SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS FOR PROGRAM DESIGN

Making sense of complex, rapidly changing and challenging contexts: methods guidance for macro, meso and micro levels

CARE International, East And Central Africa Regional Management Unit, made possible with financial support from CARE International-UK

Compiled by Diana Wu, with Mary Picard

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Forward

This guidance & compendium is the result of three years of deliberate efforts to learn from our program design experiences in East and Central Africa (ECA), while borrowing from other parts of CARE. When we initiated the transition to programs, we struggled with situational analysis at multiple levels and with ways to structure that process to inform key decision points of the program design (identifying main drivers, selecting impact groups, refining them, developing a theory of change, etc). When we started to unpack what these different levels of analysis needed to be and what methods were required to collect information, we also realized that we lost some basic skills in Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) for community level analysis. Yet, the importance of carrying out such participatory micro level analysis to elaborate on or dig deeper about issues emerging from the "macro" or national level became increasingly obvious. We also felt that we were not sufficiently "getting our feet wet" and that we had a tendency to subcontract the analysis to consultants, keeping as well the knowledge with them. Clearly, this was no longer business as usual and the good old days of problem trees were over!

We therefore decided to re-invest in building capacity in PLA to conduct community analysis drawing from Brigitta Bode’s work in Asia Country Offices (COs), while creating guidance on the higher levels of analysis. Our idea is that this type of participatory grassroots research is not only key in understanding how drivers of poverty and vulnerability manifest in the lives of our impact groups and how they are perceived by impact groups but it is also a community mobilization and empowerment strategy as well as a critical learning journey for us. As communities and impact groups analyze their own issues and opportunities for change, their own transformation process starts together with growing awareness and confidence that they can be the actors of that change. It is also key for staff to develop the necessary connection and empathy with our impact groups and start to see things through their eyes. As we started to analyze and understand how structural and systemic inequalities combine with more localized forms of marginalization to create a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion, we became more aware of the complexity of the situations in which our impact groups are often trapped and of our own limitations.

Analysis is not easy and some colleagues in ECA and outside are still skeptical, finding it time consuming, labor intensive and expensive. It also confronts us with our individual biases and can make us feel very uncomfortable. Time will tell but I am convinced that, over time, COs that embedded situational analysis in their design, impact tracking and knowledge management systems will be more successful in raising strategic funds for their programs, in developing the necessary relationships with other actors and ultimately in contributing to positive change.

We hope this guidance / compendium will offer ideas about ways to conduct holistic analysis over time in relevant and cost-effective ways for different contexts.

Aziza deserves more than another 30 years of food aid. If we don’t invest in analyzing what keeps her food insecure and marginalized, how can we help her improve her life and that of her children?

Delphine Pinault
Deputy Regional Director,
East and Central Africa Regional Management Unit
Acknowledgements

Writing this guidance / compendium has been a highly collective effort. We have drawn from our own experiences in ECA, that of other regions, particularly Asia, and pulled together different consultants and colleagues from CI, including Brigitta Bode, Diana Wu and Michael Drinkwater from WayFair, Mary Picard, CIUK, CEG & CUSA colleagues (Sarah Cussen, Karl Deering, Simon O'Meally, Bianca Suyama, Doris Bartel, Mohammed Khaled & more). Special thanks to ECA country office staff who used and commented on some of the tools during the capacity building initiative in ECA, and particularly to CARE Tanzania for hosting the event and taking time to give valuable comments.

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ECARMU
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List of Acronyms

CO  Country Office
ECAR  East and Central Africa’s Region
NGO  Non-governmental organization
PLA  Participatory Learning and Action
UCP  Underlying Causes of Poverty
Using this Resource

This guide offers a menu of options for conducting a situational analysis in support of the design process in a program approach and adapted to the East and Central Africa Region (ECAR). It is a compilation of resources that draws from CARE East and Central Africa’s Regional Capacity Building Initiative, analytical guidance from across CARE International (particularly from CAREs Bangladesh and Nepal), and myriad Country Office (CO) experiences within the ECAR.

The frameworks and tools here span macro, meso and micro level analyses for understanding the underlying causes of poverty (UCPs) and relate how different levels of analysis link together to render a comprehensive picture of a particular country context. This is not a guide to be rigidly applied. It casts a wide net of methods and tools within a strategically targeted set of themes so that design teams can choose intelligently the forms of analysis that best suit their contexts. It fulfills the situational analysis needs of multiple programs at once and their 10-15 year prospectives. It is also meant to generate innovation in practice by COs as they engage in situational analysis as part of their program design process. Using this guide as a reference, we hope that teams will develop new ideas during the application process, to inform future situational analyses.

This guide and compendium of methods is organized broadly into four main sections:

1. **The Main Body**: This section provides an overview of the levels of situational analysis (macro, meso and micro), their key dimensions and how they inter-relate. It describes use of situational analysis across the programmatic cycle and offers key tips in planning and preparing analysis.

2. **Macro Analysis Guidelines (Appendix A)**: This section provides a menu of thematic guidance on key dimensions of analysis at the macro level. These dimensions – governance, gender, demographic, social and economic development, socio-cultural analysis, climate change and disaster risk/vulnerability, conflict – are strategic areas ECAR has identified as critical to understanding and addressing poverty and vulnerability in the region. Each section concludes with a list of key resources. While the thematic analysis frameworks are tailored to the macro level, they may also be adapted to explore thematic issues at meso and micro levels.

3. **Meso Analysis Guidelines (Appendix B)**: This section elaborates the process of undertaking meso analysis. It specifically adds a spatial analysis to the macro level data, thereby making it possible to identify where the most marginalized populations are located within a country context. It also helps narrow the focus for the micro analysis.

4. **Micro Analysis Guidelines (Appendix C)**: Finally, the micro analysis section outlines a series of local level exercises adapted from the UCP analysis process of CARE Bangladesh and CARE Nepal for the ECA region. It also gleans helpful lessons and tips from the ECAR Capacity-Building Initiative which took place in rural Tanzania, and was subsequently applied in Uganda, South Sudan as well as Somaliland. The list of additional resources is instructive in the use of participatory local-level analysis for specific themes.

This work should be treated as a ‘living’ document to be improved upon in further editions, as teams learn from their practical experiences with situational analysis.

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1. Within the region, CARE identified gender inequality, poor governance, conflict and climate change as key drivers of poverty and injustice.
The Purpose

In CARE’s commitment to rights-based approaches, solid analysis is the very foundation upon which programs are constructed for lasting impact. It is not possible for CARE to successfully move beyond the symptoms of poverty, injustice and vulnerability to addressing underlying causes without solid analysis.

Situational analysis establishes this foundation and thereby helps to broaden and deepen knowledge over time of the key population groups that CARE hopes to serve within its programs. The process creates organizational understanding of the critical barriers, issues and underlying causes affecting impact groups at the same time that it informs opportunities for change and the development of program theories of change and causal pathways. Both knowledge gained from inquiry (analytical knowledge) and experience (experiential knowledge) are of value to a situational analysis. The process will vary from one Country Office to another, according to the stock of knowledge and experience of an individual CO. Other factors, such as human resource capacity, skill level, financial resources and time will also shape the choices made in conducting the analysis.

In all instances however, the process will prove to be highly iterative, moving back and forth between multiple levels (macro, meso and micro). In this process, the myriad sources of data brought to bear on the situation of vulnerable groups fill information gaps until a fuller picture emerges. There should be frequent analytical moments in this process of gathering data that ask how the issues and findings interrelate or influence one another.

Layers of Analysis and Program Design

Program design reinforces the demand in CARE for situational analysis and raises the demand for good quality research as a solid foundation for long-term programs. Analyses of multiple dimensions (gender, governance, conflict, disaster risks and vulnerabilities, etc.) should not each correspond to separate studies, although the manner in which the research is undertaken is likely to incorporate multiple inquiries and involve multiple stakeholders as researchers and participants.

There may be a menu of analyses, exploring exclusion, political-economy, conflict, and more based on a country context. To the extent possible, the situational analysis, broadly, with its multiple methods, conducted over time, should serve more than one program and ensure better integration of both development and humanitarian work.

- Drinkwater (2009)

Figure 1

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2 For a richer discussion of the Program Characteristics and related terms, please see CARE’s Program Design Brief No. 1.
Definitions of Macro, Meso and Micro

In sociological research, **macro** refers to the largest social grouping, at the level of the society as a whole. At this level (national or broader), institutions that affect the masses are relevant here – the economy, government, the norms of the society – and, for our purposes, the environmental phenomena affecting the whole population as well.

The **meso** level pertains to the smaller social groupings or smaller systems of people who follow a set of guidelines. These reveal to us the divisions in society and thus the social and economic inequities across a country context. These may also manifest spatially. Here, regional or sub-national institutions are relevant.

The **micro** level breaks down to a smaller scale geographically and socially. For our purposes, the critical unit of analysis is explanatory of the unequal power relations that account for the marginalization of a group of people. At smaller levels of analysis, micro extends to the household and the individual.

See also: http://www.appliedsoc.org/society/

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The Process

Instructions are provided below on how to undertake situational analysis. The first section describes a phased approach aligned with the design and development of a program. The subsequent section suggests how to use the analysis being generated to start making design choices (e.g., candidate impact groups) and allowing them to proceed in tandem. Analysis should in any case be viewed as an ongoing process, as program theories of change are tested and adapted.

Situational Analysis: A Phased Approach

Besides the knowledge and experience that resides with staff and partners, desk review and organizational inquiry (document review and key informant discussions) are critical to ensure that analysis builds from diverse sources of learning within the country context.

As the diagram below illustrates:

- **1st phase**: a literature review combines with CARE staff and partner experiential knowledge to produce a candidate set of impact groups. If quality, availability, and disaggregation of existing data are insufficient, teams may also seek further information from key informants. This expands to the macro level of analysis explained further on in Appendix A.

- **2nd phase**: using the same data, a spatial analysis of the data is done to identify regional disparities, which help reveal where the poorest and most marginalized populations are

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located and the drivers for marginalization (see Appendix B). This will generate a set of candidate impact groups combined with an identification of the most marginalized areas. This is intended to help you choose a locality for your micro-level analysis and potential future sites of geographic concentration for your program.

- **3rd phase**: almost exclusively primary data collection, the Country Office will be able to finalize the selection of impact groups and refine their definition (Appendix C).

Phases 4 and 5 are discussed below.

**Recommended Situational Analysis Process**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Analysis Processes</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 1: Macro Analysis</td>
<td>Candidate Impact Group Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desk review of secondary data focused on: General context, Understanding poverty &amp; vulnerability, Institutional, policy and legal framework, Key actors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 2: Meso Analysis</td>
<td>Marginalized Areas Identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying regional disparities, using the data from the desk review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 3: Micro Analysis</td>
<td>Candidate Impact Group Refinement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint analysis and action, using participatory methods in marginalized areas</td>
<td>Causes of Poverty, Vulnerability, Social Injustice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEVEL 4: Program Design</td>
<td>Finalize impact group definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desk review of secondary analysis, Experiential knowledge documentation and Strategic decision-making reflections</td>
<td>Program Theory of Change, Strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify key themes/questions, and explore through further analysis Stakeholders/Agents mapping and analysis, Review of portfolio and strategic areas for CARE</td>
<td>Design &amp; implement impact measurement and knowledge management system.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How Much Analysis is Enough?**

A common question raised across Country Offices is how much analysis is adequate to start developing the program theory of change and strategy.

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\(^4\) While it may not always exist at this level, teams should always begin by surveying and reviewing what information or studies have already been conducted in the locality where it has focused its micro level analysis.
No single situational analysis will be able to answer all questions, but it should offer the team a level of confidence in the choice of impact groups, even when data gaps still exist. For this reason, there is a 4th phase on the diagram that corresponds to a critical reflection moment, after the findings of the micro-level analysis are available. Here it is important to pause and reflect on two important questions:

- How adequate is the information?
- Which findings require deeper exploration before selecting final impact groups?

Analysis findings should be validated with key stakeholders (impact group members, partners and other stakeholders) to gain deeper understanding and various perspectives in relation to the analysis. Often, in understanding the underlying causes of poverty, teams find a cycle of key elements that reinforce one another to perpetuate exclusion, vulnerability and poverty facing the impact group (i.e. A and B lead to C. C in turn strengthens A and B, which continue to aggravate C).

The diagram shows a 5th phase. Here, one switches from design to development of the programs that involves constructing the theories of change. An iterative process of going back and forth between the analysis and the program theories of change occurs here, as the team seeks to refine the theories of change.

It is important the team not be stymied by information gaps but agrees that some answers can be gotten through the measurement and learning system for the program. Indeed, analysis is an integral part of all phases of the program cycle beyond the initial design.

This is essential to detect changes in the environment or in relation to intervention outcomes—both intended and unintended— that affect impact group members. Most environments in which CARE operates are complex and in a constant state of flux. Assumptions about the external environment must be monitored and the impact of unexpected events in the context on the program assessed. The level of uncertainty or unpredictability will depend not only on the context but its interaction with the program and with the methodological approach. Thus, to minimize surprise and know how to respond to it, continual analysis should be incorporated in the program.

Vigilance in understanding the context, as it is changing, is of vital importance to:

- Ensure program initiatives ‘Do No Harm’ and are Conflict Sensitive (see Figure 4, on page 6);
- Ensure the program is addressing possible shifting in underlying causes of poverty and social injustice;\(^5\)
- Understand how impact group priorities, barriers, opportunities and aspirations change over time; and
- Adapt interventions in light of changes in the context to capitalize on strategic opportunities that emerge for more effective programming.

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\(^5\) For more information on conflict sensitivity, please visit: www.conflictsensitivity.org
At the macro level, this means keeping abreast of broader trends and developments relating to the country context. At the micro level, participatory learning and action (PLA) methods are an effective means for CARE and impact group members to jointly analyze the situation, prioritize areas for action and collectively plan and develop strategies to overcome them. In CAREs Bangladesh and Nepal, this approach has become the basis of program design and ways of working with communities (Further Discussions on page 14). PLA methods, taken in a framework of social action, are used continuously beyond the situational analysis to empower community members.

As the situation changes, the theory of change to predict future outcomes should be adapted. Programs have 10-15 year time horizons and the time over which change occurs, in all likelihood, will adjust and re-adjust repeatedly.

Lastly, it is also important to look at the interaction of characteristics from micro, meso and macro levels across space, from the local to the national and at broader levels. This analysis reveals the power dynamics in the interplay between the three levels. Figure 5 below briefly illustrates the case of East and Central Africa.  

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**Do No Harm, Conflict Sensitivity and the Program Approach**

The Do No Harm framework is a flexible tool that aligns with CARE’s program approach, and can be used at every step of the process, from initial analysis to developing and monitoring theories of change to measuring impact. It is particularly compatible with community-based participatory approaches, and more in-depth macro conflict analysis may be required to compliment the tool. Do No Harm examines:

- **Dividers**: Sources of tension between groups that may be rooted in the underlying causes of poverty (root causes), or may be more recent, short-lived or manipulated by subgroup leaders; and

- **Connectors**: Recognizing that even during conflict, people remain connected through for example markets, infrastructure, common experiences, historical events, symbols, and shared attitudes; and

- **Local Capacities for Peace**: Identifying individuals and institutions who have a role in maintaining peace (e.g. formal and informal justice systems, police forces, elders, teachers, or clergy) who may not be able to prevent violence but provide an avenue for rebuilding relations outside the conflict.

This tool organizes these into a visual mapping to highlight their actual and potential relationships — to each other, and to programs.

Throughout analysis and program implementation, CARE and its partners must remain aware of how exercises, interventions and ways of working may affect the relational dynamics and structures within a community — in terms of their effects on:

- tensions (strengthening dividers);

- sources/relations of cohesiveness and resilience (strengthening connectors and building local capacities for peace); and

- the overall underlying causes of poverty.

The Do No Harm framework also provides space to examine how gender roles affect Dividers and Connectors.

Although the framework itself is user friendly, and its concepts relatively easy to grasp, the process of integrating Do No Harm into programming and staff perspective requires continuous monitoring of changes taking place within a community, and adjusting strategies and approaches accordingly.

It also requires organizational and staff commitment to examine their own capacity for conflict sensitivity (policies, procedures, experience, selection, oversight and management of staff and partners, etc.).

-S Cussen, CIUK Conflict Advisor; CDA (2004)

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Preparing and Planning Analysis

Situation analysis requires careful preparations and realistic planning on who to involve, resources available, team capacities, time, ethics and research design (selection of methods and respondents).

Who to Involve

In situational analysis, partners play an important collaborative role. That means, at a minimum, teams should carry out a survey of key actors very early on to identify existing or new partners with whom to engage in analysis.

To support this process, consultants may offer important support in facilitating situational analysis and building staff capacity in critical inquiry. However, staff should remain involved and invested in each dimension of analysis to ensure ownership over the process, findings and program as well as to build internal capacity for analysis.

Considerations in Design

- **Resources for analysis:** The depth and breadth of a study will be shaped by a number of factors, including: time available, project/program budget, as well as human resource availability and skill. Key technical advisors across CARE International with a myriad of thematic focus areas can complement Country Office skills and support their analysis. Support can also be found in partnering with research institutions or universities for joint learning and analysis. Typically, a more experienced researcher who is able to guide the team through all the research phases is crucial. Someone must also take responsibility for joining up the pieces of research and finalizing the written products. While consultants may play a guiding role, Country Offices must ensure that the inquiry is not simply outsourced. Program staff and key partners should also be closely involved in important steps to build capacity and ownership over findings.

- **Ethics:** In designing analysis, careful consideration must be given to risks posed in people’s participation in analysis and alignment with Do No Harm (see page 6):

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Inter-relations of Macro, Meso and Micro Dynamics within East/Central Africa

The inter-relationships of micro, meso and macro level dynamics play out across the landscapes and history of East and Central Africa.

In ECAR, international and national interests have affected local level security situations, economic systems, as well as governance practices. Through colonial administrations, policies imposed on African lands and villagers fed Europe’s industrial revolution. Since independence, civil wars in Burundi, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan and Uganda led to massive human rights violations and destabilized national borders and regional dynamics through population movements of refugees and rebel groups.

However, macro-level interests and power relations do not simply act upon provincial or local level actors, but are also influenced by meso and local dynamics. During Sudan’s Civil War, rivalries amongst southern groups (some supported by the Northern government) at times aligned with or opposed the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), shaping gains and losses for each side. In Tanzania, local-level alliances across tribes – and community-level actions of civil disobedience – fueled the liberation movement that eventually led to national independence. And most recently, across the Middle East, grassroots acts of millions of individuals across Tunisia and Egypt converged to the overthrow of governments – triggered by a single fruit vendor in Tunisia who refused to pay bribe.

Figure 5

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The inter-relations of micro, meso and macro level dynamics play out across the landscapes and history of East and Central Africa.
- **What may be potential risks to participants or community members linked to this study and how do we ensure we are conflict sensitive?**
- **How can we ensure that the analysis process is not just “extractive” but is accountable to communities, and promotes empowerment and learning?**
- **How can we ensure that we work sensitively and respectfully within communities?**

**Training and Supporting Teams:** Also, in probing aspects of gender and social/cultural norms, analysis requires careful team preparation so the research team has the time, capacity and available coaching required to ensure gender equity and diversity sensitivity, conflict sensitivity, as well as facilitation and analysis skills. This support is essential for staff to reflect on and gain awareness of their own biases and values that may shape one’s observations and interpretations of analyses across macro-, meso and micro levels.

No less important is the need to reinforce research and analysis skills among staff and partners. As more Country Offices establish program quality units that tend to include individuals with strong social science research skills, the capacity will slowly become embedded in the organization. However, skills in facilitation and participatory methods must also be revived across staff in many Country Offices.

**Confronting Researcher Bias:** A feedback mechanism should also be in place to guard against researcher bias, whether internal or external. This can occur in the literature review and shaping of the macro level analysis as much as it can at the micro level. The relationship between the researchers and the Country Office staff is a pivotal one—collaborative and mutually accepting of the potential for bias to enter into the analysis.

**Engaging Mixed Methods:** In designing research, Country Offices should seek to engage mixed methods and diverse respondents to gain a robust foundation of information for analysis. External sources of information should not exclude grey literature or experiential knowledge generated by local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or development actors more familiar with specific marginalized groups than CARE or its partners. Interviews with such key informants can be invaluable and expedient in gaining rich data without having to collect it from the field.

**Organizing the Research:** Thoughtful discussion is needed to plan the research to fit the available resources and the time which people have available. Someone must oversee the schedule for completing the situational analysis, fitting it with Country Office needs for initiating programs and applying for donor funds. It requires a team that takes responsibility for different tasks and is held accountable. Although the entire situational analysis does not have to occur in one intense period—something that is rarely possible in the work cycle of a Country Office—there needs to be agreement on the sequencing and the spacing of the research. Above all, there should be some non-negotiable deadlines that derive from or are aligned with the Country Office’s strategic and annual operating planning.

**Timing of Field Research:** The scheduling of analysis should take into account the valuable time and schedules of community members whom we would like to involve in analysis. For example, during harvesting seasons, many people would be too busy to take part in exercises. Often, the lean period – when the first season’s crops have been harvested and the second season’s crops are not yet mature – presents a window of opportunity when agricultural communities have more time. Teams should also consider the seasonal climate and implications on village accessibility. In addition to seasonal changes and their implication on people’s time, the research team should also consider how administrative and political calendars (elections, planning/budgeting/reporting cycles) can limit or facilitate access to government representatives or affect the political climate within communities.

In addition, to enable analysis activities, some Country Offices have been able to time situational analysis activities to coincide with planned events within ongoing projects (mid-term reports, baselines, evaluations, etc.). This is aimed at mining as much data as possible that already exists in CARE and partners, as well as ensuring cost efficiency by using planned data collection opportunities.
The Components

Making Wise Choices

Situational analysis captures several important dimensions (e.g., political, socio-cultural, economic, environmental) and at multiple levels (from international, national, regional, local, household and interpersonal). Given the vast amount of information in each of these categories, Country Office teams must prioritize what they are looking for –

- What are the key research questions you need to answer?
- How could answers to those questions help get to where you want to go?
- How can it help you identify impact groups, understand the issues they face, what drives their poverty and what opportunities exist to positively influence change in their lives?

To help think through areas for research, this compendium offers research frameworks and methods that Country Offices and other agencies have used to understand broader (macro and meso) characteristics/dynamics within a country context, in addition to local-level (micro) characteristics/dynamics interacting with impact group members. For further guidance on analysis methods, please view the Appendices.

As teams proceed from the macro to the meso to the micro level of analysis, step-by-step, marginalized population groups and the influences driving their vulnerabilities will become apparent.

This section gives an overview of the three levels of analysis and their associated thematic areas and explains how these different types of analysis are important. Each inquiry framework, such as governance, offers the full panoply of information gathering to produce the richest analysis. Therefore, it is incumbent upon the Country Office team to carefully select from the menu and begin by deciding the research questions. The inquiry frameworks are not mutually exclusive and allow for a margin of overlap, hence, some redundancy is to be expected.

Power and Situational Analysis

Embedded across each dimension of analysis are issues of power and inequality. Power is exercised formally and informally, visibly and invisibly. Power relations are characterized by the ability of a group or individual to:

- Exercise influence over the decisions and actions of another group or individual
- Serve their own interests, which may not be those of the other groups or individuals.

Crucially, power can either be used to exert change that has a positive impact on many people or can be used to exclude people from resources, services and opportunities. Already through macro analysis, broad trends in the exclusion of certain groups from decision-making or access to a spectrum of services, resources or opportunities may arise. Understanding power relations in a given context is complex and can carry risk, and yet, addressing weak governance, unequal gender relations or discrimination of any form (class, age, caste, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, etc.) requires that the way power is exercised changes. If we are to influence transformational social change, we need to understand the environment in which we are operating.

Figure 6
A Note on Stakeholder Analysis

Across each level and area of analysis, Country Office teams must consider who are the key actors or groups whose actions, incentives and interests have an impact on the situation; what is the source and degree of their influence; and what are their relationships with one another. For this reason, stakeholder analysis represents a critical component in any program design. For more information on Stakeholder Analysis, please reference guidance on stakeholder analysis in the CARE Gender Toolkit (http://pqdl.care.org/gendertoolkit).7

Component A. Macro Level Situational Analysis
(Appendix A)

Uses: For CARE, macro-level analysis looks at the historical trends and characteristics of poverty and vulnerability within a country context, and who suffers most from it. This process can also identify key actor groups and relationships, policies, resources and other barriers/opportunities that influence these conditions at a high level.

Methods: Macro analysis should be informed by research design, its purpose and its guiding questions to ensure that the study remains focused. Macro analysis can involve a range of methods from literature review, policy analysis, key informant interviews, institutional mapping and an analysis of latest government or international figures or statistics about the broader context. For each area of analysis, sources must be reviewed for rigor, reliability and validity.

Wherever possible, the elements used in analysis should be disaggregated spatially (e.g. national, provincial, and district), as well as by sex and age, where such data are available. Though such data is not always easy to come by and depends on the research available, data should as much as possible be sought for characteristics across household status (female/child headed households, single or married individuals, widow(er)s, etc.). Socio-economic disaggregation is also important - ethnicity, race, religion, class/wealth, caste, religion, occupation (pastoralists, agriculturalists, sex workers, migrant laborers), sexual orientation, etc., where relevant. The disaggregation is essential for the next phase, the meso analysis.

Analysis should also cover past and current trends to understand potential directions in future, when possible. As programs plan for 10 to 15 years, trying to understand future trends is critical. The vulnerability of population groups shifts up and down, depending on the drivers (e.g., conflict), and one must aim to predict how the situation may change in the medium- and long-term.

7 The full document on stakeholder analysis from CARE Ethiopia is available at: http://p-shift.care2share.wikispaces.net/file/view/Practical+guide+for+stakeholder+analysis+17Jan2011.doc
**Dimensions for Analysis:** Macro-level situational analysis involves a review of the broader level trends and characteristics that comprise a country or regional context. Key dimensions for analysis include:  

- Governance and political economy
- Gender
- Demographic, social and economic development
- Social and cultural norms
- Disaster risk, vulnerability and capacity
- Conflict

**Component B. Meso Level Situational Analysis**  
(Appendix B)

**Uses:** To organize information gathered at the macro analysis level and apply a spatial analysis to the data to find where multiple forms of marginalization co-exist. This analysis asks:

- Where are the most marginalized population groups located in space?
- What defines the boundaries around these groups?
- What are the intersections between different forms of marginalization?

**Methods:** To answer these questions, a systematic process of creating maps can identify areas that face multiple layers of marginalization and poverty. In other words, are there key geographic zones within the country context that are particularly worse off due to multiple barriers related to governance, gender, social and economic development, conflict, disaster risk, environmental and/or climate change related vulnerability? This process may not require additional data collection, though this needs to be assessed (e.g., the need for data disaggregated at lower administrative levels). As a general rule, any additional efforts in data gathering should be kept to a minimum.

**Dimensions of Analysis:** Meso level analysis focuses on specific groups within the macro context. It captures the divisions within the macro context, noting regional divisions by livelihood systems, poverty level, environmentally vulnerable areas, etc. It draws from the dimensions of analysis conducted for the macro-level, to develop mappings of differences across geographic areas (e.g. across administrative districts, or regions) within a country in terms of:

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8 Note again that these are derived from ECARMU’s regional strategic framework priority themes. Other themes may be added to the list depending on the context.

Poverty and social indicators – what is the general profile of development across the country?

Population size, growth, density and migration, done for the general population and the poor more specifically – where are people concentrated (more isolated, more connected to services and investment)? How has this been changing? How is this likely to evolve? Is migration economically, politically, environmentally or socially motivated? What are the push and pull factors of migration (including urbanization)?

Political power (marginalized vs. privileged) – do some districts or regions harness more political power (voice, representation, investment) than others?

Social exclusion – where are socially excluded groups? Where are enduring forms of social exclusion practiced?

Geographically marginalized areas – what areas are remote from political or economic opportunities or power?

Livelihood systems – where are livelihood systems most threatened by disasters or a depleted natural resource base? In what areas do livelihood systems perpetuate impoverishment or exclusion?

Conflict – where does conflict produce insecurity, instability and/or difficult accessibility? This meso-level analysis should help CARE identify specific areas of the country where poverty and marginalization is most highly concentrated. Please see the Pshift wiki for examples (http://p-shift.care2share.wikispaces.net).

Component C. Micro Level Situational Analysis (Appendix C)

Uses: Micro-level analysis typically focuses on the local community and household levels as the units for analysis. At the micro level, situational analysis helps uncover local-level social structures and dynamics, political processes, as well as household livelihood strategies and relations. Often examining both better-off and poor local administrative units within a country, this process aims to unveil varying power dynamics, inequities in accumulation strategies between communities with access to development opportunities and those consistently excluded from development. In the study of local-level context and its relational dynamics issues of conflict and peace, risks, differential vulnerability and resilience at household and community levels are revealed. This level of analysis also sheds light on the perspectives of particular population group members, triangulating findings from macro-level sources.

For Program Design: This process – complementing macro and meso level analyses – helps programs to identify what groups are most marginalized from development, the drivers perpetuating their exploitation and possible triggers or opportunities for positive social change. As such, the process will lead to refining the definition of the impact group

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Many good tools in conflict analysis are available and being used by CARE. They are included in the macro level set of tools and some of the micro level tools address conflict. The meso level conflict analysis is not a separate exercise, as the existing tools inherently reveal the important spatial differentiations of conflict dynamics.
and can also be used for “targeting” purposes, ensuring we identify who is really part of the impact group in a given community.

- **For Social Analysis and Action:** In addition, these analyses – when rooted in PLA methodologies – enable program teams to work in collaboration with local people to analyze forms of marginalization, prioritize key issues, and come up with community led plans and strategies to address inequalities. This process focuses not only upon joint analysis and learning as an empowering process, but is also formed around strategic planning and activities generated at the local level, as opposed to the traditional top-down approach toward international development programming.

- **For Monitoring Change:** In addition, aggregating micro level analyses across a given regional zone can also build a rich depiction of its characteristics and conditions at the meso level. This information could offer an important basis for monitoring change over time, particularly in comparison to other regions within a country context as a basis for impact monitoring. Beyond the program, these analyses can also signal how shifting contexts affect conditions and characteristics facing communities across time.

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**Power Analysis for Social Action**

PLA with community-based groups has taken root in CAREs Bangladesh and Nepal as powerful means for collective mobilization and action, with actions beginning to take place in ECAR.

In Nepal, analyses with landless laborers on dependency and exploitation led landless laborers to mobilize during key harvest seasons and demand fair wages from employers. This initiative dramatically shifted the working conditions, benefits and wages of laborers. Through a series of strikes and negotiations, collective efforts were able to raise a net total of an additional US$2 million dollars in wages for over 13,000 poor men and women in one year.

Based on their thorough situational analyses, CARE Bangladesh identified Community Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) as a key entry point to bring together the rich and poor in collaboration. CLTS improved the lives of all segments of a village. This approach not only led to communities freeing themselves from open defecation without external inputs, but also provided a platform from which the poor could demonstrate leadership in local development.

Over the past year, CARE Uganda also undertook participatory situational analysis and identified sanitation as a major unmet need within the poorest village studied, Village O. In a presentation of research findings with analysis villagers as well as parish government leaders, the research team demonstrated the striking imbalance in development investment across villages within the area. During the meeting, the team challenged government leaders to become more equitable in their approach to development. Over the following year, development initiatives have become more inclusive of Village O, investing in a borehole and broadening economic opportunities for residents there. While further social analysis and action approaches have yet to take hold as a part of CARE Uganda’s way of working, this example offered a glimpse of the possibilities for change through PLA.

--Picard (2010); Bode (2007); Kukla (2010)
Held in May and August 2010, the ECAR Capacity-Building Initiative on Situational Analysis carried out a host of exercises that explored dimensions on resources and power (including issues related to natural resources), the disaggregation of communities, governance, livelihoods and gender. The exercises taught and practiced through this initiative – adapted from exercises that have become core methods in CAREs Bangladesh and Nepal – form the basis of methods featured within this compendium.

**Tools for Analysis:** Tools engaged in the East/Central Africa Regional Capacity-Building Initiative held in Tanzania included:

- Village Resource Mapping
- Social Mapping of a Community
- Village or Hamlet Histories
- Well-Being Analysis
- Livelihood Network Analysis
- Land Tenure Analysis
- Crop Matrix
- Seasonal Calendar
- Wage Matrix
- Changes and Trends in Gender Norms Analysis
- Gender and Socialization
- Daily Time Use

Teams facilitated these exercises with rural, agricultural communities. While these tools are specifically tailored toward farming communities, experienced PLA facilitators may experiment and adapt methods for non-agriculturalist or even urban contexts. The capacity building initiative began to explore how to use tools with pastoralist groups, though time and resources did not allow further refinement of these methods.

### Closing Thoughts

We hope that the research frameworks and tools shared within the appendices of this compendium provide helpful guidance as you undertake a situational analysis. Equally, we hope it will generate new ideas and innovations on how to approach this process for the design of future programs. As noted earlier, rather than a static piece, this compendium aims to be updated with the knowledge generated from Country Office experiences in situational analysis. We look forward to your insights and additions in future editions.