



## Using Social Analysis to Strengthen CARE's Governance Work

### **CARE Madagascar's urban poverty reduction programme**

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CARE Madagascar has been fighting urban poverty for over eight years, starting in the capital, Antananarivo, in 2000 and expanding to the urban commune of Fort Dauphin in southern Madagascar in 2003, with funding from the US Agency for International Development (USAID). At the beginning of 2009, the programme was working in a total of 91 urban neighbourhoods, or *Fokontany*, with a variety of funding sources, building institutional capacity and promoting community-driven development. The overall goal of the programme was to strengthen urban governance at multiple levels to promote healthier living and CARE recognized that in order to meet that goal, the programme needed to be able to learn from its good governance, civil society strengthening and poverty reduction approaches about what works and what does not in the evolving urban context.

In 2007 CARE UK started helping CARE Madagascar's urban programme do just that – learn better— through funding from its Programme Partnership Agreement (PPA) with DFID. The goal of the PPA is to improve governance practice and CARE aimed to contribute to that goal by creating a learning environment within its urban programme. One of the things that the urban team learned early on, through reflective practice, was that its programming focused largely on building the capacities of its target groups, on improving the physical conditions and opportunities in their living environment, and on strengthening good governance—and much less on improving people's positions in society and on questions of social exclusion, inequality and

powerlessness. Is it important to focus on social inequity in an urban governance programme?

CARE Madagascar's urban team thought that it might be. They observed that although their programme had strengthened *Fokontany* leadership and succeeded at highlighting the *Fokontany* as the site of decentralized governance and development, and even though perceptions of the quality of life, including population health and public infrastructure had improved in CARE's programme zone, poverty persisted, and what's more, extreme poverty persisted.

Why? One likely reason was that CARE needed to widen its scope of work to include higher level urban actors and influence macro-level political systems. But CARE also thought it wise to explore the social and power-related roots of urban poverty, given that these kinds of analyses were largely missing from its urban programming. Therefore one of the initiatives that CARE Madagascar undertook with PPA funding was to build staff capacity in analysing social positions. This learning piece was developed to share the progress of the urban programme's work in social analysis with CARE colleagues and external partners.

### **Building staff capacity in social analysis**

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#### ***Transforming staff awareness***

CARE Madagascar brought in Tony Klouda, a former CARE USA employee and expert in social analysis to work with the urban team. An important first step was destabilizing them, challenging their definitions and their assumptions ("What is poverty?" Equality? "What is governance and where does

governance happen?”), as well their notions about how they should be doing governance programming and the kinds of problems they should be tackling. By facilitating a process of intense self-questioning, Tony Klouda helped the team begin recognizing the discord between development rhetoric and the reality lived by the people development programs aim to help. For example: many development organizations have made participation one of their key programming principles, but how often do they genuinely define their objectives and strategies with the intended beneficiaries? Do programme beneficiaries actually own development processes or do they simply participate in them? Although development organizations aim to empower their beneficiaries, how transparent are the relationships of power that define their collaborations with these same beneficiaries? The awareness of the discord underlying much of our development work was uncomfortable

**What does it mean to be doing “social analysis?” As CARE Madagascar understands it: “it is about exploring and challenging our perceptions of poverty—CARE staff together with people in the communities where CARE works—in order to uncover the social roots of poverty and to better support each other to plan actions to prevent or mitigate the problems we have discovered.”**

for staff, but it was from this position of discomfort that they could begin reconstructing their knowledge, letting go of the rhetoric and thinking about how to better use in their work

what they already know from their own life experiences. This included what they know about how the social sphere influences people’s behaviours and decisions, and ultimately, poverty. Transforming staff’s awareness of the social determinants of poverty helped prepare them to challenge *others* to uncover the causes of poverty that are often hidden or unspoken.

### **Reflecting with communities**

Staff also spent time with leaders and members of the urban *Fokontany* where CARE works, listening to them, probing and dissecting their perceptions of the problems faced in their neighbourhoods. One of the challenges was making the space for programme beneficiaries to define the focus of the conversations instead of CARE. Urban staff listened for “entry points” in the conversations to engage beneficiaries further on social positions and their relationship to poverty. The overall goal of these conversations was to 1) begin identifying with *Fokontany* leaders the problems they felt were important to explore in their *Fokontany*, and 2) probe and challenge both CARE’s and the *Fokontany* leaders’ thinking on these problems and their social roots, in order to eventually 3) plan actions to prevent or mitigate the root problem. Doing this well—actually *dialoguing* with *Fokontany* leaders with no other agenda besides trying to come to a truer understanding of poverty systems—would present a radically different way of working for the urban team.



Making time for staff introspection

By the end of the urban team's introduction to social analysis, it seemed that the reasons they weren't seeing the impact on poverty they wanted to were both about *how* CARE had been working in the *Fokontany* and about *what* CARE had been doing. In other words, CARE's actions in the urban environment were largely determined by project plans, whereas to have a greater impact on poverty it makes more sense if project plans are determined by actions—by collaborative explorations and open dialogue with the intended beneficiaries. Because of this, the social roots of urban poverty were often largely overlooked by the governance programme. Staff began to recognize that development projects are as much traps as they are opportunities—the challenge would be thinking and acting outside of the project environment while still working in it.

### **Integrating social analysis and action into ongoing governance work**

One of the things CARE Madagascar's urban team learned about conducting social analysis was that it would be an ongoing process—a voyage—and one that depended on seizing opportunities to dialogue with *Fokontany* leaders and residents during regular project activities. A general theme emerged that the team wanted to explore through a social lens: community institution building and social exclusion, with a particular focus on the local development committees that the urban programme had established at the *Fokontany* level, called *Sehatra Fampanandrosoana ny Fokontany* (SFF). SFFs bring together *Fokontany* officers and representatives of public service providers and local associations to exchange information about and coordinate local development initiatives. These SFFs have also drafted local development plans based on participatory needs assessments and oversee the implementation.

Despite the good work of the SFF, extreme poverty persisted in CARE's intervention zone. What did this mean about the effectiveness of

the SFF as a strategy for ensuring community-driven development? Who was and who wasn't benefiting from this kind of community institution, and why? Were there other more inclusive ways to build community institutions? These questions would broadly frame (but not confine) the urban team's dialogue with programme beneficiaries and their own internal discussions and reflections.

Thus far the team has integrated social analysis into its ongoing governance work through field visits, long conversations and workshops with programme beneficiaries, staff meetings and a staff retreat. The goal, once again, is to come to a truer understanding of poverty and its social roots *with* community leaders and institutions, in order for CARE to support them with better designed and targeted development initiatives. The voyage is in its early stages, but has



Staff during a role play in which they were divided into groups of Malagasy kings, commoners, and slaves, in order to better understand the roots of social exclusion

already generated important learning that will help strengthen CARE Madagascar's governance programming.

### **What is CARE Madagascar learning from conducting social analyses and what are the applications to urban governance programming?**

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The learning coming out of CARE Madagascar's social analyses thus far is both about the links between social positions and governance, and about development processes in general.

**Lesson learned #1: The people who are identified as among the poorest in CARE's urban programme zone are also usually those who do not have access to social support—and yet very few of CARE's collaborations with local leaders have focused on strengthening social support networks or services.**

During the social explorations initiated by CARE, leaders often cited alcohol and drug abuse or domestic violence as one of the causes of persistent poverty. However when staff probed, they learned that social marginalization and exclusion were at the root of this kind of behaviour; persons who had access to social support were less likely to develop severe and chronic problems with alcohol, drugs or violence. Reasons for social exclusion vary—but one particularly interesting track that the urban team is pursuing is the link between social exclusion and slavery, which was abolished in Madagascar in 1896 but which still influences power and social dynamics today (see box at end of the document).

How well were the poorest of the poor served by CARE Madagascar's governance interventions? It was already clear to the urban team that this group was barely represented on the SFFs; but what became clearer through

social analysis was that SFF-supported activities do not dramatically improve their situation either. Certainly the public infrastructure improvement projects in the local development plans have had a positive effect on the overall quality of life in the *Fokontany*, but the SFFs' development plans showed little analysis of the social issues underlying poverty and there were no projects focused on strengthening social networks. CARE had not sufficiently supported local leaders to listen for the social undercurrents in the life stories of the people in their neighbourhoods. All these might have helped strengthen the impact of CARE's governance programming.

**Lesson learned #2: The community institutions that are best adapted to meeting the needs of the poorest may be those which are mobilized around specific interests at a very local level, rather than those which are mobilized around general development concerns.**

Through their discussions with programme beneficiaries, CARE Madagascar's urban team learned that the SFF may be less adapted to serving the needs of the poorest and excluded compared to other, lower level, more organic community groups organized around common, tangible "interests" and which are also often able to provide social and even financial support to their members. These included for example groups of bicycle sellers, street food vendors and groups of families. The neighbourhood Water Users Associations that CARE has helped establish, and which generate revenue and are able to employ people, were also perceived as meeting real needs and making an immediate difference in the lives of their members.

In contrast, the SFFs are perceived, especially by the poorest people, as producing a lot of meetings. As one CARE staff member said: "The poor don't need and don't want meetings all the time—they're thinking about survival;

it's CARE that needs the meetings." The SFFs are also less active than the less structured groups.

The urban team's explorations have therefore taught them that governance is actually happening at many different levels, not only those that are recognized by the government. They have learned that although it is important to understand and to influence the macro level political environment, it is also important for development interventions to reach a micro level, even lower than the level of the *Fokontany*, in order to ensure the benefits of development are felt by the poorest. As a result, the team is re-thinking the kinds of community institutions that CARE should be supporting.

**Lesson learned #3: Social issues touch people's personal lives in a way that governance issues do not. As such it may be effective to build governance work into direct work on the social roots of poverty.**

CARE Madagascar views good governance as a foundation for social and economic development. However the urban team has begun to reconsider the challenges of introducing and mobilizing people around a governance programme at the local level. Malagasy are generally wary of politics and easily associate governance with politics—and especially so since the political crisis of 2009, which saw the removal of the President from power and the establishment of a transitional government headed by the ex-Mayor of Antananarivo. These kinds of associations may prevent many people from taking a real interest in institutions like the SFF.

Through their social analyses, CARE staff began to recognize that "We come into their

communities with our CARE governance label." And that this might not be the most effective way to engage people in their development and good governance in the Madagascar context. Based on the way that people opened up to the urban team around social issues, the team is considering how to use the exploration of social issues with beneficiaries and eventual collaboration around the problems identified as a catalyst for strengthening governance—instead of only the other way around.

**Lesson learned #4: It is important to be able to recognize how power influences CARE's relationships with its own programme beneficiaries in order to uncover the relationships between power, social positions and poverty in society in general.**

CARE Madagascar has developed very strong relationships with *Fokontany* leaders and residents over the years it has worked in its urban intervention zone. However its collaborations have been based on *projects* and

***Social analysis has helped the CARE Madagascar urban team rediscover the obvious: "The poor don't need and don't want meetings all the time—they're thinking about survival; it's CARE that needs the meetings." As a result, the team is re-thinking the kinds of community institutions that CARE should be supporting.***



Social analysis implies a new way of talking with and listening to *Fokontany* leaders and residents.

therefore constrained by objectives and strategies that were not always identified with the beneficiaries, and artificial timelines. CARE's relative power in relation to its beneficiaries has allowed it to collaborate with its beneficiaries on projects. But although these projects may mobilize everyone around a common, spoken objective, there are also many unspoken objectives that motivate both CARE's and its beneficiaries' involvement.

Interactions between CARE and its beneficiaries in the project environment are not completely transparent, and this may be one of the reasons why its interventions do not always produce a sustainable impact on poverty. The urban team is learning the importance of being sensitive to the relationship of power between CARE and programme beneficiaries—even when it feels like the collaboration is already strong—in order to have more open, productive discussions about development and urban poverty with its beneficiaries. Where the urban team is more sensitive to how its position of power affects what people say and do (and what they don't) it will be easier for it to engage in dialogue that allow the often hidden causes of poverty to emerge (see box at end of page).

### **Lesson learned #5: It is hard to make the shift away from CARE-centred learning to more inclusive learning with programme beneficiaries—but successfully applying what is being learned through social analysis depends on this.**

The title of this section, "What is CARE learning..." *should* be "What is CARE learning together with *Fokontany* leaders and residents?" However one of the biggest challenges encountered by the urban team has been unlearning the way it sets the agenda for discussion, extracts information from beneficiaries and uses it to draw conclusions internally within CARE. Social analysis is about discovering both the problems and the solutions *together with* people concerned, and this is the way the urban team would naturally prefer to work if they were not also constrained in a project-oriented environment.

How can the urban team remain true to what staff have learned about doing social analysis and yet focused on getting the results for which they are accountable to their donors? Although this is a question to which the urban team does not necessarily have all the answers, staff do feel that the eventual shift from a project to a programme approach<sup>ii</sup>, and towards greater accountability to programme beneficiaries and more coherent and strategic programming, will make it easier to use donor funding for more responsible development programming.

#### **Redefining relationships with programme beneficiaries to expose the social roots of poverty**

*Before CARE's urban team started working on social analysis there was little discussion within the team about the historical class divisions in Madagascar, either because staff were uncomfortable with the topic or because they did not think that it was relevant to a discussion of urban poverty in modern Madagascar. However the self-questioning methods used to build staff's capacity in social analysis forced staff to challenge their assumptions and explore them with programme beneficiaries.*

*During these "social explorations", programme beneficiaries raised caste as a cause of social exclusion and poverty without being prompted, even though the subject is generally perceived to be taboo in Madagascar and CARE staff had anticipated that it would be too sensitive to talk about. The staff learned that the way they interact with programme beneficiaries can close down real communication—even with people with whom they ostensibly had good relations. However trying to reset the balance of power between CARE staff and programme beneficiaries—by not forcing the discussion agenda, by demonstrating active listening, by being transparent about CARE's interests—helps create an environment where people feel more comfortable talking about the social roots of poverty.*

## End notes

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So what does social analysis have to do with governance programming? CARE defines good governance as the effective, transparent, and participatory management of public affairs. Using this definition, good governance is very much about how people work together and relationships of power. And these are strongly influenced by social positions. It is possible to promote the broad participation of society in decisions on how to manage public affairs, but if the causes of systemic marginalization in that society have not been dealt with, then it is not obvious that a governance intervention alone will improve the lives of the poorest of the poor. CARE Madagascar is integrating social analysis into its governance work in order to better support local leaders to address social causes of poverty. Although the urban team is still very much learning how to conduct social analyses, they are convinced there is a reason to continue.

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<sup>i</sup> *Fokontany* are the smallest administrative unit in Madagascar; an urban *Fokontany* may have upwards of 10,000 habitants.

<sup>ii</sup> CARE is moving to organize itself around coherently designed, long term *programmes*, as a way of having greater impact.



CARE Madagascar's urban team has a lot to think about and to work on—but they are up for the challenge.

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*This publication was made possible through support provided by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID). The opinions expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of DFID.*

