

# Liana Strategic Plan

&

# Operating Principles





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# Liana Strategic Plan & Operating Principles

Liana's work is primarily directed by its rules. The rules of Liana are registered with National Board of Patents and Registration of Finland, making Liana a legal entity in Finland. Liana is also registered as an International NGO in the mainland of Tanzania. This document, Liana Strategic Plan & Operating Principles is additional to the rules of Liana and clarifies the main practical aspects of Liana's operations, and is approved by the Board.



## Working to change

The need to reduce poverty, and the associated problems that reduce quality of life, has been widely agreed by international, national and local leaders and politicians. It has also been widely recognised that this cannot be done at the expense of the environment and natural resource base. The United Nations adopted a set of specific targets (Millennium Development Goals) in 2000. While these do not capture all that is important for development of all people, they have been effective in focusing attention on the problems and need for action.

### ***Multi-level action, multiple actors***

Working towards achieving development goals and producing results which are sustainable and equitable requires action at multiple levels. International institutions can change external factors for developing countries, such as trade, aid and security, and can help establish principles that guide national decision making, such as on good governance. At the national level, policies and plans such as national poverty reduction strategies are designed and implemented. At local level there are a myriad of activities that directly affect people, aiming to improve their livelihoods and quality of life, and the environment that they depend on and live in.

These actions are designed and implemented by agencies that operate at many levels, from international bodies such as the UN and development banks, through national governments and NGOs, to those acting at local level. At the local level are both local government institutions and others – traditional institutions, NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs).

### ***Local action and NGOs***

Local NGOs and CBOs can be particularly important. They can have immediate impact on the people they aim to help, for a number of reasons. They operate at the grass root level or have functioning links to the grass root level. They can focus on priorities of local communities. This happens within the framework of national policies if they are locally considered beneficial. They can also voice local concerns leading to improved policy. They are free to design action according to their own ideals. They therefore attract the attention of many development agencies at national and international level. Their activities typically fall into 5 categories:

1. Provision of relief and social services
2. Resource mobilisation (physical and financial)
3. Research and innovation (participatory research and consultation)
4. Human resource development (awareness raising, training)

## 5. Public interest information dissemination (lobbying on policies).

There are very many organisations with these stated aims of local actions to benefit local communities. Tanzania alone has 10000 on its NGO register. Some of these are busy and effective, some are nothing more than a name. However there are local NGOs which are constituted in a way that could make them effective in local action, are driven by ideals and the commitment of their members, but have critical gaps in their capacities that limit their effectiveness.

While there is much variation, local NGOs and the local government and traditional institutes they work with often have gaps in:

- Breadth of experience, limiting the range of ideas that can be brought to solve problems.
- Ability to access and use the current, science based information needed to solve problems and design interventions.
- Skills and experience in planning, obtaining funding, managing and monitoring projects.
- Capacity to recognize benefits from using people who have relevant expertise and ability to find and mobilise these people.
- Organisational structures, functions and attitudes that do not encourage empowering of local communities or ownership of development processes by the local communities

Liana aims to help fill these gaps, allowing local NGOs to be effective in their development initiatives.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the organisation is to use the best proven knowledge to improve the livelihoods of the poor in developing countries and other poor areas while sustaining the environment, emphasising equality and joint responsibility.

To fulfil its purpose the organisation operates

- to meet local development needs by generating, finding and evaluating relevant reliable information
- to enable local organisations and through them local people to use this information by connecting sources and experts
- to follow the livelihood status of the poor, putting forward proposals and initiatives, and giving statements
- to support local practical development work through local development organisations with whom agreements of collaboration have been signed
- to facilitate action by development professionals who have the knowledge, the skills and the vision to develop and implement projects aiming at alleviating poverty

Liana exists to facilitate such action by development professionals who have the knowledge, the skills, the vision and commitment to assist local organisations to develop and implement projects aiming at alleviating poverty and environmental improvement.

## **Funding**

The rules of the organisation describe the sources of funding for Liana activities. These are:

- Membership dues from regular and supporting members
- Donations and gifts
- Funds raised from official and non-official donors for specific activities, and overheads charged on these.
- Voluntary time donated by members.

Liana aims to keep organisational overheads to a minimum by relying on members contributions of time, office space etc. It uses regular members' dues to pay for unavoidable organisational operating costs. Projects have separate administrative and operational funds as approved by a donor. Liana uses gifts and dues from supporting members for identifiable contributions to specific activities meeting the objectives of Liana.

## **Members**

The nature of the organisation and the way it operates determine criteria for different types of membership. In practice regular members:

- must have a desire to contribute to livelihood and environmental development and have a vision of actions which are aligned with the purpose and approach of Liana.
- must have the professional competence and experience to make those contributions.

Liana does not actively seek new members but welcomes membership of individuals who meet these criteria. Individuals who wish to support the aims of Liana but can not become members as described above can become supporting members, as described in the rules.

## **Our Approach**

### ***Supporting local efforts***

The organisation was established to link local development initiatives with expertise, resources, information and knowledge. Liana aims to fill gaps in the capacity of local organisations to meet development objectives. These may be gaps in the organisational structure and functioning, in its capacity to design, implement and manage development activities, or purely gaps in the technical know-how of the most appropriate methods of intervention.

Liana works by supporting the initiatives of communities to help themselves, NGOs and CBOs grounded in those communities being the connection between Liana and ground work. Liana does this in two ways. Liana either:

- a) Applies for funding itself, planning to work with and through one or several local partners, or
- b) Helps a local organisation in planning projects, writing proposals and applying funding; and provides advice and technical information by connecting local organisations to relevant networks and information sources, and by finding, evaluating and synthesising information.

In the first case Liana is the leading organisation (though still not the implementing organisation), ultimately fully accountable for all outcomes, principles followed, use of funds, and both overall and financial reporting to the donor. In the process of planning a Liana collaborative project with a local partner, Liana and the partner sign an Agreement of Intention to work together. When/if the funding comes through, they sign a Memorandum

of Understanding. These agreements will clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each of the signed parties. Agreements between Liana and partners are between the organisations and need to be signed by following the signatory rules of the parties. Liana itself will sign a project agreement with the donor, committing the organisation to delivering on the project plan and following the donor requirements.

The second option should not mean that Liana simply becomes a means for local organisations to access international donors. Liana does not write proposals and apply for funding for other organisations. It assists the local organisation to do so by advising and by providing latest technical information. In this option, even if Liana may provide advice and technical information during the entire project, it does not become a partner. It is the local organisation that bears the ultimate responsibility towards the community and the donor.

The extent of Liana involvement depends on what is needed. Some organisations may just need assistance in, for example, obtaining information on technical options. Others may need guidance in the whole project cycle. Liana will not establish local organisations to fulfil its purpose.

### ***Values and quality***

Liana aims for its support to local organisations to be of the highest quality. Members acting in the name of Liana will do so in a professional manner, only undertaking tasks for which they have necessary skills and experience. They must be able to assess the risks as well as the benefits of proposed actions, and communicate these to partners. They will act with utmost probity and maintain the values of the organisation. These values are:

- Appreciation of best proven knowledge as a basis of all that we do
- Equality
- Honesty
- Efficiency
- Reliability
- Timely delivery
- Respect and appreciation of others independent of their status, ethnicity, and values
- Optimism
- Respect for nature

## **Partners**

### ***Types***

#### **Local NGOs and CBOs**

Liana aims to work with local organisations which are truly functioning to benefit their communities. Such organisations will be:

- Organisations owned by their members.
- Organisations committed to a vision and set of values, and to working with, together, and in collaboration to achieve greater results.
- Committed to improving their performance.
- Organisation that have a form that encourages the development of human potential, and the handling of conflict as a process for development and learning.
- Organisations where learning is encouraged and planned for.

However we realise that there may be organisations which do not meet all these ideals and yet, with Liana's assistance, can bring about development and environmental benefits to communities. Liana will work with such groups when it is judged that the net result is positive, and the organisations are working towards these standards.

### **Others**

Liana will work with other development partners which share the same objectives. It will not seek to compete with other organisations but to complement their efforts. Liana will seek to link local NGOs with other relevant partners without acting as intermediary.

### **Individuals**

In rare cases Liana can agree to work with local professional individuals. In this case contracts and Terms of Reference will be signed between Liana and the individual. These individuals, however, should not have a prominent role in the activities. They can have a short-term role in activities requiring specific skills or knowledge. In practice this means consultants hired to teach in the training components of the projects.

### **Criteria**

Criteria for selecting and agreeing to work with partners are:

- A shared aim of helping solve a specific problem of livelihoods and/or the environment.
- Evidence that the partner aspires to the organisational principles above.
- The partner's legal status.
- The partner's capacity to manage any activities (incl. local administration of the project) that Liana may become accountable for.
- Partners understanding and accepting the risks involved in any actions aimed at generating change.

## **Managing activities**

### ***Approval of activities***

Liana activities are initiated and followed through by members. Liana Board, in consultation with all regular members, prepares an Action Plan for each year. This is approved by the annual general meeting. Any activities outside the approved Action Plan need to be approved by the Board. The Board can decide to consult all Regular members before making a decision.

Project ideas are discussed amongst all the regular members, after which the Board either approves or disapproves the idea. If the idea is considered good then the member does all planning and preparation independently with his/her potential partners, alone or together with other Liana members. Fact-finding and planning travel and other trips will be reported to all regular members (if interestingly written, to all members). Project proposals will be reviewed by two suitable persons within Liana. The Board decides who these persons are. If Liana does not have members from the field of expertise, then at least one reviewer from outside Liana will be sought. The proposal writer submits to the Board the reviewers' report and his/her comments added to it to help the Board decide on the relevance and quality of the proposal before it is submitted to the donor. The proposal writer submits the proposal to the donor and follows up the whole process, but the application letter and the subsequent

agreements need to be signed by two Liana signatories. In general, any binding agreements by Liana are signed by two of the signatories of Liana.

### ***Budgeting and financial management***

The board prepares a budget for approval by the annual general meeting and present annual accounts to the same meeting. All regular members are consulted in the budget preparation in order to incorporate members' interests to the annual budget.

If an activity hasn't been budgeted for and agreed on in the annual meeting, members wishing to use Liana resources for an activity make a request from the Board. The Board will decide to approve it on the basis of the contribution of the expenditure to the objectives of Liana, the ability of the member to use the funds effectively, and the funds available.

### ***Role of Members***

Liana helps fill the gap that often separates knowledge and practical development activities. Liana members' role in the development initiatives that it gets involved in aims at building local capacity. Members help local development organisations and workers become effective and independent. However, while aiming at transferring scientific knowledge to the use of the local partners and building capacity in the whole project cycle, Liana, through its members, aims at supporting groups that allow people to develop and implement their own solutions leading to change.

Liana is an organisation which functions entirely through the efforts of its members. All its activities are initiated and followed through by members. Members contribute through individual and collective initiative. There is no programme beyond that which members contribute. Liana exists to facilitate activities initiated by members. It aims to be open, constructive and supportive of activities members wish to do in the name of Liana, as long as these are aligned with the purpose and values of the organisation. The registered rules of the organisation describe the formal roles of members, the Board and annual meetings.

In any development initiative, members either take the role of a Coordinator & Technical Advisor or an Advisor. These alternative situations are referred to on page 3 in points a and b under Supporting Local Efforts.

- a) Liana member whom the Board has authorised to develop a project (see Approval of Activities), to write the proposal and apply for funding, is expected to become the Coordinator & Technical Advisor and see through the project till the completion of the project. As Liana is committed to stand behind signed agreements with the partner and the donor, and to stand behind plans made with the local community, the Board requires from the member a written statement of commitment prior to the proposal development. Coordination of the project can be partly done distantly. However, if Liana is to meet its organisational commitments and terms of agreements, it requires the member to be fully up-to-date at all times on the progress of the project. This requires frequent on-site visits. In addition to coordination, Liana member's task is to bring latest proven knowledge to its projects, ensure this knowledge is made available to those who need it and ensure it is used. However, Liana does not expect members to become full time field workers responsible for implementing projects. If the member becomes, due to unavoidable circumstances (e.g. long term sickness, serious injury, death) unable to see through his/her project, the Board is obliged, in consultation with the partner organisation, to look for the best possible alternative to fulfil Liana's responsibilities towards the partner, the

donor and the community. This alternative may include a volunteer or another Liana member taking over.

- b) When Liana has decided to assist a local organisation in planning a project and/or by providing advice and latest technical information for its activities, Liana member acts in the capacity of an Advisor. In this case Liana is not formally and/or directly responsible towards the partner, the donor or the community.

Much of the work for Liana of members is voluntary. Financial commitments by Liana will be made according to the annual budgets approved by the annual meetings and project plans. Liana aims to be flexible within the frame of its abilities. It seeks to be open to continually consider responding to new opportunities and needs that may arise. (See Approval of activities)

### ***Communicating***

As the organisation exists to allow the members to put their development experience into practice, Liana encourages discussion among members. However its primary function is not as a discussion forum. Through such discussion members contribute to development of Liana strategies and operating principles and to specific activities. Any member can initiate discussion on a topic. Decisions to adopt operating principles, guides and processes are taken by the Board in response to discussion. The Board can choose to put any issue to a general meeting. Members call on the board any time in writing to arrange a general meeting to discuss a specific issue raised by the members (if one tenth of the members so demand).

In addition to the meetings described in the rules (board meetings, annual and special general meetings), communication is:

- By email or face to face meetings arranged by any members
- Through the web site
- Through circulation of reports, papers and proposals.
- By any other means members choose to organise

Liana members engaged in an activity keep others informed through through circulation of reports etc, which are archived on the web site.

### ***Geographical scope***

Since activities of Liana are determined by members, the geographical scope of Liana work is determined by the interests and experience of those members. If members, through Liana, are to make real contributions to the efforts of local organisations then they need relevant, professional experience, normally including experience of the locations where work will take place.

### ***Scope of work***

The scope of Liana activities is broad, as poverty, livelihoods and environment cover a vast range of topics. Again, the scope is limited by the interests and solid experience of members.

### ***Scale***

The scale of a Liana activity, or of the local project it is engaged with, is determined by the need and ability of Liana to contribute. The criteria for deciding is that there is a 'local' organisation implementing it, meaning an organisation aiming to bring change to specific,

identifiable people and in direct contact with and responsive to the needs of those people. The time scale of activities is likewise determined by the commitment of the individual members and funding available. Liana will not engage in activities in which the members concerned are not committed to 'seeing it through'.

### ***Monitoring in Liana, solving problems***

Monitoring Liana overall performance is closely linked with monitoring projects and other activities. Results, including positive and negative things, successes and failures are honestly reported, and this forms the basis of assessing overall performance and impact. The open nature of discussion between members, together with provisions in the rules will allow problems to be resolved.

### **Success and Moving on**

Liana hopes to be a dynamic organisation that evolves strategies that best meet its purpose. It will judge its success by the extent to which it has an active membership involved in activities which follow its operating principles and contribute to its purpose, leading to demonstrable livelihood and environmental benefits for the poor.