

PROJECT "BAILUNDO 2000"

**The Revival of a Community
Project in CED - Final Report
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PROJECT BAILUNDO 2000

CED Project - Final Report

Background

Bailundo is a small town in central Angola, with a total population of approximately 50,000. The general area of Bailundo is underdeveloped. About a third of the population came in from other regions of the country in the last days of a two-decade civil war, which ended in November 1994. The community has no industrial base. Unemployment is high (70% in 1994, according to a UNDP study sponsored by the World Bank) the existing social services are relatively poor and insufficient to cope with the growing population resulting in high levels of illiteracy and mortality rates.

Agriculture has always been the economic base of this region. Therefore the overall collapse of agricultural production has particularly affected this community, leading to a serious shortage of food, malnutrition and a dependence of the community on international humanitarian relief assistance. In September 1994, Bailundo was made a food distribution center for World Food Program, another reason why more and more people were attracted to the community. As a result of this situation, an alarming number of "abandoned kids" are on the street either because they lost their parents in the war, or because they were separated from them by adverse circumstances. These kids, known as "street kids", were estimated to be about one thousand at the beginning of 1994, in the same UNDP study.

The local authorities have very limited resources, they lack experience and they lack the legal or constitutional basis to undertake a serious program of local development. Angola is a country

ruled by people with Marxist views until very recently. The command economy and the centralized political system then adopted, have not only denied a power base for local authorities but also have suppressed the local capacity to make decisions and the ability to carry out initiatives beneficial to the community. This situation has generated a level of apathy, cynicism and mistrust in the community, that gets in the way of new ideas and makes it difficult to rally community residents behind “common goals” to address community needs. Although limited, the local Catholic and Protestant churches have been instrumental in providing social services to the community.

The national resources are still mainly, concentrated at the national. The regional authorities control tightly the resources that reach them from the central government, making it very difficult for community organizations to access them. Government programs to revitalize communities have been announced several times but never sufficiently funded, leaving communities to fight for survival or wither away.

Finally, the Marxist orientation that the national leaders imposed on the country for many years, has created a mentality of dependence. People have grown accustomed to wait for the government to come up with solutions to their problems. Local authorities, wait for “instructions” from the top for almost any decision. Meanwhile, people below simply shield themselves with indifference as the socio-economic conditions deteriorate. This mentality has a negative impact on the attitude of both groups vis-a-vis CED.

In April 1997, a new Parliament and a government of National Unity were sworn in, raising hopes for a positive change in governance. Issues of local government, decentralization and an equitable

allocation of national resources, are being discussed and, there is again talk of creating a "community revitalization fund". If materialized, these initiatives will be a good start in improving the political and economic environment conducive to community development initiatives.

The Problem

Towards the end of 1993, the general degradation of the community left a great number of its residents locked in poverty, and helplessness. Kids of several age groups, were on the streets without parents, proper shelter or education and the collapse of the agricultural production resulted in a shortage of food supplies to the community. By United Nations estimates, about 30,000 community residents were threatened with starvation. The food shortage and the "street kids" were the two issues that needed urgent attention in order to bring back to the community a sense of hope and self-confidence.

The majority of the people who came in from other areas, were of rural origin and lacked skills appropriate for town life. Moreover, the lack of government programs and absence of local sources of funding limited the ability of local organizations to respond to these needs, making the community dependent on international NGOs and UN agencies for food supplies.

Bailundo has always been a community whose economy was based on agriculture. The constraints imposed on this activity by war conditions and by the policies followed by the government for a long time, have combined to erode the community's foundation.

Project Goals

Throughout 1995, a number of community residents came together and formed organizations in view of addressing the community's needs. One of these organizations is ODRA - Organization for Rural Development of Angola - with which I am associated. These groups were carrying out activities on their own, facing all kinds of difficulties. In January of 1996, ODRA sponsored a meeting, bringing together most of these local groups. It was agreed that "there is a need for a community coordinating body that would oversee the multiple activities going on and help set goals, within a framework of an integrated strategy for the community's development." This is what ODRA set out to accomplish through project Bailundo 2000 which became truly operational at the end of 1996.

The project aimed at developing structures on the ground that would tap on the existing energy and direct it towards finding short and long-term solutions to the shortage of food supplies and the drama of the "street kids" through the mobilization of the human and material resources available in the community. Until the community can feed itself, and develop productive activities that render it relevant in the interaction with other communities, it can not begin to address the issue of poverty and helplessness. Furthermore, the project sought to identify all Washington-based NGO's working in Angola in order to develop a forum for discussion of projects, exchange of experiences and eventual coordination aiming at maximizing resources in support of the Bailundo community. In summary, the project had originally three main goals:

- Increase local agricultural production through support programs to individual farmers and the introduction of cooperative farming. To support these activities, a Farming Fund would be set up.

- Develop a shelter program for the street kids, including an elementary education component;
- Finally, develop a network of grocery stores in the community to provide food to community residents at affordable prices while making some profits to support other activities.

Intended Outcomes

- Coordination and maximization of efforts made by existing local groups such as, the women's league, the local catholic and Protestant churches, businessmen, farmers and the international NGO's.
- Sustainable commitment of participating local groups.
- Development of a comprehensive two year strategy for implementation, taking into account the different components of the project.
- Increased food supply to the community through the revitalization of local agricultural production to a minimum of 3,000 tones of corn (the main food staple) in the first year;
- Stimulate about 300 local farmers and setup at least 10 farming cooperatives;
- Creation of job opportunities for community residents as derivative services are created;

- Increased income generation and cash flow in the community;
- Improved morale and the overall psychological state of the community.
- Take 250 “street kids” off the streets by the end of December 1997 and provide them with elementary education.

The national crisis has certainly, had its impact on the community as it has had on all communities. The more improvements are made nationally, the more communities will benefit. However, the human and material resources available in Bailundo, can be utilized to alleviate the most acute needs. Given the agricultural potential and history of the community, seeking to revive this sector while addressing the basic education needs of the “street kids”, would go a long way toward addressing the root causes of the community’s current state of social and economic degradation. After all, these kids will be the leaders and the productive force of tomorrow.

Methods / Strategies

- Involve existing active organizations;
- Rely on resources already in the community;
- Ensure the support of, and participation of key community groups and community leaders.

The core group - The first thing ODRA leadership did was to form a core group made up of active community organizations interested in participating. This group includes, ODRA, CI,

representatives of local churches, the women's organization, two international NGOs, (Creative Associates International- CERA- and International Medical Corps -IC-) representatives of the local businessmen and farmers. The group meets every three months, and evaluates activities, sets short and medium term goals and decides on new courses of action, as necessary. ODRA is the engine of Bailundo 2000, while CI with the women's league, are more directly involved with the kids shelter and elementary education programs. Most of the people working with the kids' program do it on volunteer basis. They have, however, incentives such as access to food or clothing on fairly regular basis.

Tapping on existing resources - the local churches are active in education, health and child care. They also assist infants with nutritious food brought in through their own assistance networks. ODRA approached the local churches to seek their support for the project particularly, for the kids' shelter and the Farming Fund. The international NGOs present in the community were also targeted as another important source of start-up capital, technical and material assistance. These NGOs had already their own projects, so it was a little difficult to gain their commitment. However, IMC and CERA agreed at the very beginning to invest a total of \$50,000 in the project. Later on more international NGOs became involved, by offering seeds and tools distribution programs.

The local businessmen were key to any strategy. They were not necessarily interested in the CED aspect of the project. However, they understood that the project could lead to increased income and purchasing power in the community. On that basis they offered support. They have capital, transport and access to markets. Through them products could be transported from the farms to

the town or other markets. An arrangement was made whereby, they would lend trucks to the project and could take 30% of the load to sell outside of the community where they could make profit. They were also asked to make contributions to the Farming Fund. Some of them made financial and in-kind contributions to the Fund.

Contacts were established with potential farmers and village chiefs, to determine whether there were enough people interested in farming, what levels of expertise already existed, determine the support level for the farming cooperatives and what other issues were important to them. There was also the issue of the availability of land for the cooperatives which, we needed to clear up with the local chiefs.

As stated before, project Bailundo 2000 was meant to be the umbrella organization that serves to coordinate the activities of all the participating groups, ensuring participation in the decision making process and transparency in the implementation process. The participation of community residents or other organizations not involved in the project is assured through town meetings where issues of concern are raised and discussed. Community residents are informed of developments or major decisions to be taken. Three such meetings were held since December 1996.

Training and technical assistance was to be done through workshops organized in the community drawing on both local and external expertise. OIKAS, a Portuguese NGO, along with Canada Development Workshop and UNDP, have together funded two workshops that took place in May and August, 1997 before the planting season. Farmers were encouraged to produce

fresh vegetables, in addition to traditional crops (corn, beans, potato, sweet potato, and wheat) as a way to improve nutrition. The workshops focused on composting, irrigation and other appropriate farming techniques. Speakers or "experts" were drawn from countries in the region for reasons of compatibility. Although farming coops were at that time, an important goal of the project, emphasis was given to family owned farming.

Changes made along the way...

As the project moved along, changes had to be made. The first was about the grocery stores network. Bailundo 2000 has not developed the capacity to launch, let alone sustain, that part of the project, mainly for lack of transportation. Until now the project is dependent on the businessmen for transport. This is a big short come. At a given stage, the businessmen decided to cut ODRA out of their dealings with farmers. They established direct relationships and started selling most of their cargo in big cities, away from the community, where the profit margin was much higher. In retrospect, Bailundo 2000 failed to realize that transport would move to center stage at that phase of the process and lost control of the "cargo". It was decided then that individual farmers who were now dealing directly with the businessmen, should be encouraged to structure their relationships as partnerships in order to draw from them benefits such as direct financial assistance. In short, the grocery network concept failed to materialize.

Another factor was the changing political environment in the country. With the evolution of the peace process, a number of people who were involved with the project left for other regions where they saw better opportunities. We had, as a result, to streamline the project. Bailundo 2000, acts now as a supporting service to farmers. It provides tools, seeds and/or financial

assistance as needed, but it does not get involved with the farming itself except in the case of the pilot farming cooperatives. In the course of the town meeting held in May, it became clear that farming cooperatives are not popular in the community, especially because of the memories they bring of the days of socialism when people were forced out of their places to work on cooperatives without any rewards. We had to introduce cooperatives as a "pilot project" using demobilized soldiers with their families. In the context of this project, cooperatives are simply families of ex-soldiers brought together to farm on common land, under the leadership of a former agriculture expert. These are people with knowledge of the field who had practical experience. To participate, people have to volunteer and live on the farm. The country has no applicable laws at moment, regulating farming coops. The hope is that if this experience is successful, more farmers would get together and slowly realize that, if well organized and well ran, cooperatives can bring benefits to its members.

The shelter program was also cut down. The original goal of sheltering 200 kids by the end of December 1997, was a little too ambitious.

Finally, it was decided in October 1997, that the project should begin focusing attention toward local capacity building programs. There a number of local NGOs springing up but the leadership of these young local organizations have skills deficiencie in administrative areas. For example, most of them have never developed or had to administer a budget. They lack experience in producing the kind of reporting that funders require, appropriate staffing patterns and long-term planning. Facilitating training in these areas, will prove to be extremely beneficial in the long-run, to the community.

Results

The results of Bailundo 2000, have been several:

- The project has created a local forum through which involved groups, can discuss and coordinate their actions;
- The project created dynamism within the community that led to an overall improvement of self- esteem.
- It has revitalized the agricultural productive capacity of the community. In the absence of statical data, the best measurement of the project's success is the complete cessation, as of May 1997, of food relief assistance programs for the community, by UN agencies and other international NGOs. In addition, most farmers are producing not only for their own consumption but also for sale or exchange with other products. If it is true that project Bailundo 2000 was a catalyst in this process, it is not the only reason why progress occurred. Other groups and farmers outside of the project's scope did play their role. On the other hand, we are far from concluding that everyone in the community has three meals a day. Nevertheless, the shift from food dependence to financial and material dependence is a sign that the community is going in the right direction.
- Market outlets for these farmers have been created both within the community and in outside markets through relationships developed with the businessmen.

- 100 “street kids” were placed in shelters at the end of December 1997 and an elementary education program is being administered. The local Catholic church is a sponsor of this program. UNICEF and Save the Children-UK, have demonstrated interest in the program and are beginning to look into ways they can be of assistance. The expectation is now to have 200 by June, 1998 and 70 more each year thereafter.
- The Farming Fund was developed serving as a tool of community development in facilitating training workshops, seeds and tools distributions as well as financial assistance in some cases. In its present form, the Fund is simply a collective pool of resources that are allocated according to established needs weighed against probability of success. It is used to support individual farmers and the pilot project on farming coops. Members of the core group are made aware of contributions made and decide on assistance to be given. Contributions from international NGOs, businessmen or any other source, could be made to the Fund both in-kind or cash. All material or technical assistance is basically granted out. Financial assistance is in the form of loans. The fund offers the flexibility of repayments in cash or with produce at comparable prices.
- We did not obtain the intended results with the farming cooperatives. For historical and cultural reasons, farmers resisted the idea. An experiment - pilot projects - was set up using demobilize soldiers. We will monitor the experiment and use it to determine the viability of this form of farming in the community.

Next steps - the project will continue to focus on the agricultural productive capacity of the community by looking at seed regeneration programs; storage capacity and methods; ways to optimize the farmers' use of cattle for traction, including veterinarian programs.

The Farming Fund will be transformed into a Community Development Fund and expand its function to include micro-credit training and lending programs to help build the ground for a diversified economic development.

More attention will be put on developing local capacity programs. The overall goal is to strengthen the return to traditional economic patterns of production while furthering skills development through training tied to economic opportunities and income generation projects. This should gradually lead the community from financial and technical dependence to partnerships, with other national and international actors.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Going through this process was a very useful exercise. Strengths and weakness that have always been in the community became obvious to me and to many other community residents. This awareness is, in itself, extremely important in the process of mobilizing the community to implement certain actions in view of reaching defined goals.

Communities remain the social foundation of societies, working to strengthen them serves the society as a whole. I found it extremely rewarding to work at community level because of the real

impact that one makes on people's lives. Even when projects are not successful, there is learning associated with the process that remains useful.

CED practitioners, themselves, often fall into the trap of speaking for the community. It is easy to assume that one knows what the community wants and take action based on that assumption. It will prove to be helpful to question ones' assumptions from time to time as we think through projects and interact with others.

Recommendations

- The political environment is an aspect that should be taken into account all the time. Changes that occurred at this level affect very seriously the ability of CED practitioners to carry out their work. Planning need to allow flexibility to respond to these changes when possible.
- As the implementation of projects unfolds, different aspects of the project gain predominance. Careful planning may lead to the determination of which aspect becomes predominant at each stage of the process. This improves the ability to control the project throughout its development. In our case, ODRA leaders failed to realize on time that transportation would move to center stage once produce was available on farms. The local businessmen, who own trucks, took advantage of this weakness and literally ran away with the project, forcing us to make adjustments.
- The success of a community project, should be defined as a positive, direct or indirect, consequence of its implementation. Loosing control of a project in the middle of its

implementation, may not be necessarily negative especially, if it means a degree of growth that will benefit more community residents. However, this attitude of “letting go” can be detrimental in certain circumstances when the people who “go” with the project, do not share CED values and principles.

- Community participation is neither a magic solution to problems, nor necessarily easy to achieve. Poverty and a general social degradation, tend to bring out people’s worst instincts. Overcoming the apathy, the mistrust and sometimes, the helplessness associated with poverty, requires a lot of patience and perseverance.
- In my experience, I found it difficult to cooperate with the private sector. While they can be of assistance, they have a strong tendency to control or “take over”. Certainly, generalizations are not useful but, caution is recommended to CED practitioners, when dealing with the private sector.
- CED practitioners would do well to remember that people will not always be there for CED values and principles especially, when better offers are made elsewhere. A balance between the mainstream economy and CED values, needs to be struck in order to retain the best available knowhow needed to succeed.
- Finally, a mechanism of constant evaluation is essential to ensure that the project remains focused on the intended goals.

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