

Governance Working Group
Paper #2
Towards an Understanding of Governance

Synthesized by
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Summary

CARE International's vision requires the organization to act upon underlying causes of poverty. CARE staff is beginning to conclude that underlying causes are linked to the way people use power in relationships. A governance focus makes the political dimensions of poverty explicit.

Grappling with issues of governance takes us squarely into the political realm. This raises important issues about CARE's level of comfort, ability, and willingness to

- Use political language in relation to its core business,
- Use tools and methods to assess political dimensions of social and economic contexts, and
- Play roles that facilitate transformation in relationships among stakeholders.

Governance is a relatively new term in the development literature, but promoting good governance is not a new activity for CARE. CARE's concern with governance dates from 1999 when CARE International adopted a vision that requires the organization to understand and act upon underlying causes of poverty. Learning about governance in CARE is being driven by interest at every level of the organization. For CARE, good governance is the effective, participatory, transparent and accountable management of public affairs guided by agreed upon procedures and principles, to achieve the goals of poverty reduction and increasing social justice.

Adapted from Ford Foundation definition

Programmatic principles that underpin the cases in the paper

- 1) All the case studies in this paper are predicated on the assumption that poverty is frequently the result of discrimination, domination and exclusion.
- 2) When CARE develops programmatic strategies, it is necessary to ground the planning process in a solid understanding of local or national patterns of discrimination, domination, and exclusion.

High Level Lessons

A key lesson is that governance outcomes are highly context specific. Thus, caution should be used in attempting to transfer lessons.

Lessons about the political nature of poverty

- 1) ***Social transformation is political.*** Underlying causes of poverty often involve institutionalized patterns of discrimination and domination.
- 2) ***Rights may be morally universal and legally declared, but in practice they must be won, and fulfilled, little by little in each specific context.*** CARE could therefore adopt a more actor-oriented perspective on rights.
- 3) ***Patrimonial Rule is the institutional basis of conflict in much of Africa.*** Under patrimonial rule, security (of civil rights, property rights and livelihoods) is likely to be the highest priority of the poor. Unifying ideologies such as nationalism or religion tend to undermine patrimonial authority.
- 4) ***Decentralization is not always good.*** Sometimes state centralization is useful in limiting the power of local elites.
- 5) ***Involving the non-poor can enhance the success of some strategies to eliminate poverty.*** A challenge for good governance is to define problems in such a way that the interests of the poor and the non-poor coincide.
- 6) ***Private sector policies influence livelihoods in critical ways.*** In general, CARE projects have only weakly engaged with private sector agencies to shape their influence on HLS issues.¹

Lessons about links between HLS, governance and a Rights Based Approach

HLS is about people living in dignity with livelihood rights fulfilled. The HLS focus on understanding barriers to access to and control of resources, including at the policy level, is a useful entry point to governance. Governance is about assuring that mechanisms, structures, and processes in society allow rights to be fulfilled, through the exercise of voice, power, and political agency. A rights based approach establishes minimum standards to measure the degree of human rights fulfillment, and seeks patterns of discrimination and domination in the use of relational power that influences people's ability to fulfill their rights.

¹ Household Livelihood Security is CARE's framework for understanding causes and effects of poverty at the household level.

In practice, the cases that were studied for this paper showed patterns of exclusion and domination around issues of accountability, corruption, patrimonial rule, elite self-interest (economic and political power), violence/intimidation, and attitudes ranging from indifference to exploitation of others for personal gain. Looking across the cases, we can see that:

- Governance has direct effects at the household level.
- Governance issues inter-link, and span all levels of society.
- Governance issues are political.
- The issues are huge and complex – and by comparison, CARE is small.
- Working on them involves skill and risk.
- Solving them will require the concerted efforts of many organizations through time.

Lessons about CARE's role in promoting governance

- 1) ***A shift into working on underlying causes represents a blend of "technical" and "political" roles.*** CARE will need to play roles that include a mix of service delivery, capacity building, facilitation, and advocacy. We seek to facilitate processes of constructive engagement. ***What are the limits of constructive engagement? To what extent does governance imply a more confrontational role that may push us beyond those limits?***
- 2) ***CARE has taken a normative approach of promoting "universal" rights, rather than asking – what can we negotiate today?*** We need to think in terms of stages. If the context does not permit rapid movement, we must work in ways that contribute to the desired direction of change.
- 3) ***Working exclusively at the local level risks working at the margins of social problems.*** Resolving basic governance issues requires working at multiple levels, and must require a coherent, multilateral strategy.
- 4) ***Governance work is about promoting negotiated development.*** CARE has played roles from strengthening community voice, to strengthening government capacity to deliver services. In the middle of this supply-demand continuum, CARE often facilitates the process of bringing key stakeholders together around specific issues. ***This work involves a "double impact", with changes both at the household level, and at a higher institutional or policy level.*** Projects may sometimes be able to produce broader impact by working on the "supply side" of the equation, rather than only working to strengthen the capacity of individual communities.
- 5) ***The poor and marginalized are citizens.*** Promoting negotiated development is about expanding citizens' roles, and their ability to hold public officials accountable.
- 6) ***CARE increasingly plays the role of information broker, contact maker, facilitator and advocate.***
The role of resource provider *may* become less central as the definition of poverty expands to include relational issues.

Lessons about methods for governance programming

- 1) ***At the very least, working in governance requires being politically aware.*** Understanding the political economy and patterns of violence and exclusion are part of this. CARE used area specialists² and adapted HLS tools to probe sensitive issues. Consistently asking "why" was a good way to probe highly sensitive questions.
- 2) ***An enabling environment is critical for governance work.*** Conflict with government agencies frequently emerged when non-governmental organizations were perceived to threaten the government's role.
- 3) ***Support existing structures whenever possible.*** Creating parallel structures may undermine existing leadership arrangements.
- 4) ***CARE needs to do more to help stakeholders mobilize non-CARE resources.***
- 5) ***Win-win scenarios will not always be possible.*** CARE must have the capacity to deal with risk, especially when working in conflict resolution.
- 6) ***Hire and support dynamic staff who know the context and are specialists in governance related issues.*** Create an authorizing environment to support them.
- 7) ***Governance work typically evolved by modifying existing projects to probe for deeper issues*** such as advocacy, and multi-stakeholder dialogue.
- 8) ***CARE's strong history of service delivery has frequently given CARE the credibility to work with local elites and created opportunities to engage constructively with government.***
- 9) ***Monitoring and evaluation methods must evolve to measure double impact.***

Strategic Choices

Niche CARE's work in governance grows naturally out of its effort to understand and address underlying causes of specific livelihood security issues. This leads to increased efforts to understand patterns of

² Political or social scientists with special expertise relevant to a specific country where CARE worked.

discrimination in stakeholder relationships, to increased roles in policy analysis and advocacy, and to programs that strengthened the capacity of communities and authorities to engage in various kinds of negotiation processes.

Among CARE's comparative advantages for governance programming were its credibility gained through service delivery, its access to resources, and its ability to support interventions of interest to different kinds of stakeholders. Others included:

- Many potential "entry points" to governance work.
- Ability to broker relationships among organizations that do not normally work together.
- Our strengths and reputation in HLS analysis, which can allow us to expand to do stakeholder analysis in refined ways.

Constraints

- Risk averse when it comes to politics.
- Limitations imposed by "project" orientations.
- We are not known in the governance arena.
- Gaps in our ability to work with the non-poor and the private sector.

Learning about Governance

- Staff at all levels wants to be part of CARE's learning about governance.
- CARE's culture values learning by doing. What obstacles prevent us from being better at learning from others? Resource allocation is always a choice, and we can choose to learn.
- We need to move beyond a non-critical acceptance of civil society literature. We should structure our work around hypotheses that can be tested. One way to do this is to increase our use of deductive analysis in case studies.
- We will need to form alliances with academic organizations and learn to be consumers of political analysis. We need to employ more political and social scientists.

Hard Organizational Choices

- 1) ***Let's accept that CARE is not an apolitical organization – that not taking a stance is, in fact, a political position.*** Denying the political nature of poverty is essentially a risk aversion strategy. If we recognize that poverty reduction is political work, we can then deal directly with risk mitigation challenges.
- 2) ***CARE's experience strengthening communities to plan and implement development activities has some limitations.*** A challenge is to work within existing structures, and to develop longer-term relationships with organizations in specific places. There is still a big challenge for CARE in seeing how it can engage in supporting citizens' voice in the sense of political agency.
- 3) ***Governance requires working with all kinds of stakeholders, including elites and businesses.***
 - Fundamental to CARE's approach is not confronting power, but looking for entry points where compromise and mutual gains are possible. However, this will not always be possible.
 - Which elites do we work with? In many situations the issue is ***"where actually do our principles lie"***? We mostly avoid this kind of choice.
- 4) Learning, handling risk and generating resource flows are fundamental strategic issues to consider if CARE is to expand its work in governance.
 - ***Expanding our work in governance is not just about learning.*** We are close to having technical capacity. Given our organizational culture, we don't want to take risks. CARE is comfortable being apolitical. Where do we NOT want to go as an institution?
 - ***How will governance work effect CARE's resource flows?*** With governance work, CARE increases its role as a facilitator and advocate. Consequently, transferring resources becomes only a part of what we do. ***How big does CARE have to be to be effective?*** Empowering stakeholders ultimately means enabling them to access non-CARE resources. A basic challenge for working in governance is to define CARE's role in such a way that CARE can still raise resources to play the new role.