Partner Satisfaction Survey

2012

By Wonder Phiri. January 2013
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Executive summary
Diakonia Zimbabwe commissioned a Partner Satisfaction Survey which was carried out by an independent consultant between December 2012 and January 2013. The survey aims at measuring the degree of satisfaction of civil society organisations in Zimbabwe regarding the work of Diakonia. More specifically, through the survey Diakonia sought to measure their partners’ satisfaction so as to respond more effectively to partners needs, ensure consistency in practice of the values that guide the programme, increase the transparency of the relationship between Diakonia and its partners and promote a more balanced power relationship and accountability towards partners.

This report presents opinions expressed by Diakonia Zimbabwe partners during the partner satisfaction survey. Board member representatives and management staff from 7 partner organisations participated in the survey. Respondents were asked to give their opinions using Likert\(^1\) scales questionnaire and through key informant interviews. On the whole partner organisations expressed an interest in the exercise and were free to express their opinion since the survey was conducted by an independent person. Two of the responding organisations remarked that they will attempt a similar exercise with their target group and propose to their funding partners to carry out a similar survey.

The survey respondents’ expressed their views on how Diakonia Zimbabwe performs in relation to the following categories; Partnership values, strategy and autonomy; communication; problem solving and decision making; contractual obligations and responsibilities; Knowledge and appreciation of partner work; and support to partners.

The subjective responses in this survey contribute towards understanding partnership issues for Diakonia and its partners. Interviewees selected their choice on each question based on their experience with Diakonia in the past year but also in some instances referred to previous Diakonia partnership period as well as to experiences they have with other International NGOs. It emerged from the interview process that organisations board members in some cases are relatively new and they are not very familiar with the details of the partnership.

Within development work, there has been on going discussions around the issue of partnership, can there be genuine donor/recipient partnership between Northern and Southern NGOs? The survey responses highlight that Diakonia Zimbabwe has made great strides to foster genuine partnership. During the interview process none of the respondents selected answers in the partly disagree and fully disagree category.

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1 A Likert scale is a psychometric scale commonly used in questionnaires. When responding to a Likert questionnaire item, respondents specify their level of agreement to a statement
Report Findings

Introduction: The partner satisfaction survey sought to measure the degree of satisfaction of civil society organisations in Zimbabwe regarding the work of Diakonia. As part of strengthening its partnership work in Zimbabwe, Diakonia wants to measure partners’ satisfaction in relation to identified key issues so as to respond more effectively to the needs of partners, ensure consistency in practice of the values that guide the programme, increase the transparency of the relationship between Diakonia and its partners and promote a more balanced power relationship and accountability towards partners.

The report is divided into 3 sections. The first section outlines the survey process incorporating background, the partners consulted and survey methodology. In the second section, the report presents the survey findings combining the qualitative input from the partners as well as graphic presentation of the quantitative information. The last section presents the survey conclusions and recommendations.

Section 1: Survey process

Survey background- The partner satisfaction survey commissioned by Diakonia Zimbabwe was carried out between December 2012 and January 2013. Diakonia currently works in partnership with 7 organisations (two of whom are not receiving funding) in addressing issues of strategic peace building and gender. It works on the assumption that the partnership between Diakonia and its partners is one based on genuine partnership, equitable relationships, solidarity and mutual respect of each other. Whilst partners have been in partnership with Diakonia for varying years (at least 50% have been partners since 2012), the survey made reference to 2012 partnership experiences only. However partners proposed that in order to arrive at a rating for satisfaction, in some instances they had to make reference to their pre 2012 experience with Diakonia. The survey was undertaken by an independent consultant.

Survey Purpose- To provide Diakonia with evidence based information that clearly shows the quality of service provided by Diakonia to its partners based on the information and findings provided in confidence to the consultant by Diakonia partners.

Survey tool- A structured questionnaire comprising 21 questions was administered to 7 Diakonia partners. Six of the questions were directed at the partner board members and 15 questions were directed at the organisation’s management or secretariat. The questionnaire was pre tested with a Diakonia partner and after taking into consideration some minor changes, it was applied to the remaining partners. The feedback from testing the questionnaire resulted in the interview process being open to more participants rather than carrying out interviews with Board Chairperson and Director as originally envisaged.

Survey Methodology- In order to ensure independence of the process, the consultant made direct contact with all partners and set up appointments. The consultant sent the questionnaire to all Diakonia partners together with survey background information prior to the interviews. During the face to face interviews respondents were asked to elaborate on their choices and it enabled the partner and consultant to clarify the questionnaire as well as allow for verifying of information gathered from other respondents. The consultant carried out 5 face to face interviews with key informants using the
structured questionnaire. Two partners submitted completed questionnaires and submitted via email. (Annex Table 1, Survey respondents). The survey respondents’ expressed their views on how Diakonia Zimbabwe performs in relation to the following categories; Partnership values, strategy and autonomy; communication; problem solving and decision making; contractual obligations and responsibilities; Knowledge and appreciation of partner work; and support to partners. The survey responses were analysed according to a pre designed response analysis guide (Annex table 2) where survey questions were grouped to elicit information on key partnership issues.

**Confidentiality**- The partners were assured of the confidentiality of the process. At the commencement of each interview, the consultant explained purpose of the survey, the information gathering process and presentation of results. Partners were quite at ease to share information and this seems to emanate from the fact that Diakonia already has exchange platforms and forums for interacting with partners.

**Limitations**-there were instances where partners had misunderstood the questionnaire but during the face to face interview clarification was made. It emerged from the survey that some of the board members in partnerships are new and therefore not conversant with the partnership in detail. It seems that some Boards may not really be aware of detailed partnership information.
Section 2: Survey findings

Introduction. This section presents information gathered from respondents during the survey. The information is grouped and presented in six different categories (Annex Table 2). A graphic view of each question responses is presented alongside qualitative remarks made by the respondents.

2.1 Partnership values, strategy and autonomy

The findings presented here are responses of organisations board members to issues of how Diakonia performs in relation to partnership values; how Diakonia assists their organisation attain their strategic objectives and how Diakonia respects organisations autonomy. Board members (67%) indicated that they are clear on the partnership expectations. Before commencement of the partnership with Diakonia they were briefed by management to understand who Diakonia is and their expectations. Some board members attended initial partnership meetings involving Diakonia staff. Besides these, there are formal and informal opportunities to meet between Diakonia and its partners during the project implementation phase and these assist in keeping the partnership expectations in check. Management or secretariat usually informs board members about partner issues with Diakonia.

Based on the experience during the past year and considering that there is a new relatively new team at Diakonia, 33% of the board members felt that there is still room for strengthening Diakonia and partner organisations expectations and time is required to understand each other.

The partnership with Diakonia goes beyond funding. Again 67% of the organisations expressed satisfaction with the capacity strengthening interventions Diakonia has undertaken. These include supporting the carrying out of organisational assessments which one respondent described as ‘an eye opener’. Further Diakonia support for monitoring and evaluation, fundraising, finance as well as project management was instrumental in helping organisations achieve their goals. According to respondents, besides financial assistance the partnership has been of tremendous help in building capacity and ability to implement projects effectively.

The partner organisations (67%) fully agree that Diakonia shows a high degree of respect to partnership contracts and agreements. This again starts from the initial partnership meetings mentioned above. When the signatures are finally put on paper, there is usually a lot of discussion that has taken place. One respondent remarked that ‘In our previous experience, we have found some funding agencies disrespectful and they dictated issues to us. When we engaged Diakonia we were a bit concerned if they were not trying to patronise us, but with time we realised that their values are genuine’
The partly satisfied respondents (33%) felt that the partnership contracts are drawn by the donors. These are cast in stone and are in some cases universal. There is therefore little contribution partners can make. The best they can do is to abide by the contractual obligations or risk losing support.

67% of the respondents fully agree that Diakonia respects decisions made by partner organisations. Reference was made to situations where partners bring forward their suggestions and through a discussion process a compromise is usually reached. The way and the spirit in which this is all done does not leave partners feeling that their decisions have been undermined.

Throughout the survey discussions, partner organisations referred to the fact that Diakonia and partners are different entities. For instance partner organisations include a number of administrative, financial, personnel and programme costs in their proposals to Diakonia. On the other hand Diakonia might have a different perspective on the proposal budgets and the components the project should focus on. Respondents indicated that joint decision making is one area that is difficult in a partnership as each party comes with experiences and expectations in a partnership. However organisations appreciate that this is a partnership and therefore decision making is about compromise.

Given the sensitive operating environment in Zimbabwe, 67% of the respondents indicated that they feel safe and confident working with Diakonia. Diakonia’s openness and communication with partners is a big contributor to the confidence partners have in them. Part of the respondents (33%) partly agreed mentioning that it is the first time they are in partnership with Diakonia and they need time to understand Diakonia, how they do things. Feeling safe and confident is a long time process that is made possible by both parties.

In response to the question, ‘In one word, how would you describe how your organisation feels in relation to Diakonia?’ all the respondents rated themselves as partners in relation to Diakonia. This emanates from the fact that they have common organisational interests with Diakonia. Another factor that makes this a partnership is that Diakonia practices solidarity whenever organisations face various challenges. Furthermore the respondents qualified their choice by pointing out that Diakonia has shown partnership features through its interest in building capacity, good donorship and maintaining its physical presence in Zimbabwe at a time when other funders are watching the political situation.

### 2.2 Communication

Respondents expressed the feeling that Diakonia has an efficient and satisfactory communication culture. The open door policy practiced by the Diakonia staff makes it possible for partners to call in any time and discuss partnership and programme issues. According to a respondent the Diakonia management is ‘generous with communication, going beyond what is normal in a partnership relationship’. Another respondent commented ‘Diakonia sends correspondence or apologies if a deadline has not been met.’ Figure 1 below indicates that 71% of the respondents are very satisfied with the timely manner in which Diakonia handles communication.
29% of the respondents are partly satisfied with regards Diakonia meeting deadlines. Their sentiment is that the issue of meeting deadlines is dependent on both parties. For example, respondents accepted that they have a part to play in ensuring that funds disbursement is done on time and with better understanding of systems and procedures and improved dialogue the issue of deadlines is not expected to be a problem in the partnership. Respondents also felt that there are instances where they have experienced communication delays partly due to departmental challenges within their own organisations.

2.3 Problem solving and decision making
According to 43% of the respondents in Figure 2 below, in the period under review Diakonia takes into consideration partners views during decision making. Respondents remarked that previously there have been areas of disagreement regarding issues e.g. finance and programming. This has since improved. 29% of the respondents noted that Diakonia is guided by their internal organisational rules when it comes to decision making. However they are flexible, but the bottom line is that there are things they can not change since they have a mandate to fulfill to their back donor. It is common that Diakonia does accept partner suggestions through negotiation and comes up with satisfactory settlement on issues.
29% of the respondents do not agree or disagree remarking that there are instances where they are not comfortable with certain suggestions and would prefer not to be pushed into what they don’t subscribe to. Among the examples given is the discussion of submitted budgets. In most cases the final approved budget is a compromise. Whilst respondents acknowledged that they can not have all the funds they want, they remarked that Diakonia has sometimes involuntarily made decisions on their behalf.

Figure 3 above indicates that 43% of the respondents fully agree that Diakonia is quick to fix their mistake. In response to this question, respondents made reference to their past Diakonia experience.
Previously there were times when Diakonia did not accept responsibility for their mistake however the situation has since improved. 29% of the respondents did not agree or disagree as they have not encountered situations where Diakonia has made a mistake.

![Figure 4](image)

According to the survey respondents (86%), Diakonia staff invests a lot of time to understand the organisations’ they partner with. Respondents feel that Diakonia is genuinely concerned about their problems and solutions are offered from a practical point of view. Some of the solutions suggested e.g. training of staff has been based on joint discussion and analysis. One respondent remarked that Diakonia is ‘one of the few partners that actually sat down with us and tried to understand the nature of our organisation and work’. Diakonia looks at programme issues in a holistic manner, for example there are cases where Diakonia has facilitated linking partner organisations with other funding agencies. In some cases Diakonia has facilitated linkages with other Civil Society Organisations for networking and learning purpose. 14% of the respondents partly agreed and they acknowledged that it is too hectic for a small Diakonia team to respond efficiently and sensitively to problems arising in partner organisations.

### 2.4 Contractual obligations and responsibilities

Survey respondents (83%) fully agreed that Diakonia contractual obligations and other rules are clear to understand. Diakonia’s open door policy enables partners to seek clarification around issues of contractual obligations. Some of the partners indicated that they have worked with Diakonia for a while and therefore they understand the contractual obligations, rules and guidelines. Besides this Diakonia staff assists with the partnership induction.

17% of the respondents partly agree as they have found out that misunderstandings arise especially during implementation phase. A respondent gave an experience where Diakonia has drawn their attention to a particular area in the agreement that they have overlooked. One respondent felt that though the guidelines are clear, there needs to be shared understanding of the contractual documents
within partner organisations. Another respondent remarked that based on their experience with another donor and in order to minimise misunderstandings, communication regarding contractual documents should be documented by both parties.

Figure 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Does your organisation find Diakonia’s contractual obligations and other rules and guidelines clearly formulated and easy to understand?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>80</td>
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<tr>
<td>60</td>
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<tr>
<td>40</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Fully agree | Partly agree

In Figure 6 below, 86% of the respondents fully agreed that Diakonia is clear about its programme in Zimbabwe. They cite instances where at the beginning of the partnership, Diakonia makes its intentions clear and by signing the contractual documents, partners are actually relating to Diakonia’s objectives in Zimbabwe. A respondent remarked that Diakonia has not shifted goal posts during the implementation phase. 14% of the respondents partly agree, remarking that funding organisations have a mandate from their home countries. It is not always possible to know the entire programme intentions of a funding agency apart from what they decide to tell you.

Figure 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Is Diakonia’s work well-intentioned in the implementation of the programme?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
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<td>60</td>
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</table>

Fully agree | Partly agree
There were mixed sentiments on this question. Respondents acknowledged that funding is just one component of a partnership and that its availability or non-availability has an impact on their project. In Figure 7 above, 43% of the respondents fully agree that Diakonia contractual demands are fair compared to the funding they provide. On the other hand, 57% partly agree. Respondents cited the fact that when they submit proposals to Diakonia, they have an outcome as stipulated in their strategic plans. They also are aware that the final funding approval rests with Diakonia. However, they remarked that changes in funding amounts mean that the organisation is not able to achieve its desired outcome. One respondent pointed out that Diakonia places stringent financial and administrative demands on the organisation but the money they set aside for administration costs is meager.

2.5 Knowledge and appreciation of partners' work

In Figure 8 below, respondents (71%) fully agree that Diakonia staff has knowledge and appreciation of partner work and ‘their ability to sit with us enables them to know us better’ – respondent. Other opportunities arise for example during monitoring visits that allow them to get to know partners better. During these visits to the partner organisations Diakonia staff takes time to meet some of the staff involved in implementing the Diakonia funded project. This acts as a moral booster for partner staff.

In order for Diakonia to know and understand organisations, the organisations must open up. Respondents (29%) partly agree that Diakonia knows all about them. One respondent remarked that ‘Diakonia is still to fully appreciate our structures and the nature of our work’. There have been cases where partnership strains have existed before. Diakonia is aware of this. In such cases partners felt that they are trying to shake off this negative image and hopefully it will not impact negatively the current and future Diakonia support.
Figure 9 below indicates 57% of the respondents fully agree that Diakonia knows and understands their financial and administrative procedures. During the discussions, respondents pointed out that each organisation has its own financial and administrative procedures. By entering into a partnership with any funding partner it means trying to co manage two independent financial systems. For instance, there are situations where some of the partner organisations have more than one funding partner. They explained that their challenge is to work out how they retain their own system and yet respond efficiently to the funding agency’s financial guidelines.

Figure 9
Respondents noted that the area of financial reporting is one where more support and engagement can be given.

2.6 Support to partners
Respondents commented that Diakonia carries out monitoring visits on agreed periods. Partners see these as capacity building and solidarity visits. According to a respondent, ‘there is no element of witching hunting in Diakonia partner visits’. Respondents feel that Diakonia does not only come to see, they are responsible enough in that they give feedback either during the visits or later through a visit report. ‘They don’t go behind our back and talk bad about us. We get to know it from them’ – respondent.

Among 57% of the respondents who partly agree in Table 10 below, they remarked that compliance visits are sometimes too frequent. Partner organisations feel that there is need to strike a balance between visits and how they impact on the partnership. According to the respondents, the more frequent the visits the less it becomes a partnership.

In Figure 11 below, 57% of the respondents expressed that the Diakonia staff are well experienced in gender and peace building. The feedback that partner organisations get during visits or when they send their reports is an indicator that Diakonia staff knows what they are doing. Respondents (43%) however commented that it is impossible for the Diakonia team to support all aspects of the partner projects hence the outsourcing of work to consultants.
With regards to training, courses and seminars, Figure 12 below indicates that respondents (71%) fully agree that what has been provided so far has been useful. Respondents commented that Diakonia consults partners and makes use of assessments done by consultants to come up with training suggestions. The interaction with Diakonia consultants and Diakonia staff during assessment, visits and other studies is on its own a capacity building intervention. Respondents remarked that the gender and peace building as well as security management workshops were timely and relevant. However some 29% of the respondents felt that the workshop content especially on security management could have been tailor made to suit the local context.

Whilst the training support is appreciated, 29% of respondents partly agree remarking that there is room to improve on coordinating the meetings. They commented that as partners they have other tasks to complete, they therefore need sufficient invitation time from Diakonia. Others mentioned that they are short staffed and are unable to provide the number of training participants without compromising their project work.
Diakonia engages consultants to assist partner organisations improve their programme implementation as well as strengthen their financial and administrative systems. As indicated in figure 13 below the assistance from the consultants has been useful to cover the gap where Diakonia staff is unable to support. Some 29% do not agree or disagree as they felt the time spent with consultant does not warrant them to comment on this aspect.

The respondents felt that consultants who have visited their organisation understand the local context. This is useful as it enables a deeper analysis of situation and also the consultant can suggest practical recommendations.
Figure 14 below indicates that 71% of respondents fully agree that Diakonia trainings are well organised. There are however some 29% who partly agree. Respondents noted that sometimes the invitation and timing of the trainings clashes with their other internal processes and they end up sending whoever is available. This is not beneficial to both parties. They proposed that Diakonia drafts an annual planning table indicating events where partner participation is required.

![Figure 14](image)

### 2.7 General Comments
Survey respondents expressed appreciation that Diakonia leads by example. The noted especially the teamwork evident at the country office and one respondent is looking at trying out the office culture/structure in their own organisation. Partners appreciated the survey as a useful exercise that few donors are willing to undertake. They expressed hope that the findings will help Diakonia to improve services. Another remark is that Diakonia is leading the way to show that 'partnership is different from donorship.' Diakonia has put in place forums where partners meet to compliment their strengths in areas such as project planning and financial management. The fact that Diakonia allows partner organisations to plan partnership meetings is a step towards increasing ownership.
Section 3: Conclusions
The survey indicated a high appreciation of the work that Diakonia has carried out in the last year. As indicated earlier, this is the first time that the survey has been conducted with the partners. There were no benchmarks and in some instances partners made reference to their past relationship with Diakonia.

Partners are at different stages of development and there is need to continuously gain information on the priority needs of partners. Partner board members are not always well informed about the partnership developments.

Recommendations
The recommendations are based on the discussions held with survey respondents. It is the intension of this report to give recommendations that are not partner specific. At a general level it will be useful to carry out the same exercise with the same partners in a year’s time and compare the results.

1. **Partnership values, strategy, autonomy** - A lot of interaction happens between Diakonia and partner organisations secretariat. There is need to explore how partner board members can access partnership information so that they can contribute towards policy issues.

2. **Communication** - Information about forthcoming training needs to go out in time. On the other hand, partner organisations also need to improve their internal information sharing systems or procedures so that those targeted by the workshop/training invitations receive them on time. Partners' should consciously spare time for capacity building as this is emphasised by Diakonia.

3. **Problem solving and decision making** – Partner organisations agree that Diakonia uses a consultative approach in problem solving and decision making. There is need to share information/explanatory notes whenever Diakonia takes a decision perceived to be adverse by a partner. In turn partners should give feedback to Diakonia whenever they feel Diakonia has made an adverse decision.

4. **Contractual obligations and responsibilities** – Partners acknowledged that Diakonia contractual documents and obligations are not too difficult to follow. In order to minimise reporting hurdles, it is necessary in some cases for organisations to ensure that all staff members are conversant with Diakonia’s reporting expectations.

5. **Knowledge and appreciation of partner work** – This is a time consuming task that cannot be delegated to external persons. Diakonia can schedule ‘get to meet the partner/board members’ during scheduled board meetings.

6. **Partner support** – Diakonia and consultants have been doing remarkable work to support partners. The challenge is to always ensure that the support is timely and relevant. For example assessment and other reports recommendations need to be followed up.
## Annexes

### Table 1: Survey respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of partner</th>
<th>Office</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silveira House</td>
<td>Harare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth Empowerment Trust</td>
<td>Harare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Christian Movement of Zimbabwe</td>
<td>Harare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa Community Publishing Development Trust</td>
<td>Harare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe Council of Churches</td>
<td>Harare</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe Christian Alliance</td>
<td>Bulawayo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denis Hurley Peace Institute</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
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### Table 2: Survey categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of enquiry</th>
<th>Survey questions responding to area of enquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partnership values, strategy, autonomy</td>
<td>1,2,4,5,6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>1,2,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem solving and decision making</td>
<td>3,10,14</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contractual obligations and responsibilities</td>
<td>5,11,12,3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and appreciation of partner work</td>
<td>4,6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support to partners</td>
<td>7,8,9,13,15</td>
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