

Not just for Christmas? How the Guardian tried to change development reporting

 blogs.lse.ac.uk/polis/2010/11/10/online-involvement-with-development-projects-the-katine-project/

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This report by Polis intern Ivory Gaw



Katine students

People are inherently self-interested. But with this self-interest comes the occasional need for altruistic action. Arise, Christmas charities where media outlets do their once a year act of humanitarian service that attracts people to donate to causes around the world. However, the problem is, this kind of service occurs just once a year. People donate money without really knowing where the funding goes or how much of a difference one donation can make. The Guardian sought to change this with Katine project.

In the latest [Polis Media Dialogue](#), Elizabeth Ford from the Guardian explained how the Katine project was an attempt to do things differently. Launched by Alan Rusbridger in 2007 in conjunction with the [African Medical and Research Foundation](#) and Farm-Africa, the 2.5m project allowed viewers to see exactly how their money was being used, the progress of development as well as they got to know inhabitants of Katine in Northern Uganda on a more personal level.

The project focused on five areas, health, education, water sanitation, livelihoods of children and governance. Developments were reported through the official Katine project website on the Guardian.

What was unique about the project was that it encouraged citizens to get involved as well, engaging the community by providing them with a voice. A resource center was set up with 4-5 computers that enabled people to come in, post their own comments, write their own blogs, take some cameras and provide their own account or their own story.

There were several challenges, however to citizen involvement as most were focused more on eating, taking care of a family, and making ends meet. What the project had was more involvement with chiefs and committees, hearing one particular voice rather than of the single woman who lives 45 minutes away.

There was also the question of exposing a community to the rest of the world using digital communications. Citizens may not be understanding to the harsh realities of online comments and may be averted to engage further if they had a negative experience with the website. This created the challenge for the Guardian to monitor and steer conversations towards respect of the sensitivity of the Katine project.

This project was a huge risk for the Guardian, as one of the main critiques was if the Guardian was qualified to tell a true African development story. Were reporters going into the town with a western bias of trying to develop a town in a certain way?

There was also the question of funding and resources. The bureaucracy of the development itself may not show transparently where each cent goes towards development, especially the costs to running a campaign of this scale and internal labour costs. It is also important to note where the authority lies and by whose perspective the project being portrayed as. Lastly, was the project seen as successful in the eyes of the people of Katine themselves or was it seen as successful in the eyes of those with authority?

At the end of the day, these criticisms are simply criticisms. The Guardian took advantage of the digital medium and brought awareness to one of the poorest towns in Uganda that was marred by conflict. It allowed people outside of

Katine to relate to the people and gave them an opportunity to help.

Even if the Katine project may not be a perfect development model in the eyes of academia, providing clean water, health, and sanitation, among others is definitely a positive thing in anyone's eyes.

This report by Polis intern Aivory Gaw

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