

**COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION IMPACT EXAMPLE SERIES****ZIMBABWE****LEVERAGING A COMMUNITY FUND AND PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS**

Strengthening the financial management capacity of community action groups and other community groups is an essential part of preparing for sustained mobilization after programs end. It can also be one of the hardest parts of the mobilization process. An orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) program in Zimbabwe found a successful model involving training, mentoring and setting up a special Community Fund through a local micro-finance institution (MFI). The process not only served the needs of the program, but also helped communities establish relationships with the MFI needed to facilitate community-initiated and led projects.

**The Community Fund Approach**

Capacity building in the mobilization program included workplan and project proposal development, grant management, financial record keeping and reporting. Activities featured in many community group workplans included: a) conducting awareness campaigns to sensitize other community members on child rights and child abuse issues; b) assisting OVCs with birth registrations, and; c) mobilization of local resources to provide for the basic needs of OVCs. All community groups were required to identify the resources needed for their activities, and to determine what could be donated by the community, and what external support was required. A monthly activity monitoring form and budget were established and used when groups gathered to report on activities, plan next steps and get support from their peers and Mercy Corps.

Following this training, Mercy Corps worked with a local MFI to establish a Community Fund to make small grants to the groups on a competitive basis. *Micro King Finance*<sup>1</sup> has a social responsibility policy to give back some private sector generated resources to help needy communities within Zimbabwe. Community groups were invited to submit grants proposals that address the needs of OVCs, such as mobilizing local resources like maize meal, clothing, and community support for school fees for the benefit of OVCs.

Mercy Corps provided *Micro King Finance* with a loan guarantee of up to 50 percent of all loans they made, with total loan capital not exceeding US\$70,000. Mercy Corps also provided 100 liters of fuel monthly to the MFI to facilitate monitoring visits to supported projects. In exchange, a percentage of the interest charged by *Micro King Finance* was given to Mercy Corps and channeled back to community groups for additional approved and transparent support to OVCs. This innovative partnership has been able to support between six and ten proposals per month, each with a value of US\$100 to \$1000, without the need for donor funds. The program allowed community groups a 15 percent overhead on the total value of their grant to pay for administrative costs such as transportation to the bank and stationary needs. The balance of 85 percent went directly to activities and goods that benefited OVCs, ensuring that the Community Fund was cost effective. Each community group also established a bank account. Under this model,

Mercy Corps-Zimbabwe has now implemented several programs for orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) with the goal of mobilizing and supporting community-led responses to address their immediate and long term needs. Child Protection Committees (CPCs), which function as community action groups in these programs, consist of OVCs themselves, community health workers and OVCs caregivers, education, police and faith-based representatives, traditional leaders and other members of the general community.

One ward mobilized local resources such as labor and material assistance which they have channeled to OVCs in their ward. "We are satisfied with the progress we have made so far in our work, though this has not been easy, children in need continue to increase on a daily basis and this is exacerbated by the economic hardships that our country is experiencing, but all because of children, we will never give up," said Mrs. Maureen Mukweshwa – CPC Chairperson.

Through the community fund, the CPC purchased blankets, medication, food packs and clothes and worked with community members to distribute them to child-headed households in their neighborhoods. In addition to providing for immediate needs of OVCs, the funds have also restored a sense of belonging to OVCs and the community as a whole. The grants also helped people see that development could be managed locally and have a local impact.

<sup>1</sup> Micro King Finance is a subsidiary of Kingdom Bank.

*Micro King Finance* reports that all the grants and loans issued have been well-managed and community groups have been able to submit activity and financial reports, thus establishing systems that, if maintained, can have far reaching impact for years to come.

### Success Factors and Lessons Learned

Community groups and partners such as *Micro King Finance*, schools and others identified several key success factors of the Community Fund approach:

- Simple to plan, implement and monitor
- Leverages financial and technical resources from the community and other sources
- Empowers and mobilizes community groups for leadership
- Supports local ownership of solutions and dignity of communities
- Reaches wide numbers of beneficiaries
- Nurtures the social fabric that binds communities together
- Rewards good funds management due to the potential for continued access to funding through local MFIs
- Complements government policy and priorities as well as UN and other INGO work



Many of the Zimbabwe program's most active community members also work with children in other capacities, including this elementary school teacher.

Photo: Cassandra Nelson/Mercy Corps, 2007

The Mercy Corps program team also identified several contributing factors to these successes, including: the small grant size, working with non-traditional grantees, systems to support transparency, and relevance of the projects to the wider community.

#### MOBILIZATION TOOLS USEFUL FOR PRIVATE SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS:

- Initial Site Visit Checklist to understand potential opportunities for private sector support of mobilization projects
- Strategic Visioning
- Organizational Capacity Index for CBOs
- Strategic Monitoring Form

One of the major lessons from this work is that the private sector can play a major part in making simple community-led projects possible, as well as creating the enabling environment for sustained mobilization efforts. As Country Director Rob Maroni said, "Due to the current economic hardships facing Zimbabwe, many people could have the impression the private sector is not in a position to assist with support to Zimbabwe's most vulnerable. This, however, is not the case. There are numerous examples of companies and corporations in Zimbabwe which, even though they are experiencing hard times, have corporate responsibility policies in place and are making considerable contributions supporting needy groups such as OVCs and the elderly."

*This Community Mobilization Impact Example is one of a series included in Mercy Corps Guide to Community Mobilization Programming (2009). It was written by Patricia Mushayandebvu, Program Manager for Mercy Corps-Zimbabwe, with Ruth Allen, Global Advisor for Community Mobilization, Governance and Partnerships.*

You must be the change  
you wish to see in the world.

~ Gandhi



Be the change