Case Study: SAHA

The right tool at the right time

Key features

- OM is primarily used to plan the programmes' interventions with intermediary groups

- The donor in this case was interested and enthusiastic about the approach and encouraged exploration of OM

Background

Now in its third phase, SAHA is a rural development programme in Madagascar, funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and implemented by the Swiss Intercooperation Foundation (IC). The programme is designed to assist groups of land workers and communes in three major regions of Madagascar (Imerina, Betsileo and Menabe).

On reflection of the second phase, which ended in December 2006, it became clear that working with a large number of partners (1400 groups of land workers in 400 communes) at a local level was a serious challenge and staff began to question whether this was the most effective strategy. The opportunity for change came with the design of the third phase. They decided to shift focus from supporting micro enterprise and household initiatives to regional and 'meso-level' organisations, with the aim of providing capacity building to ensure the sustainability of their efforts and to capitalise on the effects achieved at local level. With the new focus on capacity building and behaviour change of meso-level actors, organisations, institutions and networks, the programme recognised the need for a planning instrument to reflect this.

Introducing Outcome Mapping

OM was very quickly identified as a methodology that would support the new direction of the programme and in particular would enable SAHA to firmly place the partners at the centre from the very start of its third phase, integrating them into the planning, monitoring and evaluation process. The team had already been taking an outcomes-based approach so

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when the head of the SDC section for Southern and Eastern Africa encouraged the team towards Outcome Mapping they immediately saw the potential benefits. The conditions were very fertile for a successful application of OM; the implementing team were in the right place and were having the right conversations, the donors were interested and enthusiastic about the approach, even though there was still scepticism from some key individuals within the donor agency, and there was a clearly defined need and rational for exploring OM.

An early obstacle to the adoption of OM was the lack of in-house expertise and competency. To address this, it was decided to bring in an experienced consultant to support the process and facilitate the application of OM. For SAHA, this was crucial, it meant that they didn't have to focus on the methodological and process issues and could spend all their energy on the content of their programme strategy.

Another challenge was the shift that OM demanded in terms of planning and running the programme. The team had become used to a project centred approach with a largely controlling role. OM on the other hand brings a partner centred approach with a loosening of control. This shift in mindset took almost six months but ultimately proved not to be such a strong hindrance.

The first contact the team had with OM was through the manual, but once the consultant was hired, the team was led through the OM process during a strategic planning workshop in September 2006. Following the initial training, the external consultant maintained contact with the team as a back-stopper, providing support as and when it was needed. The team also engaged in the wider OM community, by attending the OM users' conference in Niamey in January 2007 and by participating on the online learning community (outcomemapping.ca).

The planning workshop, run by Daniel Roduner, the external consultant, had the ambitious aim of familiarising the team with OM, planning the next three years of the programme and to build the inclusion of the partners into the planning process.

Before the workshop, the team, with support from the external consultant, developed a mission statement (based on the mission statement of IC and in coherence with national strategies and policies) and had begun to map out their boundary partners, some of whom were invited to join the workshop. In order to assure an open and transparent process, non boundary partners were also invited; they provided perspectives from other programs (i.e. strategic partners), national policy makers, and other key actors in rural development within the three regions (i.e. financial institutes, and others).

Prior to the planning workshop, which centred mostly on the intentional design, the program implementation team spent considerable time for reducing the 1,500 groups of workers (maître d'ouvrage; partners of the current phase) into to six manageable categories of boundary partners of the new phase. Because of the vast number of partners, the highly participative workshop design, and the iterative process for defining the outcome mapping components for each group of boundary partner, it was decided not to discuss the M&E tools immediately, but a process was put in place to develop appropriate tools and structures for M&E.

In order to highlight the change in direction of the programme, the team strictly stuck to the OM terminology, recognising that the use of language can help embed the concepts behind the methodology.

Applying OM

The application of OM in this case was led by Ony Rasoloarison, responsible in SAHA for the monitoring system, in close collaboration with the external consultant. The team was directed through the Intentional Design steps of OM, sticking closely to the manual. The only deviations made were the omission of the Strategy Maps tool. It was felt that, because of the confusion between strategies and activities presented in this tool, it didn't have a clear benefit to the team. Instead, the team elaborated clear strategies which included logistics such as action plans and budgets. The Intentional Design focused on setting up strategies to work with 6 distinct groups of boundary partners, rather than trying to deal with each partner separately. Additionally, the participants of the workshop elaborated clear "E" strategies, for influencing the environment of each category of boundary partners.

They diverted from OM for the M&E steps as they felt that the OM manual didn't give enough guidance on how to plan and implement the M&E system. They developed their own M&E manual to outline the M&E process, team member responsibilities and use of the monitoring tools. The manual also included guidance on analysing, synthesising and re-integrating the information into the new planning processes. It was from this that a number of journals were developed; on strategy, outcomes, organisational practices, context and 'impact', with matrices being sent to each region for them to fill in and send back to the centre. An important question that had to be answered was *what information is needed at what level?* The regional teams needed information for operational planning and adjustments, while the central project director was more concerned with strategic planning and the donating agencies needed information to support their accountability concerns. The M&E system had to respond to each of these uses and users.

Concluding remarks

A number of important lessons have emerged from this case:

- OM can engender new ways of working. OM helped the SAHA team in shifting their focus from managing grants to building partnerships and building capacities.

- OM builds natural feedback mechanisms into everyday work. OM helped to develop a culture of 'questioning', teamwork, reflection and exchange which wasn't so prevalent before. These principles were made explicit through OM and a number of practices were standardized throughout the programme.

- It is important to familiarise the implementation team in the OM process before the planning process. Attempting to train team members in the OM methodology during the planning workshop proved challenging and time consuming for SAHA.

- It is important to recognise that OM is not a standalone approach. A certain level of understanding about the programme and context is required before even deciding to implement OM. Also, OM doesn't include logistical or management details and these need to be taken into account independently.

- Working with OM means constant learning and adapting. Having a functional and pragmatic M&E system is the result of designing, testing, analysing and adapting; and again testing and so forth. Any team eager to learn and to adapt own practices can

have learning oriented planning, steering and M&E system; but it takes time and energy – nevertheless, looking at the system today, always worthwhile investing.

Further information

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