

Leadership in the FK Youth Programme

A study of how the leadership component affects participants, partners and communities

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Final Report

03.02.2015



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1 Introduction

1.1 Summary

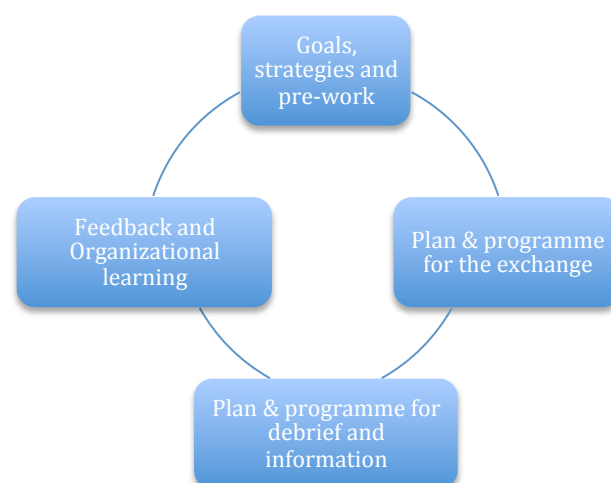
The Fredskorpset (FK) Youth Programme aims at developing young leaders to take responsibility and create positive change in their lives and their communities. By giving young people in Norway and in developing countries the opportunity to experience each other's realities, FK believes that the world becomes a little more just when people get to know each another and create values together. FK Youth Programme's main method of reaching these goals is to develop the participants' leadership skills, in order to equip them as change agents.

This study has explored the leadership component of the FK Youth Programme and analysed how the component in fact affects – or may affect – people, organizations and communities, and thus contribute to positive changes.

1.1.1 Drivers

Before we highlight the effects, we will introduce two core drivers that need to be in place in order to achieve maximum effect from the FK Youth Programme. Firstly, we found that participants need to be able to meet, live and tolerate the 'otherness' that arises from living in a cultural setting, which, in many ways, is extremely different from the person's everyday life at home. This does not mean that all participants need to have a certain personality in order to attend the programme. However, being open towards 'otherness' definitely increases the effect of participating in the programme. Secondly, we found that there needs to be some level of professionalism among the partner organizations in order for them to see any major effects of the programme. Partner organizations need: clarity of goals, a strategy for recruitment of participants, concrete plans and content of the exchange period, and the following information work. There is a clear connection between the level of professionalism at the partner level and the effects of the exchange programme on participants and the community.

Strategies and planning needed at an organization level in order to benefit from the exchange programme:



1.1.2 Effects

At an individual level, the participation in the FK Youth programme **equips the participants as leaders**. In particular, there are three leadership skills that are being improved through the programme: a) the ability to take

even further charge of their own life, b) the ability to achieve and adopt a relativistic leadership style and, c) due to the two already mentioned, they develop more efficient communication skills.

Participating in the Programme increases the participants' self-esteem, although this is seldom realized before the Programme has ended. This affects the participants in a fundamental way. People get a clearer perception of who they are, which values are of importance and what kind of future they want for their lives. Through increased self-esteem, participants acquire inner strength, an asset for leaders everywhere.

The Programme further enhances a relativistic leadership style. Over time, participants realize that the initial perceptions of otherness weren't only the definition of the unknown, but also the key to perform better leadership. The participants learn that diversity is not only something that makes leadership difficult, but also something that must be taken into consideration in order to lead. The increased skill of cultural sensitivity thus turns into a relativistic leadership style. Cultural sensitivity also improves the participants' communication skills. The participants learn to listen and to not take sides; both are essential leadership skills in order to deal with a diverse group of people with varied, and often contradicting, views and values.

Whether the programme has any effects on the organization depends on the organization. If there are no concrete institutional goals and strategies for joining the Programme, the benefits will most probably not appear either. Those who have clear goals have all experienced positive effects. The most common institutional goal for the institutions is to use the Programme as a stepping stone for internal recruitment – both for staff and volunteer work. They have all succeeded in reaching their goals. Many of these have also recruited former participants into leadership positions in their organizations.

The study has revealed that former participants manage to engage themselves in their local communities in ways that impact their societies. However, due to the mandate and consequently limits of this study, it is impossible for us confirm whether these incidents are a pattern or merely random consequences of the Programme itself. Such an impact analysis will require incorporation of other variables, entities and interventions that might affect the participant or the community in the study. We therefore urge FK to conduct more in-depth studies that focus on the effects and impact at a community level.

1.2 Recommendations

Based on the key findings, we recommend the following:

- Partner organizations must develop clear goals and strategies that *include organizational benefits* of the exchange programme;
- Partner organizations must develop a minimum plan/programme for work/tasks/activities during the exchange for each participant engaged in the programme;
- FK should ensure that partner organizations take the responsibility of planning the exchange for every participant in the programme;
- Each exchange should include leadership specific tasks for the participant;
- Partner organizations should have a clear strategy or plan for taking into usage lessons learned during the exchange during the post work period in the home country;
- Several partner organizations complained about lack of communication from their partner organization. FK should develop a quality assurance mechanism that takes into account difficulties that may occur between partner organizations and further assist on matters that will improve the cooperation between the partners.

1.3 Scope of work

The objective of this study is to gain more knowledge about best practices and key factors in developing youth leadership and the impact of the exchanges within the FK Youth Programme. The study assesses the development of youth leadership and the impact of exchanges at an individual, institutional and community level. The main purpose of the study is:

- To *identify criteria* for positive and relevant leadership skills within the FK youth programme;
- To document *how* FK exchanges are fostering youth leadership;
- To identify different frameworks and *variety of results* related to youth leadership;
- To document the *impact of exchange* on an individual level;
To document the *impact of leadership skills* at institutional and community levels.

At the start-up meeting at FK Norway on the 7th of Oct 2014, FK and the team concluded that the most important tasks during the study would be to gain a comprehensive understanding of youth leadership; how it is perceived among the participants, how it is expressed in practice, on the ground, and in terms of values. FK also highlighted the need to outline how FK can observe leadership skills, by collecting and analysing change stories from participants and partners. The last task that was highlighted at the start-up meeting was the need to provide recommendations for improvement of the Programme.

The study is focused on experiences and lessons learned from a small selection of partners and participants that participate in the FK Youth Exchange Programme between Norway and Kenya.

1.4 Methodology

Following an inception meeting with FK Norway, the team conducted a desk review of relevant documents, with a view to designing the study framework and qualitative research tools. These included: former evaluations and reviews, and quantitative data such as surveys.

We have used sound qualitative methods in order to achieve rich empirical data. Fieldwork was conducted in Norway and Kenya. The team carried out focus group and in-depth interviews with former and current participants, as well as coordinators of partner organisations, in both countries. The team has strived to achieve rich empirical details and in depth understanding of what leadership *is*, *how* it may impact people, their organizations and environment, and, finally, *how FK Norway may identify* valuable leadership in the FK Youth Programme.

Fieldwork was carried out in Norway and Kenya in October and November 2014. The main techniques for data-collection were in-depth interviews and reflection fora. The latter is a method tailored to study the relationship between values and actions, in order to see how these impact people's social surroundings. The assumption behind the method is that cultural values and ideas are social and they are created in the encounter between people. The intention of the reflection fora is therefore to create such an encounter, enabling those involved, whether partners or participants, to grasp and interpret values and changes. The reflection fora bring to the surface attitudes, values and world-views that are shared as a community. A reflection fora is also a meeting place where people meet and discuss a given topic – in this regard leadership in the FK Youth Programme. These discussions allow participants to express different opinions in response to a given question; thereby enabling the researcher to grasp a complexity of a given subject of study.

Five reflection foras were held in Norway (Oslo and Trondheim), and six reflection fora were conducted in Kenya. The foras were composed of previous participants together with current participants and, in many cases, representatives from one of the partner organizations. Some of the groups consisted of both Kenyan and Norwegian participants. Each reflection fora comprised 2 - 8 people. In total 55 people participated. Each session was finalized by documenting a Most Significant Change story of each participant in the group.

The team also conducted 8 in-depth interviews with partner representatives, both in Norway and Kenya. The reflection fora and in-depth interviews were open-ended, though driven forward by the same interview guide (Annex to this report). The open-ended interviews assured the production of data about people's own

experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge. The interview guide however ensured that all topics relevant to the ToR were discussed during the sessions.

The seven partners that participated in the study are: AIESEC; Communication for Change; Hald; NCCK; YWCA; Sarakasi and FOKUS.

2 Changes on individual, institutional and societal levels

2.1 Impact at the individual level: equipping the participant as a leader

Participation in the FK Youth Programme equips – rather than changes – the participants to become leaders. Participants tend to enter the Programme with some prior leadership experience, and with a pre-interest for development issues. A majority have been involved in volunteer work prior to the exchange programme and they all share an interest for working towards global justice. We believe that this is one reason why the participants themselves claim that participation in the FK Youth Programme has dramatically **equipped** – rather than changed – their leadership skills. In particular, three skills have been improved: a) the ability to take even further charge of own life, b) the ability to achieve and adopt a relativistic leadership style, and, c) due to the foregoing, they develop more efficient communication skills.

2.1.1 Taking charge

A significant result of the FK exchange programme is that it forces the participant to take charge of his or her own life. Engaging in the work and experiencing life in a new country is part of a process of getting to know themselves better. The challenges that are encountered socially and financially build self-discipline. They have to decide and learn how to utilise well the cash that is given. Being away from family and the usual familiar setting also reinforces value systems and skills to lead themselves. One participant commented how it shaped her: *“You can be left alone without someone telling you what to do and you have to know what to do. You have to be your own policeman”*.

Participating in the exchange programme is about throwing yourself into the unknown. This is a significant experience, both during the actual exchange, but also in the subsequent information work. There are, however, several roads towards this increased skill. A vast majority of the Norwegian participants experienced a lack of plan or programme for their stay in Kenya and thus gradually understood that *they themselves* had to change that situation. There is no doubt, however, that a planned exchange programme, with specific roles, tasks and responsibilities during the exchange and in the following information work, increases the effects of the exchange, in particular at the participant level. We found that the Norwegian partners are in general better at organizing the actual exchange than their Kenyan counterparts. As a consequence, the Kenyan participants benefit mostly in terms of added leadership skills during the exchange. Norwegians, as well as Kenyans who participated in the Norwegians' information work, highlighted the steep learning curve and the increased self-esteem achieved through the information work which followed. A former Norwegian participant explains: *“Two Kenyans and myself were told to hold 50 lectures in Southern Norway. If someone gave me a similar task prior to my participation in the exchange programme I would probably reject it. But then, when we were told to hold 50 lectures, I thought; Ok – Jump!”*

The exchange programme strengthens the participants' self-confidence. By being thrown into the unknown for a longer period they learn that they actually had the courage to be in the situation, and sometimes also to do something about it. Some participants were clear that they felt self-confident because of achieving certain goals and mastering certain skills. One former Kenyan participant noted, *“I used to have one ballet class and after the programme I had a whole school. This experience enabled me to have courage to tell people, who are taller than me, to calm down. Now I walk to my boss's office and tell about my plans and make suggestions to on-going projects. Before, I could not do that.”*

2.1.2 Relativistic leadership style

The FK Youth programme is a once in a lifetime kind of experience. For many it provides for their first real out-of-the-comfort-zone-experience. It's their first encounter of "otherness" and also, for most of them, the first time they need to solve a challenging situation, more or less, on their own. The nature of the exchange programme therefore creates awareness and reflection on the person itself and their horizon and limits. The Norwegians for example were furious about the "African time", while the Kenyans got frustrated about the non-flexible approach to time and appointments in Norway. The Norwegians got stressed by vague plans for the programme, lack of activities and blur goals, while the Kenyans were struck by the equality between leaders and their followers in the Norwegian offices.

There are different leadership styles in Norway and Kenya. Frustration, lack of patience and irritation are common feelings among the participants during their exchanges – in particular, in the initial phase of the exchange. Limited skills of cultural sensitivity initially also limit their possibilities to perform as leaders in new, international working environments. Over time, however, and for many even after the exchange programme is finalized, they realize that the otherness wasn't only the definition of the "unknown", but also the key to perform better leadership towards the group. Thus, over time, the increasing skill of cultural sensitivity turns into a leadership skill and an approach to be an efficient leader for a diverse group. As one of the participants said, *"You have to learn to compromise and sacrifice. You need to find a solution that fits everyone. In order to do that, you need to look at things from people's own points of view"*. The participants thus achieve an understanding of leadership as something that depends upon, and is carried out, in a specific sociocultural context.

The participants thus develop a 'relativistic leadership style'. The skill matures over time, in particular, after finalizing the programme. Looking back, the participants agree that Norwegian and Kenyan leadership styles differ and that, if they had the opportunity now, they would lead differently in Norway than in Kenya. The relativistic leadership style entails the skill of adapting. The FK participants learn that flexibility and openness is of importance. In adapting to new situations and surroundings, the participants agree that it is necessary to learn other concrete skills such as a new language proposal writing and public speaking in order to be able to work independently and to do campaigns.

2.1.3 (Cross-cultural) communication skills

There are in particular two skills that the participants claim to have achieved through the programme: **to listen** and **to not take sides**. Both are essential because a leader needs to deal with a diverse group of people, often with contradicting views and ideas, in addition to uniting the group and motivating them to work towards a common goal. Integrating these skills in management might slow down the actual decision-making process. However, if performed wisely, it will actively engage people and by the time you are moving, you have everyone on board.

Being able to listen and to not take sides is essential for making good decisions as a leader in the long term. The exchange programme teaches the participants to listen more. *"I learnt to listen and talk less. I listen first before I chip in"*, one of the Kenyan participants claimed. The ability to negotiate and engage with people who have different opinions is a skill that several participants highlighted. One Kenyan said: *"To hear people's perspectives and be able to engage with them at their own level, rather than from my own standards, is important"*. This is based on the Kenyan experience where the leader is always right.

A female Norwegian participant who is currently on the exchange programme sums this up: *"The thing I see as essential for me as a leader, is being aware of the diversity within a group. Everyone has their different backgrounds and experiences. And, understanding how to communicate and how to make a diverse people feel as one, is something I feel that is developing, because I am meeting many more new people and living in a different environment. I meet different groups of people, and dealing with different challenges than I usually face in Norway"*.

A current Kenyan participant in Norway draws parallels between cultural differences experienced during the exchange and the ability to deal with cultural differences and cross-cultural communication upon return: *"Being able to communicate with people of total different culture has increased my self-confidence. Now, I would like to go back to Kenya and talk to people from different places. Not necessary of different tribes, but of different*

opinions, in particular politics. People in Kenya are really passionate about politics. I would like to see if I will be able to handle that. I've dealt with it here, so maybe I can manage to do the same at home?"

Another important communication skill achieved during the exchange was the ability to talk in front of people, in public. This was equally achieved among the Kenyan and Norwegian participants. *"I was pretty good at public speaking earlier, but during the exchange I had some workshop deliverables, which I did very well. When I came back to Kenya, I continued to do public speaks, but without being prepared. That was bad. I forgot how it was to be at the work place in Norway. Here I took it for granted and then I remembered that I had to work and prepare to do a good job."*

2.1.4 Changing career and education plans

Participation in the exchange programme is, for a vast majority, a change maker when it comes to their own career plans. There are in particular two changes, or increased skills, that are important in this regard. Firstly, the participants learn more about themselves and the exchange increases their self-esteem. This also allows them to be more 'true' to their own choices of their own future. They get a more clear idea of their own talents, their weak points, but also what their interests are. Secondly, the exchange programme exposes the participants to new working methods, ways of organising and structuring work – and even new knowledge. This exposure inspires many participants to look at their own future and their own possibilities in a *new* way. One student commented,

"My stay in Norway changed my career plans. One day, I came across a young person, a university student, in a village. He had 20 dairy cows. The kind of work that was being done was amazing – he was in university but was also making a lot of money and he was very passionate about. He gave me the encouragement to pursue farming and gain interest in the regulations – basically everything in the agriculture sector. This gave me the inspiration that something can be done back home"

2.2 Effect at the level of partner organizations

2.2.1 A need of goals in order to get effects

Clear institutional goals for the exchange programme also affects the impact of the exchange programme on both the participant and the organization. Here the effect is accumulative; the benefits are higher if both partners in the Programme have clear goals for their participants.

Some of the Kenyan organizations did not have any specific goals at the institutional level. But they indicated that their aim was to develop strong participants with leadership skills, who in turn could motivate the organization and their community upon their return. Many of the Kenyan programme coordinators explicitly saw this as a point to develop in the future, and in particular the point of recruiting volunteers as a strategic goal for the organization. YWCA and FOCUS had however incorporated organizational goals and the impacts were visible.

CASE: YWCA Nairobi:

YWCA operates with a clear recruitment strategy, as well as clear goals for the outcome of the programme. All of YWCA's participants are recruited from the organization's local branches. There is an explicit goal within the organization that the participants shall engage in their local branches upon their return, by using their new knowledge and competence to reach out to their communities. Betty, one of YWCA's previous participants is today a board member of her local branch. In addition, she runs a FGM awareness project through the local branch.

Local programme coordinators were explicit in the challenges and lack of benefits that arose due to the absence of a clear strategy for the organizations participation in the FK Youth Programme. A majority of the coordinators, both in Kenya and Norway, stressed that the most important aspect in this regard, was to develop a clear plan for how former participants could be recruited into the organization after the participant had completed the programme.

2.2.2 Using the programme as a step-stone to internal recruitment

The Norwegian organizations¹ had institutional goals for participation in the exchange programme. KN (Communication for Change), for example, has an explicit goal of using the exchange programme as a means of recruiting participants to volunteer work in their own organizations. According to their programme coordinator they succeed. A vast majority of previous participants engage themselves as volunteers in the youth organization Changemaker after the exchange programme. And, the last six leaders of the Changemakers actually took part in the FK Youth programme. Hald is another organization with the same goals. Several former participants work either as volunteers or employees in the organization today.

FOCUS Kenya has also benefited at an institutional level. The exchange programme is a step-stone to develop a capable human resource within the organization – due to the exposure and the ability to communicate that increases during the exchange.

2.3 Impact at the community level

Being exposed to otherness through the exchange programme motivates participants to ‘do something about it’ upon their return back home. *A former Kenyan participant explains: “In the FK programme you meet people who fight for justice. You come back as a better person, because you then know that you have to take up the challenges.”* There is no doubt that the exchange programme motivates young people to want to make a change; either in their community, or at a global level. The participants admit, however, that their efforts in impacting their local community could have been better.

There are impacts at the community levels, as in the case of the YWCA participant we mentioned earlier. However, due to the limits of this study, it is impossible to confirm whether these effects are as a result of the programme or whether they are random effects.

The participants claim that the impact on the community would increase if FK introduced a more structured approach, or support mechanisms, that would ensure that the enthusiasm doesn’t end during the post-work. One of the Kenyan participants illustrates this matter well. During his exchange in Norway he was working in a leadership foundation among Somali immigrants. He had clear tasks and responsibilities and, among others, was responsible for organizing a huge conference in Denmark. He claimed that this experience taught him financial management and making people work towards a common goal. He describes the period after the exchange: *“The post-work was very loose, not structured at all. So I decided to take the initiative to work towards Somali immigrants in Kenya, just as I did in Norway. I received 2.000 NOK for the post work, and my aim was to arrange an inter-faith conference. I discussed it with several religious leaders. We had meetings, but at the end of the day I really didn’t have the capacity to do all the work it entailed. So, although I had improved my skills and I was motivated to make changes, I didn’t have the means needed to realize my project.”*

3 FK as a facilitator for change

How can FK facilitate for increased leadership skills and thus positive changes? Below we have summarized what we believe are the phases and activities that are of importance in order to facilitate for change. All existing phases of the programme are – in one way or another – of importance to achieve the aimed goals related to leadership.

¹ We do not have any information from AISEC Norway at a partner level, as they did not have time to be interviewed.

We have, however, added on activities and content we believe will enhance the impacts on the FK Youth Programme.

Summary of activities and content needed for facilitating change through the FK Youth Programme

PHASE	ACTIVITY	CONTENT
Pre work	Preparation camp	Learning cultural sensitivity, awareness raising (what to expect) and building network
	Quality assure partner organizations	Ensure that partners have clear goals and strategies at an organizational level, and clear plans for the exchange period.
Exchange period	Facilitate/train partner organization in adding leadership tasks during exchange period	FK should ensure that all participants, in some way or another, are exposed to leadership during their exchanges (guidelines, awareness towards partners)
Post work	Quality assure partner organizations	Ensure that partners have plans for the post-work period and that experiences related to leadership are explicitly part of the work
A new beginning	Facilitate partner organizations, so that realization of new projects/ ideas may take place	Create new activities or support mechanism that enables former participants to realize (good) project ideas – most preferably within the partner organization (either as volunteers and staff, or either as an entrepreneur with support from the organization)

3.1 Preparing for “otherness”

The preparation camp is important, especially for the Kenyans, as it prepares the participants to live in another, very different, cultural setting. The preparation courses are important as they contribute to awareness raising, facilitate meeting other participants and bonding with people in the same situation – prior to the exchange. The way FK communicates on sensitivity to other cultures is something very crucial.

The participants also highlighted the importance of the related activities in the preparation course, such as training sessions and sharing of rooms with participants from different countries. All of these activities helped to simulate the forthcoming period. These elements have also been quite valuable in helping delegates appreciate and understand the nature of the people they are involved with; the work requirements and what they need to anticipate as they go to their placements, in both the South and North. The orientation process exposes participants to various realities and helps them to start processing what they are going to encounter and envision, and to start planning on eventualities. This puts them in a better place to engage as they go into their new environments.

Leadership development begins in the preparatory camp, as highlighted by one past participant from Kenya. *“During the first three weeks in Norway, we used to have a surprise selection. The teacher would allocate someone to be the leader at random or suddenly say that you had to do the warm up and you had to think on your feet for 40 minutes. That was very interesting to me because by the time I went to Mozambique I felt prepared for anything”.*

3.2 Facilitating exchanges where participants are given real leadership experiences

It is of great importance that the participants, in one way or another, are given challenges or tasks related to leadership. A Kenyan participant says *“During my stay at Folkehøyskolen, someone had to be in charge of the group daily. One evening, they would say that I had to be in charge of the group. I knew I had to wake up, because*

tomorrow I am the leader. I had to make sure that everything was working. To experience this kind of delegation of leadership – that was really important”.

There is a significant difference between structured versus unstructured exchanges, and there are pros and cons with both. The emerging view is that some structure is good, but with leeway for self-discovery. For those that had a structured programme, this is appreciated as helping to manage their time. Although frustration is expressed for those that had/have no structured programme – both southern and northern participants – on the ad hoc nature of the work, there is an appreciation of the value of discovering things by doing. Different personalities see opportunities for self-development, discovering strengths about themselves, elements of resilience, and building of confidence, adaptability by learning a new language and making friends.

There is a level of participants being on their own and entrusted with responsibilities to do things. They are given an opportunity to process things; anticipate what to do and how they will do it and as such develop skills such as planning, organisation and negotiation. As highlighted by one Norwegian participant currently on the exchange, *“In the school we are working with, we have been put as teachers and this is helping us to get out of our comfort zone”.*

3.3 Facilitating situations where participants are exposed to a diverse group of people

Being exposed to a diverse group of people is of significance to the participants, either when it is due to participation in the preparation course, during the exchange or in the post work process. A Kenyan participant notes: *“Living with six people from other countries, that were so different, it really made a difference. It built me up for bigger challenges and by that I realized that that I could cope! At the beginning I was thinking; I’m black and they are white, wow will they look at me, my body? By sharing room with them, it made me feel that I was just like them”.*

The key factor in this respect is that FK facilitates meetings among people that stretch over an extended period of time, meaning they have to learn to live and work together – and even lead each other. The participants claim that this kind of space makes a difference, because you cannot escape the encounters. They have to deal with it. They have to learn to live with it.

3.4 Post work

There are mixed feelings about the effect of the after work; some find it important in order to achieve leadership skills, while other look back at it as something they were “forced into” participating in. The post work was perceived as positive in the cases where the experiences from their exchange was taken into usage by their home organization, or their home community. One Kenyan participant explains: *“It involved sharing knowledge, lessons learned and it was about getting involved in the organization. Our post work also teaches us to apply things we had learned into the community.”*

We have highlighted several places that a professional partnership (i.e. the partner organizations have clear goals of the exchange programme and the institutional benefits from it) increases the outcome and impact of the exchange. This also goes for the effects on the individual level. Whenever an organization has plans for utilizing the participants’ experiences and skills, the participants also claim that their new achieved skills were taken into use. One of the Kenyan participants said: *“Participants that go through YWCA the exchange programme hope that they can get absorbed back into the YWCA system, so that they can make impact to their communities. But this doesn’t happen. Organizations like this should be assisted to make use of the participants that are returning, also being able to track them and help them to give back to the community.”*

4 Conclusions

We finalize this report by briefly listing up some indicators that we argue sums up the drivers, activities and change results for the FK Youth Programme.

Short-term (during the exchange and up to 1 year after the exchange)

- Cultural understanding – embrace diversity, demonstrate respect and tolerance for others;
- New skills – developed in communication, listening, negotiation, decision-making, creation and implementation action plans;
- Leadership – changes in perceptions of leadership, increased confidence in exercising leadership skills;
- Self-confidence – increased self-confidence;
- New contacts – established new relationships and networks;
- Planning – plans made to apply new skills at the workplace and community levels.

Medium- Long-term (more than 1 year after the exchange)

- Responsibility – increased leadership roles in workplace, community;
- Employability – increased opportunities for employment, nature of employment/work;
- Income – increased earning capacity;
- Civic engagement – increased engagement in advocacy or programmes of service to community;
- Innovation – new programmes developed;
- Education – nature of academic, professional development programmes pursued.

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