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Uwezo Uganda

Vision

A society in which all children are learning and realising their full potential.

Mission

We are committed to demonstrating how to improve learning outcomes and keeping communities and leaders focused on learning through assessment, research, innovations, partnerships and advocacy

Introduction

As a newly independent organisation, Uwezo Uganda is preparing policies for its major activities. These policies are not narrowly prescriptive but set out general principles and some practical considerations that may aid decision making. In this policy document, resource mobilisation (i.e. fundraising) and partnerships are considered together, as these activities tend to be closely linked. Relationships with donors involve partnerships that go beyond financial support. Other kinds of partnerships may serve to strengthen opportunities for joint fundraising or may involve onward disbursement of funds raised.

The purposes for which Uwezo Uganda needs funding and partnerships

Uwezo Uganda has been established with goals of improving the learning outcomes of basic education and of reducing the avoidable inequalities in those learning outcomes. We pursue these goals with a focus on the literacy and numeracy of children and young people, although there is some scope for us to consider life skills as well. We pursue the goals by means of three kinds of activity: assessment, research and advocacy.¹ Our advocacy is directed to fellow citizens of Uganda as well as decision makers and education specialists. From our past experience as part of Twaweza East Africa, we retain a desire to work through civil society and to strengthen its role in the education sector.

The general profile of our costs needs to be considered. Under the current strategy (2020-23) the time of our staff is split fairly evenly between the three kinds of activity mentioned above and staff remuneration accounts for about 41% of the original budget, of just over \$3.4 million, for the four-year strategy. 'Staff remuneration' here refers only to the pay of our own staff. Of the projected non-staff expenditure, assessment accounts for nearly half (46%), while research that is not part of the assessment accounts for 9%, advocacy for 17% and organisational development for 28%. Assessment takes a relatively large share because a national assessment project is planned, as well as a smaller assessment of young people. There is some scope for modifying the size of national assessments, but the funding of assessments is vitally important. It should be kept in mind that the assessment work has an important research component, and that the assessment findings help to shape the research agenda in general.

A large part of the 'non-staff' expenditure on assessment consists of allowances paid to the volunteers that partner organisations provide: an important low-cost input. Our advocacy work builds on the findings of assessment and research but can also include ad hoc campaigning.

The dual approach to fundraising

The Secretariat of Uwezo Uganda has so far adopted a dual approach to fundraising. The first element is to maintain core funding that can sustain our staff remuneration and national assessments at regular intervals. The second element is to seek smaller grants and contracts, of more limited duration, which can add to the research programme, foster new partnerships and enlarge our experience. This policy recognises the dual approach as realistic for our situation.

¹ Uwezo Uganda, *Promoting Equitable Quality Education in East Africa: Uwezo Strategy (2020-23)*, Kampala: Uwezo Uganda, 2020.

The natural constituency for core funding

There is some truth in the idea that ‘every charity has a natural constituency of donors’². Since Uwezo Uganda is a non-profit, civil society organisation (CSO), not attached to any economic unit of production or paid service, its most suitable source of core funding is independent foundations that share our goals for the improvement of education and the strengthening of civil society. This kind of funding has in the past allowed us to operate with some degree of independence, responding to our own priorities as well as those of the donor, monitoring the public provision of education and advocating change. It is well exemplified by the past funding from the Hewlett Foundation (when Uwezo was part of Twaweza) and the current funding from the Wellspring Philanthropic Fund.

Other sources that are suitable, to some extent, are United Nations service agencies such as UNICEF and UNESCO and the foreign aid programmes of high-income countries, whether multilateral or bilateral. In many cases programmes of intervention supported by foreign aid share some of our goals and priorities (e.g. improving the efficiency of primary education and supporting the education of marginalised groups of children). While such sources are very desirable for short- and medium-term funding, they suffer from instability because of political factors and short-term responses to emergencies. The political problems are of many kinds. Within Western democracies, budgets for foreign aid are highly contested and are affected by changes of government. Aid and technical assistance are used to leverage policy changes that are not always welcome to the recipient governments. Aid disbursements are sometimes reduced because of perceived abuses of power. All these factors make reliance on foreign aid unsafe in the long term.

Within Uganda, regular funding from the national government would be hard to obtain and, if it were obtained, could adversely affect the position of Uwezo Uganda as an independent monitor of a public service. The Government cannot be a core funder, but possibilities for short-term services will be mentioned below. In the private sector, too, there is scope for seeking supplementary rather than core funding.

In building up a funding profile, the idea of ‘matching funds’ is useful, as many donors prefer to share, rather than uniquely meet, the costs of particular activities. Applications can also be strengthened by referring to, and costing, the ‘in-kind’ contributions that are received through voluntary work.³

Seeking opportunities for additional funding

One possible source of additional funding is competitive, international or regional, grants for assessments, research or the development of civil society. In many cases the scope of the funding programme and the range of expertise needed calls for application by a consortium or partnership – and we have gained some experience of taking part in such applications. But, in many of these competitions, few grants are awarded and the success rate of applications is low. Other opportunities occur when Uwezo Uganda is invited to provide assessment or monitoring services to other organisations. Such assignments require adaptability but can provide useful experience as well as additional income.

² Charities Aid Foundation (UK), *Fundraising Fundamentals*, available online: <https://www.cafonline.org/charities/fundraising/fundraising-fundamentals>

³ Alice Ruhnke, *Grant Writing in 2021: What is Different and What Remains the Same?*, presentation at a webinar hosted by Techsoup, 18th February 2021.

Another type of engagement that we could seek is paid consultancy work for national government bodies. We have provided some services to the Government free of charge (as for example in planning for the Covid-19 emergency). But, as a general rule, we should expect government bodies to contract for our services when needed and to pay for staff time. In some areas of educational evaluation and research, Uwezo Uganda could compete effectively at the national level.

With reference to the private sector, small grants or donations could be sought from companies for specific purposes, especially if we can develop our engagement with the education, training and employment needs of young people. Findings about these needs can be useful for employers. Rotary could be a source of advice about this kind of fundraising.

Types of partnership and their purposes

A general distinction can be made between partnerships that involve hierarchical relationships and those that involve collaboration on equal terms. As a recipient of funding, Uwezo Uganda has to meet its reporting obligations to donors and to go well beyond these to try to maintain their support. Regular meetings with them help to develop common objectives and shared attitudes.

Uwezo Uganda in turn engages CSOs with a sub-national focus, usually at the district level, to assist in assessment and research work. Such contracted services are generally only for short periods, but we try to share findings constructively and to develop mutual understanding that can lead to further collaboration. The partnerships with district-level CSOs are important, not only for the assessment process and the collection of research data, but also for subsequent advocacy.

The possible non-hierarchical partnerships range from collaboration through international networks to sharing tasks with other national CSOs in Uganda. Uwezo Uganda works with its counterparts within the People's Action for Learning (PAL) network to develop improved assessment instruments. We also work with other CSOs in the Regional Education and Learning Initiative (RELI) to strengthen school management. There is also potential for collaboration with university academics, within and outside Uganda, both in using our existing data for research and publication and in joint applications for new research funding.

The linkage of dissemination and advocacy to fundraising

We already invest significant time and resources in (1) dissemination – communicating our findings from assessment and research to a wide audience – and (2) advocacy – calling for specific types of action or policy to improve educational outcomes. To a large extent the advocacy builds on the recommendations derived from our findings and published in our reports, but ad hoc campaigns are also possible in response to circumstances. The point to note here is that these findings and our advocacy products, both digital and other, are important resources for actual and potential donors, as well as policy makers and the general public. Our relationships with donors benefit when we not merely report the completion of 'deliverables' but can also share key messages about our findings and the changes to policy and practice that we advocate. A stock of reports, short stories and informed feedback on our work is also useful for approaching potential new donors.

Seeking donations through multiple channels

We can consider using both online and offline channels to appeal for donations for particular aspects of our programme. Such aspects need to be selected with care, so that a tangible achievement can be demonstrated. The purchase of tablets and sound recorders for use in assessment and research, for example, could be an objective for small donations. The website, the newsletter and possibly social media could be used to announce appeals and indicate methods of payment. Such channels can be supplemented by announcements at meetings with stakeholders if the fundraising objective is relevant to the purpose of the meeting. However, such announcements need to be discrete and to avoid presenting a 'hat-in-hand' image.

Conclusion

This policy is intended for 'normal times' and does not contain any panacea for the kind of financial crises to which many organisations have been subjected over the past year as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the advantages of Uwezo Uganda, however, is that, although newly independent, it is well established in Uganda as a functioning entity and widely recognised as a contributor to educational development. We should use these credentials to seek continuing support as we chart a course through the present stormy weather.