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The Power of Partnership: A report on decision making, participation and discourse in development aid between Western Heads East and Tukamwuane Women's Group

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Introduction

This report contains the findings on the state of partnership principles exercised by Western Heads East, (a Canadian international development organization) with respect to its relationship with an NGO that receives its technical and financial aid. Western Heads East (referred to in this paper by its acronym WHE) is an organization based in London, Canada at the University of Western Ontario. Staff, faculty and students mobilize resources and personnel in order to collaborate with women's groups in Tanzania, Kenya and Rwanda to alleviate poverty and the devastation HIV/AIDS. The women's group, called Tukamwuane Women's Group (TWG) is a certified NGO based in Mwanza, Tanzania that sells probiotic yogurt to members of the community and distributes it to people living with HIV/AIDS as an immune system booster. TWG channels WHE's financial and technical resources into this project in a collaborative attempt to address the devastation of the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the region.

This report evaluates policies made regarding where to keep children in the yogurt production facility, the effect of the current state of communication between the two organizations, and the mutual understanding of roles and responsibilities of each partner. These issues were outlined by both parties in various documents, meeting minutes, and sustainability reports (**ref**), and are then evaluated through according to the partnership principles which are identified as important by WHE and the development industry in general. This culminates in policy reccomendations which were taken from the suggestions of both parties, mainly revolving around increasing regular two-way communication between project partners, mobilizing resources and personnel toward this end, a greater understanding of local contexutal factors, and a constant evaluation of each partner's actions according to the mutual

principles outlined.

Methodology

This study was mainly based on data collected during 7 months of volunteering with Western Heads East (the Canadian donor organization) from October 2008 to May 2009 and interning for 2 months with Tukamwaune Women's Group in Mwanza, Tanzania in June and July of the same year. Interviews were collected from June 2009 to October 2009 from members of WHE and TWG. As mentioned earlier, other materials were also collected for data purposes, such as e-mails from that time period and reports from 2006 onward.

The primary method used in the gathering of this data was the anthropological method of participant observation, which is the "basic fieldwork method in cultural anthropology that involves living in a culture for a long period of time while gathering data" (Miller et. al. 2007:380). While 2 months isn't normally considered a "long time" compared to other types of fieldwork, various constraints called for a shorter than planned stay, and the amount of data collected was not volumous enough to warrant much more time spent in the field. Discourse analysis, which is, to be put simply, "the study of language's relation to the contextual background factors" (Cutting 2002:1), was used in the analysis of how values of sustainability and partnership are signalled and circulated within WHE. This helps explain how talk about partnerships is used in the referencing of values important to development work, which in turn shapes the way policies are formed. The study, by its design is primarily based on the data gathered from interviewing members of both organizations.

While preparing this study, I was fulfilling the mandates of 3 different organizations, and this had a notable impact on the type of work done; the data was undoubtedly affected by the nature of my affiliation to all parties. On one hand, I was being sent by WHE who is a source of financial and technical aid, to intern with TWG. Being a *mzungu* (or foreigner in Swahili) that represented WHE, combined with the nature of the aid relationship itself may have contributed to the frequent occurrence

of certain themes when gathering data in Tanzania. I also had a number of responsibilities which

pertained to issues of "capacity building" in my analysis, as per the requirements of the funding source,

the Canadian International Development Agency, or CIDA. Lastly, because I have been involved with

WHE for over 12 months, this report is centered on the policies and practices of that organization. The

analysis of partnership involves decisions made by WHE, sometimes in collaboration with other

parties, and how those decisions affected the project in Tanzania. This study intends to explore the

policies that have been signalled as important in the discourses of development, so that the recipients of

this aid to have a greater say in decision making.

Partnership in context

In the context of the development industry

In the development industry, most donor organizations based in the Northern Hemisphere define inter-

organizational relationships between themselves and recipients of aid in terms of partnerships, a

concept that references an ethos which "disavows paternalism, [and] emphasizes partner

responsibility" (Baaz 2005:26-7). These ideas are very loosely defined when referenced in rhetoric,

which makes the definition of partnership a topic of debate in the development industry. Western Heads

East uses the idea of partnership in much the same way, while at the same time achieving some levels

of implementation, which will be highlighted in later in this report**.** WHE mainly reflects and

internalizes the importance of partnership by signalling those values through speech and

communication.

When referring to north-south development aid relationships, the common principles of

partnership are summarized in the following passage in Brinkerhoff's book, *Partnership for

International Development:* "Mutual trust, respect, accountability and influence, with mutual

determination of ends and means" It is a "dynamic relationship among diverse actors, based on

mutually agreed objectives, pursued through a shared understanding of the rational division of labour based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. This relationship results in mutual influence, with a careful balance between synergy and respective autonomy, which incorporates mutual respect, equal participation in decision making, mutual accountability, and transparency."

This report is primarily concerned with mutual influence, and the mutual determination of ends and means. The application of these principles should result in a participation in the decision making process in a way that is cognizant of the skills and special roles held by TWG members.

In the relationship between WHE, TWG and their other partners.

Western Heads East as an institution defines the relationship between itself and Tukamwuane Women's Group (TWG) as a partnership. At this time, there is no written version of what that relationship consists of. Instead, there are diverse conversations, e-mails, policy documents, etc. that signal the importance of the relationship. Numerous references to TWG as partners, visioning exercises, and other instances in which both organizations' intentions, ideas and desires for the project at that time show this characterization.

One central example of partnership being referenced in WHE is from its Mission Statement, a document that explains the organization's function and their values. An early 2009 version of this statement (in an e-mail between the WHE coordinator and interns on 20 Jul 2009), states that the organization will "work with the network of community partners to promote a sustainable, successful probiotic yogurt operation". Incorporating this language into WHE's mission statement signals that the organization values this type of relationship enough to make it part of WHE's core philosophy. In the same e-mail, the counterparts in Tanzania are referred to as partners informally as well "we will ensure that all community partners and resources are in place before we begin the technology transfer and support to be sure it will be sustainable. Western Heads East refers to the diverse players in Tanzania

and the other African countries in which they operate as "partners". This is reflected both in the main documents that define WHE's objectives as an organization, and the communication that happens between members of that organization.

Cultural representation, mutual influence, and participation in decision-making processes: A look at the policy recommendations surrounding children in the kitchen

The members of Tukamwuane women's group produce their yogurt in a site on the outer limits of Mwanza in a one room facility, which is also their meeting space and a spot where local recipients of yogurt gather to consume the product. One of the main issues which lies at the center of the ongoing interplay between cultural practices and sanitation standards concerns how children are managed inside the building. Western Heads East, as well as some local agencies in Tanzania who were appraising the yogurt project identified having babies in the production area as a potential source of contamination. If the members of the women's group could show how and why their children are being kept in the kitchen as they are, policies which are aimed at a harmonization of sanitary conditions would include these realities.

The latest policy that was developed in relation to this issue was made after a recent renovation of the production site. Although this is regarded as a policy, there is no official hard copy; it is usually passed to interns orally in their orientation. The idea was to keep the women's babies in the area where customers congregate, as a compromise that attempted to recognize that the women had few alternatives but to bring the children to work (as quoted in Jun 23rd 2009 interviews with TWG, and Dr. Katsivo on Oct 23rd 2009). The suggestion was not uniformly adapted. The lack of implementation has less to do with the impenetrable nature of local cultures, or the unwillingness of those concerned with sanitation, as TWG have started adopting, internalizing, and mentioning the importance of wearing hairnets, needing uniforms, etc. Conversely there are a set of constraints which need to be properly

understood in order to assess a practical way forward. This idea is essential to the implementation of policy when two partners from different cultures are involved.

Lack of financial resources

One of the primary constraints which necessitates having children in the production site is a lack of financial resources. Daycares exist, but they are unavailable to those who cannot afford to pay the fees. This is true for the vast majority of Tanzanians, and it is practiced among the women of TWG, especially if they have young children. This explanation has less to do with why the women aren't keeping babies on one side of the kitchen. Nevertheless, it was mentioned a number of times in the interview with TWG members on July 23rd 2009, Both the interview that took place with Dr. Katsivo on Oct 23 2009 and TWG member's answers in earlier interviews identified the primary reason for keeping children in the facility as being due to a lack of financial resources.

This constraint was rightfully acknowledged by WHE and TWG when the policy of keeping the children on one side of the kitchen was put forth. The policy did acknowledge the need to have children around the women, but it may not have considered other factors that may result in keeping the children on the mother's back or within arm's length at all times.
The other constraints below may also need to be considered to develop a policy that successfully tackles the problem of sanitation. This economic consideration, combined with the social consideration of the child's safety, produce a set of constraints which require a closer dialogue between WHE and TWG about what is appropriate and what is not.

Concern for safety of children

Another major concern of the Tukamwuane women was the safety of their children. When faced with the possibility of keeping their children at home, the women came up with 1 story and two

examples of what can happen to children when left unsupervised (Interview on July 23rd, between myself as a WHE intern and representatives of TWG). One such story was about a child from neighbouring Kilimaheya who burnt down his house and killed himself and his siblings while the parents were away. The idea that children who are not kept under close supervision are more susceptible to dangerous situations needs to be explored. Each story resulted in negative consequences when children were left unattended.

Although it is hard to say whether or not these were the constraints that produced a direct, causative role in the process that led to the idea of partitioning the production site into a child free and a child friendly space, this is true of any type of investigation that involves this type of a partnership. It would be more beneficial to try and account for contextual factors before a policy was made so that proactive measures can ensure cultural representation, mutual influence and participation in decision-making processes.

Policy recommendations for WHE and TWG pertaining to cultural representation in decision-making processes.

The list of constraints that are relevant to the cultural practice of keeping children around is an example of how WHE can take principles relating to partnership that are relevant to an issue, engage in dialogue with their partners, and make a list of considerations with which to draw up a policy with the constant consultation of the community partner. How this can be facilitated is outlined below.

CIDA or the Canadian International Development Agency (the body that funded the WHE internship) asks in its documents distributed for the Students for Development internship whether or not there is a representative of a host culture involved in the partner organization. In Western Heads East's case, that would be Dr. Katsivo. Dr. Katsivo's and linguistic resources should be better employed by the organization to facilitate agreement between the two partners. More meaningful consultation on

how to arrive at an agreeable conclusion for both parties can be reached if these contextual factors are considered first.

To substantiate the need for this, one look at the data in regards to the cultural practice of keeping babies in the kitchen shows that Dr. Katsivo and TWG's responses were nearly identical in content, listing the same sets of constraints, including lack of alternatives due to income, and lack of safety. This knowledge should be capitalized upon as this information can be used as a primer with which to engage in dialogue with the host country. Having a knowledge of the local culture is an essential pre requisite to engaging in collaborative policy, and should be practiced before this type of collaboration with TWG on any issue. As Dr. Katsivo has this role already, it would be beneficial to designate a clearer mandate which allows for the considerations of the local culture to have a more prominent place.

Also, any agreement of how to settle this issue with all parties' needs in mind must reflect the new dynamics of the facility that is yet to be built at the new production site in Nhyamgoro.

Policy reccomendation #1: Establish a role that enables Dr. Melanie Katsivo to identify contextual factors relating   to policy, and equip her with the resources she needs to bring this to the fore of policy.

The role of communication in the achievement of goals: A look at TWG's acceptance of sanitation standards set by WHE and other parties.

Concepts of hygiene and germs

If the above two examples are taken as constraints, and they are combined with the ways in which TWG's group understand concepts of hygiene and germs, the eventuality of keeping their

children on their backs or on the counters in the production facility becomes easier to understand. To quote Dr. Katsivo, the reasoning may be along the lines of "how can my baby be unhygienic? He's not sick or dirty" (Oct 23rd interview)   Due to my position as a WHE intern, talk around sanitation was always met with guarded attention paid to what was said, so data about this idea in particular was collected directly only from Dr. Katsivo and needs to be explored more with TWG members.

It is clear that the cultural concepts of germs and sanitation differ from place to place, and further communication needs happen in this area in order for WHE to understand the nature of localized beliefs of sanitation. When talking about "the culture", it must be noted that in this context it is only the activities of the women's group, which does not mean by extension that "things are done like that in Tanzania". While it is true that officials from the food industry in Tanzania recommended that similar standards must be adhered to, it must be noted that TWG and the officials from the food industry have different practices, priorities, and working cultures.

As mentioned, sanitation is a concept understood and signalled as important by TWG. Training materials and methods used by TWG to teach another beneficiary of WHE in Kenya included practices wearing hairnets, sterilization, and other sanitation practices. They seem to have integrated many of the ideas into their practices in their own kitchen such as wearing hairnets and frequently mentioning these priorities in the presence of WHE officials. Even the idea of making food in the kitchen has been signalled by the women as important as they now make food in another building.

 WHE has worked in collaboration with TWG on this issue for quite some time, starting with the first interns, followed by successive cycles of interns and visits by members of WHE's executive committee. As a result, the idea of sanitation has been slowly internalized by TWG. To quote WHE coordinator Bob Gough, "There was an understanding when Jamie went, and it's interesting because the learning has taken place, but the practice of it sometimes hasn't, which is   interesting because when they went to Kenya, they focused on food safety issues" (Interview on Oct 11th 2009)

Knowing what is and what is not working comes down to communicating with TWG. Given the identified importance of these sanitation practices by all parties, the cultural element must be explored by communication.

The women of TWG "feel like they're on an island" (July 23rd 2009 interview) which can only be remedied by more communication. This is in line with the approach to partnership which values collaborative approaches on decision making, one of the most important equalizing factors in relationships that tend to be dominated by inequalities.

One of the main ways in which this problem can be solved is the acquisition of Swahili by those who participate intimately with TWG. This has been done on the part of the interns, and has been identified by at least the coordinator of WHE (Oct 11th 2009 interview) to be a possibility in the near future. Within the past few years, WHE has integrated this reality into the training of their interns, which has allowed the bulk of essential communication to take place with the aid of the interns. So far, this has been the chosen method of communication, but there are a number of issues that this has raised. Mainly, interns are not always around. Secondly, they often don't have the ability to express or communicate what is needed with their level of Swahili. The acquisition of Swahili must take its place as a central priority with anyone involved in policy or decision-making in the WHE partnership.

A list of suggestions coming from interviewees on how to improve communication with TWG is listed below. WHE already possesses much of the technology and material resources to implement these steps, and requires small investments. It would result in having regular, productive communication on shared goals such as the improvement of quality and consensus building. All of these suggestions were taken from members of the WHE steering committee themselves, and is echoed by other members of both organizations, especially former interns.

Suggestions include:

1) Setting up weekly web conferences with TWG and WHE, using technologies already possessed, i.e. Computers in Canada, and setting up phone conferences if this is not possible; (Recommended by Dr. Gregor Reid of the WHE steering committee, in an interview on Oct 18th 2009);

2) Distributing the quarterly updates to all parties involved and asking for similar updates from all parties. This is already being done through the newsletter, for interested individuals in Canada, but needs to be translated and sent to TWG every quarter as well. (Also Dr. Reid);

3) Calibrating the linguistic resources that exist; (Dr. Katsivo, Oct 23rd interview)

    - Dr. Katsivo's knowledge of Swahili

    -The use of the Tanzanian WHE coordinator's knowledge of Swahili.

4) The acquisition of Swahili by WHE personnel (unanimous support), and

5) The continued use of interns as mediums for communication. (As is current policy)

policy reccomendation #2: WHE must go beyond the one-way flow of communication by establishing ways for TWG to communicate easily and clearly with WHE. Through the setting up of regular meetings, quarterly updates on each party's activities, the publication of documents into Swahili, and the use and growth of bilingualism in WHE and their representatives in Tanzania, the groundwork will be laid for better collaboration.

How a mutual understanding of each partner's capabilities and roles affects the problem of project sustainability, and the underlying role of discourse

The notion of sustainability is a top concern for the project in Tanzania, for TWG and WHE alike. In this context, sustainability refers to when the project is able to use the revenues from yogurt

sales to keep the project running, pay the women's salaries and upkeep of the kitchen, etc. For TWG, sustainability will ensure the long-term viability of their project and stabilize the members' incomes. For WHE, funding will to TWG will stabilize from covering for incidental expenses, to providing funds for the 125 people living with HIV/AIDS who are receiving probiotic yogurt. Additionally, sustainability is a buzzword in the development industry that signals values that are seen as important, so the concept also carries moral and professional dimension when used by WHE. It implies that a project will be able to stand on its own by a process of a gradual realization of local ownership and capacity building.

First, this section will continue the examination of how discourse affects the whole process, from the signalling of sustainability as a value, to how the way that past policies are viewed and evaluated, to even the re-interpretation of the women's capabilities and skills. The next section will move on to examine how a shared understanding of what each partner's specific skills and capabilities can be one of the central determining factors (as well as the above partnership principles) for the successful implementation of any policy that addresses the issue of project sustainability.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of sustainability is important in the development industry. WHE's acknowledgement of this puts them at equal footing at a rhetorical level with other organizations who value the same concept. As a result, the idea of sustainability frames how various elements of the project are seen.

The level of sales, for example, is a measurement of how far the organization has come on the path to sustainability, as referenced in a July 15th 2009 e-mail from interns the WHE steering committee. All action taken in East Africa in general is supposed to be "making a sustainable difference to communities," as referenced in WHE's mission statement (E-mail from WHE coordinator to interns, Jul 23).

There are however examples of how the frame of sustainability has engrossed other policy

documents that didn't originally carry that sense of meaning. The financial reporting guide that was given to the members of TWG after two business students interned with TWG in 2008 is one such example. E-mail circulations show how the financial reporting guide was interpreted as a "sustainable business model": E-mails between past and future interns read as follows: "We were hoping you might be able to provide us with your previous Budget and Sustainable Business Model" (Jun 4th, WHE intern to former business students). The report has come to be known as a business model that was supposed to increase local ownership and ensure sustainability.

In reality, the report contained recommendations that covered the needs of WHE when it came to normalizing its relationship with its sources of funding, by tracking expenses and having a paper trail to show how the monies were being spent. It also was a comprehensive plan made by the IVEY business students that partially included some of the abilities and skills of TWG members, such as their "fundamental understanding of profit" (E-mail from author of the 2008 financial reporting manual to myself, a past WHE intern) At the time however, the principles of partnership were only referenced in speech, emails and policy documents and did not have much of an impact on the process by which the business interns collected this information.

Some of the vital skill sets that TWG members have revealed over the course of 2 months of participation in their organization are as follows: 4 of the 5 members of TWG available for interviewing on one particular day mentioned that they were all former business owners, selling vegetables and rice in busy, competitive downtown markets. Further, they mentioned that many of them were part of a credit union that later merged into TWG. Their knowledge of finance and business prior to their involvement with TWG indicates that they likely possess high levels of knowledge which is untapped in the plans that are drawn out by WHE.

Suggestions for WHE

If WHE wants to make a good business model that leads to sustainability with the women, we

would have to look no further than the partnership principles: Without integrating their skills into a plan, the plan is external to what they know. When new initiatives are set forth, a quick process of consultation with the TWG would be best, in order to see how both organizations can contribute towards its implementation. This builds on the previous policy reccomendations, but is also distinct in that a mutual understanding of skills and roles is intrinsically linked to the success of that initiative.

Consequences of the previous approach

When looking at the above process that led to the eventual disuse of the 2008 financial report, it is clear that "the need of partnership is most obvious in the daunting challenge of achieving sustainable development" (Brinkerhoff 3). Unfortunately without the input of TWG, the practices that strive towards sustainability develop in a manner that is foreign to the women, and the implementation will vary depending on how much they understand or agree with it. The 2008 report was somewhat was produced, given to the women, and then framed as something that contained steps to become sustainable.This process puts the blame on the women's inability to implement this policy. It removes onus of WHE for the failure of implementation. This process can only be broken by the women's input, and making a plan that takes advantage of TWG's skill sets. Looking at their skills as past business owners and members of a credit union, who ran and tracked their businesses in a successful manner, should be combined with the theoretical knowledge of future business interns.

policy reccomendation #3: Because the most successful partnerships celebrate and take advantage of each partner's skills and abilities, WHE and TWG should engage in a dialogue about their respective skills whenever a specific policy is being developed. This should be one of the main considerations, along with the full implementation of the two other policy reccomendations, which will increase the likelihood of successful policy implementation.

Summary of recommendations.

This report has taken aspects of partnership practices and suggested specific policy recommendations, using past policy decisions as an example of how the frame of partnership can change decisions. They have been divided into "policy reccomendations", upon which future policies should be built.

These recommendations are as follows:

1) policy reccomendation #1: Establish a role that enables Dr. Melanie Katsivo (WHE's representative of the host culture), to identify contextual factors relating to policy, and to equip her with the resources she needs to incorporate this into all levels of decision making that concern the local context.

2) policy reccomendation #2: WHE must go beyond the one-way flow of communication by establishing ways for TWG to communicate easily and clearly with WHE. Through the setting up of regular meetings, quarterly updates on each party's activities, the publication of documents into Swahili, and the use and growth of bilingualism in WHE and their representatives in Tanzania, the groundwork will be laid for better collaboration.

3) policy reccomendation #3: Because the most successful partnerships celebrate and take advantage of each partner's skills and abilities, WHE and TWG should engage in a dialogue about their respective skills whenever a specific policy is being developed. This should be one of the main considerations, along with the full implementation of the two other policy reccomendations, which will increase the likelihood of successful policy implementation.

These policy recommendations are meant to be used in conjunction with one another, as they

form an integrated whole that should allow for the facilitation of participation by TWG. Participation and a wholesale acknowledgment of the local context in policy as well as rhetoric must be the way forward for an organization that is committed to sustainability.

This paper clearly shows that "Partnership rhetoric is not serving the objectives partnership seeks" (Brinkerhoff 2002:2). The current measures taken to ensure a solid partnership and with TWG has left the women with the sentiment that they "feel like they're on an island" (**ref.)** It is clear though that the relationship between these two organizations is cultivated enough to carry on into a new phase of cooperation and inclusivity, that embraces past successes and tackles its issues in a collaborative fashion.

Further areas of interest to WHE and TWG

Partnership evaluation: A report from, and for WHE's perspective

One of the most pressing elements missing from this report is a developed view of what principles are guiding the TWG-WHE relationship from the side of TWG. Because this report was constructed by an intern who came from WHE, and not TWG, the assumptions and priorities in the way this report was made reflects this fact. Specifically, the idea of partnership is a construct of the development industry, and it may not have much bearing or correlations to the way that TWG's collective defines the relationship with WHE. This area must be explored, as the data collected during the summer only contains vague references of TWG seeing WHE "like a family" (**visioning exercise '08**). At this time, there is no detailed analysis exists that clarifies how this relationship is seen by members of TWG, and in this sense, this report mainly is concerned with the objectives of realizing WHE's best practices when it comes to its relationship with TWG. This inequality has some important implications, as is explored below.

The inequality of partnership

Any development relationship, no matter how much it is based on egalitarian principles or that involves regular dispensation of financial, technical, and other types of aid is bound to those material realities. What this means is that certain inequalities are created and maintained by nature of the relationship itself. When members, staff and staff of a post secondary institution mobilize the resources available to them for the use in another place, the resources dwarf that of TWG. As well, because the assistance is one-way, the developing country partner is not always on equal footing to challenge, suggest, or refuse policies coming in, unless the conditions are made for that to become easier, i.e. increased communication, decision making, etc. This is a challenge to the very idea of equality in partnerships between donor and recipient, as the economic inequalities and the one-way flow of aid will certainly influence ways decisions are made.

The need for constant policy evaluation

Although this paper is an evaluation of certain elements of partnership, reflective reports and scrutiny of policy should be conducted at regular intervals for any organization to make sure that they are on track with their goals. The nature of this report only tackles certain elements of partnership which have been identified through the signalling of the issues outlined above, and does not include a look at other factors such as transparency, accountability, and mutual trust.. Resources must be spent towards this end in order to ensure a functional, open partnership with TWG.

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