

Outcome Mapping and empowerment: the experience of SAHA in Madagascar

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Photo: SDC/Jane Carter

This story provides an example of a donor agency deliberately changing its role and relationships with its partners to be more enabling and facilitating. It shows the influence that planning, monitoring and steering methods can have on relationships and power. In Madagascar, the **Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC)**, its Swiss implementing partner Intercooperation, and key local collaborators decided to upscale a rural development programme by changing the focus of support from working directly with small farmers' organisations to partnering with intermediary organisations which took on responsibility for planning and implementation. This strategic shift was combined with the introduction of a planning and monitoring method that was largely new to the country: Outcome Mapping. This method focuses on capturing changes in mindset and behaviour, rather than recording changes in conditions, such as improved infrastructure or services. Outcome Mapping also recognises that development efforts are more likely to be successful and sustainable when responsibility is devolved to local people and local institutions. The story describes the difficulties encountered by both partners and project staff, but concludes that it was worth the effort as intermediary organisations have strengthened their capacities and play an enabling role, which is a strong way to promote empowerment.

www.oecd.org/dac/poverty/empowerment

The story of SAHA

According to World Bank estimates, 70% of Madagascar's population can be defined as poor and 59% as extremely poor; of the latter group, 88% live in rural areas. With all indications pointing to rising poverty levels, it is perhaps not surprising that the past decade has seen an increasingly vocal expression of political views.

The Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SDC) has a long history of supporting rural development in Madagascar. SAHA, a programme funded by SDC and implemented by Intercooperation (Swiss Foundation for Development and Cooperation) began supporting organised farmer groups to choose their development priorities in 2001. This was a radical departure from previous development projects in which interventions had been pre-defined. SAHA is now in its fourth phase (2010-2012), focusing on areas of high poverty in six regions of the country.

In phase II (2003 – 2006), two new themes were introduced – local governance and risk management linked to food security and vulnerability. A study commissioned by SAHA towards the end of the phase provided insights into the complex nature of poverty. One finding was that people living in poverty view this condition as a temporary one from which they hope to escape. The term 'poor' was dropped from team use because of its negative connotations and the term 'vulnerable' used instead.

Towards the end of SAHA II, an external evaluation noted that SAHA was doing good work but that there were too many micro-projects – hundreds per year – which took too much time to manage. The effects were felt among the small groups of farmers but no wider. What was needed was a means of leverage to create wider impact.



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– Ramaria of the Union of Fitarikandro, Mahazina

It was thus in planning SAHA's third phase in 2006 that SDC decided to move the focus of interventions from the micro- to the meso-level. The idea was to build the capacities of organisations that could reach out to greater numbers, themselves becoming drivers of political and economic change and thus of regional development.

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The introduction of Outcome Mapping

The decision to work at the regional rather than at the local level in SAHA III was a major one, and those involved in the programme design realised that a different form of programme monitoring was needed. SDC's Giorgio Bianchi explains: “The system used by SAHA had been one of household level inquiry – a very heavy system of monitoring that took up considerable resources – both in time and money, running the risk of generating a cemetery of data with little chance of being used. Of course the households remained the ultimate beneficiaries in SAHA III, but establishing partnerships with middle-level organisations meant that it was necessary to monitor the progress of these organisations, especially in terms of their behaviour.”

This important strategic change in the programme design was accompanied by the introduction of Outcome Mapping (OM), a new methodology for planning and monitoring programme activities, developed by the International Development Research Centre. This shift changed the way the programme understood its goals and assessed its performance. Outcomes are defined as changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities, or actions of the people, groups and organisations with whom a programme works directly. Development is accomplished by, and for, people – this is the central concept of Outcome Mapping. It does not dismiss the importance of improved conditions, such as the construction of a road linking a village to the outside world, but instead argues that for each change in state there are correlating changes in behaviour.

SAHA's response

Given that the choice of Outcome Mapping was a donor-driven one, how did the SAHA team perceive it? Estelle Raharinaivosoa, SAHA Director, recalls: “We had certain concerns and questions, such as ‘Is it a real need of partners to change their behaviour? Isn't their need more one of support in infrastructure and seeds?’ and so on. But we were ready to take up the challenge.”

Since SAHA was at that time focussed on material support and capacity building of farmers, it took a considerable conceptual leap to place emphasis on changes in partner behaviour instead. The learning curve was long and steep. Eric Chevallier, the Intercooperation desk officer, observed the reactions to Outcome Mapping amongst participants during the first five day meeting: “One group was of those who wanted to understand the new method, who wished to learn. Amongst them I sensed an intellectual curiosity and an openness of spirit... There were others – generally more those engaged in field operations – who were clearly less enthusiastic, they just wanted to attend the meeting and get back to their work. And then there were the invited potential partner representatives, who came without much knowledge of what the workshop was about, but who took up the idea, and tried to work with it By the end of the workshop, I felt that a lot of clarity had been achieved in terms of the approach. People felt more relaxed and confident.”

Ony Rasoloarison, the SAHA monitoring officer, also echoes this viewpoint: “I'm convinced that OM induces the empowerment of the partners, given the principle that once they have established their vision of change, they are responsible for their own development, of their area and their grassroots organisations ... they take their future in their hands, without this being imposed upon them by SAHA...”

The choice of partners

In theory, the decision to operate at regional level required a new set of partners. In practice, while many of the regional-level partners in phase III were new, a good number were already familiar with SAHA. Eric Chevallier, Intercooperation's desk officer, acknowledges that in some cases grassroots organisations supported under SAHA's earlier phases seemed to form themselves ‘overnight’ into umbrella organisations in order to be eligible for continued support. However,



Photo: SDC/Jane Carter

he argues that SAHA probably merely catalysed a process that would have happened anyway, as it corresponded to the needs and political thinking of the time.

To select the new partners, the team drew a list of criteria which ranged from an absence of blatant internal conflicts and a good track record to proof of strong representation of grassroots members, and respect for equity with regard to gender and vulnerability. The selection was time consuming, but according to Annette Kolff, Intercooperation's Delegate in Madagascar, "*The five to nine months of discussion were an opportunity to ensure a good selection of partners, with the dropping of 'opportunists' either immediately or after a few months. It wasn't a lost period, but rather a contribution to capacity development and behavioural change, already before the signature of any contract.*" Overall, the umbrella organisations - including those that formed around the time of SAHA's strategic shift in support - have proved themselves in their activities - so their sustainability is not now widely questioned.

Putting the new method into practice

SAHA staff members recall encountering many difficulties when starting with the new approach. Perhaps partly because of their sense of achievement in overcoming the obstacles, they are now overwhelmingly positive. The jargon used in the method was initially difficult to grasp, and the whole process of monitoring - using journals and many different progress markers - was very time consuming. Léonard Rakotomalala, member of the regional team Miandrivazo, recalls the early days: "*The difficulty came from the different logics of SAHA and the farmers. SAHA advocates the farmers taking control through reinforcing their capacities, whereas the farmers want something concrete. And for me as facilitator, my big problem was to find the means to reconcile these opposing things, all the more because SAHA adopts a demand driven approach.*"

Leading on from this, Joseph Ranoelivony, Regional Officer for Vakinankaratra, observes that: "*with OM, farmer and organisations learn to take control, to own their projects and to have a sense of responsibility for their activities.*" Alfred Randriamandimbimana, another member of the regional team for Vakinankaratra, gives an example of the way in which planning discussions take place: "*Because they are used to receiving subsidies, members of a rural*

commune tend to ask for something in the state that they wish it to be - they think immediately of a change in condition. But the role of the team is to ask questions in response: why do you want a particular material or a particular infrastructure? I generally ask yet another question: What do you have to do first to reach the result? From that, the stakeholders start to talk about changing the way that they work, to see things differently. They reflect on and realise the importance of changed behaviour."

The 'change of condition' mentioned here essentially refers to an improvement in material assets such as the number of buildings constructed, or boats or bee-hives owned. A 'change in behaviour' by contrast concerns a change in mindset - the development of the skills and confidence needed to put together a cogent proposal, identify funding sources, argue successfully for funding, and oversee implementation and maintenance. OM not only provides a way for project staff and partner organisations to discuss these steps but also to agree on appropriate progress markers, and to monitor their efforts on a regular basis.

Jean Philémon, the mayor of a commune that has been collaborating with SAHA for five years, explains how this works in practice: "*When we entered into the negotiation, it was a big surprise. SAHA didn't do any infrastructure, it was more training in good governance. All the same, we signed the contract.*" Thus, he was at first disappointed that there were no funds for significant material improvements. Yet as the training courses and other activities planned under SAHA III progressed, he realised that they were having an effect. The commune made significant steps towards better governance, issuing official receipts for all payments received, publicising budget allocations and major decisions on a public notice board, and providing services like the issuing of birth and death certificates in a prompt and efficient manner. As a result, public confidence rose, people became more willing to pay their taxes, and tax revenue increased. At the same time, he himself grew in confidence and ability to face officials and donors with strong, successful arguments for funding. In such cases, success tends to breed success - and this example is particularly stark. However, it is not exceptional in terms of the processes.



Photo: SDC/Jane Carter

What next?

Everyone involved in this story defined their role in terms of a continuing dynamic of changing attitudes and behaviour. There is a sense of empowerment processes evolving at all levels. Perhaps the most convincing examples of changed behaviour are among the individual members of the groups who have gained confidence to plan their future – at the level of their own households as well as collectively in their organisation. However, the leadership of umbrella organisations are often quicker to embrace change than the members of their grassroots organisations; this can create misunderstandings and resentment. In its remaining years, the programme may need to place particular emphasis on ensuring that the partners maintain strong links with their grassroots, and do not run ahead too rapidly.

Both the SAHA team and their partners have in fact increased their ability to push for positive change. Indeed, SAHA has found it empowering to move from the provision of material and technical support and contract supervision to the role of broader capacity builder and facilitator. This illustrates well that even if not easy for project staff to step back and give up control and decision-making power to partners, there can be huge job satisfaction in mastering a new method, and seeing it give rise to greater effectiveness. It also shows how influential planning and monitoring “methods” can be in such a shift in perspective, in contributing to an enabling, empowering environment.

Significant changes in behaviour

The way in which SAHA is supporting the economic development of freshwater fish production in four lakes in Antsirabe provides an example of tangible change. Each of the lakes is now managed by a local organisation – this process of transfer of management rights having been supported during SAHA II. Fishing is an important activity for local households for much of the year, but selling the fresh fish was always complicated as it must be done quickly. SAHA facilitated meetings of the local organisations managing each of the four lakes to discuss the challenges they faced. Henri Rokotoson, now cooperative president, saw this as a turning point: *“After this sharing, the idea was born to constitute a fisherman’s union. We managed the fish value chain from the four lakes in terms of production and sale. It was with this that the status of the cooperative was formalised, in order to be able to conduct commercial activities. We asked SAHA to support this activity in its phase III.”*

The cooperative has some 100 members (each of whom pay a small membership fee), and has organised regular fish collection and sale. Starting with two small retail outlets, it has just established two more – one in the large market of Antsirabe. Here two catches per day are delivered, and sell very rapidly; demand outstrips supply. The cooperative has certainly not escaped many challenges – including long discussions over how to ensure sustainable fishing levels, and accusations of financial mis-management. The latter prompted the employment of a part-time accountant, whose salary is of course an additional cost. Yet membership remains strong and clearly there is broad satisfaction with achievements.

A number of individuals belonging to different umbrella organisations made a particularly striking observation. This is that they are also putting ‘OM thinking’ into practice in their daily lives. Ramaria of the Union of Fitarikandro, Mahazina, has this to say: *“After receiving the training in planning, I had the idea to apply it in our household. So we did a planning in the same way. Since then, I’ve never been criticised when I participate in the activities of the association or the commune, because everything’s been foreseen in advance. The activities in paddy cultivation, bean cultivation and livestock rearing are all shared with the family members according to their age. Every evening, we make an evaluation of the day and discuss what we’re going to do the following day, and this has been really effective.”*