



Developing a Culture of Participation with the African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)

Context

AFFORD was founded as a UK registered charity in 1994 by a group of Africans in the UK in response to concerns that, despite the vast number of Africans in the UK who organize themselves and contribute to Africa's development, Africans were effectively marginalized from mainstream development activity directed towards Africa. There was also a realization that different Africans can and should learn from each other.

Process

ICA:UK has been working with AFFORD since 1999, with a number of specific interventions being made since then:

2000 – a survey of ICA:UK partners in Africa as a prelude to AFFORD's Hello Africa project

2001 - joint development of a successful proposal to CAF/Comic Relief for an event to develop AFFORD's strategic plan

2002 - design and facilitation of AFFORD's strategic planning event, including Board members, staff, volunteers, Africa21 members and other stakeholders. The event included the development of an implementation plan with staff, and a follow up session three months after the initial event.

2003 - training of all AFFORD staff in Group Facilitation Methods (Focused Conversation and Consensus Workshop)



participants at the 2002 Strategic Planning event

2004 - facilitation of Strategic Visioning Retreat (reviewing progress of 2002 plan)

2006 - facilitation of a day event preparing UK Resource Persons for a trip to Sierra Leone as part of the Mobilizing African Home & Diaspora Resources for Enterprise in Africa (MAHDREIA) Project

Outputs

These events demonstrated effective participatory methods for focusing conversations, consensus building and planning to AFFORD Board members, staff and other stakeholders.

A strategic plan was developed in 2002, owned by AFFORD, and subsequent implementation was supported by follow up and review events.

AFFORD staff were trained and using participatory methods in their work, and facilitation skills were being more widely used in AFFORD and in AFFORD-organised events.

Impact & feedback

Conversations with Board members and staff of AFFORD point to the changes that have taken place.

The strategic planning event facilitated by ICA:UK in 2002 was pivotal in that it enabled the participants to see how a participatory way of working would work, demonstrated how all ideas could be included and be drawn upon to produce a coherent product both agreed and owned by the participants, and gave confidence to the Board and staff members of AFFORD to adopt participatory methods.

AFFORD has integrated ICA's and other participatory methods and techniques into its way of working, using them to drive and shape their approach and internal meetings and processes. At the Board level, a participatory approach sits alongside their core values.

AFFORD seeks to promote a participatory way of working by training African facilitators to manage workshops at conferences - 60 young Africans were trained for the annual African Diaspora and Development Days. They have been taught to listen, not to fear disagreement and to build consensus.

Partners are encouraged to use a similar approach. In one case they had to step back from a partner who does not share this approach - they have suffered from not using a participatory approach and we have seen people leaving their meetings disempowered and angry.

AFFORD regards its role as a "participatory space" as crucial to achieving its mission of enabling Africans to shape their own destiny and values the processes which allow it to play that role effectively.

Abiola Ogunsola, AFFORD Board member, wrote:

"If not for that planning process, I believe I might have given up volunteering for AFFORD some time ago. I gave up all the other organisations I used to serve because their processes were not sufficiently participatory and inclusive for me."

Chukwu-Emeka Chikezie, Director, wrote:

"We really value the contribution you've made to making AFFORD a more participatory space over the years. I think that's a key part of our relative success, a success we fully intend to maintain & build upon"

Onyekachi Wambu, Information Officer, AFFORD

"ICA techniques and ideas have had, I would say, a big impact on AFFORD. From my own perspective it has shaped the way I approach meetings and seek to build consensus for actions."