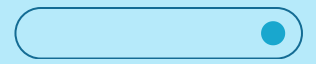


8 LESSONS LEARNED:

**WHY DEVELOPMENT
PROGRAMMES FAIL**

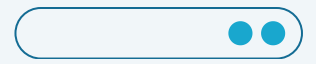




THEY DON'T HAVE A CLEAR VISION

Without a clear strategic vision about solving a specific issue, programmes run the risk of trying to solve too many social problems at once.

While it is true that many social ills are connected, trying to solve too many issues and challenges at once means there is a lack of focus and the programme becomes a catch all without solving the main issue.

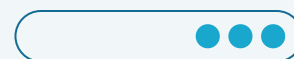


POORLY EXECUTED PROGRAMMES

Well-intended projects can fail if they're not well suited to local conditions, or are otherwise poorly carried out.

And, many projects have been abandoned too quickly to be effective. This is particularly true when the funding dries up.

And in most cases, projects were designed based on the wrong assumptions or without any risk assessment, meaning, it is flawed from the start.



TOO MANY PROGRAMMES ARE INEFFECTIVE

Most projects depends on buy in and support from a broad range of stakeholders.

More importantly, if programmes are not designed to address the specific needs of the people it is supposed to help, then the type of intervention, its application or solution configuration will be rejected.

Also, when programme assumptions turn out to be wrong, or there is no consideration for local context and culture, the project can fail to help the intended beneficiaries even if it's carried out as intended.



FOR MOST PROGRAMMES, EFFECTS ARE UNKNOWN

Finding public evaluation studies of rigorous assessments of programme effects, outcomes and impact is extremely rare.

In addition, most project evaluations are completed by the same organisations that carry out the projects, and look only at whether immediate objectives and activities were achieved - not whether the programme resulted in meaningful impact over time.

What this means in practice is that most organisations implement programmes, whose effects are not scientifically proven, and this duplication of mistakes then makes development extremely expensive.



UNREALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Whether due to excessive (and perhaps unfounded) optimism, inertia, or conformism, many times we find ourselves with unrealistic expectations about what a project can and should achieve.

Sometimes programme implementers under-estimate what it will take to affect change, not only the time and financial resources, but also human resources and organisational capacity to solve a particular challenge.

Very few organisations are positioned to solve the biggest development challenges of our time on their own, whether it be alleviating poverty, reducing hunger, increasing access to education, or solving youth unemployment.



NOT USING PREVIOUS LESSONS

It may seem obvious, but in practice, we see what has worked and - perhaps more importantly - what has not worked with similar projects.

Thinking that our project is unique and need to start from scratch usually means that we will make mistakes that could easily have been avoided if we had taken the lessons of others into account.

Most organisations skip the research component of project design and development, and this usually result in very costly lessons.



UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

Africa is unique in that there are so many socio-cultural, political and economic factors that could cripple any project.

The development challenges are enormous: from corruption, political interference, rigid models that disregard diversity and lack of buy-in from locals, to poor project planning, inadequate management skills, lack of accountability, lack of stakeholder involvement, unrealistic plans, no measure to evaluate quality, poor and inconsistent project management discipline, duplication of efforts, poor risk management strategies and unmotivated project staff all have an influence over why development projects fail.

Yet, being aware of the challenges, and being realistic about what we can achieve, will make us more successful, collectively.



BEING COURAGOUS

And maybe the most important lesson of all: Not having the courage to be honest about why a project fail, is most probably the most important reason why so many projects fail.

Because so much is expected from us, and because we are entrusted with resources, we don't want to acknowledge when things don't go according to plan.

This could be negative impact resulting from our projects, or unplanned and unintended impact, or it could be circumstances about which we have no control or some effect that we underestimated. Acknowledging our mistakes when a project fails, will help all of us.



WAS THIS HELPFUL?



Be sure to *save* this post, so you can come back to it later.

Or if we have missed something, and you want to contribute to this post, please share your thoughts with us in the comment section below.

Or if you want more information about how we assess the impacts and success of programmes, please reach out.