

Self-Directed Organizations in Rural Kenya:

From Participation to Empowerment

By

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ABSTRACT

Susan E. Stephen

Self-Directed Organizations in Rural Kenya:

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October 6, 2006

In the development field, the current received wisdom is that participation increases the effectiveness and the sustainability of development projects. Unfortunately, participation is not uniformly understood and is often conceptually simplified, so that the complex relationships and social structures within a community as well as resource and knowledge limitations are not recognized as factors in the success or failure of a project. As well, participation processes and their attendant links to empowerment suggest that development projects, rather than focusing exclusively on participatory techniques, should widen their focus to encompass collaborative alternatives which allow for empowerment on a broader scale and grant development recipients the ability to set their own agendas.

This report examines participation and empowerment in self-directed organizations in rural Kenya. Organizational structure and function are described, and empowerment is assessed. It is concluded that empowerment can occur through self-directed development efforts.

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Self-Directed Organizations in Rural Kenya
From Participation to Empowerment

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Self-Directed Organizations in Rural Kenya:

From Participation to Empowerment

INTRODUCTION

In the development field, the current received wisdom is that participation increases the effectiveness and the sustainability of development projects. Unfortunately, participation is not uniformly understood and is often conceptually simplified, so that the complex relationships and social structures within a community as well as resource and knowledge limitations are not recognized as factors in the success or failure of a project. As well, participation processes and their attendant links to empowerment suggest that development projects, rather than focusing exclusively on participatory techniques, should widen their focus to encompass collaborative alternatives which allow for empowerment on a broader scale and grant development recipients the ability to set their own agendas. While the aim of participation in development is to give voice to the people who are affected by development projects, development policy often does not acknowledge the mutable nature of such voices or the complex power relationships within a community (Kothari, 2001).

In Kenya, many rural villages have numerous small self-directed groups organized around collective labour and cooperative fundraising. These groups emerged from the *harambee* movement during the Presidency of Jomo Kenyatta, a movement based on ideas of unity and working together for the good of all. *Harambee* means “let’s pull together” in Swahili, and the concept remains powerful throughout Kenyan society (Winans & Haugerud, 1977). *Harambee* is discussed in more depth in Chapter One, but

the support for the idea among Kenyans of all strata of society is a clear indicator of the Kenyan commitment to self-improvement. For Kenyans, this self-improvement takes the form of providing for members of the community who are ill or orphaned, sharing funds in a rotating manner to enable financing of agricultural and small business efforts, working together in collective fields and then sharing the produce, and joining together in construction or handcraft groups to provide for the community or to increase collective incomes.

The underlying assumption of this report is that individuals and small groups in rural Africa are fully capable of directing their own development on their own terms, suggesting that development policies and organizational resources should be aimed at responsiveness and resource provision. As capacity and empowerment increase, locals will begin to generate their own analyses of social structures, power relationships, and needs. There are a number of theoretical debates surrounding participatory development practice; some focused on power and agency, some focused on action research and the attendant issues of researcher objectivity and perception, some focused on the effects of colonialization, as well as others. All of these debates are important in analyzing the effectiveness of development projects in rural communities, and this report will address some of these critiques, but it is concerned primarily with the assumption that development must be *provided to* the poor.

The objective of this report is to demonstrate that self-directed groups have the capacity to create their own development through participating in locally generated projects. This participation can be shown to empower individuals and small groups to be able to provide more adequately for their families and become more engaged in their

communities. Rather than examining participation from the perspective of external development programs, it argues that development projects can and should be created by those whose lives are affected by the process.

This paper will show how self-directed groups in Kenya have constructed collaborative relationships with small, Kenyan-run non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to facilitate the achievement of group goals. In the first two sections of Chapter One, an analysis of participation and empowerment is presented, clarifying the links between the two theoretical concepts and discussing some of the critiques of participatory development. The third section will describe the organizational structures of community-based organizations (CBOs) and their relationship to NGOs; introduce the history of the *Harambee* movement; and discuss the ideas of people-centred and self-directed development, arguing that development must be focused toward these concepts in order to create positive change.

Chapter Two will examine self-directed groups in the Kenyan context through the *Harambee* movement and through the specific organizations within which this author worked, including both the NGOs based in Nairobi and the self-directed groups within the village of Ngunya, Nyanza Province, Kenya.

Chapter Three will summarize the successes and failures of the groups observed and will synthesize the theoretical concepts with the organizations' activities, demonstrating how participation can impact empowerment at the local community level and how self-directed groups can effectively create their own development.

CHAPTER ONE

PARTICIPATION AND EMPOWERMENT THEORY

Lyons, et al (2001) and Ghai (1988), among others, have found that there is a relationship between participation and empowerment in development projects; this report discusses this relationship as observed in several community-based organizations in Kenya.

Empowerment as a concept is seen by Lyons, et al as “an increase in influence and control through an acquisition of knowledge and skills” (2001:1235). This is consistent with Kabeer's (1999) model of empowerment through control of resources and the execution of choices in a particular context.

Participation is associated with the development of an educated and aware populace that is engaged with society; empowerment involves grassroots or ground-level action within civil society and is predicated on participation as transformational (Lyons, et al, 2001:1235). Thus, participation engenders empowerment, which creates social and civic change.

Two points in particular are very important when looking at small organizations in relation to participation: first, “that the constitution of participatory development cannot be assumed to remain constant over time” (Lyons, et al, 2001:1235). This is due to the circumstances of social groups, which have been shown to be products of environmental factors and social forces that cannot be predicted with accuracy (Waddock, 1989:80). Second, again due to socially dynamic factors, “the very structure of participation can vary in its conception and its participants may vary over time (Lyons, et al, 2001:1235). These characteristics serve to remind us that the potential

sustainability of development projects and policies is affected by the level of participation found within them and the empowerment level of the participants.

Participation

International multi-lateral development agencies, state-based development departments and private non-governmental organizations have all adopted similar language in support of participatory grassroots development, for example:

Participation is the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policy-making, resource allocations and access to public goods and services. Stakeholder participation in World Bank-funded projects and programs can be critical for ensuring their long-term sustainability. Promoting participation helps build ownership and enhances transparency and accountability, and in doing so enhances effectiveness of development projects and policies. (World Bank, 2006)

This definition encourages but does not give exclusive rights to local participants in development projects; it is still left to the external agency to propose and direct most projects. Participation presumes some level of community-based project support, and is viewed as essential for the sustainability of development policies and programs. Not unexpectedly, however, the description of a community-based project is not uniform among agencies, and this inconsistency creates disparate applications in development project implementation. In addition, the level of adherence to this approach varies among organizations; often lip service is paid to the concept of participation, but development remains in the hands of the Northern agencies.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) attempts to encourage participation in its projects, but also approaches the issue as if it is optional, and not always possible. From a standard handbook published by UNDP in 1997, here is a list of

principles that the agency suggests should be used to bring more participation to a UNDP supported project; in particular:

“People's knowledge and skills must be seen as a *potentially* positive contribution to the project: a project which does not seek to *make use of* local knowledge and skills may not only be less effective but will also be squandering a useful resource...Autonomy as opposed to control: *as far as it is realistic to do so*, seek to invest as much responsibility as possible for the project with the local people, and thus avoid having *absolute control in the hands of project staff*...Allow for *some spontaneity* in project direction: promoting people's participation will mean that, *as far as it is reasonably possible*, the project should be allowed to develop in accordance with the abilities of local people to play an increasing role and to begin to assume some responsibility” (Clayton, et al., 1997) (emphasis added).

Thus the buzzword of ‘participation’ means only that agencies will attempt to include members of the communities in project implementation; there is no assurance that such participation will change the focus or intent of the project, even if this desired by the local participants. In the development field, “‘participation’ is classically described in ‘Arnstein’s ladder’: on the lower rungs of this ladder, participation is described as passive (people are told what will happen). The ladder climbs through consultation (people are asked what they would like but have no real say in final decisions), finally arriving at the top rungs of shared decision-making and self-mobilisation (people have a real say in decision and are in control of the process). It is these higher levels of the ladder at which power is more equally shared, people gain their right to influence decisions, and change really happens” (Oxfam, 2004). Multi-lateral agency projects tend to use the consultative level of participation within Arnstein’s conceptual ladder rather than the higher, self-mobilisation level, where empowerment is more likely to occur.

In addition, Cooke and Kothari (2001) argue that participatory development has not been adequately analyzed. They find the concepts of ‘empowerment’ and ‘participant’ to be essentialized; issues of power and agency among locals, as well as categorizations of social status, are deeper and more complex than development practitioners presume. Kothari (2001), in particular, suggests that participatory development discourse collects and interprets local knowledge without acknowledging that “the production and representation of knowledge is inseparable from the exercise of power” (143). She also argues that what is said by participants during information gathering or assessment meetings is perceived as individual experience or preference rather than as an articulation of cultural values or norms, thus masking the often hidden power structure in a community (146).

These critiques reveal the inability of external development specialists to perceive community relationships effectively or understand local priorities fully; this inability encourages practitioners to make decisions about projects from an external bias, with a simplified conceptualization of the community within the project area.

Participation and Democracy in Africa

As suggested by many researchers on Africa (Schmitz & Hutchful, 1992, Ake, 1996, Cheru, 2002), development in Africa cannot occur without ground-up participation from Africa’s people. Many of these same researchers, and others, argue that women have been neglected within development efforts in Africa, and that without women, Africa has no hope of a future (Gordon, 1996). The consistent and wide-ranging support by African scholars for participatory development programs that include both men and women is due to the understanding that the most effective way to meet people’s needs is

for the people themselves to prioritize and clarify those needs. Through both research and projects for development, scholars argue that needs are more likely to be met by beginning the development process at the grassroots community level, where the needs are felt. Further, the process of meeting their own individual and community needs will empower Africans to take control of their political needs as well.

Schmitz and Hutchful (1992) declare that the way Africa will develop is through the actions of her own people. They argue that the Western democratic model does not serve the needs of the poor in the Global North, much less in the Global South, and should be critiqued. The African experience with political liberalization has not been positive; political change cannot be assumed to be democratic, thus the heterogeneity of regional groups within the state is not guaranteed to result in a change in ruling elites or the relationships between the ruler and the ruled. Schmitz and Hutchful (1992) assert a democracy that is based on collective equal rights, and is developed with and through the participation of its members from the beginning, can promote the rule of law within African states. They also suggest that it is through the rise of this collectivized democracy, including the democratic functioning of civil society organizations, that economic and social growth will occur. Lyons (2001) agrees that social change is supported through the growth of an active citizenry, and posits empowerment as the primary factor in the building of democracy, and Ghai states that “grassroots participatory organizations may [also] be regarded as foundations for a democratic society”(1988:241).

Some of the most effective and democratic groups in Africa are the cooperative women’s groups that provide collective resources and group support for development.

Women share labour, loan each other money, and support each other within the community. Cooperative activities among women have been present in Kenya since prior to colonialization, and functioned during the colonial period as a method of maintaining a sense of belonging and support under social stress (Mutiso, 1987). The number of women's groups continued to grow during the *harambee* period, and are now a large part of development programs in Kenya (Winans & Haugerud, 1977).

Research on women's cooperative groups in Kenya demonstrates that participation in such groups gives women several valuable resources. Women's groups benefit their members in the following ways: they may expand the potential resource base available to an individual, allowing loans, the exchange of materials, or the sharing of labour; they offer opportunities for sharing information and ideas, including skills training; they provide an arena for women to develop leadership skills and other talents for working within the wider culture; they allow women to express solidarity for community development efforts; in the past this was seen through group support and assistance for community sponsored projects, currently it is often seen through women's groups that provide donations to support development projects; and they provide emotional energy and support when women are worn out by the emotional care they provide within the family, and during times of isolation, especially as traditional kinship systems weaken and leave women with new social roles to learn (Mutiso, 1987).

Cooperative women's groups in Kenya allow women authority that has been usurped by colonialization. Through this authority, women are empowered to become active members of their communities, and the groups retain influence in society. Further, these groups are capable of determining for themselves what projects will most benefit

them, and have proven to be effective managers of funds that have been pooled for sharing. However, the picture is not completely rosy, as some groups have conflicts over use of excess funds, and there are class differences within groups that may create divisions, for example when women who are literate retain leadership positions over illiterate women (Mutiso, 1987). These issues reflect some of the critiques of participation reviewed earlier by Kothari (2001) and Cooke & Kothari (2001): power relations within a community are often unclear or remain hidden in external project implementation. In addition, social groups are vulnerable to changing forces that are not predictable, thus challenging the notion that participatory groups share specific and identifiable characteristics (Waddock, 1989).

The cooperative framework common among women's groups can be used as a guideline to encourage other civic groups to operate similarly, increasing empowerment and engagement throughout the community, and impacting positively on civil society (Lyons, 2001:1235).

Empowerment

Empowerment is a debated word in the development discourse, and it has several definitions. The working definition of empowerment that is used by Lyons, et al, "an increase in influence and control through an acquisition of knowledge and skills" (2001:1235), is useful because it encompasses the most significant qualities of empowerment: increasing knowledge and increasing control. This definition follows a model by Kabeer; she uses a three-step conceptual ladder to illustrate the aspects of empowerment that are significant (1999:2).

According to Kabeer (1999), empowerment begins with access to resources, which are pre-conditions for desired achievements. Resources include physical and material resources, but also include social resources and human capital acquired through relationships in family and community. These resources create a field of possibilities that can be allocated and selected by an individual, both in the present and in the future.

Once access to resources is achieved, individuals and small groups must be able to utilize those resources towards their goals. Thus, agency is the second step on the ladder; agency is the process through which empowerment can be achieved, and is essentially the ability to define and act toward one's goals. Making choices about the future is not sufficient; individuals must have the capability of acting. In this case it is acting in concert with the goal while utilizing available resources that will result in empowerment.

The third step in the ladder is the achievement of the goal(s), or the outcome of the use of power. These outcomes can be met by individuals or by organized groups. This achievement is a representation of power that is shared among individuals (Kabeer, 1999:2-3). In the case of any development project, it is resources plus agency (the capacity to achieve) that results in a development outcome.

Empowerment as a psychological tool does not specifically address the structural issues inherent in development theory and discourse, issues such as political representation, economic mobility, and state responsiveness. However, there is some evidence that empowerment can affect a community's ability to impact structural issues. In one example, The Green Belt Movement in Kenya focused on environmental education in local communities in order to protect and recover deforested land, but found

increased knowledge encouraged women to feel empowered; they became politically active and were able to impact political decisions made regarding park land and commercial land use (Maathai, 2003:13).

Empowerment is much more than feeling good; individuals can feel good about themselves and their actions, but still not be empowered to act effectively. It is the combination of positive agency and resource applications that create empowerment.

Dharam Ghai sees empowerment as transformative, either individually or collectively, and also sees participation as inextricably linked to empowerment in a circular manner. Participation brings empowerment, a sense of empowerment encourages further participation, and so on. Ghai suggests organizations must be established that are “democratic, independent, and self-reliant” (1988:4) to enable the poor to become involved in their own development projects and plans. Ghai’s argument that empowerment and participation are linked is substantiated when bottom-up participatory development projects are analyzed. Lyons et al. (2001) agree that participation is linked to empowerment, and that the resulting control within a community significantly affects the ability of a project to sustain itself. As well, it is the process of participation in project decisions and implementation that provides the resources and agency that Kabeer (1999) suggests create the force of empowerment through goal achievement.

An extremely useful tool for the analysis of empowerment is Sara Longwe’s “Women’s Empowerment Approach” (described in Kabira & Muthoni, 1994: 97-105). This approach assumes that women must organize to gain involvement in decision-making in processes that affect them. It uses five levels of equality in order to evaluate

the effective empowerment of women: Welfare, Access, Conscientization, Participation, and Control. These levels move from Welfare, which aims at women's basic needs and does not address structural problems (zero empowerment of women), through Control, where the balance of power between men and women is equal and both men and women play an active and involved role in the development process, on a continuum of progress to empowerment. (Kabira & Muthony, 1994:97-105).

According to Kabira & Nzioki (1993:76), empowerment addresses a group's or individual's ability to utilize the available resources for the benefit of social change. Thus, Longwe's model can be used to discuss the steps that (in this case) women's groups use to acquire and exercise power. In this model, simply addressing women's own welfare needs – food, income, housing – does not provide empowerment. At Level One, provision of welfare is the minimum required to address poverty, and does not involve resource allocation through agency, according to Longwe. However, if resources are accessed through women's own agency, rather than being provided for them, empowerment moves to Level Two in the model.

Level Two in the model is Access – this is where resources become a variable in women's actions. Utilization of physical or human resources provides a level of empowerment among women's groups, which is dependent on how effectively women can access the necessary resources available to them.

Kabira & Nzioki (1993:78) found that Conscientization (Level Three) was fully realized within small women's groups in Kenya. Women are aware of the disadvantage of their social position, and of the power that is gained through organizing. Kenya has had a huge network of active women's groups since Independence, and these groups own

resources for their members and participate in actions to improve their economic and social position in their local societies.

Level Four, Participation, brings the theoretical discussion back to Ghai's position of linkage. As Longwe sees participation as a step on the road to empowerment, Ghai sees it as inextricably linked but independent. Lyons, et al. (2001) agree with Ghai that there is a relationship between the two concepts that is interdependent, that is, access to control through participation increases empowerment, and increased empowerment creates more participation. Because Longwe's analysis is limited to women's groups, I would suggest that there may be differences between women's groups and mixed gender groups in terms of control and access to resources, and this question deserves some scrutiny in empowerment analysis though it is beyond the scope of this report.

Finally, for Longwe empowerment is achieved when the group or individual controls the resources involved (Level Five). For example, resources for women in Kenya include land ownership, livestock ownership, political influence, and inheritance control, among others. When women were able to control these resources, they were empowered in their own lives. After this had been achieved, then women could talk about voting, and about addressing wider concerns in the state itself (Kabira & Nzioki, 1993:80).

The Kabira & Nzioki example simply illustrates how the idea of empowerment can be analyzed within organizations. In their study, women felt empowered to control their own resources and could affect their own lives through their actions, meeting Kabeer's definition of Resources plus Agency equals Achievement. Longwe's tool fits neatly into Kabeer's theoretical description for a balanced analysis of empowerment from

the development field. It is used in this report as a tool for comparison among the groups observed in Ngunya (see Chapter Two).

The History of *Harambee*

African culture has commonly encouraged collective and cooperative groups for sharing labour and support. Groups worked together in agricultural cooperatives, credit associations, and community welfare organizations. Colonial power in Kenya disrupted and in some cases repressed traditional social structures, but the tendency to meet and work in groups remained; in some cases, some of these cooperative groups played a role in bringing down the colonial state (Matanga, 2000: 5). Today in Kenya, the government, through the mechanism of *Harambee*, encourages small groups to become certified as a cooperative by requiring only a small registration fee and a single-page document (Otieno, 2005).

Harambee, or “let’s pull together” in Swahili, is a national movement throughout Kenya stemming from independence. Jomo Kenyatta, the first President of Kenya, called for a spirit of national unity, asking the people of the new nation to work together to build their society. He encouraged local communities to share their labour to build schools, hospitals, roads and other needed facilities, and for the well-off to contribute money towards projects in their communities (Winans & Haugerud, 1977, Thomas, 1988).

The *Harambee* movement gained momentum throughout the 1960s. It continues to emphasize local initiatives and local leadership to attain development goals, but since 1978, when Daniel Arap Moi became President of Kenya, the term has been broadened to include national development initiatives (Thomas, 1988). *Harambee* is still used as a grassroots form of labour exchange in rural communities, and is the basis for many

cooperative efforts in rural Kenya, including collective farming, bore-hole management, animal husbandry and fund raising. In urban areas, *Harambee* is more commonly a form of fund-raising for neighbourhood projects, and levels of giving by high-status members of the community are monitored to assess commitment (Thomas, 1988).

Harambee is also a significant part of the political life of Kenya. Candidates organize *Harambee* projects and, as elections near, increase their personal donations to *Harambee* funds in order to attract votes. *Harambee* is also used to increase support for government projects and directions (Thomas, 1988). In spite of the frequent use of *Harambee* among elites to raise political support, it remains a powerful concept in Kenyan society, representing to rural people the values of self-reliance and community unity (Winans & Haugerud, 1977).

The Role of Self-Directed Organizations in Development

Rather than depend on an external participatory model for development, many community groups in the developing world have begun to mobilize grassroots community-based organizations to direct their own development (Conyers & Cumanzala, 2004, Lyons & Smuts, 1999, Korten, 1986). The term 'grassroots' assumes that a group was instigated through and exists because of local efforts; often grassroots organizations are created through joint community activities when it is perceived that further action may benefit the self-defined group. Community-based organizations (CBOs) may be grassroots groups, but they may also be groups created by either internal or external elites who perceive a particular problem and wish to address it. An example of an external CBO is a church-sponsored organization working on medical interventions; the members of this group are all from the community, but the establishment of the organization came

from outside, through the national church office. There are significant advantages to development efforts generated through CBOs: such groups often have closer knowledge of the interests of the local community, and can engender more involvement and trust than can external agencies. Further, these groups tend to work at a much smaller scale, directing projects at specific and local issues such as supporting AIDS orphans or developing new markets for their produce (Lyons & Smuts, 1999, Korten, 1990); they attempt to create self-sufficiency within the community through micro-level funding and project support.

For many NGOs and governmental aid agencies, embracing grassroots or community-based projects is inconsistent with the mission to provide services, or with long-term organizational goals. In other words, it upsets the status quo and defeats the bureaucratic tendency towards self-perpetuation. Biggs & Neame suggest the common arguments against using a grassroots or community-based approach in the NGO context are 1) that the local people don't know enough about the issue under consideration; 2) that locals don't know enough about accountability and assessment; or 3) that they will suffer from local corruption. While there is substantial corruption at many official levels in many developing countries, it is less likely to be an issue when the funding is smaller and the community knows the locals managing the project and the funds (Biggs & Neame, 1996). In addition, knowledge gaps can be addressed with teaching tools and access to information, both of which most development agencies can provide, suggesting these arguments are justifications for doing what is expedient for the NGO rather than doing what is optimal for the community.

The NGO arguments against local grassroots approaches can also be critiqued at a deeper level. Development activities use a pre-arranged set of techniques to encourage participation in projects that are problem-focused and results oriented, thus prioritizing efficiency over empowerment in projects (Cleaver, 2001), which functions to make the individual skills and knowledge of local participants less relevant to the NGO agenda. Additionally, local knowledge is mutable rather than fixed (Kothari, 2001). Kothari argues that, “knowledge is culturally, socially and politically produced and is continuously reformulated as a powerful normative construct”; participatory techniques aimed at interpreting knowledge as a fixed construct cannot articulate social relations of power (141).

In response to this critique, Korten (1990) has described the power relations of several categories of organizations. He emphasizes the direction of power in order to illustrate why voluntary organizations are the most significant organizational category for the Global South.

<u>Organization Type</u>	<u>Civil Society Role</u>	<u>Power Comes From</u>
Governmental NGOs and International (multi-lateral) NGOs	linked to governments or in cooperation with government agendas	Coercion, in the form of laws and regulations
public service contractors	Private businesses or non-profit service providers	Exchange/trade (usually involving money)
Self-directed organizations	voluntary group	Integration of members with community

(after Korten, 1990, 96-97)

Essentially, Korten argues that the goal of self-directed organizations is improving the quality of life for the people in the community; they are the only

development organizations that are generated from the people, focused on the interests of the people who founded them, and operate on a voluntary basis with the attention and oversight of the membership (1990). Self-directed organizations may be small informal groups, but they may also be locally created NGOs. A group that has successfully negotiated the requirements for organizing and generating funding can offer resources and support to smaller groups who are focused on local development. In this report, both kinds of self-directed organizations are examined.

Korten's descriptions are by necessity simplistic, and the structures and functions of various organizations must be examined individually to understand their operations in full. However, the categories are useful in that they pay particular attention to the power dynamic within organizations and the kinds of influences organizations must respond to during operations. In particular, he uses the term 'integrative power' as the kind of power that is inclusive and lateral, connects people to each other, and reduces barriers that exist in hierarchical institutions. He suggests that successful voluntary organizations use integrative power to maintain sustainability in their goals and to pursue social change within their societies (1990:106).

This power dynamic within and between development organizations is directly related to the level of empowerment members of a community are able to achieve. Resources must be available to local organizations; the capacity to reach their objectives must exist within the community in the form of education, skills, technology, or other factors; if resources and capacity are controlled by the voluntary organization's members, empowerment can be achieved and development – of the sort desired by the organization

– is possible. The use of integrative power increases this capacity by bringing a focus to the value of social cohesion and justice within communities. On the other hand, if resources are controlled by others, whether it is a local government official or an international agency, and skills are treated as specialized rather than shared, very little empowerment will be achieved, and development projects will not attain the level of sustainability required for a funding agency to turn the project over to members of the organization or the community.

The expansion of integrative power, including the perception of social justice as linked to community empowerment, is one way to change the standard measures of development and progress from economic to quality-of-life measures. Specifically, measurements of quality of life, such as the Gross National Happiness measurement that Bhutan has used for twenty years (Ura & Galay, 2004), or the Canadian Index of Wellbeing currently being developed in Canada (Community Action, 2005), are more accurate and reflect more closely the concerns of individuals and citizens than do economic indicators. These measurements include indicators such as environmental quality, educational capacity, human rights, health and access to democratic decision-making, demonstrating the complexities involved in assessing the total life experience of a people. It is these indicators that show governments and multi-lateral agencies the direction for projects and policies that will improve the well-being of their populations (Ura & Galay, 2004).

Huge amounts of money are spent on development projects, including the costs of expert advisors, training and materials, vehicles, hotel costs, and the like. None of

that money is ever put into the hands of the poor, but if it were, it could be a resource that would allow communities to empower themselves (Hanlon, 2004).

Meghdan Desai of the London School of Economics recently argued, “We are giving fifty billion dollars of overseas aid. There are a billion poor people in the world. Why don’t we just find the poor and give them one dollar a week and do nothing else. No questions asked. What they do with the money is not our concern. That would probably do more to relieve poverty than anything else” (Desai, 2003 in Hanlon, 2004). Hanlon presents two circumstances where this was in fact done, and suggests that Desai’s proposal is cheaper and more effective as a development policy than much of what has been called development in recent years. Both examples occurred in Mozambique, where payments were made to demobilized soldiers to help them reintegrate into their communities, and again as an emergency response to flood victims in order to help them relocate. In both cases, most recipients used the money effectively to solve their immediate family problems; the money stimulated the economy in the rural areas, and no complex follow-up was required. Administrative costs were much lower than in other aid projects – between 5 and 10 percent (Hanlon, 2004).

The underlying motivating factor in this kind of assistance is trust that recipients can use funds effectively for their own needs; additionally, there is no large sum of money that any single individual had access to, thus minimizing both the potential corruption and the potential disruption within the community when the presence of large sums may destabilize village relationships. The avoidance of destabilization and the level of trust given to the individuals increased each community’s capacity to manage their own lives, empowered individuals to be in control of the resources they

were provided, and allowed each family to provide for their own needs. These two studies demonstrate another way to provide self-directed development focused on the needs of the recipient.

Finally, grassroots and community-based development often have political implications because of the process of empowerment that occurs as locals become educated and feel more capable. Empowerment at Longwe's fifth level (Kabira & Nzioki, 1993) provides control to individuals, contributing to further interactions with the political process within communities and the state. Most governments have a stake in keeping the population powerless to some extent; the most significant impact these organizations can have is to empower members of the community to be capable of meeting their own challenges, both individually and collectively. Such empowerment can create conflict for large donor agencies who may otherwise offer financial or other project support, as these agencies depend on local and national governments for a certain level of legitimacy, and cannot be seen to work against whatever government is in place when mobilization or empowerment of local people engenders resistance to that government. Thus, many large multi-lateral agencies give lip service to a community-based participatory approach, but are structurally limited in their ability to use such an approach fully. Self-directed grassroots groups do not depend on external NGOs and thus are able to avoid these issues.

The larger political agenda of social change and transformation is implicit in the continuing challenge to development practice. Korten (1990) has proposed a specific people-centred development process that focuses on self-directed organizations at a grassroots level, and addresses issues of social responsibility and inequity that

development agencies often do not recognize. Korten argues that social movements towards justice and equity will be more responsive than development agencies to the current failures in policies for the poor in the Global South (ix); he also suggests the ability of the world's poor to move out of poverty is a political as well as an economic challenge. Barraclough (2001) finds that most sustainable development initiatives have been detrimental to the environment and to the livelihood capacity of the poor, and states "sustainability will be out of reach without a redistribution of wealth and power from rich countries to poor ones, and from the rich to the poor in both" (37). Environmental sustainability is not directly addressed in this report, but Barraclough's observation points out the irony of continued development interventions without attention to the political and social implications of such interventions. Political transformation is the end result of full empowerment of individuals; it can only occur if people participate from the grassroots level, directing their own change.

This chapter has reviewed the theoretical concepts of participation and empowerment, arguing that they are interdependent and relational. It has also suggested that self-directed grassroots development, with its focus on participation within communities, is the strongest way to create empowerment among the poor and marginalized. The implication is that social and political transformation must be generated from a community level, and that individuals who participate in efforts to attain their own goals are best prepared to achieve empowerment and change.

The next chapter puts these theoretical ideas into the context of rural Kenya. The chapter considers the current attitudes towards *Harambee* in Kenya, and reviews the

Nairobi organizations that provide contacts and resources for the village groups. It also looks closely at several self-directed village groups and how they are empowering themselves.

CHAPTER TWO

THE KENYAN CONTEXT

Harambee Today

As a development strategy in Kenya, Kenyatta's *harambee* movement raised Ksh 32 billion in the period 1979-1984 (Ngau, 1987: 526). These funds went primarily to build schools, roads, and hospitals, and came from small donations throughout the country, often from politicians. In many cases, *harambee* allowed the rural population to trade political support for needed resources from the government.

Critiques of *harambee* suggest that the movement is essentially a state attempt to tax the poor to pay for their own development (Barkan & Holmquist, 1986:4), and that projects are often not sustainable (Holmquist, 1984:182). *Harambee* projects are very structured and generally managed by tribal or council elites with government oversight, removing the community-based focus that initiated the movement. Ngau suggests that *harambee* has become "distorted" (1987: 523). While there has been a three-fold increase in small NGOs and village resource centers since 1980, these community-based efforts are no longer referred to as *harambee* organizations. Indeed, when I was in Western Kenya in 2005, *harambee* was a term that seemed to refer only to fund-raising events, usually political, and people I spoke with used the term historically rather than as a current movement.

The organizations and small groups that I worked with are linked with the *harambee* movement philosophically, in that they operate through cooperative participation in an attempt to utilize local resources to provide local needs, but I heard little current reference to the *harambee* movement in Ngunya or Nairobi.

The Organizations

I went to Kenya in September and October of 2005 as a volunteer working with the Center for International Voluntary Service (CIVS), a CBO based in Nairobi. For the first month, I was placed in an international volunteer group in the village of Ngunya, Nyanza Province, where we participated in several local projects organized by the Ngunya Community Resource Centre, including making bricks for the construction of the Centre's building, clearing roads in the village, and working in the fields with the villagers. We worked side by side with the villagers and lived in the village with a local widow. My objectives were to gain a clearer understanding of the operations and service provision of CIVS, and to widen my knowledge of village life. I was fortunate to be placed in Ngunya, where the active Resource Centre there was unexpectedly able to provide several small self-directed groups for me to observe.

Following that experience, I returned to Nairobi, where I worked for another month with The Center for International Voluntary Service in Nairobi, and also was involved with the founding members of Home International Voluntary Service. Both of these organizations were established by individuals or small groups of people committed to improving conditions in their home communities or within the country. They are trying to take advantage of the possibilities of small-scale funding through individual travelers and volunteers from developed countries in order to expand their capacity to create programs and offer services. I worked in the office, visited two orphanages and another village project, and met with several Kenyan NGOs doing similar work.

Center for International Voluntary Service

Organization

The Center for International Voluntary Service (CIVS) is based in Nairobi and works in many rural areas of Kenya. They are an independent, Kenyan-run organization and operate autonomously; I made contact with them through the internet and arranged to spend several months working with them. They have been operating for 12 years as a clearinghouse for international volunteers, and as a small development agency within rural communities. The members of CIVS are all volunteers; they work for no formal pay, although expenses are reimbursed and small gifts are sometimes given for extraordinary services to the organization. The Vision Statement of the Organization is as follows:

CIVS is a leader in innovation in providing services to the needy; building a society whose members are in charge of their own development process and are able to meet their basic needs; as well as fostering international solidarity, peace, justice, integrity, and dignity of all (CIVS Business Plan, p. 6).

The Mission Statement of CIVS states:

CIVS exists to empower communities to alleviate conditions of extreme poverty, alleviate human suffering, promote local economic development, foster charity and justice for the needy; and build harmonious relations among peoples of different cultures and backgrounds (CIVS Business Plan, p. 6).

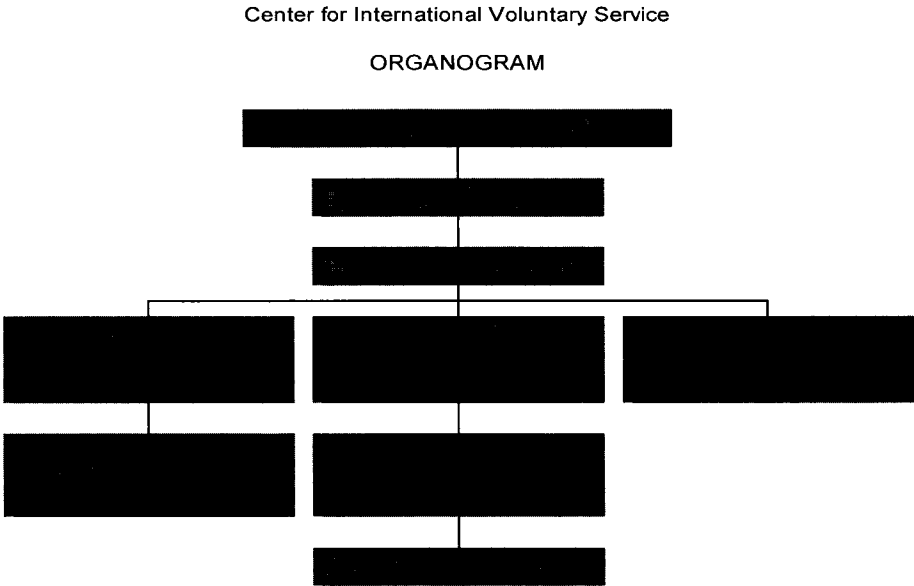
There are several services that are provided by the organization, including financial services and products through a localized micro-lending organization, Bengi Investment Group (BIG); business development services for small entrepreneurs; training for institutional and small-group capacity building; international service projects; and

educational travel and adventure for visitors. The international service project is the primary way that CIVS receives funds, through the fees paid by volunteers. Additional funding is secured through profits recovered from safaris and other travel organized by the group.

Structure

The CIVS organization holds a typical hierarchical structure, with the general assembly of members being the primary decision-making body. There are three arms of function: financial/administrative, operations, and communications. The financial arm manages the organization’s financial transactions and is the primary manager of the microfinance project. The communications arm handles publicity, web management, promotional functions and standard office communications. The operational arm manages the volunteers and schedules the projects and events, including transportation and training when required.

The CIVS organogram is illustrated below:



(CIVS Business Plan, p. 38)

Finances

CIVS is currently funded primarily through participant fees and donations; there are several project proposals that have been generated and submitted to funders, but they are for specific projects rather than general operations.

International volunteers pay US \$200 per month of voluntary service. This fee is distributed through the organization in priority order: first for administration and operations, second for capital and fixed assets, and third for community projects support. In any given month, CIVS might have a minimum of 6 volunteers or a maximum of 20, so may generate between US \$1200 and US \$4000 each month.

Expenses that are included in each category are:

Administration and Operations

- Rent and utilities for office

- Transportation costs for volunteers

- Mailing costs

- Computer time for administration work, including emails¹

Capital and Fixed Assets

- Equipment purchasing and maintenance

Community Projects Support

- Travel to and from project areas by CIVS personnel

- Support fees for hosts and local managers

- Donations to/financing of volunteer equipment/supplies

Future financial goals for the organization include the establishment of a travel/tourism program that will finance its other projects to a larger degree than currently occurs, and the management of micro-lending institutions throughout the country which

¹ It should be noted that all internet access by CIVS is through local internet cafes. Continuous Internet access is not something that small businesses can generally afford in Nairobi. Thus every electronic exchange takes several days and costs the organization several shillings per minute of time.

will enable small entrepreneurs to take advantage of financial services, including savings, investments, and loans, while allowing a small profit to accrue for development within local communities. This work is ongoing; the group's volunteers are deeply committed to the expansion of services in rural Kenya, and remain particularly focused on gender inequalities and the enlargement of opportunities for women and youth.

This organization operates as a small non-governmental organization with its primary focus the empowerment of village grassroots groups. Its volunteers find resourceful, often educated people in the villages to partner with, providing a contact in the village who then can link to the small groups who need assistance.

My experience with the volunteers of CIVS was very positive; the staff opened their office to me for my research, helped me become familiar with Nairobi and with the variety of cultures within the city, and was influential in obtaining additional interviews with local NGO directors in the city. Staff members were also quite helpful during our volunteer period in the village, encouraging all of the international visitors to ask questions, engage in debate, and clarify issues that came up for us within the village environment.

This CBO is quite small, both in functional size and in financial reach; such groups often have the ability to work at a very localized level with individuals with whom they develop complex and interdependent relationships. This appears to make them very effective within the confines of their influence, but also appears to limit the capacity of the organization to grow. Their small size also limits their influential reach in terms of capacity-building in the local communities where they are present; they have a knowledge base of Kenyan experts in various disciplines but do not have the resources to

provide these experts to the many local communities that might benefit from additional training and resource expansion.

Within the CIVS-village relationship several of Chambers' (1992) Participatory Rural Assessment priorities exist, due primarily to shared cultural values and existing trust. In particular, CIVS presumes that the villagers' knowledge and capabilities are paramount in assessing their own needs, and a relaxed rapport between its volunteers and the villagers already exists. Training and orientation for outsiders is conducted by CIVS, and the possibility of training within the village environment is greater due to the comfort level of the villagers with the organization's volunteers. Ramesh, describing a program in India, reports, "The personal – rather than the formal – relationships between members and workers have been a major factor in the success of the program as a whole" (1996:119). Thus successful empowerment may occur more easily due to the already existing relationship that has been developed by Kenyan CBOs such as CIVS.

Home International Voluntary Service

Organization and Structure

HIVS is a newly formed CBO created by two energetic young men who previously volunteered with CIVS. HIVS has been envisioned as a comparable organization; their structure and formal arrangements parallel the CIVS model quite closely. HIVS is also structured hierarchically, although it is smaller and currently has fewer volunteers.

The formal statements of the organization that are found on the website include:

Mission: HIVS works to alleviate human suffering socially, psychologically, physically and economically through provision of life-support mechanism(s) by promoting humanitarian values, pulling

together of resources through voluntary work as a powerful tool for change, by use of hands-on approach(es) by volunteers and the wider community.

Our Vision: A community that is self-reliant, economically independent and sustainable, healthy and with good knowledge of their human rights. An empowered community, especially the women and children and the underprivileged in society, living harmoniously together.

Goals: HIVS actively work to mobilize and bring additional human resources to the community to enhance their capacity to utilize and optimize locally available resources to achieve their socio-economic goals as they themselves identify, design and define them to develop and become self-reliant. We develop work camps programs and recruit skilled and non-skilled volunteers who are deployed to work with local people – stimulating them and motivating them in daily efforts to confront and overcome some specific problems and challenges, spur economic growth, promote cultural exchange, language, sensitize the community among others.

HIVS has a focused business plan, with the stated goal of helping rural villagers establish reasonable small businesses through access to markets, training in business skills and information and communications technologies (ICT), and micro-finance access. They will particularly focus on curios and handcrafts for the tourist market, the development of transportation businesses like boda boda (bicycle and motor scooter) services, and the expansion of tourist travel (HIVS Business Plan, 3)

HIVS is located in downtown Nairobi, compared with CIVS, which is located in Buru Buru, a suburb of Nairobi. The practical concerns created by this distinction are both financial and customer oriented: while it is less expensive to rent space in the suburbs, as CIVS does, it may be easier for HIVS to arrange living accommodations for their volunteers in the city centre, and transportation and access to services many western volunteers may want is certainly more convenient for an organization based in the centre.

Both of the Kenyan NGOs that I worked with in Nairobi are focused on providing resources for villages working toward their own empowerment. I found that CIVS, due to its longevity, is very effective in meeting this goal, and the volunteer members of the organization are able to act within the capacity of the organization to achieve further growth and empowerment. The establishment of HIVS is an example of how individuals can be empowered to act toward goals by establishing their own organization. I look forward to watching the progress of these very active organizations in future.

Ngunya Community Resource Centre

Ngunya is situated approximately 6 kilometres south of the Busia highway midway between Kisumu and the Ugandan border. The majority of the population of Nyanza Province is ethnically Luo, and the area is fertile, with two rainy seasons each year. Members of the community describe the changing of the rains as a large problem, as they feel the rainy seasons are shorter and the daily rains do not last as long as they used to. The Luo people were traditionally fishers, but only those villages very close to Lake Victoria continue to fish for subsistence. The region has one of the highest HIV/Aids infection rates in the country, and many young people in the community have left, heading either to Kisumu, Kenya's third largest city and a two-hour drive from Ngunya, or to Nairobi.

Organization

The NCRC was formed in 1997 to support small groups in the local community, and to mobilize resources for the benefit of the village of Ngunya and its surrounding area. It was created through the efforts of Samson Otieno, a recently retired school teacher who has returned to the community after living and teaching in Nairobi. Ngunya

is Mr. Otieno's home village, and after his retirement he felt that an organization for community support would help expand the village's capacity to support itself and deal with its contemporary challenges. These challenges include numerous orphans due to the prevalence of AIDS and other high-mortality diseases, the frequent loss of younger men from the village who emigrate to the larger cities in search of work, and the increasing precariousness of food production due to unusual weather and lack of strong agricultural workers (Otieno, 2005). Mr. Otieno recruited several members of the local community to establish his Board of Directors, and encouraged the small cooperative groups already operating in the village to affiliate with the Centre to work towards collective goals. The NCRC documents show the following mission and objectives:

Vision Statement: To encourage a healthy, safe, and self-reliant community.

Mission Statement: To facilitate resources in the community to improve health, education, and community welfare.

Objectives:

- 1. To create an environment for local resources to expand*
- 2. To educate and keep people informed*
- 3. To support women, children, and the elderly, especially in health and well-being.*

(Otieno, 2005)

There are currently eleven local groups working with the Resource Centre, sharing information and receiving organizational assistance. They are pledged to try not to repeat activities among themselves, in order to avoid competition within the Centre itself. The NCRC is still developing, but Mr. Otieno says that all local groups in the region will probably not affiliate with the Centre. As in all small communities, political and social pressures come into play for the groups who choose to become involved; there are also two other working Resource Centres within ten kilometers of Ngunya, and some groups in the vicinity are already affiliated with those Centres.

The NCRC has secured a location within the village where they plan to build a small building to house the Centre's resources and conduct meetings and training sessions. The current building design includes an office space, a meeting room, and a library. Some of the volunteers who come to Ngunya through CIVS participate in brick making to supply material for the upcoming building. Currently the Centre is renting a room in the village for this purpose with funds provided by a volunteer from North America.

Member groups support the Centre through voluntary contributions; sustainability of the NCRC is provisioned through these local donations. The NCRC Board of Directors works voluntarily. There is no direct government support of the Centre, but they are legally registered as a Community-based Organization, and the Chief is aware of the Centre. During this interview, it was implied that there is no tangible support from the Chief's office, but he does not interfere (Otieno, 2005).

In future, the Board would like to expand into orphan care, but they are currently unable to do this. There are two groups among the membership who do provide some orphan care in the community, though most orphan care is provided by family members of the children. They would also like to provide adult education among community members who were forced to drop out of the educational system due to school fees or family obligations.

Mr. Otieno expressed the Board's intention to remain self-reliant, and believes that community education and participation will support that goal. Outside funding may supplement what the Centre is doing, or allow faster progress in some circumstances, but local resources are most important.

Long-term goals for the Centre include developing solar power in the village centre and having access to computer resources, possibly through wireless technology. The Board sees this as providing a gateway to information and communication for the community (Otieno, 2005).

Ngunya Community Resource Centre (NCRC) Member Groups

The groups described below are all members of the NCRC. I have divided them into two sets: those who have begun to achieve empowerment through their participation in the group, and those who have not yet successfully created a participatory and effective group for a variety of reasons.

Successful Groups

Uyumbi Women Group

Group Structure: Founded in 1997, the group works together to develop skills and increase their standard of living. The group is structured hierarchically, with a Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, and Organizational Secretary. These officers are elected annually. There are 20 members; they weave baskets of palm reeds and sell them in the Ugunja (a local town) market. Members must be adults – that is, over 18. Most members were of grandmother age. The women also know how to make reed mats and soft bags from local banana fibres, and they make painted calabash hangings.

Financial Commitments: Money made from the basket sales goes to household expenses, school costs like uniforms and supplies, and a small percentage goes to the group to maintain its stability.

Goals: Their main objective is to empower themselves; they see this happening through developing skills and abilities to support themselves. They would like to learn

other handcraft skills to expand their product line. They would also like to expand their market, but it takes 3 days to make a basket, so they may not be able to provide large numbers of product quickly, and many larger markets are too far away to access easily.

Results: Some growth and improvement in their lives has occurred since the group began, but they are hampered by the cost of materials and low access to funds. The group has developed a strong social network as well, sharing labor on the *shamba*, or farm, and teaching each other skills. The group mentioned that they would like more knowledge of composting and farming, and funds to purchase fertilizer.

Observations: This group is made up primarily of widowed women and single mothers. The NCRC recognizes that this group is hampered by deep poverty and poor education; it has encouraged younger, more educated women to join the group to increase its capacity for self-support. There is a strong sense of purpose and community within the group, and access to some micro-financing might shift it towards real progress in terms of food resources and access to income.

Nyanyiek Mon Women Group

Group Structure: The group was founded in 2000 with 10 members; current membership is 30. The group participates in collective farming and micro-lending among its membership, and occasionally in the community. There is a standard group structure, with a chairperson, secretary, vice chair, treasurer, a messenger/agent, and an organizational secretary. The group meets weekly, and wears uniforms. Membership is restricted to married adults, and there is a membership process for approval to join.

While the group is a women's group, men can join as supporting members. The group

stated that men rarely hold positions of authority in the group, but a man was the spokesman during my visit, and was on the governing board.

Financial Commitments: Each member pays a monthly membership fee of Ksh 50 (50 Kenyan shillings is equal to approximately 75 Canadian cents); funds are maintained by the treasurer and can be loaned out on a monthly basis. Interest is charged, with members paying 20 percent per month and non-members paying 30 percent. Loans are for one month. In December, all funds gained are divided among the members and the process is begun anew in January. This financial arrangement is known as a merry-go-round, and is used in several of the groups I observed.

Goals: Nyanyiek Mon is trying to raise funds to purchase fertilizer for their farms, and would also like to purchase a goat in order to produce milk for sale. They make some handcrafts that are sold in the Ugunja market, as well. Some of their funds are used to support 8 orphans among the member families.

Results: The group seems effective and very active. Members appear to be well known in the community; when they wear their uniforms villagers stop them and engage in conversations about their activities. The group is highly structured, but members remain involved with each other on a personal level, sharing humour and chatting comfortably, which was not the case in many groups I visited.

Observations: The high level of personal involvement among members appears to be a factor in its longevity and its relative success among the groups I observed. Even though gender empowerment is low, social effectiveness, and thus individual and group empowerment, is high among members of this group.

Sinan E Lweny (“Dedication” in Luo).

Group Structure: Eleven founding members established this group in January of 2003. The group meets once a week. Their stated objectives are to work together for the benefit of the group, and to share ideas. They use a standard hierarchical structure and there are six officers in total. Current membership is 34.

Financial Commitments: Using another merry-go-round set up, contributions are collected for group savings, and funds are redistributed to members at the end of each year. During the year, soft loans are financed through the group, and 30% interest per month is charged. This allows the membership to manage their personal cash flow with collective funds, and encourages investment in income generating activities.

Goals: The Dedication group engages in small projects for income generation, including poultry keeping, collective farming and handcrafts. They have no formal goals.

Results: The group is effective in generating small funds, and successfully distributes a small profit to its members each year. According to members, it is not focused towards any social improvement goals within the village, but only in personal capacity building through micro-financing, which seems to work.

Observations: This group has learned that by working together, they can increase their own resources, but they have not expanded this knowledge into any benefits for the village as a whole. Thus personal empowerment has been achieved, but no further lessons have been internalized.

Cham Thooni Boda Boda Transport

Boda boda is a bicycle taxi service common in rural Kenya. Bicycles are outfitted to carry passengers or cargo. Sometimes motor scooters are also used, but this is not yet the case for Cham Thooni.

Group Structure: Cham Thooni is a youth group. The name means, “Eat what you work for.” The group organized itself in a period of 4 months prior to April of 2005. There are 25 current members, and they all participated together in establishing the business, including recruitment, developing a market for their boda boda provision, and locating and securing bicycles to use. Membership is open to anyone out of school; there is only one female member.

Financial Commitments: Membership fees are Ksh 50 per month (around \$.75). The membership fee that is paid in is divided into three pots: one for general issues, one for emergencies, and one for investment. The last pot is divided out among members at the end of the year.

Goals: The group would like to own its own bikes (they currently rent all but one). They would also like a cell phone to take pick-up orders, and money for shirts, so the drivers are recognizable as Cham Thooni drivers. They would like to expand their membership as well, and down the line hope to secure a 3-wheeled transporter or a motorized vehicle of some kind for heavier loads and groups.

Results: This is a very successful business in most terms: they provide a needed service and the village uses them frequently; they are always busy and there is virtually always work. The business has provided a steady income for its members and increased the capacity of the youths to provide for their families. The challenges can be seen in the

specific goals of the members; the ability to expand the business is limited by the number of bikes the group owns and by marketing.

Observations: Cham Thooni members work hard and are committed to making their business work. The financial arrangement they use is complicated and may, in the end, get in the way of the group making progress because it limits their capacity to invest in the business. On the other hand, they have carefully analyzed their needs, and believe this system to be the best way to address those needs. The group is moving towards effective empowerment.

Umala Youth Forum (Umala is a neighbouring village near Ngunya)

Group Structure: Umala Youth Forum was founded in November of 2004 with 14 members. Membership has remained constant.

Financial Commitments: Membership fees are Ksh 50 per month, plus one chicken.

Goals: Their main aim is to eradicate poverty among group members and to enlarge their capacity to take care of themselves. They want to provide youth services to others in their community to fight unemployment and immorality.

They want to buy hybrid chickens and cattle to increase the meat yield of their products. Members also try to participate in local councils, education projects, and community activities in order to increase their influence on local youth. They would like to increase income-generating opportunities in animal husbandry and learn skills to increase health and care of animals for better production. They would also like to gain technical skills and offer a computer business in Umala.

Results: Umala Youth Forum has been very successful in their animal husbandry efforts, with a substantial hybrid chicken project that promises good returns when the poultry is raised.

Observations: This group is very organized and very effective in meeting its goals. All members are full participants, though they have difficulty recruiting new members to expand their projects. Because of their involvement in the community, this group's members have become more visible within the area and will benefit from this visibility as their business efforts expand.

Ambira Mother's Group (Ambira is another nearby village).

Group Structure: The Ambira Mother's Group was founded in September of 2004. Members are married and over 18. Most of the members tested positive for HIV, but many are not open about their status, due to the stigma of the disease.

Financial Commitments: The group raises funds through shared financing. They have some support from CARE, International and they have a small savings bank (Current balance is Ksh 10,000, or \$155 CA). They also get some support from a local health education group for food and medicines.

Goals: This group is working to sensitize the community about HIV/AIDS, and to reduce the stigma for villagers with the disease. This group is very active in the community; activities include visitation of the sick, supplying fruits and other glucose tournaments for youth to enhance educational opportunities, provision of training workshops for community members, and counseling and support for HIV/AIDS patients. The group would like to open an office in Ambira to coordinate activities, including testing and support for HIV-positive community members.

Results: This group is very active and has support from several outside sources. They feel empowered by their experiences even though the community remains resistant to some of their activities. AIDS is a difficult issue in this area; Nyanza Province has the highest HIV infection rate in the country at 14.7%, and is one of the most highly populated rural districts in Kenya. Nyanza Province also retains many traditional practices, such as wife inheritance, which increase HIV risk, and changing local attitudes is challenging (IRIN, 2005).

Observations: Personal and group participation remain high among members of the Ambira Mother's Group. This can be attributed to the high level of commitment by members because of their own HIV-positive status...there is a deep personal motivation for them to succeed in their goals. As they become more effective, this motivation will increase, unless or until they lose the ability to control resources allotted to them.

Imani Women Group (“Faith” in Luo).

Group Structure: This group was founded in January 2004 with 15 members. The group operates with a standard hierarchical structure and meet twice per month. Membership is not limited, except to men; the women say: “Men use force and may take the livestock away” (Group Member One); “Men will hit you if they want to take what you have” (Group Member Two).

Financial Commitments: Membership is Ksh 50 per month; there is a funding merry-go-round to help members in need.

Goals: The group’s stated goal is self-development through raising livestock. They have a graduated program: they have begun by purchasing chickens for each member. The chickens are raised and sold at market, and the money is put toward the

purchase of sheep. When the sheep are sold, that money will be put toward purchasing cattle. The livestock also reproduce, of course, and so continue to provide members with income generation. Currently the group owns 42 chickens and one sheep. They expect all members to have at least one sheep by the third year of operation.

Results: So far this group has been very successful, but they have not been established for very long. Commitment is high, and they work well together.

Observations: The group needs guidance and advice to develop organizational skills, financial accounting skills, and other animal husbandry information. They hope and expect their membership in the Ngunya Community Resource Centre to provide these opportunities. Most of the members of this group are illiterate and innumerate, but they are very committed to increasing their capacity to care for themselves and their families, and a few younger members are currently providing the skills that are needed. They are a group of highly motivated women with a lot of hope, which may translate into effective action with a few resources to guide them.

Rito Ngema Mon Women Group (“waiting for your life” in Luo).

Group Structure: This group was founded in 2000 with 20 members. They operate with a standard hierarchical structure with four officers who rotate through the membership. Membership has been stable, in part because each member participated in a training session offered by a church-sponsored NGO, to teach locals about common diseases and treatments. They also received training in pharmacology. The women chose to establish themselves to fight disease in the region and no new members can be added without the training.

Financial Commitments: Membership dues are Ksh 300 (approximately \$4.50 CA) per member per year.

Goals: The two primary objectives for the group are to meet the need of the chronically ill in the village, and to make a small profit for expansion. A larger goal is to establish a building on land that is already owned, so that they can create a formal pharmacy.

Results: The group purchases drugs from the church group and resells locally where needed; they also frequently donate drugs to indigent and very ill patients. The membership meets weekly to divide and distribute drugs; there is also small farming done collectively, and the produce is shared among members and among patients who need food. Currently there are 22 terminal AIDS patients that the group is caring for, with many more chronic patients with a variety of diseases.

Observations: This group has the most focused goals of any group I visited with, and has had the most training to achieve their goals: resources plus the ability to make decisions equals empowerment. The participation level among members is high because the group gets results: they are able to provide critical medication to ill villagers.

Challenged Groups

Ngunya Upendo Youth Group (Upendo means 'love' in Luo)

Group Structure: Upendo began in June of 2005 with 15 members. Membership is open to anyone in the community aged 15-35. There are no fees, but participation in meetings and activities is required. Meetings occur once per month, and usually have a focused activity. The day I visited, a local health care worker was presenting a lesson on Sexually Transmitted Infections and passed out condoms for the group.

Financial Commitments: No membership fees; income is generated through joint farming activities.

Goals: The group came together when they observed discrimination against girls and young people among members of the community. They want to reduce gender bias and empower youth in their society. The group is trying to mobilize more youth in the area through sports activities and collective farming. They believe that if youth meet for such activities, they are more open to receiving educational information. Upendo would like to improve society for young people through discouraging unsafe sex and encouraging participation and income production. The farming efforts will help group members raise funds for group activities and their own families.

Results: The group is very new, and is challenged to keep an involved membership. Currently they have a lot of goals without many resources to reach those goals.

Observations: There are several very strong members within the group who are committed to increasing resources for young people in the community. However, there are also a few members who clearly are not very committed. In particular, several young men treated the meeting as a bit of a joke, and reportedly only attend occasionally. It is not clear that the group has enough focused members to maintain its direction.

Ngunya Dago Retirees Group

The Ngunya Dago group has been in sporadic existence since 1980, when they were part of an international borehole building project. The group maintains the borehole and keeps track of community membership. The borehole provides free fresh water to a local community of 3000 people.

Group Structure: The current group consists of 60 retirees from the area, with about 40 really active members. They meet twice a month and pay Ksh10 (around 15 Canadian cents) each month as a membership fee.

Financial Commitments: The group has a small bit of money in a bank account to support its projects.

Goals: Keeping the pump in repair, distributing water to those who can't come to the borehole and to fields for irrigation, and to train new maintenance people. The group also manages a collective farm together, and has started a childcare group for handicapped children. (The children I saw at our meeting appeared to have Down's Syndrome and other birth defects). Currently there are 17 children being cared for by mothers in the group on a rotating basis.

Results: The group remains in a relatively static position with regard to its goals and progress.

Observations: It is clear that the group needs to train people to repair and maintain the borehole machinery in order for it to continue to provide water to the community. Nothing is currently happening on this front, probably because the group and the NCRC, which the group is affiliated with, don't know how to make that happen. The child care is also very important to the community, as it allows the parents of handicapped children to work their fields and support the family, but again, there is no access to training here that could improve the conditions for the caregivers or the children.

Ngunya Retirees Welfare Group

Group Structure: The Ngunya Retirees are a registered group with the District. They were established in April of 2004 with 10 founding members; currently there are 20 members, with 15 active ones. They meet once each month.

Financial Commitments: Members pay a Ksh 50 (\$.75CA) membership fee at each meeting, and maintain a small account with the local postal bank. The group operates a micro-finance merry-go-round within the membership, loaning money to each other from the collective account. They charge 10 percent monthly interest on all loans.

Goals: Their general objectives are to share ideas, support one another and achieve development within the group. Informally, they are interested in supporting new business ideas among the membership. Currently they are involved in organizing a Harambee, or helping festival, to raise funds for their projects.

Business projects up for consideration are 1) a posho mill, which would refine the local maize flour, 2) a telephone business, and 3) an agrovet, to supply farm products to the community. Some are also discussing the possibility of a hardware supply store. In addition, the group helps each other through assistance when member families experience a death, illness, or orphaning. They also try to link up to local and district NGOs who are “well-wishers”, (Otieno, 2005) that provide training for various skills, including paralegal training and business skills.

Results: Currently things within this group appear to be at a standstill. Their efforts to create a Harambee fundraising fair have been delayed twice. They have not prioritized a use for any funds that might be received, because (they suggest) that they

cannot establish a priority before they know how much money can be raised by the Harambee and through outside assistance.

Observations: These men are retired but wish to keep busy; they are also the elite of the village and may not actually need to raise personal income. This group appears to be creating busy work rather than focused on tangible and attainable goals. It is my impression that the Retirees wish to participate in the energy and commitment generated by the NCRC, but may have little clarity about the way to do that.

Summary

The groups that have associated themselves with the Ngunya Community Resource Centre do so with the understanding that they will be able to use the Centre for skills development and resource sharing. The Resource Centre wants to empower the groups, but also has an interest in attracting foreign development dollars to expand the capacity of the village and its cooperative groups. With the NCRC continuing to expand its reach in the community, and as it continues to make connections with groups from Nairobi and with international funders, its ability to support and provide resources to the groups will grow.

If the groups continue to support each other, sharing information, labour and skills, the village of Ngunya will benefit from the capacity growth of the individuals and groups; participation increases as the groups demonstrate their ability to positively effect the standard of living and skill development of the village as a whole, and, as argued previously, participation increases empowerment in the community as a whole.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter will look at the structures and interactions of the organizations delineated in Chapter Two through the theoretical definitions of participation and empowerment described in Chapter One. This analysis will illustrate the interactions of these two critical concepts in the development realities of rural Kenya.

Participation and Empowerment: Nairobi

Levels and quality of participation vary within the groups observed. Within the two Nairobi groups, volunteers receive both financial and social benefits from participation and increased involvement, though the benefits are unofficial and sporadic. Many expenses are covered by the organization, and gifts are occasionally given for service. Volunteers also achieve higher social status due to their connections with outsiders and their access to information and resources. Both international and local volunteers tend to participate out of a sense of altruism, which has a psychological benefit to the participant as well.

However, participation in the organizations is focused on development goals that are external to the formal organizations, and they are essentially service providers, thus full participation is not critical to the successful operation of these groups. This can be seen in the ease with which participants in CIVS were able to establish HIVS, a similar organization with a slightly different agenda and goals. This separation was not undertaken without dissatisfaction from CIVS, but CIVS has a rotating membership and volunteer base, so it has been able to continue without significant disruption.

The relative difference in longevity between CIVS and HIVS can be clearly seen in the ways that the members of the governing board of CIVS have learned to limit both the rhetoric of engagement in development projects and the focus of that engagement, so that stated goals can be more fully supported by the operations of the organization. CIVS has also developed significant partnerships with numerous overseas organizations, from which it benefits by drawing its international volunteers. Developing continuing personal relationships with these volunteers increases its impact both globally and locally, although on a small scale.

In the case of HIVS, the stated objectives found on the website, while laudable, are either functionally unachievable for a group of its size, or vague and not assessable in any quantitative way. For example, the language of these objectives includes such statements as:

- Promote and educate the masses on human rights
- Enjoy and celebrate the different ways of life from various communities locally and international
- Promote the spirit of self-sustenance and empowerment of women and children and the less privileged in society
- Promote pluralism amongst the community and volunteers (HIVS, 2006)

On the other hand, the founding members of HIVS are moving relatively quickly to become involved in the international development field through extensive travel and linkages with other organizations. This may serve to increase their effectiveness more rapidly than their parent organization CIVS.

The level of participation within both of these groups, while limited in terms of Lyons et al.'s (2001) description, does interact to empower the individuals involved in

the organizations. This occurs because the members and volunteers feel able to utilize the group's resources to achieve both personal and organizational goals. In the case of these groups, being able to make a noticeable impact on the various rural communities that the groups interact with empowers both the volunteers from Nairobi and the participants within the rural villages, thus creating social change.

Participation and Empowerment: Ngunya

A more significant level of participation is found in the small groups that are members of the NCRC; members of the village community who have similar status and concerns form these groups, and decisions are made within the small groups through a directly democratic process. In addition, the participation of individuals in such groups impacts their quality of life directly by increasing access to resources and to income; empowerment occurs when visible qualitative markers have been affected by participant actions, and those improvements directly benefit individuals and their families.

An example of this participation – empowerment interaction can be seen in the small group Umala Youth Forum. This group chose to focus on direct income generation through cooperative animal husbandry in order to increase employment opportunities among young adults in poverty. Through income sharing and participation in collective goals, they have established a substantial poultry-raising project that currently promises to generate enough income to expand into cattle raising. The group members have seen a marked improvement in their own standards of living and have become more involved in community councils, developing as leaders in the Umala community. While the group has challenges, they clearly felt that they were responsible for their own increased capacity, and continue to be committed to maintaining and expanding their projects.

While participation is high in all the groups I observed, empowerment is inconsistent across groups. The Umala Youth Group felt empowered to move into political involvement, but the Ngunya Dago group is waiting for someone to provide expertise. Even with limited access to resources, some groups make more effective choices than others, so the NCRC has the responsibility to explain planning, budgeting and group process techniques.

It was clear to me that the many groups who have affiliated with the NCRC have a perception of Mr. Otieno as an effective and capable director. This can be seen by noting the number of groups from villages outside Ngunya who chose to affiliate with the NCRC (three of the 11). They believe that working with the Resource Centre will increase their capacity to achieve their goals, and to a large extent, this has proven to be correct. Mr. Otieno created the link with CIVS in Nairobi, and has maintained contact with several of the volunteers who have been in his village over the last several years. The Centre has benefited from outside resources donated by individuals from Germany, Japan, France, England, the U.S., and Canada. All of these donations were made by individuals to the Resource Centre directly, and were used to further the work of the Centre. This external support also demonstrated to the community groups that the Resource Centre could provide access to resources and had working relationships with outsiders.

Conclusions

The Bhutanese measurements of Gross National Happiness include economic development, environmental preservation, cultural promotion and good governance (Ura & Galay, 2004). The Canadian Index of Well-Being is more complex, with seven

indicators: living standards, including the gap between rich and poor, health, community vitality, quality of the environment, educational attainment, free time, and civic engagement and governmental responsiveness (Community Action, 2005). Qualitative markers such as these allow a more complete analysis of development benefits; small community-based organizations can focus on these measures as indicators of progress for their own small-scale projects as well as for larger multi-lateral development.

The groups I observed in Ngunya were utilizing their capacity to enhance their economic development through merry-go-round loans and commercial projects, thus increasing their own living standard. They were attempting to work together to share and sustain their cultural traditions; many groups had a specific focus towards improved health or improved education. The environmental measurements were not visible in the small groups I worked with, and while localized civic engagement was high, participation in governance, or a sense of government being responsive, was not. The NCRC was engaged with both environmental and governance goals on a limited basis, but is not able, at this time, to be effective.

In many cases, these well-being indicators are interdependent, with a more educated populace being more likely to participate in democratic government, for example. It has also been shown that empowerment on an individual basis expands to create greater participation in social and civic issues (Lyons, et al., 2001), and this was confirmed in several of the groups I observed: Umala Youth began participating in local councils, Ambira Mothers Group became engaged in social action around HIV and Aids, and members of Rito Ngema have developed a reputation for providing health maintenance and prevention throughout the community.

The member groups of the NCRC have demonstrated that they indeed have the capacity to create their own development. They have actively designed projects that meet their specific needs, and they are either managing those projects effectively, or they are learning how to manage them through the NCRC. These self-directed groups are successfully negotiating their own development agenda through participation in self-directed groups following the traditional conception of *Harambee*. The NCRC is successfully linking to national and international organizational resources to provide the resources requested by the groups. In particular, the relationship that the NCRC has developed with the Nairobi NGOs CIVS and HIVS has encouraged the community to organize, to set goals for themselves in small groups, and to assess resource and educational needs so that they can ask for what they need and provide for themselves where it is possible to do so. This is self-directed development that empowers its participants directly, and makes it possible for members to care for themselves and their families without dependency.

In Kabeer's model (1999), access to both physical and social resources is the first step on the ladder to empowerment. Virtually all the member groups of the Resource Centre have access to resources of both types because of their relationship with the NCRC and its linking NGOs in Nairobi. The second step on the ladder is agency, and many of the groups demonstrated that they had the ability to act toward their goals. The groups that were not effectively moving forward toward their goals seemed to be less cohesive and less cooperatively organized, hence unable to act to achieve what they set out to do.

Further, several of the groups have become fully empowered and in control of their lives and futures, participating in local and municipal councils and sharing their knowledge and influence throughout the community. This demonstrates the achievement of goals, and the ability to sustain and expand projects currently in process. Individuals have maintained their connections with the organizations in Nairobi, and with international volunteers who have visited them, expanding their personal and community connections with the world.

More research on the dynamics of participation and empowerment at the self-directed level needs to be done; it is time for development agencies to be responsive to grassroots needs, recognizing that external direction and management cannot substitute for the transformational empowerment necessary to maintain social well-being.

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