

ADVANCING GOOD GOVERNANCE in International Development

Making Market-based Approaches to Development Work for the Poor

4 – 5 June 2015

Rhodes House, Oxford

Briefings on Recent Developments: Data and Democracy

Ann Cotton (Founder and President, Camfed) discussed transparency in data sharing and its impact on the rural poor.

Key Points from the Session:

1. **Traditional methods of data gathering often fail to respect human dignity or to collect data accurately.**

There is a power imbalance inherent in so much research practice in international development.

The imbalance operates on so many different levels.

The educated ask the uneducated.

The literate ask the illiterate.

The privileged ask the under-privileged.

The adult asks the child.

The rich ask the poor.

Race, class, gender and age infuse in the dynamic. Multiple indicators of power versus multiple indicators of its absence. It is 'them and us'. How do we begin to consider the ethics of questionnaires, of surveys, of research, when one side has the control and the prerogative regarding the collection, analysis and sharing of information or data?

2. **Camfed has devised and implemented a data gathering method that strives for greater ethics and empowerment of individuals. In addition, Camfed's method has resulted in the collection of high quality data which is powerful in supporting development.**

Good data is fundamental to poverty eradication. How can data be gathered in a way that is ethically defensible? How do we multiply the power of data for poverty eradication? The creation of data should not be the starting point; the starting point is already in the community as knowledge capital. As in all of Camfed's operations, community involvement is the driver behind monitoring and evaluation of programme quality, integrity and sustainability.

Data collection is conducted by Camfed's large network of volunteer activists – community members who own the problem of girls' educational exclusion, and own the solutions. Those activists speak the local language, perceive the nuances in children's and young people's responses, honour personal boundaries and, in their initiatives, build wide relationships with their communities. We train enumerators in both the technical and social processes. They gather data on mobile phones and it is uploaded in real time via GSMA in 90 per cent of the rural locations where we work – data on childhood development initiatives, safety net funds, supporting primary and secondary school-age children, and secondary school bursaries. They understand that the

data-gathering exercise is accountable first and foremost to the child as our client, so every interaction is infused with respect. This interactive and client-partner method of data gathering provides an extremely detailed and rich picture that is more authentic and more revealing in complexity than more typical extractive methods.

3. Technology partnerships enable Camfed to scale its data gathering.

Salesforce provides the foundation for bespoke applications. We now have a system that enables us to store data on every girl and young woman Camfed supports and with built in levels of access to protect privacy.

Emerging Questions:

1. How can the international development community use the data gathering process to enable people who are currently poor to become the principal agents of their own destiny?
2. How do we build a community of practitioners and researchers that have a quality of imagination born of emotional and social intelligence?
3. How can we empower rural communities to better own, understand, and control their data?