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Monitoring Empowerment: The experiences of SAHA in using Outcome Mapping

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OutcomeMapping

LEARNING COMMUNITY

1 Introduction

Outcome Mapping (OM) was developed in the late 1990s in recognition of the limits of monitoring and evaluation tools that focus purely on the physically quantifiable results of development interventions (Earl, Carden and Smutylo, 2001). The authors sought instead to develop a method that recognises the complexity of “real life situations” - that it is rare that impacts are linear (direct “cause and effect”), and can be attributed to a particular intervention over a particular time period. It is far more usual that project impacts are the result of many converging factors, some well beyond the control of the project; furthermore, it is to be hoped that they will be felt over a longer period than the project itself. Outcome mapping thus focuses on changes in people - on monitoring and evaluating the behaviour of, and interactions between, people involved in a given development initiative. This is done through self assessment, meaning that recipients of donor funds are required to demonstrate that they are making progress in achieving an impact – without being accountable for the impact itself – and are able to continue doing so after the project has ended. The method places accountability on learning and improving; on making a contribution, rather than attributing an action to a result. As OM captures changes in power relations between people, it can in principle be used to monitor empowerment. Furthermore, since it actively supports mutual learning, it can also be argued that its use can promote empowerment.

OM is now quite widely used by some donors, including SDC in a number of its projects. In examining one particular experience of a rural development project in Madagascar (SAHA), this paper highlights some of the challenges and lessons learned in the use of OM, mainly from the perspective of the implementing agency. It also sets out a number of issues of wider relevance for monitoring and evaluation by development agencies. The paper is based on field interactions in Madagascar on two occasions (November 2009 and May 2010), field interviews conducted by a local consultant, and self-reflection on the part of the SAHA team. It is divided into three sections – a factual account of when, why and how Outcome Mapping was taken up by the programme SAHA; an analysis of this particular experience in terms of empowerment; and finally a broader discussion on the method, drawing on the lessons learned through SAHA. A separate narrative on the SAHA experience with OM (see Carter, 2010) provides complementary information.

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2 The programme SAHA and its use of OM

Box 1. SAHA fact sheet

Key message: Empowering civil society to fight against poverty, with particular emphasis on good local governance and regional economic development

Financing Agency: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

Implementing agency: Intercooperation, Swiss Foundation for Development and International Cooperation (IC) through its Madagascar office; the SAHA team comprises some 60 national staff (thematic experts, staff responsible for programme management and support staff).

Financial volume: Approx. CHF 4 million per annum

Location: Currently 6 (earlier 3) regions of Madagascar, selected for their high poverty incidence

Period of operation: 2001 – 2012 (in four phases)

Phases I and II (2001 – 2006): Focus on local level support, through contractual agreements with small groups of farmers – and, in phase II, with some rural communes. By the end of the second phase, SAHA was working with some 50,000 households (12.5% of the population in the 3 regions of operation), reaching about 410,000 persons.

Phases III and IV (2007 – 2012): Focus on meso or regional level support, partnering initially with over 80 organisations. The number of persons reached is difficult to calculate, being often less direct, but is over 1.7 million. The number of partner organisations has been reduced to about 40 in phase VI.

2.1 The evolution of SAHA

Key information about SAHA is provided in box 1, from which it may be noted that a shift in the level of programme intervention took place in 2006, at the end of phase II. The programme began by facilitating self-driven grassroots development, working with small farmers' groups. They were supported in determining their own development priorities, and in planning, managing and evaluating the work then undertaken. A particularly notable feature was that the farmer's groups did not have to fit their ideas to specific project topics (such as forestry, agriculture or education) – they could decide themselves. In phase II, a degree of thematic guidance was introduced in the form of two transversal topics: local governance and risk management linked to food security and vulnerability. The idea behind the first theme was to link the project directly with local decision-making in the communes, whilst the food security and vulnerability focus ensured emphasis on the poorest and most marginalised households and communities.

Towards the end of SAHA II, a number of studies on project impacts were conducted, and an external consultant was contracted by SDC to make a programme evaluation. His recommendations, combined with internal discussions amongst project staff and Bern-based Intercooperation and SDC staff, led to a re-thinking of the programme's approach. SAHA was recognised to be highly successful in its grassroots

level impact. However, it lacked a concerted regional impact, and the system of individual contracts with each of the numerous partner organisations was administratively cumbersome. It was thus a logical evolution to shift programme intervention to regional level, and to develop new partnerships with meso-level organisations. Empowering such organisations to undertake development initiatives was perceived as having greater potential to drive political and economic change, and thus sustainable regional development.

2.2 The need for a new monitoring system

Those responsible for designing the resulting SAHA phase III¹ realised that the most important aspect to monitor would be the development of the meso-level partner organisations in terms of their internal operations, activities, and external linkages. This fits closely with the logic of OM as explained in the introduction – that is, placing focus on monitoring and evaluating changes in the behaviour of the people involved in a given development intervention. At the time, OM was eliciting considerable interest in SDC headquarters. SDC therefore decided that SAHA's earlier monitoring system, of monitoring outputs and conducting detailed inquiries at household and community level, should be replaced by OM. An external consultant specialised in the method provided considerable support in this process.

The vision and mission statements of SAHA III were discussed and agreed at a planning workshop in 2006, attended by Intercooperation-Bern, the SAHA team, and selected boundary partners. These statements are given annex 1.

2.3 Practical challenges in introducing OM

Putting OM into practice was generally considered by SAHA staff to have been a major challenge. The system as currently followed has three main thrusts, designed to monitor:

- the changes in the behaviour of the direct (boundary) partners (self-assessment by the partners, cross-checked, discussed and finalised with the SAHA team)
- the quality of support offered by the SAHA team (self assessment by the team)
- changes in the context.

In addition, the programme collects information on the effects of the actions of the boundary partners on the programme's ultimate beneficiaries – that is, the most vulnerable rural citizens, especially women. This information is analysed by a thematic specialist in the team, using partner records as a base. This last thrust is made as an additional element, and is not strictly a part of the OM method itself.

Some of the particular challenges faced by SAHA in putting OM into practice are outlined below.

¹ SDC and Intercooperation staff – the latter comprising senior members of the SAHA team, expatriate advisers, and a Bern-based staff member.

Box 2. Outcome Mapping (OM): key features

OM was developed by the Evaluation Unit of the Canadian International Development Research Council (IDRC) in collaboration with a number of other agencies. It is based on the logic that it is through changes in the behaviour of people and the organisations to which they belong that development takes place. Key features of OM are as follows:

- Under OM, a broad programme **vision** is first elaborated that describes desired human, social and/or environmental improvements in the future; it is therefore a description of the large-scale development changes (economic, political, social, or environmental).
- The vision is followed by a **mission** statement which sets out how the programme will contribute to the vision. It states the areas in which the programme will work but does not list all the activities in which the program will engage.
- The programme partners – those individuals, groups and organisations whom the programme can influence through direct interactions - are termed **boundary partners**.
- OM defines programme **outcomes** as changes in the behaviour (in terms of activities, actions and relationships) of the boundary partners. **Outcome challenges** are defined with and for each boundary partner. Outcome challenges are descriptions of the ideal changes in the behaviour, relationship, activities, and/or actions of a boundary partner.
- Changes in boundary partner behaviour are measured by **progress markers**, a set of graduated milestones that focus on the depth or quality of change.
- OM focuses on how a programme **facilitates** change, rather than how it controls or causes it. It looks at the logical links between interventions and outcomes, rather than trying to attribute results to a particular intervention. Programme support to its boundary partners are described as **support strategies**.
- OM requires the **involvement** of programme staff and partners throughout the planning, monitoring and evaluation stages.

Source: Earl, Sarah, Carden, Fred and Smutylo, Terry (2001b) http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-62234-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html and Daniel Roduner, *pers. comm.*

2.3.1 Diversity of partners

The existence of numerous diverse partners was a simple fact arising from the nature of SAHA's work. It is indeed not uncommon for development projects or programmes to have a number of different partners, although the 80 boundary partners of SAHA in phase III is a particularly high number. Under OM, boundary partners are grouped into different categories; SAHA classified its partner organisations into five main categories: rural communes; umbrella farmers' organisations (OPF), inter-communal organisations (OPCI); associations of communes; and rural civil society umbrella organisations (OFSCR) (see annex 2 for further information). Within each of these categories, further diversity exists in terms of size, interest and capacities. The way in which SAHA dealt with this diversity was to support all boundary partners in defining their own mission statement (broadly corresponding with the overall project vision and mission), and developing their own outcome indicators and progress markers. In order to monitor

overall progress at programme level, a set of standard, broadly worded progress markers were worked out for each partner category, in an iterative process². The challenge was to combine the need for a strong sense of ownership at the level of each of the boundary partners for its own planning, monitoring and evaluation with the need of the programme to monitor overall changes. An example – in this case of an inter-communal organisation - is given in text box 3.

Box 3. Planning using OM: the example of the inter-communal organisation (OPCI) FFAV (Ambatolampy District)

The FFAV (Fampandrosoana ny Faritra Avaratr'i Vakinankaratra) is a registered organisation for inter-communal cooperation that was created in January 2005, with a membership of four communes; a fifth joined subsequently. It defined its **missions** [*sic*] as follows:

- Boosting local tax revenue
- Integrated planning of the combined communal resources
- Development of the local economy through sectors of shared communal interest (such as tourism)
- Civil defence
- Construction and maintenance of shared communal equipment (for agriculture, sanitation and sport)
- Protection and sustainable management of joint natural resources.

The **outcome challenge** defined in the partnership between FFAV and SAHA in 2009 was as follows: “In 2009, FFAV inventories its resources and manages and uses them in a knowledgeable, good and transparent manner for the development of its member communes and their population with the aim of reaching out to the exterior [beyond the boundaries of the member communes].”

The **markers of progress** (MP) were that the FFAV:

- is formally constituted and has a strategy for developing its common interests (MP1 and MP2)
- conducts a detailed assessment of its resources and is capable of managing and using them to improve the financial resources of the member communes (MP3)
- develops formal collaborations with diverse partners (MP4)
- has a plan for environmental protection (MP5)
- has a strategy for engaging its citizens, particularly women and young people (MP6).

These correspond as follows with the markers of progress for OPCIs at the overall programme level:

- Improvements in institutional development (MP1)
- Application of the principles of good governance (MP2)
- Improvement in the system of information and communication (MP3)
- Development of a network of partners (MP4)
- Contribution to local area development (MP5)
- Promotion of the interests of the member communes (MP6)

² In this the differentiation sometimes used in OM between “expect to see”, “like to see” and “love to see” progress markers was effectively dropped.

2.3.2 Capacity building of staff members

Under previous phases, SAHA's monitoring and evaluation (M&E) unit functioned somewhat autonomously. They compiled basic data and oversaw the collection of detailed, household level information - and whilst they coordinated with locally based team members when so doing, theirs was a specialised task. They were required to gather data and synthesise it in a form that provided the donor (SDC) and project staff with an overall assessment of programme performance – particularly with regard to reaching the most vulnerable, and promoting good governance within the local partner organisations. The use of OM, by contrast, requires that everyone in the team participates in monitoring, and understands the procedure. In SAHA's case, the fact that the programme also works with (field-based) service providers gave an additional layer of people to be trained in the principles of OM. The training of over 100 persons was a logistical challenge, but it was an investment in time that resulted in considerable self-reflection, and ultimately in an increased awareness and understanding of the persons concerned. The investment was also made at one point in time, and does not need to be repeated (the training of any new staff members is now done on the job by their colleagues).

2.3.3 Self-monitoring by the boundary partners

Of course in order to conduct self-monitoring, key persons representing each of the boundary partners need to understand the logic of the method. In SAHA's case, the use of the rather complex terminology of OM has been avoided as much as possible in the way it is used with and by partners – whilst keeping the essence of strategic planning, and self-defined progress markers.

Box 4. How partner self-assessment of progress works in practice: An example from the Commune of Ambohibary

The Commune defined its **outcome challenges** in early 2008 for three years in advance – that is, for the end of 2010. The first challenge was that the commune should be well managed, and capable of offering the best possible services to its population. The markers of progress set for this were that the commune should

- apply good governance practices to improve all its services
- implement an effective system to increase its revenue.

Normally the commune representatives meet on a quarterly basis to evaluate their progress on a scale of 1 to 5. For the period of June to September 2008, they assessed their progress in applying good governance to have started, with limited effect (2) – even though according to their indicators, they had decreased the time taken for issuing birth certificates to half a day; introduced receipts for all payments made to the commune; simplified procurement procedures, and employed a member of staff to welcome and direct visitors to the commune office. They still considered that they could do a lot better.

By comparison, the commune representatives assessed their performance in implementing an effective system to increase revenue as good (4). They listed many indicators to this effect – including insistence on the treasurer being the only person mandated to accept any payment made to the commune; the intervention of the Mayor at the central taxation office to obtain the return of the commune's share of certain taxes; and the increase of the revenue to a point that the salaries of the staff could be paid on time.

The executive members of each partner organisation meet on a regular basis to assess changes that have occurred, using a 1 to 5 ranking for each progress marker (1 signifies not yet commenced; 5 signifies fully recognised and institutionalised). They are expected to deliberate carefully and honestly. Box 4 provides one small example in illustration of partner self-assessment in practice.

To allow for feedback, provide support, and ensure objectivity, the partner's self-assessment is followed up by a joint evaluation conducted with the SAHA regional staff. The staff reflect with the partner on the rankings given, propose adjustments if necessary, and finalise the rankings on the basis of joint agreement. SAHA staff note that it is important that at this point they stress their role as a facilitator, and not as a superior or judge.

2.3.4 Ensuring programme learning

A consolidation of the results of the partner self-assessments could be achieved by simply forwarding them to the core team. However, an additional step is taken to promote feedback and learning within the SAHA team. This is a joint, cross-cutting discussion (“regard croisé”) between operational and thematic staff, during which progress is considered by partner category, and by region. Factors influencing progress are analysed, and needs for further support - or a rectification of existing operational or thematic support - are identified. This provides an opportunity for staff with different specialisations, at different levels, to gain an overview on developments, to contribute their perceptions, and to learn from others.

“The application of OM also induced a change in the way of working of our whole team. One can say that OM helped us to structure our work better and better. In phase I and II we did evaluations, self evaluations and joint evaluations, but it stayed at the thematic level. But in phase III, we made a cross-cutting assessment that saw the participation of everyone in the SAHA team. It's a big change. As a result of the cross-cutting assessment, the adjustments by the partners came out immediately. The reflex to “put into question” is now well established within the team – for every change or lack of change that is registered, we seek to ask what are the success factors and what are the blockages...and we draw the lessons.” Ony Rasoloarison, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer

2.3.5 Adoption and adaptation time

The introduction of OM took a considerable amount of time. Looking back, SAHA staff members consider that a period of five to seven months was needed for the team to truly master the method, followed by a period of continued learning and adaptation. The team's first reaction was to try to adapt the method assiduously to the local context. After two cycles of monitoring (of six months each), they realised that it was too complicated, and made the decision to simplify. For example, the list of markers of progress was originally over 100, but was reduced by grouping them into more generic categories. Ensuring coherence between locally defined outcome challenges and progress markers, and consolidating this information for use in decision making at programme level, was a challenge. Box 5 provides an illustration of how this is done – taking the example of progress made by umbrella farmer organisations (OPFs) in 2009. What is

shown is the overview; the full analysis includes a discussion of the reasons for the trends observed, both in terms of successes and difficulties.

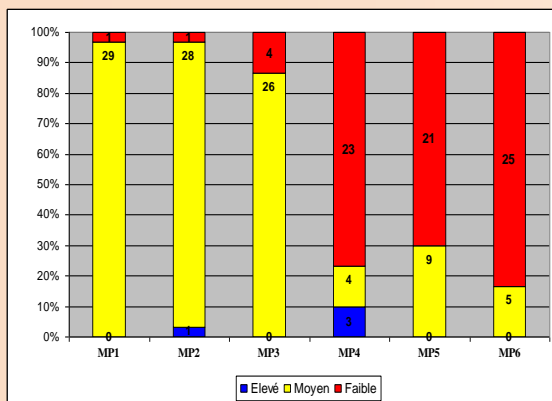
Box 5. Overview of progress of umbrella farmer organisations (OPFs)

SAHA III supported 30 OPFs. The outcome challenges of these OPFs may be very broadly summarised as being the improvement of their institutional, organisational and management capacities, the facilitation of production, processing and marketing of the specific product common to their grassroots members, and the supporting of these members in developing linkages with external organisations – especially in access to credit. The markers of progress fall under six main areas

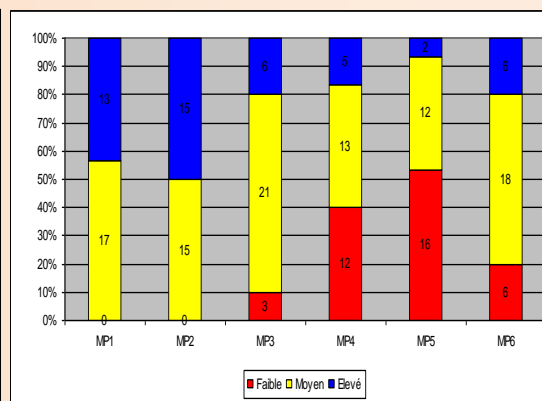
- Improvements in institutional development (MP1)
- Application of the principles of good governance (MP2)
- Improvement in the management of economic activities (MP3)
- Awareness-raising of members regarding sustainable natural resource management (MP4)
- Development of a network of partners (MP5)
- Contribution to local area development (MP6)

The SAHA team consolidates the partners’ self assessment on a biannual basis, simplified into three performance ratings: weak (faible), medium (moyen), or strong (élevé). This is shown below for the ratings made by the 30 OPFs for the first and second semesters of 2009. It can be seen that in the first semester, the majority of OPFs considered that their performance was fair in improving their first three progress markers. However, most ranked their performance regarding progress markers 4, 5 and 6 as weak. By the end of the second semester, a significant number of OPFs considered that they had performed strongly with regard to progress markers 1, 3 and 3, whilst their performance with regard to progress markers 4, 5 and 6 had also improved, although in developing network partners (MP5) it remained weak for the majority of partners.

Self-assessment by OPFs in June 2009



Self-assessment by OPFs in December 2009



The entire process of action learning and fine tuning OM took some two years in total. However, this is not seen as “wasted time”, given that it contributed to building a better conceptual understanding amongst all concerned as to the nature and meaning of their work; neither did it imply that programme activities were seriously curtailed. It was more that staff felt that a particularly heavy investment of their time and energy was needed during the introductory period.

2.3.6 Changing mindset

It is one thing to understand the procedures of OM; it is another to be convinced by what it means in terms of the changed relationship between the programme team and the partners. OM implicitly puts the partners at the forefront of determining their future, and requires the programme to step back; to facilitate and not to decide. This is a mindset strongly associated with the method, and not with the change in the level of project intervention – it would have been possible to work with the partners in a more directive manner, but OM implies a clear choice of putting accountability in the hands of partners. This was not always easy for either team members or the partners to fully realise, and it took some time for them to internalise the changed dynamics.

“One day, in order to illustrate the concept of responsibility¹, someone from SAHA said in front of the farmers that they were the bosses. This evoked a lot of reactions, because following the list of requests, most of them were ineligible as they were for things such as seeds, ploughs...The farmers said that “being boss means to be master of these needs, but SAHA is just like a demagogue – otherwise why not accept our demands? We’ll never be boss in such a situation....” Léonard Rakotomalala, member of the SAHA regional team Miandrivazo (talking about early SAHA experiences)

The change in mindset is best illustrated by a few examples. To take umbrella farmer organisations, it is common for them to state that they wish to improve the sales of their product. Their expectation might be for a development agency to organise sales for them. Rather than do this, the SAHA approach is to facilitate a process of analysing the value chain (bringing in thematic knowledge), identifying specific steps to be taken, and then supporting the various actions that have been agreed – such as the production of a flyer advertising the product, or a visit to a buyers fair. In this way, the members gain greater understanding of the value chain, experience in marketing, a network of contacts, and other associated skills – all of which they can use in the future. In a similar way, the executive committee of commune may decide that they need to increase fiscal revenue. SAHA supports them in analysing why the fiscal revenue is low, and what steps make sense to increase it. If it transpires that the best way to ensure transparency in financial management is through computerised records, SAHA will support the training of the commune personnel and the provision of computer equipment (if prerequisites such as an appropriate building and a reliable supply of electricity are in place).

For the SAHA team, their regular self-assessment of the quality of the support that they provide to the partners has helped to reinforce the change in mindset. For the partners, perhaps the greatest force in changing attitudes was the realisation that the process was working – that, for example, the umbrella farmers’ organisations succeeded in developing new markets for their product, or that the communes did manage to increase their revenue (see the quote below).

“Before [2008], the rate of revenue collection was around 11%, whereas now it is about 50%. We undertook a huge awareness campaign to achieve this improvement: we used the local radio, and we worked with those responsible in the fokontany [equivalent of wards]. We alerted the citizens to the fact that the commune didn’t have the budget to meet the needs of the population, and that it was only through the revenue collection that the commune could contribute to meeting this needs. At the level of the commune, we set up a reception window, installed notice boards, and introduced the use of computers. All this was to improve the services offered to the citizens: less time wasted, awareness of the rights to pay... The queues for waiting no longer exist, generally services are provided within a quarter of an hour. As far as infrastructure is concerned, in accordance with the needs of the fokontany we’ve managed to construct 5 schools, 3 health centres, and 10 wells – the wells were specifically installed in the fokontany of the most vulnerable persons. What I understood afterwards is that I feel satisfied with the small amount that I’ve done. I could satisfy the people who put their faith in me. Furthermore, what pleases me is that I haven’t worked alone in these tasks conferred on me, but with partners, and also colleagues here.” Solofonirina Andrianaorina, Deputy Mayor, Soavinandriana Commune

3 Lessons drawn from the SAHA experience

3.1 Key points

This section provides an analysis of the lessons learned by the SAHA team members on the use of OM in the context of empowerment. As noted earlier, it was not the team who made the decision to introduce OM, and although senior staff readily agreed to try the method, this was on the basis of very limited prior knowledge about it. They started with few preconceptions, and it was through their own experience that they became convinced of its merits in supporting an empowering process. Key points in this respect may be listed as follows.

- The method provokes or promotes analytical thought
- Everyone is involved in monitoring
- Team-work is encouraged; team spirit is built.

The over-arching aspect in this, which is fundamental to the thinking behind OM, is that the **partners are at the centre of development**. The partners take responsibility – and are made accountable - whilst the SAHA team merely facilitates the planning process (trying in particular to ensure that it is realistic).

3.1.1 Analytical thought

The use of OM demands strategic thinking and planning in determining causal patterns and how to address them. Conventional development projects often focus on particular themes – as defined by the donor – and then provide training in related skills or subjects, or grants for pre-identified activities; interested persons or organisations can then apply. They are essentially recipients of what is on offer. Under a project or programme using OM, the partners must first develop a vision of change, define their

development objectives (outcome challenges in OM terminology), set the steps that they need to take to reach them (progress markers), and then monitor their own progress in reaching them. Of course there is not total flexibility in this – the partners have to conform to broad types of progress markers – but they are nevertheless “in the driving seat”. In this process, they often realise a wider variety of factors that need to be tackled than might have been first evident, but at the same time gain deeper understanding of their situation. In this way OM is more than “a different approach to monitoring and evaluation” – it deliberately seeks to promote increased self-awareness and a pro-active, strategic mindset in taking control of the development process.

“In fact, we realised quite quickly that if we wanted to respect the principle [of empowerment] it was necessary to start with the partners’ own outcome challenges and progress markers, and to avoid imposing those suggested in the programme plan. In this way, we had to conduct the planning process and actions at the level of SAHA’s direct partners, in a spirit of learning and action research. This helped us to adapt the method to our principle. And I think that this is one of the strengths of this tool, because it helped us to develop a culture of questioning, of analysis and documentation.”
Estelle Raharinaivosoa, SAHA Director

The caveat to this is that not all partner organisations find it easy to grasp the concept. There is a risk that in requiring people to analyse a situation and identify steps to address it, the weaker, less capable partners get “left behind” in the process. The logic of working with meso-level organisations was of course that they would support their weaker (or at least more rural and often isolated) grassroots organisations. Nevertheless, it remains a risk that the regional partners develop at a pace which is out of touch with the thinking and reality of their grassroots members. Supporting the regional partners to maintain a strong contact with the grassroots thus needs to be emphasised.

3.1.2 Everyone is involved

As already noted, OM means that all project staff and partners are engaged in monitoring the progress; it is not “hived off” as a separate specialisation. This has the significant advantage of raised common understanding of what is happening – with the result of a greater sense of shared responsibility. Since meetings to discuss progress (the “regard croisé” discussions) are held as a regular, integral part of activities, problems and opportunities are also identified quickly.

A possible criticism of the method is that staff members end up spending a large amount of time in monitoring; rather than there being a few specialists, everyone has to devote their time to it. This was certainly a concern amongst some SAHA team members during the period of learning the method, when it sometimes seemed that there was time for little else. However, that period is now over. OM has simply become a regular part of SAHA activities, integral to building partner capacities. It would indeed be artificial to distinguish time spent in monitoring and evaluation from other programme activities.

3.1.3 Team-work is encouraged

It is not only each partner that is encouraged to think strategically; the SAHA team also monitors its organisational practice as part of OM. Initially, this was done systematically using a performance journal

that listed matters such as “researching new ideas, perspectives and resources”; “requesting partner feedback” and “encouraging organisational reflection”. This journal has not been maintained as it was found to be unnecessary – the practices were well integrated into daily work. Nevertheless, a discussion of ways to further improve organisational practice is systematically included in annual planning. This has had a palpable effect in building cohesion, shared commitment and team spirit. Similarly, the members of the partner organisations attest to a greater degree of mutual understanding and shared ideas. This is even reported down to household level, with members of partner organisations being so convinced of the team-building effects of working towards a strategic vision that they have introduced it – to apparently good effect – within their families.

3.2 Implications for empowerment

Empowerment is often defined with reference to the way that power is exerted (box 6).

Type of power relation	An ‘agency’ approach to empowerment	Transforming ‘structures’ for empowerment
Power over: The ability to coerce and influence the actions and thoughts of the powerless	Changes in power relations within in households, communities and at the macro level e.g. increased role in decision-making and bargaining power	Respect equal rights of others, challenge to inequality and unfair privileges
Power to: The capacity to act, to organise and change existing hierarchies	Increased skills, access and control over income and resources, and access to markets and networks	Increased skills and resources to challenge injustice and inequality faced by others
Power with: Increased power from collective action, social mobilisation and alliance building	Organisation of the less powerful to enhance abilities to change power relations Increased participation of the less powerful	Supportive organisation of those with power to challenge injustice, inequality, discrimination and stigma
Power from within: Increased individual consciousness, self-dignity and awareness	Increased confidence and awareness of choices and rights; widened aspirations and ability to transform aspiration into action	Changes in attitudes and stereotypes; commitment to change

Box 6. Different power relations and their empowerment implications (Source: Luttrell, C. and Quiroz, S. with Scrutton, C. and Bird, K. (2007) – quoting but adapting Mayoux, 2003:16)

Box 6 distinguishes both between different types of power relations, and between responses to them. Thus an agency approach focuses more on people, and a structural approach focuses more on the social systems and institutions that guide – and may constrain - people’s behaviour. In the main, SAHA can be said to adopt more of an agency approach, although the team does play a role in channelling the lessons

of programme experience to policy makers at the national level, thus potentially influencing the transformation of structures.

During SAHA I and II, when the programme worked with small farmers' organisations, the emphasis was very much on promoting "**power from within**". This was expressed in terms of supporting partners to develop their own "*knowledge, ability, and willingness/daring [to take action]*". The data that was collected included, for example, the number of contracts signed for the transfer of management to local level and the number of hectares transferred; the number of small dams and length of water channels rehabilitated; the number of functioning village literacy centres; the number of households benefiting from specific activities in support of the vulnerable; and the number of rural granaries constructed. The full list is a long one, as multiple activities were supported. Case studies provided insights into how the lives of particular individuals or households had changed, but essentially monitoring focused on the actions that had been achieved, without capturing the changes in people's knowledge, ability and awareness that had been necessary to bring them about.

With the change of intervention level and the uptake of OM under SAHA III, the programme's approach to empowerment evolved - so that it can now be seen to be addressing three types of power relations. It is still supporting greater "**power from within**" as far as the individual members of the project partners are concerned, in that they are gaining increased confidence and awareness of choices and rights. Indeed, this is also true of the team members - whose commitment to pushing for change has grown. The decision to operate with meso-level partners clearly positioned the programme in terms of addressing "**power with**" – supporting umbrella organisations and other grouped bodies to increase their power through collective action and the building of alliances. Beyond this, the use of OM *as a method* has particularly raised the partner's "**power to**" act, to organise, and to push for change. They have gained skills to analyse their situation and to push for greater access to resources and to markets. Thus, for example, a group of communes will act collectively in lobbying for funding for an access road or a similar joint benefit. Producer organisations specialising in a particular value chain (notably raw silk, honey, beans or fish) work together under one umbrella to position themselves on the market, gain better access to consumers, and better prices. SAHA's concept of empowerment is now expressed in terms of promoting "*conscious planning – determining a strategic vision for the future*".

In terms of the information that is collected and monitored under OM, whilst the emphasis is clearly on a qualitative assessment of performance, this is made in a structured (and to some extent quantified) manner. Thus performance according to a range of clearly defined progress markers in specific thematic areas (such as good governance, sustainable natural resource management, or economic development) can be easily tracked over time for different partner categories. It is furthermore presented in a manner that gives an immediate visual impression. Basic data is maintained on the number of grassroots members of the partner organisations, and the number of households they represent; in addition, all partner activities are monitored for specific actions in favour of the vulnerable, or in support of gender equity. The result is that the programme is able to generate concise overview information on partner

performance but also has access to details (provided in individual partner progress markers) if these are required.

4 Wider implications of the SAHA experience

Back in 2006, a conscious decision was taken for SAHA to move away from a monitoring system that focused essentially on material impacts, to one that monitored development processes, primarily from the perspective of those experiencing that change. The current system is designed to be meaningful to the partners; the information collected is synthesised upwards, but it is a bottom-up rather than top-down system. Whilst its strength lies in the high degree of partner ownership, some donors might not be satisfied with a form of monitoring that is essentially based on a qualitative self-assessment. There is nevertheless some flexibility to incorporate additional data collection. As far as SDC is concerned, there was a particular demand for information about programme impact on the ultimate beneficiaries – the most vulnerable rural citizens. Therefore, partner records are particularly checked for information on this matter by a staff member mandated with the task. He consolidates this information in report form, and organises follow up case studies as appropriate.

When it was first introduced to SAHA, OM was generally seen as a method that would monitor empowerment processes in a meaningful way. Yet as outlined in the discussion above, the method has itself had an empowering effect. All the members of partner organisations interviewed expressed this in terms of greater knowledge, skills and confidence – and thus greater self-determination. What is perhaps more interesting is that the SAHA team has found that shifting from the role of decision-maker to that of facilitator has been paradoxically empowering. They consider that the emphasis placed on learning and on sound organisational practices, and the greater understanding and new skills gained through this, has made them into better professionals. It is thus argued that programmes using OM are fully oriented to sustainability, having equipped people with skills to determine their own future.

For donors, the question turns to one of development goals. This paper is not arguing that OM is the only, or the best, way to monitor development projects. Different contexts require different approaches, and OM will not be appropriate to them all. However, where empowerment is a clear project or programme goal, and particularly where programme delivery is conducted through local partners, it is suggested that the introduction of OM is given serious consideration.

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7 Annex 1: The vision and mission of SAHA III and IV

Vision

The synergies between local, regional and national levels, as well as interactions between civil society and the public and private sectors, contribute to an improvement in the living conditions of the rural population of Madagascar.

Rural people, notably those who are socially vulnerable and/or marginalised, have access to information, natural and financial resources and participate in decision-making; they exercise their rights and obligations as citizens and are actively involved in local development.

Community based organisations have opportunities for coordination and solidarity, allowing them to play an intermediary role in influencing policy, as well as responding effectively to the needs of their members and promoting their interests. They become long term, essential partners in local development.

The federations of farmer organisations joined by a common economic interest [and the regional chambers] contribute to the increased professionalism of local producers through participating in sustainable, market-orientated value chains.

The decentralised local governance organisations³ provide fora for the development and coordination of local and regional initiatives. Through transparent and accountable management, and an effective and efficient offer of services, they ensure that multiple interests and needs are served. They can collaborate to better promote their interests and offer their services at an appropriate geographical level.

These different local and regional actors develop partnerships to assist them in improving their technical and organisational competences.

Mission

In keeping with the vision of interlinked local development in Madagascar, the rural development support programme SAHA engages in regional and national policy and reinforces the competences of diverse actors in their social and economic interactions.

SAHA is careful to avoid trying to fill any institutional gaps, but instead seeks to reinforce well established organisations and institutions in their respective functions, notably with regard to their responsibilities towards their grassroots organisations and their communes. The programme builds on and makes available good practices and experiences, and shares its competences and knowledge with different stakeholders to ensure sustainable development.

At the same time, SAHA actively promotes coordination with other technical and financial partners in local governance and rural economic development, particularly in the approaches and principles of intervention (equitable development, local implementation, co-financing, subsidiarity, etc).

SAHA focuses its activities primarily on decentralised local governance organisations, umbrella groups of farmer organisations with specific economic interests, and umbrella civil society organisations.

³ That is, rural communes or groups of rural communes.

8 Annex 2: The five categories of direct boundary partners (*partenaires limitrophes*, or PALIs) under SAHA III and IV

Communes: A number of communes were already partners in SAHA II, and continued in SAHA III. SAHA works with them out of recognition that rural communes often require support to operate in accordance with the powers that they have. For example, communes have legal powers to register private land within their territory and to give out land certificates – but this is only possible if they have computers and printers (and of course electricity), and trained people to operate them.

Inter-communal organisations (OPCI or *Organisme Publique de Coopération Intercommunale*) came into existence in 1999⁴ to provide a legal entity by which several communes involved in the management of a common resource – such as a rural road, an irrigation scheme, a forest or a water body – can manage funds and decisions over them on a common basis. An OPCI is comprised of representatives of each member commune; its members change according to communal elections.

Associations of communes differ from the above in that their aim is to broadly defend the interests of communes within a given geographical area – to share information, exchange experiences, and lobby together on matters of common interest. These associations are legally registered as such; the original idea was for government funds to be channelled through them, but this did not materialise.

Umbrella farmers' organisations (OPF or *Organisation Paysanne Faïtière à vocation économique*) are groups of grassroots organisations all of which share a common economic interest - in a particular value chain. Those supported by SAHA are mainly concerned with the production and marketing of raw silk, beans, honey and fish - value chains that are relatively accessible to vulnerable households. Many of the grassroots organisations supported under SAHA I and II became members of such umbrella organisations.

Rural civil society umbrella organisations (OFSCR or *Organisation Faïtière de la Société Civile Rurale*) are groups of grassroots organisations sharing a common social interest – for example, rural radio stations, parental organisations for school pupils, etc.

⁴ Decree No 99-952, 15 December 1999