

# *Creating Space for... Greed*

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There are no guarantees in OD, even when you take both a spiritual and professional approach. With one organisation we will call Church Development Department (CDD) we deliberately put into practice the principles of taking a spiritual approach to OD consultancy (highlighted by Space for Grace<sup>1</sup>). We were excited to see what miracles would occur... But it ended in tears. Instead of grace we saw greed. Instead of positive change, there was destruction. Instead of reconciliation there was backstabbing. A 'good' OD process led to the Bishop effectively closing down CDD to start something else under the church's direct control. As Christian consultants, we are left with more questions than answers: Where did we go wrong? Where was God in all this? What have we learnt? This paper is the product of our on-going reflections and discussions.

## ***Why the OD Intervention?***

CDD was established in 1992 in response to the social concerns of members and as a legal part of the church. Initially CDD was expected to assist with church roofing projects as well as take over the management of the existing Synod development programmes. Over the years it has evolved to work in Community Based Orphan Care Programme, agriculture, relief and HIV. By 2004 CDD had an annual budget of around \$ 1 million and employed over 100 staff. It has a good reputation with donors and the church for managing programmes efficiently and accountably.

There were, however, significant challenges facing CDD, not least because of major shifts in the external environment since the time of its inception. CDD senior management perceived that there was a lack of overall vision and articulated values that often made it difficult for CDD to prioritise between the conflicting demands of the church, donors, beneficiaries and staff. The approach had moved to an increasing emphasis on participation, empowerment and sustainability, but it was not clear whether these were really owned and implemented. There was a sense that the structure of CDD did not fit with the emergent strategy. The growth in donor funded projects had led to increasing donor demands, administrative tasks and staff workloads.

After some months of discussions, CDD contracted Joyce Mataya and I to facilitate an OD process that would result in a clearer CDD identity and a more focused programme strategy. This would build on the results of on-going programme impact evaluations recently undertaken to understand the impact CDD was having at community level.

## ***What happened?***

After an extended period of contracting and planning to ensure that expectations on all sides were clear we gathered data through:

- review of documents (proposals, reports, constitution)
- e-mail questionnaire sent to all CDD donors
- 25 semi-structured interviews (board, staff, Synod management)

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.missioncouncil.se/download/18.5b4c3f30107c27e2cd580007929/04\\_2\\_space\\_for\\_grace.pdf](http://www.missioncouncil.se/download/18.5b4c3f30107c27e2cd580007929/04_2_space_for_grace.pdf)

- participatory ‘Vision and Values’ meetings with programme staff on-site

We jointly analysed the data and produced a paper highlighting the key strategic issues that CDD was facing and the outlined five critical decisions that had to be made. The report was discussed with the CDD senior management and forwarded to board as a framework for the first strategy workshop.

At a two-day workshop CDD board and senior management met to listen to the feedback from the programme staff and discuss the findings of the report. The consultants structured the event to make sure that critical questions of identity and strategy were answered as clearly as possible.

In the light of the board/management discussions, CDD wrote and disseminated four page concept note that encapsulated the main elements of the suggested strategy. This was sent to the church board and to the CDD staff for further discussion. A three-day workshop with staff confirmed the new directions for CDD. The meeting with the church board approved the new directions and were committed to following through the recommendation to improve the relationship between the church and CDD. As a result, the church lawyer developed a Memorandum of Association to guide church-development department relationships.

Unfortunately, however, the Bishop was out of the country at the time. When the Bishop returned from his travels, CDD management went to see him and outlined the proposed strategy and MOU. He expressed enthusiasm. A presentation was planned to explain the new strategy to all the pastors in April 2005.

Before this meeting, however, one disgruntled pastor (who had been turned down by CDD for a job as their chaplain and who wanted CDD to favour church members with relief handouts) circulated the draft MOU to the other pastors. He told them that this was proof that CDD wanted to become independent of the church (the exact opposite of what the MOU was actually trying to achieve). When it came to CDD’s opportunity to present the strategy at the pastors’ meeting, they were scarcely given a chance to start before they were shouted down for trying to leave the church. The meeting ended in chaos with the Bishop saying he would commission another consultancy to ensure CDD came under tighter church control.

Numerous entreaties were made to the Bishop by CDD international church partners and ourselves. We went to see the Bishop privately and explained to him that if he took the church this route, most donors would pull out and staff would leave. Did he really wish to be remembered for the collapse of CDD? He politely listened. But it was all to no avail. The Bishop took matters into his own hands. He sacked the CDD Executive Director (illegally as he was constitutionally employed by the CDD board); dissolved the CDD board; and set up a new church development commission. Within a relatively short period of time a decently functioning development department of the church has been torn apart. So much for creating space for grace - it was more like we created space for greed!

### ***What did we do right?***

We intentionally and explicitly followed good OD practice in a number of ways:

- Investing more time than in any other contract on the client consultant relationship and ensuring the terms of reference were mutually understood and agreed.
- We started from the perspective of the ultimate beneficiaries by preceding the OD work with evaluations of the programme impact.
- We carefully ensured broad stakeholder participation despite CDD having over 100 staff and facilitated participatory workshops in the field.

- We were a diverse, but unified consulting team with one British male and one Malawian female.

We also explicitly tried to integrate our understanding of church and OD by integrating the CDD change process within the wider context of the church. This meant:

- discussing the initial terms of reference with the church leadership;
- developing a relationship with the church leadership through facilitating a one-day visioning exercise for the church;
- interviewing most Synod leadership during the data-gathering;
- having church representatives present at all significant events
- discussing the Strategy Concept Note first with the church board, even before the staff;
- supporting the development of a Memorandum of Understanding between the church and CDD as part of the change process.

We also integrated our own faith into the process by:

- launching the OD exercise with staff at a staff prayer meeting. We started each day of the workshops with Biblical reflections and prayers.
- following biblical principles in the process of change, such as emphasising the importance of vision and values in driving change and also giving time for listening and repentance.
- making time to pray for the process.
- ensuring that all communication was carefully thought through, particularly reports, so that as far as possible communication was “full of grace and truth”.

But it all ended in tears. One big question we are left with is:

### ***Where did we go wrong?***

Certainly in retrospect the process failed to engage sufficiently with the church pastors. They could have given more input to the process and we could have better prepared for the feedback meeting. With hindsight we see that the process failed to get key church people on board. We could have made more effort to identify the informal powers that be in the church and work explicitly with them throughout the process. We were reminded again that most organisational change is quite deep and involves a change of heart, not simply new plans.

Yet we know that despite our best efforts as consultants, change remains the client’s responsibility. People still have free will, just like the rich young ruler in the Bible. The church leadership deliberately chose to misunderstand the situation. They asserted their power to take over the development department resources. We cannot control the actions of others.

Perhaps such a sad situation is needed for the church to be brought to its knees and be revived. Who can tell? Out of this apparent disaster good may come. But in the short term there is a lot of pain, particularly for those staff employed by CDD and for the poor people it was serving. It is a healthy reminder of the seriousness and sensitivity of OD with churches. It demonstrates the pivotal role of leaders. It also shows that good OD practice, however spiritual, does not guarantee positive change in the short term. It reminds us that ultimately we have to trust that God has the church (with all its weaknesses) in his hands. Our faith is in God, not in our OD.