

WORKSHOP REPORT

The Art of Proactive Fundraising

Introduction to Fundraising · Kampala, Uganda · Tuesday 11 August 2026

Stichting Mirembé Partner Fundraising Training · Trainer: Han Valk, HVFC International · Host: Elizabeth Namaganda Foundation



The day at a glance

On Tuesday 11 August 2026, ten participants from five partner organisations of Stichting Mirembé came together in Kampala for the opening day of a week-long fundraising training: Kawempe Youth Centre, SEECHILD, KACHICA, Tusaidiane Trust Uganda and the Elizabeth Namaganda Foundation (ENF), who generously hosted the week. The day was opened with a video welcome from Guus Verzellenberg and facilitated by Han Valk, senior fundraising consultant at HVFC International.

Day One set the foundation for fundraising the shift from reactive to proactive fundraising. Rather than waiting for calls for proposals and depending on one or two loyal donors, participants explored how to create their own opportunities, build a pipeline of donors who know them, and let their vision decide what gets funded. By the end of the day, every organisation left with a first draft of a SMART fundraising goal, an honest scan of their fundraising strengths and weaknesses, a positioning statement tested by their peers, and a clear picture of the donor landscape open to them.

The energy in the room was remarkable. Participants scored the day 4.8 out of 5 on average across all evaluation questions, and their most consistent request was a telling one: more of this, over more days.

How the day unfolded

Naming the real challenges

The day began where good training should: with the participants' own reality. Each organisation wrote its biggest fundraising challenges on sticky notes and presented them to the room. The picture that emerged was honest and strikingly consistent. Young organisations struggle to win trust without a long track record. Proposals are sent out by the dozen, often without any response. Funding tends to be short-term and project-bound, leaving little for staff costs and core operations, and when a donor exits abruptly there is rarely a safety net. Participants also described an operating environment that adds real friction: certificates and permits delayed around elections, bank accounts frozen pending new compliance requirements, and new taxes arriving unannounced. Softer challenges surfaced too, including limited visibility, the difficulty of telling a compelling story, finding donors whose priorities genuinely align, and cultivating a culture of local giving.

Naming these challenges out loud did two things. It showed each organisation that it is not alone, and it gave the rest of the day a very practical purpose: by the closing session, the group returned to this wall to ask which challenges now looked different.

The proactive mindset

Han introduced the core idea of the week with a story from his hotel: a cat that had learned to ride the elevator, patiently waiting for the doors to open onto floors no other cat could reach. The lesson landed immediately. Opportunities are found by those who widen their scope and go where others are not looking, and the same is true for donor diversification. He paired it with four deceptively simple principles that shaped the whole day: if you do not ask, nobody gives, but never ask too much, too little, too soon or too late.

From there the group unpacked what proactive fundraising actually means. Reactive fundraising waits for calls for proposals and lets the donor dictate the terms; proactive fundraising treats a donor as a partner with goals of their own, invests in the relationship first, and only makes the ask when the time is right. As Han put it, people give to people: trust is never built between organisations, only between the human beings inside them.

A fundraising strategy on one page

Participants then built the backbone of their own fundraising strategy around three ingredients: organisational capacity (what your team can realistically take on), uniqueness (what makes you distinctive), and donor demand (what funders are looking for, and whether they can find and trust you). Sustainable success lives where the three overlap. Two ingredients look inward, one looks outward, and the day moved deliberately from the inside out.

In the first exercise, every organisation drafted a SMART fundraising goal starting from its vision rather than from a funding gap, then tested it in cross-organisation pairs where fresh eyes quickly exposed anything vague. Several goals sharpened noticeably in the process, with clear amounts, dates and diversification targets built in, such as spreading a multi-year revenue goal across several donors so that no single funder becomes a risk. The strengths and weaknesses scan followed the same peer-challenge logic: each organisation mapped its fundraising honestly, and peers added one strength that had been undersold and one weakness that had been softened.



Positioning: why would a donor choose you?

After lunch, attention turned outward. Drawing on his years evaluating proposals at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Han described how quickly funders filter: many proposals are rejected before they are even read in depth, which is why visibility, professionalism and a distinctive story matter long before any application is written. The group explored the many things that can make an organisation stand out beyond its programmes, from community roots, beneficiary voice and low overheads to storytelling, donor stewardship and the composition of the team itself.

Each organisation then condensed its distinctiveness into a one-breath positioning statement, written large on a flipchart. In a gallery walk, participants voted with coloured dots for the statements that convinced them most, deliberately not their own. The winning statements shared a pattern the group named together: concrete beats vague, sustainable solutions and problem-solving language resonate, and positioning that centres people, whether talented staff or the bridge between donors and beneficiaries, is more convincing than positioning that centres the organisation itself. The exercise closed with a habit worth keeping: always have someone outside the writing team mirror your story before it goes to a donor.



The donor landscape and the road to control

The final teaching block mapped who actually funds organisations like these, from individuals who give from the heart in small, flexible amounts, through companies and foundations, to institutional donors with strict criteria but large, long-term budgets. A lively true-or-false quiz corrected several common assumptions: embassies in Kampala also run small grants schemes,

companies can contribute in kind and that contribution can count as match funding, some international foundations actively require healthy overhead budgets, and international NGOs can themselves be donors and consortium partners. The discussion also affirmed that individual giving can work in Uganda, provided the culture of local giving is deliberately cultivated.

The day closed with the fundraising funnel, the tool that turns all of this into control: identify more prospects than you contact, build more warm relationships than you expect to convert, and keep nurturing every relationship so that funders stay for decades rather than a single project cycle. This funnel is the thread that runs through the rest of the week, from donor research to relationship plans to the pitch.

What participants told us

At the end of the day, participants completed a written evaluation. All ten forms were returned, and the results speak for themselves: every single score given was a 4 or a 5.

Statement (1 = not at all, 5 = very much so)	Average
The workshop was useful for our organisation	4.9
The content was clear and easy to follow	5.0
The exercises were practical and relevant	4.8
The facilitation gave room for our own situation	4.5
The handouts and materials will help us back home	4.9
I feel more confident to fundraise proactively	4.4

The written comments were equally encouraging. Participants highlighted the participatory character of the sessions, the practical value of the handouts, and above all the mindset shift the day set in motion.

“Fundraising should be done with a strategic plan.” — SEECHILD

“All the fundraising documents and handouts given out will be of great help.” —
Kawempe Youth Centre

“How to approach donors proactively, and approach potential donors and partners.” — Tusaidiane Trust, on the most valuable takeaway

Asked what could be better, the message was consistent and, in its own way, the finest compliment of the day: participants wanted more time. Nearly every form suggested extending the training over more days, so that the rich exchange of experiences between organisations could continue. One participant also asked for continued attention to clear, slower-paced English so that everyone in the room can follow comfortably, feedback that was given openly during the day and immediately taken on board.

What organisations will do in the next 30 days

The evaluation forms asked each organisation to name the first thing it will do within 30 days, and the answers show that Day One is already translating into action. Several organisations committed to reassessing their fundraising goals and developing or refreshing a fundraising strategy. Others will involve all staff members in fundraising activities and donor identification, improve their visibility and marketing by putting their social platforms to more active use, tell their story in a more compelling way, and explore local income generation and new partnerships alongside donor funding.

Looking further ahead, participants named the topics where they want future training and support: storytelling and new technologies, donor mapping and understanding the conditions of different donors, proposal and project writing, strategic planning for fundraising, social media fundraising, building strong donor relationships, and staff capacity building in monitoring and evaluation. These requests give both HVFC and Stichting Mirembé a clear, demand-driven agenda for follow-up support.

Materials and the road ahead

Every organisation received practical materials to continue working with at home: the workshop worksheets for the fundraising goal and the strengths and weaknesses scan, the full slide deck, and four HVFC handbooks covering negotiation for nonprofits, diversifying your funding, writing a winning funding proposal, and the one about unrestricted funding. Each organisation also received a flash drive to store and protect its own fundraising documentation. This flash drive is given to be done by Stichting Mirembé.

The strongest resource in the room, however, is the room itself. The five organisations left Day One connected in a shared WhatsApp group, committed to exchanging donor leads, reviewing each other's proposals, and keeping each other proactive. That is exactly the spirit this programme hopes to build.

Webale nnyo, thank you!

Our warm thanks go to the Elizabeth Namaganda Foundation for their generous hospitality, to Stichting Mirembé for making this training possible, and above all to the participants, who brought honesty, energy and ambition into the room. We look forward to the rest of the week.

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