Workshop on Intercultural Communication with Reflections on Ownership

Paidha, May 21 – 23, 2024

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Report by Marcus Büzberger

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1. Background

Project results can be hardly sustained without local ownership. This is a fact that is commonly recognized. However, the vagueness and the complexity of ownership might be the reason why ownership aspects are often not further analysed and operationalized, although in project documents the importance of local ownership is usually highlighted.

As an attempt to systematize and to operationalize reflections on ownership with the aim to assure and if necessary to increase local ownership for more sustainable project results, we developed at the Institute for International Cooperation in Education at the University of Teacher Education Zug (where I used to work as lecturer) a concept for the assessment of the motivational ownership factors in International Cooperation projects.

Local ownership is defined in the concept as the ability and the motivation (or willingness) of a stakeholder to assume responsibility for specific project activities and for what the project

leaves behind as results. Projects of International Cooperation normally promote change. Ownership therefore means local ownership for a change. The focus of the assessment is placed on the motivational factors of ownership. The assumption behind this focus is that motivational factors are often not considered enough by projects as they are less obvious and more difficult to assess than ability factors normally targeted by projects in the form of technical and financial assistance.

The motivational factors of ownership were divided in three sub-areas: the relevance, the quality of (intercultural) communication and the compatibility of meanings and values. An overview of the different factors is given in graph below.

	Ability to assume responsibility	Motivation (willingness) to assume responsibility		
		Relevance	Quality of (intercultural) collaboration	Compatibility of meanings and values
Factors influencing ownership	Know-how and skills Financial means Material resources Legal and social rights Security Institutional environment	Expected benefits from project Feared disadvantages from project Aspirations and priorities Social and political context	Communication and conflict styles Meaning of collaboration Recognition Power relations Credibility Trust Language used History of collaboration The past	Meanings and values of local stakeholders in comparison with values and meanings behind goals and approaches of project

Systematic reflections should be considered in the whole project cycle:

- In the planning phase to get a more realistic picture of what can be expected in terms of ownership and to adapt the objectives and the design of the project accordingly.
- In the implementation phase to be aware of ownership aspects as part of the monitoring during the implementation and to make the necessary adjustments.
- In the evaluation phase to assess the actual ownership. The assessment can be done in form of workshops, interviews or individual reflections.

The concept was so far never tested and further developed in a real project environment. Some months before my retirement Marcel auf der Maur of Co-operaid asked me whether I could do an ownership assessment in the Alochi Ku Somu primary school project in Uganda. We agreed to do this in form of a two-and-a-half-day workshop in Paidha in the Northwest of Uganda, where the project is located. Two main objectives were defined for this pilot workshop: (1) To have a clearer picture of the local ownership in the project. (2) To test and further develop the concept of ownership assessment.

2. Program, moderation, logistics, participants

The workshop had two main parts. The first two days were intended as preparation for the actual ownership reflections on the third day. They had a strong focus on intercultural

communication as it plays an important role for ownership especially in the assessment of the quality of collaboration and the compatibility of meanings and values. That is why intercultural communication was highlighted in the workshop title. During the preparation of the workshop, I got the feeling that the term ownership assessment might suggest an aim that is too ambitious to reach during the limited time and with the rather big number of participants (over 30). I was also not sure what kind of dynamics to expect and finally it was the first workshop with this link to ownership that I conducted. I conducted many workshops and seminars on intercultural communication during my time at the University of Teacher Education Zug and when I used to work in International Cooperation for Helvetas. However, this workshop on ownership was the first of this kind for me. I therefore felt more comfortable with the term "reflections on ownership" than "ownership assessment". All these considerations lead to the final title of the workshop. The program of the workshop is attached to this report as Annex 1.

The workshop was moderated by Marcus Büzberger assisted by Rashid Abed of Co-operaid. The logistical support on site was provided by LICO (Life Concern). LICO is one of the local project partners of Co-operaid and has its base in Paidha.

The workshop took place in the facilities of the Country Cottages Hotel in Paidha.

Over thirty persons participated in the workshop. The following stakeholders of the Alochi Ku Somu project were represented:

- The three local partners:
    - CEFORD, Arua
    - NDNGOF, Nebbi
    - LICO, Paidha
- Parents association
- Teachers
- Local Government
- Alur Kingdom

Also, a delegation from Bangladesh, representing the Humanitarian Foundation in Bandarban participated in the workshop.

Co-operaid was represented by Marcel auf der Maur and Rashid Abed.

A list of the participants can be found in Annex 2.

3. **Results**

Most of the participants were very active throughout the workshop. There was a lively exchange in plenary and especially in the many group discussions. The workshop seemed to have been of interest to the participants and it is hoped that it contributed to team building between and within the different stakeholder groups. The presence of the group from Bangladesh gave an added value to the workshop as it enriched the intercultural exchange.

However, it was not always clear to me how much the representatives of the parents' association could or wanted to bring them into the discussions especially in plenary. It might have been a question of language or of other dynamics among the different stakeholders that might have played a role.

During the first two days the participants produced and presented many posters with their findings from the different group works. Rashid Abed took photos of most of them. The posters contain a lot of information that in many cases needed further concretization. This
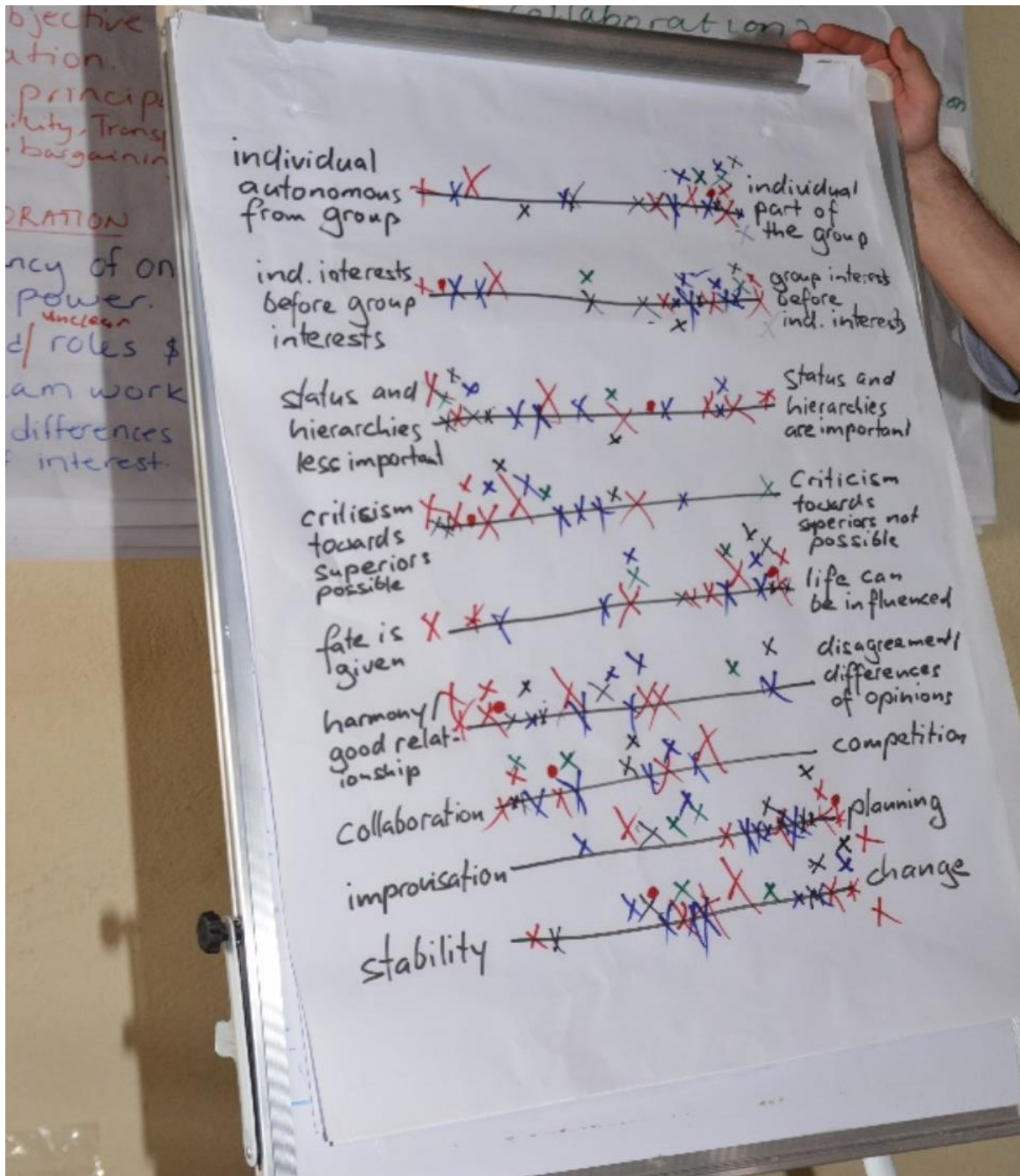
makes it difficult to analyse the posters in depth. Nevertheless, a few conclusions can be drawn.

During the session regarding different communication styles, it became obvious that most participants prefer a rather indirect communication style especially when it comes to giving critical or negative feedback.

The four conflict styles by Mitch Hammer are combinations of the way how a disagreement in a conflict is addressed (directly or indirectly) with the way how emotions in a conflict are managed (emotionally restraint or emotionally expressive). The picture below shows the result of the self-positioning of the participants to the four different conflict styles. It shows that in conflict situations different ways to approach a conflict are present among the participants at least in their self-perception. Quite a few of them prefer to approach a conflict in a direct way without expression too much of their emotions. The directedness might be contractionary to the statement above that many of the participants prefer an indirect style when it comes to negative feedback. However, we need to be careful not to make any conclusions too quick, as we don't know who positioned him- or herself in which box. The preference to a certain communication or conflict style cane be cultural as well as individual.
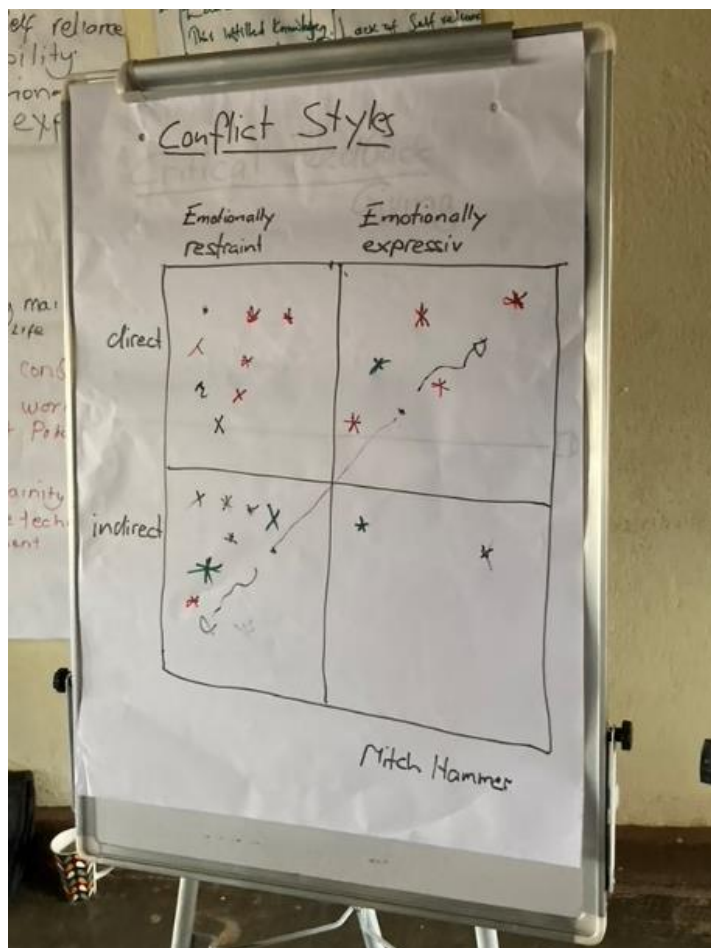
Interesting are also the results of the self-positioning regarding different value dimensions (see picture below). More participants than expected see themselves on the individualistic side. This might be true but maybe also something they wished to be. On the other side harmony and collaboration seem the be important for many of the participants. Regarding status and hierarchies, the picture is quite mixed, with a clear majority that would prefer that criticism towards superiors is possible. Also, in this case it is not clear whether this is the reality or something they wished.

individual autonomous from group ————————— individual part of the group

ind. interests before group interests ————————— group interest before ind. interests

status and hierarchies less important ————————— status and hierarchies are important

criticism towards superiors possible ————————— criticism towards superiors not possible

fate is given ————————— life can be influenced

harmony / good relationship ————————— disagreement / differences of opinions

collaboration ————————— competition

improvisation ————————— planning

stability ————————— change

Other exercises also provided information on the social values of the participants. For instance, some interesting results were obtained from the question of how a child should be brought up. An example of one group is given in the photo below. Interesting is the importance of spirituality and religion in the upbringing of a child. A further interesting aspect is the one of discipline. One can assume that discipline plays a more important role than it usually does in Switzerland. Interesting would be to follow up on what is more concretely meant with the good values that were mentioned by the group.
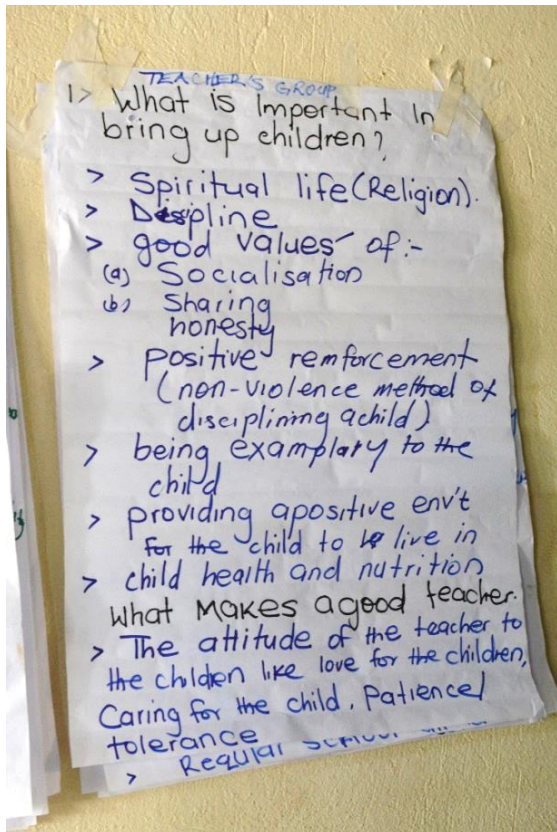
When they were asked what the relation between a teacher and the pupils should be, many answered in the sense of what the project stipulates in their objectives as good teaching (an example of one group is given in the picture below). This is certainly a positive aspect with regards to ownership. However, we also have seen that student centred teaching is based on certain cultural value assumptions as low power distance between teachers and pupils. In an environment where hierarchies between teacher and pupils are of importance and where hundred and more children sit in a classroom student centred teaching might be less desired and possible to be practised. This needs to be taken into consideration.
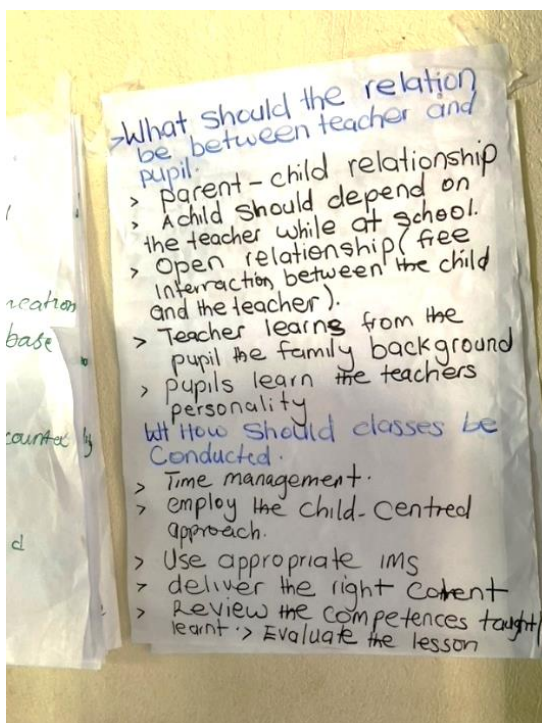
The participants also exchanged views in groups on the question of what constitutes good cooperation. Trust and transparency were the factors that were mentioned the most. These are factors that seem self-evident but are in my opinion often underestimated in the realisation of projects in International Cooperation.

On the last day of the workshop the participants were asked to reflect on ownership along the three factors relevance, quality of collaboration and compatibility of values. They were given respective forms to be completed in stakeholder groups.

From what they filled in we can conclude that the project seems to be relevant for all of the stakeholders. Regarding the quality of collaboration there were some issues mentioned that led to the feeling of not being fully appreciated by a specific collaboration partner. The communication by radio, the frequency of emergency meetings and not timely appointments in advance were mentioned as problematic points.

The questions regarding compatibility of cultural values were for most of the participants (but not for all of them) difficult to understand. The introduction to the cultural value dimensions on the second day was probably not sufficiently profound due to the lack of time. The respective results therefore cannot really be interpreted. Nevertheless, the discussions on the second day regarding student centred teaching and the underlying values, gave indication that there might be some gaps to be bridged regarding power distance.

4. **Possible further steps**

The following ideas for further analyses in relation to local ownership are intended as inspiration. In case Co-operaid or its local partners would find some of the suggestions interesting one would need to see how to follow up on them.

From the reflections on ownership, one could conclude that there are no major problems regarding local ownership, and this might be even true. As there was not enough time for more profound reflections, I would however suggest having a more in-depth look at certain aspects. As the group was very large what made more profound analyses difficult to impossible, I would like to suggest further in-depth analyses within smaller focus groups (per stakeholder or mixed).

One could focus on the following aspects:

Relevance: Very often beneficiaries of a project say that the project is relevant to them. The key question, however, is why exactly the project is relevant for them. This could be the question to be deepened in focus groups.

Quality of collaboration: The problematic areas could be followed up with or by the concerned stakeholders.

Compatibility of cultural values: It is true that the respective analysis and its link to local ownership was not completely understood by most of the stakeholder. The workshop however provided a certain basis on which we could build with further in-depth analyses to be more aware of possible gaps in cultural values and most important to think of ways of how to bridge them in a meaningful way. The Value and Development Square by Friedemann Schulz von Thun could be a useful tool for this kind of reflections and analysis. It enables a holistic view on conflicting values and shows development opportunities in dealing with them.

Although the results of the ownership reflections were not as meaningful as I expected, I think it was worthwhile to have done this pilot workshop. Nevertheless, I would like to draw the following lessons learnt from it:

- The workshop produced some interesting results that could be followed-up.
- Especially the part on intercultural communication attracted the interest of the participants.
- The reflections on local ownership did not quite produce the results as expected by me due to the following reasons: the forms were not clear enough and too complex, the time for the reflection part was too short, the group was too big.
- The workshop was content-wise too broad. I tried to touch too many topics. A clearer focus with more specific objectives would have allowed more in-depth analysis.
- The workshop would need a more focused in-depth follow-up regarding ownership as mentioned above.
- I still think that it would be useful to reflect and assess local ownership along the three fields relevance, quality of collaboration and compatibility of cultural values. Especially the last is often less obvious as it is less visible, but in my experience often the one that affects local ownership the most. As it is at the same time for many people in the North and in the South the most difficult one to recognize and to deal with it would need a more focused attention than it was possible during the workshop in Paidha.
- Clarify beforehand and in more detail whether the discussion about ownership concerns the general project work or a specific project (such as the primary school project Alochi ku Somu).

5. Thanks

It was great to do this workshop. I enjoyed being in Paidha. I could learn a lot from working and exchanging with all the participants. My thanks for this experience go to all the participants.

I am grateful for all the support I received during may stay in Paidha from LICO, NDNGO and CEFORD.

Finally, I would like to thank Co-operaid and especially Marcel auf der Maur for having given me the opportunity to conduct this workshop. Thank you, Rashid, for having me assisted before and during the workshop. I very much appreciated it.

Annexes:

Annex 1: Workshop Program

Annex 2: List of participants

Annex 3: Workshop Impressions (Photos)

Annex 1: Workshop Program

Workshop on intercultural communication with ownership reflections

May 21- 23, 2024, in Paidha

Moderator: Marcus Büzberger

	May 21, 2024	May 22, 2024	May 23, 2024
Morning 8:30 am – 1pm Coffee break of 30 minutes	**Introduction and getting to know each other** **Reflections on life priorities of participants** **Intercultural stories of participants** **Intercultural communication styles**	**Reflections on the meaning of collaboration** **Values and culture dimensions**	**Introduction of Ownership Concept** **Project related reflections on motivational aspects of ownership regarding relevance, quality of collaboration and compatibility of values** **Summary of results of project related ownership reflections with possible next steps**
	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
Afternoon 2pm – 5pm Coffee break of 30 minutes	**Intercultural communication styles** (cont.) **Intercultural conflict styles**	**Values and culture dimensions** (cont.)	**Evaluation of workshop** **Closing of workshop at 3 pm**

Annex 2: List of Participants

S/n	Name	Sex	Designation
01	Odeba Nicholas	M	DEO
02	Ocakuwun Augustine	M	CDO
03	Onegiu Jinaro	M	LCIII
04	Ocam-Giu Innocent	M	C/M BA/MA
05	Rv. Issac Rwothomio	M	Religious leader
06	Masendi Innocent	M	C/M SMC
07	Abineno Sisto Omulongo	M	C/M PTA
08	Wapokurwa Innocent	M	Minister Alur Kingdom
09	Susu Alex	M	Head-teacher
10	Awekonimungu Prisca	F	Teacher
11	Atimango Stella	F	Teacher
12	Ofoyrwoth Ronald	M	ED- NDNGOF
13	Kakura Emmy Kizito	M	ED- LICO
14	Bikadho Patrick Othuma	M	P/C- NDNGOF
15	Ocana Denis	M	P/C- LICO
16	Okaya John Bosco	M	P/C- CEFORD
17	Onim Albert Wathum	M	FM- NDNGOF
18	Rwothomio Herbert	M	FM- LICO
19	Adralia Robert	M	FM- CEFORD
20	Alan Assa	M	MELO- NDNGOF
21	Malengrwoth Brendah	F	MELO- LICO
22	Opoka Kennedy	M	MELO- CEFORD
23	Oweknyinga Jackline	F	P/O- LICO
24	Viga Habib	M	P/O- CEFORD
25	Ruva Robert	M	ITO- LICO
26	Rashid Abed	M	COOPERAID
27	Marcel Auf der Maur	M	COOPERAID
28	Moung Moung Shing Marma	M	Director
29	Mongwai Ching Marma	M	Project Manager
30	Bidya Chakma	M	Project Manager
31	Amar Chakma	M	Project Manager
32	Ocaki Samuel	M	DCDO

Annex 3: Workshop impressions

Photos by Rashid Abed

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