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# Practical Notes

## A day in the life of a development manager

*David Crawford, Michael Mambo, Zainab Mdimi, Harriet Mkilya, Anna Mwambuzi, Matthias Mwiko and Sekiete Sekasua, with Dorcas Robinson*

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### Introduction

What does development management mean to development managers on a daily basis? Seven such managers in an NGO in Tanzania were asked to write a diary of one day in their working life.<sup>1</sup> This paper presents extracts from these diaries. They are only snap-shots of a more complex picture. But whether presented as descriptive narrative or more personal reflections, they provide insights into the routines, challenges, and concerns which shape the working days of many managers.

Writing diaries can serve a number of purposes: from individual managers realising how they actually spend their time and using this as a tool for time management; to information-sharing and building understanding within teams; to providing a collective memory or organisational record for future reference.

These managers particularly enjoyed the opportunity to read each others' diaries. They began to see, committed to paper, the issues which provide the substance of 'informal' thinking and talking; issues that rarely get written into reports or minutes of

meetings. For them, the question then arose of what this might mean for the way they work and communicate with each other on a regular basis.

Clearly, even on the most 'operational' of days, these development managers are grappling with significant, and at times apparently overwhelming, questions. As one manager pointed out, mostly these diaries reveal the endless stream of 'problems' which bombard you in your daily work: 'problems' which you have to filter and resolve in some way. Thus most days of the development manager are about managing feelings about the bigger picture, in the face of one's own limitations, at the same time as dealing with the day-to-day nitty-gritty.

### Michael Mambo

One of my duties is to visit villages. On Friday, for example, I went with my colleagues to Usinge village. The journey took about four hours on the train (the road is not open at the moment).

On arriving in the village, as usual you are met by village officials. Always they want you to talk about *your* plans; that is what they want to hear. I try to change their expectations by explaining that we have the following areas to look at: meetings with the building committee to review a way forward *together*; with the village assembly to discuss, among other things, each one's role in the project; and with the Community Based Health Care committee (CBHC).

As usual you discover that people want to know more about the organisation. They want you to talk in the village assembly. But

what exactly do they want me to talk about? I thought that the Community Extension Worker (CEW) in the village would have done this. Am I not doing her job? My colleagues and I ... discuss this among ourselves ... and decide it is not a problem as it was in our plan to meet the village assembly anyway.

Meeting with the CBHC committee was very interesting. About 18 people met, half of whom were women, which was quite unusual. The chairman opened the meeting in only two sentences: '... the meeting is opened and I welcome Mr Mambo to tell us what he has come with'. My first reaction is to think 'I don't live in Usinge, so what do I say?' All of a sudden I made up my mind and decided to talk. I said, 'this is an opportunity for us all to discuss what has happened to the plans you developed at your CBHC meeting last year. What do you want to talk about, based on the real situation in your village?' It was agreed and our discussion went very well.

### *What else!*

When you are in the village you also discover a lot. For example, a new doctor has been appointed and sent to the village. He is a Medical Assistant—a higher rank than the Rural Medical Aid (RMA) who managed the dispensary before. Good news. But he does not have accommodation. He wants an upgraded type of accommodation. Some villagers think he should stay anywhere but he is reluctant. All of a sudden you discover it is a problem and they want you to be part of it. They start asking you a lot of questions. But what do you say?

You go round the village and talk with some people. You discover that a lot of people have malaria; some children are anaemic when they are brought to the dispensary. I go to the dispensary and find the Medical Assistant with a child who will only survive if it gets some units of blood. According to the Circular from the Ministry

of Health, only District and Regional hospitals are allowed to give blood to patients, so the case is then referred to the District hospital. Now a problem arises. The child's mother does not understand why the Medical Assistant does not just give drugs. 'What kind of doctor is this?', she asks, 'People say that he is more qualified than an RMA'. The child's mother does not want to go to the hospital. Some people are saying it is because the transport is too expensive, and she is very poor because she is not married. They tried to persuade her, but the child passed away while we were in the village. Now people are talking: some are abusing the doctor, some are accusing the woman. Some come to you complaining, and they want you to comment and maybe 'deal with the doctor'. I end up smiling as usual. I don't want to comment on anything. This leaves them surprised.

I left Usinge feeling quite frustrated. When you think about your work in your head you expect that when people in a village start to use the CBHC approach (problem analysis, dialogue and so on), the problems of anaemia, of relationships with the dispensary and so forth, will be dealt with through discussions about prevention and community action. But what I found in Usinge was the CBHC committee has not been active, and that there are new problems with the Medical Assistant. Now how do I deal with this?! During their discussions, the CBHC committee planned to do make house-to-house visits to discuss malaria and clearing swamp areas, because child deaths have been increasing. I think that the CEW and the CBHC committee need more support, so I begin to plan more visits.

PS: Usinge is located about 210 km from Tabora town, in the middle of the forest reserve. Villagers are kind and they offer accommodation, clearing a room for you. For god's sake, how are you going to deal with the mosquitoes? You realise that you didn't remember to bring your sleeping bag or bed net. ...