4. How to manage Umoja
How to Manage Umoja

Introduction

As the co-ordinator of the programme, you can put a lot of effort and energy into starting Umoja and getting it off the ground, identifying churches and communities, and recruiting and training facilitators. Once the facilitators start work, it is tempting to sit back and take a break. Experience shows, however, that the level of involvement the co-ordinator continues to have, in supporting and monitoring the facilitators and the communities, is critical to the overall success for the programme.

The diagram below shows the five areas a co-ordinator needs to be aware of in managing Umoja effectively. Over the cycle of Umoja these areas will require varying degrees of support.

Documentation

• Compile regular monitoring reports from each community.
• Put together interim and final reports for donors if required.

Churches

• Ensuring ownership of Umoja by leadership.
• Ensuring the churches build good relationships with their communities.

Community and local co-ordination group

• Monitor progress towards change.
• Monitor quality of relationships between church and community.
• Monitor quality of reports and documentation about community needs and plans.

Facilitators

• Monitoring the quality of facilitation.
• Coaching and mentoring.
• Providing technical support.

Process of Umoja

• Monitor the relevance of the material.
• Look at areas that need revisiting or reinforcing.
• Consider how Umoja can be repeated and replicated in other communities.

1. How to monitor and coach facilitators

Facilitators need regular support and follow-up. It can be easy for facilitators to fall back into bad habits, such as doing top-down teaching, rather than group facilitation. They can also be unaware of possible deficiencies in their facilitation, such as failing to involve women in discussions. It often needs someone else to help them see this.

This kind of support can be provided by fellow facilitators and by the Umoja co-ordinator.

Support provided by fellow facilitators

It can be very helpful to link up facilitators in small groups of three to four in a local area. The facilitators in these groups should be encouraged to regularly visit each other’s communities and observe one another facilitating Umoja. In doing so, each facilitator can get invaluable feedback from their peers. It also gives them the opportunity to observe and learn from how others facilitate.

An adaptation of the self-assessment form in the Facilitator’s Guide could be used as a useful tool to help facilitators observe one another and give feedback.
Support provided by the Umoja co-ordinator

In addition to peer review, it is important that you, as the Umoja Co-ordinator, see the facilitators in action in their communities. It is only then that you are able to check that they are applying their training well. Meet with them after a church or community meeting that you have observed to feedback your observations. You can advise them on how they can improve their facilitation skills, discuss what went well and what did not, and make plans for how you can work together to develop them further.

As well as seeing the facilitator in practice, it is also important to receive other forms of feedback too. Asking facilitators to fill in a regular report form, maybe after each stage of Umoja, can help you to assess how well the facilitator is doing. It is also a good idea to speak directly to the local church and community leaders, on an occasional basis, to get their feedback.

If there is a problem beginning to emerge, such as a breakdown in communication between the facilitator and the local church leader, it is important to know this and act on it as soon as possible. Such issues are always easier to resolve at an early stage, rather than when people have become frustrated and unwilling to change.

2. Providing support to community initiatives

A common experience of Umoja co-ordinators is that they can put so much effort into making sure the initial stages of Umoja go well that they tend to run out of energy once it comes to supporting the community in the implementation of projects. However, this is a vital aspect of the work, and communities still require a lot of training, advice, support and mentoring at this stage.

Here are three ways co-ordinators can provide support to communities at the implementation stage:

Providing specialist advice

Once communities identify issues that they want to address in their locality, or decide on initiatives they want to take, helping them to access specialist knowledge can be very useful. Specialist advice on, for example, building of water wells, when combined with local knowledge and ownership, can help ensure that initiatives are successful, and that mistakes made in other communities are not repeated.

Specialist advice can be accessed from government extension workers, other organisations and skilled community members. There are also many written resources that provide advice. (See page 117 for some helpful resources).

It is important that specialist advice is offered in such a way that it does not take away the independence of the community, or come with promises of large resources that can undermine attitudes of self-reliance that Umoja helps to develop. Before recommending a specialist agency to a community, it may be worth considering what the overall impact of the agency will be on the community.

Encouraging learning visits

Another invaluable source of information and advice is to encourage some community members to visit another community who have addressed a similar issue. By seeing what other communities have done in practice, this can help to inspire and inform the response of the community.
Providing seed funding

The provision of external funds for Umoja community projects is a controversial area, and different organisations have reached different conclusions on this. For some, any hint of external seed funding for community initiatives (a small amount of money given to help start a community initiative) undermines a community’s move towards self-reliance and a breaking free from a dependency mindset. For others, seed funding can provide an extra boost that helps community initiatives happen quicker and more successfully.

Here are some principles that it may be helpful to bear in mind when thinking about this issue:

- The community should have a good history of using its own resources to support initiatives before external support is offered. They should be able to demonstrate self-reliance. If seed funding is offered before this point, it may be difficult for communities to ever become fully self-reliant.

- The community should always retain ownership of the initiative. If the amount of funds being offered is proportionately so large that the initiative essentially becomes the “donor’s project”, it is probably inappropriate.

- The idea for the initiative, even if not all the funding should have come from the community. If a donor offers to pay for something that the community had not initially planned themselves, this can raise questions of long-term ownership.

- Seed funding should, if possible, be given in the form of loans. This limits funding to an amount that is feasible for a community to repay, and also keeps the ownership and initiative of the project clearly in the community’s hands.

- Seed funding should only be provided where the community has demonstrated good planning and project management skills, and where strong accountability structures are in place.

- Encourage the community to think about whether they want external funding or not. Help them to weigh up the positives and negatives of receiving external funds, and to make a well-informed and well-discussed decision. Even in emergency situations, it is important not to assume that communities will want external funding. Have a discussion with them first.

- Instead of seed funding for projects, other financial support may be more appropriate, such as enabling community members to visit other communities to learn from what they are doing, or to provide specialist training.

3. Trouble shooting

This section aims to provide some simple advice on what to do when problems arise during Umoja. Some of the advice will be relevant to you as a co-ordinator. Other advice may be more relevant for you to pass on to your facilitators when they encounter these problems.

What can you do when...

. . . donors are dissatisfied with the slow pace of change?

- Remind them that the process is about ‘elephants’, not ‘chicks’, and that to achieve substantial long-term change takes time.
- Provide them with stories of what change is already happening in communities. Help them to see how these changes are not one-offs, but part of a movement of change. If possible, give them examples from other Umoja communities which are already showing significant transformation, in order to build their confidence in the process.
- Ask them to come and visit the communities to meet people and see and hear for themselves whether the process is making a difference.

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. . . senior church leaders feel threatened by empowered local congregations?

- Spend time with the senior church leaders, explaining why the local congregations are acting as they are. Help them to see the positives of this.
- Show the senior church leaders how these churches and communities have been transformed, and encourage them to visit and see for themselves.
- Work with the local congregations to help them realise how their empowered behaviour may be perceived by senior church leaders. Help them to think of ways in which they can communicate in constructive ways.
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. . . the facilitator is not doing a good job?

- Identify with the facilitator how they can improve, and work closely with them. Maybe you could facilitate the next few stages of the process with them.
- Ask an experienced and competent facilitator to work alongside them, modelling the process and the skills needed.
- Do not let the situation continue for too long. Ultimately, it is the community that suffers from poor facilitation. If you do not think the facilitator will ever be able to do a good enough job, it is better to replace them with someone more experienced as soon as possible before the process becomes discredited.

. . . conflict breaks out in a community?

- Assess whether Umoja can help to resolve the conflict. Bring people together to analyse the causes of the conflict and its potential consequences if it is not resolved.
- Remain as neutral as possible. As an outsider, you may be able to ask "naive" questions about the situation that help to challenge people's thinking on the issue.
- Bring together the churches (or faith communities) involved in the process, and see whether they can act as a catalyst for peace-building.

. . . the community complain about the time demands of the process?

- Help the church and the community to set clear and realistic time-frames.
- Build "rest periods" into the process, particularly during labour intensive periods of the year, such as harvest.
- Encourage the community to celebrate when major mile-stones are achieved or when key break-throughs or achievements happen. This helps people to realise that progress is being made, and that the process is worthwhile.

. . . key issues in the community, such as HIV or gender inequality, are ignored by the community and the facilitator?

- Work with the facilitator to educate them and make them aware of the issues.
- Provide them with skills and tools to help them facilitate church and community discussion around these issues.
- If appropriate, attend some of the discussions with the facilitator, to provide support and experience for the facilitator in handling sensitive issues.
- See the supporting manuals on HIV and other issues for help in dealing with this issue.

. . . the local co-ordination group members begin to reduce their level of involvement?

- Find out from them why they are not participating so much. Is the process too demanding? Are they disillusioned with the process? Are they lacking adequate support?
- Look at ways in which you and the facilitator may be able to address these issues.
- Consider ways in which you can value their contribution more publicly, such as special awards, mentions in newsletters, asking them to host visits of outsiders or enabling them to visit other communities. Consider whether a form of remuneration may be appropriate.
- If time pressures are a major issue, look at ways that you can involve more community members in their tasks. Also, encourage the community to look at ways in which they can free up the local co-ordination group members to do their Umoja work by doing other work for them, such as looking after their animals.