

Summary

We spent much of the year 1997 still establishing AFFORD and laying the groundwork for its future work. Thus, we put a lot of energy in to completing the survey of African organisations in London and producing the report. Our biggest concern has been our failure to date to secure long-term funding either for AFFORD's core work or for any of the projects identified through which it will fulfil its mission. In a small farewell ceremony, we said good-bye to our outgoing chair, Nicholas Atampugre, and paid tribute to him for his excellent work in helping to establish AFFORD.

Projects

Survey of African Organisations in London

We completed our much-delayed research project into African organisations in London. Nicholas Atampugre had hoped to devote most of his vacation time early in the year to progress the research work but these plans were upset by tragedy for his family. Work was also delayed by difficulties in finding the right research personnel to tackle the task. Nonetheless, we finally completed both research and write-up. The report comes in two parts, the main presentation of findings and a discussion of them, and a separate set of appendices. The report highlights the need for training for African organisations in the UK, for a network of African organisations, and for dialogue between African organisations and mainstream international development organisations.

Part of the reason for doing the research and producing a report was to initiate a debate about the role of Africans in the diaspora in Africa's development. So, although we have not yet formally published the report we have sought to circulate it to a wide range of people including potential members, workers within mainstream international development organisations, politicians and policy makers, and so on.

Never intended as solely an academic exercise, the report contained a number of recommendations for AFFORD to take forwards. Members debated these recommendations at a strategic planning meeting (more on this below). Facilitating training and a network of African organisations emerged as a high priority project for AFFORD to seek funding in order to implement.

As far as the research project is concerned, the outstanding task is to prepare a final report for our funders, the Trust for London, along with a set of accounts authorised by a suitably qualified accountant. This will be a top priority for the incoming Treasurer.

AFFORD Launch

Members have agreed in principle to launch the organisation. The aims of the project were identified as: (1) to renew and establish new links with African organisations in London; (2) to attract more members and volunteers to AFFORD (NB although AFFORD does not aim to become a mass member organisation it does need a few more key people with skills in specialist areas to take forward its work as well as more volunteers); (3) to begin the debate about what role Africans in the UK diaspora can and should play in Africa's development and to open dialogue with key constituents about these issues; (4) to launch AFFORD's web site and the research report. All launch costs will be underwritten by members to ensure that AFFORD is not left out of pocket. Indeed, the organisation will hopefully make a small profit.

We agreed that the launch should include a media press conference and an evening event which would combine a discussion of some key issues and a dance. Members' efforts to promote the event—we are targeting 150 people—and sell tickets costing £5 each will make or break the launch. The proposed date for the evening event is Saturday 21 March.

AFFORD's Internet Web site

AFFORD won sponsorship from BT to develop a web site to be facilitated by OneWorld Online. Guy Roger Douhoure is coordinating the project and liaising with Cursitor Consulting, the company that is designing our site. We are hopeful that it will be ready for launch by 21 March.

The central aims of the site are (1) to illustrate the ways that Africans abroad are adding value to the processes of African development; (2) to connect together Africans committed to working for African development; (3) to challenge the marginalisation of Africans from the mainstream of development processes and explore constructive bridge-building and partnership schemes. We hope that the site will evolve to become a major tool helping AFFORD to connect and converse with diverse constituencies in the world.

Membership

We said thanks, good luck and farewell to Nicholas, our energetic outgoing chair in September 1997. Nicholas has taken up a contract with the Department for International Development (DFID) in Kaduna, northern Nigeria. Since his departure, Nicholas has kept in close contact with AFFORD members and there is no doubt that distance has made his heart grow fonder for AFFORD, if that is indeed possible!

Of course, Nicholas's departure left a gaping hole in AFFORD's management that the remaining team members have struggled hard to fill. We hope that the appointment of a new executive will go a long way towards reinvigorating efforts to move AFFORD into the next exciting phase of its development.

We also had to say farewell to another valuable AFFORD member, Kathryn Nwajiaku who took up a post in Senegal with Oxfam. Thanks to modern electronic communications we have managed to establish links with Kathryn and will be keeping her informed of developments. The good news about these two departures is that once they have settled into their new lives, both Nicholas and Kathryn will be immensely valuable to AFFORD in helping us to make links with groups on the ground in Nigeria and Senegal.

Whilst we said good-bye to some we said hello and welcome to others. Every member of AFFORD has played an important part in the organisation's work and development but we should all extend special thanks to Donna Alexander who, in spite of demanding responsibilities elsewhere, has put in enormous amounts of time and effort for AFFORD. Without Donna's input, we would have really struggled to get in some funding applications and other important documents by the required deadlines.

Women are still woefully underrepresented within AFFORD and the organisation remains dominated by West Africans whilst we have no one from Southern Africa. Late in 1997, an ad hoc committee was

tasked with recommending a set of membership criteria that we can use to more actively recruit new members. A key task for the future has to be to devise structures that involve more of AFFORD's membership in where the organisation goes and what it does.

Fundraising

Our fundraising strategy in 1997 concentrated on securing support for our African organisations capacity-building project. This essentially involves putting into operation what we learned from our research, namely, the demand by African organisations for training and a network. Our first application to the National Lottery Charities Board was unsuccessful and we submitted an improved bid late in 1997. We submitted a complementary bid to Comic Relief and although we had expected to hear a response by Christmas 1997, we have as yet heard nothing from them. Our application to Southwark Council for a one-off grant for computing equipment was also unsuccessful on the grounds that we did not meet their main criteria for funding.

As a contingency, we should probably submit a third bid to the National Lottery for the round shortly opening. However, in light of our lack of success to date we should also consider whether we need to change our fundraising strategy. For instance, we could seek funding for much smaller projects and build a track record of success with these which is likely to stand us in good stead for more ambitious applications. Of course, this would mean that we would be unable to appoint a full-time coordinator in the near future. Such an appointment has been a key feature of AFFORD's own capacity-building strategy given the clear personnel constraints that have restricted our development and ability to carry out work to date.

Lobbying and Networking

DFID White Paper

The election of a New Labour government in the UK in 1997 signalled a new approach to the government's development policy. Development was upgraded to a cabinet post (no longer an arm of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office headed by a junior minister), and Clare Short was appointed Secretary for International Development. DFID duly published a White Paper entitled *Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century*. The report was broadly welcomed from most sectors of the development industry.

Particularly significant from AFFORD's viewpoint was DFID's commitment "to seek to build on the skills and talents of migrants and other members of ethnic minorities within the UK to promote the development of their countries of origin" (panel 23, page 68). As a result, we submitted evidence to the House of Commons International Development Committee welcoming the commitment and drawing attention to the findings of our report (thanks to Donna for agreeing to take this on at very short notice). It seems that the Committee appreciated our intervention because in its subsequent report to the government, it drew attention to AFFORD's comments and the comments by the Black International Construction Organisation (BICO) and recommended "that further detail be provided in the Government response of how ethnic minority and refugee groups in the United Kingdom are to be involved in the development process".

Clearly an opportunity exists for AFFORD and similar organisations to contribute to government thinking on this important issue. The government has three months within which to respond to the Committee's report so now is the time to act. BICO has already contacted AFFORD and we need to identify areas of common interest and explore how to move the agenda forwards.

Oona King MP

Oona King is the new black Labour MP for Bow and Bethnal Green who has been cited by many as a rising star. Unusually for a new MP she was appointed to sit on the International Development Committee. As a result, AFFORD has approached her to explore how we could further our common interests together. We hope that if Ms King takes an interest in AFFORD's work she will agree to provide facilities in the House of Commons to host AFFORD's media launch and act as keynote speaker for our evening event.

BOND

BOND is a consortium of British overseas non-governmental development organisations that provides a range of services to its members including training. BOND recently decided to do something about its lack of black and ethnic minority organisation membership. It has been conducting a survey of ethnic minority organisations very similar to AFFORD's (but not limited to African organisations) to establish what their strengths and weaknesses are, and whether and how BOND could help.

We have already highlighted the need for training and the question is whether BOND can help. We need to be aware of the dangers of reinventing the wheel or of contributing to over-capacity but we also need to appraise critically whether existing mainstream organisations such as BOND have the capacity and will to serve the smaller African organisations that are AFFORD's main interest. We should, in the first instance, arrange a meeting with BOND to explore the issues further.

Southwark Council

We held a meeting with Ms Sade Johnson of Southwark Council's Equalities Unit to explore areas of mutual interest. Although Ms Johnson's main brief, as far as voluntary organisations is concerned, is for the north of the borough (and AFFORD is based in the south) she is particularly concerned about the fragmentation of the African voluntary sector. She noted that even though the borough officially has 21,000 Africans—the largest concentration of Africans in the country—and 20,000 people of Caribbean descent, these two groups are very poorly funded, a situation she would like to rectify. Although we did not discuss specific projects, Ms Johnson has promised to ensure that AFFORD is better plugged in to what funding opportunities do exist within Southwark and to pass some useful information on to us. We agreed to maintain contact and to schedule another meeting in the near future.

Organisational Development

Moves to establish AFFORD as a project-based organisation are well underway. Our strategic planning meeting facilitated by Gibril Faal, a management consultant, started the process. The next steps are to agree the wording for AFFORD's aims and objectives, to identify appropriate projects and to develop detailed costings and plans for these projects.

Meanwhile, Price Associates, the firm of graphic designers that has agreed to design a logo for AFFORD on a pro bono basis has presented some initial ideas for us to consider and provide feedback on.

Goals for 1998

Funding must be top priority for AFFORD. We need both core and project funding in order to fulfil our mission. We should aim to initiate one major project this year as well as complete those already underway.

We also need to give membership high priority. In addition to recruiting more members along the lines to be suggested by the ad hoc committee, we need to more actively involve existing members so that AFFORD does not become an overly centralised organisation too heavily dependent upon one or two key members. Many organisations fail by becoming overly personalised in that way and effectively granting too much power to one or two individuals to decide the organisation's future. It is a fate we should avoid at all costs. We also need to give more careful consideration to how AFFORD can be of more benefit to its members. We need to explore the issues of mentoring and other such schemes.

We need to consolidate AFFORD's structure and focus by completing the strategic planning process and putting it into practice. We also need to implement a robust system of accounts that will meet the Charity Commission's requirements.

On the external front, we need to re-establish, consolidate and extend our links with African organisations in the community. The launch will help us make a start with this but we need to think through more carefully what sort of relationships we want to have with different organisations and how we can keep them alive. We also need to begin exploring with both Nicholas and Kathryn on the continent how we can begin to establish links with organisations near them.

The year 1998 will be a challenging year for AFFORD and if it is to retain and grow the interest and support of its members and well-wishers it will need to begin to demonstrate a capability to give practical shape to its good ideas.

African Foundation for Development (AFFORD)

1997 Annual Report