Management procedures for development NGO that work with headquarters in developing countries

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Abstract

The aim of this document is to promote a strengthening of the management systems and internal organisation of DNGO that have headquarters in developing countries, particularly in Africa, where due to differences of context, the level of development and cultural differences, it is of particular importance to apply efficient internal management processes for the organisations working on the ground and to provide solutions. To this end, a pilot study has been undertaken to adapt and implement management procedures in a NGO in Tanzania with the purpose of obtaining information that can be adapted to other organisations and make a definitive contribution to enhancing the quality of the actions taken by International Cooperation that will lead to more efficient measures, result in process monitoring systems that are closer to the actual development projects and simplify programme assessment.

Keywords

Project Management in non profit organizations, development programmes, Development NGO, cooperation for development.

1. Introduction

Everyone is now aware of the ever increasing use of management and quality programmes in every sphere and sector of an organisation in order to enhance its performance.

In recent years, this effort has also become visible in the Development NGO sector, with an ever greater number of these organisations beginning to adopt this type of tool as a basis for enhancing their internal organisation, and, as a result, achieve more efficient project management.

However, this effort put into management is made in the headquarters these organisations possess in their countries of origin but does not extend to the offices operating in the countries where their programmes and projects are developed. This situation hinders relations between central headquarters and the headquarters "on the ground", which has led to a need to take these management models to every place where the organisation is operating.

The countries where DNGO are running their projects are many and varied, which means it is important to compare theoretical approaches with in situ difficulties. In order to be able to propose what form these management systems should take if they are to be acceptable to the organisations, a thorough analysis must be carried out that includes the type of organisation, the way relations are conducted, communication... an analysis that embraces all the players so that the tool proposed will really improve the management that these organisations have on the ground. As an example of a medium-size organisation confronting this reality we have chosen Engineering Without Borders in Tanzania to materialise the implementation of these internal management systems and compare the theoretical approaches with the real experience.

In order to strengthen the management systems and internal organisation of Development NGO that have headquarters in developing countries, the work has been approached along two lines:

- To design a manual of internal organisation procedures that is available to members of the DNGO Coordinating Committee in Spain so that they can make a manual available to those organisations needing one to improve their internal organisation in third world countries. Later on, this model will be made extensive to all interested organisations that request it.
- To adapt and implement these procedures in a medium-size NGO in an African country; in this case, Engineering Without Borders in Tanzania.

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By coordinating this project along a double track of theoretical and practical work it is hoped to generate a research-action working methodology that will enable theoretical designs to be compared with an application to a specific case. The object of this is to offer a project management model that is appropriate to the real problems of NGO working in developing countries and be able to foresee to the full any problems of implementation and finally be committed to setting up internal organisation systems precisely where it is most difficult, but at the same time where they are most needed.

Finally, it is hoped to contribute to enhancing the quality of the actions carried out by Cooperation for Development so that their measures will be more efficient, the process monitoring system closer to the operation being run and make assessing the development programmes more accurate and efficient.

2. How to improve development actions on the ground. Project goals

What the majority of the prioritised countries of Cooperation for Development in Africa have in common is determined by various factors:

- The countries have an enormous surface area.
- There is a broad variety of cultures and language, even within the country itself, which complicates running projects and hinders communications with counterparts, partners and beneficiaries.
- There is no advanced social organisation at a counterpart level, which makes it difficult to run the programmes and obliges organisations to have their own staff to carry out many of the related tasks.

The sum of these three factors means that, in general, NGO must have a large number of own staff, often in several locations (country capital, places where the projects are being run, and intermediate cities to set up communications and logistics).

The organisations frequently have no locally developed internal organisation procedures to ensure the optimum management of these teams. If to this we now add the bad infrastructure and communication network existing in most of these countries, we come up against a barely efficient internal organisation that undermines the quality of any actions taken in the south.
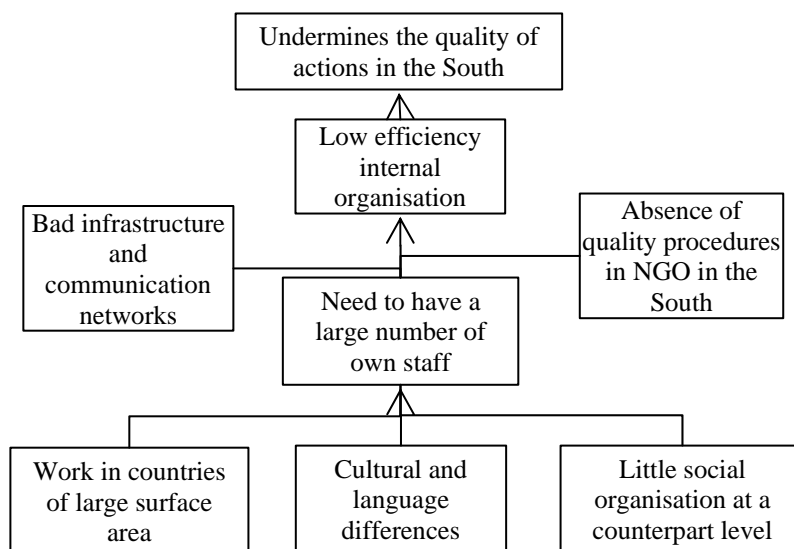

Figure 1. Identifying needs in on-the-ground management

Faced with the problems detected, it was decided to work on the generation of new internal management and quality procedures for NGO in developing countries so that the systems themselves will, to some extent, compensate the deficient infrastructure and communication networks in these countries.

Therefore, in order to define these procedures, several complementary lines will be worked on:

- Strategic planning for the NGO in each country as an essential framework for action inside each organisation.

- The need to draw up an operations manual to describe the activities of the programme with a detailed description of each of them to ensure appropriate on-the-ground actions. This manual would be extremely useful for new programme coordinators as well as for other partners joining while the programme is running. If the differences between programmes were significant, the manual would have a common general section and specific sections for each programme.
- A definition of the job descriptions and the ways of conducting relations and communications between each player in the organisation (Headquarters Coordinators, Country Representatives, General Administrators, Programme Experts...), documenting and setting out the procedures to be followed between the country coordinator, domestic staff, programme coordinators and the NGO central headquarters with the purpose of sharing and exchanging information on the different programmes underway, developing coordination activities, joint assessments and proposing annual meetings to make clear what is being done at any one time.
- The internal management of the organisation in each country, including domestic and expatriate human resources management, safety policies, accounts and administration management, subsidy management…
- The integration of voluntary workers into the new organisation charts, as important players in the partnership movement of Cooperation for Development, who must be bound to the activities of NGO in third world countries.
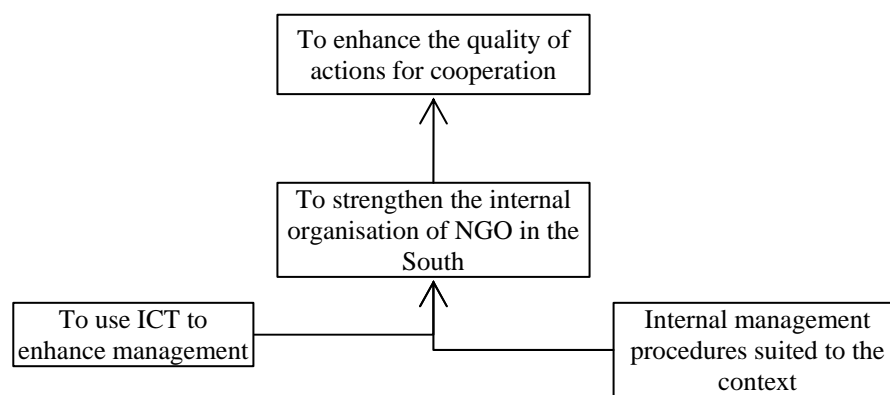

Figure 2. Project goals

3. Methodology and implementation of management procedures in a DNGO in Tanzania.

Engineering Without Borders is a non-governmental organisation devoted to cooperation for development that seeks to place technology at the service of development. The ISF cooperation programmes are long-term plans to ensure that in a zone of an impoverished country the population has access to one or more basic services, in addition to other needs, such as farming production and marketing. The phases are focussed on planning, building and improving the infrastructures, on the one hand, and on the other on instructing, training and involving the inhabitants of that zone or community.

The mechanisms of involvement appropriate to each individual situation are determined by running cooperation projects in the zone, pilot experiments that will then become programmes. The paths chosen for getting involved take account of social, economic, technical, cultural, ethical, environmental and political factors to ensure the programmes are comprehensive. In both the projects and the programmes, ISF works jointly with its counterparts. These are indigenous social organisations that are fighting for development and social justice in the zone and share basic principles with the organisation. The areas for involvement are:

- Social equipment and infrastructures: attending to the needs of the indigenous populations and integrating them into the decision-making process.
- Farming development: development programmes and projects for farming to promote cooperativism.
- Energy: electrification projects, technical advice, training and the spread of knowledge as part of a development programme that includes other sectors.
- Information and Communication Technologies: ICT and rural health system management projects in Latin-American countries and Benin.
- Water and Drainage: water supply and treatment programmes (health and hygiene education, training in water management systems in the villages, improvements to the district's epidemiological surveillance system and its different health units, the construction and overhaul of the water supply systems in some of the villages to provide better access to drinking water). This is the programme that has been used as a pilot reference for developing this project.

Faced with the need to structure a comprehensive management system for this organisation, we began by compiling all the information available on how matters were being dealt with up to that moment. During this assessment stage, it was found that the organisation had grown very rapidly during recent years and that a whole range of new procedures had been developed in the light of immediate circumstances in order to take on board the new model towards which the organisation was evolving.

Having compiled all the information, the different processes were defined (strategic, operational and support) to be undertaken in the organisation and how they were interrelated. Thus a preliminary internal organisation process map was drawn up.
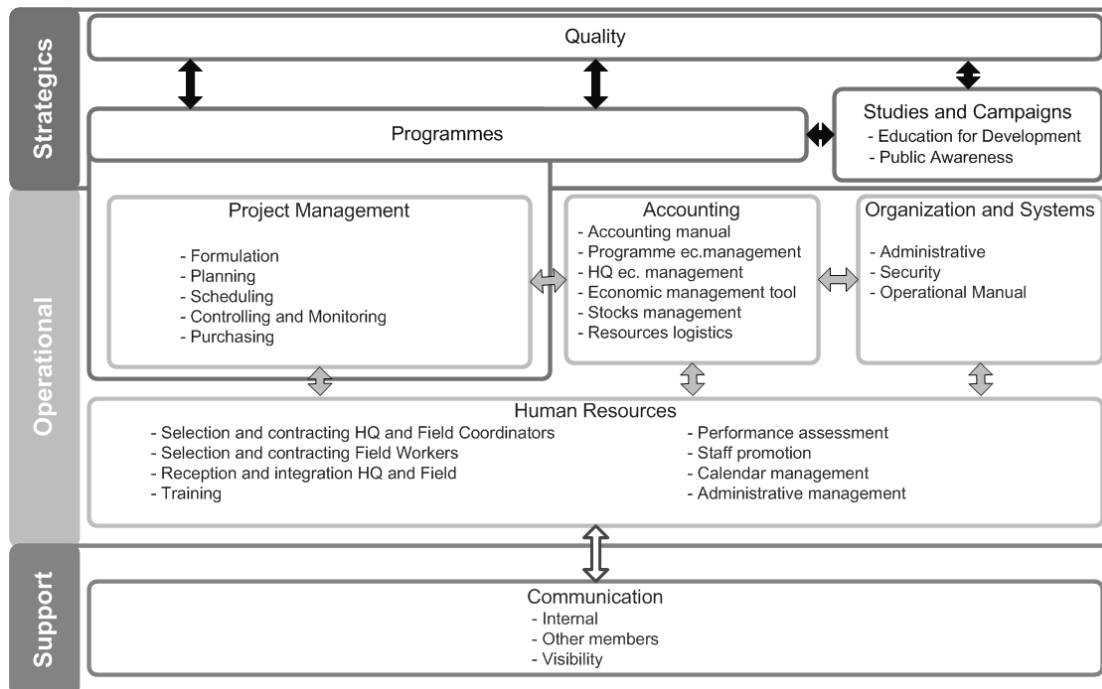

Figure 3. Internal organisation process map

Later on, a visit to the programme in Tanzania was arranged in order to compare and validate the preliminary process map and gather first hand information on work in the country. To this end, a meeting was arranged in Dar es Saalam for the organisation's different programme coordinators with the purpose of assessing the performance of the different "on-the-ground" processes where it was suggested they quantify each of the following items:

- The importance of each process for appropriately managing the programme under coordination.
- The current level of performance of each process.
- To prioritise measures to improve each process.
- To assess the difficulty of implementing these measures with the currently available resources.
- To assess the resources, time and training needed to carry out these measures.

Thus, depending on the impact, and the difficulty and urgency to develop each of the processes the priority items were identified so that a start could be made on documenting and implementing procedures for enhancing on-the-ground actions.

	Impact		Difficulty		Urgency
	Importance	Current performance	Implementation	Need for resources	
Project Management	4	2.6	3	3.3	1
Accounting	4	2.4	2	2.3	3
Administration	3.6	3	2.2	3	2
Human Resources	4.3	3.1	3.3	4	3
Internal Communication	4.6	2.2	2.75	3.7	3
External Communication	4	3.7	2.33	2.33	1
Security	3.6	1.6	3.5	2	3
Purchasing Logistics	4.2	2.4	2.25	2.33	2
Resource Logistics	4	2.6	3	2.5	1

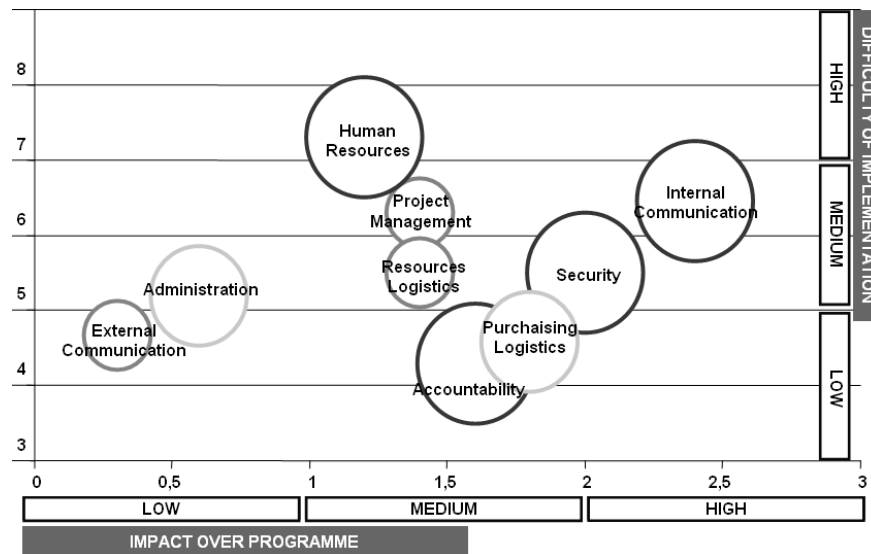**Table 1. Results of the assessment of each on-the-ground process**

Figure 4. Process prioritisation diagram

After this analysis, it becomes obvious that the immediate development of processes such as, 'Internal Communication', 'Security', 'Purchasing Logistics' and 'Accounting' would have a medium to high difficulty of implementation in the management of the programme to be coordinated. Other processes, such as 'External Communication' in the organisation or 'Administration' would have a much lower impact on the internal organisation and be less difficult to implement. Processes like 'Project Management' or 'Resource Logistics' are characterised by medium levels of impact and difficulty. Finally, the 'Human Resources' process was identified as the most complicated to manage and is now organised in parallel with the processes of the first group in the definition of the organisation's functions and responsibilities.

Having identified the processes to be prioritised for development and implementation, the next issue to be approached was to plan the activities for 'The quality management of the on-the-ground development actions'. This plan contained the following activities:

1. Benchmarking.
    1.1. Collecting and selecting information from other DNGO.
    1.2. Classifying inspirational processes.
2. Process redesign.
    2.1. Data collection.
    2.2. Planning the activities for each process.
    2.3. Redesign in line with methodology.
3. Document management.
    3.1. Designing tools and modelling formats.
    3.2. Information repository: on-line procedures manual.
    3.3. Preparation of specific guides for processes requiring them.

4. Gradual transfer of results to other programmes of the organisation.
5. Monitoring and continuous assessment (indicators).
6. Integrating processes with the organisation's strategy and structure (functions).

The plan to redesign each process is structured in such a way that the objects for improvement, taken into account both by headquarters staff and on-the-ground staff, are decided, mutually agreed and approved. Once this step has been taken, the criteria for redesigning each process are set out, bearing in mind that all the work done must become integrated with other aspects that involve quality management, such as continuous assessment and monitoring, be coherent with the organisation's human resources strategy and be suited to a document management system adapted to the needs and capabilities of everyone involved in the project.

5. Conclusions

Developing this project has increased the efficiency of the actions taken and will enable more resources to be allocated to on-the-ground activities. The project will considerably improve the quality of the measures aimed at cooperation since tools and mechanisms likely to be implemented by other organisations with on-the-ground headquarters will be identified, developed and assessed, thereby promoting more efficient management so that more resources can be allocated directly to the activities underway. Therefore, in the medium term it is estimated that the cost/beneficiary ratios can be reduced if the proposed methods for internal organisation are applied. Moreover, the organisation in Tanzania will ensure that knowledge is transferred to partners and collaborators in the country.

On the other hand, it is hoped that improving management will have an impact on the quality of the actions themselves and lead to closer supervision and monitoring and make assessment easier. These measures strengthen the long-term sustainability of the projects, ensuring that investment is not repeated in the same zones for the same actions after a few years.

One of the greatest benefits provided by running this project is the work developed together with the counterpart and local staff, which leads to their learning valuable knowledge about how to interpret new management procedures as well as how to draw up and improve others in the future as the need arises. In addition, the project has resulted in an optimum information flow, coordination activities between the players involved, the possibility to develop joint assessments and an improvement in communication on both an internal level in the organisation at the receiving end, and on an external level for those for whom the development programmes are intended.

Also, organising training workshops guarantees that knowledge and capability will be transferred to the managers of the member cooperatives. An enhanced internal management system will be available and the DNGO Coordinator for Spain will have a procedures manual available for any organisation requiring a guide in order to implement a similar project.

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