogue (Day 1)**

A high level meeting of NGO's from Europe (North) and those from East Africa (South) has converged in Moshi to deliberate on effective ways of reaching a common dialogue through mutual relationships.

The four-day event dubbed the *Moshi Dialogue* seeks to address the real understanding of each other, and the road to reach that understanding.

The dialogue will also look into other pertinent issues that cut across sustainable partnerships, transparent relationships, building a common identity between the two parties and effective communication that is devoid of mistrust between funders and the recipients of aid. The event has been organized by the East Africa Support Unit for NGO's EUSUN and PSO ( a network of 50 NGO's from Netherlands)

The inaugural session of the Moshi Dialogue was characterized by high spirited participants who jointly agreed that lack of effective communication is the major hindrance towards open relationships between Northern and Southern NGO's. In her opening remarks, PSO representative Jacqueline Verhagen from Netherlands reiterated the need to embrace sustainable relationships in order for NGO's to carry out their intended goals of positively transforming societies.

Hitherto, both parties have always been embroiled in blame games; with each viewing the other with suspicion.

In their capacity as lending partners, sometimes the Northern NGO's shy away from challenging their governments to review their stand on development aid. A case example is where such governments impose tough conditions on aid, hence compromising genuine objectives of such aid. Failure to articulate this appropriately has led to misunderstandings between the North and South.

And for any meaningful objective intended to leave a positive mark in the communities, there is need for both parties to trust each other.

Often times, the civil society identity of Northern and Southern NGOs is eroded when they are more conscious of their own survival, through funding mechanisms and related use of power, rather than their stated causes and the necessary developmental practices that are more likely to sustain partnership for social development. It is against this backdrop that the two groups deemed necessary to share the same platform and 'unpack' the secrecy surrounding their objectives.

Participants highlighted the strengths and obstacles surrounding the North/South relations. There was a joint consensus that both parties share common goals and commitment that are instrumental to the welfare of their targeted communities. Among the obstacles tabled down include; lack of trust between North and South, uncertainty in government policies which in turn affect aid deliverance, parallel goals between donors, NGO's and the communities, cultural barriers, communication constraints, poor financial accountability among others.

The workshop is expected to draft positive recommendations that will map the way forward in enhancing the relationships between North and South organizations.

## **Who owns the agenda?**

**By Joyce Joan Wangui, reporting on the Moshi dialogue (Day 2)**

Mutual respect of original agendas is a sure way of enhancing cordial relationships between the Northern and Southern CSO's. Participants in the two regions unanimously agreed that respect for diversity of thoughts, culture, ownership, communication are key to sustaining a healthy dialogue between them. And to attain the real sound agenda, there is need to mobilize the CSO's to fully understand what it is they want accomplished.

Clear agendas that are devoid of self interest of one organization at the expense of another should be the 'key words' in partnerships. Ownership, it was agreed, goes along way in identifying the key goals of an organization, which would translate into positive achievements.

The Moshi Dialogue, in its second day running brew heated debate on pertinent issues surrounding mutual respect vis-à-vis ownership in partnerships. Participants were embroiled in never-ending discussions on what constitutes ownership, for whom it should be attributed to, and to who it benefits in the long run. Other emerging questions capitalized on why some partners hijack 'what is not theirs' and make it 'their's', all in the pursuit of self interests.

In most cases, many organizations in the South find themselves in a tag of war with the North as regards ownership. The South wondered why sometimes their agendas are hijacked. And if the agenda slips from their hands, it becomes increasingly difficult to defend content; the content which defines the agenda; the agenda which helps in soliciting for funds; the funds which are meant for transforming the lives of the vulnerable.

It is imperative to note that sometimes what developing countries deem urgent is viewed differently by the donors.

Participants from the South also noted that lack of ownership in partnerships always creates apathy in achieving the intended goals. If a developmental agenda emanates the South, it should therefore, rightfully remain within its ranks. The South has the right to defend and guard their agendas if what they do on the ground is meant to leave any mark. But often times, they will succumb to donor pressure and deviate from their projects. They would rather please the donors up there rather than fulfill the needs of the locals, down there.

### **Mutual respect**

The meeting noted that creating relationships and sustaining them are more than meets the eye. According to the participants, it is more a matter of mutual respect other than the mere technicalities involved. The North need to understand, respect and take into consideration the intricacies regarding diversity of thoughts, culture, background as well as language barriers. This would lead the two groups into a common understanding of their goals.

In Africa, projects are carried out differently as compared to the North. Bureaucracy, laxity and ignorance always characterizes the running of projects; such slowness tends to irk the North, thus creating a sense of suspicion on their part. The North on the other hand prefers to be upfront in their manner of things. Such parallel thinking was the centre of debate but participants agreed that each side should respect the approaches of the other. Against this backdrop, the two groups agreed to marry their differences to enable them reach their common goals.

### **Process and outcome**

Developmental processes and outcomes should be in line with each another, and not the opposite. The gathering underscored the differences involved in dealing with processes and outcome. The South blamed the North for capitalizing more on the product (outcome) with little regard to what processes were entailed in reaching that outcome.

“We seem to be more upfront in seeking immediate outcome,” admitted a participant from Netherlands.

At the same time, sometimes deliberate or inevitable circumstances force the South to tip-toe on the processes involved in reaching the outcome thus wasting relevant time which would have been used to implement agendas.

### **The paradigm shift**

There is an urgent need to shift from problem-oriented to results oriented approaches. The South should shift from laying blames on the North and take charge of their own developmental projects.

On the other hand, the North should recognize the efforts that the South employs in their processes. Success stories have shown that well calculated processes translate into positive outcomes.

## **Pain or gain, who eats the bigger pie?**

**By Joyce Joan Wangui, reporting on the Moshi Dialogue (Day3)**

The issue of self-interest in development partnerships took centre stage as the Moshi Dialogue entered its third day with participants flaring up on whose interests the partnership is meant. Is the North (developed countries) driven by genuine intent when they give aid to the South (developing countries) or do they want any gains out of it? What prompts the North to give aid to Africa? Is it out of remorse, a need to assist or basically to reap the gains? Are the gains viewed as the end justifying the means?

The gathering genuinely outlined the pains on both sides which come along with unequal partnerships and why the North and South have been resilient. The Northern NGOs made it clear that they too feel that they are pained to lobby their governments fund developmental projects that fail to yield positive results in the South. Yet the South lamented on the stringent conditions that the North always attach to aid. Even as the two sides agreed to deal with the gains made so far, the South feels that they bear the heaviest brunt of the pains. Some participants noted that sometimes the pains were too much on the South, thus derailing the gains.

In essence, the gathering shifted to blame games, with one side pointing accusatory fingers at the other and consequently blaming the 'back donor' for causing the pains in developmental agendas. Northerners are fully convinced that aid is necessary in Africa but they feel that self interests of some CSO's in Africa have hindered development. At one instance, the North seemed to blame the many strings attached to aid and sought to distance themselves from the blame. They cited shifts in government policies as the major impediments to aid delivery but the South was quick to point that the North was capacitated to challenge their governments to review their stand on aid.

If the North and South are to attain mutual relationships, there is need to respect one another. The question of ownership resurfaced, with participants debating at length. For instance, a Southern NGO is caught between a rock and a hard place whenever there is a change in development aid policies from the North. If a certain NGO has identified, say, poverty reduction as its agenda and the donor feels that education needs more priority, the former will be forced to shift his agenda. So whose interest is finally served here?

The million dollar question is why the South fails to say 'NO' and succumb to donor pressure. Why is the South resilient to brain wash and why cant it stand its ground and defend its own agendas? Why don't they call for a change in aid mechanisms other than being held up in workshops for months on end? Sadly, a participant from the South admitted that the bigger chunk of donor aid goes to organizing workshops, deliberating on the same topics that seems to hit a snag and while they are at it, the poor gets poorer. Whose interests are they serving here when the donor aid will circulate among them? Why do some individuals in the South want to be associated with the flamboyance that comes along with the title NGO or CSO, at the expense of the people they claim to serve? Does this mean the South has succumbed to greed?

**Good aid, bad aid?**

Aid only becomes good when it positively serves its intended purpose. A heated debate regarding the authenticity of aid seemed to dominate the gathering. Even with the 'good' intent of the North to assist Africa, the latter feels that it is being exploited. But is the South transparent and accountable? Issues of corruption, government bureaucracy and self interests were cited as the major impediments to achieving developmental goals.

The North unanimously agreed that aid was pivotal in Africa but they also decried the many strings attached to it. The South however feels that the same aid is sometimes not genuine. When money is pumped into Africa with so many conditions, the latter feels disillusioned and hence an apathy to make good use of that aid. In the same breathe, the South feels that the same aid has, at some point increased the vulnerability of communities. Hence it becomes bad aid, when communities feel at the mercy of donors. They find themselves in a vicious cycle as they have to rely on international funds to do things that they hitherto did without foreign intervention.

Against this backdrop, the South is challenging its fellows to reject 'bad' aid. For what need is there if the same aid is not transforming the lives of the vulnerable? There is need to change the perception, mechanisms that are associated with donor funds. The North and South came to a consensus that they both need to challenge their governments to review their stand on aid. They both agreed that aid is important but there was need to change the focus in which it (aid) is administered. The North should cease its chest thumping and a feeling of superiority if they genuinely want to help Africa. And the latter has a daunting task to prove that it can make it.

## **Reaching a consensus**

### **Joyce Joan Wangui, reporting on the Moshi Dialogue (Day 4)**

As the Moshi Dialogue came to a close on November 12th, participants were content that the four day learning experience was fruitful albeit earlier differences. There emerged a feeling of mutual respect between the Northern and Southern organizations, with the two groups consenting to work together as mutual partners and building effective capacity building relationships.

Generally, the dialogue assumed a renewed energy where both groups agreed to generate visible impact on practice and interventions of Northern and Southern NGOs in institutional and social development activities, particularly approaches that will promote growth, sustainability and authenticity of civil society organisations in the South.

Participants agreed to respect the civil society identity of Northern and Southern NGOs by deviating from their own self interests to the interests of the societies they serve. This would more likely sustain partnership for social development.

The North and South made commitments which they pledged to maintain in future. There was progress in terms of will and decision for some change from both sides. At least the two groups were in a better understanding of each other's struggles as well as strengths. After the blame game in the plenary sessions, the two groups now had a better understanding of each other's goals and aspirations and this was more exemplified in the group works. The North appreciated the Southern organisations' struggle, feeling of loss of vision/identity due to donor directions while the South took note of the many strings attached in the donor aid from the North

Among key issues tabled was the need to 'keep the dialogue alive'. Participants agreed to continue networking online on a wiki that was set up from the preparatory phase in this dialogue already. This forum should be updated on a regular basis. Volunteers from both South and North were mandated to keep track of ongoing discussions and update issues online. By so doing, the dialogue would assume a new level of mutual partnership.

Other issues reached upon included the need to include civil society beneficiaries in future dialogues. The gathering noted that by involving the beneficiaries in meetings, this would enhance a balanced dialogue and a better understanding of their struggles. The beneficiaries would be better placed to air their grievances in the presence of all stakeholders.

The issue of aid mechanisms was also deliberated upon, with participants agreeing to review their stand on aid. The North and South came to a consensus that aid be transformed into investment. They both agreed to revolutionize planning tools and carry out a comprehensive research on aid mechanisms.

The need to fund civic education was cited among the recommendations of the dialogue. The North and South agreed to pool resources that would go into civic education, all the way to the grassroots level. Beneficiaries need to be aware of the community development projects that take place in their vicinities. They would also learn

on self reliance skills that would help transform their villages.

EASUN and IACD( the International Association for Community Development) planned to organize a South-South meeting early next year to reflect on the Moshi Dialogue. The South needs to meet with their stakeholders in the South and other relevant groups in order to discuss pertinent issues that affect South-South relations, with the aim of enhancing their goals.

Earlier in the meetings, Southerners had noted the need to boost their own development by harnessing the resources that are available in their region, noting that donor aid is not always sufficient. The group had noted that Africa was rich in resources but failed to utilize them properly. The South decried on challenges they faced such as bureaucracy from their governments, corruption, hence a need to bring together all stakeholders to deliberate on such issues.

The two groups agreed to ensure that there is accountability to constituencies. They noted that the issue of accountability was a core value in partnerships and that needs to be maintained. In the same breathe, there was also need to create awareness in constituencies through funding for civil education.

Generally the Moshi Dialogue ended up with more gains than pains. The two groups had come on board, each holding some suspicion for the other but this was later buried as they gradually 'rubbed shoulders' and understood each other better. Future dialogues will ensure that they incorporate the fruitful deliberations learnt from the Moshi Dialogue.