

## ActionAid Uganda - AAU

### Country Director's New Year Message

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**To:** All Staff  
**CC:** The AA Uganda National Governing Board  
**Date:** 06/01/2014  
**Re:** **THE SKY IS THE BEGINNING!**

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It is often said that the 'Sky is the limit'! For ActionAid Uganda, it may just as well, be the beginning. As I welcome you all from a deserved Festive/Holiday Season to yet another year we expect to continue our service to humanity through this incredible organisation, I found it prudent to share with you some retrospective as well as prospective thoughts as below:

### **A Look Back at 2013**

First, I would like to congratulate you all for going through 2013 and the festive season. I am aware that a few staff lost loved ones during this period and I extend sympathies on behalf of the Board, Management and all Staff. For most, it has been a peaceful holiday and we thank God for that too.

Secondly as we all know, 2013 was a great and remarkable year yet again. We recorded many successes in various areas but a few I would like to highlight are:

- **Campaign Success!** The year saw us become one of few countries in the AAI Federation to complete a strategy and launch the Tax Justice/Power Campaign. We also made vital knowledge, technical and resource contributions to other critical civil society wide campaigns notably the effort against the proposed GMO Bill as well success of the Black Monday Movement (BMM) which remains *the* defining face of a determined citizen resolve to bring to an end wanton theft of tax payer's money and donor aid with impunity and without shame.
- **Fundraising Success!** We all knew that 2013 would be a defining year for fundraising given the investments we had made in 2012 and the impending end of a number of projects. By the end of the year, we were celebrating several fundraising successes through various proposals most notably a 1 million Euro grant from the European Commission, a UGX 4.2 Billion grant from the Democratic Governance Facility and an estimated 900,000 Euro annual grant from AADK for the next 4-5 years, to mention three major ones. We must now ensure we deliver to the required levels.
- **AA Uganda SACCO ready to roll!** We are aware of the difficult economic times not just for our supporters across the world, but also for us as citizens and so in 2012, we revived the idea of a Staff SACCO despite a sad experience a few years earlier. At the end of 2013, we successfully elected office bearers and were witness to a start off amount in excess of UGX 150 million. We believe that the SACCO will be a handy resource pool for staff to improve their economic situation starting 2014.
- **A concrete step to AA Uganda's Dream Institutional Home!** After several years of discussion and searching, with the support of the Board, we finally bought a 1 Acre piece of land in a prime area on the road to Entebbe International Airport. We can now start the real work to build our dream Head Office which we hope will be standing in the not so distant future.
- **Recognition and Awards!** As testimony to all the hard work staff, management and Board have put into the organisation this year, we, in addition to getting a clean External Audit also won important awards, most notably the Human Rights and Social Accountability Award for our courageous and determined fight against corruption and for public accountability awarded by the Uganda Human Rights Commission and its UN Partners and the Financial Reporting (FiRE) Awards where we emerged the best NGO in Uganda following a Runners up position we achieved in 2012.

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As expected 2013 wasn't a year without challenges and two critical ones encountered were: a) staff turnover and unceremonious exist of some of former staff colleagues - 4 out of staff departures were involuntary; b) contract management remained a challenge especially for projects and in particular absorption and utilization of donors funds largely explained by partnership challenges as well as lack of strict adherence to agreed work plans.

We thank the Board for standing by Management, advising and providing effective oversight. The constructive relationship between Management and Board is probably one of the most critical reasons for all the progress we make as an organisation.

### Looking forward to the year ahead!

As a learning organisation, taking stock of our achievements, reflecting on challenges and changes in the environment, we must look forward with optimism and hope for our very existence as an organisation is not so much about us but about the service we render to humanity. To be able to deliver on our mandate, I would like to outline the following critical areas of focus in 2014.

- a) **Performance Management:** In the course of 2013 there were instances of lapses in line management of staff performance as well as individual's staff accountability for their functions. This is an urgent and critical area of focus for 2014 if we are to strengthen our results focus. I expect all Line Managers and respective staff to treat this as a core deliverable of the year. To kick this off, we must prioritize completion of all appraisals by **15<sup>th</sup> of January 2014** with measurable targets for each staff for 2014. We must progressively strengthen a performance culture in AA Uganda.
- b) **Strengthen Projects and Contracts Management:** Trends in Sponsorship income and Regular Giving over the years show a consistent decline. As already noted in our CSP IV we must diversify our efforts and projects are becoming a major source of income and programming as seen in the over 30 projects at present. We must demonstrate greater competence to manage big projects, but also sustain the gains within the current donor fraternity that is proud of our work. To provide greater leadership for this area, Management in its last CMT Meeting created a position of Projects Manager to oversee all projects and we shall be advertising for this position immediately.
- c) **Consolidate Fundraising Efforts:** While the gains over the years must be celebrated, in the same breadth, we must do more in 2014 to consolidate. A very urgent priority this year is the completion of a robust Fundraising Strategy that will guide fundraising, an undertaking that every staff will contribute to in one way or another with clear targets as already communicated last year.
- d) **Develop a Business Case for AA Uganda's Home:** We have come a long way in acquiring the space for the dream home as mentioned earlier. Working with the Board and the IS, we shall make a compelling Business Case and search for appropriate financing options for this enterprise.

### Expectations and Binding Commitments

As I conclude this maiden message to you all, I would like to reiterate some expectations of different functions and units.

- Overall and for all staff, units and even partners, we expect a strict adherence to and timely implementation of the approved Plans and Budgets. To this end, we must as a matter of urgency complete the IASL coordinated effort to have our Operational Plan over and above the Plans and Budgets completed by **15<sup>th</sup> January 2014**.
- **Sponsorship** - we expect better supporter care, timely and quality reporting as well as strengthening the RaMH Model which we must to document for federation-wide learning.

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- **IASL** - completion of the Management Information System (MIS). In the same way I expect a rollout of our robust M&E Framework and System.
- **Programmes** - better partner relations and support, quality programming and innovations especially at LRP level, improved reporting, documentation and communication, better performance of projects and institutionalising knowledge management.
- **Communications** - improved documentation and engagement on online platforms such as the StoriesHub, Hive especially the AAI page, keeping our website up to-date and exciting as well as a positive and rewarding engagement with the media, including social media platforms like face-book.
- **Administration** - efficiency standards in all processes and procedures to avoid unexplainable bureaucratic delays. The HROE Director will share guidelines to this effect. We also expect better communication, courtesy and responsiveness to all external inquiries to ActionAid.
- **Fundraising** - improved contract management and new long term grants especially for Mission Areas 1 and 2. All this must be guided by the urgent completion of our Fundraising Strategy.
- **Finance** - timely response and greater support to enable compliance as well improved financial reconciliations to inform expenditure decisions by various units.
- **Audit** - improved and more constructive relationships with auditable units as well as a special focus on assessing the quality of our relationship with partners especially at LRP level.

Finally, as CMT we commit to the following for which we shall be held accountable, not just by staff but also the Board.

- Uphold the values of ActionAid especially at a time when internal and external scrutiny of our organisation and civil society is likely to increase. There should be no compromise in our values and to this end we call upon staff to be open and report any concerns they have about our decisions.
- Strengthen shared leadership and consultative decision making especially on critical matters concerning the organisation without compromising efficiency in decision making. We commit to timely updates of CMT decisions and discussions as appropriate.
- We commit to do more to build a skilled and motivated staff through exploring ways to improve staff welfare, greater team building & support and continuing to implement the staff retention strategy.

Finally, I would like to remind all staff that we have an incredible group of Advisors and Inspirators who are at our and partners' disposal. We have to respect, harness and make the most of this important resource and also do everything to make their time as rewarding and fulfilling in our beloved country.

I wish you all a very Productive and Truly Rewarding 2014!

For God and my Country



Arthur LAROK  
**COUNTRY DIRECTOR - ActionAid Uganda**

*January 6<sup>th</sup> 2013*