

JOINT LEARNING INITIATIVE on FAITH & LOCAL COMMUNITIES

PARTNERING FOR EVIDENCE ON FAITH & DEVELOPMENT

After meeting at the JLI's Religion & Sustainable Development Conference (2015), the Organization of African Initiated Churches (OAIC) and International Care Ministries (ICM) have partnered up to learn from each other on monitoring, evaluation, and learning for organizations working through local faith actors. We spoke to Rev. Nicta Lubaale (OAIC) and Dr. Lincoln Lau (ICM) to find out more about their collaboration.

Rev. Nicta Lubaale¹

How did you first connect?

I connected with ICM through the Joint Learning Initiative. I had listened to the chief executive, David Sutherland, making a presentation during the conference on Religion and Sustainable Development in Washington in July 2015 at the World Bank. So he made a presentation about evidence based work in the faith perspective from the Philippines. When I heard that presentation, I realized that there was an organization already doing what we are yearning for. Because OAIC is involved in work that is similar to what ICM is doing. All of us seem to be using the same approaches in reaching out to people in poverty through church congregations with a focus on empowering the household.

¹ Interviews edited for length and content.

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What happened when OAIC invited ICM to Nairobi?

The focus was on training people who are working as facilitators in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. They were brought together for two full days and taught how to use a digital approach in M&E. The training also focused on how to build a realistic log frame and analyzing the data coming from the field so that proper decisions are made.



Group work in Nairobi²

The building of the log frame with the trainers who came from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania was a highlight. And then also

² All photos from Lincoln Lau

the use of online platforms for M&E so that reporting in real-time is done and so that the data is collated as soon as it is submitted. Digital M&E is taking us beyond the paper-based M&E that we have been using. We have previously had reporting from lead farmers in households, to farmer resource persons, to the country coordinator, to the regional office in Nairobi. These levels meant data was delayed. ICM worked with us, helping us to put in place an M&E system whereby as soon as the data is collected it is submitted straightaway because of the digital nature of the system. The other side is that we have worked the whole area of analysis.

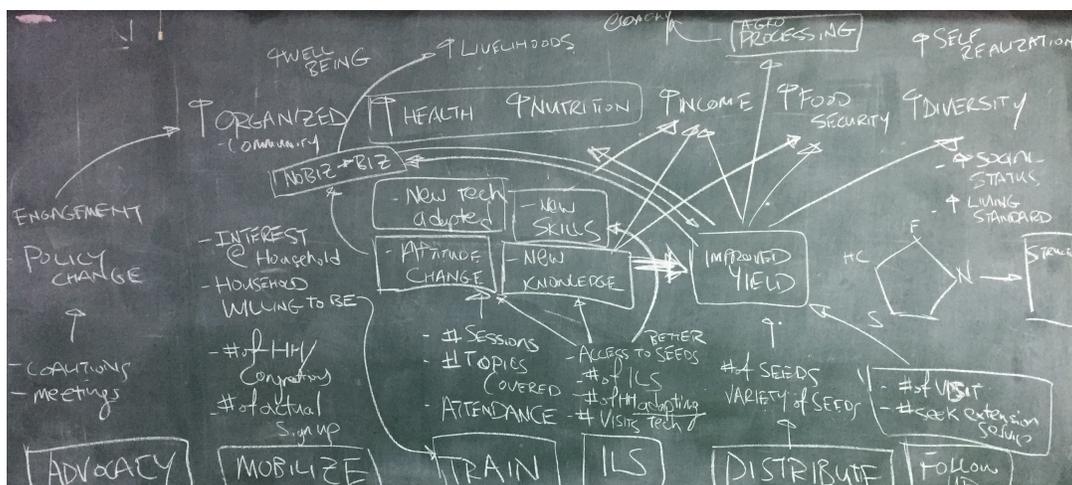
“We have a lot in common especially in working with congregations in communities.”

The programs we are working on are around food and nutrition security with 400,000 households in the East Africa region. Farmers are trained to improve their yields, to improve marketing, and to influence public policy. We linked with ICM to make sure that the data is analyzed in relation to the evidence that is emerging

for the program’s progress. We are all working for transformation. ICM is working for transformation, OAC is for transformation. So it is the evidence that transformation is taking place in households that have been food insecure, who have suffered from malnutrition, that they are moving away from food insecurity and moving on from malnutrition to better health and better livelihoods.

What is the future for your partnership?

The future will be in more concrete partnership because we have realized that we have a lot in common especially in working with congregations in communities and making the households a point for reaching out to those living in poverty. That will include 1) concretizing the M&E system that we have already started working on and then 2) continuation of training with part of it online but also on specific meetings that are organized in Africa. We are also considering a visit to the Philippines so that implementers in Africa can learn practically from the implementers who are working with ICM in the Philippines.



Visualizing the role of evidence

On the JLI:

This has come through Jean Duff and the JLI. We have learned from ICM about evidence. The next question is what else can we learn from JLI. It is most likely there are some more partners who have what we are looking for and who can also learn from us.

Dr. Lincoln Lau

How did you first connect?

The first point of contact between us and OAIC, was our CEO, at the Religion and Sustainable Development conference. Nicta tells us that when he saw our presentation he thought this is what I want, this is what I need and he preceded to contact us. It was quite straightforward, he got our emails and we corresponded via a few emails.

Can you tell us a bit about Nairobi?

It is such a great relationship and we could hit the ground running. It's quite clear that we are there for the same reasons: we believe that faith-based organizations have a key role to play in development, we want to scale up and be more efficient, and we have a similar theme that evidence is important. With those shared common values we moved forward very quickly.

We spent the day in the workshop, hearing what they do, sharing what we do, and in many ways cross-pollinating ideas so that we can learn their best practices and they can learn ours. We also got to share some photos and videos of our work and so our sessions weren't packed with theory and teaching the whole time. With the videos and pictures we were able to add a bit of color to where we came from and I was quite surprised that some of the reactions

were "Wow, that's similar to our context." Rural poverty, that's agriculture based, far away from roads and cities, is comparable. We can learn from each other in a way that wasn't expected. It was very refreshing and very encouraging as it felt like we were colleagues even though we are separated by a continent. That was impactful on both sides.

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The main thing we were trying to cover in the training was how do we involve evidence in development of strategy – how they implement programs, what programs to build up, and how also to involve evidence in terms of management. We had an hour or two of us sharing how we grappled with the ideas of log frames and theories of change at ICM, then we would hear from them about their projects. We worked together to create a working theory of change. It felt more like a process than a classroom. We were mapping out the causal pathway of what they believed was happening in their programs and then asking how are we going to measure it. We talked a lot about one of their interventions which is to increase crop yield and diversity of crops being planted. We listed what they had been collecting so far and gave suggestions about new data points and strategies to use. We went

through and figured out what data points they would like to collect and how.

Then we moved on to different types of equipment or technology to collect data, talking through databases and tablets. The main difficulty for technology is having somebody set it up for you. On the last night before we left, OAIC went out and purchased tablets. We were more than willing to try to set them up immediately so that they can learn how to do it.

What Rev. Nicta said is that there is evidence, they just haven't collected it yet. I thought that was a great point. It's not that there is no evidence, they just haven't collected it in a way that is easy to report or a way that is easy to communicate to non-experts. We weren't unearthing this brand-new idea, but we were helping them figure out how to translate and put structure around collecting evidence in a way that's easily reportable. We were probably in a similar place and we are still learning at ICM.

What is the future for your partnership?

It wasn't a one-time connection between us and OAIC. We're more than willing to assist from here and we're also thinking about inviting them here in the future. It is a conversation between organizations that share the same values and have certain expertise and skills that we can share back and forth. Recently we've also been talking about inviting different NGO to see what we do and the models that we have. We want to hear how they view our models and have fresh angles and perspectives, so those are ways that we are thinking of increasing that whole concept of cross-pollination.

It is a very special partnership that we have developed. To take a few people, me and my colleague from the Philippines, and turn up in Nairobi, and call each other colleagues, not just in a light way, but in the way that we were working together with similar means, similar goals, and similar values, and being able to work through technical issues, including technology, was that much more rewarding because it felt that the world was a little bit smaller in a good way. It was a very, very positive experience from us.

On the JLI:

I sincerely think that without groups like the JLI to convene these type of meetings it wouldn't be possible to meet these type of organizations that are likeminded, faith-based, and thinking through similar difficulties.



Lincoln with OAIC workshop participants

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