

# Sustainable initiatives

An Information and Communication Technology case study

## Global Voices, Nairobi, Kenya



### Introduction

This case study has been generated as part of a research programme into Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sustainability factors. Funded by the [Department of International Development \(DFID\)](#), the research programme identified activities that sought to benefit the poor and had an ICT component. In particular it considered programmes where ICTs had enhanced ongoing development activities, the ICT activity could be replicated without sizeable investment, and there was a measure of sustainability. Sustainability was taken to be more than financial cost recovery. Drawing from lessons learned in other development sectors, sustainability involves a combination of factors including among others, clear objectives, institutional frameworks, local capacity and development benefits. While perhaps not fulfilling all the features of a strong sustainable activity, the following case was felt to hold points of interest for the wider global development community.

### Description of case Study

In 1998, Oxfam UK was in the process of undertaking a global strategic review. They decided to use an innovative approach to better understand the issues that they were dealing with as an organisation. They enlisted the help of communication students from the University of Reading (UR) to undertake a survey in Kenya, which focused on using video as a tool to record communities discussing their own poverty and ways to get out of it. The finished video would be a powerful visual aid that would inform the strategic review by enabling Oxfam to see real people discuss their problems, as opposed to reading documentation on poverty in these communities. Pumwani, an informal settlement area in Nairobi, was chosen as the survey site. In order to facilitate the process, youth from the community were selected to assist the UR students, thus providing an insider link to the community. These 6 youth then became the *Global Voices* (GV) team who continued the activity after the UR students left.

In looking at *Global Voices* as an ICT project using video, it is important to keep in mind the origins of this activity which grew out of Oxfam's own internal needs in undertaking a strategic review, as opposed to being designed as a project to fulfil one of Oxfam's programmatic themes.

### Key Strategies

Initially, to create videos in which communities discuss causes and solutions to poverty that would be a powerful visual aid to inform Oxfam's strategic review by them to see real people discuss their problems.

### Hindrances

Technology:

Lack of office space for GV has created communication issues, both among the target communities and with Oxfam. It also created the need for video equipment to be stored at Oxfam's offices thus decreasing access.

Socio-economic:

*Global Voices* was not designed as a project and as such it has had difficulties in trying to develop into a full-fledged organisation with the ability to create commercial videos as a step towards sustainability.

GV as a group whose original mandate was to catalyse communities to effect positive change has been severely weakened by what is perceived to be a lack in leadership. In addition, the members have had to find livelihood activities as the project did not provide them with an income, but rather per diem and other allowances.

There is concern within Oxfam that the GV team has not been able to concretise their ideas into a workable project that could now receive additional Oxfam funding outside the initial seed funds.



Photo 1:  
Community  
based  
filming

## ***Development benefits***

Oxfam hope to create policy changes on land tenure, access to services and education. At the community level, they would like to mobilise the community to advocate and find solutions to these same issues. Oxfam believes that the communities' ability to voice their issues and in so doing get media coverage has led to things such as a city council clean-up of the affected area, is evidence that the video gave people the voice and courage to advocate for change.

The video was shown to a lot of people using a local community school. In using video to record the images and voices of the people, GV ensured that these were then shared with the communities filmed. The people filmed were thus able to see themselves and their neighbours talk about the things that affected them as a group. This ability to see themselves reflected appears to have energised them to act and take responsibility for the things happening in their community.

After seeing the a GV video about how street children really live community women came up with the idea to form the WW group to help the street children and other children at risk. Through this the women have been empowered to take responsibility for their own lives, particularly after a GV-organised workshop for them. They now seek out institutions that will take in the children and have used the video towards that end. Their increased awareness through actively taking a community role has even enabled them to have a woman in their community arrested for child battering.

## ***What helped it Succeed***

Technical:

The use of standard ICT equipment donated by Reading university enable support and service to be found locally.

Socio-economic:

Global Voices have a very articulate communicator and an effective community mobiliser. Two types of people that are important attributes for this type of community based activity. All members are also trained social workers and so are aware of the many social and community issues that the videos deal with.

The target group trust GV because one of the members, Carole, came from their community. In addition, when the GV group started off they showed the children photos taken thus creating trust before they began filming them. A trust and local appropriateness that helps to make the filmed community discussions freer.

## ***Sustainability factors***

### *Objectives*

For Oxfam there were two objectives: 1. Globally: to inform Oxfam in its strategic review process so that it could be more effective in alleviating poverty; 2. Locally: to give people a tool that would give them a voice so they could be heard expressing their concerns and possible solutions on issues that affect them.

Of the User groups, Wazazi Wanaojali (WW) thought the project was to help them with their lives, education for children, improve the environment they live in and to help others in their community.

### *Policy environment*

In Kenya, the government regulates the production of film (including video), which means that an organisation (business or other) needs a licence to make a film for public dissemination. However, given that this was a local community activity, it was felt that such a rule would not apply. Oxfam received clearance from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting prior to commencing the activity. The Global Voices project would need to get licensing if it were to grow and continue its activities in other informal settlements.

### *Institutional arrangements*

Oxfam → Global Voices → Wazazi Wanaojali → Street children

Taking GV as the vehicle for reaching the ICT project target group their role has been to film using the video equipment and do some editing. The finished videotapes are sometimes given to the community or other targeted beneficiaries (e.g. schools, street children, WW etc.). With regards to involvement in the projects design one Oxfam official stated that they did not want to build a project for GV but rather for GV to define for themselves what they wanted to achieve. Therefore, after the UR students left Kenya, Oxfam met with the GV team to discuss giving them support for activities that GV themselves would define.

GV team has no formal structure but two of its members took more of a leadership role from the beginning. One has since left the country and the other is in a full time position thus

leaving GV without clear leadership. The GV team members were selected because they come from the target community and therefore there is client representation in the project structure.

Initially, the final videotape was an evaluation tool that was used in its strategic review process. At the local level, the review or evaluation is seen as the communities ability use video to voice their concerns and mobilise action.

From the GV initiative WW was created whose mission is to create solutions at the community level. WW is able to identify children at risk and bring them to the CLC facility where they are fed and educated using Behaviour Change methodology.

### *Target groups*

Even though the activity started out to serve Oxfam's needs, by identifying youth from the target community to take forward this technology, the economic poor have become a user of this technology, with the Pumwani community as the overall target group.

Street children have become a major target group for both GV and WW as an offshoot of the GV project. WW role is to actively seek out children at risk and find institutions that can help rehabilitate them while also seeking out parents (usually mothers) to give them support.

GV & children see video as a very powerful medium. The children said that video is better than books because people "get tired" reading books. However, video is more expensive as you need electricity to show tapes.

The user groups have no way to contact GV unless GV gets in-touch with them. This had not happened for 7 months until the end of Oct when GV took the consultant to meet them. Before April, when GV was more active, they'd see them almost weekly.

### *Technology*

The University of Reading (UR) team brought 2 video cameras, microphones, sound equipment, cables, tapes etc. This is currently stored at Oxfam's offices as GV do not have their own premises.

As the activity started out to fulfil Oxfam's internal review needs, video standardisation was not a criteria and Oxfam's involvement in GV's projects has not continued to a level where this would become an issue.

At the community level, given that this is an informal settlement,



*Photo 2: Learning how to use a camera*

access to electricity or TVs and video players can be problematic but there are community centres that can be used on occasion.

The overview organisation believes that ICTs (computer, internet, video etc.) would further empower the group if they had access to them. For video, they would be easily able to show it in the community, which would send a powerful message to whomever viewed it.

### *Finance*

Oxfam has been funding GV activities from the start (approx. 400,000 Kenya shillings or US\$ 5,000). As the initial GV-specific activities that Oxfam were funding have been completed, no clear costs currently exist. According to GV, Oxfam stopped funding the programme in 2000 because it no longer fits in with their strategic direction in Kenya.

GV did not know the cost of the video equipment except for blank videotapes that they had purchased while the UR team was in Kenya.

### *The project process*

The activity grew out of Oxfam's need for a strategic review using video to record people's perceptions on poverty (both Oxfam staff and economically impoverished communities). Having taped these discussions, they then had visually enhanced information on scarcity issues.

Communication between GV and the community is often through weekly community meetings that have come about due to this project.

Despite Oxfam seeing the ICT project and equipment as belonging to GV, the equipment still resides at Oxfam. GV feel that the procedure for accessing this equipment constrains their ability to use it as needed. Oxfam thus effectively monitors use of the equipment.

### Points of Interest

Highlights the need for an initiative such as this to have clear boundaries from the start. As the situation changes there is clearly a need for the structure of the initiative to be questioned, maybe even changed to become an official project.

The use of video as a tool to initiate discussion of community programmes appears to be very useful. Users highlighted that it becomes more tangible than reading something from paper.

### Key linkages

When the project started, Oxfam worked with a local legal aid organisation (Kituo cha Sheria), some schools and another NGO. GV itself works through the WW group at the community level. They also work with other NGOs such as Undugu who have since given WW some funds for income generating activities. GV also works with the local children's homes/institutions and other religious organisations.

With regards to local government, they have a chief, district officer (DO) and social services officers in the area. There is also a council of elders and an elected councillor. These officials can call meetings. At the same time, the community can go to their local officials as needed. The city council should be the most useful link but unfortunately, the failure of this organisation is often the cause of the problems in these communities.

### Intermediaries

The needs of the target group revolve around issues of land ownership (Ministry of Lands), water and sanitation services (Ministry of Local Govt., city council), street children (Ministry of Education) and other ministries.

Of the street children interviewed they felt that the video represented them fairly (i.e. editing done well) and that it was a good way to show the "true picture" of them. However, they also expressed that was not good to put children in a children's home and then not follow up to see how they are doing. They said that if you started something then you must show interest to see how it was turning out.

Editorial control for the initial video was through the UK where it was edited and then sent back to Kenya in its final version. However, Oxfam states that all the raw footage was also left with the GV team to use as they saw fit. Thus theoretically, editorial control is in the hands of GV.

### Capacity

Following 2 weeks of training in video with the UR students in 1998 and a 4 week training at a local film school in 2002, GV has the requisite capacity to use video. The communities that they work with are able to operate video players to show the final recorded tapes.

All the members of GV were originally selected because they were social workers in their communities; in addition they were also trained in participatory approaches.

Users have had no training on using video. WW have had courses on issues such as conflict analysis, business skills, family communication, strategic communication to get children into institutions.

### Stakeholders Consulted

This case study information has been gathered through the assistance of Oxfam and Global Voices staff, who facilitated interviews with a range of stakeholders. Stakeholders consulted included 5 members of Wazazi Wanaojali (WW). A women's group established through a video raising awareness about street children. Also three street boys who through the women's group are now placed in the Don Bosco childrens home. The recently established Communications Commission of Kenya, a regulatory body responsible for policy implementation, regulation, frequency allocation and licensing, was also interviewed to get an overall picture of the changing policy ICT environment in Kenya.

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