Collaborative Methodology for Public Managers and NGO Leaders: Implementing Social Change Policy

By David Kenneth Waldman and Margaret Meador

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Abstract

This article spotlights a collaborative partnership approach to develop and garner support for Healthy and Smart, a HIV/AIDS prevention curriculum strategy. Focus is purposely placed on an action research methodology based in theory and evidence. The programmatic method is incremental and encompasses a transdisciplinary and culturally appropriate approach. In particular, our method instigates effective social change and public policy by forming collaborative partnerships. The essence of collaborative partnerships with key public policy and administrative actors is its alignment with a nation’s social development policy position. Critical to the development of a comprehensive action research approach is investing time to explore each social factor fully. Healthy and Smart HIV/AIDS Prevention Program for Youth exemplifies a participatory program development model for public managers.

Introduction

To Love Children Educational Foundation International Inc. (TLC), was founded on the hypothesis to work collaboratively across and within sectors based on practice and theory will advance positive social change for girls. To meet the mission of sustainable educational development for girls, TLC initiated an evidence-based approach into the design and delivery of its programs. Informed by scholarly research, Waldman put forward the theory to provide advantage to a government’s social change policy, a nongovernmental program needed to integrate empirical studies and theory with policy. A collaborative model was selected to build partnerships with public managers who aspired to piece together meaningful social change for girl children.

Cross Sector Collaboration with Civil Society
Waldman reasoned that policy collaboration based in both practice and theory would meet local and national needs of any marginalized population TLC wanted to serve. After much thought, TLC programs focused on sustainable educational development opportunities for girls. This goal had widespread support from public managers who looked for expertise to implement programs that addressed complex social issues. Although many socio-economic issues necessitate the education of public officials, due to the United Nations global focus on HIV/AIDS prevention, educational training of public managers on HIV/AIDS prevention as a human right was not necessary. Governments were already informed and responsible signatories of international human rights treaties and global social development targets such as UNCHR International Guidelines on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights (2006) and the Millennium Development Goals, (Goal 6 2000).

Still, how does civil society motivate public managers who are charged with the implementation of national social policy to advocate on an issue as complex as girl children social development? Waldman and Meador’s objective was to induce public managers to include a gender justice and human rights tactic when implementing public health policy. Public managers already had difficulty with carrying out social policies due to the lack of financial resources. To overcome this challenge, TLC trained public administrators to accept the advantage of gaining additional resources from working with a nongovernmental organization (NGO).

**Social Change and Policy Implementation**

To Love Children acquired knowledge to empower girls from best practices along with evidence-based research. This process cultivated relationships with public managers who were ready to champion girl empowerment thereby ensuring a social justice policy which centered on
gendered equality. Waldman and Meador’s specific strategy was to take account of community based organizations and the private sector. However, targeting local groups necessitated more than understanding best practices and the qualities of effective programs and policies.

Waldman and Meador recognized the importance to improve intercultural communication skills to create lasting and meaningful policy dialogue. This awareness affected how TLC communicated with public managers to win sponsorship of key local actors. Advocacy among a culturally diverse range of appropriate stakeholders was critical to strategically gain access to substantially more sustainable human and financial resources.

**Action Research Methodology**

Action Research is a methodology relevant to public managers who need to incorporate data from different sectors to inform public policy. Action research, put simply, is “learning by doing” -- a group of people identify a problem, do something to resolve it, see how successful their efforts were, and if not satisfied, try again, (O’Brien 2001). A more complete definition is, “Action research...aims to contribute both to the practical concerns of people in an immediate problematic situation and to further the goals of social science simultaneously. Thus, there is a dual commitment in action research to study a system and concurrently to collaborate with members of the system in changing it in what is together regarded as a desirable direction” (O’Brien 2001).
Action Research Questions

- How will Identification of Policy Issues and Best Practices (Secondary research and field work) be conducted and integrated into policy?
- What is the advantage of a theoretical framework: Empowerment Theory, Social Learning Theory, Social Choice Theory, and Ngoma over a conceptual framework for collaborative partnerships? How can this not become an either or situation?
- What is the role of NGOs in Public Advocacy Building for Public Managers to implement social public policy?
- How are Stakeholders and Key Actors identified to formulate an Implementation Action Plan?

Figure 2: Action Research Questions
Waldman and Meador (2010)

Determining Program and Policy Foci

Meador assumed that the ideal scenario was to approach a community with a blank needs assessment and formulate programs and policies based on what emerged from the community solely. However, the reality is that this approach is usually not feasible or practical, and funding is rarely uncategorical—that is, often funds are granted to address a specific social or health issue, rather than awarded open-ended for public managers and implementing organizations to determine the most effective use. As a result, public managers must be cautious not to fall into one of the 13 Challenges indicated below, but balance top-down and bottom-up approaches. Public managers are encouraged to conduct comprehensive

Figure 3: Waldman discussing community needs with local leaders, Uganda
secondary source research on regional needs and best practices in concert with seeking to understand a community, even if the focus is predetermined.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13 Top Challenges of Public Managers</th>
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<td>1. Non-democratic policy decisions influence civil society</td>
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<td>2. Corruption of actors and stakeholders</td>
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<td>3. Perception of international NGOs role as imposing western ideas</td>
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<td>4. Lack of a whole systems policy approach to policy issues</td>
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<td>5. Failed governments, policies which block gender equality, and women empowerment</td>
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<td>6. International developmental and humanitarian help creates aid dependency</td>
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<td>7. Local negative bias against girls and women</td>
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<td>8. Culture, traditions, and religion hinder girl and women development, including cultural perceptions of women by women</td>
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<td>9. Lack of political will, ineffective legal enforcement, and implementation of Human Rights’ treaties.</td>
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<td>10. Weak coordination of program efforts and resources</td>
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<td>11. Lack of democratic governance in all sectors, extremist viewpoints, and diversion of world’s attention</td>
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<td>12. Instability of world economic markets</td>
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<td>13. Lack of unified evidence-based transdisciplinary sustainable social development paradigm</td>
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**Figure 3: 13 Top Challenges of Public Managers**
Waldman and Meador (2010)

**Building Capabilities and Competencies**

The old paradigm for most international nongovernmental organizations was to advocate for human rights, deliver humanitarian aid, or create prevention based programs for the most poor and marginalized. Anecdotally, Waldman and Meador discovered that international NGO programs were often premised on western teaching methods which addressed western determinants of health issues. Moreover, many interventions were implemented without measurable objectives or means to collect data to determine effectiveness. Rarely did a NGO develop a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process with the express purpose to adapt and improve inputs and outcomes. When programs did create metrics,
many were not consistent, and so comparability across initiatives proved impossible. As a departure from these earlier models, Meador synthesized a HIV/AIDS prevention curriculum with the culture and learning approach of the population in mind and designed a learning pedagogy based on an M&E plan which incorporated standardized HIV prevention indicators developed by the World Health Organization.

**Partnership Paradigm**

New philanthropic trends of how money was donated did not alter the fact that governments were still weary of NGO’s and individuals from sitting down at the policy table. Public managers and policy makers still maintained the responsibility to implement social public policy centered on individual local needs. Culture and political expediency were still the driving factors of a government’s national social policy over the goals of well-intentioned philanthropists or NGOs. Due to donor fatigue, Waldman understood the difficulty a small not well-known international NGO has in competing for funding with philanthropists partnering with larger NGO’s and community based organizations. The solution was to take a locally-based sustainable development approach to To Love Children’s international health programs. The key seemed to be to develop effective collaborative partnerships with government at the local and national level along with civil society.

Public managers need to establish accountable, productive, efficient, and effective partnerships when integrating a NGO’s program as a policy suggestion. According to the USAID New Partnerships Initiative, “optimal NGO partnerships are with organizations that have clear objectives grounded in the volition of its constituents, mutual interests, support one’s mission in some capacity, and ideally, fill a gap not currently addressed by one’s own organization” (USAID 2010). Partners who have demonstrated longevity, have a solid reputation, and are
neutral with respect to religious, ethnic/cultural, or political affiliation make good candidates.

Special priority should go to local or regional NGOs who have a greater stake in the target community and are more likely to engender trust, understand local processes and politics, and be tailored to address local needs.

**An Incremental Approach**

Implementation of our program started with an awareness outreach campaign to gain acceptance of our nongovernmental organization’s mission and expertise. While these efforts collectively may be considered extensive, each initiative helped build TLC’s credibility and reputation, and also established trust. This foundational work helped TLC understand the complexities of working in our target countries and fostered relationships necessary to develop more substantial programs and ultimately, influence national social policy:

1. Walk for Education in Kamuli, Uganda
2. Creation of the Global Child Journal
3. Donated books and educational resources
4. Opened four libraries (two in Uganda and two in India)
5. Donated a poultry farm to promote sustainable educational development for HIV/AIDS orphans.
6. Held dialogues with local leaders, civil society, and governmental ministers
7. Encouraged citizen service participation and decision making with community-based organizations
8. Adapted a HIV/AIDS Prevention Curriculum for Teens (the basis for *Healthy and Smart*)
10. Frequent visits to internally displaced camps and the war zone in northern Uganda
Theory Informs Practice

A transdisciplinary evidence-based practice model was used to address historical gender bias shortcomings and overcome that bias with a theoretical framework. The use of social choice and empowerment theory are two examples of theoretical frameworks that allow governmental and nongovernmental managers to identify a niche where both can execute a gender equilibrium environment that is unique to the nation and upholds international agreements. Moreover, Meador used theories such as the health belief model and the theory of reasoned behavior as well as experts in mental health, peer training, evaluation, learning styles, and HIV epidemiology to inform best policy and procedures for Healthy and Smart.

Healthy and Smart - A Participatory Model

Healthy and Smart is TLC’s HIV/AIDS prevention program was designed to reach populations most vulnerable to HIV. HIV has detrimental biological, social, and economic costs, hampers efforts to reduce poverty, and has negative impacts on educational development. AIDS can kill sexually active adults; therefore, it most impacts a country’s labor force. This reduction in labor causes a domino effect beginning with poorer economic revenues that negatively affect education and health services, which, in turn, leave behind orphaned children and grandparents, and often results in the removal of children (especially girls) from school.

Current data show that youth and young adults are at the core of the pandemic in terms of transmission, vulnerability, impact, and capacity for change (UNAIDS 2006). Thus, preventing HIV transmission in this target audience supports TLC’s integrated educational strategy and overall mission: To create sustainable educational development opportunities for the girl child in the developing world in order to break the cycle of poverty.

Assessing Needs
In order to best understand how to make the curriculum culturally appropriate, effective for the target population, and sustainable, our process began with conducting an informal needs assessment. According to the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, a “health needs assessment is a systematic method for reviewing the health issues facing a population, leading to agreed priorities and resource allocation that will improve health and reduce inequalities” (Cavanaugh and Chadwick 2005, 3). Our needs assessment to plan for Healthy and Smart involved establishing dialogue and consulting with field and public managers at the local, national level, and international level, including the Ugandan Government Ministers of Education and Sports, Health, Gender, Labour (Sic), and Social Development. In addition, Waldman visited HIV/AIDS affected women and children in Uganda, while Meador sought expert advice from nonprofit and private organizations such as the World Health Organization, the United Children’s Fund, The AIDS Support Organization, Johns Hopkins University, and the University of Kenya, Nairobi. Community leaders also provided important insights on the most feasible and acceptable intervention strategies and actions.

*Achieving Cultural Appropriateness*

Experts from varying levels of government, and international and community-based organizations’ also informed TLC to understand how current officially sanctioned HIV/AIDS programs fail to effect real social change. Existing approaches are often didactic, literacy-based, and Eurocentric, and ignore the rich oral African traditional forms of communication (Leonard 2006). Therefore, Meador intentionally focused on increasing visual graphics, using modelling and role plays, and created scenarios that would both resonate with and be socially acceptable to TLC’s target audience.
Further, Meador developed a curriculum appendix outlining how to weave *Ngoma* in with other teaching methods. *Ngoma* is a traditional east African teaching practice that involves using local artistic language and performance to communicate information and motivate participants toward positive action (e.g. healthy behaviors) (Leonard 2006). The authors felt it would be appropriate to encourage the use of *Ngoma* to convey non-western communication where this type of oral tradition is part of the core of daily life.

**Policy Alignment**

While cultural appropriateness is paramount to acceptance of policies and programs that originate inside of a target nation, global approval rides on whether public managers follow international law. A good public manager will additionally seek policy alignment with United Nations goals which reflect on their government’s cooperation. Waldman and Meador found that alignment with strategic national policies is imperative to receptiveness. Relationships with public officials at the national level allowed TLC to obtain much needed input to match *Healthy and Smart’s* objectives and aims with national health and education standards. In particular, Meador ensured *Healthy and Smart* was consistent with the most recent official Ugandan HIV/AIDS policy at the time of development: the Revised National Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS Activities in Uganda: 2003/04–2005/06. Uganda’s strategy outlines three main goals: 1) To reduce HIV prevalence by 25%, 2) To mitigate the effects of HIV/AIDS, and 3) To strengthen the national capacity to coordinate and manage the multi-sectored response to the epidemic.

Based on Meador’s research and viewing HIV in its broader social context, as well as considering the skill building component of the Uganda AIDS Commission’s position, TLC
expanded the “ABC” intervention concept to “ABCDEF”: Abstinence, Be faithful, Condom use, Do not do drugs, Empowerment with life skills, and Financial independence through livelihood skills training for adolescents to provide them with chances for gainful employment and help protect themselves from exploitation and risky behaviors. Key stakeholders embraced these additional goals, as our modified concept still supported Uganda’s national HIV agenda.

A Programmatic Conceptual Framework

A programmatic approach is systematic and deliberate, and yet malleable enough to expand or change. In contrast to an individual project approach which may be tightly developed, limited in scope, and offers recipient countries little leverage to influence activities or strategies. A programmatic approach promotes the harmonization of policies and interventions with national priorities and current capabilities. The scope is wider and calls for a longer term vision of goals. The expanded program framework for Healthy and Smart grew out of best practices and evidence-based HIV interventions that demonstrated success using more holistic designs. Woven in Meador’s implementation model included a clear and firm intervention strategy, yet tempered with flexibility and improvisation. An example of when this became necessary was when shifting political venues forced postponement of a pilot as TLC waited for Kenya’s recent political unrest from Presidential election results to settle.

TLC conceived Healthy and Smart using a logic model well accepted in the public health community, where resources are mobilized to undertake activities (inputs), that result in outputs (e.g., completed education and training), which have immediate short-term effects (outcomes) and long-term impacts. This linear model is ideal for obtaining input at each level of program development and allowed planners to map out expected effects and ensure each program component supports agreed upon aims.
Training Trainers

A programmatic community-based approach is deliberate and requires local centralized leadership. However, Meador was resolute that our planning phase at the international level involved deliberate plans to transition to local implementation, which included training of trainers. Thus, one of the key inputs included in our logic model was the development of a training of trainers module to operationalize the delivery of Healthy and Smart. The module served as a guide for TLC staff to train teachers and student leaders in the curriculum content.
and various learning methods. It also provided instruction to understand social context of the particular teaching environment and local cultural norms and values related to HIV and AIDS. The Integration of community members into the implementation of TLC’s program underlies program acceptance, ownership, and sustainability.

**Monitoring and Evaluation**

The logic model sets up *Healthy and Smart* for monitoring and evaluation to capture and replicate successes and innovations, as well as make needed modifications. *Healthy and Smart*’s initial intervention component is health and life-skills education; however, a framework is in place to embrace new intervention strategies and activities as successes are realized, new best practices documented, and funding expands. The importance of intentional planning for M&E included meeting the need to expand funding opportunities with demonstrated results from models that could be replicated all over Uganda.

Meador defined monitoring; assesses a program’s efficacy—the extent to which the program uses resources appropriately and completes activities is according to plan. Evaluation, Meador described as focuses on whether the program produced the intended results by attempting to link particular outputs or outcomes directly to an intervention. An evaluation is also critical to demonstrate accountability to what an organization has set out to achieve to their key stakeholders, actors who aim to benefit such as; community, governmental agencies, and community-based NGOs, and funders. Part of this accountability is to maintain a collaborative approach through all stages of the program. The rationale is to include the evaluation so, students, teachers, community peer trainers, and TLC staff will participate in various aspects of the monitoring and evaluation of *Healthy and Smart*. 
Future Recommended Actions

Creation of a social justice program model which incorporates cross-cultural communication, gender justice and equality, human rights, and culturally appropriate democratic governance institutions reinforce the United Nations’ capability to empower women and girls and advance positive social change. Women who are empowered with universal acceptance nationally, locally, and in civil society can enact positive educational social change for the girl child and benefit in enhanced quality of life.

Conclusion

Waldman and Meador agreed with Dr. Irmak Renda-Tanali, D.Sc. a specialist in crisis, disaster, and risk management supposition that in order to respond to crises, public administrators are required to be experts in policy and know best how to leverage the resources of their government. Applying this precept, Waldman and Meador assumed that it was important to work with public leaders by first understanding their political culture to gain influence for TLC’s HIV/AIDS public policy. Our intent was to build on posteriori evidence to justify from...
prior Ugandan prevention strategy success and then construct a culturally appropriate conceptual and theoretical prevention curriculum in response.
References


