



Submission No 7

Review of Australia's Relationship with the Countries of Africa

Name: Julia Newton-Howes
Chief Executive

Organisation: CARE Australia



CARE Australia

Submission No:..... 7
Date Received: 11/12/09
Secretary:

**Submission to the
Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade:
Australia's relationship with the countries of Africa**

11 December 2009

Overview

As one of Australia's foremost humanitarian aid agencies, CARE Australia is pleased for the opportunity to contribute to the Committee's important and timely inquiry into the future of Australian engagement in Africa.

This brief 3-part submission focuses on Australia's development assistance programs for Africa:

- Why might our input matter? CARE's experience in Africa
- What are some of the issues? Some general perspectives on Australia's aid to Africa
- What role for Australian non-governmental organisations (NGOs)? Adding value to Australia's official assistance programs in Africa.

Note: For the Committee's information, we have attached two short papers (by the Overseas Development Institute, London) as illustrations of the value of collaboration between the Australian government, Australian NGOs, and African communities. *CARE would be glad to assist the Committee during the course of the inquiry including by further elaborating issues raised in this submission.*

1. CARE's Experience in Africa

CARE Australia is part of a leading international humanitarian aid agency established in 1945. We are a non-religious, non-political Australian charity. We work with poor and vulnerable communities to bring lasting solutions to poverty and respond to humanitarian emergencies. CARE has a special focus on working with women and girls because they suffer disproportionately from poverty but are generally very effective agents of change. We consider that empowering women and girls is fundamental to the fight against global poverty.

We depend on the support and contributions of the Australian public. We also receive significant program funding from the Australian government (and other institutional donors) and have well-established relationships with a range of UN and other relief and development agencies.

Australian NGOs like CARE make an important contribution to poverty reduction and development across Africa through a wide range of programs and by responding to emergencies. In 2008, for example, about one third

(35%) of all funding for overseas aid raised by Australian NGOs directly from the Australian public was for programs in some 40 African countries. Since 2007, CARE Australia has supported work in the Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, Malawi, Zimbabwe and South Africa. CARE International has a presence in 29 Africa Countries. Over the past 5 years, CARE Australia has spent around 6.5% of our total funding in Africa and we will increase our support as resources permit.

Many NGO programs have a strong focus on reaching poor, remote communities in Africa and play an important role in protecting the most vulnerable. Indeed in many cases the only services provided to these communities are through civil society organizations like ours. In much of Africa, the work of CARE and NGOs is the only 'Australian connection' that many African people know.

In Zimbabwe, CARE has helped with humanitarian relief work (food security and public health) and is equipping rural communities with the tools and skills to move beyond dependence on food aid.

APAC

The Australian government, through AusAID, has worked effectively with Australian NGOs to support African communities. This is well demonstrated through the Australian Partnerships with African Communities (APAC) program. This A\$60 million initiative (2004-2010) is providing funding for seven Australian NGOs to support development in seven countries in southern and eastern Africa. Under APAC, CARE is working with African governments, civil society groups and communities to deliver services to marginalized communities. For example:

- in South Africa, CARE works closely with municipal government on planning and policy to meet the water needs of vulnerable households; this includes acting as a broker to facilitate dialogue between local civil society and government;
- in Kenya, CARE actively participated in policy dialogue which saw the revision of discriminatory policies that hampered development of marginalized communities in the conflict-prone north-east (Somalia borderlands) of the country; we are also supporting women affected by sexual violence;
- in Malawi, CARE has worked to promote mutual accountability between civil society, private sector and government.
- in Mozambique, CARE is helping to create village entrepreneurs through supporting business training and access to credit; we also help to improve water supplies and work with local NGOs and government service providers to build accountability with village-level organisations

The APAC work includes a particular focus on supporting women and addressing HIV/AIDS. We refer the Committee to the two attached ODI papers recording significant positive impacts of our work with African communities. An indication of the value and effectiveness of the work done

under APAC is the development by AusAID of a second APAC partnership agreement with CARE and other Australian NGOs.

2. Some general perspectives on Australia's aid to Africa

There are 47 countries in sub-Saharan Africa alone, and considerable donor and agency involvement. This complex and diverse continent has shown limited progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This submission does not attempt to a comprehensive analysis of African humanitarian and development needs, priorities, obstacles or possibilities. Rather, CARE would recommend that the Committee consider the following perspective on the general approach of Australia to assistance in Africa:

- CARE Australia welcomes the Australian government's increased attention and commitment to Africa. There appears overall to be goodwill towards Australia in most African contexts, and little 'political baggage'.
- Despite a significant increase in funding, however, Australia's aid program to Africa will remain comparatively modest, both as a proportion of Australia's overall aid program and in comparison to the major longstanding programs of many other Western donors. If it is to provide a lasting and credible demonstration of Australia's commitment to Africa, the Australian aid program will need to be *guided by a clear strategy, with a limited number of objectives*. African countries are very familiar with the politics of aid: the legitimacy and credibility of Australia's development assistance partly depends on whether it is perceived to be responsive, coherent, and not driven purely by narrowly-perceived advantages and interests at a distance from the challenges faced by African communities.
- CARE Australia considers that *the principal objective of Australia's aid program in Africa* should be to assist poorer African communities to progress towards the MDG targets, through empowering communities to themselves take on the development challenges and priorities they face. In particular, the second phase of APAC should be informed by an overarching strategy that outlines the *regions* where Australian aid can add the greatest value and (within those regions) the *sectors* where Australian support brings a comparative advantage relative to the many other aid programs. Given the efforts to date in establishing effective programs amidst the continuing challenges and opportunities in sub-Saharan Africa, CARE Australia would see that Australia would gain most value by consolidating and expanding its presence and assistance in Eastern and Southern Africa, rather than extending further to establish a major presence in West Africa.

3. The role of NGOs in Australia's overall aid contribution in Africa

In relation to the experiences touched on in Part 1 of this submission, CARE Australia wishes to draw the Committee's attention to the following respects in which Australian NGOs add value to Australia's official aid program:

- **Ability to build civil society capacity in African countries:** Local African civil society groups play a variety of socio-economic roles alongside or with the state apparatus. In many African settings, in addition to capacity, resource and regulatory constraints, the potential contributions of these groups are often hindered by local government perceptions about the legitimacy of a civil society role. International NGOs like CARE have demonstrated the ability to broker local NGO-government relationships, build trust, establish networks, and strengthen joint capacity to deliver social services.
- **Ability to link communities to broader policy and program efforts:** In many priority program areas, results can only be achieved if the higher-level work by governments and multilateral agencies is informed by having effective links to what is actually happening in poor or marginalised communities. NGOs are well-placed to provide these links. Advocacy can help to ensure assistance is accurately and efficiently designed and targeted.
- **Orientation towards learning, experimenting and innovation:** our close relationships with poor communities enables groups like CARE to find innovative ways to respond to local needs and adapt international practices to local circumstances. Indeed, many of standard practices in humanitarian and development aid in Africa today were first developed by NGOs. Because of CARE's network of offices across Africa, we are well placed to take innovations from one country and consider how they can be applied in other countries. Examples of such work include our approach to improving self-reliance in communities through establishing Village Savings and Loans Groups, and our "Scorecard" approach for involving communities in engaging positively with service providers to assess performance and identify improvements.
- **Ability to work in places where direct bilateral engagement is not desirable or possible:** NGOs are able to successfully support communities even in countries with governments that are unwilling, indifferent or unable to provide for their populations, such as Zimbabwe.
- **Capacity to respond quickly and effectively to major humanitarian emergencies, and to transition to effective post-emergency recovery efforts:** Many NGOs maintain a standing capacity to respond quickly and within agreed international standards and protocols to distribute supplies in the event of a humanitarian emergency and then to assist affected communities to recover and rebuild their livelihoods. In a disaster, NGOs such as CARE are often the first to respond in saving lives and alleviating suffering.

- **High degree of accountability:** Australian NGOs have some of the world's most robust systems for accreditation, management and accountability. These provide a significant degree of assurance for AusAID in terms of accountability for taxpayer funds.

Summary

- CARE Australia broadly supports the Australian government's commitment to increased engagement with Africa.
- Australia will remain a relatively small contributor to African development. Australian official aid engagement should be informed by an overarching strategy clearly defining an Australian approach to the regions and sectors where it will work. Such strategy should seek to identify and maximise Australian comparative advantage and impact.
- Australian NGOs such as CARE add value to Australia's efforts to help African communities in realising the MDGs. Such organizations have long-established relationships, networks and experience working in varied and challenging environments in Africa. To many African communities, NGOs like ours are the face of Australia in Africa. They are valuable partners in implementing Australia's aid program and linking it back to the Australian public.

For further information on CARE's work, visit www.careaustralia.org.

Julia Newton-Howes
Chief Executive

Project Briefing

No 19 • April 2009



Beyond Basic Needs: Programming for marginalised and vulnerable groups – The Australian Partnerships with African Communities (APAC) Programme

Fiona Samuels, Victoria James and Kerry Sylvester

Key points

- Development programmes work best when they reflect local realities and respond to both rights violations and lack of access to services
- Basic and 'beyond basic' needs programming should be planned together from intervention design, with a clear step-by-step process to move from one to the other
- A rights-based approach to programming is crucial in the achievement of long term and sustainable empowerment of marginalised groups

Overseas Development Institute

ODI is the UK's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues.

ODI Project Briefings provide a focused and specialised summary of a project, a country study or regional analysis.

This and other ODI Project Briefings are available from www.odi.org.uk

The Australian Partnerships with African Communities (APAC) programme is a five-year cooperation agreement (2004-2009) between the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and Australian NGOs to address emerging development challenges in Southern and Eastern Africa, using community-based approaches. With the end of the five-year agreement in sight, it is time to look at the key lessons, successes and innovations of the programme. This briefing is the second of three. The first explored People in Planning processes (Samuels, et al., 2008) and the third will highlight the innovative ways in which Australian and African NGOs have worked together.

This Briefing focuses on aspects of service delivery that go beyond the provision of basic services. It explores the ways in which APAC partners in Kenya, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia have, increasingly, recognised the need to address issues of vulnerability and exclusion to achieve lasting changes.

Sub-Saharan Africa, where APAC is operating, has seen the convergence of a number of factors that have increased the vulnerability and marginalisation of people who are already poor. These factors have included high HIV prevalence rates, humanitarian emergencies (both man-made and natural) and poor governance structures. This has been referred to as a Triple Threat (UN, 2003). While the provision of interventions to meet basic needs are essen-

tial where poverty is pervasive and where the majority of people live on less than \$2 per day, there is growing recognition that these should be accompanied by strategies that empower people to know their rights and demand equitable access to services.

Why 'Beyond Basic Needs' (BBN)?

Development and human rights are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. For development to be sustainable, marginalised and vulnerable groups need secure and long-term access to the resources required to satisfy their needs, including economic, social, cultural, civil or political resources.

A rights-based programming approach (Box 1) is one approach that acknowledges the need to go Beyond Basic Needs (BBN). BBN includes issues of respect, safety, the need to 'belong' and trust (see Box 2). Examples of BBN-type of approaches can be found in APAC programmes that address stigma and discrimination and in those that provide psychosocial support to orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and other marginalised and vulnerable groups.

Two broad approaches are seen among APAC partners. First, those that started out by addressing basic needs and used their success to go beyond their original goals, realising that lasting change would only be possible if they also addressed issues of rights and exclusion. And second, those that started with

Project information



Australian Government
AusAID

An Australian Government, AusAID initiative. Written by Fiona Samuels (ODI), Victoria James (New Dimensions Consultancy, NEDICO, Zimbabwe), and Kerry Selvester (Technical Advisor for Livelihoods and Food Security, APAC). We would like to thank the full APAC team for their comments and contributions. For more information, please contact Fiona Samuels (f.samuels@odi.org.uk). For further information on AusAID/APAC programmes, contact Lucy Kirimi (Lucy.Kirimi@dfat.gov.au).

Box 1: Rights-based programming

According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP): 'A human rights based approach leads to better and more sustainable outcomes by analyzing and addressing the inequalities, discriminatory practices and unjust power relations which are often at the heart of development problems. It puts the international human rights entitlements and claims of the people and the corresponding obligations of the State in the centre of the national development debate' (<http://www.undg.org/?P=221>). Underpinning this are the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Box 2: Concepts related to Beyond Basic Needs (BBN) and Basic Needs (BN) as defined by the APAC technical team

Beyond Basic Needs (BBN): Safety, love, psychosocial support, self esteem, dignity, voice, self-worth, personal fulfilment, identity, freedom, participation and distributive justice.

Basic Needs: Shelter, food, water and sanitation, education, health.

programmes to tackle the barriers to people exercising their basic rights and, during implementation, recognised the importance of ensuring basic needs, such as shelter, health, clean water, education and food security.

From BBN to BN and back again

Three examples of the work of partners are described below: the ChildFund (CF), working in Kenya, Uganda and Zambia; Plan/FIDA (the Association of Women's Lawyers) in Uganda, who began with BBN and moved to BN; and Chikuni, in Zambia, who started with a focus on BN and shifted to BBN.

From BBN to BN: ChildFund (CF), Kenya, Uganda and Zambia. The original purpose of CF's programme was to improve the psychosocial wellbeing of children and youth living with HIV by strengthening community-based support systems. Findings from baseline surveys showed that communities were unable to adequately care for and support HIV-affected and other vulnerable children and youth in their own communities, and that counselling and other psychosocial support services for vulnerable children/youth were extremely limited.

In response, programmes were developed that included: vocational training for vulnerable households; HIV prevention education; peer education; life skills; child/youth mobilisation, empowerment and participation; and provision of children's/youth clubs. Psychosocial support to children was also provided by building the capacity of teachers and carers in the community. Training caregivers, teachers and a range of other stakeholders, such as the police, meant that it was not only the individual child and his or her family who received support, as was occurring in CF's earlier child sponsorship programmes, but the community, in general, became more involved in providing a supportive environment for vulnerable children and their families.

Children whose psychological and material needs are met are much more likely to become self-sufficient and participate actively in their own development (Richter et al., 2006). The move beyond the provision of basic needs has been facilitated by food security initiatives with caregiver groups and in schools. One example is the establishment of school gardens, where food from the gardens is used to enhance school-feeding initiatives, or sold to generate income to benefit pupils, particularly OVC. Children and parents involved in the gardens also benefit through acquiring farming skills and learning about appropriate technologies.

From land-grabbing to domestic violence – from BN to BBN: Plan/FIDA. The Plan/FIDA programme works explicitly on rights issues, both the abuse of individual rights and the barriers to accessing services (e.g. education) that stem from stigma and discrimination. FIDA works on the basis that people can only assert their own rights and respond to the rights of others if they are aware of those rights. The programme has improved access to legal services by children, women, and men affected by HIV and AIDS through training clan leaders, religious leaders and law enforcement officers in will-making, succession and inheritance laws.

From BN to BBN: Chikuni Mission. This Catholic mission in Southern Zambia is a partner of the Australian Foundation for the Peoples of Asia and the Pacific in the APAC programme. The Mission has developed a Home Based Care (HBC) programme to provide care and support to people living with HIV in the mission area, and runs a hospital and a community radio, as well as many other community projects.

The Chikuni HBC programme has had remarkable success in reducing levels of stigma and discrimination towards those living with HIV, and a number of local leaders are open about their positive status. Support groups are now involved in local decision-making bodies and a weekly radio programme is designed and delivered exclusively by people living with HIV. At the outset, the Chikuni HBC programme aimed to reach those living with HIV with basic health care and support. It soon moved beyond this, as it became clear that stigma and discrimination played a big part in the community response to HIV and AIDS. The success of the programme is due, in large part, to the broad range of activities led by people living with HIV.

What makes the BBN approach work?

Using a rights-based programming framework, APAC's Beyond Basic Needs programming has empowered marginalised and vulnerable populations. There are six key elements in this success:

Participation and responsibility. The APAC programmes have demonstrated clearly that where participation is part of decision making, planning and execution the chances of success are higher,

with participants taking on increased levels of responsibility. Many of the APAC programmes took a nuanced approach to participation, with different groups with different levels of adherence to the programmes having different levels of participation. In the Chikuni HBC programme, for example, people living with HIV formed Positive and Living Squads (PALS), but this was backed by the active support of traditional and community leaders, which legitimised the initiative in the eyes of the whole community. There is a high level of both individual (e.g. adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART)) and community responsibility in the Chikuni programme, which augers well for sustainability of its initiatives.

In both of the CF programmes, child participation was central to success. Children took responsibility for planning and carrying out the activities and campaigned actively for their rights with government officials and politicians.

Breaking the barriers. Partners aim to break the often hidden barriers to accessing services. For example: HIV-testing facilities only make a difference if they are used; antiretroviral drugs only work if taken at the right time in the right way and with sufficient food; and counselling services for victims of domestic violence can only protect if domestic violence is recognised as abuse. The APAC programmes work on these issues through stigma and discrimination programmes, psycho-social support initiatives and through legal and community counselling services.

The Chikuni Mission boasts a near 100% HIV-testing rate and there are, at present, no cases of treatment adherence failure. This is the result of intensive and innovative work to address stigma and discrimination. The work by Plan/FIDA on legal and paralegal services has brought the issue of domestic violence to the forefront in communities. Debate on how to reduce incidence of domestic violence and punish perpetrators is now part of the programme, and defilement cases are now being tried in the Ugandan High Court. The CF psychosocial support programmes with teachers and vulnerable children have resulted in less discrimination in schools, and the self-esteem of children has increased.

Seeking legitimacy. APAC partners sought legitimacy by inspiring trust and acceptance with individuals, communities, government services and policy makers. Examples include:

- Care and its local partners, Mvula Trust and AWARD, worked with national government (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry) to mainstream HIV and AIDS in their plans;
- CF Kenya, Uganda and Zambia established active partnerships with District Orphans and Vulnerable Children's Committees (DOVCCs), caregivers and youth councils;
- Plan/FIDA developed strong partnerships with local police through active engagement by police in DOVCCs, and through ongoing partnership between the police and community legal advisers.

Targeting and working with unconventional partners. APAC partners have developed innovative ways to identify target populations. FIDA, for instance, included men – an often neglected but critical group – as key players in rights-based programming. CF ensured that head teachers were included in work on protection, stigma and discrimination, providing leadership within schools. Similarly, CF was supported by the community to identify vulnerable youth and children, while FIDA recognised the key importance of clan leaders, including them as principal targets for capacity building.

Standard and innovative ways of measuring change. Strong monitoring and evaluation systems, the use of baseline surveys and continuous documentation have helped APAC partners identify and address the vulnerabilities facing marginalised and vulnerable groups. As well as measuring 'hard' outcomes, such as the numbers of children staying at school, and the numbers of people testing for HIV, APAC partners have measured 'softer' issues, such as self belief, self worth, safety and security. CF, for example, has made progress in developing monitoring instruments that have been used by community members to judge the impact of activities. These included measures of self esteem and confidence (see Box 3). Other programmes have shown clear examples of people who were once 'invisible', including children and young people, being empowered to speak about their situations and lobby for change.

Significant involvement of the community allows for sustainability. Community involvement in planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation offers an opportunity both for learning and for following the future progress of the intervention. Plan Kenya has, for example, involved communi-

Box 3: Child Fund Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) tools

Indices were developed to gauge the psychological and social wellbeing of children. These worked as both monitoring and evaluation tools to assess the impact of programmes on children and their perceptions of their own wellbeing.

The psychological wellbeing index contains 13 variables, including:

- I blame myself for what happened;
- I feel like leaving this world;
- I have an upset stomach when I think about some things in my life;
- I am satisfied with my life.

The social wellbeing index contains seven variables, including:

- I have arguments with family members;
- I feel loved and wanted by my family;
- I trust my relatives to look out for my best interests;
- I have an adult to comfort me when I am sad or sick.

Responses range from: 'never', 'rarely', 'sometimes', 'frequently', to almost always. These indices were used in group sessions and fed back to children and carers as a form of real time monitoring. The programme was adjusted according to the results. The indices were also a formal part of the impact evaluation at mid-term and will be used in the final evaluation.

ties in data collection, analysis and dissemination. Other APAC partners have involved traditional leaders, which has made the adoption of programmes at community level much easier. Such leaders are respected as the custodians of culture and are major community power brokers. Stigma and discrimination has decreased where those living with HIV are now involved in decision-making and communities are, increasingly, accepting them. The success of the Chikuni HBC programme in Zambia is a prime example.

Lessons learned

BN and BBN are not mutually exclusive – they need to go hand in hand. Meeting Basic Needs addresses only the most immediate vulnerabilities faced by marginalised and vulnerable groups and the needs are likely to be continuous. At the same time, offering only Beyond Basic Needs, without addressing basic needs, is likely to result in resources being diverted to meet those basic needs. Programmes should address both basic needs provision as well as long term strategies to deal with policy changes and higher level outcomes.

Scale-up requires addressing BN and BBN from the outset. BN and BBN should be addressed together, though not necessarily simultaneously, from the initial design of the programme. Indicators on when the programme should shift from one to the other should be clear from start-up. The situation and context will determine whether interventions should start with BN or BBN programming. During implementation, interventions should be sensitive, flexible and have a strong learning framework in which staff continuously review and document progress, lessons, strengths, challenges and threats.

Strategic partnerships are crucial to empower vulnerable populations. The BBN model has shown that strategic partnerships with civil society, community leaders and government structures are complementary and will help to provide a comprehensive response to vulnerable groups. Partnerships

with civil society will help to increase resources, for instance, while government partnerships will provide an opportunity for policy development, change and implementation.

Rights and responsibilities form the bedrock of sustainable development. All of the APAC programmes reviewed showed that it is impossible to address chronic poverty without acknowledging that poverty is, in itself, a rights violation, and ensuring that excluded and marginalised communities benefit directly from programmes. The programmes that have resolved this issue have some common ground. All worked with 'vulnerable' groups and gave active support to their leadership and involvement. All have worked with sustainable and long-lasting structures.

BBN approaches need validation through measurable impacts and tangible results. The ability to measure and demonstrate results is essential in going Beyond Basic Needs. The case studies were selected largely on the basis that they demonstrated tangible results, such as increased access to HIV testing or in decreased cases of property grabbing. But, very importantly, they show how and why these improvements have happened. This means that the models can be replicated.

Constant monitoring and flexibility is necessary to ensure that programmes respond to differing forms and levels of vulnerability. One of the hallmarks of the success of these programmes is that, although there are clear indicators to measure success against baselines, programmers are constantly reviewing who is vulnerable and who is accessing care. Programmes can, therefore, not only be refined to meet their initial goals, but to ensure that new lessons learned can be applied as vulnerabilities change, or as hidden vulnerabilities become more transparent.

The provision of Basic Needs and Beyond Basic Needs services are interlinked and are complementary. Both are critical for the achievement of long term and sustainable empowerment for marginalised and vulnerable groups.



Overseas Development
Institute

111 Westminster Bridge
Road, London SE1 7JD

Tel +44 (0)20 7922 0300

Fax +44 (0)20 7922 0399

Email

publications@odi.org.uk

Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce material from ODI Project Briefings for their own publications, but as copyright holder, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication.

© Overseas Development
Institute 2009
ISSN 1756-7602

References and resources

References:

- Richter, L., Foster, G. and Sherr, L. (2006) 'Where the heart is: meeting the psychosocial needs of young children'.
- Samuels, F., Sibale, B. and Selvester, K. (2008) 'People in planning in Malawi: Lessons from the APAC Programme in Eastern and Southern Africa'. ODI Project Briefing, No. 18, December. London: ODI.
- UN Fact Sheet (2003) 'HIV/AIDS, Food Insecurity and Lack of Government Capacity: the Triple Threat'. Position paper. New York: United Nations.

Useful resources:

- UNICEF (1998) 'Guidelines for Human Rights-Based Programming Approach: A Human Rights Approach for Children and Women: What It Is, and Some Changes It Will Bring'. CF/EXD/1998-04, 21 April. UNHCR Refworld, available at <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/3f82adbb1.html> [accessed 3 February 2009].

Project Briefing

No 18 • January 2009



People in planning in Malawi: Lessons from the APAC Programme in Eastern and Southern Africa

Fiona Samuels, Bright Sibale and
Kerry Selvester

Key points

- Development planning should go beyond programme pragmatism to generate lasting political and social change
- Efforts to involve communities in development planning must be backed by a multi-owned, transparent and responsive institutional set-up
- Increasing the participation of marginalised groups in planning processes can only be achieved if this is an explicit part of programme strategies

Overseas Development Institute

ODI is the UK's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues.

ODI Project Briefings provide a focused and specialised summary of a project, a country study or regional analysis.

This and other ODI Project Briefings are available from www.odi.org.uk

The Australian Partnerships with African Communities (APAC) programme is a five-year cooperation agreement (2004-2009) between the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and Australian NGOs to address emerging development challenges in Eastern and Southern Africa (ESA) using community-based approaches. With the end of the five-year agreement in sight, it is time to look at the key lessons, successes and innovations of the programme. This briefing is the first of three. The second will document how the APAC programme has gone beyond provision of basic needs, to address such issues as stigma and discrimination, rights based programming and psychosocial support for vulnerable children. The third will highlight the innovative ways in which Australian and African NGOs have worked together.

Focusing on the role of people in planning (PiP) processes, this briefing provides a short overview of the rationale for decentralisation and how this works in practice in Malawi, looking at the work of three NGOs. It describes key aspects of the PiP models used by the NGOs, how these have facilitated people's involvement and how they can be sustained and replicated. It concludes with three overarching findings.

Decentralisation and PiP

Decentralisation is a process that has facilitated the involvement of people in planning.

Defined as 'the transfer of political power, decision-making capacity and resources from central to sub-national levels of government' (Walker, 2002), the last decade has witnessed a proliferation of decentralisation and local government reform around the world, including in ESA. The drive towards decentralisation has been motivated by disappointing progress in meeting national goals through the centralised, highly bureaucratic processes followed by governments in the region since independence to the mid 1990s. Globalisation, and rapid political, economic, and technological changes have also fuelled the trend towards greater reliance on lower levels of government (Smoke, 2001). There are, however, ongoing debates on the benefits of decentralisation. According to Manor, for instance, empirical evidence from more than 60 cases indicates that decentralisation at the local level – when it works well – has many virtues, but is no panacea. It also has limitations as a force for reducing poverty, on which its record is mixed (Manor, 2000, 2003).

Decentralisation in Malawi

Decentralisation is a major government policy in all countries in which the APAC has been implemented: Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This briefing explores the decentralisation process in Malawi and three PiP models that have been developed by NGO partners in the country.

Project information



Australian Government

AusAID

An Australian Government, AusAID initiative. Written by Fiona Samuels (ODI), Bright Sibale (Centre for Development Management, Lilongwe, Malawi) and Kerry Selvester (Technical Advisor for Livelihoods and Food Security, APAC). We want to thank the full APAC team for their comments and contributions. For more information, please contact Fiona Samuels (f.samuels@odi.org.uk).

The Government of Malawi adopted its Decentralisation Policy in 1996. The aim was to decentralise political and administrative authority to the district level as a way to consolidate democracy and achieve poverty reduction. As a result, the District Assembly (DA) is the focal point for district level policy and programme development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation (Figure 1). The DA is composed of elected ward councilors and is serviced by a Secretariat, headed by a District Commissioner or a Chief Executive for rural and urban assemblies respectively. The District Executive Committee (DEC), composed of technical staff from government departments and civil society organisations, is the technical arm of the DA and is directly responsible for formulation and implementation of the District Development Plan.

The Area Development Committee (ADC), below the DA, operates as a Traditional Authority, consisting of many villages, and headed by a Chief. The lowest of the three tiers is the Village Development Committee (VDC), composed of community members.

While the structures are in place, government extension systems responsible for their mobilisation lack resources and are, as a result, weak, poorly-motivated and unable to ensure that communities can participate in planning and programme implementation. The NGOs are, therefore, filling a gap created by government inactivity.

All three of the NGOs studied in Malawi target vulnerable and marginalised populations, including the elderly, orphans and vulnerable children, female-headed households and people living with HIV (PLWH). The areas where the NGOs work are dominated by subsistence farmers, with few income generating opportunities and limited access to services. Many households are trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty, HIV and AIDS and food insecurity.

Key aspects of the PiP models

Genesis and approach. All models were developed by the NGOs in response to the disconnect between district authorities and communities, the lack of responsiveness and accountability of district authorities to communities, the exclusion of marginalised and vulnerable communities, and lack of community involvement in planning and decision-making processes. The goal was to strengthen participation of community members in development programmes and ensure effective representation of all villages in VDCs, ADCs as well as DAs. All models promote sus-

tainable development through such activities as savings schemes (CARE), food security, marketing and community institutional development.

- CARE Village Umbrella Committee Model (VUC). A participatory livelihoods assessment conducted by CARE led to the creation of village umbrella groups. The model is an umbrella organisation, made up of smaller issue-based subcommittees that are, in turn, made up of members of other committees. Within these subcommittees, people are selected for the umbrella group.
- Kumanga Umodzi (KU): The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) SAFARI Malawi Project Community Institutional Model. Developed from lessons learned from the CARE VUC model and further studies. The model is an umbrella committee of 2-3 Community Development Committees, which operate at village level and represent the villages at the VDC level. Members of the committee are elected by the community.
- The Concern Universal Community-based Organisation (CBO) Model. The evolution of the model was a pragmatic process in response to the lack of linkages from CBOs to VDCs. The model works through CBOs instead of umbrella committees, organised at group village level.

Links to the District Assembly and participation in the planning processes. Each model provides clear communication channels between the community bodies and the district authorities. Participation of vulnerable groups has been encouraged and achieved through the systems set up by the NGOs, together with the district and traditional authorities.

- CARE: the umbrella committee reports directly to the VDC and the small sector-based subcommittees report to the umbrella committee. The sector-based subcommittees have full representation from women and the most vulnerable people in the community.
- ADRA: vulnerable people are represented on the community development committees, intermediary committees between a single village and the KU model, which report to the VDC.
- Concern: the CBOs that represent different interest groups in the villages have been formally accepted by the VDCs as interlocutors for the groups they represent.

Increased resources at village level. The KU (ADRA) and Concern CBOs are formally registered and have raised funds for their activities. The umbrella committees in the CARE model have, through the scorecard monitoring tool (see Box 1), successfully lobbied for increased resources at village level and provided the district authorities with a clear and open communication channel.

All models are recognised locally, but none are recognised as national models for the creation of institutionalised links between the formal decentralisation structure and the grassroots. The mem-

Box 1: Building dialogue through Community Score Cards (CSCs)

The Community Score Card is a community-based participatory tool for social auditing, planning, monitoring, evaluation and reporting. It is used to demand accountability, transparency, inclusion and responsibility from service providers by service users. It does so by bringing together users and providers at meetings to analyse challenges in service delivery, finding shared solutions. CARE Malawi has used the tool extensively in Dowa, Lilongwe and Ntchisi districts to start a dialogue between Government and the local community, facilitated by the VUC.

bers of these various bodies are selected or elected by community members so are part of a representational system rather than a political system.

How do models include local people?

Through participation in Village Action Planning (VAP) processes. Malawi's decentralisation policy requires all group villages to have a Village Action Plan (VAP), representing a development programme for the VDC. The VDC is mandated to facilitate the planning and implementation of the plan. However, because of the inadequate capacity of VDCs, these plans are not completed. The CARE and Concern models, in particular, have mobilised communities to develop VAPs that feed into the district development process. In the areas of Lilongwe where CARE Malawi works, the DA used VUCs to facilitate the development of VAPs, which have now been incorporated in the Lilongwe District Assembly Development Plan.

By facilitating community mobilisation in development activities. Decentralisation is not realistic when grassroot communities are not linked to official government structures. With limited resources at DA and community level, the government extension system faces serious problems in reaching the majority of the poor at grassroots level. All the NGO models fill this gap by building capacity of community-based volunteers, who mobilise fellow community members in development programmes that are then implemented by NGOs and other services providers including government.

By institutionalising dialogue between communities and decentralised structures. By establishing links with VDCs, ADC and the DA, the CARE and KU models provide an explicit opportunity for the community – through the Community Score Cards (CARE) (Box 1) and recognition at VDC of KU – to interact with the decentralisation structures, thereby incorporating community perspectives in the district development system. CARE provides this through the CSC and KU through recognition at the VDC and district levels. For example, PLWH are involved in development planning and decision-making through support groups with representatives in the PiP models. Youth, children and women participate through their own groups. The models channel the community development proposals to relevant authorities and some CBOs are now also sourcing funds from other donors. The models have also provided the government and other service providers with a legitimate channel for consultation on, and implementation of, their programmes. In Lilongwe, under CARE Malawi for instance, the Government used the VUC structures to target beneficiaries for agricultural input subsidy programmes.

By empowering people economically, especially women and PLWH. The models use community volunteers who identify markets for locally produced agricultural products (Box 3). By linking to the market, the models involve people in the economic development

of their areas and households. Under CARE Malawi, the VUC model also facilitates access to credit through Village Savings and Loan (VS&L) schemes, which target women in particular. A recent strategic impact enquiry (CARE Malawi, 2008) has shown that women who are members of such schemes have more economic power than those who are not. Improved access to economic opportunities promotes ownership and motivates women to participate in planning and implementation of other community programmes.

What makes the models work?

A number of factors contribute to the effective functioning of the PiP models, including a conducive policy and legal environment for decentralisation in Malawi. The decentralisation process has created decentralised planning systems and structures at district and community level.

There have been investments in capacity-building through NGOs for a range of stakeholders, including community-based volunteers, local leaders, government extension workers, the police and the judiciary.

Partnerships with DAs in implementing sub-programmes have helped. In the APAC programme, implementation is multi-sectoral and the DA is closely involved, alongside other relevant government departments at district level. This multi-sectoral approach has contributed to the sustainability and replicability of the models. In Malawi the DECs lead in programme implementation and monitoring for CARE Malawi, Concern Universal and ADRA.

The use of participatory approaches to identify community needs and solutions has been key to the success of the APAC programme. NGOs have used participatory methods to develop APAC proposals, and implement and monitor programme activities with stakeholders, including government representatives.

When it comes to sustaining and replicating such models, the ongoing involvement and capacity-building of the DA and the legitimisation of the models by local government at district and community level will play an important role in their functioning beyond the APAC programme.

The models fit well with decentralisation processes, systems and structures, and are likely to continue to feed into the government planning systems. There is evidence in Malawi that the models are being used by the Government, through DAs, to implement government programmes to target vulnerable groups and distribute subsidised agricultural inputs.

The PiP models are being facilitated by a cadre of trained community-based volunteers who have been selected by their communities. Their skills will, therefore, survive beyond the project. In addition, communities have been mobilised, have actively participated and have owned the processes. Inter-village learning (field trips, community sensitisation campaigns, open days, joint monitoring) has ensured that learning is institutionalised at community level. Finally, working with Traditional Authorities means that the methods are legitimised

by authorities that influence community life. All of these features are likely to encourage the continuity of the models beyond the duration of the project.

However, model sustainability is threatened by weak capacity and lack of funding by government to the DA. This could result in weak backstopping of the models once the APAC programme ends. There are questions as to whether volunteers can remain committed without training and other incentives.

Lessons learned

Community structures are critical in bridging the decentralisation gap. Most decentralisation structures are unable to facilitate real participation by all households, meaning inadequate representation. The PiP models have represented the people and enabled the voices of the vulnerable to be heard; facilitated the development of community-based programmes; been platforms for consultations at local level; and have helped to improve the responsiveness of local governments in service provision.

Capacities should be built at district and community level concurrently. Governments tend to build capacity at district level, while the APAC NGOs have built capacities at all levels. When capacities at district and community level are built together, district level authorities become more responsive, while communities become aware of the challenges faced by district level and their rights as citizens.

Collaboration in service delivery is critical to meet demand. By raising awareness and building capacity at community level, NGO programmes often create a demand for services that they cannot individually meet. Government may lack the capacity and resources to respond effectively to the increased demand for services. More collaboration in service delivery is needed and the APAC models have created the required entry points.

Transparency and accountability (T&A) are crucial for effective decentralisation. By bringing authorities closer to the people through interface meetings, the models promote T&A. Transparency is achieved because development programmes are formulated, implemented and monitored with the people; accountability is attained through joint and participatory planning and decision-making processes. CARE Malawi has used the CSC to achieve T&A, and improve understanding of the resource constraints faced by the district. The CSC is now being adopted by other NGOs, both in Malawi and beyond.

Three over-arching take-home lessons have been learned from the models in Malawi.

First, a multi-owned, transparent, responsive institutional set-up is the most effective approach to ensure that communities and individuals are involved in planning processes. Within decentralised systems of governance, there may be many institutions with competing interests working at community level, including traditional, political and government sectoral planning institutions and NGOs. Through APAC, NGOs have learned that no single institution can implement quality programmes and represent the people. A multi-stakeholder platform agreed by the community, built on the institutional framework established by the authorities, is an opportunity for development and growth. They have learned that a platform where all community groups have their views taken into consideration, and the government, traditional authorities and other interests are represented, is the most appropriate model for institutionalising participation and community involvement and thereby involving people in planning and development.

Second, programme planning should go beyond pragmatism to build social and political leverage. NGOs often focus on pragmatic approaches to identify and solve community problems. They often create or strengthen local institutions to improve programme delivery, based on agreed targets and timeframes. Greater engagement with the formal decentralised structures at district level shows that going beyond implementation to empower people to represent communities in district systems enhances efficacy and increases sustainability.

Third, raising the voice and participation of marginalised groups in planning and development is only possible if this is an explicit part of the programming strategy. By focusing on marginalised groups in the community, and increasing linkages with formal structures, the NGO programmes have created space for participation in decision-making at various levels. Initiatives such as VS&L schemes and income generating projects have promoted not only economic outcomes, but also the empowerment and participation of women, youth and PLWH. With this new found economic and social freedom, the NGOs have seen the increasing participation of marginalised people in representative planning bodies, demonstrating more confidence in expressing themselves to district officials. The models have created a platform and a political space for the participation of people whose voice is rarely considered in formal district fora.



Overseas Development
Institute

111 Westminster Bridge
Road, London SE1 7JD

Tel +44 (0)20 7922 0300

Fax +44 (0)20 7922 0399

Email
publications@odi.org.uk

Readers are encouraged to quote or reproduce material from ODI Project Briefings for their own publications, but as copyright holder, ODI requests due acknowledgement and a copy of the publication.

© Overseas Development
Institute 2009
ISSN 1756-7602

Endnotes

- CARE Malawi (2008) 'Strategic Impact Inquiry (SII)', January.
Manor, J. (2003) 'Local Governance'. Mimeo prepared for the Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA).
Manor, J. (2000) 'Decentralisation and Sustainable Livelihoods'. Livelihoods Connect. PIP Papers. DFID-IDS (www.livelihoods.org/pip/pip/dcbback.html).

- Smoke, P. (2001) 'Fiscal Decentralization in East and Southern Africa: A Selective Review of Experience and Thoughts on Making Progress', New York University.
Walker, A. (2002) 'Decentralization'. Key Sheet No. 1, Overseas Development Institute, London.