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Improving Maternal and Child Health in Simanjiro, Tanzania

Lorna Renwick spent two years working as a health trainer with Skillshare International in the Simanjiro District in Tanzania to improve mother and child health.

Simanjiro covers an area of 25,500 square kilometres (about the size of Belgium) and has a population of about 150,000, the majority of whom are Maasai. When we arrived in the district, there were only 12 functioning basic level health facilities, no hospital, no tarmac roads and limited radio and telephone contact. For many of the population, it takes up to two days to walk to the nearest health facility and even then there is a shortage of skills and essential drugs, such as antibiotics and paracetamol.

The main health problems in Simanjiro are malaria, respiratory problems in children, immunisable diseases such as measles, trachoma, pneumonia, diarrhoeal diseases, sexually transmitted infections, TB, HIV/AIDS and problems associated with child bearing. Women and children are especially vulnerable to all of these problems.

Access to health care has been improved in the district by operating mobile health units that conduct mother and child health services, screen for malaria and provide treatment to reach those who cannot get to the static health facilities. More health facilities have been built and renovations have been carried out on existing facilities.

Health facility staff have been trained in community planning, the management of acute and complicated malaria, the identification and

treatment of trachoma, HIV/AIDS counselling and school health screening. Training has also been given to more than 600 traditional birth attendants and community based health workers to ensure that they have the appropriate skills, tools and information to deal with health issues in their villages. And, they are linked to health facilities so that they can get technical support.

School teachers have been trained in first aid and health promotion in schools. More than 5000 children have received immunisations for BCG, diphtheria, polio and measles through the schools. School health plans have been developed and a school screening programme has been initiated. Targeting schools in this way has a direct impact on improving health as schools can often be found in areas with no health facility. Diseases like trachoma can be easily identified and it is simple to treat if diagnosed early enough. In a district where 96% of children display early signs of trachoma, the school screening programme is a crucial intervention to prevent the blindness caused by the disease and for long-term health.

A community health awareness programme has also been established to increase the population's access to health information. As a result, about 100,000 people (two thirds of the population) have been educated in mother and child health, HIV/AIDS, TB, leprosy, malaria, trachoma and safe water and sanitation through community radio programmes and peer educators.

Photograph: Screening for trachoma in schools in Simanjiro.

Working with small businesses in Namibia



Andrew Harris joined the Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) team in 2002 as Network Advisor. His role is to assist the internal development of the JCC, develop improved approaches to support small businesses and develop the organisational and management skills of individual members of the JCC.

People participating in small and medium enterprise activities make a significant contribution to the Namibian economy and represent about 15% of the adult working population. The Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) is the representative body for service providers which supports and promotes the strengthening of small businesses in Namibia. It is based at the Small Business Information Centre in Katutura, the main township of Windhoek. The Small Business Information Centre was a new venture when I joined the JCC and remains the only one-stop shop for information for small businesses in Namibia.

Within a year, the centre has established the most comprehensive database on small businesses in the country, has found new ways to reach small businesses and keep them informed, and has piloted improved training and development programmes for small businesses. It has also become a respected proponent of the needs of small businesses, recently publishing a report "Small Businesses in Namibia: a valuable investment".

New ways have been developed to keep track of organisations and individuals that provide support to small businesses. This has included publishing a Directory of Small Business Service Providers with more than 150 agencies including banks, training agencies, consultants and governmental bodies, monitoring the nature and extent of small business support across Namibia and developing (and delivering) management training modules for small business service providers.

A number of improvements have also been made to business training in Namibia which is an important step towards achieving new approaches to business support. Voucher schemes enable participants to pay part of the cost of the training and allows them to choose the trainer that they best feel meets their needs. Furthermore, the effectiveness of training is measured according to the effect it has on the participant's approach to business.

The Small Business Information Centre is also teaching people to save and keep family money and business money separate. When Clara Coetzee came to the centre, she had one sewing machine. Now she has 10 industrial machines and is planning to export her products to Botswana and other SADC countries. Other trainees expanded their activities sufficiently to employ more people in their businesses while others changed their product lines having reviewed the market in which they were operating. All the trainees were challenged to write their own business plan – learning how to create the plan themselves and not depend on someone else to do so. On 31 October this year the Small Business Information Centre presented certificates to 27 successful graduates of its "Building Your Business" programme.

Corporate Strategy Review

Skillshare International is approaching the end of a five-year plan. Our current Corporate Strategy sets out our purpose, values and strategic objectives for the five-year period 1999–2004. It is now time for us to evaluate our performance. It is a priority for Skillshare International that our key stakeholders are able to share their experiences and views in this process. This information will also help us to develop our new Corporate

Strategy. As a supporter of Skillshare International, you may be invited to participate in this review and we would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support during the review activities.

If you would like more information on the Review of the Corporate Strategy, please contact Jessica Lowe on 0116 257 6607 or email jessica.lowe@skillshare.org

Mozambican Premier endorses Skillshare International's work

President Chissano of Mozambique and the Prime Minister, Mr. Mucumbe, met the staff from Skillshare International's country office in Mozambique at the 39th annual meeting of the Maputo International Trade Fair (FACIM) in September.

President Chissano first became aware of Skillshare's work more than a decade ago when Skillshare worked on a project to renovate the hospital in Lichinga in Niassa province, in the north of Mozambique. The war was still raging across the country and the construction materials had to be transported from Malawi.

Ricardo Xavier, Country Director in Mozambique said: *"President Chissano's acknowledgment of the value of Skillshare's contribution to poverty reduction and sustainable development in Mozambique is a great endorsement for our work and a strong foundation for us and our partner organisations to continue to pursue our development goals in Mozambique."*

About 500 enterprises and organisations from all over the world participated in FACIM/2003 – For Economic Consolidation of Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) – and the event received more than 8,000 visitors. It gave us an ideal forum to share our experiences of development with people from different organisations and institutions, including the British High Commission, the British Council, DFID, VSO, BESO as well as local and international businesses, and will act as a catalyst for developing new partnerships and collaborations.

It's not a quick fix

By Richard Lackmann

Based in Shakawe in north west Botswana, Richard Lackmann is a financial administrator at the Letloa / Kuru Family of Organisations which works with marginalised people in the Western Botswana district.

Looking back I see that my problems began on my second day at Kuru. Orientation had gone well, but on day two I was saddled with the problem of trying to get the staff paid despite the electronic payment system not functioning. I assumed that I was selected for this task because of my impressive London financial background or maybe it was because I had been brought in to train the team. Whatever the reason, everyone was really impressed when our staff got paid on time and I came to believe that I could fix all our problems.

Development workers come to Africa for many different reasons. I came because I wanted to give something back to the world but I was also interested in gaining something myself. I wanted to see if it was possible to slow myself down a little and enjoy work for itself rather than the 'victories' that one experiences in climbing the corporate ladder.

I had entered an environment that required a great deal of fixing. Donors weren't paying us because we weren't giving them information, there were piles of unpaid invoices because no one knew how much money was in the bank account, the auditor was refusing to sign-off the financial statements, the vehicles were unreliable and there were a hundred other tasks to do just to ensure that the organisation was functioning, let alone being successful.

I quickly felt buried by the demands of the organisation. I had always worked in places that were results orientated so I immediately set out on a path to fix all of the problems of the organisation as rapidly as possible.

I became fixated on time, partly because of my western background, and partly because a number of issues which required my efforts were with organisations based in Europe who had a set of hurdles that Kuru had to jump over before we could get funding. Without funding we would cease to exist – it was as simple as that.

Setting yourself European time frames in a place like Shakawe is a big mistake. I became irritated with non-working phones, power cuts, poorly installed banking systems, banking staff who never returned phone calls, staff who could not understand why there could be no staff loans if we didn't have any money, an intermittent internet service, car mechanics charging outrageous sums of money for awful work and anything else that could stop me from helping to get this organisation back on its feet.

All of this took place in an environment unlike any I had ever worked in. During our six months of summer, the office I shared with three other people was often over 45 degrees. There was a constant stream of visitors requesting money, vehicles or some other resource. The staff have a different work ethic to that which I am used to and at times I was immensely frustrated just because I couldn't understand what was going on.

Once a driver told me that he'd missed work the previous day because he was having trouble with his

vision and had to go to the clinic. An hour later, I saw him drive one of our precious 4x4s out of the compound. I gave chase to the vehicle to try and stop this blind driver from putting himself, the vehicle and others on the road at risk but I couldn't catch him. I found out later that his vision was fine and that it was just an excuse for not coming to work. The truth is slightly more fluid than I am used to but I am learning.

The stress of the conflict between my western business values, the realities of working in Botswana and the requirements of my customers (like donors and government) was immense. With my wife, I discussed quitting at least every other day. Whilst it was little comfort at the time, other development workers with whom I shared these thoughts said they had considered quitting within the first six months for very similar reasons.

I am not exaggerating when I say that the first few months of the placement were hell, not just for me but also for my staff and colleagues. I must have alienated a large proportion of the people I came into contact with. I was going to get things fixed regardless of the consequences. And I did.

Kuru now has working phones (most days), happy donors, new financial processes, better vehicles and money in the bank. All of this is an outward sign of success but it does not reflect my many failures on the people front and, although not unique to this part of the world, in Africa, people relationships can be more important than financial success.

I have repaired some of the relationships because the Kuru staff have seen the benefits of my work but in some cases relationships have been destroyed forever. This is my failure but I am learning how to get things done in an incredibly difficult and different environment. I still don't know all of the answers but I've learnt that you must try to retain the abilities that are required to assist the organisation whilst remembering that things work differently in Africa.

When asked by Skillshare how I envisaged my first months, I thought I would spend time learning about my co-workers, their cultures and the organisation prior to jumping into 'fix' mode. This is a great hypothetical answer but it doesn't reflect the reality. Many partner organisations need significant help from development workers immediately upon their arrival. The challenge for most new development workers is how to balance taking the time to learn about the culture and environment of your placement with the quick benefits your skills can bring to your organisation.

In order to bring the most benefit to your partner organisation and yourself, my advice is to take time to adjust to your environment which will give you the best chance of ensuring that your work goals are realistic and sympathetic to your co-workers. In all probability this will mean accepting a slower pace of achievement. By not doing this at the outset, I ended up frustrated and unhappy. Do I now follow my own advice? Well – on good days. I still have some bad days of frustration and barely concealed irritation. But I can see that the work of all Skillshare's development workers, including myself, is valuable and I am at least a little proud of myself that I worked through the difficult period without quitting and am contributing to Kuru's ongoing success.

Bake a Cake for **ENABLE** on International Day for Disabled Persons

The International Day for Disabled Persons falls on 3rd December each year. The aim of this day is to promote understanding of disability issues and to mobilise support for the dignity, rights and well-being of persons with disabilities. The theme for 2003 is 'A Voice of Our Own' and the focus is on giving a voice to the human experience of disabled persons.

This theme epitomises the aims of Enable. This programme, which strives to improve the literacy levels of disabled people in Kwa-Zulu Natal, South Africa, is run on a totally participatory basis and is set up so that disabled people are involved at all levels of decision-making and implementation.

We would like to ask all supporters to bake a cake (or buy one) for colleagues or friends on Wednesday 3rd December and to send all donations received to the Enable Appeal. Please make cheques payable to Skillshare International.

We still have a long way to go towards our £10,000 target and have found that cake sales have been one of the most successful ways for supporters to raise funds. Please use this day to raise funds and awareness of our work.

For further information about the Enable Appeal please see News 21 or contact Victoria Edge-Baron, Supporter Development Officer on 0116 257 6615, or email supporters@skillshare.org or visit our website www.skillshare.org

International supporters in Lesotho

On Sunday 2 November, Skillshare International hosted a family day at the office in Maseru to raise awareness of the new international arm of the supporters association and to raise funds for the Taung Skills Training Centre Girl's and Women's Dormitory.

The development of the international supporters association in Lesotho is a new initiative for Skillshare International. The aim is to raise awareness and support for Skillshare International in the countries where we work as well as in the UK.

Mrs Makholu Matete, Skillshare International's Country Director in Lesotho, said: *"Having supporters in Lesotho will help us build our constituency worldwide because it helps validate our work. If people want to be supporters here it demonstrates the value and impact of what we do and encourages international support."*

Poverty alleviation and eradication is the biggest development challenge in Lesotho, as it is in much of sub-Saharan Africa. Typically, the problem of poverty is more prevalent and acute in the rural areas. Since the population of Lesotho is largely rural, poverty is the major development challenge in this country.

Poverty in the rural areas of Lesotho is characterised by and attributed to the acute deficiency of productive skills among the rural communities; limited commercial activity; limited employment opportunities; lack of support and facilitation for enterprise development; and lack of infrastructural development (roads, utilities etc). The problems have been exacerbated by HIV/AIDS and by the retrenchment of mine workers from South Africa. As a result, rural areas have remained isolated and economically barren.

The communities of the Taung Ward took the initiative to establish a skills centre in 1998 in the southern district of Maseru's Hoek, to provide skills training to young people to improve their employment prospects. Due to the lack of hostel accommodation for girls at the training centre, young females were being excluded from any form of training and denied the opportunities to increase their skills base and employment prospects. To address this problem, a hostel for 16 female students is being built to give the opportunity for skills training to both sexes.

Profits from the braai at the supporters family day and the dinner dance at the official launch of the supporters association in Lesotho on Saturday 6th December will be donated to the Taung Skills Training Centre. Supporters in Lesotho are also going to be fundraising among the business community for direct contributions to the project.

For more information, please email supporters@skillshare.org or visit www.skillshare.org

Global Education

The UK Government set itself the target of improved levels of development awareness by 2015 as part of its overall strategy to achieve the millennium development goals. Enabling Effective Support is the part of this strategy which is aimed at work in schools. The aim is to bring together development education centres, local education authorities, NGOs and other interested parties to provide a joint approach towards development awareness. Overall there are twelve regions – nine in England, and one each in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Each region has an individual identity determined by local stakeholders and circumstances. Contact details for all development education centres and information on introducing the global dimension into education can be found on the Development Education Association website at www.dea.org.uk.

For details on local EES strategies, please contact Cathryn Gathercole on 0116 257 6606 or email cathryn.gathercole@skillshare.org

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