

Access Africa Minute

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UPDATE ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACCESS AFRICA SIGNATURE PROGRAM

Welcome to the third edition of the Access Africa Minute!

I hope this updates you on developments in Access Africa over the last month. If you'd like more details please follow up with me at lhendricks@care.org or you can reach me at 255(0)784 348474.

Highlighting: The VSLA MIS System

Over the past year CARE has been piloting a new MIS system, designed specifically for VSLA groups. The software was designed by Hugh Allen and Chuck Waterfield, who I am sure many of you know. CARE contributed significant input into the design of the MIS system. The piloting of the MIS has been led by Abdoul Karim Coulibaly in Niger, Mali, Ethiopia and Malawi.

The MIS is an excel-based tool that allows programs to track and manage individual Field Officer portfolios. These are consolidated into a program-wide performance system. The MIS is available for programs that keep written records and, in a simplified form, for those that do not. The MIS provides performance ratios for the individual Field Officer and the overall program. This allows for it to be used as an efficient project management tool at the same time providing the information on programs that Access Africa will need for global reporting. The MIS will be mainstreamed across all Access Africa programs over the next year. Below is a list of the Performance Management Ratios tracked by the MIS system. Starting in January, 2009 Access Africa will issue a quarterly report with the ratios for each country and for the program as a whole. It is important to note that the MIS is only one component of the overall M&E system for Access Africa. Future editions of the Minute will highlight the other components.

Access Africa Out and About

- On August 20 Lauren Hendricks met with the Deputy President of South Africa to brief her on Access Africa. The Deputy President is herself quite interested in microfinance and has visited programs in Mexico and India. A follow-up meeting including CARE South Africa is scheduled for September 8th.
- On August 21 Lauren Hendricks, Rene Celaya (ACD CARE Mozambique) and Alfred Chamuss, (Learning Advisor of CARE Mozambique) were guests of ABSA Bank Mozambique, the local Barclays Bank affiliate, at a gala event celebrating ABSA's anniversary in Mozambique. ABSA used the event to announce CARE's partnership with Barclays for VSLA expansion. The President and First lady of Mozambique were guest of honor for the event. The First Lady announced that she will be the patron of this partnership in Mozambique.
- Access Africa was presented at the African Green Revolution Conference in Oslo, Norway. Lauren Hendricks spoke on a plenary panel entitled "Financing the Green Revolution". Other panellist for the session included James Mwangi, CEO Equity Bank Limited; Clive Tasker, Chief Executive, Standard Bank Africa, Aly Abou Sabaa, Director, Agriculture and Agro-Industry department, African Development Bank group; and Juerg Trueb, Managing Director, Swiss Reinsurance Company. It was a prestigious group, and we were pleased to have Access Africa presented at such a level. Keynote speakers at the event included Kofi Anan and Bingu wa Mutharika, and the President of the Republic of Malawi.

Savings-led Micro-finance Working Group: Ratios for Savings-led Financial Services

Result/ Ratio No.	Ratio/Number	Ratio as	How derived
Client Satisfaction Ratios			
R1	<i>Attendance rate</i>	%	No. of members attending meeting/ Active members at time of visit
R2	<i>Retention rate</i>	%	Active members/ (Active members + Dropouts)
R3	<i>Membership growth rate</i>	%	(Active members at present time - Members at start of cycle) / Members at start of cycle
Financial Performance Ratios (Association level)			
R4	<i>Average savings per member mobilised to date</i>	International Currency	Cumulative value of savings / Number of active members
R5	<i>Annualised return on savings</i>	%	(Profit-Loss / (Cumulative value of savings/2) x (52/Age of Association in weeks)
R6	<i>Average member investment</i>	International Currency	(Assets - External liabilities) / Active members
R7	<i>Average loan size</i>	International Currency	Value of loans outstanding / Number of active loans
R8	<i>PAR</i>	%	Value of internal loans in arrears / Balance of internal loans outstanding
R9	<i>Loan losses: internal loans</i>	%	Value of internal loan write-offs / Average value of internal loans outstanding
R10	<i>Risk-coverage ratio</i>	%	Net profit / Value of loans past due
Operating Efficiency Ratios (Association level)			
R11	<i>% of members with active loans</i>	%	Number of borrowers / Number of active members
R12	<i>Fund utilisation rate</i>	%	Value of internal loans outstanding / (Total assets - Fixed assets)
Operating Efficiency Ratios (Implementing Organisation level)			
R13	<i>Caseload: associations per FO</i>	Number	Total number of Associations being supervised / Total number of Field Officers
R14	<i>Caseload: members per FO</i>	Number	Total number of active members / Number of Field Officers
R15	<i>Ratio of field staff to total staff</i>	%	Number of field staff (including supervisors) / Number of all staff
R16	<i>Cost per member assisted</i>	International Currency	Total programme costs to date / (Total active members + Total graduated members)
ER1	<i>External PAR</i>	%	Value of external loans past due / Value of external loans outstanding
ER2	<i>External Borrowing</i>	%	External liabilities / (Assets - External liabilities)

Highlighting: SII Summary Findings in VSL and Women's Empowerment

In 2005, CARE International developed a new core business process titled the 'Strategic Impact Inquiry' (SII). The SII was conceived in order to better understand how CARE projects impact underlying causes of poverty and achieve women empowerment. To understand the difference of the SII in comparison to an evaluation it is important to note that by definition it is a multi-level, multi-year and multi-method process. Thus, the first SII proposed a 3-year research commitment on women's empowerment with the original field research to take place in 25-30 country offices, some of the selected programs included the CARE's Village Savings and Loans (VS&L) methodology, also known in Asia as Self Help Group methodology. The VS&L promotes locally self-managed savings and loan associations in rural areas. While CARE has many mixed VS&L groups, the majority and original design of the methodology was to serve as solidarity among women. The self-managed adaptable system enables the members to respond to economic opportunities that present themselves as well as unforeseen shocks that may typically drive them into a cycle of uncontrollable and un-payable debt thus causing the sale of productive and household assets. Over time, the VS&L methodology has assumed that participating in the association enables women to assume more leadership abilities in their household and enterprises. The SII looked in depth at this assumption and came out with findings that either confirm this assumption or demonstrate some unintended results.

Over the past months, Abdoul Karim Coulibaly and Sybil Chidiac have been working together to put forward a summary capturing the global findings of the VS&L and Women's Empowerment studies conducted in Uganda (2007), Mali (2006), Tanzania (2006), Niger (2005) and India (2005). The 3 pages summary (which can be downloaded from the following site: <http://usago.care.org/signatureprograms/default.aspx>) highlights the results achieved under the global research framework which is composed of three dimensions of women's empowerment: Agency, Structure and Relations. Below is portion of the document which focuses on how Access Africa plans to utilize the SII findings. Visit the website for the full document to download.

HOW WILL ACCESS AFRICA INCORPORATE THE FINDINGS ?

Strategic focus on Economic and Social Empowerment

Exclusion of the most poor was a dominant finding that came out of many of the SIIs. Access Africa is still seeking input on how programs can be adapted to ensure country specific marginalized and vulnerable populations are targeted and specific programs are developed to incorporate their needs. Building on the SII findings, Access Africa seeks to develop methodologies that seek to ensure that VS&L programs focus on targeting populations living under \$2 a day and which are considered marginalized or vulnerable. Already suggested is the incorporation of poverty measures and targeting in country office baseline assessments to be conducted as a part of the CO strategy.

The VS&L methodology currently being replicated by Access Africa plans to incorporate methods that undertake a focus on addressing access to financial services related issues as well as structural wide barriers that prevent social empowerment of women. Already the findings speak to the confidence levels assumed by women VS&L members as well as their marked ability to engage in social and political realms. Beyond the agency change brought about through the VS&L programs broader changes impacting the enabling environment and social positions (along the lines of relational and structural areas) will be assumed through specific program activities and advocacy.

Access Africa envisages developing and piloting new models of the VS&L methodology to address structural changes. VS&L projects have had relatively little impact on the structural level of gender inequality, in large part, because they did not target this level. Even projects that use VS&L as a gateway often use it for community or inter-community initiatives without planning particularly for structural changes. At the same time, Access Africa recognizes that in many of environments CARE works in, the customs and religions can become an obstacle to enabling the structural changes needed to empower most vulnerable community members, generally women; particularly if people perceive these changes as an attack on fundamental values. Access Africa plans to analyze these factors and develop models to test out VS&L inclusion with populations often left marginalized.

Access Africa FY09 Timeline and Milestones

Task	Start Month	End Month	Status
Strategy			
Strategy Finalized	Aug-08	Aug-08	Complete
Condensed Strategy Finalized	Aug-08	Aug-08	Complete
Branding Strategy	Aug-08	Sep-08	On Track
Financial Sector Review	Aug-08	Sep-08	On Track
Advocacy Strategy	Aug-08	Sep-08	On Track
Technology Strategy	Aug-08	Sep-08	On Track
Promotional Package	Sep-08	Dec-08	On Track
Detailed Life of Project Budget	Sep-08	Oct-08	Not Started
Present Advocacy Framework to SPCC	Oct-08	Oct-08	Not Started
Country Office Interaction			
CO Strategy Framework	Aug-08	Aug-08	On Track
Tier 1 CO Strategies	Aug-08	Jun-09	Delayed
MIS in use and quarterly reports	Jul-08	Jun-09	On Track
Tier 2 CO Capacity Building	Jan-09	Jun-09	Not Started
Establish AA Governance			
Establish External Advisory Panel	Oct-08	Dec-08	Not Started
Establish Internal Steering Committee	Aug-08	Oct-08	Delayed
Establish Steering Committee	Aug-08	Oct-08	On Track
Finalize KM and Internal Communication Plans			
M&E Framework	Aug-08	Sep-08	On Track
Communications Plan	Aug-08	Oct-08	On Track
India Site Visit	Nov-08	Nov-08	On Track
Learning Framework	Oct-08	Dec-08	Not Started
State of Sector Report	Jan-09	Jan-09	Delayed
Technical Learning Series	Jan-09	Jun-09	Not Started
Secure Existing Partnerships			
IBM Business Plan	Aug-08	Oct-08	On Track
Gates Contract Final	Sep-08	Sep-08	Complete
Barclays Contract Final	Dec-08	Dec-08	Not Started
IBM Funding	Nov-08	Jan-09	Not Started
MicroVest Investment Fund Launched	Mar-09	Mar-09	On Track
Identify New Partners			
MFI Partners	Oct-08	Jun-09	Not Started
Advocacy Partners	Nov-08	Jun-09	Not Started
Technology Partners	Oct-08	Jun-09	Not Started

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Signature Programs now has a website containing information on Access Africa, Mothers Matter and Power Within. You can access the site by clicking on the following link. <http://usago.care.org/signatureprograms/default.aspx>. When prompted for a username and password, use your CARE email information. For Country Office staff that do not have a care.org account, a universal guest username and password has been created. Enter username wsscarelcare and password abc!123.