



John Cropper on PMD Pro

Introduction



John Cropper is Global Programme Co-ordinator for Oxfam, currently overseeing Oxfam's 'Raise Her Voice' initiative. Running in 17 countries, the programme helps women around the world who are denied basic human rights. In this

article, John talks to Leah Radstone and Kate Winter from APMG-International about PMD Pro, a new certification for project managers working in NGOs/developing economies.

Can you tell us how the idea for PMD Pro came about?

The idea for PMD Pro came from LINGOs (Learning in NGOs), a consortium on international NGOs that came together to share learning resources and experiences - their members include Oxfam, Christian Aid, Save the Children, Care, Habitat for Humanity, Catholic Relief Services, World Vision and many others. Rather than having each organization develop and deploy their own materials, by working together they could reduce cost and improve quality. LINGOs also became a place where private-sector companies that wanted to support the work of NGOs could work with a single entity and know their contribution was being leveraged across many organizations.

As they explored common needs, Project Management capacity building came up as the highest priority. The "product" of NGOs is project management - they receive funds and they manage projects to achieve the goals of the community and donors. Yet little emphasis had been placed on making sure the technical experts in Health, Agriculture, Livelihoods, MicroFinance, etc knew the practice of professional project management. They were excellent in their specialism but hadn't been exposed to best practices in planning and implementation, for example.

We set up a working group which later became PM4NGOs and I was the Oxfam representative. The working group met virtually over a few months and then, thanks to funding from PMI, came together in Baltimore in mid-2007. We started to put a strategy together, thinking about what we wanted to achieve for beneficiaries, how money could best be utilized, and how donor organizations could achieve more for their intended recipients. Above all, we want to maximize the value of project investments - for the people making the investments and for those who should be receiving the value i.e. people living in poverty.

As part of our efforts, I started the Linked In Group for PM4NGOs at the end of 2008; it was a lot of work at the beginning but now the group has a life of its own. It currently has around 800 members and is growing all the time. It has been an invaluable source of contacts, help and advice. We were clear that we needed to test our ideas and so we developed the curriculum for what was to become PMD Pro. We trained about 250 people around the world and the feedback we got was encouraging. Our aim was to include and involve our partners and the people working at grass roots level as well as those at the top. We didn't want the certification to be imposed on people - it was important they could see the benefit themselves.

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"We want to maximize the value of project investment"

We came into contact with The APM Group in March 2009 and by September we were in a position to launch the idea of certification. The Project Management Summit took place in Washington and London. The aim of the Summit was to maximize input before we began writing the manual and for feedback after we had a draft. 175 people from over 75 organizations participated, including organizations from the private sector and professional societies. The manual was written by the end of 2009. We started the pilots and received a warm reception from the NGOs which took part.



How many people have qualified in PMD Pro now?

We've now had over a hundred candidates take the qualification. The Inter-American Development Bank is funding LINGOs to train local project managers working in Haiti. There is so much to do in Haiti – a million people there are still living under canvass a year after the earthquake.

In Southern Africa, World Vision has plans to train one thousand people. Their regional director has a great vision to ensure World Vision's focus is set clearly on its stakeholders – the people who need help most. PMD Pro is all about delivery so it dovetails well with that vision.

What benefits does PMD Pro bring?

Although there are well established project management qualification schemes in use throughout the world, we thought a contextualized certification for NGOs could make a real difference.

If project managers in NGOs understand their projects in terms of time, cost and scope then they are on their way to managing projects successfully. We have an absolute imperative to use funds well. If, for example, it costs £1 to give someone clean drinking water for a day, this means that every pound wasted translates into people without clean drinking water. Another way to look at it, is that if a project improve its performance by 1%, 2% or 5%, this means that millions of pounds are freed up which can be used to help those who need it the most.

“The main aim of PMD Pro is to deliver something useful to frontline staff”

PMD Pro is about building generic capacity. Often capacity building for local NGOs involves developing local partners' ability. If they are able to do the jobs themselves it means they can operate independently and sustainably in the future. PMD Pro is an important part of that because it focuses on understanding the nuts and bolts of project delivery and helping Project Managers and organizations to do what they say will do.

We have always sought to provide something that was appropriate, accessible and affordable. There has been “out of the box” project management training for NGOs in the past – it doesn't work because it isn't appropriate and people have seen it as irrelevant. PMD Pro is 100% contextualized to international development. It needs to be accessible and so it is web enabled. Pretending that NGOs and especially local NGOs will be able to pay for people to travel to other countries to take face-to-face training or go to exam centres is utopian. They can't and won't. PMD Pro materials are downloadable free. The practice exam is on the web and free. The fee rate for certification is designed to be affordable for even local NGOs – local NGO staff can do the certification for US \$20/person. I hope this is as inclusive as possible.

My programme, Raising Her Voice – has a project in Pakistan, which I have just visited. The project is working with women's groups to ensure women have ID cards, can access resources and are organized and able to advocate for the changes they want. Poor women and children here have access to very little and so we need to do as much as we can for them. PMD Pro could help Project Managers in many different contexts deliver on their promises. It helps Project Managers understand what they need to deliver, when they need to deliver it and how much it will cost.

What's the future for PMD Pro?

Level 1 for PMD Pro is available now - people can take a sample paper or live exam online. The qualification is designed to be accessible everywhere in the world – and it is affordable too. There is lots of information available on www.pm4ngos.org. This includes resources to help staff pass the certification. The manual is available free. This is an important principle. We have worked really hard to develop something that is available at the very cheapest rates possible and learning materials are free of charge.

We are now scoping Level 2. We are looking at how we do project governance. We want to bring people up to international PM Standards such as CAPM or PRINCE2 Foundation and PMD Pro2 will include an international standard but it also needs to be a bridge to them.

We're hoping to be able to translate PMD Pro into key languages so that local partners can make the most of it.

Interestingly, the World Vision project managers in Zambia asked about starting up a professional association. One exists in Zambia, but there are very few in least developed countries. We are now talking to professional bodies about how to set up local associations. This could be a very positive way to encourage professionalization of project management in our sector.

Level 3 will be about a higher level of internationally recognized certification (PRINCE2® Practitioner or PMP®) and an assessment of a portfolio of project management work. We still need to think about how this will work on a practical level throughout the world.

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The First PMD Pro Level 1 Graduating Class with Roger Steele and Eric Berg of LINGOS