INTERGENERATIONAL AND CROSS CULTURAL INTERACTIONS FOR ENHANCING LITERACY LEARNING AND SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES IN UGANDA

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INTRODUCTION/PRESENTATION STRUCTURE

- This paper shares the experiences of the volunteers of Uganda Rural Literacy and Community Development Association (URLCODA) regarding contribution their intergenerational and cross-cultural literacy programme is making towards the attainment of a sustainable society in Uganda

- The paper begins with an explanation of the conceptual and contextual issues and proceeds to describe the meaning, vision, purpose, management and activities of URCLCODA

- It then outline's strategies adopted to implement and achieve URLCODA'a set objectives and ends with a summary of the achievements, challenges associated with voluntarism, the way forward and appeal for support

MEANING OF A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

- A society that is sustainable in one which:
  - Ensures health and vitality of human life and culture; and of nature's capital for present and future generation (Veiderman, 1993, p. 34)
  - Functions in a way that does not deplete the energy or material resources on which it depends; and
  - Cherishes a return to simple life and minimization of unnecessary spending

THE CONTEXT IN UGANDA
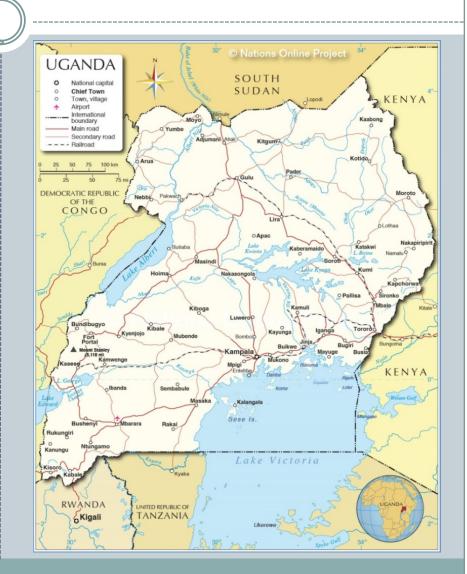
ARE WE A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY?

- I would say, to a large extent, **NO** because of the following reasons:
  - The current state of the depletion of our environment is appalling
  - We are living a lifestyle that not within our means; and
  - The values and norms we cherish are not sustainable

  NB: Proof of the above reasons is clear in the characteristics of Uganda's society outlined below

CHARACTERISTICS OF UGANDA'S SOCIETY

- Uganda is located in East Africa and is characterized by:
  - Diverse ethnic groups
  - High population (39.2 million) with growth rate of 3.2% p.a
  - 86.7% rural population
  - 10 million people living in poverty
  - About 7 million people non-literate
  - Degraded environment
  - Prevalence of violent conflicts in communities; and
  - Low status accorded to non-formal, informal learning and adult education

  NB: The above problems need an educational approach which at the moment is not adequate

URLCODA COMMUNITY LEARNING INTERVENTION IN UGANDA

- URLCODA stands for Uganda Rural Literacy and Community Development Association

- It is registered with the NGO Board of Uganda

- It envisions a literate, healthy, happy, secure, gender sensitive and peaceful communities and sustainable society

- It aims to improve literacy skills of people of all ages as a critical tool for achieving socio-economic, cultural and political development in rural areas so as to promote wise and sustainable use of resources

KEY ACTIVITIES OF URLCODA

- Key activities URLCODA runs in Uganda on voluntary basis include:

  - Intergenerational literacy classes

  - Establishing community libraries

  - Participatory local reading materials development

  - Organizing intergenerational and cross-cultural community dialogues on issues that affect the ordinary people

  - Routine HIV/AIDS counselling and testing for rural people

  - Helping orphans and the girl child to remain in school through psychosocial support services

  - Encouraging income generating activities like local crafts production

PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF URLCODA'S ACTIVITIES

Female learners of Okokoro Literacy Group presenting a song during their annual conference at St. Joseph's College Ombaci in April 2014

URLCODA intergenerational literacy learners in a plenary session during their annual conference

PHOTOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF URLCODA'S ACTIVITIES

- Women seeking HIV/AIDS counselling and testing services

- Members of National Community of Women Living with HIV/AIDS presenting a song during the conference

ICT SKILLS CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING
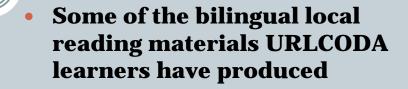
- **Learner made clay keyboard**

- ICT skills training

PARTICIPATORY LOCAL READING MATERIALS PRODUCTION

- **A group discussion to generate ideas for producing local reading materials**

- **Some of the bilingual local reading materials URLCODA learners have produced**

INCOME GENERATING AND CULTURAL LITERACY SKILLS LEARNING

- **Local crafts for income generation**

- Lugbara cultural dance

URLCODA MANAGEMENT, FUNDING AND STRATEGIES FOR PROMOTING COMMUNITY LEARNING

- URLCODA is a volunteer-led local NGO in Uganda that has no external funding
- It is managed by:
  - a 5 member Board that gives strategic direction to the organization
  - Secretariat comprising a multidisciplinary team of volunteers; and
  - Standing committees on projects, finance and disciplinary issues

STRATEGIES FOR REALIZING URLCODA OBJECTIVES

- To realize URLCODA's objectives; the volunteers use the following strategies:
  - The concept of virtual voluntarism where one's location does not matter
  - Empowerment of the vulnerable in the society through literacy
  - Building strategic partnerships for resource sharing
  - Local capacity building through training
  - Building a network of rural community libraries in the villages
  - Discouraging harmful cultural practices, values and norms

PARTNERS URLCODA WORKS WITH

- URLCODA has been working with and/or through a number of institutions some of which include:
  - District Local Governments in Uganda
  - Government and Missionary hospitals
  - The US Embassy in Uganda
  - AIDS Information Centre in Uganda
  - National Community of Women Living with AIDS
  - Makerere University College of Education
  - Local media houses
  - Uganda Community Libraries Association
  - Maendeleo Foundation – an ICT training provider; and
  - Primary and Secondary Schools in the country

WHAT HAS URLCODA ACHIEVED?

- In its period of existence, URLCODA has:
  - Successfully worked with resourceful partners to support the poor in Uganda
  - Build people's skills in various literacies such as ICTs, income generation, farming, environment management, health, leadership, etc
  - Complemented government's efforts in communicating important policies to people
  - Successfully organized 4 national intergenerational and cross cultural dialogues for the communities in Uganda in which over 2,500 people have participated,
  - Organized community health camps from which over 3000 people have benefited across Uganda from medical/health volunteers
  - Conducted computer training of more than 2000 rural people in various places
  - Established 18 community libraries strategically linked to primary schools; and
  - Identified a rural Primary School to set up Pilot ICT centre for rural folks to learn ICT skills

CHALLENGES WE ARE FACING IN TRYING TO ENSURE A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

- The main challenge URLCODA volunteers are facing relates the shift in the current understanding of voluntarism where people no longer want to offer their hours of service free of charge

- The way people used to work collectively to support one another has collapsed in the current neoliberal climate

- The volunteers have also experienced the problem of having to use many translators since their target groups lacks formal literacy skills

- Since there has emerged huge demand for computer skills, the lack of equipment and facilities for people to learn and practice computer skills is creating a serious road block in terms of learning computer skills

CONCLUSION

- Whereas the initiative of URLCODA volunteers are positively complementing national and global efforts to realize sustainable societies across the globe through various activities, the current shift in the conceptualization of the concept of voluntarism, the prevailing neoliberal climate and the ever rising poverty levels in the society is creating a serious stumbling block in the realization of the dream for a sustainable society in Uganda

- However, we should not sit by and watch the status-quo, but rather strengthen partnerships and continuously educate the communities on the role of voluntarism in bringing about a sustainable society in Uganda and the world at large

- Deliberate efforts should therefore be directed towards promoting learning across contexts, cultures, generations and geographical boundaries

APPEAL FOR HELP/SUPPORT

- In view of the above URLCODA volunteers are appealing to all those who have passion to support the poor to:
  1. help them acquire computers and internet connectivity to equip at least one rural learning centre to help learners in rural areas learn digital literacy skills
  2. refer to them any individual, group or agency wishing to partner with URLCODA to supporting diverse learning options for the rural people; and
  3. Link URLCODA to those interested in volunteering to serve the rural poor, especially in the area of writing grants for implementing projects in rural community learning Centres