

A day in the life of a development manager

David Crawford, Michael Mambo, Zainab Mdimi, Harriet Mkilya, Anna Mwambuzi, Matthias Mwiko and Sekiete Sekasua, with Dorcas Robinson

Introduction

What does development management mean to development managers on a daily basis? Seven such managers in an NGO in Tanzania were asked to write a diary of one day in their working life.¹ This paper presents extracts from these diaries. They are only snap-shots of a more complex picture. But whether presented as bullet points, descriptive narrative, or more personal reflections, they provide insights into the routines, challenges, and concerns which shape the working days of many managers.

Writing diaries can serve a number of purposes: from individual managers realising how they actually spend their time and using this as a tool for time management; to information-sharing and building understanding within teams; to providing a collective memory or organisational record for future reference.

These managers particularly enjoyed the opportunity to read each others' diaries. They began to see, committed to paper, the issues which provide the substance of 'informal' thinking and talking; issues that rarely get written into reports or minutes of meetings. For them, the question then arose of what this might mean for the way they work and communicate with each other on a regular basis.

Clearly, even on the most 'operational' of days, these development managers are grappling with significant, and at times apparently overwhelming questions. As one manager pointed out, mostly these diaries reveal the endless stream of 'problems' which bombard you in your daily work: 'problems' which you have to filter and resolve in some

way. Thus, most days of the development manager are about how managing feelings about the bigger picture, in the face of one's own limitations, at the same time as dealing with the day-to-day nitty-gritty.

Michael Mambo

One of my duties is to visit villages. On Friday, for example, I went with my colleagues to Usinge village. The journey took about four hours on the train (the road is not open at the moment).

On arriving in the village, as usual you are met by village officials. Always they want you to talk about *your* plans; that is what they want to hear. I try to change their expectations by explaining that we have the following areas to look at: meetings with the building committee to review a way forward *together*; with the village assembly to discuss, among other things, each one's role in the project; and with the Community Based Health Care committee (CBHC).

As usual, you discover that people want to know more about the organisation. They want you to talk in the village assembly. But what exactly do they want me to talk about? I thought that the Community Extension Worker (CEW) in the village would have done this. Am I not doing her job? My colleagues and I ...discuss this among ourselves...and decide it is not a problem as it was in our plan to meet the village assembly anyway.

Meeting with the CBHC committee was very interesting. About 18 people met, half of whom were women, which was quite unusual. The chairman opened the meeting in only two sentences: '...the meeting is opened and I welcome Mr Mambo to tell us what he has come with'. My first reaction is to think 'I don't live in Usinge, so what do I say?' All of a sudden I made up my mind and decided to talk. I said, 'this is an opportunity for us all to discuss what has happened to the plans you developed at your CBHC meeting last year. What do *you* want to talk about, based on the real situation in your village?' It was agreed, and our discussion went very well.

What else!

When you are in the village you also discover a lot. For example, a new doctor has been appointed and sent to the village. He is a Medical Assistant — a higher rank than the Rural Medical Aid (RMA) who managed the dispensary before. Good news. But he does not have accommodation. He wants an upgraded type of accommodation. Some

villagers think he should stay anywhere but he is reluctant. All of a sudden you discover it is a problem and they want you to be part of it. They start asking you a lot of questions. But what do you say?

You go round the village and talk with some people. You discover that a lot of people in the village have malaria; some children are anaemic when they are brought to the dispensary. I go to the dispensary and find the Medical Assistant with a child who will only survive if it gets some units of blood. According to the Circular from the Ministry of Health, only District and Regional hospitals are allowed to give blood to patients, so the case is then referred to the District hospital. Now a problem arises. The child's mother does not understand why the Medical Assistant does not just give drugs. 'What kind of doctor is this?' she asks, 'People say that he is more qualified than an RMA'. The child's mother does not want to go to the hospital. Some people are saying it is because the transport is too expensive, and she is very poor because she is not married. They tried to persuade her, but the child passed away while we were in the village. Now people are talking: some are abusing the doctor; some are accusing the woman. Some come to you complaining, and they want you to comment and maybe 'deal with the doctor'. I end up smiling, as usual. I don't want to comment on anything. This leaves them surprised.

I left Usinge feeling quite frustrated. When you think about your work in your head you expect that when people in a village start to use the CBHC approach (problem analysis, dialogue and so on), the problems of anaemia, of relationships with the dispensary and so forth, will be dealt with through discussions about prevention and community action. But what I found in Usinge was the CBHC committee has not been active, and that there are new problems with the Medical Assistant. Now how do I deal with this?! During their discussions, the CBHC committee planned to make house-to-house visits to discuss malaria and clearing swamp areas, because child deaths have been increasing. I think that the CEW and the CBHC committee need more support, so I begin to plan more visits.

PS: Usinge is located about 210km from Tabora town, in the middle of the forest reserve. Villagers are kind and they offer accommodation, clearing a room for you. For god's sake, how are you going to deal with the mosquitoes? You realise that you didn't remember to bring your sleeping bag or bed net....

Sekiete Sekasua

Read book on methods of financing health care for one hour; held planning meeting for one hour to sort out the problem of the government Community Development Technician (CDT) for Usinge village, who was after the increase in government site allowances which the district government cannot afford to pay; went to Tanzania Telecommunications and Tenesco to clear office bills; half an hour on lunch break. Went to [the Regional] hospital to organise a training session about working in partnership on community health, for next week. This took one hour, and was followed by attending two cases for a co-worker who was in a training course. I joined the course and conducted a session about community games for improving communication skills while working with communities. This exercise took one and a half hours. I returned to the office to write this report and finalise the lesson notes for the planned training on partnership.

Anna Mwambuzi

Today I visited the Community Extension Worker (CEW) in Ufuluma Cluster. The villagers were breaking stones to make *kokoto* [aggregate] for the construction of a village primary school. The CEW was busy with the women in doing the same job, and others were carrying stones. So what I did is join those with hammers and start breaking stones. I talked with the CEW to see if she could arrange a meeting with the women in the afternoon.

At the meeting we discussed about how a woman can participate in the projects whilst it is the same woman who is needed in the family/home activities. Does the woman feel that she is overloaded instead of getting relief? How does she feel when she can discuss/participate in decision-making in front of her father/brother/husband and fellow women?

The women also said that they are very happy that their children will have a modern school, and this assures them that their children will get a good education, as competent teachers will be willing to come to the school as it is modern with good quality staff quarters. One woman said that 'one day, one of my daughters will be working as a doctor to the village dispensary which honourably was opened by the President, as she will pass her examinations because of the good quality classrooms'.

They discussed how they can find a market for their groundnuts. They agreed to make oil from the nuts, and use some in their daily cooking and sell the rest to their fellow villagers. The women asked if we can find a

refinery machine to help. I told them that in town there is someone who sells different machines. I will go there and see if there any and then I will tell them how much it costs so they can decide/plan how to buy it.

I went to see the building committee chairman to talk/enquire about women's participation in the project. He said in fact women are the ones who initiated the school and well construction, and now every villager is benefiting.

I thanked the CEW, and came back to the office.

Matthias Mwiko

'Last year we had a problem in raising funds to pay local *fundis* [craftspeople] because we had poor crop yields from our fields' — a lament from a village chairperson. 'This year', she continued, 'there is too much rain which is not good to our crops either'. Another person can be heard complaining like this about rains — a truck was not able to ferry sand and rocks for a school project because it was very difficult to reach places where these materials are located. The story continued like this. 'These are national trunk roads and you are calling them water trenches — how unkind!' Anyway, let us stop these endless complaints and get our heads into our PRA and CBHC and Child-to-Child workshops.

Back to the office — where ...it is no longer possible to come through the front, with the Singidan lake about to encroach on our office. What surprises people is that by late November there was no water in the lake and people from different corners of Singida District came to collect salt from the dried water.

But what is on my mind? The question is whether our approaches suit, and are appropriate to, such communities. Techniques and tools like PRA, CBHC etc might sound OK ...but are they jargons that have nothing to do with actual needs of people? This El Nif Singhlights the level of development of the communities we are working with, in relation to their capacities and capabilities in handling issues. For example: 'Last year we had no rains, so we ended with poor harvests. This year we are in the same situation because of too much rain.' Most people have not been able to cope with the situation, unable to utilise the rain by growing something else instead of traditional crops. ... But a few farmers were able to grow different crops and they are very proud of their performance, while the majority are blaming El Nien able

On days like this (and there are many), I am left thinking, how is it possible to suit or meet community needs, and to be acceptable to them, at

the same time as trying to retain reputation from outsiders such as donors? Or are we just using such communities for our own learning ...while poor villagers are left off helpless.... with a lot of semantic and sweeping statements. It was said by Jules Feiffer 'I used to think I was poor. Then they told me I was needy. Then they said it was self-defeating to think I was needy instead I was deprived. Then they said deprived had a bad image; I was really underprivileged. Then they said underprivileged was overused; I was disadvantaged. I still don't have a cent, but I have a great vocabulary'.

The list of catch-phrases includes participation, democratic process, working partnership, decentralisation. But does it end up with grassroots people with access to decision-making machinery ... or ... are they still more dictated to by the participatory facilitators? On a day like this you are faced with people's immediate problems, but have gone to conduct PRA. You talk about flexibility, but have to worry because your year's schedule must be modified because the roads are inaccessible!

Harriet Mkilya and Zainab Mdimi

We set out for the monitoring of Child-to-Child activities in the nine neighbouring primary schools of Kaselya ...and of course we got stuck twice due to the muddy roads. ... After two Child-to-Child workshops last year, the four schools responded with an action plan of activities ... which included rehabilitation and construction of pit latrines, growing shade trees in the playground and nutrition projects like growing vegetables. ...The last monitoring in December showed a good start to these activities. ...Then there were the holidays, and after these the roads were impassable until April.

What do you think we found? A promising progress of Child-to-Child activities? But alas! The El Nig shade trees in the playground and nutrition projects like growing vegetables. ...The last monitoring in December showed a good start to these activities. ...ng well, but in others people are just busy trying to maintain damaged houses. Village fund-raising for the projects is an issue until harvest time...

David Crawford

- 8.00 Arrive at office, say good morning to everyone, talk with Sek about break-in the night before last.
- 8.10 Straight to the Administration Manager's office to talk about reconciling the cash. I am trying to get her to make Friday a day for

financial matters. She finds it difficult to package the week like this because she has a lot of work and the staff are constantly asking her about admin and money matters.

- 8.15 Start on SUN (accounting software)... Need to analyse SUN data to make an invoice for April to GiftAid.(2)
- 8.30 An entrepreneur from Urambo looking for GiftAid money to expand his business. He had been in Dar and 'a woman' told him that we would help. Our agreement with GiftAid is very clear. We only support community-based health and education projects. I think he has a good idea ...but have to tell him no...
- 10.00 Phone (Singida Programme Manager), talk about programme matters. ...It looks like his block making machine is working now ... Discuss again about working/training/capacity building with District government. It's hard to be optimistic about this, partly due to experience, partly due to cynicism...Why are we here?
- 10.30–11.00 Shoot the breeze with Farajala (mechanic). The Landrover won't be ready for Monday.
- 11.00 Need confirmation from GiftAid that they will fund Ifucha school project. (Last month I found out that they will not, as it was not in our original agreement — I also found out that the guy who said they would fund it has been sacked. The goalpost for me has moved again. Lesson learnt.) Phone the new GiftAid Technical Director. He tells me he never received the fax requesting funds. ...I was told to send it to his HQ as he was on leave. He tells me off for sending it there! I say sorry. I suggest that he send someone to help us prepare our new agreement as this will avoid misunderstanding in the future. He says he is coming at the end of May ... he will never come, of course, as Tabora is out of Mobitel range! I fear, not for the first time, that the GiftAid projects unit will soon implode anyway, and start to worry about funding.
- 11.30 Go shopping...
- 12.30–2.00 Make lunch, cake, talk business ideas, argue badly with my children in Mandinka.
- 2.15 Meeting with Sek and Mambo. They have produced a coherent training proposal with budget and well thought out training plan. Suggest this is definitely the way forward and that we have the makings of a training manual. I ask how they will know if their

target group in the training will learn and translate it into their work. There is talk of supporting CBOs and supporting the national policy on participatory development. So I rephrase the question and link it to 'bite size projects', 'costing money' and 'who pays'. I tell them that in order to justify this kind of training to [funders] I need to be able to show 'it can work because....'. Also it needs to be finite, so vague notions of 'follow-up' are not good enough...

- 4.00 Chali has made some blocks with the new block-making machine. Nice ones too. Think about how this would affect our 'appropriate technology' policy...
- 4.15 Back into office. Neat piles of paper, articles etc (neat because the cleaning lady has been in and I have not) all over desk and shelves. No idea where to start, so don't. Realise I haven't been in my own office all week and this is Friday. Do something about it on Monday.

Notes

1 Health Projects Abroad, a British NGO which has programmes in two regions in Tanzania. It uses the Community Based Health Care (CBHC) approach to promoting community health and development. CBHC seeks to enable communities and groups within communities to undertake a continuous process of participatory problem analysis, dialogue, and resource mobilisation in the interest of taking action to improve

community health. As part of this programme, the NGO also works with primary school teachers and pupils, extending Child-to-Child, an approach to developing health awareness among children, and to promoting learner-centred education more generally. This group of managers includes those employed full-time by HPA and those who are seconded to it from their government posts.

2 Pseudonym for a programme donor.