ISSUE
After completing the Tawa Sand Dam (read more of this project in the case study – Part One), the Project Office in Kenya East needed to report on the project to their territorial and international partners on what had been achieved. They felt good about what had been achieved and, after drafting a report at THQ, they took it to the community for checking.

The women who had been involved with the project asked why they had not been consulted before the report was drafted, and requested to have more input. They were concerned that:
- The report was written by THQ
- There was a lack of consultation over the final review and so the report was incomplete
- There was no community input into the calculation of how much local contribution had been given

After the success of the project, the community ended up feeling disempowered.

DESCRIPT AND ANALYSE
In order to address this issue, the Project Office set up a community audit of the project.

The Project Office took some time, with the community, to understand more of the context around how the project was managed.

The community shared their concerns about how funds were distributed and what their contributions amounted to. The community had strong enough relationships with the project office to feel comfortable in communicating these views. It seems that the processes and finances, especially in the review stage were not as well shared as they could have been.

Their analysis also led to the discovery of some strengths in the project management and implementation:
- The community felt that the relationship was strong and robust enough to share their concerns with the Project Office
- Unity amongst the self-help group
- The fact that there was now a chance for an inclusive review and evaluation
- The self-help group felt a sense of strong ownership of the project

Their analysis led to the discovery some weaknesses in the project management and implementation:
- The self-help group felt a lack of understanding and knowledge over the project processes and finances
- Accusations of misspending funds had been made towards the self-help group from the wider community
- The community contribution had not been fully calculated
- The Project Office had learnt a lot from the project, but it was their learning and not the communities' learning
REFLECT
After this initial analysis with the community, the Project Office team took time to discover what they had learnt:

- That transparency and accountability needed to be an important part of our work & how we had not been true to this in our processes
- They talked about the need for not being defensive
- Why it was important they listened and learnt

The team reflected on their values of openness, community ownership, pamoja (Swahili word meaning together) and transparency. They also reflected on the Bible, and read the story of Jesus (aged 12) who visited the temple with his family, but Mary and Joseph continued their journey and left him behind - even though He is the most important person in the story.

PLAN
With the community, the Projects Office looked at different ways of improving this situation and together came up with the idea to develop and implement a system of public review or community audit. The plan was to conduct a process with all the beneficiaries (the Self-Help Group in the first instance) to audit the whole project, based on the data provided. Together, they agreed a way that this could be undertaken - through reviewing the final report and achievements and the Project Office giving a full and open account of the finances.

The tools they used were:

- Focus Group discussion
- Community Walk
- Community Finance Calculation
- Questionnaires
- Individual stories
- Vision Plan

ACT
Three small groups were initially set up to talk about the positive outcomes from the project as well as the main lessons learnt.

The community calculation looked at the finances of the project. First of all, the Projects team gave a full income and expenditure account to the community. The community were able to ask questions. The Projects Officer was asked why his “Monitoring” budget line had a higher expenditure then planned. They asked why some tools, such as wheelbarrows, were missing from the expenditure. They double-checked how much the balance of cement in the project was worth. Finally, the community calculated together the value of the contributions overall. It came to $21,522!
EVALUATION AND MORE REFLECTION

The community calculation had a very positive impact on the community leading to considerable encouragement, a sense of achievement and a real change of approach and attitude.

The Project Office learnt a great deal about the process of community audit, and appreciated the value of both themselves and the community openly sharing and being honest together.

The community agreed that they would start refer to donors as ‘partners’, and that when visitors might come to village in the future, they would now tell them what they had achieved together rather than what they needed or lacked.

An elderly man talked about the story of the feeding of the five thousand. Jesus turns to disciples and asks ‘where shall we buy bread for these people to eat?’. The man highlighted that Jesus was giving them the opportunity to participate in the solution. The local community stated that they felt that despite their poverty, they had played their part, this process felt like they had been given the opportunity to contribute and become an essential part of the solution.

Self-worth was considerably changed and improved as a result of this whole exercise. The community were far more realistic of what was achievable and how they could be involved when planning the way forward. They felt more able to recognise strengths and own contributions, and thought about how these could be used more.

Finally, the Projects Office completed a review of the community audit. After discussing what they had learnt, the process has now be introduced to more areas of work in The Salvation Army in Kenya East. “Audit” and “transparency” have become positive terms instead of a policing exercise, and the importance of using faith based facilitation and participatory tools were able to show everyone why decisions were taken, what actions resulted and how to bring about measurable outcomes.

Questions:

How does this story challenge, encourage or inspire you in your own work?

What might you change as you Analyse, Reflect, Plan, Act and Evaluate?