

Case study: Concern Worldwide

Enacting community communication, participation and feedback

Background

In March 2016, Concern Worldwide (Concern) carried out a contextual analysis in Ombella Mpoko prefecture of the Central African Republic (CAR). CAR is ranked 187 out of 188 on the [Human Development Index](#). The recent conflict and subsequent displacement has had a significant impact on people's livelihoods and coping strategies. Concern started to work in CAR in 2014 as part of the humanitarian response to the 2013 crisis there. As the country now moves towards a period of transition, the time is opportune for Concern's country programme to consider a longer term strategy and consult with communities about the best way to focus their future support.



*Photo 1: Village mapping in Bouyembe, March 2016.
Credit: Joanne Smyth.*

Rationale

As a member of the [CHS Alliance](#), Concern has committed to applying the Nine Commitments of the [Core Humanitarian Standard \(CHS\)](#) in its work and has already strongly embedded accountability practices across the organisation. The CAR contextual analysis in particular demonstrates [CHS Commitment 4](#) in practice:

“Communities and people affected by crisis know their rights and entitlements, have access to information and participate in decisions that affect them.”

Quality Criterion: “Humanitarian response is based on communication, participation and feedback”.

The contextual analysis had the two-fold objective of deepening the understanding of the root causes of poverty in the area and building the team's capacity to use participatory rural appraisal (PRA) tools and accountability principles.

Framework

Concern's contextual analysis guidelines have been developed to reflect the organisation's conceptual framework of extreme poverty that considers assets, return on assets, inequalities, risks and vulnerabilities. It involves a process of review of secondary information, training with field teams, field work for primary data collection, and analysis and reflection to outline programme options. The intent is to leverage local knowledge to answer the following key questions:

1. Who are the extreme poor in this context and where are they?
2. Why are they poor (immediate causes)?

3. What keeps them in extreme poverty?
4. What opportunities are available to extremely poor people?
5. What needs to change – who is responsible, what is already happening?

It is sometimes suggested that information-gathering exercises with communities affected by crisis can be overly extractive and don't offer sufficient scope for communication, participation or feedback. This exercise, in one of the most complex humanitarian settings where Concern is working, proved the contrary.

Process

The process started with a three-day training session with the country programme team in Ombella Mpoko. The make-up of the team considered gender balance, language skills, technical expertise and managerial responsibility. The training was based around three areas: i) the analytical framework of assets, inequalities, risks and vulnerabilities; ii) use of PRA tools; and, iii) accountability principles and practice.



Photo 2: Local teacher draws village map of Bouyembe, March 2016. Credit: Joanne Smyth.



Photo 3: Feedback of village map of Bouyembe, March 2016. Credit: Joanne Smyth

During the field work, each day began with an open community meeting where the team explained the contextual analysis process, Concern's mission and objectives, the programme design and funding cycles and how the information the community shared would be used.

The first PRA tool used in each location was the village map. Once the Concern team had explained the exercise, the village leader appointed the 'map drawer' from among the participants (often the local teacher). The group worked together to describe the community's infrastructure (See photos 1 & 2). Throughout the process, the Concern team remained largely on the side lines, observing and listening. Their involvement had focused on explaining the rationale and method, but thereafter the community moved the exercise forward.

Two aspects of the approach taken supported effective communication and feedback. Firstly, although the map was drawn by village leaders and administrative representatives, the exercise was carried out openly in the presence of the rest of the community. Secondly, once the map had been completed, two representatives from the 'mapping group' presented the map to the rest of the community and asked them to feedback on the accuracy of what had been presented (see photo 3).

After the village map was completed, the analysis team split into smaller, separate groups of men and women to use tools such as a Venn diagram, historic profile, seasonal calendar, wealth ranking and

options matrix. The options matrix was one of the most important tools to support the community's participation in programme decision-making. Having identified a number of key problems (in separate groups of men and women), focus group participants went on to outline which were the most important issues for them. This ranking process fed directly into the programme options discussion that took place after the field work (see photo 4).

Overall, with the active participation of the community, the process highlighted the parallel challenges facing households: as they are trying to recover from the recent shock of conflict and displacement, they are also coping with the underlying issues of chronic poverty.

Success factors

The key factors which allowed the contextual analysis process to be an effective mechanism for participation, communication and information sharing with the community were:

- Good team diversity in terms of skills, experience and gender.
- Role-play practices on information sharing integrated in the preparatory training sessions.
- Working in only one or two villages per day allowed the team to have a deeper understanding of root causes than if they had tried to work at a larger scale.
- Encouraging the field work team to step back and let the community lead resulted in more meaningful participation by the community.
- The importance of disaggregated groups was repeatedly highlighted as information from women and men's focus groups and interviews offered significantly different perspectives.
- Daily debriefs to reflect on observations helped the team to share information and deepen their analysis.

Outcomes

The contextual analysis process is recognised within Concern as the foundation to good quality programming across the organisation's areas of operation. This exercise represented an opportunity to broaden the team's understanding of the challenges and opportunities for the extreme poor in the CAR. As the entry point for longer term engagement with the community, it also set the standard for the country programme's commitment to accountability. Everything from the introductions the team made, to directing people to the local office if they needed to comment or complain about the field work, and letting the community lead on the different data collection processes, communicated the essence of the way Concern intends to work in this area – placing communities affected by crisis at the centre, in accordance with the CHS.



Photo 4: Programme options workshop, Bossembele, March 2016. Credit: Joanne Smyth.