

# Sustainable initiatives

An Information, Communication and Technology case study

## UGANDA DEVELOPMENT SERVICES (UDS), Uganda

Information resource centre



### 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

UGANDA DEVELOPMENT SERVICES is a Christian non-governmental organisation whose mission is to contribute to the socio-economic development of communities in Uganda, through information sharing and technical empowerment.

The country remains basically unindustrialised and, while there is relative growth among the urban population, 90% of the nation's population live in rural areas. The "economic miracle" has not extended to these. War, Structural Adjustment Programmes and AIDS have increased their poverty. These rural communities are the intended beneficiaries of the two pilot Development Support Centres in Kamuli and Mubende Districts.

Some families independently, or groups of families acting as Community Based Organisations (CBOs), who may be farmers or small traders, want to improve their income to give themselves better access to health and education. They are eager to learn how to improve their lot, by reducing the use of expensive chemicals in farming, for example. The centres aim to make this kind of training available in one place, making the process economical.

At the Kamuli centre, the project provides a growing range of services:

- training in computer skills using in-house computer facilities; they are starting a Community Computer Literacy project in which trainers and computers travel to provide training in communities;

- business services e.g. photocopying, typing and printing;
- stationery shop;
- library facilities – access to books, newspapers, and a quiet room.
- Public phone – they have entered an agreement with MTN to install a phone booth on the veranda of the high street premises.

### Key Strategies

Through the provision of information, communication and training resource services, to raise the rural poor's capacity to tackle their own poverty.



Photo 1: Kamuli Support Centre

## ***Development benefits***

In 9 months they have trained 70 people including staff from the District administration and from Community Development Volunteers (a CBO).

The Rural District Commissioner has done a training course at UDS. He had some prior experience of computing, but the training has given him an in depth understanding. Two reasons for doing training: As RDC, he is often asked to take minutes of meetings (e.g. church, NGOs) and has to prepare good copy for distribution. He feels that an educated person should know how to use a computer.

PCs & photocopiers owned by NGOs can make valuable services available to communities (those who can pay), and recover costs for NGOs (make it sustainable). BUT at expense of stifling local private sector, which places communities in long-term jeopardy – risk of loosing facilities when donors pull out. Then the private sector can step in pretty quick but prices will increase, as donor subsidies will no longer exist. There will be value in redundancy in early days of infrastructure development e.g. 2 fax machines out of order.

## ***Hindrances***

Technology:

Old versus new Equipment: UDS use reconditioned equipment and experience equipment failures. A private trainer and SAFA use new equipment said they had no problems.

A major problem is power cuts, particularly embarrassing when running training courses, but people understand. They experience load-shedding once/twice per week (6 hours?) and cuts in bad weather. The biggest problem is that power is unpredictable. To try to deal with this they have a small UPS (uninterruptible power supply) to enable them to power down machines.

Socio-economic:

One aspect of UDS' work is capacity building for NGOs. After running 2 workshops further training was hindered as the funding had run out.

A hindrance to making the computer facilities applicable to the local populace is that technical language is English.

The effectiveness of the resource centre in meeting the needs of target groups is compromised by a lack of "extension" skills and resources (although UDS is now taking training courses out into the community).

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

Technical:

The use of standard computer equipment has enabled service and support to be found locally.

Socio-economic:

There is clearly demand for the services offered and recognition of their value. For example, ICT capacity is

poor, which is the justification for the project e.g. schools have no computers and only a handful of businesses (10) have computers. With some exceptions, the ICT capacity of local organisations can be regarded as non-existent.

UDS have made important links with local government, banks and other service providers. With the local government officials this is primarily for credibility and marketing (awareness raising) e.g. deputy CAO is chair of district NGO board, and chief of district planning unit.

Resource centres are becoming popular, with Districts and NGO networks rolling out plans to set up centres; opportunities will increase in the near future when internet services becomes viable.



*Photo 2: Despite the fact that there are no computers in schools, young people are determined to learn computing skills, as this will give them a competitive edge when it comes to looking for employment.*

## Sustainability factors

### Objectives

UDS aims to help the poorest uplift themselves, in consultation with them, by providing appropriate: INFORMATION to facilitate development, COMMUNICATION to receive and distribute information and TRAINING people in its practical applications.

### Policy environment

There is no ICT policy yet, still being debated at parliament level. UDS activities fit in with decentralisation policy e.g. workshop arranged by Strengthening Decentralisation Unit (SDU), USAID.

### Institutional arrangements

UDS's structure consists of a Board of Directors and an executive Secretary in the UK; a Ugandan Advisory Council, Programme Manager, Office Administrator, Accountant and security staff in Kampala. At project level they have a Kumuli steering committee of 6 people, a development officer, business Centre Assistant, Development Assistant for Training, a driver and a security guard.

UDS have no formal links with schools. Although some school staff and children use UDS facilities.

The project provides private training, business services e.g. photocopying, and runs a library.

### Target groups

The Kumuli project has identified 3 target groups: private individuals wanting IT training; local NGOs / CBOs and small-scale local businesses and government offices.

Communication with target groups has included sending out introductory letters to 20 local groups. At the planning stage of the project, local groups took part in 2 stakeholder workshops for needs assessment.

At present local ICT capacity is poor, which is the justification for the project e.g. schools have no computers and only a handful of businesses (10) have computers. With some exceptions, the ICT capacity of local organisations can be regarded as non-existent.

### Technology

To date, most equipment has been provided by UDS UK. This includes 2 laptops, 1 PC, 1 printer, 1 copier, 1 fax in the Kampala office, and 1 fax, 1 laptop, 3 PCs, 2 printers in Kamuli.

Currently, the photocopier is the single largest revenue

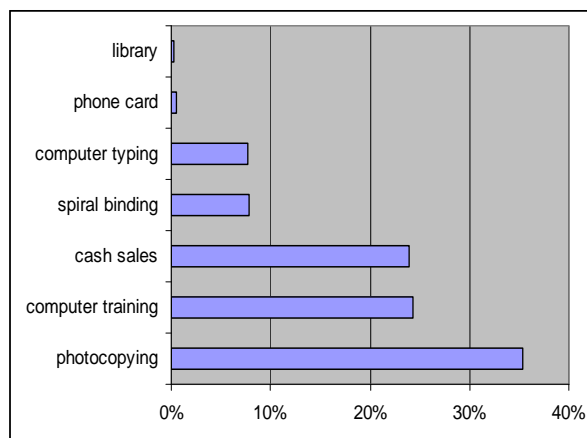


Figure 1. UDS Resource Centre Revenue over first 6 months of operation

earner, with the most appreciated function appearing to be capacity building.

For all organisations interviewed repairs are expensive. UDS use reconditioned equipment and experience equipment failures. Whereas the private trainer and SAFA have new equipment and claimed that they have had no problems. Frequent problems include unpredictable power supply, dust and poor user capacity. A major user constraint is that all the technical language is in English.

### Finance

To date UDS fundraising has been done through UDS UK. This has included a targeted campaign and has won donations of books from BookAid, British Council, and the American Information Centre. Donors have been more willing to give 'in kind' than 'in cash'.

Cost recovery mechanisms include: MTN installed a Publicom booth at the centre shortly after it opened. It accepts coins and cards; most people prefer coins. UDS receive 8% of revenue, which is paid (3 months later) through the phone cards which they sell. They are also installing a fax machine. They will also offer a message delivery service, which will give them a competitive edge over a similar fax service provided by the post office.

### The project process

The Kamuli and Mubende project area selections were initially made through contacts with local government. Through this contact they got support to hold stakeholder workshops in each district. At these, they took an open agenda approach and started with identifying development needs then developing a problem tree; this identified "information". Grouping: youth, women, men, old men, disabled, NGOs. The results were then used to draw up logical framework as

### **Points of Interest**

Despite having a focus on ICTs, the most appreciated function appeared to be capacity building (Maria's Care did fund raising, SAFA attended planning workshop).

They have made the facilities appropriate to a wide range of reach within the local community – from schools to other NGOs to individuals. They are responding to demand rather than trying to create a new form of supply in the hopes of demand.

Despite English being very widely used in Uganda it is still a major hindrance to the technical appropriateness of the project.

Through linking with the local bank UDS have created a new path for women to be able to access loans.

basis for strategic plan. Commitment of government is critical, to ensure support when eventually handing over to the community.

### **Key linkages**

UDS key local linkages include nurturing the contacts made during the project design stages. They have also been working with the District Planning Unit to provide training in information management (with UBOS) - all related to decentralisation policy.

The Manager of the local bank (a woman) has agreed that any woman who has attended a UDS business skills course can be eligible for a loan.

Links with international NGOs have been established, but do not appear to be used regularly e.g. Plan, USAID project.

### **Intermediaries**

One aspect of UDS' work is capacity building for NGOs. They carried out a training needs assessment (through AIDTS), and found there was demand for reporting, financial reporting, bookkeeping, fundraising, communication and leadership skills. They ran 2 workshops, but the funding has run out

### **Capacity**

Among UDS staff the project manager has worked on IDRC community telecentres, and works as a high level consultant e.g. to World Bank missions. Their trainer is a Makerere graduate in urban planning who picked up computing skills while in school.

With regards to computer repairs, Moses (UDS's trainer) would like to do a computer maintenance course.

The effectiveness of the resource centre in meeting the needs of target groups is compromised by a lack of "extension" skills and resources (although UDS is now taking training courses out into the community). Such a link with target groups is needed, both to field requests for information and to feed information out to target groups.

At present the training given to teachers has no direct benefit as there are no computers in schools, but the potential is there. Similarly, girls want to be secretaries – some go to cities, others waiting for technology to arrive. A similar lack of computer capacity exists among the NGO staff (e.g. UCCF, Community development volunteers), and admin staff.

### **Stakeholders Consulted**

This case study information has been gathered through the assistance of UDS staff, who facilitated interviews with a range of stakeholders. The research including discussions with the local RDC who recognises the need to learn computing skills; also interviews with organisations that have worked alongside UDS in providing the training and are using some of the resources available from UDS in their own work, e.g. a women in business CD.



*Photo 3: Staff have developed a wide range of courses and teaching methods to meet the requirements of different clients.*

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