

FACILITATING ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH NETWORKS

Jane Travis Viva, with Armi Martinez (Philippines), Michelle Meinesz (South Africa), Mim Friday (Uganda), Jim De (India), Sopharith Kong (Cambodia)

Viva's mission is to inspire and enable effective collaborations among Christians, providing sustainable solutions to the needs of vulnerable children. This involves developing an overview of the current work with children at risk, equipping those who are serving them, and further mobilising the Christian community to respond. The vehicle for achieving this is to work with city based, local and national networks of organisations and Churches working with children at risk to increase the comprehensiveness, credibility and capacity of the response.

A key element of this work has been OD support to Churches and organisations in the networks through a capacity building tool called the Viva Quality Improvements System (QIS). QIS is a two year programme, specifically aimed at small to medium sized projects (both NGO's and Churches) running projects for children. Using an approach rooted in organisational development, it introduces international quality standards and biblical principles in 6 areas that are of importance for work with children at risk, namely Child Protection, Child Wellbeing, Project Planning and Design, People Care, Financial Accountability and Governance. QIS provides a framework for organisations to make improvements towards those standards, through assessment, training, mentoring and external verification.

The tool helps organisations to improve towards *Foundations in Quality*; (principles that provide a firm foundation for quality work and workable systems for accountability) or *Accountability Level*; a significant level of quality related to international standards in the 6 areas. Training is designed around improvement needs to equip organisations to reach the relevant level, using improvement strategies which include mentoring, coaching through change and peer to peer learning. These methodologies are best implemented within a network setting.

QIS is being implemented through 14 city networks with a total of 329 churches and organisations in Uganda, South Africa, Bolivia, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Peru, El Salvador, India, Cambodia and the Philippines. Most networks have a specific focus (for example prevention of sexual exploitation and trafficking of children) and QIS has proved to be an effective part of consolidating the work of the network as local organisational capacity is increased and credibility is built.

Each network implementing QIS has a QIS Facilitation team running the programme. The team is trained around the vision and process of QIS to set appropriate expectations around the tool with network members and to gain commitment to the process of organisational development and change. At least one person on the QIS Facilitation team needs to have good OD knowledge and skills.

QIS Facilitation teams in the different locations are able to exchange their experiences around QIS through monthly learning exchanges by Skype and e mail. This has been crucial in helping us to develop the tool and understand how QIS works within a variety of contexts.

We are continuing to learn much about QIS and about the process of organisational development in faith based organisations and Churches. For the purposes of this paper, we have looked at learning around three key areas: 1) Facilitating a collaborative approach to OD 2) The Spiritual dynamics of OD through QIS and 3) Accompanying organisations through change.

The most recent learning has been collated from QIS Facilitators in the Philippines, India, Cambodia, South Africa and Uganda and all of the comments in Italics are taken directly from those QIS Facilitators listed above.

Facilitating a collaborative approach to organisational development

QIS is implemented through networks of organisations and churches and is a two year process. This creates a challenging but essentially powerful dynamic as Churches and organisations have to journey **together over a period of time** on a process of organisational development and change. The underlying rationale for engaging in the OD process is the desire for faith based organisations and Churches to be implementing good quality work with children at risk.

*There seem to be a 'natural' tendency for organizations in the same industry to be competitive even among Christian NGO's but going through an OD process together seem to foster a **more collaborative** atmosphere*

The length of the programme enables trust to grow between participants and the QIS Facilitation team. Organisational and Church leaders have to make themselves vulnerable to one another in the network as they reflect on how they can improve in their work with children and strengthen their accountability structures. To fully benefit from QIS, participants must be willing to share experiences and learn with others in the network through peer to peer mentoring workshops held for each of the QIS units. In these sessions, QIS participants encourage one another, exchange learning and offer practical support and resources to enable each other's organisations to succeed.

By offering a framework for a structured process of organisational development in which organisations and Churches are accountable to one another through the network, we have found that once committed to the two year process of OD the drop- out rate is fairly low.

*Every organization implementing QIS in Manila is interested in organisational development and improvement. What hinders or slow them down is their **sense of confidence** in embarking on the process – which stems often from their perceived lack of resources (funds, information/know-how, people); and the other is **safety** or that they are given a 'safe space' to embark on the process of change or improvement. Thus building the confidence of organizations to take the journey of improvement as well as creating that 'safe space' for them are factors that to be considered in the OD process.*

*The energy of many organisations is zapped by the daily demands of the ministry/programme so that looking into key areas of organisational development is something that often gets postponed. Thus creating a **venue** where they can actually do this and a **process** to help them with the task of looking at their organisations, recognize gaps and target for improvements is something that they have found helpful. Although the urgent demands of the ministry do not go away, being part of the structured process keeps them on track.*

Where a two year OD programme becomes a problem is where there may be a constant change of Director or Project Leaders, as for example in Cambodia, where the contracts of organisational leaders may be limited to 6 months. However we believe that '*OD is always a process and for certain growth there are no short cuts. Sustained growth and change cannot be done by one driven person or done so quickly that it all falls apart when one person leaves the organisation or because the staff are not "on board".*

We have found that those organisations that have QIS champions within them who have the authority to be able to influence change benefit most from the process of organisational development as well as those organisations that place a high value on learning

Envisioning organisations around committing to change is one of the most challenging aspects of the role of the QIS Facilitator. As Allen Ankunda points out in last month's OD bulletin, we have also discovered that for organisations to remain committed to QIS, it is important to demonstrate how **organisational change is adding benefit**. In order to do this QIS must assist them to achieve their objectives rather than becoming a burden or an add on for them.

It is very useful to give the participants of QIS some training on organisational development theory. It contextualises the process of change introduced in QIS and also helps organisations to be realistic and to identify what is important for them considering their stage of development. In Cape Town, we decided to run an Organisational Development Module as a pre-cursor to the 6 modules –to prepare the organisations – and as a marketing tool to explain the need for QIS. It is useful to share this information with organisations which are going through growth crises to put their experience in context so that they understand it is not because they are doing something wrong but that it is an issue of growth and that the crisis can be an opportunity.

Importantly larger more established NGOs in the network need to feel that they can benefit as much from QIS as the smaller grassroots CBO's. Within a network there will be a variety of organisations at different stages of growth, size or maturity. QIS Facilitators need to be able to work through OD processes with a range of organisations that may be starting at very different levels. Every organisation is different and has different needs.

In our experience, larger organizations are more focused on set strategies and working systems and find it more difficult to bring about change. Smaller start up organizations have less strategy of work in place, making them more flexible to try out new options. However, that may not always be the case. One of our partners, Salvation Army, is probably one of the largest international church based organizations and is an ideal partner as they not only share their experiences and accept their shortcomings, but also show a great deal of interest with the mentor to bring about change. On the other hand, smaller start-up NGOs find it difficult to cope with demands and would like to settle for easier objectives which are achievable. It's crucial to keep identifying smaller achievable objectives which are SMART and within achievable limits.

There are also challenges in a collaborative approach for QIS Facilitators trying to promote organisational development for Churches and organisations simultaneously, especially training around areas such as governance, as governance structures vary so greatly between Churches and organisations. However in the long run there are benefits to this collaborative approach to OD. Not only are some of the barriers broken down between Churches and NGO's as they learn from one another, but Churches are also encouraged to walk together in the journey of change

Somehow it brings churches from different denominations in to a working relationship that is based on children and working together on their behalf rather than debating theology. It's great to see things change that reflect Biblical principles, for example when people start to pay their taxes, or when they begin to treat their staff well, or when they start to listen to the children their projects are supporting'

The Spiritual dynamic of QIS

Within different locations, Churches and most NGO's in the networks have a Christian ethos and/or are happy to accept that organisational transformation and change has a spiritual dynamic. The QIS tool therefore encourages organisations to be able to reflect on biblical principles of change. Improvement is recognised as a journey of transformation that can be made with the help of the Holy Spirit and emphasis is placed on creating space for God's grace in organisational change and development. QIS challenges all organisations to move forward and to engage in a process of continual improvement through steps of understanding standards, self-assessment, training, setting improvement objectives, action planning and review. However often in the learning exchanges, QIS Facilitators feedback not only on the improvements that organisations are making towards reaching quality standards, but also about transformation of attitudes of the QIS participants.

It is so exciting to be free to include the spiritual dimension in QIS. We are putting our belief that only God can change and transform us into practice – by allowing the space for Him to work. I have only been at four QIS modules so far in Cape Town but I have witnessed the beauty of us praying together as participants and how people have returned on the follow up half day with changed hearts and SO enthused with what God has taught them.

QIS enables organisations to focus on the spiritual dimension and rationale for their work, getting participants to reflect on 'Gods standards', and how these are outworked in the workplace. Also the tool helps participants to reach back to the original mission, the reason and motivation that the organization was started and the values underpinning it.

Through QIS we can see our partners find the true meaning of joining together not only for developing their organizations, but more importantly, for identifying their mission and their goals according to God's purpose in their lives. They are able to see how they may have fallen short of God's expectations and what they need to do to improve on those situations. QIS is not just a tool that brings management to the new demanding age of today; it is a tool that helps partners realise that God's demands are much greater. It makes us realize that with the pace the society is changing that we need to strengthen our focus on the cross, and His direction in our mission.

As well as focussing on the spiritual element of transformation and change, the tool also enables participants to reflect on practice by linking international quality standards in each of the 6 QIS area's to biblical principles. It is often this process that 'turns on the light' for participants from Churches, making the language of international standards accessible and meaningful, prompting a change of heart which leads to change in practice.

In the Philippines, when participants are able to show the rootedness of the principles of quality standards in the Bible, and when they are able to see the link, bringing them to seriously assess their organization, planning for improvements becomes an easier task. Scripture is a source of encouragement; an anchor or rationale to pursue improvement; the standard or mirror from where an organization can assess itself; and a framework which provides (or even compels) organizations towards deeper reason and commitment to work for improvement. If there is something distinctive about QIS – it is the spiritual dimension of its process where the Word and prayer plays an important part.

Mentoring or Accompaniment through change

In line with the spiritual dynamic of QIS, accompanying organisations on the journey of change is part of the QIS process. *'Since organization do self assessment and identify areas of improvements themselves, the QIS team's main "OD" function is supportive in nature – facilitating the process of improvement by coaching through change, organizing learning exchanges and events and enabling access to various resources and prayer'.*

As well as peer to peer mentoring, organisations receive visits to help them to follow through on action plans for improvement. In some cases the QIS Facilitation team does the mentoring, in other cases external mentors are brought in

In India, it was realized that just imparting knowledge about standards would not work unless we provided substantial support to organisations through mentoring. Mentoring is undertaken by individuals who are external to the network, but who have a heart and capacity to motivate, support and encourage each participating organization to keep 'moving' on the path to change. It is very easy for an organization to give up, when it cannot identify its goals especially when the goals are too broad based. A mentor helps to give a definite focus on small objectives rather than on larger goals which seem impossible to achieve.

In mentoring organisations and Churches, the underlying value is to support and encourage them through change

*The life giving questions in the mentoring process is not "what is the problem" but rather "what can be done?" Not 'what are the problems?' but 'what are the possibilities? Since the process looks for **outcomes** or change in the organization's, activities, the resulting outputs are always subjected to the question "so what?" challenging participants (and the QIS team as well) to be more focused on the change that they want within the organisation, rather than ticking off a 'done" list. The issue is not about having a policy in place, but what change will be made as a result of that policy.*

Summary

These are just a few of our compiled thoughts about the implementation of QIS as an OD tool and its capacity to promote organisational development and change. So far it has been an interesting and exciting journey and it is a privilege to walk it with the organisations and Churches we come into contact with through the networks. We are in a continual learning process and we look forward to the next stages with interest.