

# Sharpening my Self for OD

Doreen Kwarimpa-Atim<sup>1</sup>

*'As a facilitator, you are your own best tool. Awareness of 'who' and 'what' you bring into the situation plays a big role in the process of facilitating an OD intervention'* noted the course facilitator. I was part of a group of trainee OD practitioners. We were looking back at an OD facilitation exercise we had conducted in our own organizations. As we talked, we each became painfully aware of how what we knew about our organizations and colleagues had influenced the way we had facilitated the processes. I wondered: *'How can I ensure that this does not happen again and taint my ability to be a good OD facilitator?'*

I quickly realized that being a good OD facilitator was not just about mastering the theories, skills, and facilitation tools. *It asked something of 'me' and who I am as an individual (the self)* in the situation. I discovered that my personality (shaped by my experiences); what I think about myself and others; coupled with what I know, will greatly influence the way I facilitate. Therefore to be effective, I needed to go beyond acquiring skills and knowledge, and begin to sharpen myself as the best tool for facilitating the development of others. I challenged myself to work on this area of my development as an OD practitioner. Is it easy? No! Especially when you are not comfortable with what you see of your 'self' or you seem not to be making any progress. Is it worth it? By all means yes, especially when you see how working on your 'self' has supported others to grow and enabled you to experience and see your leadership differently.

## How it all began

In 2008, I decided to enroll for the 'Facilitating Organizational Development (FOD) course facilitated by EASUN - Centre for organizational learning based in Arusha, Tanzania I had been working for the last 10 years in capacity building and training with CBOs and NGOs in Uganda. Gender and HIV were my specialties. But I thought that OD might offer something more. I wanted to know:

1. *What are the theories and approaches in OD and how do they link with the practice in actual interventions'?*
2. *What are the pre-requisites for a successful OD intervention, and what makes a good OD facilitator?*
3. *'How does one apply the principles and approaches of OD in handling specific issues like gender, HIV and AIDS, what tools are available, and how does one apply them?'*

## Learning to listen

---

<sup>1</sup> Doreen is an EASUN Associate and freelance consultant. She has worked with major church bodies like the All Africa Council of Churches, the Ugandan Joint Christian Council and briefly at the World Council of Churches in Geneva. She is a gender specialist by background and also has worked extensively on HIV through STOPAIDSNOW! Doreen is a Ugandan, married, and has three lively boys.

I began the modular course (three week-long sessions spread over eight months) eager to learn as much as I could; to master as many tools as I could. But the most important sessions proved to be the 'self-development band'. Those sessions re-defined for me the core purpose for attending the course. They touched and challenged a part of me that would never have been influenced just by increased technical knowledge, skills and techniques. One time we were asked to 'find a spot outside the training room and listen to the environment.' We were asked to note the sounds we heard and list them as mechanical or natural sounds. I found a spot that was close to the road. I carefully made my list. When we shared in plenary the different sounds we had had heard, it dawned on me that I had only recorded the loud and obvious sounds. I had missed hearing the softer, quieter sounds. When I applied this to a facilitation situation, I realized that I am more inclined to listen to the loud voices and see the obvious. I tend to ignore the quieter people (perhaps because I have no difficulty expressing myself, I assume that it is the same for everyone). I asked myself: So to listen more effectively in OD, what do I need to be and do differently in future?

Throughout the course, the self-development bands surfaced a number of unconscious processes that influence many of my actions. They challenged my assumptions, attitudes, how I worked with other people's contributions, or made my own contributions, how I listened to, and respected others. I realized that as long as I did not consciously work with these issues, my theoretical and technical knowledge and skills would only go so far in enabling me become an effective OD facilitator. I realized that I had to invest in developing my 'self' as the best tool I have.

### Investing in my self

- On realizing the treasure in the self development bands of the course, I took each one of them very seriously and noted the insights that stood out for me at a personal level.
- I immediately took the opportunity to apply for an apprenticeship position with EASUN, and fortunately I was taken on. I knew that this would expose me to client situations and provide an opportunity to surface my developmental questions. I also try to make sure that I fill the reflection forms for the program (after every intervention) and these help surface the questions as well.
- I began reading books on Self development.
- As part of the EASUN apprenticeship program, I started developmental counseling. I have a listening partner who supports me in this area through scheduled face to face sessions and ongoing email discussions.
- During interventions, I create my own time to look back at the end of the day to surface and write down questions related to self, especially personal challenges. For example; 'What do I struggle to let go of? How does this make me feel?'
- Before an intervention, I try to surface and deliberately work with 'who' and 'what' I bring or am likely to bring into a situation- especially when I think I know a lot or nothing. I always remind myself of Proverbs 3:5 '*Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him and he shall direct your path*'.
- I try to let go and not control situations, through praying and asking God to be in charge because I know it is not easy to change myself, I need a power higher than mine for '*It is not by might, nor by power but by my Spirit says the Lord*'. Zech. 4:6

### Taming my critical mind

This self-development did not end with the course. I remember one critical incident during my apprenticeship. During my very first accompanied intervention I noticed that I was a little uneasy whenever we discussed what had 'gone well' during the reflection session at the end of the day. I often did not have much to contribute. I had only mentioned one thing that I felt had gone well when I filled in the apprenticeship reflection form. I had a long list in the section for what had 'not gone well'. Mosi Kisare, (EASUN Director) who was my accompanying facilitator challenged me to look back on the event and think of what else I had done well. This set me thinking not only about that incident, but many more. I realized that there seemed to be a 'dominant posture' in the way I regarded situations, including the way I saw myself. I noticed that I find it easier to critique than appreciate. Even when I did not express the criticism verbally, it was at the back of my mind. This had become my default mode of looking at situations. I was not even conscious of it. When I thought about how this could affect my effectiveness as a facilitator, I saw that I was highly prone to emphasize surfacing what was going wrong. I would not really support my client to surface and celebrate what was good. I thought about the many times where I could have missed the opportunity to build on existing strengths, and instead rubbed in the weakness. What the consequences might this have had? This was very humbling for me ...

But I also realized I could do something about it. When I asked Mosi what I could do, he pointed out that I could read about appreciative inquiry, but most importantly, I had to work consciously with what I had seen about my 'self' in this case. I must say I am now more comfortable and genuine with 'reflecting on what has gone well'. I also challenge myself to start by seeing and appreciating the good in people and organizational situations. I keep my critical mind better under control.

### Looking ahead

Sharpening my Self as my best tool for OD has been both exciting and challenging so far. I smile when I notice that I have made milestones. I frown when I find that I have gone backwards or I discover something about me that is not so pleasant. But I do not wallow for long as I know that my healing journey in that area has begun. I am grateful to God that I had the opportunity to attend the course at EASUN and I have a very supportive mentor. I am confident that *'He who began the good work in me will bring it to completion.'* Phil 1:6

To find out more about the EASUN course see: [www.easun-tz.org](http://www.easun-tz.org),

Contacts are; P.O.Box 6120 Arusha, Tanzania. Tel. +255-(0) 27 2548803, Mob. +255 754 552 542