

# INSIDE GEMINI

By Joe Kilonzo, Communication Officer

About a fortnight ago, a GlobalGiving evaluator, Leah Ambwaya, visited our project to have a better understanding of how GEMINI works. She spent a whole day interacting with project staff, volunteers and beneficiaries.

We would like to thank all our donors who have read and responded to the report by Leah. We always appreciate ALL kinds of feedback.

This update is divided into 2 sections. Part 1 provides a preview of the organization's Modus Operandi. Part 2 assesses GEMINI's perceived strengths/weaknesses [from the Evaluator's viewpoint] and recommendations put forward for increased efficiency.

## PART 1

### MODUS OPERANDI

i] **Volunteers:** As precisely stated in the Evaluator's report, the Director "*is more conversant with the issues on the ground where she spends most of her time.*" Stella is heavily involved in working with the grassroots communities, including visiting elderly grandmothers, empowering vulnerable teen mothers, monitoring orphaned children's progress, and providing VCT to clients. She spends up to 40 hours a week in the field and does not earn a salary.

Most of the paper-work is carried out by [unpaid], part-time volunteers and low-paid field officers [earning an average of US\$40/month]. But as Leah aptly captures in her narrative, they are exceptionally adept at what they do for the organization, despite the limited resources earmarked for their departments.

ii] **Financial Management:** Since its inception, GEMINI has always maintained an impeccable fiscal management policy. It is a rigorous process that is meant to ensure openness and transparency. For instance, before any withdrawal is made, the Field Officers provide a detailed budget to the Director, who presents it to the Governing Council (beneficiaries' representatives). The GC approves the budget and hands it to the Accountant. She in turns prepares & signs a bank withdrawal voucher that MUST also be counter-signed by the Director, a member of the Board and a member of the Council.

Every month, field officers prepare a breakdown of expenses [that can be counter-checked using the bank withdrawal vouchers]. These summaries have been used to prepare regular reports that we have been submitting to the GlobalGiving community.

iii] **Documentation:** As many of you might have known, Stella was awarded an Ashoka Fellowship for her innovative ideas. At that time, she operated from the confines of her tiny, two-bedroom house. Today, she has managed to set-up a modern office, which also serves as a Stand Alone VCT center, a Field Office which also serves as a Tailoring Unit & Food Distribution Center [for orphans & elderly grannies]. In March, she set up a new Bakery Unit [that offers training to teen mums] after the other one was deserted during the post-election violence. Plans are underway to set up a Computer Literacy Unit.

As expected, each Unit is responsible for its own documentation, filing system and any other paper-work. But a visible gap exists since, as Leah correctly put it, documentation is not centralized and thus visitors not able to visit the Field Office are unable to access vital documents/reports.

iv] **Reports:** As some of you have correctly noted, GEMINI has been providing steady reports to the GG community. This is still possible even without a fully-fledged secretariat, without computers and without paid staff that would commit all their time to the program.

## **PART 2**

This part provides a brief summary of perceived strengths/weaknesses as observed by Leah and provides some recommendations on the same.

### **PROGRAM STRENGTHS**

- ✓ **All-inclusive organizational structures:** “....She listed members of the project advisory board, which is very well constituted with very high ranking professionals in the region.”
- ✓ **Passionate leadership:** “I could see a humble young woman, who has stepped up an initiative to serve, looking into her eyes; she was full of inner strength...”
- ✓ **Effective monitoring structures:** “....a governing council that constituted by beneficiaries both girls and the grannies. This council acts as monitoring tool to ensure that our services reach the beneficiaries as per the project objectives.”
- ✓ **Satisfied project beneficiaries:** “...His legs were all covered with mud, and he tells Stella that he came to say thank you after receiving the fertilizer and seeds. He had come all the way from his farm to thank *Mayii* (Stella)...”
- ✓ **Dedicated volunteers:** “.... this young lady, is more conversant with the issues on the ground where she spends most of her time, but feeds in data to Joe, a man who offers

such invaluable services to this organization in terms of packaging information and sending to donors present and potential.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- **Centralize documentation:** Leah suggested we should think about centralizing all documents in the town office where it would be easy and convenient for the public/visitors to monitor progress.
- **Build Capacity for Staff:** She noted that staff and volunteers could benefit from capacity-building and project management training.
- **Financial Audits:** She suggested that the organization should consider carrying out comprehensive, annual financial audits. [*We informed her that though we do not have adequate resources to carry out comprehensive, organizational financial audits, we have been carrying our specific-project audits e.g. Mama Cash project audit (for a project supported by Mama Cash, a Netherlands-based NGO), IYF/Starbucks Project audit (for a project supported by IYF/Starbucks) etc.*]
- **Human Resource policies:** Leah felt that volunteers/staff could provide more value to the organization if they received competitive compensation/remuneration for their services.

## **LAST WORD**

All these are great ideas. If implemented, the organization would definitely increase its performance, offer better services and be more responsive to partners and donors.

The only fix, as one of you accurately noted, is that funds from GlobalGiving are solely earmarked for project-specific activities, not organizational overheads or program administration.

As usual, we welcome your ideas. Like many of you, we believe that GEMINI has the potential to grow into one of the most viable non-profits in Kenya. But we can only increase our efficiency through implementing such great ideas.

Please, help us to help others more efficiently.

**THANK SO MUCH FOR ALL YOUR DONATIONS. WE REALLY APPRECIATE**