

Overview of Engage Africa Foundation's Pilot Project in Lagos Nigeria **Dates: June-July 2013**

Focus areas: Health Promotion, Engagement, Collaboration and Funding

Summer 2013 was a monumental year for Engage Africa Foundation. Not only did we clock a year, we also embarked upon our first field project- a pilot in Lagos, Nigeria.

This was conducted between June and July 2013.

The focus of this project was to gain a better understanding of the context, to engage the community from the bottom-up and to pursue possible synergies in the niche.

The project will be discussed by breaking it down into the significant events that took place as well as the successes, challenges and observations made to enable the information to be useful in internal improvement as well as knowledge sharing for other members of the chronic disease prevention community.

The first main event was a health promotion with Young Planners' Forum of the Nigerian Institute of Town Planners in the first week of June.

Organization: This meeting was organized through a contact that the President had made in 2011; Mr Oshodi. Oshodi's work in urban development had led her to him during her research work with the World Health Organization. After keeping in touch for years, this project was an opportunity for them to collaborate in doing some work on the ground.

Oshodi was well networked in the Institute of Town Planner and since he served as a gatekeeper, facilitated a warm reception of the foundation's work. The meeting was carried out at the location of their usual monthly meeting as the President of E.A.F was invited to give a guest lecture on the intersection between chronic diseases and urban planning.

Some successes recorded by this event include, building awareness, the ease of communication due to participant's understanding of the issue, convenience, access and the use of an incentive.

Building awareness: A key success recorded by the event was the opportunity to raise awareness of E.A.F's work and mission among decision makers in the country.

Ease of communication: It was quite easy to educate the crowd on the issue at hand due to their work on the ground and the use of examples related to their scope of work to drive the message home.

Convenience: This event was possible because it was planned around the schedule of the organization through accepting an invitation to provide a guest lecture during their usual monthly meeting. It was at no cost to them, and the meeting was run at the office.

Access: Due to the availability of a gatekeeper, it was easy to establish trust and a sense of high value of the E.A.F.

The use of an incentive: A healthy organic anti-oxidant tea (Eby's tea Africana) was used as an

incentive to encourage to thank participants for attending. This was very warmly received and further solidified the relationship and build cordiality with the participants.

Some challenges faced included low attendance, poor timekeeping, poor continuity, absolving of responsibility, and the undervaluing of the service due to convenience.

While the talk was warmly received and very discussed by participants, it was surprising to see the lack of interest in continuing the conversation. For example, during the talk, many participants agreed with the thrust of the organization and promised to raise the profile of the organization to providing access to key government players. However, after the meeting was done, there was no willingness to follow up with the promises made.

There was also the absolving of responsibility. While the young town planners agreed there was an issue, most of them stated that the government was responsible for making the changes and did not put forth any significant commitments on their part, even though they had been reminded about the intersection of their work with chronic disease issues.

Due to the heavy rainfalls and the general poor timekeeping culture in Nigeria, the event attended late and some participants were hindered from coming due to the heavy downpour that took place during the meeting.

Convenience and the provision of the lecture, incentives and lecture notes for free were both an advantage and a disadvantage. Due to the free nature of the service, the talk was seen as a one-time event, rather than a continuing conversation despite all attempts to move the discussion in this direction. There was all the general attitude of getting the most 'free' things. For example, participants kept asking for free print outs and things to give to their colleagues who did not attend. It was hard to build a sustained conversation rather than a free one time event.

The next event was a health promotion seminar with Uruana Community Group, Festac Town Lagos. This was made possible by Mr Mogo, the father of the President who's towns kinsmen this group were. Due to his respected status in his community of origin, this value was transferred to E.A.F and a lot of respect was accorded the work and seminar. The men and women who usually met differently, assembled together to listen to the talk, ask a lot of questions and convey gratitude. This group had also lost a significant number of members to chronic diseases like cancer, and cardiovascular problem and so was primed to learn about how to prevent this from happening to them.

The challenge with this group was that the lack of follow up opportunity made it hard to be sure if any sustained change would take place despite their eagerness to make changes. The cultural attitude where drinking was associated with male socialization also meant that serious changes in the cultural attitudes would have to be made to control for risk factor, which was something we were not opportuned to work on at that time beyond providing education and educational materials. However they did indicate a strong interest in making changes, ask a lot of questions and promised to educate their members who were not around on how to make lifestyle changes.

The next health promotion event was with Association of Artisans- 403 road, Festac Town, Lagos. This is a group of manual workers such as carpenters, electricians, and plumbers. They generally occupy a lower socioeconomic group and are exposed to much stress in commuting, they work they do, and due to the toll of poverty. This group was educated on chronic diseases, identification, prevention and were

also provided and manual demonstration of how to measure their blood pressures. Again access was provided by a gatekeeper- Mr Mogo who uses their services and has developed cordial relationships with them due to residing long in the same town. As such the talk was given a warm reception, big attendance and high attention. The talk was carried out during their monthly meetings for ease of access. The group was all male, mostly middle aged and most of them were found to be hypertensive. Some had lost loved ones to chronic diseases and so paid great attention. The regular response to their hypertension ranged from fear, to seeking more education, to apathy and preferring death to their present condition.

While it was great to educate them it was also very saddening to not be able to do anything sustainable. Most of these groups may not have the luxury of time and money to take their drugs or go to a hospital given their tight schedule. Most of them would need more ongoing care and not just a one-time checkup which was all we were able to provide. Most of them had a veneer of laughter but it was obvious that they were concerned about their health and worried about the next steps to take. This was we were able to help although there was still room for much work to be done. Given that free checkups were provided at the pharmacy, these groups were not unable to monitor their health; surprisingly the main issue was time because they would have to leave their job station and miss the opportunity of getting a customer since their jobs were wage-based.

The summer was also an opportunity to pursue possible collaboration in widening the scope and sustainability of Engage Africa Foundation's work. One avenue for this was exploring a collaboration with HughAlies, a medical data management company. The meeting was insightful and provided more in depth understanding of the Nigerian context. Both organizations are relatively new and getting situated in the context, avenues for collaboration are still being explored albeit slowly since both organizations are still refining their work and what is possible in the given context.

There was also a meeting the soul singer- Bemyoda, who is upcoming but rising up the charts quite fast. A proposal was submitted to him on using music as a way to engage the youth. However he is still working on getting back to the team.

Two other more established musicians received a proposal from us but did not respond despite indicating initial interest.

There was the opportunity for media interview with Silverbird Television, Jakande Estate, Lekki, Lagos. This interview was organized through the help of a friend of the President who was well connected in the media circle. It was an opportunity for the whole country to learn about the work of E.A.F since this was a national television station.

However, next time we will endeavour to provide the organization's website during each interview as we forgot to plug this in. While the interview went well, it was not run on schedule and the workers at the station refused to make a copy of the interview available to us unless we travelled to another location to pay for it. All in all, this was a great opportunity for high exposure.

The Nation Newspapers all provided a one page write up in the most circulated Nigerian newspaper about the organization's work. This was well read and a very positive article that helped to raise the organization's profile. Again, next time it would be key to include the organization's website to make it easy to retain the audience.

Although it was hoped that the summer would yield funders, this was the most difficult aspect of the work. We wrote letters to hundreds of organization which were emailed and then hand delivered to the office. The President followed up with these letters in Nigeria. Most of the responses were rude and avoidant once they realized it was non-profit that was calling. It was very challenging to portray value as non-profits in this context are largely seen as unreliable, possibly fraudulent and associated with asking for money.

This response was repeated when the President spoke to a radio personality. She refused to air the organization as she was very suspicious of the work. In addition, due to the lack of a prevention culture in this context the prevention work of E.A.F was seen as easy and undeserving of attention.

In general, this project was success in achieving the goals of collaboration, engagement and health promotion. The challenging areas were building social and financial sustainability into the project as well as building respect and value for the work especially due to its preventive nature. However this is just the beginning and it has helped us to come closer to understanding the context so that we regroup, refine our work and increase our value added in the work we are privileged to do.