

“That problem of being isolated and away from others has gone away”

May

2013

Located in Gisozi Sector, Kigali City, Aspire is a unique NGO working to improve the lives of vulnerable women through a holistic range of training and empowerment activities, supplemented by work with the women’s children and husbands. This review examines the organisation’s considerable achievements over the first four years of its existence, highlights some of the key strategic choices Aspire must consider as it moves forwards, and offers recommendations for actions to be taken to consolidate the organization both programmatically and administratively.

**Review of
Aspire Rwanda,
2009-2013**

**Conducted 22 Feb –
2 March 2013**

***Dr Chris Dolan
Alex Rutagarama***

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	4
1. Introduction 7	
1.1 OVERVIEW OF ASPIRE RWANDA	7
1.2 OVERVIEW OF VISION, MISSION, AND THEORY OF CHANGE	8
1.3 ASPIRE'S PARTNERS.....	9
1.4 REVIEW METHODOLOGY.....	11
2. Programming 13	
2.1 IDENTIFICATION OF PARTICIPANTS	14
2.2 VOCATIONAL TRAINING.....	15
2.3 EDUCATION	18
2.4 HEALTH	19
2.5 LEARNING ABOUT LEGAL RIGHTS	21
2.6 INCLUDING HUSBANDS & PARTNERS	22
2.7 CHILD CARE	24
2.8 FROM SPECIFIC OUTPUTS TO WIDE IMPACTS	26
2.9 RELATIONSHIPS & SOCIAL STATUS.....	27
2.10 APPRECIATION OF ASPIRE.....	28
3. Project Process & Organisational Development	29
3.1 INCLUSIVITY	29
3.2 RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS	30
3.3 MONITORING AND SUPPORT	30
3.4 ASPIRE POLICIES.....	31
3.5 ASPIRE KEY DOCUMENTS	31

3.6 RECRUITMENT, BENEFITS AND JOB SATISFACTION.....	32
3.7 INTERACTIONS WITH BENEFICIARIES.....	32
3.8 SUSTAINABILITY OF IMPACT	33
3.9 THE RELATIONSHIP WITH NETWORK FOR AFRICA.....	33
4. Discussion and Conclusions.....	33
4.1 LESSONS.....	33
4.2 CHALLENGES AND ISSUES	34
4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS.....	35
4.3.1 Operational	35
4.3.2 Programmatic	36
Annex 1: Schedule of Interviews and Focus Group Discussions	38
Annex 2: Documents Reviewed.....	39
Annex 3: Key Questions for the Evaluation.....	40

Executive Summary

Aspire is a unique and forward-looking NGO working in underserved areas of Rwanda to better the lives of vulnerable women through a carefully structured and holistic three year programme – a one-year schedule of vocational training, rights and health awareness raising, and psycho-social support and two years of follow-up support. The impact of these is consolidated by the provision of child care to participants, as well as engagement with their male partners.

As the organisation begins its expansion from its urban base in Gisozi sector to also working the rural sector Rutunga, this review examines the organisation's achievements and challenges in its first four years. Conducted by two independent consultants in late February 2013, the review data collection involved a combination of document review, key informant interviews with important partner organisations, as well as staff of *Aspire*, and a combination of individual interviews and focus group discussions with the participants themselves.

The selection of fifty vulnerable women to join *Aspire's* programme every year is done primarily with the input of local level government officials. This helps to ensure that the most vulnerable are selected, with the added benefit of establishing a good relationship between *Aspire* and the authorities.

The vocational training, which in the first years focused on handicrafts, has since shifted to hairdressing and cooking skills. It is evident that all the skills provided have had substantial impacts on the women's income generating capacity (*Aspire's* own monitoring indicates four-fold increases in some participant's incomes), and that the current skills sets are quickly applied and marketable in the environment the women are living in. Furthermore, the establishment of cooperatives by the graduates of each cohort of participants (to date two have been established), helps to ensure that graduates continue to benefit from both the economic and the social benefits of being and working together.

The education programme works to improve women's literacy and language skills (both Kinyarwanda and English), as well as coordinating awareness raising activities provided by a number of partner organisations, structured around health care (First Aid, HIV testing, prevention and response, Breast Cancer, etc.), legal rights (inheritance laws, family law, etc.), and relational matters (sexual and reproductive health, family planning, relationships, etc.). The beneficial impacts of this education programme range from increased self-confidence and self-awareness, through better interpersonal and domestic relationships, better self-care and care of children, and better capacity to engage with customers and authorities in the building of income generating activities.

Without diluting its core concern with reducing the vulnerability of women, *Aspire* has successfully found mechanisms to also engage with their husbands and partners. The mutual understanding this has generated has helped to assure the success of the work with women. A further core contribution to *Aspire's* success has been its provision of child care and feeding for the children (under-fives) of its women participants, which with relatively little resources has substantially improved the learning opportunities and social skills of the children at a critical stage in their development.

While each of the components of the training has its own direct impact, the overall impact on reducing the vulnerability of the women participants and those immediately around them appears to be considerably greater than the sum of the parts; *Aspire's* graduates report increased respect within their families and neighbourhood, more equitable and respectful relations with their husbands, better socialised children, and better incomes. The isolation that characterised many of their lives, is substantially reduced or ended altogether, and this combination of physical, psychological and socio-economic benefits allows *Aspire's* graduates to develop more forward looking perspectives and longer-term plans. In short, it is an 'upward spiral of self-confidence, empowerment and income earning capacity'. This is reflected in the depth and breadth of the expressions of appreciation for *Aspire*, whether from the women themselves, their husbands, or the partner organisations. The sustainability of these positive impacts of *Aspire's* work with its primary beneficiaries appears assured. The sustainability of impact of work with husbands and partners requires *Aspire* to advocate strongly with partner organisations so that they strengthen their work in this regard.

When turning to the organisational dimensions of this review, it is clear that, as an organisation, *Aspire* has an impressive set of policies against which to ensure staff accountability and performance, and these reflect strong principles of inclusivity in its policies, as well as strongly sensitising its participants to existing legal frameworks, including the legal protections provided by marriage. While sex-work is a reality for some of its participants, this is – given the sensitivity of the subject - currently addressed on an individual basis rather than with the participants as a group.

Aspire has already established a good working relationship with the local authorities, and a range of NGOs, and is looking to strengthen its profile and relationships at district and national levels. Internally, *Aspire* has well developed monitoring systems, and needs to ensure that these keep pace with the expansion to a rural sector.

As it continues to expand, *Aspire* faces a number of strategic choices. These include geographic location (rural, urban, both), target beneficiaries (women and their children, husbands, others), the scope of training activities (e.g. should there be more emphasis on business skills coupled with the vocational skills?), how best to diversify its funding base, how best to utilise the advocacy potential of its existing activities, how best to capitalise on the mental health benefits of its programming.

In terms of key documents, the review strongly recommends the development of a three year strategic plan, together with a fund-raising strategy which builds on the already strong funding and capacity building relationship with Network for Africa, but also substantially increases the direct fund-raising of *Aspire* staff inside Rwanda. While job satisfaction of current staff is uniformly high (and this is also reflected in strong and respectful interactions between staff and participants), current salary levels could jeopardise staff retention if not improved, and this reinforces the need for a strong fund-raising strategy. The review thus recommends that, from an administrative perspective, establishing an Annual Report for 2012, and an organisational budget for 2013, would substantially support future fund-raising.

Whether looking at the individual components of the programming and the administrative/organisational systems supporting it, or the organisation as a whole, the overall picture is a highly positive one; the organisation has achieved considerable impacts in its first four years, and, with the added benefit of capacity building and fund-raising support from Network for Africa, has developed sufficiently strong staffing, systems

and procedures, as well as credibility within the community and with the local authorities, that it is well positioned to expand further in coming years.

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview of Aspire Rwanda

Aspire is a new, innovative organization making a unique, much-needed and holistic contribution to improving the life situation of poor and vulnerable women in one of the poorest districts in Rwanda. It began on the veranda of Peace Ruzage's home in Gisozi Sector, Gasabo district, in 2007. The district, which has both urban and rural sectors, was in 2012 ranked 29th out of 30 districts in the Government's performance contract evaluation exercise,¹ and worst performing in Kigali city.² Until *Aspire* was established, Gisozi had no NGO working on the economic, social and health-related vulnerabilities of women and their children; despite the evident poverty of the area there was little by way of vocational training, health information, rights awareness or child-care, nor was individual and relationship counseling available. As in many other poor urban areas, many of the inhabitants are immigrants from other parts of the country, and social support networks are correspondingly weak; women frequently experience extreme isolation as they struggle to make ends meet and bring up their children. For the fifty women per year who enter *Aspire's* programmes, as well as their children under the age of 5, *Aspire* provides a much needed step up from acute vulnerability to greater economic and social capacity, coupled with rights awareness, increased self-esteem and mental well-being.

After Peace invited unemployed widows and single mothers in her immediate neighbourhood to socialize together in her compound, numbers grew rapidly and it became clear that many of the women felt a need for a structured educational programme. In 2008, Peace met with Rebecca Tinsley and Sophie McCann of Network for Africa who agreed to help with fund-raising and capacity building. In July 2009 *Aspire* was registered as a Non-Governmental Organisation under the Ministry for Local Government, and in June 2010 opened its first office with a staff of two. The current Programme Coordinator was recruited in May 2011.

Initially, when *Aspire* first began there were 100 participants who were enrolled in the programme from 2008-2009. *Aspire* then carried out another intake of 50 women in mid-2010. Since then, there have been two further intakes of 50 women each. Each intake undergoes one year of training, followed by two years of follow up. The graduates of each year establish a new cooperative. To date two cooperatives have been established, the first known as *Tuyjembere* (Let's go forward), and *Bohoneza* (To live Safely/a better life). These cooperatives are legally established under the Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA), which is the national regulatory body, and has training and supervisory functions. *Tuyjembere* members graduated with vocational skills in handicrafts, while *Bohoneza* members were trained in cooking and hair-dressing skills.

Recognising that the women participating in the programme had nowhere to leave their young children when they were coming to the center for training, and that some were having to leave young children at home

¹ For a ranking of all Rwandan district done in August 2012, see The Rwanda Focus, 24 August 2012, at <http://focus.rw/wp/2012/08/premier-commends-district-performances/>. (Accessed 8 April 2013)

² See <http://www.kigalicity.gov.rw/spip.php?article749>, published March 2013 (Accessed 8th April 2013)

unattended, a day care and feeding program was started in January 2012. This both allows the young mothers to learn and work with the knowledge that their children are safe, and addresses the malnutrition among children that is often a reflection of the mother's own vulnerability.³

A major development and expansion in *Aspire's* scope occurred in 2013. With funding from DFID to lift 450 women and their dependents out of poverty through education and vocational training, *Aspire* extended its activities to Rutunga, a rural sector of Gasabo District. Building on lessons learnt from the Gisozi programme, the Rutunga project will replicate many aspects of that project, including providing childcare for under-5s, providing psycho-social support, training in health, nutrition, literacy, numeracy, business skills, but with the key difference being to train the women in profitable agriculture, moving them from subsistence farming to profitable farming. The number of beneficiaries will also be higher – 450 women and their dependents will benefit over three years.

1.2 Overview of Vision, Mission, and Theory of Change

***Aspire's* Vision**

To inform and equip poor local women through trainings and rights-based education, to build women's capacity to improve their lives and the lives of others in the community, thus encouraging the foundation of a viable and peaceful community

***Aspire's* Mission**

- *Aspire* helps Rwandese women rebuild their lives in the wake of the genocide, war and poverty that have shattered their country
- Equips women with the knowledge, skills, esteem, friendship and confidence to become self-sufficient, improving their families' standard of living
- Facilitates women to make their own choices, by working together, and taking control of their future

***Aspire's* Theory of Change** takes as its starting point that vulnerability is caused by multiple, inter-dependent factors:

When you say I can teach her a skill, most people are doing that, but there are other factors around her that keep her in that state of poverty; firstly, she is not aware of her health issues; family planning - she keeps getting kids; second, she does not know her rights, she is illiterate, her chances of employment are minus zero. Her social networks are either non-existent or within the same class who cannot help each other. Then you realize that even if I [want to] teach her a skill, when will she have time to learn? That's how we realized that if we bring her in [to Aspire], [we need to] take care of the child. When she comes

³ *Aspire* child care programme-Brief information. January 2013

in she has the merry-go-round where the group decides they can save as much as 100Frw per week. When I look at it, [I ask myself] “Can this woman be given some kind of holistic approach so that she feels supported, can we address those things that keep her down?” She needs to be informed, to read and write, to be aware of saving, she needs the skills. Basically that’s how we see we can help this woman.

This theory is summarized in the statement that;

‘For positive change to happen women need the means to escape poverty, the knowledge to improve their (and their children’s) health, and awareness of/access to their rights’.⁴

Aspire believes that the women it works with are united by their poverty, despite big variations in age (18-45), number of children (0 – 8), marital status (single, divorced, widowed, traditional marriage, religious marriage, civil marriage), and personal history. *Aspire’s* CEO, when beginning this work, and reflecting on the loss of many of her own family members during the Genocide, made a conscious decision to work with all vulnerable women, whatever their personal history, or that of their partners.

As such, *Aspire* is a non-governmental organization which is non-religious, non-political and non-ethnic, and it models people learning and working alongside one another in a manner which, over time, can help to reduce historical barriers. For example, some members are widows from the genocide, others are orphans, and others are married to perpetrators who were imprisoned for their part in the Genocide.

An important dimension of *Aspire’s* approach is that it has two tiers of direct beneficiaries: while the primary direct beneficiaries are vulnerable women, the organization also recognizes that the people most closely associated with their primary beneficiaries, namely their partners and their small children, constitute a secondary set of direct beneficiaries, whose inclusion in programming greatly strengthens the outcomes of work with the primary direct beneficiaries.

1.3 *Aspire’s* Partners

Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre (RWAMREC) was founded in 2006 to act on gender-based violence and gender inequalities in Rwanda. Its vision is of a ‘Peaceful society where women and men share roles and responsibilities of raising families and governing society in equality and respect’. An important part of its mission is ‘to serve as role models for the promotion of positive masculine behaviours’. RWAMREC has collaborated with *Aspire* in the delivery of trainings to the male partners of *Aspire* members (sometimes to men only, sometimes to both the women and their partners).

HAGURUKA (Association of the Defense of Women and Children’s Rights): Founded in 1991, and with more than 90 member organizations, the overall objective of HAGURUKA is to enforce the rights of women and children and to improve family life in Rwanda. In partnering with *Aspire*, HAGURUKA provides trainings to its

⁴ Interview with CEO *Aspire*, 27 Feb 2013

beneficiaries on women and children's rights as well as family law. They also receive clients from *Aspire* who are in need of legal advice and support.

MEDSAR: this is a non-profit and non-political medical students' organisation which started in 1995. It is based at Butare University, which has the only Faculty of Medicine in the country, and is affiliated with the International Federation of Medical Students Associations (IFMSA), and the Federation of East African Medical Students Associations (FEAMSA).⁵ The association has worked with *Aspire* since 2011 to provide various health trainings. The majority of the trainings target the women, though some have also worked with their male partners. Insofar as MEDSAR reports on its activities to the Faculty of Medicine and to the Ministry of Health, as well as their own partners (e.g. Danish Youth Council), it can be seen to be advocating on behalf of ASPIRE and her beneficiaries.

SACCO: In general SACCO stands for Savings & Credit Cooperatives. In the context of this report, it refers to those run by the Banque Populaire du Rwanda following a directive that such Coops be established at the sector level (*Umurenge*).⁶ In most circumstances, SACCO loans are interest-bearing, but at present SACCO in its relationship to *Aspire* acts as a bank for the *Aspire* participants, providing both group savings accounts for the cooperatives themselves, and also individual savings accounts for the individual group members. SACCO's in-house staff trainers provide sensitization and training for the *Aspire* women in both credits and savings. SACCO bank accounts are being used, particularly those who have received a cash grant from an organization called Microseeds.

Microseeds: *Microseeds* is a Christian NGO specializing in zero-interest microcredit loans to people living in extreme poverty,⁷ with the aim of empowering poor people to help themselves and their families break out of poverty. *Microseeds* primarily supports widows and single mothers raising children in Rwanda, and works through the church to provide these loans.⁸ In January 2013 *Microseeds* provided \$3,000 for 60 individual loans for cooperative members at 0% interest.

Kigali City: The City authorities first engaged with *Aspire* on a basket-weaving training programme known as *Agaseke* which it was running in other parts of Kigali as a way of providing sex-workers and street vendors with legal alternatives. The *Aspire* graduates were subsequently employed on a temporary basis to train other women.

⁵ <http://www.who.int/pmnch/members/list/medsar/en/index.html>

⁶ SACCOs and credit unions are legal entities which differ from banks in that they are user-owned financial intermediaries. Members typically have a "common bond" based on geographic area, employer, community, industry or other affiliation. Each member has equal voting rights regardless of their deposit amount or how many shares they own. Their principal products are savings and credit, however some offer money transfers, payment services and insurance.

<http://www.microseeds.org/about-microseeds/index.html>

⁷ Defined as living on less than \$1 a day.

⁸ <http://www.microseeds.org/about-microseeds/index.html>

Network for Africa: Network for Africa (N4A), a British charity (1120932) founded in 2007, supports communities destroyed by war and genocide to rebuild. Focusing on education, civil rights awareness, psychosocial support and health, N4A and its partners' projects promote economic and community development, empowering individuals, particularly women and children, to break the cycle of poverty. N4A has partnered with *Aspire* since 2009, providing capacity building and financial support for *Aspire's* development and growth.

1.4 Review Methodology

The review team consisted of two persons, with logistical support from the *Aspire* Programme Coordinator and driver. The Lead Independent Consultant was responsible for leading and coordinating the review, designing the detail of the methodology (e.g. questionnaires), working with the Programme Coordinator to coordinate and revise activity plans if necessary, providing overall technical direction to all aspects of the assignment, and writing the report of findings and key recommendations. The lead consultant was assisted by a local consultant whose principal role was to liaise with respondents, as well as interpreting during interviews, and where necessary probing further. The lead consultant has extensive experience evaluating projects in Rwanda, and the assistant was chosen on the basis of his extensive work as a psychologist supporting genocide survivors.

The consultants' visit was supported by the Network Africa Director in the UK and the *Aspire* Chief Executive Officer and Programme Coordinator in Rwanda.

Data Collection

The data collection comprised:

- Review of documents provided by *Aspire*, Network Africa, and local partners (see Annex).
- Individual Interviews with key programme staff (CEO, Programme Coordinator, Education Coordinator, Social Worker)
- Group interviews with support staff (driver (1) & watchmen (2), cooks (2), child-care assistants (3))
- Individual interviews with 10 women beneficiaries
- Individual interviews with 8 men beneficiaries
- Two focus group discussions with *Aspire's* participants (one with members from each of the two cooperatives established by *Aspire* graduates)
- Group discussions with the respective executive committees of each of the two cooperatives established by *Aspire* graduates
- Key informant interviews with staff from the main partner organizations (RWAMREC, MEDSAR, HAGURUKA, SACCO) and government (Kigali City representative, local Cell Leader for social affairs in charge of community affairs ⁹)

The interview schedule was drafted by the Programme Coordinator, and finalized in discussion with the lead evaluator and the CEO of *Aspire*. Both individual interviews and focus group discussion participants were chosen purposively, to ensure that each of the cohorts of beneficiaries was reflected, and also to ensure that the key

⁹ A 'cell' is a level within the local government hierarchy and is comprised of a number of villages within a sector. Cells have elected local cell leaders, and report to the sector level leaders. The levels of hierarchy are as follows in ascending order Village – Cell – Sector – District – National. Each level reports to the next level.

variable of marital status was reflected (those who had elected to have a civil marriage compared to those who had decided not to, as well as the number of children a respondent is caring for).

All interviews and focus group discussions of beneficiaries were conducted at the *Aspire* offices. Interviews with staff of partner organisations were conducted both at their own offices, and in some cases at the *Aspire* offices.

Respondents were provided with refreshments as well as a modest 'transport' refund to compensate for any lost earnings arising from having participated in the evaluation.

Debriefing

At the conclusion of the field research, preliminary findings and recommendations were presented to the project team (*Aspire*) at the *Aspire* offices in Kigali. The final draft was sent to both *Aspire* and Network Africa for review and comment. All comments were reviewed by the lead Consultant and incorporated or not at his discretion.

2. Programming

Since 2009 Aspire has annually recruited poor and vulnerable and often illiterate and poorly educated women from the local area of Gisozi, Kigali, to be trained in a three year programme starting in January every year. The participants are selected at the village level by a committee comprising the village leader, women affairs leader and health advisor. In 2009 to 2010, 100 women were trained in handcrafts skills, making necklaces, bracelets, earrings and belts from recycled materials. They were also sensitized on their basic rights and those of their children, some basic health information, such as family planning, HIV and malaria.

In 2011, 150 graduates of the *Aspire* programme registered their cooperative, Tujyembere, with the Rwanda Cooperative Agency (RCA). They were trained by Kigali City in making baskets and tray handicrafts as part of the City's 'Agaseke' project.¹⁰

Responding to feedback from their graduates, *Aspire* further developed their vocational training programme so that in 2012, the 50 *Aspire* participants were provided with two separate vocational training courses, of six months each, in hairdressing and cookery and business skills respectively. All participants attending the programme were also sensitized about women's and children's rights, Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) prevention, family planning, HIV/AIDs in 16 individual training sessions over the course of the year. They are also given the chance to participate in voluntary HIV testing, nutrition and hygiene, First Aid, and other health related issues and basic business skills.

Additionally, many of the illiterate women or those who were unable to complete their education attend Kinyarwanda literacy classes every morning, and some participants are also learning English in the afternoon. This year (2013) there are 29 *Aspire* participants (both graduates and currently enrolled participants) learning Kinyarwanda literacy, and 50 women learning English.¹¹ In 2012 12 women were learning Kinyarwanda and 13 were learning English¹²

To enable the women learning effectively with fewer distractions about 125 of their young children (between the ages of 2-5 years old) attend the child care centre on site on a weekly basis. Here they play and learn and are fed healthy nutritious meals twice a day.

¹⁰ Agaseke project is a Rwandan Handicrafts Making Project established in 2007 in Kigali City, with support and partnership from Imbuto Foundation, and Rwanda Investment and Export Promotion Agency ("RIEPA"). The vision for the Project is to provide an opportunity for vulnerable, unemployed and landless women of Kigali City, by supporting them to create their own employment and a sustainable livelihood thereby enabling them to redeem themselves and their families, out of extreme poverty. Source: <http://www.ukumbi.org/projects/agaseke.html>

¹¹ Education report, Feb 2013

¹² Annual report 2012

45 men attended the sensitisation sessions in 2012, and 30 couples attended a couples training session both given by RWAMREC.¹³

Aspire employs a full time social worker who plays a key role in realizing this holistic benefit, as she is able to follow-up the various trainings and see how they are put into practice, as well as to support members and their families when they are struggling. This can include home visits, counseling sessions to students and also to their partners. The social worker also engages with the children in child care.¹⁴

2.1 Identification of Participants

A clear and well-structured system has been developed to ensure community level awareness of what *Aspire* does, and that the most vulnerable women in a given village (*umugudugu*) are nominated for the registration process. At a community level, information about *Aspire* has spread by word of mouth and also by demonstration effect (it was evident to the review team that *Aspire* graduates look visibly better off than the new intake, and this was also mentioned by numerous respondents).

My wife told me when they call people for registration for third group, there were more than 100, but they chose many who were down [vulnerable]. The feedback is from people who come here [as students]. Physically they are looking well, so they see 'ah, there is a good result there, let us wait, next time I will be there'. They know that here is a development for mind. They work on handicrafts, they sell, they learn English, my wife is learning English here. (Male Respondent 1, 23 Feb 2013)

Cell leaders from six villages are given training on *Aspire's* selection criteria, and they then move around registering potential beneficiaries. These names are then discussed by the cell committee, as well as with the Conseil National des Femmes (National Women's Council at the Village level), and ten names are put forward to *Aspire*. The involvement of several different cell leaders in any given village minimises the possibility of corruption in the nominations.¹⁵

Nominees are invited to *Aspire* for a presentation of what the programme aims to do, what is expected of the students, and what they can expect from *Aspire*. At this stage a small number drop out, on the basis that they would not be able to attend regularly. Those who are genuinely interested are requested to discuss it with their husbands or families to establish whether or not is any resistance from the home. Where there is, home visits are conducted to see whether this resistance can be overcome.

Given that there are many more vulnerable women than places available, the importance of the checks and balances in the nomination and registration process are central to maintaining the credibility of the organization as working with the most vulnerable. At the same time, the use of cell leaders in the nomination process is an important relationship-building tool with the local authorities.

¹³ Annual report 2012

¹⁴ Interview with *Aspire* social worker, 26 Feb 2013

¹⁵ In the first round of registration, some cell leaders were said to have asked for Frw 5,000 to nominate a person, but this was overcome through the system of multiple stakeholders being involved, as described (interview with Programme Coordinator, 25 Feb 2013)

2.2 Vocational training

Vocational training takes place three times per week (8am – 1pm) over the course of one year. The first 150 women trained by *Aspire* were trained in handicrafts (e.g. making jewellery from recycled materials, belts, greetings cards.) The training came through the *Agaseke* (basket) programme established by Kigali City in collaboration with the First Lady's *Imbuto* Foundation.¹⁶¹⁷ This collaboration took place in 2010 with the first intake, and some of those trained in turn became trainers for the *Agaseke* programme.

After monitoring the women's sales of handicraft products over time, it became clear to the *Aspire* team that the handicraft market was unpredictable and an unsustainable income generating activity for the women. Following market analysis of vocational skills that could provide more sustainable income generating activity for the women, *Aspire* decided to change the vocational skills training to hairdressing and cookery.

The next intake of fifty women was trained in hairdressing skills including washing, plaiting, and weaving:

"We started with small tresses, the next size we used some artificial hair, another one called 'pencil', also rasta (two ways). Then we trained on how to make a wig (peruque/plant). Amakoma is another style"
(Hairdressing Instructor, 26 Feb 2013)

Additional beauty case skills included pedicure and manicure. The students were also trained in cooking skills, beginning with simple convenience food that can be bought on the streets (e.g. samosas, chapattis), and progresses to more complex skills such as *'vegetable cutting, sauces, salads, beef, chicken, fish, stocks (white stock, brown stock, vegetable stock). Also about hygiene, knife-skills, preserving foods. After that we see how to make a buffet, how to prepare salad, soups, courses, desserts'* (Cooking Instructor, 26 Feb 2013). The training thus opens up both opportunities in the informal sector (preparing and selling food by the road-side, or for private functions), as well as for employment in the formal hospitality sector.

The trainers bring demonstrable experience to bear (the hairdresser owns a successful salon, the cook works as head chef in a major Kigali hotel) and can be seen as role models, having worked their own way out of poverty using the skills they are imparting. Each year, the graduates establish a new cooperative in order to be better placed to maximize the use of these skills.

Economic Benefits

It is clear that the vocational skills provided by *Aspire* are critical, and highly valued by the graduates. Many graduates have quickly put the skills to use and seen an improvement in their economic circumstances as a result: The most recent survey of 58 graduates indicated that their average weekly income had gone from 1,431 FRW before the training to 5,823 after completion of the training, a more than four-fold increase.¹⁸

¹⁶ This was a programme designed to get women street vendors and sex workers 'off the street' (Interview with Kigali City Council member, 25 Feb 2013)

¹⁷ www.imbutofoundation.org

¹⁸ *Final Evaluation of 2011*. 8 November 2011

One widow who lost her husband in the middle of the training, narrated how she has since been able to support her eight children (six of whom are in school) using both the hair-dressing and cooking skills:

Widow: We learned here hairdressing and cooking. Sometimes I do hairdressing. In the morning I cook, in the afternoon I do hair dressing.

Q: how much can you make in a day?

Widow; when I work well, and I get customers for hairdressing, I can gain 10,000 per day [US \$16]. When I get that I get the opportunity pay school fees for children. I can feed my children (Aspire Graduate (2011 intake), 26 Feb 2013).

Tujyembere cooperative opened an account with SACCO on 3 May 2012, with a deposit of 41,000 Frw (approx US \$65). At the time of the review, the cooperative had 1,276,950 Frw (approx US 2,014.00).¹⁹ In 2012 the cooperative managed to secure a supportive donation from the Gasabo District Authorities of 4,600,000 RWF (Approx \$7,255) in recognition of their work and dedication. They have used some of this money to purchase a piece of land and are planning to build a centre for itself once the land-title is secured. *Bahoneza* cooperative opened their account on 13 June 2012, while the members were still in training. Their initial deposit of 71,000 Frw (US \$112) had more than tripled to 251,000 Frw (US \$395) in the six months to December, even as the members were still in training.²⁰ In both cases, the executive committee members appeared to envisage a gradual progression towards ever greater independence on their part, while retaining close ties with *Aspire* as the 'parent' institution.

Psycho-Social Benefits

In addition to the economic benefits, it is clear from the interviews with beneficiaries that there are also psychological and social benefits for the women, including the fact that this training leads them into membership of a cooperative within which they find solidarity and a support system.

Q: when you look at Aspire do you think they are doing the right things, or are there other things they should be doing?

*A; Aspire did well, because when we look here at the people trained here, when we compare with those who have not come here, they are totally different. Their minds are open. They know how to create their own jobs*²¹ ¹ Cell leader, 25 Feb 2013

Discussion

From an income generating perspective, the first set of skills requires the producers to find a market; while all respondents from the first group reported having made and sold handicrafts, establishing a steady demand appeared to be something of a problem for many of the first group, and for the cooperative as a whole.

Tujyembere did not appear to have established its own marketing, and was still dependent on income from sales in markets in the UK, US and Canada to which they had been linked by Network for Africa and by *Aspire's* CEO.

¹⁹ This is using the official exchange rate of 1 USD = 634 Rwf as at 15 March 2013

²⁰ Cell leader, 25 Feb 2013, SACCO Loan Officer, 26 Feb 2013

The Executive Committee believed that they needed a space in Kigali from which to sell their products.²² In the Focus Group Discussion with ordinary members, the problem of finding markets for their products was mentioned repeatedly.²³ Although the income from selling the handicrafts is good when an order is placed, one member described how there could be gaps of many weeks between commissions.

The second set of trainings (hairdressing and cookery) seems well designed for the economic situation of the participants, in that the skills are portable, do not require a lot of capital to get started, and the products meet a demand which is relatively constant within the women's own communities. Although the cookery trainer felt that it would be good for *Aspire* to connect their graduates to further training opportunities to facilitate their access to formal employment, it was evident that many of the students were already applying these skills and successfully generating income with them. Indeed, twenty five of the fifty students reported that they began using the skills taught within the first two months of training.²⁴

Notwithstanding this rapid deployment of skills learned, there may be a need for more concentrated business skills training to allow all graduates to better operationalise these skills and market their products. When the second year graduates were asked how they had used Microseeds grants of \$50 per person, they reported that, collectively, they had decided to invest it in their old activity (buying and selling vegetables), rather than directly investing it in the new activities in which they had received training. They argued that the start-up capital of \$50 was very small, and that they therefore preferred to work individually on the hairdressing and cookery, while working collectively on selling vegetables, with the intention of increasing the capital in order to establish a saloon as a cooperative.²⁵

In preparation for any business skills training it would be helpful to have a clearer analysis of the business skills training required by cooperatives, and those required by individuals: Some of the vocational skills lend themselves to cooperative activity (e.g. necklace and belt-making for external markets would require the capacity to meet bulk orders), while others (e.g. making and selling samosas and chapattis) do not necessarily require a collective effort and can be well done by an individual working on her own. It is also not clear that the Cooperatives receive sufficient mentoring support in the early phases – in the view of one *Aspire* staff member, the support provided would ideally be extended over a longer period than the current two years, possibly through the appointment of a business advisor to work in an ongoing fashion with the cooperatives and individuals.²⁶ Alternatively, some of the micro-credit schemes may be in a position to provide ongoing business advice to their loan recipients.

²² Tujyembere Executive Committee, 25 Feb 2013

²³ FGD with Tujyembere members, 26 Feb 2013

²⁴ Programme Coordinator, 25 Feb 2013

²⁵ It is perhaps also important to note that, in another recent evaluation of a project in Rwanda with a loan component, women were often initially reluctant to take loans, both because of cultural gender models in which women are not supposed to control money, as well as more immediate concerns about what steps would be taken if a woman were to default on her loan repayments.

²⁶ Programme Coordinator, 25 Feb 2013

2.3 Education

Aspire provided literacy and numeracy training to those members who need it and request it. This is undoubtedly important – in the opinion of the cookery trainer, for example, the lack of literacy amongst his students slowed down the teaching/learning process dramatically. In 2012, there were 26 students, of whom 11 were beginners and 15 were intermediate. Classes were provided to members of the 2012 intake (14 members), and separately to the members of the cooperatives established by earlier cohorts (12 members).

English language training is also provided by *Aspire* staff and volunteers. In 2012, 11 members of the new intake were attending, while 7 members of the cooperatives established by the earlier cohorts had their own classes (3 beginners, 4 intermediate).²⁷ At the time of the review in early 2013, the English class had grown to 34 participants, of whom 6 were male partners of the *Aspire* participants who, following trainings on positive masculinity from RWAMREC, requested to be allowed to attend the classes.²⁸

As noted in the monthly education report of July 2012, attendance at literacy and English language classes is somewhat variable, given that members will already have spent half the day in vocational skills classes, and are often obliged to leave classes in order to earn some money for that day. When considering the final figures for 2012, the drop-out level appears highest in the literacy classes (Of 13 who began in one group, only 3 finished, while of the 19 who began in the second group, again only 3 finished). In the English language classes, the retention was much higher (numbers dropped from 22 to 12 in one group, and 18 to 13 in the other), while in the cookery group only 5 out of 50 dropped out, with 45 completing the course.

Notwithstanding these drop-out levels (which are not unusual in adult learning situations where the learners have to juggle multiple priorities), the reports also indicate a steady progression through levels 1-3 of the literacy training.²⁹ The February 2013 report notes that one of the reasons for the ever-growing popularity of the English language classes is that “The participants are becoming more aware of how the language is more useful both locally and regionally, so I am receiving a big numbers of applicants than before”.³⁰

Business Skills Training: This is a 2 day training course, carried out by an independent trainer. He teaches basic business skills, recording income and expenditure, the importance of keeping records. The business skills training is provided at the end of year, after the vocational skills training so the participants can use their knowledge to start their own business using the vocational skills training they have also been given.

SACCO (Savings & Credit Cooperative) has provided mobilization sessions to encourage the cooperatives to open accounts. Tujyembere cooperative opened an account following one such training (May 2012), but since that time the cooperative has yet to take a loan.

²⁷ Education Programme Report, June 2012

²⁸ Interview with Programme Coordinator, 25 Feb 2013

²⁹ Education Programme Report, July 2012

³⁰ Education Programme Report, February 2013

2.4 Health

Training in First Aid is provided to *Aspire* participants by the Rwandan Red Cross, and is designed to enable them to respond appropriately to many different accidents and illnesses in the home. Topics include the main qualities of a first aider, the essential rules of intervention during accident, how to position a patient while waiting for more qualified medical personnel to arrive, how to evacuate victims safely, how to respond to hemorrhages, sores and wounds, fractures, respiratory distress, intoxication, women in labour, fires, electrocutions, drowning, fainting and comas. The training also covers Sexually Transmitted Infections, hygiene and sanitation, and use of a first aid kit. After the training participants are awarded certificates; in the 2012 graduate survey, 97% of women said that thanks to this training, they felt they could now handle medical emergencies.

Following a request from *Aspire*'s CEO for assistance, training and sensitization about health issues such as hygiene, nutrition, malaria, TB, sexual health and family planning etc has been provided by MEDSAR (Medical Students Association of Rwanda). The training was provided by a group of 10 students drawn from 3rd, 4th and 5th year. In the 2012 graduate survey, 100% of women said they understood their sexual and reproductive rights more clearly because of *Aspire* trainings. Additional family planning sensitization has also been conducted by trainers from Amarembo Centre, a training and drop-in centre for disadvantaged youths in Kigali (this was a training on 'natural' methods of contraception).

HIV testing and prevention has been conducted by Kacyiru Police Hospital since 2010: On 10 May 2012, for example, the Kacyiru Police Hospital brought a team of 6 nurses to the *Aspire* compound, tested 45 persons and found 3 women who tested HIV+, bringing the number of known HIV+ve participants in *Aspire* to 11.³¹

One advantage of working with the police is that the Police Hospital is within easy walking distance of the office, and therefore the participants' home so it is more accessible for the women to access their follow up and counseling services. Furthermore, the Kacyiru Police Hospital has a 'one stop centre' – where women can go if they have experienced sexual assault, and are seen by a doctor, receive counseling services and are referred to the police, so they can report the crime if they choose. Another is that the experience of giving the trainings creates a working relationship between *Aspire* and the Police.

To encourage men to become more aware of nutritional issues and the need to reserve income for nutritional purposes, MEDSAR did a sensitization regarding risks of heart disease – including obesity – and screened male participants with stethoscopes and measuring body mass index. They only found two obese cases, but numerous cases of malnutrition, thereby enabling an in-depth discussion about nutrition.

Aspire has also used an individual activist to draw participants' attention to breast cancer.

To date, *Aspire* has not provided any training on mental health issues, primarily due to the lack of qualified partners with which to work on this. However, in cases that the social worker or *Aspire* team deem to be severe they will refer the participants onwards to other more specialized organisations, eg hospital or the police.

³¹ A support group for these HIV+ve members has been created

While measuring the health impact of health-related training is not always easy, particularly as some impacts, such as weight gain or loss due to improved diet, could take some time, the health-related statistics gathered from surveys conducted with 2011 and 2012 participants are encouraging. When *Aspire* surveyed 58 women who had participated in the first two years of the programme, they found that 100% of the women said they understood sexual and reproductive health following the training *Aspire* provided. 95% of the women had had their first HIV test at *Aspire*. 88% of respondents said they now had mosquito nets and knew how to use them properly. 98% of the women said they ate more healthily as a result of the nutrition classes, and 97% said they now felt that they could cope with a medical emergency (as a result of the First Aid training organised by *Aspire*).

Similarly, the mid-year evaluation (carried out in June 2012) of 45 *Aspire* participants currently in their first year suggests that the benefits of the *Aspire* programme are quickly felt. 15% of women had been able to afford health insurance for themselves and their families since joining *Aspire*. 87% said they now understood family planning and HIV prevention, 44% had started using birth control since the training on family planning, 67% said they now felt comfortable talking to their partners about family planning issues, and 82% had tested for HIV following the HIV training. With the 2012 class, While 48% of the incoming class stated during the enrolment survey that they used family planning, by the end of 2012 this had risen to 82%.³²

Qualitative evidence of impact is not hard to find. Trainings in family planning alerted women to different options, as described by one cell leader:

Q: what about Family Planning? Does it have any impact?

A; The women go to use some different methods. Earlier women failed to use different methods, but after teaching them the women are starting to use different methods. When they were using only one method, if it didn't work they stopped, but now they use a variety of methods.

The benefits of sexual health classes are apparent in the responses of the husband of one recent graduate:

"They are teaching us about a woman's problem, how to approach a woman for sex. From our grandfathers' time up till now it was just 'Me, I need it now'.

Q: did it improve your sex with your wife?

A; yes. There are many problems with women that I didn't know about, but now I know, and now when she tells me I can hear her. We can share problems with each other. The problem of sex has gone because of this class. My wife can tell me if it is not a good day." (Male respondent 1, 23 Feb 2013)

In terms of nutrition, *Aspire's* social workers and other team members are able to observe changes in appearance (obvious weight gain/loss) and when home visits are carried out, any alarming/concerning cases identified are reported by the social worker and followed up. Referrals are made if necessary.

³² From the health impact section taken from the *Aspire* data impact sheet

Overall, the impacts of the various trainings on health issues appears to be a very positive one, confronting as they do, a whole range of critical health issues, and providing the participants with greater control over particular health situations, notably through first aid skills training.

One critical area which is not presently addressed through training explicitly, is mental health. It seems probable, given the circumstances of poverty, exclusion and vulnerability which many of the participants come from, that there would be a number of related mental health issues. Many of the respondents spoke of how Aspire had helped them to overcome acute feelings of isolation, which themselves may be an indicator of a lack of mental well-being. If the programme as it currently stands, despite not having an explicit focus on mental health, has an overall impact on participants' mental health (by their own assessment), then it may be useful to consider a more explicit focus on this through the training programmes. Given the sensitivities of identifying any kind of mental health problem, it may be useful to frame such training as a training in 'Peace of Mind', for example.

2.5 Learning about Legal Rights

Sensitisations on rights are sub-contracted to a rights organization known as HAGURUKA. Three sensitization sessions are conducted per year, covering 1) women and children's rights 2) Family law 3) Gender-Based Violence.

Without exception, *Aspire* graduates interviewed were able to tell the review team what they had learned in regard to these areas of rights, and to describe which institutions to approach in situations where these rights are violated. HAGURUKA itself had received a number of *Aspire* graduates seeking legal aid, suggesting that the training does not just impart the knowledge, but also impacts on rights-seeking behavior.

For one graduate, the training in rights had transformed the relationship between herself, children from a first marriage, and her husband:

Q: What are the rights that you learned about that you think are important to you in your day-to-day life?

A; before I did not know how to bring my children to this marriage (they stay with my parents) but now during the holidays they come to my house, and when there is any financial problem my husband contributes.

Q: that's good!

A; that's why I love Aspire, because before I was always afraid [to bring my children to my home].

Q: so what exactly made the difference?

A; they trained me.

Q; what did they teach you?

A; I learned a lot of things, for example to be patient, to know my rights and how to get them respected.

(Couple interview, 23 Feb 2013)

The interaction between greater awareness of rights, greater economic capacity, and a better relationship was put very clearly by her husband, who stated: *"The relationship was good, but has become very good because my wife has money to help those children, without asking me for anything".*

The issue of civil status is a core element of *Aspire* and HAGURUKA's work with the women. Although Rwanda's marriage laws provide considerable protections to women and their children once they are within a civil marriage (e.g. in the event of the death of the husband, or of a separation/divorce of husband and wife), very few of the vulnerable women who come to *Aspire* are married: in the Focus Group Discussion with members of the new intake that had started in January, for example, none had so far had a civil marriage, though the majority were living with a male partner. *Aspire* therefore encourages members and their partners to enter into civil marriage by organizing wedding functions and covering the costs of those functions. So far, 2 such functions have been organized (19 couples in 2011 and 13 couples on 26 October 2012), and all *Aspire* members and staff are aware of them.³³

Some male respondents expressed reservations about civil marriage if it is not adequately prepared for through a traditional marriage. They argued that a true marriage has to involve and have the approval of the families of the two persons. Others had clearly internalized the sensitization:

Q: so for you, why is civil marriage important?

A: it is important because it helps the relationship and to be proud of yourself as a man, it is confirmed that legally she is your wife.

Q: how does it help your family?

*A: it is important to have it because it helps the wife or the children to have inheritance. If you do not have civil marriage, when you pass away, then the wife has nothing. It is so important to have a civil marriage.*³⁴ ¹ Male respondent 2, 23 Feb 2013

When asked about the reservations expressed by some male partners, the one NGO respondent dismissed them summarily as simply being an excuse for not getting married. However, it is important to recognize that poverty acts as a major obstacle on being able to pay dowry and organize a wedding party, and for some men it remains important to be seen to have the capacity to do both. In short, the discussion about legal marriage needs to be held in conjunction with a discussion about the relationship between perceptions of masculinity, and the possibilities of changing markers of masculinity.

2.6 Including Husbands & Partners

In synergy with its efforts to encourage people to enter into civil marriage, an important element in *Aspire's* work with vulnerable women has been the decision to engage their husbands and partners in training on gender equality, violence prevention and positive masculinity. While from a budgetary/resources/time perspective, this

³³ The influence of *Aspire* may be read from the marital status of the members of Tujoyembere Cooperative, which breaks down as follows (figures provided by the President of the Coop):

Civil marriage	25
Other marriages	21
No marriage	17
Single mother	3
Husband in prison	2
Single	3
Widow	6
Separated	8
Total	85

is only a minor part of *Aspire's* work, it appears to be a very popular element of the programming by both the men themselves, and their wives;

I was talking with my wife, she told me we have a seminar with Aspire, they want to teach you everything for a woman and a man... so I came here and they taught us many things: for example, fighting in the home, relationship with wife and family, how we can be free, how we can be in peace. So we have gotten many things.

Q: what is the most useful thing?

A: the issue of relationship; not just with my wife, but with everybody, how can you recognize conflicts with your neighbours, how you can teach someone who is doing something wrong, how you can deal with things you see which are not good. Then there are many things I didn't know, because me I didn't have chance at all – I had no schooling (Male Respondent 1, 23 Feb 2013)

The same respondent noted that as a result of his wife's new capacities, they now take joint responsibility for the education of their children;

A: we both participate in the cost of the education. When I don't have money she can pay, when I have money, I can pay.

Q: do you teach them [your children] different to what you learned [when you were a child]?

A: Yes, I don't want my boys to be street boys. I don't want to see my son look like me. I'm working hard. I'm teaching them discipline to care for everybody. How to care for visitors, [how to care for] their class mates. They are preparing to get Catholic baptism. They can get baptized without their parents having a religious marriage. Their behavior is good.

Another respondent reported:

My wife learned many things here; handicrafts, belts... At the beginning my wife did not have an open mind. She didn't know how to cooperate with other women, she was always alone, didn't have an open mind to work in a cooperative or association. The important thing for me is how to live with my wife without having conflict. Before we did not have a marriage, but coming here we learned about civil marriage. So now we are thinking about it. This idea has come from training here in Aspire, by RWAMREC. (Male respondent 2, 23 Feb 2013)

For some husbands, the impact has also been on how they perceive their own roles and potential contributions:

Q; In some cases the husband has started to do things that traditionally he was not doing?

Husband: right now culture has changed; we are supposed to work together for development, our family, our life. When my wife is caring for the crying child, I go to cook, I can clean the house, I don't wait for my wife to deal with those things. (Couple interview, 24 Feb 2013)

Trainings have helped couples to improve their sexual relationship:

Husband; Before it was not good, but now we discuss all the time about having sex. We didn't have how to prepare my wife in that manner. But when one of us has a problem I can't force her. Today we negotiate. When she wants it she can tell me. When I want it I can also tell her.

Perhaps most importantly, it is evident that the trainings have helped to reduce domestic violence, as suggested by the same couple:

Q: what difference has Aspire made to you?

Wife; we are a bit changed; we have learned how to live together without having a conflict. Before we would have conflict, when my husband said something, it would take time to understand each other.

Husband: before it was so difficult to live together, when I came back from work and found there was a problem sometimes I would beat her and talk badly to her, it was even difficult for her to prepare my clothes. From coming here she has learned how to care for me better, we live in peace and we collaborate, there is no conflict. When it comes we know how to deal with it.

Q: how do you deal with a conflict now?

Husband; we sit together and we look what happened. The one who made a mistake can apologise and we can resolve between ourselves without another intervention

Q: do your friends and neighbours see a change?

Wife: before they understood the noise from our family, because we were always beating each other.

Right now they ask themselves "what happened?" That means our family has been changed. (Couple, 24 Feb 2013)

In one example given, the combination of training and support from the social worker resulted in a major reduction in domestic violence. Prior to the intervention, the woman was depressed and scared and had lost her appetite, becoming thin and withdrawn as a result. As the domestic abuse diminished she began to gain confidence, became happier as living with her partner became easier. She recovered her appetite, and her weight increased correspondingly, from 40 to 60kg.³⁵

The trainings provided by RWAMREC in particular, have seen men starting to think about having their own cooperatives, or at least a regular follow-up discussion on the issues they have been sensitized in. This wish was repeatedly expressed by the male respondents. According to the Director of RWAMREC:

It's really important [to do follow up] because what we do in the two days is create an excitement, but sustaining it is really important; when you are dealing with behaviours, don't expect it to change in just one day, it changes with time and is a long process that people have to engage in. (RWAMREC, 25 Feb 2013)

The evident importance of engaging with the male partners of *Aspire* participants should not call into question *Aspire's* primary focus on vulnerable women; indeed, it is important that *Aspire* retain its character and activities. It does, however, highlight the importance of working in collaboration with other organizations to ensure that the issues and persons related to the women are addressed in holistic fashion, and *Aspire's* success in doing so to date.

2.7 Child Care

As with its engagement with the husbands of the vulnerable women it works with, *Aspire* has also taken a pragmatic approach to also including the women's children in its programming as secondary direct beneficiaries. The childcare centre was developed as part of a monitoring and lessons learned exercise by *Aspire* staff who identified that the presence of the participants' young children was hindering the women's ability to work and concentrate during their literacy and vocational skills training and sensitisations. Furthermore, some women

³⁵ Interview with *Aspire* social worker, 26 Feb 2013

were leaving their young children at home either alone, which was not safe, or their older children were looking after their younger sibling, thus preventing them from attending school. The children were also undernourished. In February 2012 an experienced nursery school head teacher and childcare expert from the UK came to Kigali for 4 weeks to assist the establishment of the childcare centre at *Aspire*, giving intensive training to the childcare workers and working with *Aspire's* social worker to establish the foundations of the centre.

By mid-2012, the child-care centre was catering to a daily average of 49 of its participants' children (lowest attendance was 42, highest was 60) up to primary school going age (5). By January 2013 the average attendance had risen to 70.³⁶ They are provided with basic child-care, including feeding, safe and supervised play, learning letters and numbers, becoming involved in celebrations of children's day. The Education Report suggests that three core principles taught to the children are 'Hygiene, Discipline and Sharing',³⁷ and it is clear from the child-care staff that much else is also addressed:

Q; what do you teach them?

A; I have prepared them for primary school. Many don't know where milk comes from. We start with how to hold a pen. They play drawing different things. The ones who were here last year went to primary already knowing how to write their names, different figures, and so on. Another issue; they know their own names and their parents names, and where they live. If they get lost they can give that information. Also some words of English; here there is a system where children are taught in Kinyarwanda in primary school. (Group discussion with Aspire support staff – child-care, 25 Feb 2013)

The three care-givers are all themselves graduates from *Aspire*. Following an intensive training from a UK expert over a 4 week period, the three employees were also placed with a nursery for a three week period. One of the biggest challenges facing the care givers is that when the children begin, they are not used to being with other children:

Q what is most difficult thing about your work?

A; when new kids come, they are not used to live with other kids. They come here with different behaviours. When you combine that it is not easy. After being here and sharing, there are no other problems. When the first arrive, they try to take everything for themselves, we teach them to share. When they come here they always want to see their mothers who are learning, and are always crying. What we do we approach them like their own mothers, we take care, and the day comes when they integrate with others. When we look at the children we started with in January, today they are OK. It depends on how caring you are, and how they identify. (Discussion with Aspire support staff, 25 February 2013)

Although the child-care service is not registered as a nursery, there is little doubt that this service is a key part of what enables the women to stick with the *Aspire* programme, and also that the benefits to the children are significant in their own right. Many of the participants interviewed spoke very highly of the attention their

³⁶ Education Programme Report, January 2013

³⁷ Education Programme Report, July 2012

children had received, and how they had benefited to the same extent as children they knew who had gone to formally recognized nursery schools.

2.8 From Specific Outputs to Wide Impacts

The overall impression when talking with beneficiaries of *Aspire*, is that, as intended, the combination of interventions has an overall impact on the well-being of the women which goes beyond the impact of individual interventions. The following exchange illustrates this scenario:

Q; when you look at your life before Aspire and your life now, what is the main difference?

A; right now I have my own house, I am able to buy insurance for me and our children, I can pay school fees for our children.

Q: it's a big change

A: yes

Q: what does your family say about it?

A; they respect me because I contribute, but our husband will tell more about how I contribute, the change in my capacity to change life.

Q; do you have any brothers or sisters and what do they say?

A; they are proud of me, they wish me to go far.

Q; here in Gisozi, are they [community members] seeing the change?

A; when I meet with someone I share and talk to him in English. They ask me 'where did you learn those things?'

Q: are there any bad things that have come?

A; some [people] are jealous but they want to join me.

Q; how has it changed your relationship with your husband?

A; There are a lot of changes; when he gets something new he comes to me and we discuss how to work together; he knows I am capable and I have a contribution to make. We like working together to make the small things big.

Q; would you say you have more or less conflict?

A; there is no conflict

Q; was there conflict before?

A: he didn't trust me like he does today

Q; how does he show it?

A; when he gets something, he gives it to me to put in the bank.

Q; has it changed the way you and your husband relate with your children?

A; my husband helps me to encourage the first born to perform better in class.

Q: do you have a big dream for your family and for yourself?

A; the dream is to have a good space for living, school fees for our children, and the capacity to buy something we want.

As this exchange demonstrates, the *Aspire* graduate has benefited in a holistic manner, ranging from economic benefits, through increased respect within her family and neighbourhood, to a more equitable and respectful relationship with her husband.

2.9 Relationships & Social Status

It is very evident that for many women, one of the most important benefits of training through *Aspire* is an end to isolation:

Q: If you look at your life before you came to Aspire and now, what is the biggest change?

A: Before I was always isolated, because I'm an orphan. They helped me to join a group and we share lifestyle. They helped me to contribute during the wedding ceremony. Right now I have a family where I can share my life. I'm not alone. (Couple, 24 Feb 2013)

A single mother reported as follows:

Q: apart from vocational skills, what other skills have you learned from being here?

A: the important thing is not to be alone. Before I was alone, nobody could hear me, [there was] nobody to talk to, it was terrible, I was always crying. Right now I'm good, I participate in cooperative, I gain money, I gained everything. I was closed. Even when I think today about the life I was in it makes me cry until now. That problem of being isolated and away from others has gone away. (Interview with Aspire graduate – single mother, 24 Feb 2013)

The solidarity established through *Aspire*, and subsequently in the cooperatives, is important in enabling formerly vulnerable women to engage with the mainstream and government institutions:

A: Through the cooperative we are confident, we can face many people.

Q: are you able to go to Rwanda Cooperative Association by yourselves, or you have to go with Aspire?

A: before they used to help us to go there, but now we go without accompaniment, we have the numbers... (Discussion with Tujyembere Executive Committee members, 25 Feb 2013)

As this quote indicates, there is a direct correlation between stronger relationships and increased social status on the one hand, and the capacity to generate income on the other. Women who are unable to engage with the authorities will find it very hard to get the necessary permissions and licences to engage in productive activities in the public domain.

It was evident from the men interviewed, that they were overwhelmingly positive about the changes that they perceived in their partners. While some of *Aspire's* sensitization is specifically about dimensions of the husband-wife relationship (e.g. the form of marriage, modalities of family planning), it was clear that it was the package as a whole, and how that changed the graduates, that was appreciated. For example;

My wife was not working, she was not developed. She didn't have knowledge for life... She went to school but didn't go to secondary or university. She was in primary only. After coming to this organization, she learned five months, so I saw feedback, she came here and she improved the mind. Before my wife came here she didn't think of working to gain money. After coming here she developed in the mind, she knows how to find something for getting more. Even how she collaborates with me the husband changed. (Male partner 1, 23 Feb 2013)

Another respondent was asked:

Q: do you now get more respect from your neighbours?

A; yes, we have respect and value in the community, because we contribute. Even in our family. If the neighbor needs money he comes to borrow. So life is better. (Male partner 2, 23 Feb 2013)

Earlier in the conversation the same respondent was asked what he had learned in the two day training that was important:

A: how to live together without having conflict always, that's where I got the idea of having a civil marriage because now the relationship is good, we can communicate without having a conflict.

Q: anything else?

A: Having a good relationship with my wife is the most important thing that I would thank the association for. Also, my wife is not alone right now. When she gets a problem she brings it to the cooperative and gets information on how to handle it. (Male partner 2, 23 Feb 2013)

In summary, the skills the women learn, the knowledge they acquire and the social network they become part of whilst being an Aspire participant - realising and accessing their rights, learning income generating skills that were never available before, gives them the confidence to be more socially and financially independent. As they begin to earn money, and understand how they are protected by the law, they also gain in self-worth. Financial independence earns the participants new found respect from their husbands/partners/family members, neighbours, and local community. As described by *Aspire's* CEO, an 'upward spiral of self-confidence, empowerment and income earning capacity' is set in motion, and this in turn also makes the women more receptive to new ideas and challenges.

2.10 Appreciation of Aspire

One of the striking features of virtually all interviews with beneficiaries was the depth of appreciation towards *Aspire*, and their sense of surprise that an initiative of this kind could happen in their community. The following quotations give some sense of this:

- *There is no organization like this. There is nobody who can call many people like this. We are happy to welcome the ones who had that idea to create this organization. They hope to meet them, to say thank you. Before the genocide there was no organization here to help people to develop. (Male partner 1, 23 Feb 2013)*
- *Aspire is like a family, parents, if it were no longer here we would be very disappointed. We wish for Aspire to have many donors because they did many things. When we compare Aspire with other associations, for example the one where I was, they give only money, whereas here we didn't get money but we learned how to get money. Aspire is making our life better, it is totally different to before; we hope and wish Aspire to have many donors, to get a lot of possibilities. I am happy that you are here and try to understand the achievements, and that sharing my life with you can help you. (Interview with Aspire graduate – single mother, 24 Feb 2013)*

In the words of the President of *Tujyembere* Cooperative:

We cannot finish the list of things we have achieved through Aspire. We have rehabilitated houses.³⁸ We are smart (good clothes). Everyone has a phone. Today we are open. We know how we can gain money. We are happy. No-one is going with a basket to sell in illegal markets. When we talk about Aspire we cannot end up, they did a lot. We ask ourselves, where did Aspire come from? They came at the right time! Can you help us find awards to give to Peace? She is an angel for the women in Gisozi. (Discussion with Executive Committee of *Tujyembere* Cooperative, 25 Feb 2013)

The uniqueness of *Aspire* was evident from an interview with a cell leader from Ruhango:

Q: are there other organizations working with poor women in this district?

A: no other one that works with poor women.

Q: what about GBV?

A; not in this sector (Discussion with Executive Committee of *Tujyembere* Cooperative, 25 Feb 2013)

3. Project Process & Organisational Development

3.1 Inclusivity

As the findings indicate, *Aspire* has primary direct beneficiaries (vulnerable women), and secondary direct beneficiaries (the infant children and the male partners of the vulnerable women). Within the category of vulnerable women, *Aspire* has a strongly inclusive approach to the identification of its beneficiaries; the overarching criterion for inclusion is vulnerability, with no exclusion on the basis of HIV status, ethnicity or marital status. *Aspire* has taken a conscious decision not to extend support to disabled women, as it does not have the resources to provide the appropriate kind of access, nor does it train older women (45 and above).

While *Aspire* has a strong and progressive equal opportunities and harassment policy, this does not appear to be transmitted to the beneficiaries, with no respondent making any reference to anti-discrimination. The cookery trainer still thinks that women are the weaker sex and should be trained alone. Despite the anti-discrimination policy, there is no discussion of the fact that some *Aspire* beneficiaries may be lesbian or gender non-conforming, or for other reasons may not wish to engage in marriage, and that this itself may be a huge source of vulnerability.³⁹

The emphasis on civil marriage, while very reasonable in terms of the additional legal protections it provides to women and children already in stable heterosexual relationships, could usefully be balanced by more awareness-raising on the validity of other domestic arrangements; what appears to be a widespread community

³⁸ Meaning they have been able to afford to rebuild/upgrade parts of their homes, for instance rebuild a wall, replace the roofing.

³⁹ One single mother in her late twenties, for example, asked if she planned to find another man and enter into a civil marriage, answered categorically that “I don’t plan to have a husband, or to get pregnant again” (26 Feb 2013).

perception that unmarried women in relationships should be described as ‘sex-workers’,⁴⁰ for example, could usefully be challenged during awareness raising on women’s rights, and this would further empower those women who for whatever reason have chosen to live without male partners.

At present issues women are not asked directly about their engagement/non-engagement in sex work, but some do discuss these challenges with the social worker. It may prove useful to both some of the *Aspire* participants, and to *Aspire* itself, to seek to open up discussion further about the resort to selling sex for survival purposes, as this is likely to be a particular issue – and a particularly silenced one - for the vulnerable categories of women targeted by *Aspire*.

3.2 Relationship with other local authorities and other stakeholders

Aspire has been able to achieve a lot through having the right kind of relationships with other stakeholders and local authorities. The central role played by cell leaders in the identification of beneficiaries is critical to the legitimacy of the organization and to a sense of ownership by the local authorities. The collaboration with Kacyiru police hospital creates a good working relationship with the key stakeholder in first line response to incidents of SGBV affecting *Aspire*’s members.

The collaboration with a range of other NGOs in the provision of different dimensions of training ensures that *Aspire* does not have to have all skills-sets in-house, but can draw on well established resources elsewhere. In the case of MEDSAR, the opportunity afforded to medical students to provide training is in itself a form of advocacy, ensuring that these medical students, once graduated, will have a greater insight into the medical and social realities of vulnerable women.

While relationships at the local level appear strong, *Aspire* feels it has yet to impact on the district and national level. Although *Aspire* participates in Gasabo District’s Joint Action Forum, staff did not feel it had attracted sufficient attention from the District and above. As the Programme Coordinator described the situation:

The problem is that no-one from government is coming to visit. The ones who come are local leaders who come for events in Aspire. But from Gasabo district, nobody is coming. The only ones who come are when you are running after them, looking for papers. (Programme Coordinator, 25 Feb 2013)

This could usefully be worked on through a combination of advocacy at national levels, and *more* ‘running after them,’ given that where an official is won over they can become a mouthpiece for the organization.

3.3 Monitoring and Support

For a young organization, *Aspire* has well developed monitoring systems: Enrollment and Mid-year Evaluation Forms ask beneficiaries a wide range of questions with regards to the key areas of programming (education, marital status, household composition, economic situation, skills-sets, social relations & networks, democratic participation, health and rights awareness, SGBV & HIV status, family planning, as well as change in their status

⁴⁰ In discussion with the Executive Committee of Bahoneza Cooperative, the members described how “*The neighbours called us sex workers because we didn’t have a civil marriage. Even our own families. Today we are good women and we have value.*”(26 Feb 2013)

over time as a result of *Aspire* inputs). In addition to the forms, meetings are held with the participant groups to discuss the findings of the mid-year evaluation. (e.g. meeting with Bahoneza group, 13 June 2012). Staff members provide regular reports to the Programme Manager. For purposes of individual staff accountability, particularly as the organization now has two geographical sites which make day-to-day informal monitoring more challenging, it will be important to utilize individual workplans and six-monthly performance reviews.

3.4 *Aspire* policies

Aspire's policies are well developed, particularly for a relatively young organization. Policy documents reviewed include: Personnel Handbook (2013), Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedure, HIV & AIDS Policy, Child Protection Policy, Equal Opportunities and Anti-harrassment and Bullying policy, Conflict of Interest Policy. The Equal Opportunities and Anti-harrassment and Bullying policy is very progressive in terms of sexual orientation and gender reassignment, but it is not clear whether these issues are actually surfaced in staff development processes. Given the probability that a minority of *Aspire's* beneficiaries fall within these categories, and are particularly vulnerable as a result, it would be important to work through these issues during in-house discussions and trainings.

3.5 *Aspire* key documents

The organization has an annual external audit, and copies of the reports for 2009-2011 were availed to the review team. It also has an annual action plan which stipulates activities and outputs. It currently lacks an annual report, a strategic plan, and a projected budget for the calendar year. *Aspire's* documentation is generally good, with some excellent reporting, but also some gaps (e.g. education reports were availed belatedly). Current action plans focus on outputs only, with no impacts provided for.

Now that it is well established and fully operational, the organization would benefit from a three year strategic plan. Key issues for discussion might include:

- Vision and Mission (needs tightening up)
- What is *Aspire's* hoped for/intended geographical coverage: Gisozi, Rutunga, where else?
- This relates to the question of whether to go for depth of impact (i.e. working in a very limited number of places over an extended period of time), or breadth (i.e. establishing a presence in a multitude of different places)
- What is the relationship between vulnerability, mental health, social networks/social capital?
- While *Aspire* women are united in their poverty, are other tensions being addressed?
- Where should men fit in the picture (do a survey of educational levels of men and women...?)
- Does *Aspire* have an organizational position with regard to employing its graduates? (e.g. child care workers, the women who were trained and then trained in basket-making)
- Does *Aspire* live up to the strong anti-discrimination position adopted in its policies?
- Can documentation include visual documentation, to facilitate explaining the work to external audiences?

- Could more work be done around 'voice' for vulnerable women?

In addition to an overall strategic plan, it would be helpful to elaborate a fund-raising and fund-diversification strategy. This could make use, for example, of the fact that *Aspire* is a therapeutic space which many treasure for having broken down their isolation, an empowering space which is enabling women to lift themselves out of extreme poverty and vulnerability, and a place in which vulnerability is addressed holistically. The holistic nature of *Aspire's* approach actually allows for a modularized fund-raising approach, with different proposals to funders interested in particular components of the work (e.g. health training, rights work, anti-discrimination, gaining voice, child-care, vocational skills etc.)

3.6 Recruitment, Benefits and Job Satisfaction

All staff, with the exception of the watchmen, described a full recruitment process involving open advertisement, short-listing, tests & interviews. All staff confirmed that they had contracts, and that statutory deductions are made (National Social Security Fund, Income Tax). All staff reported regular meetings at their respective levels, and all were able to identify their respective line managers.

All *Aspire* staff reported high levels of job satisfaction.⁴¹ When, for example, the child-care givers were asked:

Q; what do you like best about this work?

*A; gaining more friends; the kids! That makes us very happy. The baby comes. When we meet on the street they come running to us; in this whole area you always see a child who knows you.*⁴²

At present *Aspire* does not provide health insurance to its staff, and all staff expressed serious dissatisfaction with salary levels, which they all believed needed to rise (one staff member felt that the current salary was about half of what the person deserved).

The establishment of a new project in Rutunga, which will involve staff travelling between Gisozi and Rutunga, may also demand new systems in terms of per diems, or lunch payments.

3.7 Interactions with Beneficiaries

From observing the interactions between staff and beneficiaries, as well as the frequency with which the *Aspire* vehicle was recognized on the street, there seemed to be close and mutually respectful relationships and modes of interaction, which correlated well with staff's own sense of job satisfaction. As in other organizations with close day-to-day interactions with beneficiaries, the language of "family" is often used by staff and beneficiaries alike. By extension this creates particular expectations about what can be expected from *Aspire* and from beneficiaries respectively. This is exemplified in the following exchange with Bahoneza Executive members about whether or not the cooperative should admit men also:

A: We can ask Peace...

⁴¹ It was also mentioned that *Aspire's* modest stipend to MEDSAR volunteers at times lowered their commitment levels

⁴² Group discussion with *Aspire* support staff, 25 Feb 2013

Q: is she the boss?

A; she is our parent, we can ask her advice... When you are a kid, you have to ask your parent, if you do it without asking, it will be not good.

Q: you are all adults!

A; not yet, they are still caring for us.⁴³

Framing the relationship in this way can be used in a positive way, depending on the expectations set up by the metaphor: at what point in a child's development does she become independent of the parent – or begin to take care of the parent?

3.8 Sustainability of Impact

The probable sustainability of impact of vocational skills training is high in the sense that the basic skills learned should not be very hard to retain. Perhaps the biggest question-mark is over the capacity of the newly established cooperatives to really become established with a sufficient degree of independence, and whether individuals have sufficient business skills training to really utilize the opportunity provided by the vocational training. The beneficial impacts of working with children as secondary beneficiaries also seems clear, particularly as the support given often extends beyond the one year of the mothers' training.

The sustainability of impact of work with the husbands and partners is less guaranteed, and this is a reflection of the fact that the engagement with the men is currently very limited and no process is in place amongst the men themselves to consolidate its benefits. As discussed above, this requires advocacy from *Aspire* to RWAMREC and others who have an interest in working with this target group, rather than any fundamental re-orientation of *Aspire's* priorities.

3.9 The Relationship with Network for Africa

The relationship with Network for Africa goes back to 2009. It has been and remains a key relationship; by assuring *Aspire* of its funding base, and helping this to expand to the opening of a second site, Network for Africa has given the CEO and staff of *Aspire* an important breathing space in which to establish the strong programming and systems which characterize the organization. In addition to fund-raising for *Aspire* itself, Network for Africa has also been able to help identify markets for the handicraft products of Tujyembere Cooperative. Clearly, in moving forward, it will be important for this key relationship to remain strong; given that all staff in both *Aspire* and Network for Africa are aware of the sensitivities in such international partnerships, and of the need to rigorously maintain clarity about the distinctions between fund-raising, capacity building and management issues as *Aspire* continues to grow, and this should ensure that the relationship continues to be productive for both partners.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

4.1 Lessons

⁴³ Discussion with Bahoneza Executive, 26 Feb 2013

The scale of neglect of populations within a stone's throw of the city centre, and their levels of vulnerability, are disturbing. *Aspire's* presence has highlighted and begun to fill a gap in support to vulnerable women in the Gisozi sector, and also demonstrated that a huge amount can be achieved in a relatively short period of time, and that an organization which is well networked with like-minded partners can effect dramatic changes in the lives of individuals, their households, and ultimately their communities. These changes range from positive shifts in self-awareness and self-esteem, through changed economic capacity, and important reductions in inter-personal physical and psychological violence. An important element in *Aspire's* evident impact has been its recognition of secondary direct beneficiaries (husbands and children) and the need to work with them to ensure the success of work done with the primary beneficiaries (vulnerable women)

4.2 Challenges and Issues

- In an environment with high poverty levels and low levels of external support, *Aspire's* presence is raising multiple expectations, both within its beneficiaries and in the wider host community. For example, mothers want educational support beyond the childcare, all the way through primary and secondary.⁴⁴
- Husbands want follow-up trainings and a regular meeting. *Aspire* is very clear that it does not wish to broaden its primary focus from vulnerable women to vulnerable people. This makes sense as to do so would fundamentally alter the nature of *Aspire* and its objectives. However, it is clear that the work engaging husbands and male partners has also created a new set of demands, demands which if met would undoubtedly have benefits for both the men and the women. As such the challenge is to find appropriate partners to take forward the work with husbands/male partners.
- As *Aspire* restructures its Board in line with new legislation, it needs to ensure that this does not jeopardize its creativity and independence.
- *Aspire* has to diversify its funding base; the current dependence on a single funding source puts it in a vulnerable position, as well as putting considerable pressure on Network for Africa.
- *Aspire* staff are so busy with the day-to-day running of the organization, that they have not succeeded in finding time to address key strategic imperatives, whether in terms of direct fund-raising, or raising their profile with relevant stakeholders (e.g. district authorities, central government authorities, UN bodies)
- *Aspire* is becoming deeply acquainted with the realities of women's vulnerabilities in one of Rwanda's most impoverished districts; it now needs to balance day-to-day activities with advocacy to try and influence policy and practice towards greater involvement with those vulnerabilities.

⁴⁴ As described by the Education Officer: "when you are in front of people and they have very high expectations; they think that after graduation you will give them money so that they can start a new project, I think probably *Aspire* and donors should think twice about it because when you teach but after graduation there is no start-up, it's really not a good thing. Because even those people who are observing... if people think that those are graduates from *Aspire*, they should talk more so that those who come later have examples to learn from. When people are expecting more from *Aspire*, there are some who bring all their problems here. In rainy season there are those whose roofs are flying, or getting flooded, or children falling sick, or failing to go to school – they think *Aspire* should provide support for all of that." (24 Feb 2013)

- *Aspire* provides a multi-dimensional therapeutic space for the vulnerable women it works with, but it does not capitalize on this in terms of fund-raising or advocacy
- The provision of vocational skills needs to go hand-in-hand with provision of business skills

4.3 Recommendations

In this section I have not attempted to make recommendations on every single aspect of *Aspire's* work, only on those where it appeared there were issues or challenges that could be addressed. The recommendations are divided into a) operational issues b) programmatic issues c) minor administrative issues

4.3.1 Operational

Aspire needs to diversify its funding base and increase its funding. Key steps towards this are:

1. Establish an **Annual Report for 2012**. The data is already available, simply needs to be compiled and presented. The annual report could compile the findings of the intake, mid-year and end of year evaluations, and present the statistics in three columns: Before, During, After. This would be a relatively simple step given that the data is already being collected, and would allow a much stronger demonstration of impact than is currently possible.
2. Establish an **Organizational Budget for 2013** as the basis for further fund-raising. This should include a line for staff capacity building (Budget for Staff Capacity Building: for some positions (e.g. the child-care givers), formal training could be extended
3. Hold a two day strategic planning retreat, and draw up a **3 year Strategic Plan for 2013-2015** (this could be done in-house or with support from a consultant)
4. Develop a written **Fund-raising Strategy**, separation from the overall Strategic Plan
5. Carve out time for the CEO to begin profile and fund-raising within Rwanda, particularly with district and national authorities (e.g. Ministry of Gender), UN Women, UNFPA, key embassies, etc.
6. Consolidate output indicators and add in impact indicators (Given that much of *Aspire's* work relates to training, the outputs are trained individuals (and it is clear that *Aspire* graduates know what they have been taught), and the impacts that need to be measured are changes in behavior (e.g. new income generating activities, different responses to incidents of GBV, changes in health-seeking behavior)
7. Identify in more detail primary direct beneficiaries (vulnerable women), secondary direct beneficiaries (the women's children and male partners), indirect beneficiaries (neighbours, extended families, communities)
8. Budget for and organize a half-day round-table for donors represented in Kigali, at which *Aspire's* history, achievements, strategic plan and budget are all show-cased

9. Systematically invite Kigali-based donors to visit the project, both in Gisozi and Rutunga.⁴⁵
10. Clarify the relationship, roles and responsibilities between *Aspire* and Network for Africa and set this out in a Memorandum of Understanding between the two parties.

Human Resources

1. Review the salary levels provided by comparable competitor organizations, and establish an *Aspire* organizational salary scale with levels and steps. While this cannot be operationalised until the funding-base is broadened, the scale should inform the organizational budget and be the basis for fund-raising. Success in fund-raising using this scale will help to ensure staff retention and is thus in the interests of team-building
2. Include health insurance and work accident cover in all budgets
3. Ensure that project budgets cover some form of per diem for when staff are away from their primary duty station (for example if a staff member based in Kigali travels to the Rutunga project)
4. Conduct in-house discussion on the anti-discrimination policy, and its implications for *Aspire's* work with vulnerable women

4.3.2 Programmatic

Strengthen business skills training in support of vocational skills training

1. Analyse and distinguish between the business skills required by the cooperatives, and those required by individuals
2. Strengthen the business skills training to enable graduates of vocational skills training programmes to establish themselves more quickly and competitively
3. Work with SACCO to develop greater confidence among the women to take micro-credit
4. Establish a set of phases for cooperative development, with clear markers of different levels of capacity to enable sufficient mentoring, as well as phased withdrawal of *Aspire* support function⁴⁶
5. Ensure that the entire executive committee of each cooperative is skilled-up and can demonstrate leadership

***Aspire* needs to articulate and capitalize on its benefits for mental health of previously vulnerable women, and social health of their households and communities**

⁴⁵ Where donors have been persuaded to visit, it has resulted in funding (Microseeds), and expressions of interest in receiving funding proposals (US Embassy)

⁴⁶ In discussion with Bahoneza Executive, for example, they suggested that *“after we are registered and have our own space, have our own restaurant and hair salon, then we can say that we can take our own decisions, that we have become [grown-up]”*

1. Include questions related to mental health in the enrollment survey administered to new intake, as well as the mid-year review and end of year evaluation. Much of the mental health benefit seems related to breaking down isolation, and advocacy materials could emphasise how isolation is a dominant feature of economic and social marginalisation, as experienced by this broad range of vulnerable women.
2. Maintain the current range of health-related trainings, but extend it to include training on mental health *issues* (one option being to work with MEDSAR or Mental Health Medical Students Association to develop more mental health sensitization and training). To avoid the stigma associated with mental (ill) health, these could be presented as *Peace of Mind* trainings, for example.
3. Discuss further with RWAMREC the possibility of creating a) more sustained follow-up discussions with male 'graduates' of short sensitizations b) a programme for the men⁴⁷
4. Engage men in more discussion about marriage, more listening to their existing perspectives, e.g. re the importance of introducing the wife at home so that you don't get a 'meaningless marriage'⁴⁸

***Aspire* occupies a unique experiential position which puts it in a strong position to do advocacy to reduce the vulnerability of women in Rwanda**

1. Budget for simple visual documentation exercises; these could range from simple and cheap options such as powerpoint slide-shows with photographs and accompanying captions, through developing participatory video, to fully-fledged professional documentary about *Aspire's* work and the lives of its participants. Such products are often much more powerful than written documentation, and are particularly useful in persuading people to come and see for themselves.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Such a programme would be established and run by RWAMREC, not *Aspire*, given the wish to retain a clear focus on women

⁴⁸ This phrase reflects an understanding of marriage as being not just a union of the man and the woman, but also establishing a relationship between their respective families. In this view, if the marriage is not sanctioned by the two families it is regarded as 'meaningless', whether it is recognised in law or not.

⁴⁹ This could be something as simple as five or six beneficiaries telling the story of how *Aspire* impacted on their lives and situations. Such a film need be no longer than 5-10 minutes, and can be shown at the beginning of any presentation to a potential donor

Annex 1: Schedule of Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Individual Interviews

1 Aspire intern	22 Feb
President of MEDSAR	23 Feb
4 male partners	23 Feb
2 couples (Aspire graduate & partner)	24 Feb
1 single mother (Aspire graduate)	24 Feb
1 widow (Aspire graduate)	24 Feb

Director – RWAMREC (men’s involvement)	25 Feb
1 Cell leader	25 Feb
Programme Coordinator – Aspire	25 Feb
Kigali City representative	25 Feb
Cooking trainer – Aspire	25 Feb

Legal officer – HAGURUKA (rights trainings)	26 Feb
Social Worker – Aspire	26 Feb
4 Aspire graduates	26 Feb
SACCO Representative	26 Feb

Hair-dressing Instructor – Aspire	27 Feb
4 New Intake Students (2013 Intake)	27 Feb
Executive Director – Aspire	28 Feb

Group Discussions

5 Aspire Support Staff (3 child care, 2 watchmen, 1 driver)	25 Feb
Tujyembere Cooperative Executive Committee	26 Feb
12 Tujyembere members	26 Feb
Bahoneza Cooperative Executive Committee	27 Feb
13 Bahoneza members	27 Feb

Annex 2: Documents Reviewed

Aspire, Action Plan for 2011
Aspire, Action Plan for 2012
Aspire, Activities Covered Since January up to December 2012
Republic of Rwanda, Economic Development & Poverty Reduction Strategy 2008-2012
Aspire, Enrollment Form
Aspire, Mid-Year Evaluation Form
Aspire, Evaluation Form
Aspire, Top line stats for 2012 mid-year evaluation
Aspire, budget notes for Rutunga budget (2013-2015)
Aspire, Data for incoming women, 1 June 2011
Aspire, Health impact data 2011-2013 summary sheet, 2013
Aspire, Haguruka Sensitizations
Aspire, End of Year Data Analysis, 2012 (Bahoneza Group)
Aspire Personnel Handbook, 2013
Vulnerable Adults Policy and Procedure
Child Protection Policy
Aspire Policy for HIV & ADIS in the workplace
Equal Opportunities and anti-harrassment and bullying policy
Conflict of Interest Policy
Training outlines for:
 18 July 2011: Aspire breast cancer awareness training
 3 May 2012: Savings & Credit Co-operative (SACCO) Mobilisation Training
 9 May 2012: Family Planning Sensitisation using the Bead Approach (Natural birth control)
 10 May 2012: Sensitisation on HIV Prevention and Voluntary Testing
13 June 2012: Notes of Meeting with Bahoneza Group
Aspire Quarterly Project Reports: Jan-Mar 2012, Apr-Jun 2012, Jul-Sept 2012, Oct-Dec 2012
Aspire Quarterly Narrative Report: April-August 2012
Aspire Social Worker Reports: August 2011, Feb 2012, March 2012, May 2012, June 2012, July 2012, Sept 2012
Aspire Final evaluation of 2011
Aspire Internal Evaluation - October 2012

Annex 3: Key Questions for the Evaluation

What difference has the project made to people's lives (*what, who, where, when*)?

Beneficiaries: what were the biggest challenges facing you before joining the project? Are they still the same or have they changed? If they have changed, what has been the role of the project in this?

- To what degree have project outcomes been achieved? Were there any unexpected outcomes?
- Who has benefited (women, men, girls and boys) and in what ways? (NB feeding of children of learners, access to counseling for men, support for civil marriage, access to credit for learners)
- Are those changes (outcomes) relevant to people's needs? (Did you feel exhausted? Hopeless? Has this changed in any way? Has your relationship with your partner or husband changed for the better or for the worse? Have you been able to access better medical care? Have you tested for HIV? Has your income improved? Has your nutritional status improved? Has there been a change in school attendance by your children?)
- What training have you received, and what are the most important things you have learned? (health, vocational, rights?)
- What are the rights that you learned about that you think are important to you in your day-to-day life? Have you been able to claim any rights that you were losing out on before? (NB sexual/reproductive rights, rights within marriage, inheritance rights, land rights, children's rights, family law)
- Have you voted since you were trained?
- Do you feel you have more voice in matters that concern you?
- Has there been any change in patterns of SGBV in Gisozi as a result of this project?
- Are they likely to be sustainable in the **long term**?
- Have there been changes to policies, practice and attitudes of decision and policy makers to benefit the project's target groups?
- To what extent has the project contributed to the achievement of broader national and international policies, conventions, targets etc in Rwanda? (have you seen any changes in the response to SGBV by the authorities?)
- To what extent has the achievement of the changes/ outcomes been influenced by external context and other factors?

How has the project made this difference?

Approaches used by the implementing organisation:

- What is the overall theory of change for ASPIRE? How were the needs identified? Has it been effective in bringing about **long-term** change? Were there any gaps? (what about advocacy work?)

- What have been the most effective methodologies and approaches used to bring about changes to people's lives? What has worked and what has not? What lessons have been learned? Who have they been shared with?
- How has the type of organisation funded (i.e. local NGO linked with UK-based NGO), helped or hindered the delivery of lasting change?
- How have relationships between partners throughout the relationship chain (looking at UK organisation-Rwandan organisation-co-operatives) helped or hindered the delivery of change /outcomes?
- How effective have the project's management, monitoring, learning and financial systems been? How have they helped or hindered the delivery of lasting change?
- Has the project been cost effective/value for money?

Approaches used by Network Africa

- What has been the relationship with Network Africa, and how have Network Africa's policies and processes helped or hindered the delivery of lasting change? (any capacity building? Strategic planning? M&E?)
- How has Network Africa's approach to grant management (e.g. individual work with grantholders, and learning activities with other funded organisations) helped or hindered the delivery of lasting change?
- Has Network Africa used its organisational assets in a way that helped or hindered the delivery of change (e.g. use of the media, access to decision makers)?
- Are there any other ways in which Network Africa has helped or hindered the delivery of change?

Learning questions

ASPIRE

1. How does ASPIRE's approach specifically identify and address the needs of members?
2. What are the main advantages/disadvantages of former students establishing their own cooperatives?
3. How important is it to include husbands and partners?
4. What is the importance of the relationship with local authorities?
5. What are the main administrative challenges in running ASPIRE? (e.g. human resources, financial management, capacity building/training, attitudinal)
6. What opportunities do you have/have you created to do advocacy around your work?
7. What monitoring and evaluation tools do you have?
8. Can you give case studies of the five different elements of your work?

COOPERATIVES

1. What is the relationship between ASPIRE and the cooperative?
2. Do you have specific indicators to demonstrate your independence from ASPIRE?
3. What further support is required by cooperative members to enable their participation in profitable activity?
4. What are the challenges to making the cooperative sustainable?