



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade



Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES)

Achieving Sustainable Results through Community Partnerships
Lessons Learnt from the AACES Program in Kenya and Tanzania



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Foreword

The Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) – underpinned by a strong partnership approach – encourages learning and sharing of experiences and resources in a broad range of areas, including gender equality. This culture of collaboration, now entrenched in AACES, is a key element of an effective program delivering real results across 11 African countries.

Four years into the AACES program, there is good evidence of increased agricultural productivity – including in areas previously dependent on food aid – greater resilience through diversified sources of income, and improved access to maternal and child health, and water and sanitation and hygiene services. Importantly, these achievements have been realised in partnership with the communities AACES seeks to serve.

We are committed to capitalising on the strong community partnerships we have established over the life of the program to achieve greater impact through shared lessons and ideas. The following pages offer development professionals invaluable insights into AACES community partnerships that are successfully supporting marginalised groups – especially women and girls – to access services and participate in decision-making.

In sharing lessons learnt through the AACES program, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the importance and characteristics of effective community partnerships – ultimately to inform and strengthen development programs in Africa and beyond.



Community members inspecting a water project in Karatu district in Tanzania. AACES is a community led program whose focus is on empowering communities to provide solutions to their own problems and challenges. Photo by Caritas Tanzania

Executive Summary

The Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) is a partnership between the Australian Government, ten Australian non-government organizations (NGOs) and their African-based partners, operating in 11 African countries.

In 2015, the AACES Program Steering Committee commissioned a study to identify and document AACES NGO community partnerships that are successfully supporting marginalized groups especially women and girls – to access services and participate in decision-making in Kenya and Tanzania. Eight AACES NGOs participated in the study: ActionAid, Anglican Overseas Aid, Marie Stopes, Plan, World Vision, CARE, Caritas and WaterAid. Collectively, they are involved in programs throughout Kenya and Tanzania that address food security, livelihoods, community health, environmental conservation, human rights advocacy, child protection, and water, sanitation and hygiene.

The study assessed the nature of community partnerships between AACES NGOs and local African NGOs. Specifically it examined how these partnerships relate to the communities they serve; the evolution and quality of these partnerships; and how successful they have been in supporting communities to achieve sustainable development outcomes. Analysis was informed by the AACES partnership principles: trust, flexibility, accountability, mutual respect, collaboration, transparency and learning.

The study was conducted in two stages. Firstly, participating AACES NGOs completed a questionnaire to 'map' their community partnerships; this was followed by interviews with the AACES NGOs and key community partners, as well as focus group discussions with community partners.

The study found that successful community partnerships require communication, a shared vision and mission, resources, power sharing and synergy. Under AACES, good communication is founded on clear roles, responsibilities and processes for decision-making, and an approach to dispute resolution where disputes – should they arise – are documented and negotiated.



Carolin, a community health worker in Laikipia County in Kenya proudly displays her medical supply bag that she carries to every household visit. **Photo by Loretta Pilla, Anglican Overseas Aid**

The study found that communication processes are most effective when they constantly support all partners. Openness, honesty and transparency are essential and provide opportunities for soliciting and incorporating input, addressing challenges and ensuring mutual accountability.

Regarding vision and mission, the study found that partner agreements defining community needs with concrete goals for collaboration are crucial for successful partnerships. Such agreements are the building blocks to developing a shared mission, vision and values. In actualizing the goals of the partnership, AACES NGOs work to ensure legitimacy and mutual benefit within an agreed time-frame.

Healthy partnerships are characterized by a sufficient and reliable flow of resources at individual, agency and community levels. Resource development, access and distribution build on existing strengths and should be done in a manner demonstrating fairness and equity. By equity, the study refers to the understanding that partners contribute according to their capacity and resources, which may not necessarily be the same across partners.

The study found that decision-making, governance and power structures need to be clear, emphasizing shared ownership, interdependence and mutual benefit to sustain partnerships. Successful partnerships validate contributions and expertise, clearly state options and degrees of involvement, and create strategies for decreasing power differentials. Such strategies are manifested in partnership management style, how responsibilities are distributed, and the ways and extent to which empowerment and self-determination are emphasized.

Mutual trust among partners, appreciation for unity amid diversity and mechanisms to encourage accountability are important ingredients for developing team synergy. The study found that communities involved in successful AACES programs demonstrate respect, flexibility, strong participation and willingness to learn each partner's unique perspective. Teams build and sustain synergy by building commitment among leaders, publicly acknowledging one another's achievements and holding productive meetings.

The study recommended that vision, mission, communication, synergy, resources and power sharing among partners continue to be strengthened and enhanced. This will ensure projects and programs initiated under AACES are sustainable, are owned and valued by communities, and can be replicated.



1. Introduction

The Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), funds the Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES), an AUD \$90 million program designed to operate over five years (2011–2016).

1.1 The AACES program

The AACES program focuses on marginalized communities, particularly women, children, people with disabilities and people vulnerable to disaster. It is being implemented in 11 African countries: Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The AACES program has three key objectives:

1. To give marginalized people sustainable access to the services they require;
2. To ensure development programs, including AACES, are strengthened, particularly in their ability to target and serve the needs of marginalized people through learning, collaboration and exchange among AACES NGOs, and between AACES NGOs and DFAT; and
3. To better inform the Australian public about development issues in Africa (retired from July 2014).

1.2 The AACES partnership approach

AACES is a partnership between the Australian Government, ten Australian non-government organizations (NGOs) and their African-based partners. In line with the Australian Government's commitment to a more cooperative relationship with civil society, AACES uses a partnership approach to improve the lives of women, men and children across Africa. AACES partnerships include relationships among participating Australian NGOs, between Australian NGOs and their African partner NGOs, and between all participating NGOs and the Australian Government. Beyond these direct partnerships are other important relationships between the African NGOs and the communities in which they work, including the private sector, between African NGOs and their government counterparts, and between communities and their governments.

The AACES Partnership Agreement commits all partners to adhere to a set of agreed principles and demonstrates DFAT's commitment to a cooperative relationship with AACES partners. This model has been central to the success of AACES, enabling the program to achieve greater development efficiencies and impact. This has been achieved by capitalizing on individual organizational strengths and expertise, open and regular sharing of information and active collaboration.



Hamida Zuberi with her son. The quality of life of women in rural areas has improved through increased food production and incomes, and greater awareness of women's rights. Photo by CARE Tanzania.

One of the strengths of the AACES partnership is that it brings together people from different agencies, countries and sectors, recognizing that each group brings particular agendas, skills, resources, connections, understandings and cultures. Significantly, AACES NGOs have been able to meaningfully engage local community groups, community members, local governments, schools, voluntary organizations, financial institutions and businesses. By sharing resources, expertise, knowledge and accountability with community partners, the program has been able to reach people most in need.

1.3 AACES NGO–community partnerships

Two surveys have previously been conducted to gather views from AACES partners on different aspects of the partnership to establish what it looks like in practice and capture lessons learnt.

The survey results indicate AACES partners feel the partnership principles are important and well-practiced, and that good governance, effective communication, mutual respect, flexibility, regular partnership reviews and reporting have been critical to the success of the partnership approach. Nonetheless, the findings of these surveys have been limited in terms of capturing how effective NGO–community partnerships have been developed and maintained to achieve strong and lasting results.

Zuhura Msesa a community health worker displays her training manual. She works with WorldVision in Kwediboma village, Kilindi district in Tanzania. Photo by Douglas Waudo, AACES Resource Facility



In recognition of this, the AACES Program Steering Committee commissioned a study in 2015 to contribute to a deeper understanding of the importance and characteristics of effective NGO–community partnerships. (The study’s findings are featured throughout this report.)

Specifically, the study sought to identify and document AACES community partnerships that are successfully supporting marginalized groups – especially women and girls – to access services and participate in decision-making in Kenya and Tanzania. Eight AACES NGOs operating in these two countries participated in the study, and are detailed below.

1.4 AACES NGOs working in Kenya in Tanzania

Kenya

ActionAid seeks to empower communities and improve their livelihoods through advocacy. Action Aid Kenya runs AACES projects in three districts: Mwingi, Isiolo and Mbeere. These projects are improving sustainable access to food and agriculture-related services for farmers, most of whom are women. Action Aid Kenya works in partnership with the women’s association of Kitui, Kakili Irrigation Water Users Associations, County Departments of Agriculture in Mbeere, Mwingi and Isiolo, and Finlay Kenya Ltd.

Anglican Overseas Aid (AOA) works in partnership with the Mothers Union of the Anglican Church in Kenya (MUACK) to improve maternal neo-natal and child health in Laikipia and Samburu counties. MUACK works with county government health departments, the Laikipia organization of people with disabilities, community health workers, traditional birth attendants and water management committees.

Marie Stopes seeks to increase marginalized people’s access to and use of equity-sensitive sexual and reproductive health services. It does this by providing education and services to rural and remote communities through outreach, and strengthening public and private sector healthcare providers so they can deliver sustainable, cost effective, quality sexual and reproductive health services. Marie Stopes Kenya works in partnership with the Ministry of Health, mainly in the coastal counties of Kilifi, Kwale, Taita Taveta and Tana River.

World Vision aims to improve maternal, newborn and child health through increased access to services, strengthened health systems, education, and engagement with governments. In Kenya, the project is implemented in Kilifi county. World Vision Kenya works in partnership with Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Youth, Gender and Development, and Education; Jamii Smart Consortium; AMKEN Kenya; Association for the Physically Disabled of Kenya (APDK); and Inter Religious Council of Kenya (IRCK).

Plan International enables marginalized people – particularly women and girls, young people and people with disabilities – to claim rights and access to services. This work includes prevention against violence as well as responding to violence against women and girls; women’s rights to land and property inheritance; health and education rights; and legal rights and services. Plan International Kenya works in partnership with Hand in Hand, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Interior & Coordination of National Government, Heifer International, Safe Water and AIDS Project (SWAP), International Centre of Insect Physiology and Ecology (ICIPE), youth groups, women’s groups and farmers.

Tanzania

CARE International seeks to improve household security and resilience by empowering women, particularly through increased agricultural productivity. Its AACES project works with households in Lindi and Mtwara regions in Tanzania, where it partners with CARE Tanzania as a project of CARE Australia. CARE Tanzania works with District Agriculture and Livestock Development, Mtwara Paralegal Centre, Tanzania Regional District Police Gender Desk, Mennonitte Economic Development Association (MEDA), Tanzania Official Seed Certification Institute (TOSCI), Small Industry Development Organization (SIDO), Nitaendele Agricultural Research Institute (NARI) and Tanzania Metrological Agency (TMA).

Caritas aims to improve the provision of clean reliable water, promote sanitation and hygiene, and increase agricultural production for marginalized communities. Its projects are implemented in rural communities in the dioceses of Mbulu, Ifakara and Mahenge in Tanzania. Caritas Tanzania liaises with all three dioceses and Caritas to address issues at the national level while playing a key monitoring and coordination role.

WaterAid aims to improve access to water, sanitation and hygiene in under-served communities and schools in rural and urban areas of Tanzania including Dodoma region, Bahi and Chamwino, Singida region in Singida Urban and Iramba, and Tabora region in Ngeza. WaterAid Tanzania works in partnership with Sustainable Environmental Management Action (SEMA) and WaterAid Australia.



The Road Less Travelled Nurse Catherine treats a mother and child at the Morupusi Dispensary in North Laikipia in Kenya.

Photo by Loretta Pilla, Anglican Overseas Aid

2. Community Partnerships in Action

The Australian Government, through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), funds the Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES), an AUD \$90 million program designed to operate over five years (2011–2016).

2.1 Building strong foundations

A shared vision and mission

Interactions between AACES NGOs and community partners demonstrate that they have mutually compatible goals and objectives. Partnership agreements are guided by AACES NGOs' policy documents on community engagement, and the country's short- and long-term development plans, or by international conventions to which Kenya and Tanzania are signatory. These agreements form the building blocks to developing a shared mission, vision and values, which ensure work undertaken is legitimate and of mutual benefit.

In keeping with their mission, AACES NGOs align their strategic planning to community needs and local government strategies. Programming from inception to implementation is participatory, involving local communities, who are the beneficiaries, and local government offices. The communities' involvement in all stages of the program has resulted in their commitment to AACES projects, as they understand that these projects belong to them.

Sharing information, coordination and relationship building is done at various fronts and levels with all stakeholders involved in the processes.

A woman in Endashangwet, Karatu district, Tanzania fetches water using her donkey from a newly constructed water project. Photo by Cartilas Tanzania



For example, AACES committee members who received training from experts passed on the knowledge to other members of the community during public meetings, short training sessions or through project implementation. Participatory review processes with partners enable transparent implementation of projects during barazas (public meetings). The communication processes of sharing information are honest, transparent and provide opportunities for feedback from partners, ensuring mutual accountability.

Case study: realizing a shared vision to deliver accessible, clean water

For years, the local community in Endashangwet, Karatu district, Tanzania, struggled with a perennial water problem: water points were up to 10 kilometres away, making it difficult for community members to access water for their daily needs and to irrigate their land.

In 2011, community members approached the Catholic Diocese of Mbulu for assistance. Caritas Tanzania and Caritas Mbulu responded using a ‘strengths-based approach’, which identifies and builds on the strengths, abilities and assets that communities already have. In this instance, community members provided labour and local materials such as sand and stones to implement the water and irrigation projects, while Caritas provided other materials and resources such as cement, pipes, tanks and skilled labour.

Importantly, community members agreed to change their damaging environmental practices and start conservation and protection programs through tree planting. They also agreed to change their attitude towards women, with government officials, village elders and community leaders comprising both men and women now meeting regularly to make decisions and allocate responsibilities.

As a result of this AACES NGO–community partnership, community members have reclaimed a hill devastated by erosion and built a water tank at its top, which uses a gravity-fed system to supply water points located in the community and on farms.

A youth peer educator training young mothers in sexual reproductive health in Homa Bay, Kenya.

Photo by Plan International Kenya



They have also dug canals and built toilets to provide better sanitation facilities – the community's vision successfully realized in partnership with Caritas through a strengths-based approach to development.

Mutual trust

Mutual trust is a fundamental driver for partnerships as it creates synergy. Important ingredients for trust, respect and group commitment for team synergy include flexibility and strong participation. As part of their approach to community partnerships, AACES NGOs identify partner 'clusters' with important rationales for engaging in partnerships, such as shared experiences and expertise.

Each partner then brings its particular knowledge and skills to the task at hand and provides mutual support to achieve project goals. Plan International and Marie Stopes International's partnership project supporting young mothers in Kenya offers a particularly good example of how mutual trust between partners can result in efficient, effective service delivery.

Case study: enhancing young mothers' socio-economic wellbeing

In Kenya, the average age of first-time mothers is sixteen. Many of these adolescent girls are still at school, and about 70,000 of them are expelled every year after becoming pregnant.

A health worker interacting with a mother during a postnatal counselling visit at a local clinic in Kilifi.

Photo by World Vision Kenya.



These young mothers face a range of challenges in accessing sexual and reproductive health, family planning and maternal and child health services. They are also often socio-economically marginalized especially if they are unmarried – affecting their ability to provide for their children and contribute to their communities.

Plan International and Marie Stopes International (MSI) are addressing these challenges through an innovative partnership project designed for mothers aged 24 and under in Kenya's Homabay and Kilifi counties. Their project is improving young mothers' access to and demand for sexual and reproductive health, family planning, and maternal and child health services, while also enhancing their socio-economic wellbeing through Village Saving and Loan Associations (VSLAs).

MSI and Plan International bring complementary approaches and programmatic experience to this project. MSI delivers sexual and reproductive health services in Kenya through private providers, clinics and mobile outreach teams that service remote areas. Plan typically works with communities using a rights-based approach to promote community development, address poverty and protect children and their families. In Kenya this includes promoting the right to health, as well as the right to inclusion and protection, quality education, just and democratic governance and sustainable and dignified livelihoods.

The project is supporting young mothers to become youth peer educators who can reach other young mothers with information on sexual and reproductive health and family planning. To date, more than 160 young mothers have been trained as peer educators. Young mothers have also been encouraged to join VSLAs so they can build up their savings and access loans for small business activities. By the end of the project, it is expected there will be more than 30 VSLA groups involving a total of 640 young mothers in the project locations.

By developing the capacity of young mothers to advocate for better services and improve their economic situation, the project is creating a strong network of women who can influence their male partners and share their knowledge with other women to increase the number of young mothers accessing services.

Sustainability

Sustainable partnerships are characterized by a sufficient and reliable flow of resources at individual, agency and community levels. Access and distribution of resources are built on existing strengths in a fair and equitable manner. In AACES projects, local communities typically provide the bulk of human capital during a project's implementation, while the local government or private sector often provides the capacity and technical know-how. The role of AACES NGOs is to build the capacity of communities and provide financial assistance. Marie Stopes' social franchising model operating in Kenya offers a good example of this partnership approach.

It is important to consider how well positioned local communities are to achieve sustainable development outcomes over the longer term. Whether the impact of AACES programs continues depends on how deeply integrated they are within core government business. Using local groups shows promise as it leads to knowledge sharing and continuity. The sustainability of projects also depends on the political goodwill of local politicians. Achieving this requires close working relationships with policy-makers to ensure that they include AACES projects activities in the policy level programming of needs.



Amua franchise clinic in Malindi, Kenya. Photo by Marie Stopes Kenya.

Case study: improving access to reproductive health

In Kenya, more than a third of women using family planning access the service from private providers. Private providers offer long-term family planning methods not typically available in the public sector. In recognition of this, Marie Stopes has developed an innovative partnership approach to deliver sustainable, cost-effective quality sexual and reproductive health services to women in Kenya's coastal region through social franchising.

Social franchising offers tremendous opportunities to strengthen the private sector, lower costs to the consumer and improve service quality. This in turn benefits women and men's access to sexual and reproductive health services and family planning services. Social franchising is based on the model of franchising commonly used in the commercial sector. It typically involves the granting of a license by a social enterprise (the franchiser, often an NGO) to another person or company (the franchisee) to allow them to create demand using the branding of the social enterprise. The franchisee receives training by the franchiser, including business skills, agrees to quality controls, and is supported through commodity and equipment supplies.

Through Marie Stopes International's AACES project, 20 private healthcare providers have been trained in family planning and joined the accredited social franchising network AMUA. Marie Stopes Kenya has provided additional support to these healthcare providers through branding, subsidized equipment and family planning commodities. In return, providers have agreed to comply with reporting requirements and undergo regular supervision and monitoring to ensure they adhere to Marie Stopes' quality standards. To date, the AMUA network includes 406 accredited providers in Kenya.

By building the clinical capacity of private service providers from existing clinics to better serve family planning needs in the community, social franchising is sustainable because the improved service provision translates into increased client volume. This leads to increased clinic revenue for the franchisees and the potential to expand the business of the clinic. Moreover, the skills gained through the accreditation process will remain with providers beyond the AACES program.

2.2. Creating value

Building solidarity and facilitating community ownership

AACES NGOs have been at the forefront of building solidarity and linking communities with like-minded organizations. AACES NGOs and partners have also successfully facilitated community ownership of programs and projects. This requires an understanding of the genesis of ownership and how to develop ownership in the communities. The skill to convene and facilitate such conversations on community ownership requires training, practice and coaching support.

AACES partners typically respond to the needs of the community by identifying stakeholders, establishing goals, and building consensus and leadership capacities. They conduct specific community needs assessments to identify areas that require strengthening, and map existing community resources to identify duplication or gaps in services. AACES partners then prioritize program needs and provide information to inform decisions about new initiatives, or ways to strengthen or modify existing efforts. Once decisions are made, the group begins planning for implementation, including analyzing potential barriers, developing strategies to overcome challenges and linking to community needs.

The study's findings show that this process encourages groups to align their efforts to mutual goals, which benefit all partners, as has been the case in WaterAid's innovative work with communities, local NGOs and the Government of Tanzania.



Provision of menstrual hygiene management infrastructure in schools has made a significant difference, especially on the girls' attendance and confidence. Photo by Olivia Greenwell, WaterAid Tanzania.

Case study: breaking the silence on menstruation to keep girls in school

Inside and outside schools, access to water, sanitation and hygiene is integral to a girl's ability to pursue an education. Reasons for absenteeism are many but international research suggests that inadequate access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) plays a critical role. This is particularly true for menstruating girls, who may feel uncomfortable managing menstruation in schools without facilities.

WaterAid is addressing the dire school WASH situation in Tanzania and helping to reduce the high levels of school absenteeism through policy, advocacy and research work on school WASH, and by providing improved WASH facilities and services.

As part of its AACES project, WaterAid has tested and refined models for school WASH facilities to ensure they are sustainable, and developed school WASH guidelines and toolkits in consultation and collaboration with communities, local NGOs and the Government of Tanzania. It is expected this work will inform national WASH guidelines so that all children in Tanzania benefit from improvements to their school WASH facilities and services.

WaterAid has worked to ensure menstrual hygiene management needs are met by infrastructure as well as in education. Its research on menstrual hygiene has informed improvements to designs: for example, toilet blocks now include a menstrual hygiene management room with clean water, a toilet, a clothesline and rubbish bins or incinerators for discrete disposal of waste. WaterAid has also provided training and learning materials for teachers appropriate to their local context, which is supporting education on menstruation and menstrual hygiene for adolescent girls.

Building relationships and advocacy with partners

AACES partners promote community advocacy for community needs by involving all stakeholders in their programs. Relationship building between partners, local administration and communities is crucial to success. On the whole, more open communication is desirable and can prevent breakdown in relationships that can cause projects to stall. The citizens' voice and advocacy helps to inform community needs, which are used to advocate for pressing and urgent services. This is occurring in both ActionAid and World Vision's work with young people and Plan International's work with vulnerable community members.

An effective community partnership involves communication. This entails that roles, responsibilities and documentation are clearly outlined. Communication between AACES community partners is both formal and informal. This is mostly done through social media and emails as well as constant communication with all stakeholders, including government officials and the local community through barazas. Some of the barazas are organized by the local government administration and others by the local community, often for specific activities.



The Ndigiria Citizens Voice and Action group in Kilifi, Kenya has been effective in using evidence to mobilize communities to claim their rights and influence local government. Photo by World Vision Kenya

Case study: empowering youth, changing the world

ActionAid and World Vision are working in partnership to empower youth in Kenya. World Vision is leading on the project in the coastal community of Kilifi while ActionAid works in the inland sites of Isiolo, Mwingi and Mbeere.

The two organizations have intensified their focus on youth, combining their unique ways of working. World Vision brings expertise in reproductive and maternal health, while ActionAid focuses on economic empowerment. These approaches are being used to bring youth together and equip them to identify their needs and effect solutions. The joint project recognizes that young people and women in Kenya face similar challenges around agricultural productivity and reproductive health. Both lack access to productive resources, such as land, and family planning services. Both also experience high levels of unemployment, resulting in poor socio-economic outcomes.

Young people have the capacity to transform this situation. As part of ActionAid and World Vision's project, participating youth have learnt about family planning, HIV and AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases and child, newborn and maternal health through training from the Ministry of Health. They have then been supported to develop strategies for collective action and share learning and influence each other. Inspired by their peers, youth in Mbeere and Kilifi have successfully challenged and influenced decision-makers so that women, in particular, can exercise their health and reproductive rights as stipulated in the Kenyan Constitution. Young people have also helped to address issues women face in relation to under-nutrition and poor health.

Through this project, young people have proven to themselves that they can successfully take collective action and be part of improving the long-term health of their communities. Their efforts are contributing to reducing maternal mortality, pregnancy complications, and HIV and AIDS-related illnesses. Buoyed by their potential and influence, they are now addressing broader socio-economic barriers to education and agriculture. For example, youth groups are learning to generate thematic maps of their community, which they plan to use for lobbying decision-makers to further improve service delivery.

Ultimately, empowering youth to advocate for their needs and demand their rights leads to long-term value for money in development programming where there is strengthened accountability and delivery of public services. The impact of this work will also remain long after the project is completed.

Ministry of Health Official engaging with the community in Homa Bay Kenya.

Photo by Doreen Awino, Plan International Kenya.



Case study: advocating for inclusive community health services

In Homa Bay county, western Kenya, Plan International is improving the health and wellbeing of community members – particularly women, young people and people with disabilities – by empowering them to advocate for better health services.

Plan International's Promoting Rights and Accountabilities in African Communities (PRAAC) project uses rights-based and strength-based approaches to promote inclusive, appropriate services. These approaches work by supporting communities, civil society and government to work together to improve accountability, good governance and human rights.

One of the project's defining strategies is to develop community members' advocacy skills so that when the project ends they can continue to effectively engage with government at various levels to realize their health rights.



"Without [AACES] interventions I would have sold most of my household items to buy food for my family," Mutheina Mwinzi, a smallholder farmer in Eastern Kenya on her millet farm. Photo by Douglas Waudo, AACES Resource Facility.

In the project's first year, six people from each community cluster within the project area took part in advocacy training. The following year these women and men formed local advocacy committees to identify their communities' health concerns and act as focal points for community engagement with government duty bearers.

Project staff provided further training and mentoring, helping advocacy committees to raise community awareness and gather information on issues concerning local health service delivery. Committees then organized engagement sessions with the Ministry of Health in Ndhiwa to advocate for health services in Kome. As a result, the ministry has provided the community with a dispensary, where a clinic now operates five days a week.

Community advocacy committees have since engaged with Homa Bay county government and officials on health budget allocations and policy decisions, and lobbied for an additional health facility. Processes are now underway at the county to designate land for a health facility and community members are fundraising to buy building materials.

Plan International's project has achieved important development outcomes. The Ministry of Health is providing better access to health services and is more responsive to community priorities. Community members are represented on health management committees and community advocacy committees are now able to engage directly with sub-county government and county government to discuss services, budget allocations, policy and legislation.

Moreover, this project highlights the importance of tailoring citizen–duty bearer engagement to the local context and of including women and other marginalized people in community deliberations and actions with government in order to achieve inclusive and sustainable outcomes.

2.3. Achieving gender equality

Empowering women

Achieving gender equality and women's empowerment remain key challenges in Kenya and Tanzania. In these patriarchal societies, it is difficult to change gender relations, with entrenched cultural norms and values making the transformation of gender relations a complex set of challenges.

Through AACES, partners operating in Kenya and Tanzania have had the opportunity to learn and share approaches to improve their gender work from the experiences of peers within and outside their country of operation. They have adapted and are integrating many of these lessons into their own programming. Significantly, partners have been able to secure meaningful participation from both men and women in their interventions to promote gender equality.



Members of the Women's Association of Kitui County in Kenya marching through Kitui Town calling for their involvement in development activities in the County Government.

Photo by Harriet Gimbo, ActionAid, Kenya

As a consequence, the efforts of AACES partners in Kenya and Tanzania have helped women and girls access services and participate in decision-making, which has improved their living standards and status.

Case study: empowering women farmers

Many marginalized men and women living in the Kenyan districts of Mwingi, Isiolo and Mbeere are smallholder farmers, cultivating small plots of land that are generally less than two acres. However, severe under-investment in agriculture in these districts and scant regard for the value of smallholder farming has made it increasingly difficult to sustain a livelihood through farming. Changing weather patterns also challenge these farmers' ability to farm effectively.

Despite making enormous contributions to agricultural productivity, women farmers in Kenya face additional challenges. While the principal development focus has been on male farmer household heads, women face greater barriers to access equipment, land and the market, and are often excluded from policy processes. To address this situation, ActionAid has been working with smallholder women farmers to design, test and document farming alternatives, such as the use of drought-tolerant crop varieties.

It has also been helping women's groups to work towards collective action and call for changes to policies and service delivery. This work has included consolidating women's groups into umbrella organizations so they are able to act collectively, and more powerfully, for change.

One of these umbrella organizations is the Women's Association of Kitui County (WAKC) in Mwingi. WAKC has a membership of more than 2,000 women drawn from eight women's savings and credit associations in Kitui county. ActionAid has helped WAKC to develop its constitution and register as an organization and strengthened its capacity through training in budgeting, communication and report writing.

Through this community partnership, WAKC has been able to use different strategies to improve the livelihoods of women in Kitui county, ranging from civil action for change to increased agricultural productivity and access to diversified income sources. This has seen the county invest in water harvesting, irrigation and school agriculture projects and fish farming, and develop interventions to address food security in the county.

Groups such as WAKC now recognize their collective capacity to negotiate their rights effectively and will continue to call on decision-makers to create enabling environments to improve their income and production. Women value the relationships they form, the freedom they've achieved to think and act, and the greater respect at home and in the community.

Creating cultural shifts

Culture shapes how things are done in a society and provides explanations as to why they are done that way. Traditionally, men enjoy a privileged position compared to women, with greater power and voice. As a result, they are frequently able to ensure that their preferences and values with regard to culture prevail.

Under AACES, projects are making headway in influencing power relations within communities. This work has resulted in reduced gender-based violence, space for more equal decision-making on use of assets and uptake of family planning, increased respect from men and more female leadership positions in community structures. Moreover, the study's findings demonstrate the personal impact of these projects and wider behavioral change of community members, which will endure beyond the life of the program.



Mary, 27, youngest woman elected to the Tiamamut Group Ranch Committee in North Laikipia in Kenya. Photo by Loretta Pilla, Anglican Overseas Aid

Case study: shifting culture and nurturing change

The Maasai ranch of Tiamamut in North Laikipia, Kenya, is accessible only by an undistinguishable dirt road. Here, in this highly patriarchal society, men's voices have traditionally drowned out those of women. Land and livestock are owned by men, which are of paramount importance to the Maasai, while women are afforded ownership of only a few products and resources, such as kitchenware, food, milk, chickens and hides. The only possessions a woman can inherit are her mother's ritual beads. Customarily, the viewpoint of many traditional elders has been that women have no rights and thus no role in decision-making within the traditional nomadic pastoralist social structures.

For the last three years, Anglican Overseas Aid's local partner MUACK has been nurturing a new generation of young women who are influencing change in their communities. The project has provided numerous training programs in leadership and management, adult literacy and numeracy, financial management, maternal and neonatal health, nutrition and sanitation. Through their involvement with these activities, young women in Tiamamut, for example, are achieving their vision of empowering others into positions of leadership. As a result of working intimately with communities, the project has established the trust of elders, while creating new opportunities for women through such roles as 'link persons', community health workers and community volunteers. This process has translated into unprecedented appointments of young women to senior positions within the community.

2.4. Developing effective strategies

Exit strategies

One of the greatest strategies in promoting community partnerships is planning for exit from the start. AACES NGOs achieve this by involving communities throughout the project, encouraging community ownership and working towards handing over responsibility when the partnership ends. Planning and implementation should therefore be through regular, transparent stakeholder communication involving all partners.

In all instances, AACES NGOs take advantage of every opportunity to consult with the communities. This entails highlighting community needs in consultation, discussing all planned activities and coming up with the best method of implementation for success. That means accommodating views from relevant committees, village governments, local governments and community members to ensure the best method is selected. Such consultations lead to partners that can communicate with each other freely, while at the same time promoting trust.

It also ensures gaps are identified and partners agree on the best implementation strategy. Through consultations, principles of partnership are embedded and this promotes successful partnerships.

Advocacy

Advocacy strengthens partnerships by helping stakeholders to resolve any problems arising between or among partners, identify bottlenecks and discuss solutions. Advocacy also builds the capacity of communities to prepare for and effectively address important matters such as the upcoming elections and constitutional review in Tanzania, and improving livelihoods through increased land productivity.

For community members whose voices are curtailed, particularly women, AACES NGOs use advocacy to ensure these voices are heard and listened to. This involves building women's confidence and empowering them, while encouraging men to be open-minded to women's ideas. This has been a particularly effective strategy for CARE in its work to develop the resilience, income and food security of rural women in Tanzania.

Advocacy strategies employed by AACES NGOS enable women to take part in barazas, be consulted on issues and participate effectively as members of various committees. They also enable women to express themselves without fear and discuss issues, while participating in family and community decision-making. Gender equality is promoted as a result, ensuring women's roles in community, local and national development are recognized.



Fidex Gadiya, a widow with two girls has improved her agricultural productivity through use of land contouring method in Endashang'wet Tanzania. She has increased her maize harvest tenfold, from 20 to 200kg. Photo by Cartilas Tanzania

Case study: improving women's resilience, income and food security

CARE works directly with local NGO and government partners to improve the quality of life for chronically food insecure rural women in the Lindi and Mtwara regions of Tanzania.

While agriculture is the primary occupation in these regions, cassava and other crops have become increasing difficult to grow as farmers contend with reduced rainy seasons, inconsistent rainfall and severe weather events such as floods and droughts. As a consequence, local communities are experiencing deepening poverty and are increasingly food insecure.

CARE's project seeks to turn this situation around by improving the resilience, income and food security of married women and women heads of smallholder households, both of whom face particular challenges. Poor married women provide husbands with significant labour for crop production but have little say over their own bodies and labour, and gender-based violence is frequent. Women in female-headed households have greater decision-making authority on how their farms and income are managed but are hampered by gender norms that stigmatize women without husbands and subsequent lack of labour, which limits their productive potential.

Through Village Saving and Loans Associations run by a local partner, CARE is helping these women to access financial services as well as build their capacities in functional literacy, household financial management, food and nutrition planning and food processing. By supporting the Tanzanian Government's farmer field school model, the project is able to link these groups to provide practical field training.

To promote gender equity in crop production and marketing, the project is also helping to develop or strengthen mixed-sex farmer production groups and cooperatives. As part of this work, CARE is promoting the registration of both the husband and the wife on cooperative-linked bank accounts, as well as positive leadership models for women in traditionally male-dominated structures at the community, ward, district and regional levels.

Training

AACES NGOs have adopted a strategy of frequently training community members in a cross-section of issues of relevance to the partnerships. This empowers the communities to know their rights and helps them to conduct partnership activities effectively. The working strategy is to engage external trainers, who attract a better response and a greater impact.

AACES NGOs and other key partners offer community partners training for advocacy purposes but also to enhance their understanding of development issues such as hygiene and sanitation, reproductive health and family planning, and modern farming methods, as illustrated in the case study below.

Case study: training smallhold farmers and increasing food security

Nicodemus Wambua is a smallholder farmer in Makima, a village in Mbeere south district in Eastern Kenya. In just under one year he has earned 170,000 shillings (AUD \$2,119) from farming. Resilience and modern farming methods have catapulted this former hawker into a successful model smallholder farmer. Wambua is now using his agricultural knowledge and skills to transform his community.

It has not been easy for Wambua and his community. The effects of climate change coupled with poor agronomic practices and weak market linkages have all contributed to food insecurity in the area. All this changed in 2011 when Wambua, his wife Regina, and 25 others joined the Kamuru Farmer Field School, supported by ActionAid under the AACES program. After adopting the modern farming methods, Wambua has tripled his farm produce through improved crop quality and yields. ActionAid has assisted Wambua and other farmers in Makima by training them in good agricultural practices and introducing them to various agricultural innovations such as irrigation, drought-tolerant seeds and 'zai pit' technology.



"our members are now not only food secure, but have also a reliable means of income," [Nocodemus Wmabua](#)

From growing only maize, Wambua now plants a variety of crops all year round. The crops include pumpkin, cassava, Irish potato, paw paw, pigeon peas, cowpeas, sweet potato, beans, sorghum, millet and mangoes. He has also increased his productive land from a quarter acre to six acres and employs a casual worker. To diversify his farming, Wambua rears rabbits. From an investment of one rabbit, he now owns 60 rabbits valued at 90,000 shillings (AUD \$1,121).

Wambua's income has increased substantially and his children are now eating more nutritious food. Taking advantage of the increased production of food crops in Makima, he now buys sorghum and other crops from the community and sells to various traders, including East Africa Breweries Ltd, the largest alcohol beverage company in East Africa.

"Thanks to the technical assistance from ActionAid we no longer depend on relief food. In fact, our members are now not only food secure but also have a reliable means of income," Wambua says.

3. Lessons

Many lessons have been learnt through the AACES partnerships, ranging from the effects of partnerships on development to project ownership and leadership. In sharing lessons learnt, we hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the importance and characteristics of effective community partnerships – ultimately to inform and strengthen development programs in Africa and beyond.

3.1 Partnerships and development

Here are major benefits to working in partnerships. Working together has strengthened communities and revealed that united they can make great achievements. The involvement of local government authorities and community leaders has also helped to strengthen community participation in community development and service provision.

Most of those involved in community partnerships have learnt that all local problems have local solutions. Those living in dry areas, such as the community in Endashangwet, Tanzania (see page 15), have been asking for water and now manage water projects from nearby water sources. Partnerships between AACES NGOs and local NGOs have built the capacity of local NGOs. Some of these NGOs' theory of change is to develop more partnerships, and in the process, learn more about how to work with their communities.

Members of the Bidii self help group in their collection centre grading harvested french beans before weighing and labeling for dispatch. Photo by Action Aid Kenya.



AACES has facilitated more collaboration among NGOs and their partners. This has enabled partnerships to blossom, leading to synergies and mutual benefits for collaboration and sharing. Communities that initially thought all development had to be initiated by the government now know that other partners have the ability to bring change sooner. For example, the school water, sanitation and hygiene (SWASH) partnership projects have improved relationships between parents, teachers and students, helping them to work together to encourage students to stay in school.

Partnership fosters good relationships, collaboration and learning, builds sustainability, gender equity and women's empowerment, and increases community confidence. Students from schools with the improved toilets have encouraged parents to construct improved ones at home. Many, particularly girls, are staying in school encouraged by the modern toilets that have room to change sanitary towels and clean up in privacy (see page 19).

3.2 Resource use

NGOs, communities and local governments have managed to leverage resources and funding to augment and scale-up AACES activities, including integrating services. Partnership promotes better use of available resources. Duplication is reduced by working together, which reduces costs in resources and time. By pooling resources, work is also made easier for all partners. The communities have learnt that without great wealth, they can pool together the little they have to help vulnerable community members and uplift themselves.

3.3 Community engagement, ownership and decision-making

A key lesson in community engagement is how it makes programs accepted, hence more effective. Success is greater when a community is involved in spearheading projects. It develops trust among implementing organizations, AACES NGOs and stakeholders. This has been demonstrated through participatory planning so that communities are part of decisions on when, where and how the activities will take place, which generates a sense of ownership. These partnerships have revealed to both donors and the communities that before projects are started, it is important to involve the community in decision-making and materials contribution for complete ownership.



People with disability, particularly women are leading healthy and productive lives through promotion of disability inclusive development, removal of physical barriers, and provision of sexual and reproductive health services. Photo by Marie Stopes Kenya

Another key lesson is that capacity building of communities and their partners – such as providing training for water point committees and community health workers – is key to community enlightenment and project success. Feedback is also essential. Key players in the various activities are encouraged and motivated when they receive positive feedback on their performance, honesty in all aspects, and guidance on how to do things better.

3.4 Peace and unity

In some places where conflicts have been prevalent, there is increased unity and openness among different and previously warring communities. With peace and unity comes development from increased efficiency in production, brought about by the partnerships and good working relationships in the community. Such partnerships promote understanding and peace among members of different tribes and an enhanced government image.

3.5 Health

Reproductive health is a key part of human life and the basis of mental and physical health. This makes it essential to increase the capacity of community health workers to provide the best possible service. Reproductive health and family planning services target young mothers, a well-chosen target group as it increases family planning uptake and offers young mothers the opportunity to improve their livelihoods and those of their children – over the longer term.

3.6 Human and women's rights

Mainstreaming equity and inclusion is a complex and expensive undertaking that demands collaboration between specialized groups and users. Community members have learnt to demand their rights from governments.

They have also achieved self-respect and confidence as community members, particularly women, many of whom could not talk in the presence of their husbands and men in general. They can now speak during barazas and present their issues and needs coherently.

3.7 Leadership and enlightenment

Women are still taking a back seat in their communities with respect to decision-making and ownership of resources. AACES partnerships have had a great effect in empowering women in decision-making, ownership and control of resources, lobbying and leadership, as well as economically through improved access to diversified sources of income.

In terms of enlightenment, communities are starting to teach young people to avoid early pregnancies, and how to manage pregnancies should they happen, while educators are delivering this message in schools. Key participants in partnership activities have gained skills through training offered by AACES NGOs, and appreciated their regular visits and calls when there are issues that need attention. Quality of work has improved through community leadership, an observation from government agencies working with AACES NGOs.

A group of Youth Peer Educators in Kwale, Kenya, recruited by MSK to raise awareness among young people on family planning, sexual and reproductive health, information services and disability inclusiveness. Photo by Bertrand Guillemont, Marie Stopes



