



A Partnership in Nyanga Helps Build Municipal Governance in Rural Zimbabwe

Summary

The Rural District of Nyanga in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe and the small Canadian community of Rossland, British Columbia have developed a training program on good governance and leadership that is helping municipalities in rural Zimbabwe improve municipal management and services.

The two communities established a partnership in 1992 under FCM's Municipal Partnerships Program and set out to train municipal workers in Nyanga in road maintenance, housing construction, equipment maintenance and financial administration. Their expectation was that this would result in improved municipal services to the population of Nyanga. When the anticipated results were not achieved, and it became evident that the problem was cumbersome governance practices in Nyanga, the partners re-focused the project on developing municipal governance. First, they developed and delivered a Policy Governance and Leadership Workshop tailored to the needs of the members of the Nyanga Rural District Council. The training was so successful that FCM and the Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe (ARDCZ) decided to expand the project to a group of three other Rural District Councils (RDC) in Zimbabwe. Rossland then produced a workshop handbook that specifically addressed the key governance issues faced by Zimbabwe's RDCs. In 1999, 40 Zimbabwean instructors were selected from Rural District Councils and trained to deliver the Leadership and Policy Governance workshop. Since then, nine other RDCs in Zimbabwe have benefited from the workshop and handbook, and have begun to implement the principles of democratic governance and policy development in their own municipalities.

As the government of Zimbabwe is decentralized, and as responsibilities are passed to RDCs, efficient and democratic governance processes become increasingly important to Zimbabwe's elected officials. This type of sustainable, far-reaching training will help RDCs face this devolution with greater confidence and effectiveness.

Introduction

FCM's Municipal Partnerships Program, with funding from the Canadian International Development Agency, links Canadian municipalities with their counterparts overseas. The partners focus on municipal management and governance; they share expertise and technology; they work on improving public participation in decision-making, and on building the capacity of local governments to provide improved services. The participating municipalities manage their own partnerships, which usually involve a series of short-term visits between staff, council members and community representatives, as well as hands-on training in specific areas of municipal operations.

FCM's Municipal Partnerships Program finances travel and accommodation requirements, and Canadian municipalities provide the time of staff and elected officials. Although the Canadian partners provide real-life examples of local governance policies and procedures that work in the Canadian context, these are starting points for discussion, rather than solutions. The real solutions are arrived at together, after the partners have had time to understand their different contexts, cultures and challenges.



Traditional methods of transporting goods are still the norm in Nyanga.

The Municipal Partnerships Program has established partnerships in Southeast Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Although Africa is making rapid progress in economic growth and democratization, it remains the poorest continent in the world. Local governments have scarce resources, which does not allow for proper infrastructure development and quality municipal services.

The Rural District of Nyanga, Zimbabwe and the City of Rossland, BC established a partnership in 1992 under FCM's Municipal Partnerships Program. Nyanga (population 120,000) comprises 31 widely dispersed wards in the eastern highlands of Zimbabwe. Rossland (population 4,000) is a small community in the West Kootenay region of British Columbia.

Faced with the poverty of the rural population, weaknesses in the design of high-density housing, and scarcity of adequate public works equipment, Nyanga lacked the technical skills, material resources and experience in municipal governance and management to deal with these problems. The situation was exacerbated by the decentralization of central government responsibilities, which increased the level of responsibility for Rural District Councils, while offering little help in capacity building.



An acacia tree, part of the varied landscape of Zimbabwe's eastern highlands.

The Nyanga-Rossland partners worked through two major phases of cooperation. The partners on both sides not only learned from the experience, but also put their learning to work in what has become a real success story.

The Approach – Train, Evaluate, Disseminate

In the first phase of the Nyanga-Rossland partnership (1992-1995), the partners focussed on improving municipal service delivery through technical assistance and training for municipal workers and tradesmen in road maintenance, housing construction, equipment maintenance and financial administration. The expectation was that their improved skills and more current knowledge would lead to improvements in the maintenance of machinery, roads and housing.

When the expected results were not fully achieved, the partners shifted gears. The Rossland partners realized that they had had a preconceived notion of worker empowerment, based on the situation in Canada. In Nyanga, municipal supervisors were reluctant to implement methods they did not understand. This led Rossland to initiate technical exchange training programs for managers and supervisors, and eventually included Nyanga's Chief Executive Officer and Senior Manager. When this also failed to produce the desired results, the Nyanga-Rossland team turned their attention to the way Council and senior management operated.

During an evaluation of the training, it became apparent that it was the set-up of the Council itself that prevented the implementation of new procedures. Local government management structure was a complex system of departmentalization, fragmentation and layered management levels. Senior managers were setting policy, while elected officials were busy trying to oversee the delivery of services. A few dominant councillors controlled the Council, and as a result, many councillors were not motivated to participate: "Why vote when my vote doesn't count?"

It seemed that only improved awareness of democratic governance procedures, planning and leadership would enable Nyanga to make the most of its limited human and material resources. In the second phase of their work (1996-2000) the partners decided to focus on improving municipal governance by training municipal elected officials and senior officers.

To address the issues at Council level, Rossland, in association with Selkirk College, developed a one-week Policy Governance and Leadership Workshop. The workshop was designed specifically for the Nyanga context. It included democratic governance practices, strategic planning, policy development and decision-making procedures, and the relationship between council, committees and staff. The Chair of the Nyanga RDC, the five chairs of the principle committees, and one senior manager came to Rossland to participate in this training. While in Rossland, the participants also attended regular council meetings and committee meetings.

The results of this workshop were so positive that the Association of Rural District Councils of Zimbabwe (ARDCZ), in conjunction with Rossland, Nyanga RDC and FCM, decided to try the same methodology in three other RDCs: Umzingwane, Chivi and UMP Zvataida. It was agreed that ARDCZ would evaluate the impact of the workshops and take the lead in disseminating the governance workshops to its members. To this end, Rossland and ARDCZ made further improvements to the governance handbook. The four districts that had participated in the first workshops were encouraged to establish communication links for mutual assistance.

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The program is currently evaluating the performance of the Zimbabwean trainers who were selected from the RDCs, and the impact of the workshop on the first 13 RDCs who received the training. Eventually, they hope to extend the workshop to 44 other RDCs in Zimbabwe.

Results – From Rural Council to National Role Model

On a local level, Nyanga has effectively reorganized its Rural District Council to define roles for itself and for its councillors. As these roles became clear, the balance of power shifted from individual councillors to the Council itself. Confidence was increased in the Council, as it became apparent that its role had changed from administrative overseer to policy maker and performance evaluator. Council had the power and will to effect change.

As a result of the 1998 *Policy Governance and Leadership Workshop*, the Nyanga Rural District Council developed a policy agenda, mission statement, ends policies, performance evaluation procedures and executive limitations policies. When the workshops were expanded, first to three other RDCs and then to a second group of nine more RDCs, new elements were added to the workshop handbook, including the Standing Rules of Order and the Councillors' Code of Conduct developed by ARDCZ.

ARDCZ's involvement in the evaluation and dissemination process was an important factor in the success of the project. ARDCZ's request for more *Policy Governance and Leadership Workshops* is an effective indicator of the impact observed in Nyanga, and provided approval and recognition for the methodology and workshops on the national level. As part of its commitment to disseminate these policies throughout Zimbabwe, ARDCZ has delivered workshops in nine more RDCs and, in collaboration with FCM, has trained 40 local trainers to facilitate the workshop.



The local government environment in Zimbabwe is being radically changed by the dissemination of the policies and leadership practices developed through this partnership.

Graduating students from the first 'train-the-trainers' course in Zimbabwe, a method of knowledge dissemination that ensures the sustainability of the project.





Coffee break during the second phase of the 'train-the-trainers' course in Nyanga.

From an ordinary Rural District Council operating in the remote eastern highlands of Zimbabwe, Nyanga has evolved into a role model for good governance on a national scale. Nyanga has become a catalyst in Zimbabwe for the dissemination of democratic and transparent governance processes.

Lessons Learned

Partnerships take time to develop. One important discovery was that smooth municipal relationships depend on personal contacts. The partners needed to get to know each other and work together to develop trust before any real exchange of knowledge could take place. Once the relationships were cemented, the transfer of new practices was facilitated and the project was able to grow in size and importance.

Understanding the local context should be the first step in planning. When the partnership began in 1992, the Rossland partners had little knowledge of the context of rural Zimbabwe (social, cultural, political, economic). They had preconceived notions of how the partnership would develop, and based their initial plans on the use of computers to help modernize financial administration and mapping. (The discovery that Nyanga CEO's office was not permanently supplied with electricity came as a shock.) They also expected that training for workers would have a roll-up effect, when in fact, each higher level of authority in Nyanga blocked the implementation of new techniques and methods.

Training should be adapted to the level and language of the audience. The use of workshops as a pedagogical tool helped the Rossland partners adapt their ideas and messages to the appropriate level. The handbook provided concrete examples and exercises for training (and training future trainers), and evolved as a result of participant feedback. In fact, the

translation of the handbook into Shona and Ndebele was a result of interaction at the workshops – after all, if the Nyanga policy makers did not understand the concepts in English, their second language, they could not be expected to implement or pass on the message accurately.

Ongoing participatory evaluation and flexibility were keys to success for this project. They helped the project to grow and change as new aspects of the situation came to light. They allowed the project to shift its focus from Canadians training Zimbabweans, to Canadians training Zimbabweans to train other Zimbabweans. Through methodical evaluation after each round of training, Rossland was eventually able to determine that the appropriate target for training was in fact the Rural District Council itself. And by involving Nyanga delegates and members of the ARDCZ in the evaluation process, they not only ensured that local opinions and perspectives were taken into account, but actually empowered the Council and helped to ensure the sustainability of the evaluation process.



The communal lands of the Nyanga Rural District Council.

Although the partnership between Rossland and Nyanga RDC was discontinued in 2000, the project achieved a level of sustainability that has allowed its success to continue. The knowledge gained in Nyanga is being disseminated to rural district councils throughout Zimbabwe. FCM now supports the program directly through its Special Initiatives fund.

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