

REPORT ON THE SEVENTEENTH NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FORUM

BACKGROUND

Uganda Change Agent Association (UCAA) is a voluntary member based wide association that provides training to rural men and women ensuring that these people are empowered to initiate and sustain their own self reliant, economic, political and social development processes. Membership of the organization is diverse including people from different regions of the country.

As UCAA works towards strengthening the political development process, focus has been channeled to creating a situation where rural men and women are able to confidently participate in intellectual debates that affect their livelihood. As UCAA encourages men and women to analyze and understand the root causes of the different challenges they face, a conscious awakening is stirred amongst them. This stirring is further fuelled up as UCAA encourages the rural men and women to create their own possible solutions to these challenges. As the solutions are successfully implemented, rural men and women are now confident of their own abilities and are in greater position to participate and add value to decision making processes at the grassroots.

One of the key avenues UCAA provides to strengthen this political development process is at its National Development Forum. This is an annual forum where members of the association convene to discuss a key topic whose effects are wide spread in the communities where the Change Agents live and work. Local councils, district leaders and other development workers are invited to attend the forum to encourage deeper and wider dialogue. At the forum, practical examples, debates, analysis of key issues and all round participation is encouraged. It is important to note that the rural men and women at the grassroots select the topic discussed at the development forum.

This year's topic was; **"is Bonnabaggawale increasing dependency or promoting self reliance?"** This year's forum was held at Elly's Motel in Seeta, Mukono on the 25th April 2008 and was well attended by 98 development workers. (See appendix 1 for detailed attendance list).

OBJECTIVE OF THE FORUM

The forum was guided by three major objectives

- a) To get a better understanding of the Bonnabaggawale programme.
- b) To identify practical lessons and justification for the existence of the program.
- c) To forge a way forward for UCAA's involvement and participation in the program.

INTRODUCTION

The UCAA's Board of Directors Vice Chairperson welcomed everyone to the forum. The Regional Program Officer for South Western who moderated the forum gave a brief background of the association, highlighted the topic of discussion and introduced the three panelists; Hon. Salim Saleh, the State Minister for Micro Finance, Dr. Ezra Suruma, the Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development and Ms. Ruth Namusubo, a rural woman from Iganga town branch in Iganga district. He then opened the floor for the first discussant to give her views and perception on the topic.

FIRST PRESENTATION

In her presentation, Ms. Ruth Namusubo gave an insight of how the Bonnabaggawale program was increasing the dependency syndrome rather than promoting self-reliance. Basing on her argument, she noted that the programme kills innovativeness as people sit back to wait for

handouts from government. This is made worse by the lack of managerial skills, capacity, and the lack of empowerment at the grassroots. She wondered if Bonnabagagawale was a reality or a dream. In her view, for the program to be successful, there is need to create awareness, bridge the information gap and to empower and build the capacities of the intended beneficiaries.

SECOND PRESENTATION

Dr. Ezra Suruma the Minister of Finance, Planning and Economic Development made the next presentation. He presented his own view about the Prosperity for all program so that the audience would make a comparison and draw lessons. He noted that it is the government's intension for all citizens to have a good standard of living and improved welfare. He said the difference is not what we want but how we will get it. He went through the design of the program, the role of government and the view of the movement i.e. prosperity for all through all round improvement, the rural strategy - recognizing that the majority live in the rural areas, increasing household income through increasing processing and capacity thus productivity. He noted that government's intension is that every household should have some form of assistance.

He wondered if the dependency on government was a justified criticism? He noted that maybe the problem is in dependency thinking and there was a need to shape peoples attitudes towards the program. He highlighted the benefits of savings and credit and noted that part of our poverty and backwardness was because we don't have savings and credit schemes. He opposed the view that the prosperity for all program was increasing dependency rather than promoting self-reliance. He challenged members to use this forum to change their thinking. The idea of dependency was an illusion mistake that should be corrected.

THIRD PRESENTATION

Hon Salim Saleh, the State Minister for Micro Finance, made this presentation. He tackled financial services verses the SACCOs. He urged members present to learn so that the people at the grassroots can be guided.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Having listened to the presentations from the panelists, the audience was invited to an open discussion as follows;

Bonnabaggagawale has promoted self-reliance in communities through group formation. It has helped people to start savings and credit schemes. However, although there is a big percentage of the self-reliant, there is still a small percentage dependency. *(By Okware Moses, Change Agent, Tororo)*

The introduction of SACCOs has made the majority of people to pick up the idea of savings and credit. The most important thing is the change of attitudes of the poor rural men and women. Change Agents play a major role in attitude transformation we advocate for an opportunity to extend prosperity for all. *(By Dimba David Kenyi, Change Agent, Koboko Central branch)*

The theory of Bonnabaggagawale is 100% right but the problem comes in the way the program is implemented. If the program is to succeed and prosper, there should be a yardstick against corruption. We feel that our people are still cheated this has created a bias on the government. We need to have strategies to improve the system. *(Byamukama John, UCAA Programme Officer Western Region).*

The strategy government has put in place is a right strategy and it is good empowerment for the rural man and woman however there is need to tackle the agents who are taking information back to the rural man and woman, they are the ones promoting the dependency thinking. (*Rev. Ogira David, UCAA Program Director*).

Today for the first time I have heard a clear view of Bonabaggagawale and its intensions. The message watered down to the grassroots is much distorted. I challenge the ministers to think about the programs' life after 2011. (*Irene Ogwal Change Agent, Lira Central branch and Chairperson UCAA BOD*).

I thank the government for Bonabaggagawale but try to address the cause of the rural people's problems. Programs are working with the active poor but we still have the in active poor. As we plan, there are others who plan negatively. There is need to address the pseudo micro finance institutions to instill some confidence in the people. (*Margaret Kihika. Change Agent, Fort Portal (Kabarole) branch*).

Prosperity for all is expected rather than a shock. Business and entrepreneurship education is still lacking in households. Government should increase network with NGOs and allocate serious oriented organizations to educate the community since they have been dealing with them for many years. (*By Mr. Fred Nsubuga, ED, Africa Business Foundation*)

CONCLUDING REMARKS FROM THE PANEL

Ms. Ruth Namusubo stated that the people taking information to the grassroots have created an information gap because of their uniforms. She however admitted that she had heard the facts and she was going to tell people to adapt the culture of saving so as to invest in viable income generating activities.

Dr. Ezra Suruma thanked members for their contributions. He said that the comments made were very important. Since there was an agreement on the objective and purpose of the program, he urged members to sensitize more on how the program can be improved. The issue of implementation and sensitization is a key lesson.

Hon. Salim Saleh in his closing remarks noted that resources are not the problem but mobilization, sensitization and equipping people with knowledge.

The moderator noted at the end of the day that the mission and vision of the forum had been achieved.

CLOSURE

The Executive Director, UCAA thanked the panel for honoring the invitation to the forum. She noted that the session was very educative and fruitful. She urged everyone to spread the knowledge that they had received.

Margaret Kihika, thanked the ministers and all participants for their contributions. She challenged members to go back and change the rural attitudes so that they can embrace the program. With this the forum was ended