

# **On the feasibility of the Organisation Workshop Approach At Marsh Farm, Luton Borough Council, UK.**

## **Consultancy Report**

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### **1. Background and Context.**

The efforts to bring the OW approach to the UK began soon after the inception of the Marsh Farm Community Development Trust, year 2000. Some of the founder members of the trust knew about the OW approach through available literature and actively sought and established contacts with OW practitioners in Southern Africa. Some of these practitioners travelled to the UK, and delivered seminars on the methodology, with the attendance of residents, members of community working groups and members of partner organisations. All of them endorsed the approach as a valid tool to counter some of the problems facing Marsh Farm community.

Preparations for holding an OW began in earnest after a May 02 seminar, coming to a halt and regaining momentum later. The Neighborhood Renewal Programme, Community Development unit of the Luton Borough Council, awarded Marsh Farm Community Enterprise and Resource Centre (CERC) a study to look into the feasibility of an OW at Marsh Farm. This effort entailed capacity building and training events to a point that would enable the group to undertake further actions. This report focus on the activities that took place within this study.

Following a steady e-mail correspondence, CERC arranged for the consultants to travel to the UK to deliver training sessions with the “Facilitators Enterprise”, a group tasked to prepare for the OW and approach potential partners and get them engaged into the OW process.

### **2. Terms of Reference**

The consultancy aimed to the following objectives:

- To contribute to the prospective partners’ acceptance of the OW concept as a seemingly valid approach to tackle the problems facing the implementation of the New Deal for Communities at Marsh Farm, in particular to reach the “hard to reach” residents.
- To contribute to prospective partners’ engagement in the OW process through expressions of interest in participating in the Facilitators Enterprise.
- To appraise the operating conditions for an eventual OW held in the UK.

- To identify the conditions posed by the said operating environment, as well as the opportunities the UK institutional framework open to the OW as well as to the enterprises that may come up from the OW.
- To assess the viability of holding an OW at Marsh Farm and figure out what needs to be done to contextualise the OW techniques to the UK conditions.

### 3. Activities performed

**3.1. Briefings** The consultants arrived to the UK on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 05. They attended 2 briefing meetings. The first of them in the morning of the Sunday the 13<sup>th</sup> March 05 with Glenn Jenkins, Jacki Jenkins and John Sheppard and the second one in the evening of the same day, where Dr. Raff Carmen, Glenn Lawson Ricky Bell and Caroline MacBride joined in. In these meetings Raff, Isabel and Ivan received information on developments on MF after May 02, when the last seminar on the OW had taken place.

### 3.2. Installation of procedures in the Facilitators Enterprise.

- **Work plan.** The organisation of work for the week began on Monday 13th March 05. All tasks at hand went into a simple Gantt chart, containing the list of tasks, the dates and the name of the person in charge.
- **Weekly co-ordinator.** One of the members of the FE would perform as co-ordinator for the week, on a rotational basis. Her/his tasks included the supervision of the accomplishment of all the tasks included in the work plan, plus gathering the information generated during the process. The FE elected Caroline Mcbride as co-ordinator for the week.
- **Critical Analysis.** All information collected whilst monitoring the advance of the work plan would go into a written report called "Critical Analysis". This is put together by the weekly co-ordinator, photocopied and distributed to all FE members shortly before the next meeting.
- **Meeting procedures.**  
The weekly co-ordinator would chair the meeting according to the following agenda:
  1. Time allocation. The meeting would allocate the total time to be used for the meeting.
  2. Reading the Critical Analysis
  3. Discussion: one or 2 minutes for each member to suggest suppressions, additions or changes to the Critical Analysis.
  4. Conclusions. The remaining time, usually about 10 minutes, will be used to read the proposed conclusions of the meeting, containing the new task distribution, time and responsible person in the form of a new work plan for the coming period. The FE decided to have weekly work plans, to be reviewed within a weekly meeting. Therefore, before the weekly meeting the co-ordination of the FE must prepare the Critical Analysis and

the proposed work plan based upon the tasks that could not be performed as planned and upcoming tasks

- 3.3.** The consultants visited the Community Enterprises and Resource Centre, looking at the availability of space, used and unused areas and their conditions. Other visits to spaces that could be potentially used during the OW also took place.
- 3.4.** The consultants held extensive discussions with Outreach team on the following:
- 3.4.1. Existing and potential community enterprises, their apparent feasibility and characteristics.
  - 3.4.2. OW intended participants, their profile. How to design the social composition of the group and technicalities of the pre-registration process.
  - 3.4.3. OW Logistics, food for participants for the first days. The participation of community enterprises as service providers.
  - 3.4.4. The problem of personal versus community ownership. Role of the feeling of personal ownership on conflicts of common occurrence.
  - 3.4.5. Roles and responsibilities of the FE and each one of its members.
  - 3.4.6. The need to analyse data on existing community enterprises. This led to the preparation of a questionnaire with basic information on the enterprises, subsequently applied by the FE members.
- 3.5. Enterprises' data collection.** The division of labour between the different members of the FE allowed for a quick data gathering of the present position of the enterprises being fostered by CERC. Data requested from the enterprises included: names and number of participants, description of the activity, existing means of production, value of the assets, average work-time of the people, product definition, estimated cost per unit, estimated selling price per unit, estimated market possibilities, present income, potential for new members and problems. The activities included were: Farmers café, Radio station, Transport, Café 2000 Food for Thought, Car Boot Sales, Community Launderette, Multimedia, Marquees - Bouncy Castle, People's Market, Little Bears Creche, Printing and Publishing project, Co-ordinet, Performance Arts groups, Club Adventure, Music Editing and Recording, Community Building, Community Farm, Project Engineers, Bookkeeping Services, Youth Forum, Wauluds Bank Trust Heritage Museum. The data collection process was still in progress when the consultants ended their mission.
- 3.6. Partners Seminar.** The seminar took place at MF Community Enterprises Resource Centre on the 16th March 05 under the theme "Minding Our Own Business". Mr James McGinley, CEO of MFCDT briefly opened the seminar. The consultants made a presentation on the OW approach, emphasising the subordinate role of literacy with regard to division of labour, which led to abstract thought that in turn allowed for literacy to develop. Consequently, literacy is not a pre-condition for training if the right approach is to be followed. The seminar also enjoyed presentations from Dr Raff Carmen on Autonomous

Education, Bernie Ward, Head of Local Money Flows at New Economics Foundation and co-author of ‘Plugging the Leaks: making the most of every pound that enters your community’ and Marek Lubelski, Neighbourhood Renewal Co-ordinator, Luton Borough Council Community Development, who highlighted the key points of the feasibility process and presented the LBC Policy framework within which the OW partnership would operate. MF local businesses provided food, drinks and entertainment. About 50 participants attended the seminar. Amongst them representatives of Barnfield Collge, Luton Borough Council, Luton Chamber of Commerce, Learning Skills Council, New Economics Foundation, Voluntary Action Luton, Family Matters and members of community enterprises. During the presentations and their corresponding Q&A periods the participants showed manifestations of endorsement of the OW approach and interest to join the Facilitators Enterprise. Later, the FE developed a follow up questionnaire sent by e mail to all participants. Interviews and formalisation of the partners’ participation in the FE are still in progress.

**3.7. Perusal of documents.** The consultants looked at a consultancy report prepared by ECOTEC, as well as the Community Interest Companies Bill and related documents made available by Mr Marek Lubelski. The MF history book prepared by Jacki Jenkins also contributed to place the current situation at MF into perspective. NEF booklets “The Money Trail” and “Plugging the Leaks” provided invaluable information on the efforts to make regeneration money to remain the targeted NDC communities.

**3.8. Conference.** Under the theme “It is time to swim against the tide”, the consultants participated in a conference held at Friends House, London on the 26<sup>th</sup> March 04. Several officers and residents of NDC schemes attended to it. The consultants made a presentation on the OW, together with Dr Raff Carmen and Gavin Andersson. Other presenters were Bernie Ward from New Economics Foundation and Mr Ben Merrick, from the Social Exclusion Unit. At the end of the conference, a group of Lewisham NDC scheme gathered to discuss what they had listened to and its potential. Later one of them wrote to the consultants expressing interest in carrying out an OW at their own NDC scheme, and asking them for the availability of English speaking trainers on the approach.

**3.9. Meetings.** The consultants briefed James McGinlay CEO of MFCDDT. Apart from that, they did not benefit from any exchange with MFCDDT Programme Managers. They also held several working meetings with Drs Raff Carmen and Gavin Andersson to prepare for their respective presentations. Friday 18<sup>th</sup> March 05 they held a wrap-up meeting with Mr Marek Lubelski to brief him on the developments of the week and map out the way forward.

#### **4. Findings.**

**4.1.** There are hundreds of potential participants that can engage on the OW. The target group of the intended OW would be the “hard to reach”. They are largely

out of employment, living either on benefits or without them, some times performing activities characterised as dysfunctional towards mainstream society, likely to have depression as a base component. They can certainly benefit from their participation on the OW. The consultants consider that the desired engagement of the MF NDC target group could be more a question of attitude than a question of “skill”. In that regard, Outreach team provides a clear leadership based upon the fact that they are a genuine expression of, *and eventually represent* the population in the estate.

- 4.2. There is a team in place that is sufficiently prepared to efficiently perform the relevant tasks. The Facilitators Enterprise and the MFCDT as a whole went through externally determined periods of inactivity that stopped progress in their efforts to bring the OW to MF. Nevertheless, the team has managed to register and operate as an independent company with the ability to bid for jobs and generate income. It has sound office facilities and continues to go ahead with renewed enthusiasm, commitment and hard work. From May 2002, when the OW seminar took place, the group has gained remarkable understanding of the OW approach as well as clerical, management and computer skills. The group showed resilience, unity and discipline when administrative decisions affected them, as well as ownership and sense of direction towards their OW thrust. These constitute strong basis for their effort to succeed.
- 4.3. There are first quality physical spaces where the OW can take place. There are also plenty of unused assets and resources belonging to the large community that the OW could release to the people for their benefit. Perhaps no other country can claim the same. MF existing community enterprises differ sharply in all characteristics. Some of them have assets and are operating without paid staff, others have assets and are dormant, and others do not go much farther than being ideas whose proponents do not know how to go about getting resources to make them proper enterprises. In all cases, business procedures seem not to be in place.
- 4.4. There are many potential partner organisations that are prepared to join in the OW effort, and in so doing, augment the reach of their services. MF Outreach’s potential partners endorsed the Organisation Workshop Approach and expressed keen interest in joining the Facilitators Enterprise. In general terms all of them seem to have excellent installations, quality training materials and publications, competent staff. Nevertheless, all of them seem to share the same difficulties to mobilise residents to use available services to engage in activities of interest to them, their families and the community.
- 4.5. OW activities so far seem to be restricted to Outreach, community enterprises and partners, with less involvement from MFCDT officers. This does not go along with the fact that the results of the OW, good or bad, will affect the MFCDT in the first place. Experience so far demonstrates that once the OW releases the organisational potential of the target group, sponsoring agencies become overwhelmed with the requests for services from the people they always wanted to serve, and unfortunately, their delivery capacity fell way too short from what is expected from them. This is a clear risk of the OW. Once people become aware of the fact that they are the legitimate owners of the funds, they

want to exercise their legitimate right to decide how they must be used, and benefit directly and effectively from them.

- 4.6. The UK has a century's old, complex institutional framework, in which detailed regulations preside over most, if not all activities of public interest. Whilst going down the hierarchy of services that make up the state organisation, regulations with the widest scope pile up on top of others with a more limited reach. Citizens intending to relate to state or council services, or to pursue an undertaking, have to be conversant with the relevant regulations.
- 4.7. In some places, regulations put limits to the ability of the citizens to participate. For example, elsewhere in the UK, a regulation prevent people attending to computer technology activities from downloading attachments, and in so doing, the regulation defeats the very purpose of the Internet. In another example, replacing a bulb, in the interest of safety, has to be done by maintenance services.
- 4.8. Such a complex and heavy regulatory framework poses a challenge to the Organisation Workshop technique, even though it does not challenge the methodology or the approach. Whilst the consultants think that the OW methodology is valid in the UK context, the OW technique has to take in the "regulations" feature of the operating environment. This will only require a more thorough preparation phase, including the regulations affecting the intended activities in the analysis of activities of the OW Technical Plan.

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1. Based on the findings above, the consultants conclude that the OW approach is relevant and timely to the situation of the NDC at Marsh Farm and eventually to other NDC schemes in the country. The change of activity for a large number of people could be of significance to improve the quality of their lives.
- 5.2. Along the same lines, the preparation, running and follow up of an Organisation Workshop at MF is perfectly feasible, since MF presents all the necessary conditions for the OW to take place: The people, the means of production, the possibility to hand over the means of production to the people and the possibility to enjoy full freedom of organisation within the law and relevant regulations.
- 5.3. The OW approach, that is to say its aims, principles and methods find strong support in the UK policy framework at national level as well as council level<sup>1</sup>. Examples of this can be found in the following policies:
  - National Strategy for Neighbourhood renewal.
  - ODPM policy on sustainable communities.
  - LBC community development policy.
  - LBC Social Inclusion Policy.
- 5.4. Even though the mentioned policy framework is clear enough, regulations can be taken out of context, construed as constraints and used to stop, rather than to improve the performance of activities that benefit the community. In so doing, regulations can be put to work against the very policy framework that they are supposed to forward, perpetuating rather than minimising social exclusion in

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to Mr Marek Lubelski presentation to the "Minding our own business" seminar, 16 March 05, MFCDT

favour of private interests. “No where does the money leaks out faster than in the efforts to “regenerate” poor communities”<sup>2</sup> The consultants concluded that the regulatory framework in the UK is neither more nor less than other operating conditions of the OW in the country.

- 5.5. The feasibility of the Organisation Workshop as a capacitation event must not be taken as the feasibility of potential enterprises coming out of the OW. The OW would accomplish its objectives if and when participants achieve an organisational level of consciousness expressed in collective, organised action.
- 5.6. The feasibility of the enterprises coming out of the OW would have a in the organisational consciousness of its members a *condictio sine qua non* for their success as proper, independent business. Success in business, though, depends on market conditions and businesses operating environment as a whole. The support MFCDT and partners are able to provide during a follow up period after the workshop will be key to their take off.
- 5.7. The Theory of Organisation, a main educational tool within the capacitation process, lends itself perfectly well to receive all the richness of the history of organisation of labour in the UK. Events of major importance, like the Industrial Revolution for example, can be illustrated in the UK as nowhere else in the world.

## 6. Recommendations

- 6.1. The consultants recommend looking into the formation of a Community Interest Company as soon as the bill turns into act. For the purposes of the Organisation Workshop and beyond, a CIC could be a means to give a common thrust to all small enterprises and community efforts that will come to the workshop.<sup>3</sup>
- 6.2. The golden rule of the OW “Freedom of organisation within the law” should read “Freedom of organisation within the law and relevant regulations”.
- 6.3. Therefore, the FE should research existing regulations to carry out the OW as a whole, as well as to perform OW intended activities in particular. The OW as a training set up should fall under training regulations, but offering “jobs”, contracts and payment for work may fall under employers’ regulations as well.
- 6.4. Respect and allegiance to regulations should also mean to develop the capacity to critically look at them in the light of their efficiency and effectiveness to bring NDC intended benefits to the target population. Regulations and or procedures that do not perform accordingly should be identified and a process to change them should be set in motion.
- 6.5. It is desirable that MDCDT officers increase their level of participation in OW related activities.
- 6.6. The next step in the MF OW process should be putting together a fully fledged OW proposal and get it through the system. A feasibility study for the potential enterprises for the OW should be done as one of the activities of the OW. This activity, on top of the already identified ones will give coherence to the whole.

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<sup>2</sup> The Money Trial. The Countryside Agency and New Economics Foundation. ISBN : 1 899407 60 X

<sup>3</sup> Mr Marek Lubelski kindly informed the consultants about the Community Interest Companies Bill and gave them the necessary reference documents.