

CARE Sudan Leadership Team – Evolution and Challenges

1. Introduction

Organizations change constantly. Most of the time, a combination of external and internal factors drives that change. CARE Sudan is no different in that respect, and the current change processes can best be understood and seen in a historical context. In Sudan's case, this is the civil war, how the war has shaped donor policies and practices, CARE's reactions to it, and staff's capacity and ability to change.

In CARE's world, Management or Leadership teams play key roles as change agents. The compositions of these teams vary of course, and depend on many factors. This short paper outlines some of the key changes and its rationale in CARE Sudan's Leadership Team since my arrival (August 02), and some of the current challenges.

2. Background

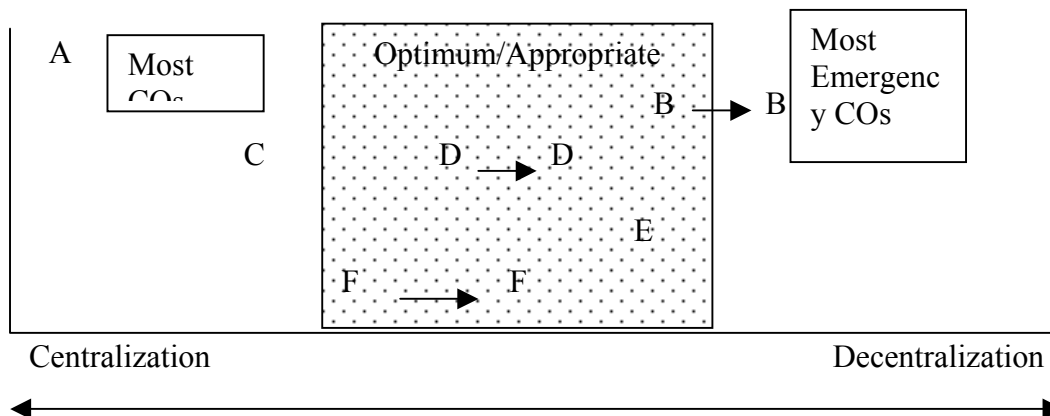
As background info I attach an ALSUD I wrote in January 03. The ALSUD describes the result of a consultative process to make changes in the management set – up of CARE Sudan.



ALLSUD# 572
Management Set Up.

This review process has resulted in a structure which is more decentralized, more layered, more inclusive, but slower perhaps to respond. Structures are usually also a function of the 'state of the CO': whether the orientation is more towards 'development' or 'emergency'. CARE Sudan's history certainly reflects this, operating between periods of relative calm, and periods of great upheaval. These reactions are reflected in the level of centralization and management structure: often more decentralization occurred in crisis situations, with corresponding management structures. To illustrate this, reference is made to a structural review conducted by the CO in Oct/Nov 2001. The consultant notes: " CARE support systems frequently fluctuate between somewhat decentralized and somewhat centralized in what I refer to as the pendulum swing. This happens for two reasons. First, left unchecked, the weakness of an approach become too extreme and there is a management backlash to the other extreme. Second, CO's approaches change with changes in CD and senior staff who have personal preferences towards centralization or decentralizations."

The following graph shows an estimation of the levels of centralization in CARE-Sudan from a historical perspective:



- A) Late 80s, very centralized
- B) Early 90s, more decentralized, then “became too loose.”
- C) Mid 90s, More centralized
- D) Move towards decentralization (96 onwards)
- E) Somewhat decentralized (around 98-99)
- F) Centralization but moving towards more decentralization (99 - 2001)

The above illustrates that the external environment is an important driver for determining the level of decentralization, and therefore choosing the most appropriate management structure. It highlights in my view the need to be flexible and adapt to (sometimes rapidly) changing circumstances.

3. Current situation

After the new team was put in place and we began to meet every 4-6 weeks, a number of issues began to emerge.

1. Communicating with all the members of the LT is problematic. Some members live and work in far – off places, and one of the sub – offices has no means of communicating other than by Thuraya phone and hard copy. Flights to that sub-office are only twice per week. This creates imbalances in information access, and limits participation.
2. From the onset, and with the creation of this new team, expectations were raised. Staff felt that they were given new opportunities for input, and that was welcomed; on the other hand, and probably erroneously, input was confused with decision-making. This was complicated by the fact that issues were many and complex, processes slow, and not all the time ‘staff wishes and desires’ were acted upon.
3. Even though efforts are made to make the agenda setting of the LT democratic, in practice most of the items discussed are proposed by the top management of the CO: the CD, the ACD’s and the HR Manager. Staff seem to have a difficult time distinguishing between ‘policy and strategic issues’ and ‘operational’ ones. It is clear that for most staff, the

immediate, project issues and personal issues touching on compensation take precedent over ‘strategy’.

4. Overall, the general feeling seems to be that staff is ‘happier with the current set – up’ the ‘before’. There is a feeling that field representatives have an opportunity to provide input, and that their voice is heard and considered.
5. It is sometimes not clear what certain discussions and agenda points are intended to achieve: Decisions? Input? Brainstorm? It is also not always clear which kind of decision – making processes the team should use. A recent example derives from the repeated case of verbal abuse by one staff member, upon which I decided in consultation with the HR manager and the Project Manager to terminate the staff for violation of CARE’s core values. The Khartoum Field Leadership Team was in disagreement and felt that they should have been consulted.
6. The ability to communicate in English was a requirement for participation the LT. In practice however, not everyone in the team has the same proficiency level, is and some seem to be at a disadvantage.
7. Sudanese are very respectful of authority, and it is possible that CD and ACDs, who are expats, ‘discourage’ unintentionally participation in the group by those members of a lower hierarchical status.

All the above made us realize that we are not necessarily working together as a team. Based on some of the above, the LT conducted a small self – assessment a few weeks ago to examine how well we are “working as a team”. After the exercise, four main areas were identified as constraints:

- The lack of a clear Vision, or Goal: what is the CO LT’s main objective?
- How well is the LT monitoring progress? And are we clear on the indicators for success?
- Not everyone in the LT participates at the same level, and the LT needs to investigate why that is, and how it can be addressed. Participation in the LT is un-even.
- Members of the LT have not had training on how to be an effective team member.

Based on the above, the each of the four sub-groups was asked to come up with 2 suggestions / solutions or practical steps to overcome the constraints. Good suggestions were made, and it was agreed that we would continue the way forward in the next LT meeting. Even though this is still a work in progress, I do want to share the output of one group, which I found very good.



Training COLT
members Capacity.dc

After discussion, members trended to agree that we do need external assistance to help us foster a true team, but that we should also begin by using our own internal capacity better and more.

4. Conclusion

I do think that we have made some good progress over the past year or so. To mention a few things: we have become better at ensuring 'voice' for staff; we have become more transparent in decision – making processes, and in communicating these decisions; we have become more sensitive to the great diversity of CARE Sudan, and how our organizational culture needs to reflect this. On the other hand, many things remain to be done, and some of these issues I have described above.

I am increasingly concerned about the external environment, the (financial) viability of the mission, and the effects that this could have on our ability to give attention to the above identified issues. Continued delays in reaching a peace accord will most likely reduce substantially the current portfolio. We may be forced to downsize, and to re-assess the viability of our current structures. Even if this happens, it should not affect negatively 'the way we work', and the adherence to openness, transparency and participation. However, it may affect the time and energy needed to move things forward.

On the other hand, a potential peace accord will have consequences for how we function as CARE (north and south) in Sudan. E.g. some of the administrative boundaries may be redrawn, and some of the Field Leadership teams that now function in the north, may become part of the 'southern administration', which would impact on the structure of the LT. How one manages these changes will remain a key challenge.