

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. At the same time we know that the systems that support all life on earth – plants, microbes and animals including people – are being threatened by economic, environmental and social changes. This is happening at all scales from the planet as a whole to the local. As a response, in 2016 the United Nations adopted specific targets (Sustainable Development Goals) to guide global development. These go well beyond a focus on poverty to include social, political and environmental targets, but still put human development at the centre.

A holistic view of development recognises that people are part of the ecosystem and are not separate from or opposed to the natural environment. As we seek to influence changes at any scale in desirable directions - a meaning of development – we need to consider all components of the system and not assume human needs are at the centre or the only consideration. While never easy, this is the approach that Liana aspires to take.

Multi-level action, multiple actors

Working towards achieving positive environmental and human well-being changes 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, security and global action on some environmental concerns, and can help establish principles that guide national decision making. At the national level, policies and plans - which are often sectoral and are not based on a holistic view - are designed and implemented. At local level there are a myriad of activities that directly affect the environment and people, aiming to improve human well-being and quality of life, but seldom address both environmental and human needs in a balanced way. 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 and their environment, 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 and on immediate local environmental concerns. 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. 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).
6. Environmental development and rehabilitation and community management of natural resources

There are very many organisations with these stated aims of local actions to benefit local communities and the environment. 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
- Lack of an integrated view and connection to nature and local environments, often because of traditions that see nature as something that is in opposition to people or solely a resource to be utilised.

Liana aims to help fill these gaps, allowing local NGOs to set targets that integrate environmental and human well-being aims and to be effective in their development initiatives.

Purpose

The purpose of the organisation is to function in development cooperation using holistic approaches that combine improving the state of the environment and human well-being.

To fulfil its purpose the organisation operates

1. To meet local environmental and human well-being development needs by generating, finding and evaluating information
2. To enable local organisations and through them local people to use this information by connecting sources and experts
3. To follow the status of the environment and human well-being, putting forward proposals and initiatives, and giving statements
4. To support local practical development work through local organisations with whom agreements of collaboration have been signed
5. To raise awareness of environment and human well-being development issues

Liana exists to facilitate such action by individuals who have the knowledge, the skills, the vision and commitment to assist local organisations to develop and implement projects aiming at improving the state of the environment and human well-being in a balanced way.

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, both monetary and in-kind

- 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 the purpose of the organisation and have a vision of actions which are aligned with the purpose and approach of Liana.
- must have the experience, skills and knowledge to make those contributions.

Liana will recruit new members who meet the requirements and encourages existing members to introduce them. 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 groundwork. Liana does this in three ways. Liana either:

- a) Applies for funding itself or as part of a consortium, planning to work with and through one or several local partners
- 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.
- c) Using funds and donations to work with or support activities of local partners or individuals that are aligned with Liana aims and with whom agreements of collaborations have been written

In the first case Liana is the leading organisation and an implementing partner, 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.

The third option recognises that it is increasingly hard for Liana or local organisations to secure project funding from traditional institutional donors. However funds can be raised through donations from individuals or companies. The income from such donations is unpredictable so they are best suited for supporting activities that can be implemented as and when money becomes available, rather than within a formal project structure. This approach to providing support does not mean standards of quality or accountability are any less. It is designed to allow flexibility and make good use of any donations provided.

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:

- Attention to ecosystems and humans as part of them
- 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

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.
- Organisations that seek to restore, maintain and enhance environments as well as supporting human development needs.

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 with a holistic approach addressing both environmental and human needs.
- 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 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.

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.

The alternative roles for Liana members in development activities are referred to on page 3 in points a, b and c under Supporting Local Efforts. Accordingly, in cases a and b, members take a formal role of a Coordinator & Technical Advisor (a) or an Advisor (b). Depending on the scale of activities in case of c, the role is specified (or left unspecified) together with the Board

- 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 ensure holistic approach of addressing both environmental and human well-being needs, and ensure this approach 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.
- c) Liana member whom the Board has authorised to raise funds through Liana and do specific activities with or through a local partner organisation or an individual is fully responsible for the activities done and funds used. Requirements for the member are as under (a), though a formal positional role titles are not necessarily needed.

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 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 member
- 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 the 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 experience, normally including experience of the locations where work will take place.

Scope of work

The scope of Liana activities is broad, as environmental and human-well-being needs cover a vast range of topics. Again, the scope is defined 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 or individual implementing it, meaning an organisation or individual aiming to bring change to specific, identifiable people or place and in direct contact with and responsive to the needs of those people or that place. 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.