



*Development  
Studies  
Network*

# Challenges for participatory development in contemporary development practice

## DEVELOPMENT BULLETIN

### No.75 August 2013

Editor: Pamela Thomas

### Features

Participation – voices from the past

Can the very poor be reached?

Contemporary challenges to participation

Research, monitoring and evaluation

Issues in inequality: gender and disability

Innovative methods for participation

Communicating for participatory development



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The Network provides information and discussion on social, economic and environmental development issues through its journal Development Bulletin. It is in regular contact with development-related academic courses and organisations, government and non-government development organisation and community-based development groups.

The Network is located within the Resources and Environmental Development Program, in the Coombs Building of the Australian National University.

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Development Bulletin has for 25 years been the journal of the Development Studies Network based at the Australian National University. It is an occasional publication available in hard copy and for free download online. It includes commissioned and submitted papers. Each issue focuses on a specific topical development theme providing a multi-disciplinary perspective on a diverse range of opinions and experiences. While academic in focus, the Bulletin is accessible to a wide range of people. Papers are short and concise, with a word limit of 3000. It includes papers and case studies from both academics and non academics, with a special focus on those engaged in development practice in developing countries. Overall, the Bulletin contents are of particular value to development agencies, those working in the field, governments and non-government organisations, teachers and students of development.

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# **Development Bulletin**

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## **Challenges for participatory development in contemporary development practice**

Papers and case studies include many of those presented at the international conference “The challenges for participatory development in contemporary development practice” held under the auspices of the ACFID-Universities Linkages Network at the Australian National University, 28-29 November 2012.

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## Preface

This issue of *Development Bulletin* includes some of the 86 papers presented at the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID)/Universities Linkages Conference held at the Australian National University on November 28–29, 2012. The theme of the conference was ‘Challenges for Participatory Development in Contemporary Development Practice’. It was the third conference organised by the ACFID/Universities Network — a partnership between ACFID’s NGO members and Australian universities. The Network is co-hosted by ACFID and the Institute of Human Security at La Trobe University.

The Network grew out of a collective desire to widen debate on international development and to strengthen collaboration and research between academics and the members of ACFID. It provides a platform to develop partnerships within and between these two sectors and in turn, strengthen their collective impact against poverty and injustice. In particular, the Network focuses its work on harnessing quality research as essential for good international development practice. This means ensuring the best possible outcomes for those who are the beneficiaries and partners in this development work.

The primary aims of the Network are to:

- initiate stronger relations between ACFID members and individual academics with an interest in development, as well as with their departments/research centres;
- provide a better understanding of the potential entry points and areas of collaborations between NGOs and academia; and
- extend the existing network of universities linked to ACFID to foster future collaboration as well as information sharing of development related research.

The theme of the conference was chosen because among donors, researchers and development practitioners participatory development tends to be taken for granted and its methods and benefits are largely unquestioned. Participatory development involves including people who are affected by development processes as planners and implementers and became very popular in the 1980s and 1990s as a response to globalisation and neoliberal development policies.

Participatory development is inspired by the work of Robert Chambers who saw it as a way of overcoming the shortcomings of top down development and the limitations of expert research and planning. Participatory development’s catch cry might be ‘ordinary people know best’. It has, however, been criticised for being tokenistic and unable to address the issues of top down development and, more recently, results-based planning and inclusion. This conference explored these issues from both academic and practitioner perspectives.

The keynote speakers at the conference included Professor Robert Chambers, a Fellow of the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex; Professor Gita Sen, of the Indian Institute of Management in Bangalore, India, and Adjunct Professor of Global Health and Population at the Harvard School of Public Health; Emele Duituturaga, CEO of the Fiji Ministry for Women, Social Welfare and Poverty Alleviation and Head of the Pacific Women’s Resource Bureau for the Secretariat of the Pacific Community; Dr Alan Fowler, Emeritus Professor at the International Institute of Social Studies in the Hague and for more than 30 years an advisor to, and writer on, civil society organisations involved with international development.

Recordings of the key note addresses can be found on:

<http://archanth.anu.edu.au/events/development-studies-conference>

*Patrick Kilby*  
*The Australian National University*

# Participation for development: A good time to be alive

*Robert Chambers*

To be engaged with participation for development, why is this a good time to be alive? There are so many negative trends in our world — in climate change, rising inequality, abuses of globalisation, the glorification of greed and so much else. But for participation for development, I believe the glass is not half empty but half full and filling, because there are so many realities and potentials for making a difference for the better.

But first, let us clear up what we mean by participation, participatory and development. Participation in development-speak is used to cover a multitude of practices, some inspiring and good, and some depressingly bad. I shall not define it but simply say that participation has implications for power relations, personal interactions, and attitudes and behaviours and that participatory can apply to almost all social contexts and processes, not least in organisations, education, research, communities and the family. For its part, development can be taken to mean good change, raising questions of power and relationships concerning who says what is good and who identifies what change matters — whether ‘we’ professionals do, or whether it is ‘they’ — those who are poor, marginalised, vulnerable and excluded.

In our contemporary context, four major trends are both significant for participation for development and easy to overlook or underestimate.

First, change accelerates for poor and marginalised people. They include changes in the conditions they experience, and changes in their awareness, aspirations and priorities. The revolution of the mobile phone in the past decade is one spectacular dimension of change, but more broadly there has been rapid social change, including changes in gender relations. In consequence, the challenge for development professionals to keep in touch and up to date is now greater than ever.

Second, development professionals are increasingly isolated from poor people. This applies especially to senior people in governments, aid agencies and NGOs. Many are caught in the ‘capital trap’ — capital cities in which they are imprisoned, held tight by meetings, visitors, internet and the digital tyranny of email, skype, webinars and the like. Field visits outside the capital have become more difficult to find time for and rarer. And when donor staff from OECD country headquarters say they are visiting ‘the field’ they often mean the capital city of the recipient country.

Third, tensions have become more intense between the Newtonian paradigm of things, design, planning and predictability (the domain of the left hemisphere of the brain) and the complexity paradigm of people, participation, processes, emergence and unpredictability (the domain of the right hemisphere). The buzzwords empowerment, participation, partnership, ownership, transparency and accountability all imply changes in

power and relationships, but these are contradicted especially in aid, by top down, standardised demands and the mindset that goes with ‘delivery’ — a prominent word in AusAID and other aid literature.

The Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness repeatedly talks of *partners* and *partnership*, which added together are used more in the Declaration than any other word or word root. My count is 96 times. *Monitor, measure, assess, performance and results* are very common, but *poor, vulnerable, marginalised, people* and *power* are not to be found. The 1990s were a time when people and participatory approaches were being mainstreamed. But in the 2000s, the pendulum has swung back to ‘things’ and pre-set planning, and continues to swing in that direction. So why is this a good time to be alive as a development professional?

The fourth trend, the quiet revolution of proliferating participatory methods (PM) is one reason. We now have an extraordinary variety of PMs. The approaches of the 1990s — PRA, Appreciative Inquiry, Reflect and many others — survive but increasingly practitioners adapt and improvise their own ways of research and participation to meet their particular contexts and needs. ICTs, most notably mobile phones, but also Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other technologies, have added to the ever richer range of PMs that can be combined with others.

Three Rs are relevant here — reversals, reflexivity and realism.

*Reversals:* There is now vast scope to reverse adverse trends. Reality checks, pioneered in Bangladesh and used by AusAID for learning about basic education in Indonesia, are one. Researchers live with families in representative communities for five or six days and nights and then come together to compare experiences and learning, revealing very rapid social change that those in capital cities are often unaware of. Participatory statistics are another method with huge potential for win-win situations. Outside professionals or local people facilitate the generation of up-to-date statistics about qualitative changes, and those whose participatory analysis generates them, themselves learn and change as a result. Behaviour, attitudes and facilitation are more and more recognised for their primacy as drivers for change in almost all contexts.

*Reflexivity:* Becoming aware of and offsetting the biases and frames of one’s mindset and beliefs is a key way forward, with each discipline looking at itself in a mirror. Good professionalism recognises the need of introspection in order to do better development. It will be a great day when this is integral to all university courses.

*Realism:* Realism is key. It demands being in touch with, and up to date with, rapidly and unpredictably changing grass roots realities. It requires recognising and rewarding those who learn from what works and what does not,

acknowledging failure and learning and changing fast. It means being constantly alert to learning from new insights, like those outlined in *Listening for a Change* (Slim and Thompson 1993) which included the experiences and opinions of 6000 recipients of aid in 20 different countries. From these voices we hear strong appeals for smarter aid and not too much of it too fast. We learn how bad the effects are of 'proceduralisation' with its logframes, lists, matrices and templates which close off any spontaneous and respectful interaction that recipients want.

The primacy of the personal and personal relations comes across very powerfully. Recipients would like their donors to have direct relationships with them. *Time to listen* reports that:

Every story of effective aid told by aid recipients included a description of particular staff who worked in ways that developed respect and trust with aid recipients (Anderson, Brown and Jean 2012).

The implication is that more effective assistance requires more donor staff, closer to the ground, with continuity, and continuous mutual learning of recipients and donors together. This reinforces a situation much wider than aid. That is, each one of us can make a difference, and on a daily and hourly basis. Many big

changes come from many small actions of many, many people. Before Palestine was recognised as a country by the UN, 1.8 million people had signed a petition on AVAAZ, each taking perhaps less than five minutes to do so. As *Time to Listen* concludes:

Every moment of business as usual is a lost moment for making a change (op.cit).

And Ghandi's much quoted 'We must become the change we wish to see in the world' is as pertinent today as it ever was.

So across a wide front we have more, and new, challenges and opportunities in participation for development and through its wide interpretation and implications. In our globalised world, and with all the innovations to hand, we have scope as never before to make a difference. Creativity, fulfilment and fun are there waiting for expression and experience.

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## Introduction: Challenges for participatory development in contemporary development practice

*Pamela Thomas, The Australian National University*

### Accumulating knowledge: Voices from the past

This issue of *Development Bulletin* considers the key factors that influence participatory development processes and practices in the changing contexts of the 21st century. Our understanding of participatory development is based on accumulated research, practical experience and the body of knowledge available. As these papers show many of the challenges are not new.

It is over 40 years since non-government organisations and academics, often geographers or anthropologists, working within communities in developing countries, recognised that development assistance and planned change could be a two-edged sword. In the early 1970s there was already awareness that linear approaches to social and economic development had limited long-term success and that the negative, unintended consequences sometimes outweighed the benefits. At the time, Australasian government aid agencies had small budgets, were poorly organised, with limited professionalism and limited sources of reliable development-related information.<sup>1</sup> A large proportion of government aid was in the form of bilateral budgetary support while social development was commonly the business of largely self-funded NGOs and volunteers. There was no process or framework available in Australasia to pull together into a coherent cross disciplinary study of development, the many diverse strands and sources of development-related information. There was, however, considerable individual knowledge and experience in addition to the Latin American literature, including Freire's 1972 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

In Australia, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the ANU's then world renowned Research School of Pacific Studies was at the forefront of in-depth primary research into social, economic and political change in Pacific Island countries — a time when Pacific Island nations were becoming or had just become politically independent. Geographer, Harold Brookfield's landmark book, *Interdependent Development*, published in 1975, provided a multidisciplinary, in-depth understanding of development assistance and development processes at that time and in that context. Although its focus was rural development including the impact of changing land use and farming practices, it remains as pertinent to broader development today as it was then.<sup>2</sup> It was Robert Chamber's 1983 study, *Rural Development: Putting the last first*, that reinforced the need to focus on the very poor. Discussion at the time covered the relative merits of top-down and bottom-up approaches, the value of involving the 'grass roots', how to encourage community participation, the need for more flexible approaches among donors, and the active inclusion of recipients in their own development activities.

### Establishing development studies

The need for an organised approach to the study of development in Australia and New Zealand led to the establishment, in 1982, of the Development Studies Centre (DSC) at ANU. It brought together geographers, economists, anthropologists and environmentalists to study development processes and provide post graduate courses in development studies. Macquarie University, La Trobe, Flinders, Deakin and Curtin universities were among those who also established development hubs, usually in association with Departments of Geography. At ANU, the DSC grew into the National Centre for Development Studies led by the indomitable Helen Hughes and development studies became an accepted and important area of study supported by what was then the Australian Development Assistance Bureau who

benefitted from the multi-disciplinary analyses of the research being undertaken.

By the late 1980s there was a body of literature on participatory development, focusing on involving local people and engaging and empowering the poor to take control of their own development. Manuals, such as Werner and Bower's *Helping Health Workers Learn* (1982), based on 15 years of extensive work with village communities, outlines in simple language and illustrations how to empower and involve the poor in improving their health. Its approaches are still relevant to the current context. Schramm and Lerner's (1976) *Communication and Change: The last ten years and the next* considers the important role of communication in involving the poor in development — again as relevant today as it was in 1976. In 1987, the University of Papua New Guinea's Waigani Seminar focused on the ethics of development and the need to ensure that Pacific Island people were supported to be self-reliant and that their cultural identity was maintained and their languages and culture respected in all aspects of development assistance.<sup>3</sup> These key points from the conference papers remain relevant today.

By the 1990s, there was wide recognition among NGOs and some of academia that the basis of successful development was strengthening peoples' capacity to determine their own priorities and to organise themselves to act on these. It was accepted that development was a constant social process of growth and enrichment, not a question of reaching a particular set of goals and objectives within a set time frame. The key challenges to participatory development were considered to be those embedded within government donor requirements, including project design processes, and projects that set demands which related more to development agencies than to the development of people.<sup>4</sup> Linear, time-bound projects were seldom catalysts for development but often ends in themselves. As aid budgets grew, so did the demands for accountability and cost effectiveness making it increasingly difficult for smaller NGOs and those heavily reliant on government funding.

Today there is some agreement that smaller scale projects with meaningful partnerships between donors and recipients are likely to be more effective than large projects that are designed in urban offices with little direct link or input with those at community level. However, there remains less agreement about what exactly participation is and how it can be achieved. Principles thought to be important are information sharing, full consultation, recipients involved in the processes of decision-making, project design and implementation and recipients themselves initiating action. Despite the large volume of information, the extensive experience, and lessons 'learned', putting principles into action remains difficult. As this issue of *Development Bulletin* illustrates, the challenges are long standing and for all our accumulated knowledge, inclusion of the poorest and most marginalised groups in society remains elusive. This journal offers some positive approaches but also includes examples of projects where the context appears to demand a top-down approach.

## **The contemporary challenges of participatory development**

The following papers cover a wide range of challenges and solutions to encouraging effective participatory development, from the need for bureaucratic reform in donor agencies and recipient governments — including the need for additional staff and time to build relationships and encourage participation — to the need for specialised facilitation skills to ensure among other things, that the participation of women is not tokenistic, supporting men rather than women. The major themes covered here are the role of the administrative structures of development assistance; participatory governance; gender; communication and access to information; reaching and involving the very poor; monitoring and evaluation; and indigenous participation.

### **Administrative structures and reaching the very poor**

A common theme throughout the journal is the need for a new approach to 'doing development'. While more donors are embracing participatory approaches, the administrative structures and staff skills of both donor and recipient organisations remain appropriate to top-down, linear processes that are seldom conducive to participatory development. Discussing an Indonesian poverty reduction program, Asmorowati illustrates the difficulties of changing the bureaucratic culture to allow a devolution of power to communities. Her research also revealed that 'increasingly powerful communities are often dominated by the elite who create barriers against the community gaining access to participatory development'. She concludes that while bureaucracy is often seen as a rational tool for administering poverty reduction programs, centralised governance processes need to be reformed if government is to interface effectively with communities.

The 2005 Paris Declaration calls for donors to base their support on partner countries' development strategies, institutions and procedures thus requiring changes in the ways in which aid organisations operate. McPeak, Gomez and Chan review the difficulties faced by NGOs in moving aside to let local communities or governments take control and outline the different skill sets needed for NGO field staff and management including new knowledge of recipient government systems. They call for NGO and other donor staff to master recipient government legislation and planning so they can enable inclusive, democratic governance at local levels. They recommend that NGO workers adapt the participatory tools that worked well pre-Paris to the current context—that is, to help governments fulfil their legal obligations towards all, especially those most excluded.

The need for change also applies to government agencies. As Thomas shows, participation takes time, additional resources, and additional skills. It also requires a change of donor and recipient administrative culture. In the example of a successful participatory AusAID-funded civil society project in Vanuatu, where the donor is an active partner, AusAID's participation was much more

costly in terms of time and staff than had been realised. In today's heightened concern for short term cost effectiveness and/or value for money, participatory approaches which take time could be considered cost-ineffective. Donor agencies and recipients need to recognise that building trust and enabling partnerships requires new skills and time. These are attributes that as yet, most donors and recipient organisations do not have.

Using examples from Cambodia, Brown shows that the culture of cooperation among NGOs at national and micro levels can influence development effectiveness. Cooperation at national level, he maintains, is valuable and facilitates engagement with political society, but given the bureaucratic nature of the cooperation, can have negative consequences for the autonomy of civil society from government. At provincial and local levels the autonomy of civil society is enhanced by NGO cooperation as interpersonal trust is observable and the damaging effects of trust breaking down are equally visible and can be remedied. In conclusion, Brown maintains that as NGOs depend on social capital, it is necessary for them to build trust, networks and cooperation with other NGOs.

### **Research, monitoring and evaluation**

Chalk considers the role of participatory evaluation within World Vision's program capability review, which was designed to help World Vision offices evaluate their organisational contribution to objectives shared with partner communities. As there was nothing in place for the organisation to measure outcomes against external expectations, the methodology allowed communities and external partners to set the benchmarks. The approach was qualitative and created space for discussion, where variations were valued rather than homogenised, and where bias, hearsay and misconceptions were all relevant.

Nguyen, Nicetic, Hinthorne and van de Fliert's report examines the value of participatory communication approaches adopted in agricultural research projects in the Northwest Highlands of Vietnam as an attempt to better link research with development. They observed that the contribution of a participatory approach to agricultural research was problematic in terms of method and objectives. In particular, agricultural research is short term while research for development takes time. Evaluation of agricultural research projects are carried out at the end of a research project without consideration for longer term impact. A further problem was that many research projects pay more attention to the interests of researchers and donor agencies than to communities. The result is an intense focus on economic impacts that ignores livelihood resources such as human, social and natural capital.

Participatory action research is becoming more widely used and engages innovative research methods including peer review. However, Godden and Mull consider that peer review is significantly under-utilised and provide a peer review model as a participatory action research tool. Their experience of using this tool when reviewing Oxfam's water, sanitation and health project found that through peer review, reviewers and hosts can objectively analyse critical

areas of power imbalance, such as gender sensitivity, cultural awareness and community relations.

### **Using local expertise and capacity building**

Identifying and using local knowledge and skills is increasingly recognised as vital first steps to successful participatory development. Watson and Webster outline the importance of improving the capacity of communities, marginalised groups and government agencies before, or at the same time that administrative, judicial and fiscal powers are devolved to locally elected bodies. Their example from Nepal, illustrates the importance of identifying local knowledge and skills and then developing appropriate training programs. In Cameroon, there is growing recognition among NGOs of the value of utilising local knowledge and skills in implementing development projects. Mboumiena reports on research undertaken by the civil society network organisation in the Cameroon (NWADO) into innovative, indigenous approaches to disseminating development knowledge and building capacity among individuals, institutions and beneficiaries. Their research identified 'an amazing level of knowledge and expertise available locally' that was previously not recognised.

The benefits of empowering communities to use their existing knowledge, skills and social assets is also discussed by Ware who uses an example of an asset-based community development approach in Myanmar. This approach seeks to empower communities to draw on tangible and social community assets to manage their own development. It focuses on an appreciation and utilisation of pre-existing community strengths, assets and communication systems as the primary resources for development, together with reliance on community leadership, social networks and advocacy to bring about substantial change. Ware explains that the project makes very little finance available to village development committees but redirects community attention back to tangible and social community assets. Outside workers act as facilitators rather than channels for financial assistance. Ware says that even in the very difficult socio-political context of Myanmar the ABDC programs have been surprisingly effective.

Sanjeevanti and Chularatne discussing their Sri Lankan experience focus on an appreciation and utilisation of existing community strengths and assets as the primary resources for development, together with reliance on community leadership, social networks and advocacy to bring about substantial change

The impact of using local expertise and empowering communities to undertake their own development and to demand accountability from government can how ever depend on the political context as McBeth and Bottomley's review of Oxfam Australia's 30 year integrated community development program in Cambodia shows. The program sought to provide communities with skills to organise their own development activities and to engage with government when their livelihoods were threatened by government plans. While communities were

able to engage effectively in their own development activities, there was little evidence of their capacity to influence government, or even obtain meaningful information about imminent major projects that threatened their way of life. When seeking accountability, communities faced tremendous odds given the intensely corrupt and intimidatory context of Cambodia.

Graves gives examples of what can go wrong when volunteers drive project priorities rather than leaving this responsibility to local organisations. While volunteers often have strong technical skills they can sometimes lack awareness of national policies and systems as well as the language skills. Graves found that too often, the technical skills of local qualified staff were overlooked and undermined volunteer-initiated and run workshops and relegated qualified local staff to logistical roles. In conclusion, Graves says that volunteers can and do make positive contributions to development but undirected or misdirected good intentions can risk impeding national counterpart capacity to take on leadership roles or direct development processes.

Involving communities in efforts aimed at improving their quality of life have had some criticism, including that it is a way to get community approval for an already decided project and that within a community there are existing power blocs which effectively silence the very poor and marginalised. These challenges remain problematic as do the issues of gender and the question: who benefits most from participatory development programs?

### **Issues of inequality: Gender and disability**

Several papers show that the practice of participatory development becomes complicated when marginalised groups such as women, young people and people with disability are encouraged to take part in development processes without addressing the structural factors which contribute to their continued disempowerment. In a case study from Pakistan, Jabeen outlines the unintended outcomes of a program widely known for its participatory and holistic approach to poverty alleviation. The 11 Rural Support Programs provided microfinance and targeted women. While nearly 40 per cent of the borrowers and members of community organisations were women the program did not contribute to their empowerment but maintained and supported gender inequality. It did not address the underlying cultural attitudes or the discriminatory behaviour of men in the community. As has been found elsewhere, the finance that women obtained was used by their husbands but the women remained responsible for repaying the loans. While the Pakistan context may have exacerbated the situation, similar situations are true of other societies. Regular gender monitoring is recommended as one attempt to address the situation.

A participatory gender monitoring framework developed by Plan International's water, sanitation and hygiene program provides an explicit focus on changes in gender relations in the program. As gender relations are integral to the effectiveness of these programs a gender monitoring tool comprising a series of participatory rural

appraisal activities is used in the community meeting setting. They are based on four major principles: focus on ways of working that enable women, girls, men and boys to be actively involved in improving their water, sanitation and hygiene situation; using decision-making processes that enable women's and men's active involvement in the project and activities; observing and understanding the value of the work, skills and concerns of women and men in relation to water, sanitation and hygiene; and providing space and support for women and men to experience and share new roles and responsibilities. As Leong and Elkington point out this process is gender neutral but is powerful in that it highlights diverse views on gender roles within a community.

Including children in development is discussed by Liongue, Soares and Noy who show that two Save the Children projects in Timor-Leste — the Children's Club and Race for Survival — have made small individual changes at the local community level, giving children opportunities and confidence to articulate health and nutrition issues and providing greater awareness among parents that children can usefully take part in decisions that involve them.

The most marginalised and poorest people within society are those with disabilities. They are also the most discriminated against and the least likely to participate in development decisions or to benefit from them. As the papers show, people with disability seldom have access to education, health care, employment or decision making and are often subject to severe abuse. In their research into the impact of road development in Papua New Guinea on people with disability, James, Whitzman and Powaseu undertook research into the extent to which people with disability were consulted or involved in road infrastructure decisions. Their research, employing participatory consultation tools, used people with disability as data collectors. The research demonstrated that it was possible and desirable to meaningfully involve and partner with people with disability when conducting research, and that it resulted in better outcomes by providing an increased understanding of those with disabilities and advocacy for their inclusion.

On the other hand, Makuwira's analysis of Malawi's move towards disability-inclusive development and poverty reduction discusses the complete lack of inclusion of people with disability in an international study of people with disability in poverty reduction policies. The study was conceived by and dominated by international donors, who from Makuwira's experience, were not consultative and excluded discussion with civil society and disabled peoples' organisations marginalising further an already marginalised group.

Looking at participatory development from a health perspective, Conn, Modderman and Nayar agree that 'most at risk' populations typically are not included in participatory health where community development or program consultation approaches are tokenistic at best, involving limited investment of time and resources — this means that control over decisions rest in the hands of the funder. On a more positive note they found that a mixed model of participation in health can have positive impacts

on 'most at risk' populations. Their research provided three major lessons: allowing greater time is an important investment helping participants to fully understand the health issue; using different engagement options including meetings, field visits, drawing, drama, photo-voice and use of oral traditions and offering a range of possibilities for 'most at risk' populations opens doors to participation; it is necessary to share power between organisations, professionals and those deemed to be 'most at risk'.

### **Innovative methods and communication for participatory development**

Communication for development forms an important component of this issue of *Development Bulletin* and includes several innovative approaches to using modern technology. There is also discussion of the value of traditional communication systems. nnaEmeka Meribe discusses the right and wrong types of communication for development using the example of indigenous African communication systems (IACS) in a village participatory development program in a Nigeria. Information is important, she says, but so is the communication channel through which it is provided. In rural African villages, information using traditional communication systems is crucial for participation. 'IACS are a manifestation of the culture — they speak the people's language and people over the years have relied on them for everyday interactions.' Meribe maintains that in rural Africa, the bulk of people get their information from a hierarchy of village leaders, or chiefs, village ward heads and town criers and that it is counter-productive to use other communication channels or media. IACS are a complex network of communication systems which operate at different levels in African society. They go beyond communication or the message to include the communication source. Source-related characteristics are authoritative and credible whereas media messages are transactional and integrative. 'While IACS reaches everyone, literate and non-literate, mass communication influences only the education and usually urban', she says.

Language is a critical factor in participatory development. This is particularly the case in countries like those in Melanesia where there can be over 150 different languages. Selim considers the role of language in a participatory program in transitional justice in Nepal. As transitional justice was a foreign mechanism the project used language for which there was no translation in Nepalese. Terms such as 'reconciliation' and 'forgiveness' were confused and at times appropriated for political agendas. 'Reconciliation' was sometimes translated as 'friendship' and politicians spoke of reconciliation when they referred to settlement or even amnesty ... in a country where there are over 100 languages there are serious challenges, exacerbated by the meetings and surveys being conducted in Nepali or English, which limits or excludes those not fluent in these languages. Thomas found the same problem in Vanuatu where there are over 100 vernaculars in addition to Bislama, French and English, and where project meetings were held in English

and used a number of development-related terms that were not understood.

As communication technology becomes more readily available, participatory video can now be used for development purposes. Plush provides a conceptual framework for using video as a participatory development tool as the visual nature of video, together with its capacity to capture the voices of people from marginalised groups, has considerable potential to educate, persuade and advocate in ways that can bring positive change. 'Participatory video' she says 'needs to go beyond community members telling their stories for a mainly external audience to one that addresses power issues through more inclusive participation to address embedded social and economic inequities'. Participatory video is based on the participatory action research framework and enables people to empower themselves through construction of their own knowledge.

Photovoice is another communication method using pictures to assist research. In Shamrock's example, Photovoice is used to research lived experience of people with disability in Timor Leste. Shamrock explains that Photovoice is a form of qualitative research that combines documentary photography with storytelling. Individuals, often excluded from decision-making processes, are able to present their views and talk about their lives, concerns and communities. It combines two theories: feminist theory which describes power imbalances and inequality and participatory methods of research which call for action identified by participants.

Hintherne shows that serious play can create opportunities for knowledge exchange about complex issue. The use of Lego tiles to build models encourages participants to think abstractly about complex problems.

### **Aboriginal development**

Discussing the establishment of a Community Development Unit (CDU) in Central Australia, Hunt and Campbell outline the latest findings of five major projects being undertaken with traditional land owners and Aboriginal community members. The unit was established to find new approaches to generating benefits that arise from Aboriginal land being used for mining. Numerous challenges include the relative shortage of key community leaders, the endless consultation with rafts of government and non government agencies, entrenched community-wide divisions, and the difficulty that outsiders do not grasp the differences in world view in the communities in which they work. For example, Aboriginal landowners prioritise expenditure on cultural and social initiatives while government policies emphasise economic priorities including enterprise development and employment, English language, numeracy and literacy. There is a disjuncture between the approach of the Central Land Council in its support of Aboriginal aspirations to live well in two worlds and in the approach of other service providers. The resulting impasse frustrates attempts to generate any sort of development — whether it reflects

Aboriginal priorities or not. Against these challenges the CDU is making some progress.

Watt takes to task the ideals of participatory development and the notion of rational, informed citizens making reflexive choices about their lives and others. Using the capabilities approach to participatory development in Cape York, Northern Australia, she shows that cultivating a democratic ideal can lead to peculiarly illiberal liberalism, particularly when it encounters people who are not embracing educational opportunities available to them. Watt maintains there is some justification for top-down change.

Finally, Chevalier reminds us of both the basics of participation and of the lessons we either never learned or never made time to put into practice. These are: listen to people; focus on value for people rather than value for money; have genuine conversations and discussions; be

passionate about people and their lives; build quality relationships with counterparts; treat them like colleagues not workers; get out of the office and into the field and KEEP IT SIMPLE.

## Notes

- 1 See Bob Dunn, former Director General, ADAB (now AusAID), *Retrospective on Australian Aid*, Development Studies Network, 1994
- 2 *Interdependent Development* was preceded by Brookfield's *Pacific in Transition*, 1973 which discussed the drivers of change.
- 3 See Susan Stratigos and Philip Hughes, 1987, *The Ethics of Development: The Pacific in the 21st century*, UPNG Press.
- 4 Oxfam, 1995, *The Oxfam Handbook of Development and Relief*, Vol.1, Oxfam UK.

# At the limits of participation: 'Most at risk' populations and HIV programs

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## Introduction

Community participation is regarded as essential to the development and delivery of appropriate and acceptable health programs (Rifkin 1996). Ideas about participation in development practice are based on respect for people's knowledge and local action by communities (Cornwall 2003; de Koning and Martin 1996; Rifkin and Pridmore 2001). Participation is also viewed as a means to empower communities through education and action (de Koning and Martin 1996); with communities and experts learning together as partners (Arnstein 1969; Chambers 1983; Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Freire 1972). Development practitioners have been influential in introducing participation practices which access community voices, and relate their knowledge and opinion to programs (Chambers 1994; Reason and Bradbury 2006). Furthermore, there is much evidence that communities benefit from participation by developing greater self-esteem and confidence (Wallerstein 1992, 1999). This can provide fruitful ground for addressing health needs in an effective and long term way, given that health problems reside within families and communities. As such, these ideas of community participation more broadly have shaped participation in health programs (Attree et al. 2001; Laverack 2006).

Despite the positive discourse, methods for introducing participation into a health context are poorly understood; do not fit within the dominant biomedical paradigm (which is expert-driven); and there is typically a lack of commitment by health policymakers to provide resources and create a space for communities to have a say in program development (Emmel and Conn 2004). Debates and criticism of participatory health have centred on a lack of adherence to the goal of partnership with communities, with accusations of tokenism. There is a concern for a lack of theoretical transparency and a reluctance to be critical of dominant discourse and practice (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Kesby 2005). Evidence is perceived as the basis for expert decision making, although, in reality, evidence only ever forms some basis for decisions, with other factors such as historical norms and politics playing a major role. Expert led HIV programs are a good example of this. Also, there is criticism of an over-emphasis on the 'whole' community, to the neglect of the needs and views of vulnerable or silenced groups (Rifkin 1996); take for example, 'most at risk' young women discussed in this paper.

Yet, in the face of these challenges, developing countries have been the site of innovative participatory health; for example, a community controlled nutrition strategy in Senegal involving unemployed people operating

micro-enterprises (Diallo et al. 1998). Another example is in the Shan State, Myanmar, where community participation, in the form of themed focus groups, was used to mobilise resources and assess needs in a maternal health project (Soe et al. 2012). Such initiatives may provide useful lessons to guide HIV program development.

HIV, as a key issue in development, has been the subject of much debate (McNally 2000). Today some 35 million people are living with HIV/AIDS, and although the trend in prevalence rates is downwards due to improvements in treatment and prevention, there is still much to be done (UNAIDS 2012). Concern for HIV in development has tended to be limited to the economic impact of the epidemic rather than as a broader development problem. Yet there is consensus that HIV, given the scale and scope of the problem globally, 'affects virtually all aspects of human development' (Moodie 2000:8) and as such, claims considerable attention in the aid agenda.

Since the identification of the HIV virus in the 1980s prevention has been the main measure adopted with an important role for community in disseminating prevention messages. However, the nature of HIV as a sexually transmitted disease has resulted in stigma and silence around many issues; creating a challenge for prevention and community participation in HIV programs. This has led to mainly pro-abstinence messages. In the last decade, selective anti-retroviral treatment of people living with HIV (especially pregnant women) has become widespread in the developing world. However, there is limited access to drugs with a major challenge to upscale treatment and care programs (UNAIDS 2011). The prevention agenda is therefore still of vital importance and needs to move away from pro-abstinence strategies, which are antithetical to condom use and contribute to stigma and silence (Cohen 2008). Ultimately the ideal for HIV activists is to normalise and integrate HIV treatment and preventive programs as part of wider changes in attitudes towards sexual rights (UNAIDS 2011).

Today, a major focus of the strategies described above is on addressing the needs of 'most at risk populations'. These populations include youth, sex workers, migrants, men who have sex with men and the whole population in high prevalence areas. Yet, such populations are typically difficult to reach; they may be stigmatised and excluded from established communities; and they may be marginalised and voiceless within their environment (Boesten and Poku 2009). This can pose a particular challenge in meeting their needs as well as create barriers to their participation in HIV programs. This paper considers the participation of 'most at risk' populations in HIV programs

using a 'best practice' framework of formal and informal mechanisms for participation in health, drawing on studies from Uganda and Thailand.

### **'Most at risk' populations, participation and HIV programs**

Two studies, exploring HIV programs for 'most at risk' groups in Uganda and Thailand, are used to consider issues of participation in health. The first study, conducted by the primary author (Conn and Waite 2010), in partnership with an NGO Straight Talk Foundation Uganda, explored the voices of young women of Busoga in Eastern Uganda in relation to HIV prevention programs in schools. The second study, (by the second author), investigates issues of young sex workers participating in HIV programs in Thailand.

In both countries there has been considerable success in tackling HIV to date (Moodie 2000). Despite considerable differences in socioeconomic context between Uganda and Thailand, there are similarities of approach with strong political support and open media campaigns targeting HIV education and prevention (Low-Beer and Stoneburner 2004). Now 'most at risk' populations are a priority for policymakers.

The Ugandan study showed that the challenges faced by young women of Busoga are defined by sociocultural norms of being female and young. Young women participants aged 15–19 years describe, through the means of drawing, drama and story writing, the complex historical, social and cultural norms of young womanhood; such as staying at home, early pregnancy and arranged marriage, and submissive behaviour customs. Whilst these norms are acknowledged and accorded some respect, they are also portrayed as limiting young women's voices. One prominent representation was that of the cultural practice of kneeling to elders. Young women depict the custom of kneeling as a potent symbol of respect for elders:

In Busoga region a girl is supposed to kneel down on her legs whenever she is to greet someone. Because when kneel(ing) you respect your parents while God adds you some days to be alive.

But they also represent it as a symbol of female subordination and lack of voice. As such it is also a focus of young women's resistance, as they attempt to speak out on their own behalf:

One day as I was going to school I saw a girl in Busoga region. She met her father on the way but instead of kneeling down to greet her father she just stand ... But her father told her this is the warning. Next time I will slap you. And also on her way home she met her teacher who teaches social studies and also she did the same thing. She greet her teacher while stand. Her teacher told her not to do that again. That was the last I saw of her.

So sociocultural norms both limit young women's access to school and underpin their behaviours in school, limiting participation in relation to young men and adult teachers. Kakuru (2006) in her study of Ugandan education and gender, noted that male pupils are allocated

more talking time, and were more confident to participate in class. Girls and young women were noted to refrain from verbal exchange in class.

In the case of young sex workers in Thailand, they are at greater risk of HIV due to their youth, risk of sexual violence and access. Young sex workers typically have a low level of education and have poor communication skills, making it harder to negotiate condom use, and further, have been found to have little access to condoms due to financial constraints, which is why a number of them enter into sex work in the first instance (Moraros et al. 2012). Those who are exposed to sexual violence lack opportunity to prevent HIV and experience higher risk (Decker et al. 2010).

A review of the literature found little involvement of young women sex workers in Thailand in policies and programs (Cameron 2007; UNAIDS 2000). A recent study, involving focus group discussions with young women sex workers and NGO key informants in Bangkok, reflected this finding (Modderman 2013 forthcoming). At the provider level, those working with sex workers are invited to participate in advisory boards that are used to inform HIV policy and program development. Their participation is however largely tokenistic:

Even though they include sex workers in the group, the power pretty much lies on the authorities and not on the sex workers.

They only want to include sex workers to make it look good.

Despite this lack of participation, the sex worker participants were interested in increased participation and felt it was an important mechanism for preventing HIV.

It would be good for young sex workers to participate especially when it comes to sex education. They may get education in schools but it's not in-depth enough, it's not detailed enough. I'm not studying anymore but I have had basic education and I feel like I haven't received enough information on STI or HIV in school. In Thailand, from my experience, sex education is mainly how to prevent pregnancy but not so much on STIs.

### **A mixed model of participation in health for 'most at risk' populations**

Despite a positive consensus amongst scholars and practitioners around the benefits of participation in health and many examples of successful small scale participatory health initiatives, governments neglect participation in large scale and long term programs. Typically programs are designed and delivered using top down, professionally driven approaches (Rifkin and Pridmore 2001). Where mechanisms for participation in health do exist, these mechanisms can be formal or informal, short or long term. Often such mechanisms assume that communities are homogeneous and harmonious and they tend to reflect the views of a section of the community, such as, adults, tax payers, the wealthy, professional classes, men, and in general, the elite. As such, they rarely take into consideration the voices of marginal or 'most at risk' populations.



In this section, issues of participation in HIV programs by ‘most at risk’ populations are explored using a framework of four different mechanisms of participation (adapted from NHS 2002), designed to work concurrently in the health sector. Such a framework is valuable for exploring the issues of participation described above because it reflects the reality of health sector environments:

1. *Participation of users in a health program*: User groups, often represented by single issue NGOs, build partnerships with programs and powerful allies at local and national levels. An example of this in HIV participation is that of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) in South Africa. This NGO was founded by a group of HIV positive young adult women. TAC has been extremely effective and influential in establishing an activist lobby by, and for, young women (Campbell et al. 2010). However, this model is limited in relation to ‘most at risk’ populations as illustrated in the Uganda and Thailand contexts. In the case of TAC, young women as adults were better able to take a lead and access support. Furthermore, they did not face the same emphasis on submissive behaviour as a socio cultural norm as seen in the Ugandan example above. In the case of sex workers in the Thai context, they suffer from norms of submission and association with a stigmatising disease and illegal work. Creating a safe space for such groups to have a say is no easy task, and requires change to the social environment which promotes marginalisation (ibid).
2. *The informed views of citizens, juries, panels, focus groups*: Here communities are consulted in relation to a specific health program. Consultation is widely used by donors or governments as it ensures that they maintain control of the process of participation. For this model to be successful, it requires non-coercive participation, an understanding of the issue being presented, and the expectations of the engagement (Mubyazi et al. 2007). Unfortunately, too often consultation is a token effort towards the principles of participation in health and as such may have limited effect. It does not genuinely elicit what people think or empower and mobilise communities to take ownership or actions relating to a program. Further, it is unlikely to differentiate between different groups in a society such as those who are ‘most at risk’.
3. *Community development*: This is defined by being bottom up, community controlled, and inter-sectoral (Attree et al. 2011). In reality health programs tend to be top down, professionally controlled (with a major role played by funders) and health sector specific. Even if there is a genuine space for community voices, ‘most at risk’ populations usually have limited voice given that they may be stigmatised and powerless within the community. Instead community development is driven by ‘community leaders’ who are less likely to represent the interests of such groups.
4. *Local participation in accountability, scrutiny and regulation of health*: This concerns statutory and long term representation and as such it can give the community a powerful voice in health. Examples of this in practice are statutory community councils or lay representation on local health boards and programs. This model of participation is least likely to have representation from ‘most at risk’ populations; given its

formal and high level nature. Yet it could be argued that, given the statutory and long term nature of such structures, it would be appropriate to have ‘most at risk’ representation so as to give a greater and more established voice to these groups (NHS 2002; Percy-Smith 2006).

## Participation, ‘most at risk’ populations and HIV: ways forward

Typically ‘most at risk’ populations are not included in the different forms of participatory health. Where they may be included, for example, in informal, short term initiatives, invariably using community development or program consultation approaches, these are tokenistic at best, involving limited investment of time and resources. Reasons for this include a belief in expert driven paradigms, which ensure control over decision making by funder or policymakers hands.

We propose that a combination of the four mechanisms for participation in health programs, used concurrently, provides a best practice model. A more explicit and thought through involvement of ‘most at risk’ groups in a range of mechanisms would give wider scope for involvement, both short and long term, and in both formal and informal mechanisms. To achieve participation the following steps are recommended:

1. Invest in time to develop relationships with those from ‘most at risk’ populations to build trust and ensure that they will benefit from the interaction. Greater time investment will further ensure that participants have a deep understanding of the issue being presented.
2. Utilise a range of alternate strategies such as formal, statutory and long term strategies as well as the more informal and short term options to serve as avenues of engagement. For example, engagement may involve ‘boardroom’ style meetings or it may take the form of ‘field visits’, attending social or community gatherings and using alternative methods of engagement such as drawing, drama or photo-voice to get diverse perspectives as opposed to traditional oral discussions. Offering a range of possibilities for ‘most at risk’ populations will serve to open doors to participation in HIV programs.
3. Sharing of power between organisations, professionals and those deemed to be ‘most at risk’ populations. Often organisations and professionals are seen as having the power to make changes, whereas the power to enact and sustain change lies with those at the heart of the experience. Thus sharing of power requires will and dedication to explicitly engage marginalised communities and support the emergence of leaders who can help to give a voice to the ‘most at risk’.

A number of innovative community participation practices are unfolding, yet there is need for a continuing and strong participation agenda with regards to HIV programs. The challenge is to upscale treatment and care programs (UNAIDS 2011); shift the prevention agenda from pro or abstinence-only strategies to support condom use (Campbell and Cornish 2010; Cohen 2008; WHO 2004); and normalise and integrate HIV into health, as part of wider changes in attitudes towards sexual rights

(Campbell and Cornish 2010). Participatory health can support these efforts by ensuring that they are appropriate and acceptable to ‘most at risk’ groups, and that they support a process of empowerment for these groups so that they have greater choices. Based on the recommendations above, action for participation in HIV programs should be prioritised alongside accountability systems to ensure that the views of ‘most at risk’ groups are represented, and that these views are transferred into a reality which continues to address the problem of HIV.

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# Bureaucratic reform for participatory development: Bureaucracy and community in implementing the National Program for Community Empowerment Urban in Surabaya, Indonesia

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## Introduction

This paper concerns the relationship between bureaucratic reform and participatory development. It examines whether bureaucracy is becoming more citizen/community<sup>1</sup> focused by exploring the implementation of the National Program for Community Empowerment Urban (PNPM-Urban) in Surabaya, Indonesia. PNPM-Urban is the first nationwide poverty reduction program for urban areas in Indonesia. Together with PNPM-rural, it signals the shift away from centralised governance processes towards participatory development. The paper critically examines the extent to which the reforms have resulted in more benefits for the community by analysing the interface between bureaucracy and community in the community driven PNPM-Urban.

Bureaucracy is understood as a rational tool for executing the Indonesian government's commitment towards poverty reduction. At local government level it is responsible for achieving the PNPM-Urban objectives. It is assessed on the basis of its effectiveness and efficiency in achieving predetermined results. This includes local government staff/bureaucrats involvement in PNPM-Urban implementation in Surabaya at the city, sub-district and urban village level.

In defining community, Cohen (1985) has two related ideas: that the members of a group have something in common that distinguishes them from the members of other putative groups in a significant way. Community thus implies simultaneously both similarity and difference. Within contemporary development, community, as a unit, is the typical site for participatory projects or community development (Meade and Shaw 2007). In PNPM-Urban, the target area, a *kelurahan* (urban village), is regarded as one community.

This research is greatly influenced by Claver et al's (1997) model of bureaucratic culture which is characterised by hierarchical structure, task division, formal rules/regulation, reluctance to change, authoritarian management style, and limited scope for initiatives and innovations as opposed to citizen oriented culture characterised by a focus on serving citizens, quality service, shared values, frequent contact with citizens and advancement of citizen roles.

This research incorporates interface analysis, which argues that interfaces typically occur at points where different and often conflicting, lived experiences or social fields intersect (Long 1999).<sup>2</sup> The methodology was based on semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Fieldwork was conducted in February to July 2009 and included interviews with 40 informants.

This research finds that even after over a decade of reform in Indonesia, rather than citizen oriented culture, it is bureaucratic culture that is more prevalent in PNPM-Urban bureaucracy in Surabaya. This has affected the interface between bureaucracy and community in the program and the overall successful implementation of the program.

## Bureaucratic reform in Indonesia

Efforts to reform the bureaucracy began in January 2001, with the implementation of decentralisation known locally as *otonomi daerah*, literally regional autonomy. Together with decentralisation, the adoption and further advancement of good governance in Indonesia has provided avenues for further bureaucratic reform at both central and local government levels. All bureaucracy including that at local government level has been forced to follow the principles of transparency, accountability, participation and rule of law.

Yet, with slow decision-making processes, organisational inertia and limited collaboration and cooperation between the bureaucracy and community any reform strategies are fraught with problems.

## PNPM-Urban: Principles and mechanism

PNPM-Urban is one of the largest urban poverty reduction programs in Indonesia. Previously known as the Urban Poverty Project its overall objective is to ensure that the urban poor in the program locations benefit from improved socioeconomic and local governance conditions. It involves community participation and empowerment, competition for funds, and transparent decision making. The overall coordination of the program is the responsibility of the Directorate General of Human Settlement of the Ministry of Public Works. A national management consultant assists with program management, organisation, reporting, procurement and training, and the hiring of community facilitators led by a city coordinator (DGHS 2008).

From the beginning, the existing local administrations (city, sub-district, and urban village government) have been involved in program implementation. The program identifies a *kelurahan* (urban village), as the target area. The target *kelurahan* community is then invited to form a voluntary and democratically structured organisation, known as *badan keswadayaan masyarakat* (BKM or community organisation) and *kelompok swadaya masyarakat* (KSM or community group).

The project transfers a block grant to a targeted *kelurahan*. The amount varies according to its population with a range of Rp. 150million-Rp. 350million — a relatively large amount in the Indonesia context. Once a BKM is formed, KSMs are required to submit proposals including development plans, prepared through four to six month participatory processes. The grants can be used for an ‘open menu’, such as for infrastructural, social, and economic activities, which the community believes to be a development priority (DGHS 2008).

## **The implementation of PNPM-Urban in Surabaya**

The initial implementation of PNPM-Urban in Surabaya (2007–09) was controversial, following the City Government’s unwillingness to provide co-shared funding for the program. The initial implementation was marked by a claim that the City Government of Surabaya refused to implement the program resulting in PNPM-Urban being not fully implemented in 2008 and 2009.

Early 2009, the Surabaya Government initiated a solution that instead of providing fresh funds for co-shared funding it would contribute to PNPM-Urban with matching programs (a largely top down approach). But, the central Government refused the matching program. This resulted in delayed implementation while the bureaucracy was waiting for instruction from their heads/their mayor as to how they should be involved in the program.

After several discussions and negotiations among the program stakeholders in 2010 the City Government finally agreed to provide co-shared funding for implementation. Since then PNPM-Urban has been implemented fully in Surabaya with local government and bureaucratic support.

## **Bureaucracy and reform: Key ingredients for development?**

As the instrument and/or institution of the state and/or government, the overall mandate of bureaucracy is to translate government policies and programs into actions. In the context of development, as Turner and Hulme (1997) explain, although often blamed for poor developmental performance, bureaucracy remains an essential and vitally important instrument of development. Importantly the focus on community as subjects instead of objects of development and more broadened governance, demands a different role for bureaucracy requiring it to shift towards more democratic governance and citizen participation (Cope 1997; Claver et al 1999; Hirschmann 1999; Harwood 2004). In this sense, bureaucracy, which previously was the dominant actor, has been forced to act more as facilitator and/or enabling actor in the ‘new’ development, creating more spaces for many other stakeholders, especially community, to be actively involved in development activities. Unfortunately, this shift is susceptible to conflicts, especially if the bureaucracy, used to the privilege of being the only responsible and dominant actor, is not ready to release some of its power and domination. On other hand, community is often not ready to carry the new

responsibilities. This research clearly reflects this tendency for conflict.

Lessons learned from the previous UPP notes that bypassing local governments does little to foster a productive or sustainable relationship with communities. This has given more space for bureaucracy to get more involved in the program. Bureaucratic culture rather than citizen-oriented culture is more prevalent in PNPM bureaucracy in Surabaya<sup>3</sup> and how the bureaucracy is involved in the program poses challenges for the program and its interface with community. This is worsened by a shocked community that is not ready to take more power and responsibility.

As informants in this research maintain, the first challenge for the successful implementation of PNPM-Urban in Surabaya is the bureaucracy. As the most recent community driven development initiative, PNPM-Urban is eager to promote a paradigm shift from bureaucracy as implementer to bureaucracy as facilitator. Yet, as this research finds, this shift has not been achieved and this is mostly due to the existing bureaucratic culture. Strict hierarchy, adherence to law, and *Tupoksi*<sup>4</sup>, as well as orientation towards obeying commands and orders have led the bureaucracy to impede the successful implementation and sustainability of the project. This unfortunately has further affected the way the bureaucracy interfaces with the community.

## **Bureaucracy and community interface: An uneasy relationship**

In the interface analysis, the notion of interface tends to express the image of some kind of two-sided articulation or face to face confrontation (Long 1999:1) with interfaces typically occurring at points where different and often conflicting, lived experience or social fields intersect. It happens in social situations in which ‘interactions become oriented around problems of bridging, accommodating, segregating or contesting social, evaluative and cognitive standpoints’. In this context, interface analysis is most relevant for understanding cultural diversity, social difference, and conflict inherent in processes of development intervention. More importantly, it enables an analysis of critical junctures involving differences of normative value and social interest. This involves not only understanding the struggles and power differentials occur between the parties involved, but also an attempt to reveal the dynamics of cultural accommodation that makes it possible for the various worldviews to interact (loc.cit 1999; Roberts 2001).

### *Inherent conflicts*

Apart from the problem of co-shared funding PNPM-Urban implementation in Surabaya has also been marked by conflicts between bureaucracy and community. As findings in this research reveal, in many areas, community organisations that sought to be developed to foster community self-help development (the BKMs) could not work in synergy with *kelurahan* governments. As the program has been implemented and sustained in the community, the BKMs which are mostly dominated by the elite community

members, have become exclusive institutions, with members who feel that their institutions are independent from the government and thus refused to be monitored by the bureaucracy.

This exclusiveness and the large size of PNPM-Urban grants (from Rp.150million to Rp.350million)<sup>5</sup> managed in BKMs have further led to misuse of funds by BKM members. Rarely involved in the disbursement of PNPM-Urban grants, or in program monitoring and evaluation, a number of bureaucrats, including the head and staffs in the city planning body and the local community empowerment body, the PNPM-Urban executing agency in Surabaya had been called as witnesses by the police to several cases involving misuse of PNPM funds. This has created trauma among Surabaya bureaucracies in relations with BKMs and PNPM-Urban in general.

### *Cultural diversity/social difference*

The presumed antithetical characters of the bureaucracy and community can potentially threaten the interface and further collaboration/partnership between bureaucracy and community. On the one hand bureaucracy emphasises expertise, pragmatic, highly focused relationships, impersonality, and rules, while on the other hand community emphasis on open, diffuse, effective relationship and informality (Litwak et al 1970; Litwak and Meyer 1966; Mott 1973).

Following the City Government's unwillingness to provide co-shared funding for the implementation of PNPM-Urban in Surabaya and the delay in implementation, the bureaucracy chose to stop all its involvement in the program and merely waited for orders. Moreover, one of the reasons for the City Government not to provide co-shared funding for PNPM-Urban is it is of the opinion that there is no legal framework for the funding. This once again confirms that most of the time bureaucratic conduct is determined by the rule of law, a typical characteristic of bureaucratic organisation.

PNPM-Urban has put emphasis on collaboration and partnership between bureaucracy and community. Yet, rather than collaboration/partnerships, there is an uneasy relationship. The fear of losing its predominant roles and power, for example, has led PNPM-Urban bureaucracy in Surabaya to hesitate to get more involved in the program. The increasingly powerful target community is one of the factors that drives this hesitancy. More interestingly, this research also finds the tendency that once community is given 'the space' or holds power, they can exclude bureaucracy, implementing the project without the facilities or supports and control of bureaucracy. This is confirmed by some bureaucracy informants, who were rarely consulted in the implementation of the program in the community. Unfortunately, the increasingly powerful community is often dominated by the elite who create barriers against the community gaining access to participatory development.

### **Conclusion**

This paper confirms that rather than putting emphasis on citizen-oriented culture, as bureaucratic reform aims to

achieve, it is bureaucratic culture, which is more prevalent in PNPM-Urban in Surabaya. Within the PNPM-Urban bureaucracy, from controller and implementer of development to facilitator, participatory development has not been attained. This has affected the interface between bureaucracy and community and overall, the successful implementation of the program. Findings also reveal how the increasingly powerful elite communities may exclude bureaucracy in the program implementation creating barriers for community access to participatory development.

Finally, this research has revealed the complexities of participatory development without the support of enabling bureaucracy. More initiatives for bureaucratic reforms are highly recommended, and should start not only within the bureaucracy but also at grass-roots level within the community.

### **Notes**

- 1 Though often used interchangeably, the terms community and citizen do not necessarily conflate as being the same. Within development discourse the notion of community is more prominent, while within state or public administration discourse the notion of citizen is more prominent. While citizens are undoubtedly should be the ends of all public sector, state or bureaucracy's orientation, citizens certainly hold self-interests. In this context, citizens have responsibilities to look beyond themselves but take on the challenge of being part of community (Harwood 2004).
- 2 Please see Claver et al (1997) for detail discussion on the model of bureaucratic culture and citizen oriented culture and Long (1997) and Roberts (2001) for more detail discussion on interface analysis.
- 3 For more detailed discussion on bureaucratic culture and citizen oriented culture in PNPM Urban in Surabaya, see Asmorowati (2010).
- 4 In Indonesia all bureaucracy tasks and activities have been outlined in a 'Tupoksi', standing for *Tugas, Pokok dan Fungsi* or Main Tasks and Functions. *Tupoksi* is a legal document, which comes in the form of laws, regulations, or policy document with main purpose to outline the main tasks and functions of each public positions/organisation. It thus determines the authority and organisational mandate of each government employee, including bureaucracy.
- 5 Current exchange is approximately Rp. 10.000/ AUD, so the amount is equivalent to AUD 10.000–35.000), which can be considered huge for (poor) Indonesian community.

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# Midnight in Paris? Case studies of participation in the new post-Paris world

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## Introduction

Gil Pender seems suited to different times. Played by Owen Wilson in Woody Allen's film 'Midnight in Paris,' Gil is magically transported each night back to Paris of the 1920s, where he feels most at home — rubbing shoulders with Ernest Hemingway and Gertrude Stein is much more exciting and meaningful than living in drab, superficial 2010.

Gil's fiancée Ines describes him as one of those

people who live in the past. People who think that their lives would be happier, if they lived in an earlier time.

Her pedantic former college flame pontificates that

the name for this fallacy is called 'golden age thinking'... the erroneous notion that a different time period is better than the one one's living in. It's a flaw in the romantic imagination of those people who find it difficult to cope with the present.

Like Gil Pender, many of us working in international NGOs (INGOs) share Gil Pender's nostalgia for the past, a past when we cut our teeth on participatory methodologies and implemented community development projects.

But since the Paris Declaration of 2005, times have changed. Now, partner countries are to exercise effective leadership over their development policies and strategies, and co-ordinate development actions. Donors are to base their overall support on partner countries' development strategies, institutions and procedures.

What is the role for INGO staff in this post-Paris world? Three modalities can be seen. Firstly, there are situations in which our organisations will still directly implement projects, particularly in contexts of poor governance or in emergencies. Here, the full range of participatory methodologies we grew up using will be indispensable to achieving just and enduring outcomes.

In other situations, we will work to achieve positive change in partnership with local government or civil society, or with both. In fact, that is how most INGOs work today and in this mode we continue to practice the participatory methods that worked before.

Increasingly, however, in the post-Paris world, this second mode of operation is the equivalent of fielding three teams on a football field: one team is out of place and the game is confused. One team of players on this metaphorical field, developing country governments, is building stronger institutions and (according to the Paris Declaration) should be held accountable for development results as duty bearers.

The other players, citizens living in poverty, have the right to development and to active participation in their own societies according to international agreement and legislation across the world. But the third team, INGO staff, often behaves like Gil Pender, dreaming of a previous world, confusing matters by remaining on the field — assuming duty-bearer responsibilities, weakening the power of citizens.

A third modality is explored through case studies included in this paper. As developing country governments build their capacity to fulfill rights, leading even where they might not initially be financially capable, and as (excluded) citizens become active in claiming their rights, the following case studies illustrate how INGOs are finding ways to play catalytic roles supporting both 'teams', instead of invading the football pitch.

## Case study — Guatemala

In 2004, Plan International celebrated 25 years working in rural communities in Guatemala. Alongside the celebrations, country office senior management decided to use this milestone to assess program results. They decided to review sectors that had seen substantial investment over this period. Evaluations of work in water and sanitation, education, and health were carried out by independent, specialised local NGOs.

Results were revealing. For example, an assessment of water quality in 447 rural communities found that 97 per cent were accessing unsafe water. Evaluations of basic health and primary education programs revealed similar outcomes: initial positive results had faded over the years.

At the same time, when people in the Mayan communities where Plan was working were asked who was responsible for realising their rights, the great majority named NGOs. This was a surprising finding, given recent peace accords that had led to a recommitment by government to support these poor communities.

Reflection on these results led to deep change for Plan in Guatemala, a shift in approach based on addressing child poverty as a human rights issue. As seen by Plan's country office senior management at the time, this shift would place active citizenship and government's constitutional obligations at the center of program design and implementation.

Fortunately, Guatemala's constitution includes a solid legal framework and establishes the required institutional foundation for such an approach — embracing free access to basic health services and primary education, in addition to a set of rights to survival, development, participation, and protection.

Over the next few years, as a result, Plan stepped aside, moving into a fundamentally different role (Gneiting et al 2009). In part because a devastating civil conflict had just ended, a non-confrontational approach was adopted, bringing citizens and government together in common cause.

Guatemala's constitution was discussed in the communities where Plan was working, emphasising the fundamental power of citizens, alongside their responsibility to be actively involved supporting and monitoring state institutions. Parallel discussions were held with government officials, focused on their constitutional responsibilities and their duty to provide the services mandated by law.

Plan gradually began a shift from supporting community managed projects to supporting, technically and financially, state institutions responsible for fulfilling child rights.

## **Key challenges**

### *Implementing staff changes*

In retrospect, the greatest challenge faced in this change was internal. Shifting Plan staff's views required time and significant attention from senior management. Every aspect of the strategy needed to be discussed, tested and accepted by staff, because the success or failure of the new strategy depended on them.

Staff readily accepted that the evaluations that were carried out in 2004 indicated an overwhelming need for change; they could see that the organisation could not continue as before, that community members were too dependent and passive. They recognised that government should, and could, be more accountable.

But there were still major internal obstacles. Firstly, since Plan had worked in Guatemala for so long, most staff had been with the agency for at least a decade. They had been recruited to manage community projects, and they had been trained to implement them based on a set of guidelines defined by headquarters. The change meant that they needed new skills.

Staff needed to learn to work with line ministries to build government capabilities to realise rights, aiming to ensure that the ministries assume management of all rights-related programs. Finally, staff needed to learn how to support communities' understanding of rights, promoting their ability to take collective action to claim rights through active citizenship. In effect, moving away from a project based relationship with communities.

This shift took time. The new strategy was revised, reshaped and approved via multiple discussions involving all staff over a year. Country office leadership realised that the first 'community' in this shift was Plan staff themselves, having to change before leading others through the transformation process.

Throughout that year, during which rights-based concepts and actions were checked and compared with the realities in local communities, staff were challenged to practice these ideas in their own lives, as Guatemalan

citizens. Active citizenship was a concept that applied to all constituencies, starting with Plan staff.

### *Implementing programmatic changes*

Programmatic changes were implemented gradually at community level. Commitments made for ongoing projects — including direct assistance — were honored. Programs where state institutions were slow to reach communities, due to lack of resources or political will, were implemented by Plan, but agreement was reached with these institutions to ensure that they approved, and led, all activities. This cleared the way for state institutions to ultimately take over.

The driving force underlying the shift was that the commitments made in Guatemala's constitution must be made real to all citizens. Those citizens gradually began to advocate for themselves, with Plan's support, encouraging state action.

An unexpected result of this process was that Plan staff morale improved dramatically and measurably.

Another important internal obstacle was that the old way of working had enhanced the power of NGO staff. They decided what projects were implemented, and where. Plan's new approach shifted this power back to citizens and the state, where it belonged.

### *Strengthening local capacity*

An external review of Plan Guatemala's approach was carried out (Bruno-van Vijfeijken et al 2009). Plan's focus on strengthening the capacities of citizens and government, and emphasis on the practical exercise of rights instead of human rights education, was seen as appropriate for the social and political context in Guatemala. The approach of increasing government services to rural and excluded populations was seen as sensible. It was noted that the most significant change for Plan was the redefinition of its relations with communities and a greater engagement with government institutions on a municipal and national level. It was clearly shown that Plan staff had a coherent vision of the new approach and a high level of affirmation of the new strategy.

Finally, the evaluation pointed to evidence of greater agency and empowerment of communities and more sustainable impact because the government was slowly assuming its responsibility for the provision of services.

## **Case study — Cambodia**

After the general election organised by the United Nations in 1993, Cambodia's National Assembly was directly elected by citizens for the first time since the Khmer-Rouge era, for a term of five years. A process of decentralisation and deconcentration of government was introduced at commune level in 2002 and, in 2009, district and provincial councils were indirectly elected by commune councilors.

By law, each level of sub-national government is required to formulate development plans for its five year mandate, using a participatory approach involving at least 60 per cent of households in each constituency.



ChildFund Australia has been working in Cambodia since 2007, beginning in Svay Rieng province. In 2010, Mr Uy Than, then district governor of Svay Chrum, Svay Rieng province, asked ChildFund to help facilitate the development of the district's five year development plan.

Taking note of the experience of Plan in Guatemala outlined above, and noting the requirement related to broad participation, ChildFund Cambodia responded to Mr Than's request in two ways. Firstly, ChildFund designed a project aimed at helping the district council understand their role and responsibilities related to development needs in the area. At the same time, ChildFund supported the district council to develop and implement their five year plan according to national standards. Finally, the agency worked to help mobilise local citizens, particularly youth, to participate in, and influence, the process.

Extensive practical training was given to the district council planning team, and to citizens, by an external consultant who is an advisor to the National Committee for Democratic Development. As a result, the district planning team conducted orientations with all stakeholders, including commune councils, on the planning process. The planning team then organised community consultations with villagers to identify their needs, consulting separately with children and youth. All data collected from different stakeholders were consolidated and a plan was drafted at the district.

This draft plan was reviewed openly with stakeholders, including youth and NGOs, and revised accordingly for district council approval before presentation to provincial authorities for approval. Finally, the plan was printed with support from ChildFund and disseminated to all stakeholders for their use.

Svay Chrum's five year development plan was the first to be approved among Cambodia's 186 districts.

Having a plan is only the first step of a long journey. At a recent workshop to reflect on experience with this effort thus far (Rasmussen 2012), ChildFund Cambodia reconfirmed its journey on this path. A key priority emerging from the reflection workshop was a commitment to expanding staff knowledge, awareness, and rededication to this effort, in part by agreeing to pilot direct funding of a project identified in the five year development plan.

ChildFund staff roles will change in fundamental ways. Firstly, they will learn to play an advisory role to support government decentralisation, mastering relevant government systems, strategies and policies. They will need to master Cambodia's constitution, government conventions and treaties, and laws related to human rights, especially child rights. And they will learn to establish strategic collaboration with government to reinforce decentralised planning, by identifying the right government counterparts and partners to work with and support (to build their capacity and to encourage their ownership of their obligations). Secondly, staff will learn to promote active citizens, and, finally, ChildFund staff will learn advocacy skills in order to influence and promote deconcentration, decentralisation, accountability, and transparency.

## Conclusions and recommendations

These case studies describe how INGOs are beginning to adapt to the new, post-Paris reality. Staff are learning new skills and roles: firstly, they are mastering national legislation and planning, so that they can enable inclusive, democratic governance at local levels. Both case studies included in this paper report experiences in this area, showing that staff are gaining fluency in the legal and programmatic framework for the realisation of human rights in their context. This is enabling them to bridge specific national commitments to particular human rights with the situations of excluded people.

INGO staff are learning how to mobilise excluded populations. Ironically, in our rush to embrace results-based management, logical frameworks, and linear models of human development (McPeak forthcoming), we have lost an entire generation of staff who came from activist backgrounds. The case studies included in this paper<sup>1</sup> describe efforts made to begin to recover these skills — applying participatory methods in a new context.

In the film 'Midnight in Paris,' Gil Pender comes to realise that we should make the most of the times we live in, and not focus our energies on past realities. Near the end of the film he explains to Adriana, who he has met in 1920s Paris, that he

was trying to escape (his) present the same way you're trying to escape yours, to a golden age. And he has an insight, 'a minor one,' that 'I have to, you know, get rid of my illusions ... that I'd be happier in the past is probably one of them'.

Likewise, INGO workers need to adapt the tools that worked well pre-Paris, such as participatory methodologies, to our times. That means that in many, perhaps most, contexts, our role now is to help governments fulfill their legal obligations towards all, especially those most excluded; and to help people (especially those most excluded) participate as active citizens.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Another similar effort is underway in Uganda, supported by ChildFund Australia; other agencies are exploring similar shifts.

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# Perspectives on participation and partnerships: Participatory planning and practice in Vanuatu

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## Background

With 35 years hindsight, the current study and practice of participatory development in the Pacific seems to offer little that is new. The benefits and the challenges, the lessons, largely unlearned, have been known for many years. However, with the recent recognition of the important role of religious or faith-based organisations in development (Clarke 2011:3) and AusAID's formal recognition of the practical value of working in partnership with civil society, including the Pacific churches, the situation is beginning to change.

Australia's Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness and AusAID's response to it, *An Effective Aid Program for Australia*, discuss the need for new approaches to aid delivery including through partnerships with civil society. The main benefits of this are seen as 'civil society's networks, perspectives and resources that the Australian government does not have' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011:180) and ...

their presence on the ground ... their connections with local communities, their ability to engage on policy issues and deliver assistance directly to those who need it most (AusAID 2011:55).

AusAID recognises that engagement in community partnerships can be risky and may require skills within AusAID that go beyond traditional development areas ... AusAID would

... need to adjust to engagement with a range of partners including NGOs and community groups ... greater resourcing will be needed in partnership areas including dedicated senior management (op.cit:182).

## Introduction

This case study reviews the partnerships and opportunities for community participation in AusAID Vanuatu's Churches Partnership Program (CPP). In particular, it considers different perspectives of partnership and AusAID's capacity to engage effectively as a partner in the program. The study is based on a review of the Vanuatu CPP undertaken in 2011–12.

In a country where government has little influence or reach outside the urban areas, AusAID's decision to establish a partnership with the churches was pragmatic and influenced to some extent by an existing program in Papua New Guinea and the findings of the 2007 'Drivers of change' analysis of Vanuatu's socio-political and economic context which recommended that:

... a coherent approach to service delivery will need to draw on non-state actors already present at local level, including churches, chiefs and community-based

organizations ... no credible service delivery strategy can afford to ignore them (Cox M et al. 2007:69–70).

AusAID Vanuatu was aware that the churches in Vanuatu, as in most Pacific Island countries, have well established village congregations as well as extensively linked networks at local, national and international levels which are recognised as important building blocks for participatory development. Van Heck (2003:2) illustrates the importance of common religious and/or ideological belief systems in providing the motivation for improving service delivery and engaging in poverty alleviation and Thomas (2010) has shown the strong influence of church-based communities on maternal and child health. In the Pacific, as in some other developing countries, it is the churches, not the state, that provide the bulk of health and education services (Clarke 2011:2) and in some Pacific Island countries, including Vanuatu, have done so for over 100 years. In Vanuatu, it is the churches together with the traditional governance systems, that today provide conflict resolution and the moral authority that underlies law and order in more remote communities (Thomas 2005:3).<sup>1</sup>

The Vanuatu church partnership approach was also influenced by the 2009 Port Moresby Declaration (AusAID 2009) which calls for mutual accountability, shared priorities, country-driven approaches, working with partners' systems, and mutual trust. Using these guidelines, this study considers how the following factors have influenced relationships between program partners and the opportunities for community participation, mutual accountability and trust, collaboration, shared priorities, and improved development opportunities:

- the composition of the partnership and level of partner involvement;
- the cultural context and partner expectations of what constitutes partnership; and
- the structure of the program and the processes in place for participating in program research, design, planning and monitoring.

## Background to the Vanuatu CPP

The Vanuatu CPP provides an innovative, small scale and relatively risky approach to development assistance. It is unusual in that it does not have a managing contractor, the design has no logframe or pre-determined, long term objectives or activities but allows the flexibility to take advantage of existing and emerging opportunities. It also takes advantage of a population that is 95 per cent actively Christian (Government of Vanuatu 2009:8).

The budget of the CPP was \$A4 million over three years. Its purpose, as outlined in the program design document, is for:

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The Vanuatu Christian Council and Churches in Vanuatu to individually and collectively play an increasingly recognised and effective role in improving governance and service delivery at national and local levels.

The major program focus is on rural communities who comprise approximately 74 per cent of the total Vanuatu population (Government of Vanuatu 2009:5), few of whom have regular contact with the state or state services and most of whom are poor.

## Composition of the partnership

### *The Vanuatu partners*

The Church partnership comprises 14 different organisations: six Vanuatu churches,<sup>2</sup> the five Australian NGO church partners (ANGOs)<sup>3</sup> who support and oversee management of church involvement in the program; the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC) — the churches' umbrella group; the Government of Vanuatu (GoV) and AusAID. The churches in the program represent 67 per cent of the country's Christian population.

### *AusAID Vanuatu*

The AusAID program partners include a ni-Vanuatu staff member from a well known and respected family providing in-depth understanding of Vanuatu, and two other officers who also oversaw a number of other programs.

### *The Government of Vanuatu*

On paper, the GoV is a program partner. In practice it was sporadically involved in the initial discussions but, with the exception of the GoV Department of Women's Affairs, who occasionally attended meetings, there was no government involvement. This was unexpected as the churches play an important role in supporting the delivery of health, education and conflict resolution services.

### *The Australian partners*

The Australian NGO partners are the development arms of Australian churches which in the past provided mission support to their churches in Vanuatu. In the case of the Presbyterian, Anglican and Seventh Day Adventist churches the relationship between Vanuatu and Australia has been both strong and very long standing with a high level of mutual trust developed over 90 to 100 years.

The complexities of the partnership, including the large number of partners and marked differences in church capacity, administration, size and location would not seem an auspicious start. It could be anticipated that this diversity, the different island locations of the church headquarters (Espiritu Santo and Efate) the five Australian based ANGOS (Sydney and Melbourne) and the resulting difficulties in communication would make a working partnership difficult not only psychologically but also physically and linguistically as in Vanuatu there are over 100 local languages and a marked division between English and French speakers. In fact, this diversity supported the establishment of strong collaboration.

Table 1: The churches in the Church Partnership Program, Vanuatu

Church	Approx number of members	Percentage of Christian population
Presbyterian	70,000	33.0
Anglican (Church of Melanesia)	25,000	13.4
Seventh Day Adventist	20,000	10.8
Church of Christ	8,000	3.9
Assemblies of God	7,000	3.5
Apostolic Church	5,000	2.3

Source: Compiled from Vanuatu Churches Partnership Program Baseline Report 2008:6

## The CPP organisational structure

The CPP is organisationally complex with different funding arrangements between the ANGOS, their Vanuatu church partners and the VCC. This framework allows for the diverse church structures, capacities, hierarchies and ways of operating and recognises the benefits of leaving direct engagement with AusAID to the Australian church NGOs. However, it meant a large amount of paper work for church partners and for AusAID. To function well, it also needed excellent organisation, communication and collaboration and more importantly, initial clarification on exactly how the partnership was to function and what was to be incorporated within the different management roles. This was initially overlooked.

The administrative structure of the CPP includes a small Governing Council which provides oversight of the program. The key decision making group, the Partnership Group, comprises representatives of all partner organisations. Each ANGO manages the administration of its church partner including overseeing the contracts, budgets and the relationship with AusAID. The Vanuatu churches are individually responsible for their own program development, strategies, activity plans, budgets, financial management, implementation and evaluation, calling on assistance from their ANGO when necessary. Training in research, evaluation, budgeting and financial management, including MYOB, was provided to the different church administrators.

## The partner experience and expectations

The external review of the program found that the partnership, while overly complex and the meetings frequent, long and expensive, was effective in providing a consolidated and collaborative approach to key development issues and very unexpectedly, in promoting friendship, collaboration and trust between the different churches. Prior to the program, church leaders report they never had discussions with the other churches and were suspicious of one another. By November 2011, churches were sharing program strategies and implementing collaborative development activities and training workshops. The reasons they gave for this included the regular and

open discussions made possible by the partnership activities, the flexibility of the program and the opportunity provided for representatives of the churches to come together — often for the first time — to share information, to participate and to build trust. The collaboration and shared activities were an unexpected achievement in the two short years the program had been in operation.

Although internationally there has been engagement in participatory development through civil society organisations for many years, and most of the challenges and achievements of partnerships are known, there has been limited recognition that partnerships and participation may mean different things in different cultures and that this influences partnership expectations and dynamics. In addition, there remains limited recognition that donor conventions regarding program design, monitoring and evaluation are seldom conducive to effective partnerships with civil society organisations but frequently isolate them from participation in planning or monitoring (Thomas 2002:65–70).

In the CPP, the church partners understood and expected inequality among partners — this was considered the cultural norm. An equitable alliance between AusAID and the churches was considered impossible as inequality was inherent in economic and political control. Churches saw their relationship with their ANGO partner as a mother/ daughter relationship and more recently as a big sister/little sister one.<sup>4</sup> They were relationships of long-standing trust. For the two small churches that did not previously have a long standing relationship with their ANGO, this was an unequal and initially difficult partnership where trust and friendship took time to develop.

However, the way the partnership functioned between the churches was considered by ni-Vanuatu to be in line with their shared religious commitment — ‘sharing, willingness to assist one another, trust and opportunity to participate openly in discussion’ even when there were minor difficulties for some partners. For example, the relationship between the smaller churches and their ANGO could sometimes be uneasy, most particularly over group decision making — ‘they want things done too quickly’ and ‘in the Australian way’ rather than the slower and more collaborative Vanuatu practice of discussion and reaching towards consensus. Vanuatu representatives considered it a lack of partnership when the bulk of discussion in the Partnership Group meetings was in English. Neither English, nor the language of development, were always understood, resulting in decisions made in the Partnership Group meetings sometimes being revoked after informal group discussions in Bislama — the widely spoken Vanuatu pidgin. In response to this, AusAID initiated additional training in ‘development processes’ and following partnership negotiations, agreed to meetings being held largely in Bislama.

AusAID, while recognised as the key partner, was not what the ni-Vanuatu church representatives considered a ‘true partner’. The problem had little to do with AusAID as a donor or the individuals involved, but lack of AusAID staff and staff time to participate fully. The churches expected their greater involvement and openness as well as

greater availability of AusAID staff to help and explain development problems, and provide more hands on, practical support. The limitations to AusAID ‘partnership’ were not explained.

The GoV was conspicuous by its on-going lack of participation in the program — a situation mirrored in other AusAID-supported civil society programs including those with Kastom Governance, Wan Smolbag and the Women’s Crisis Centre. Among the negative impacts of this for the CPP were the Ministry of Education complaining of AusAID financial support for education going directly to the churches without involving them and a GoV ban on the VCC holding public demonstrations following a small, peaceful VCC-organised demonstration in Port Vila asking that the Government of Vanuatu provide the public with information on why they were considering accession to the World Trade Organisation and what the likely impact of this would be.<sup>5</sup> Had there been government participation in the program it is unlikely that these misunderstandings would have occurred.

## **Participation and the process of program design**

The CPP provides a rare and valuable model of participation in program design. The design is innovative and unlike any of the many designs I have seen. The usual design process and structure are not conducive to partnership or participation. They are frequently undertaken by a consultant with limited or no contact with those who will be actively involved in the project or those expected to benefit from it; designs are linear and built around a logframe; most local people involved in their implementation have no knowledge of the design as it is often considered commercial in confidence. It is still typical for big programs to be managed by commercial consulting companies who hire advisers, researchers and administrators allowing no opportunity for true partnership with local organisations or governments (Thomas 2002: 65–71). The CPP is at the opposite end of the development design spectrum in terms of process, participation, partnership and design structure.

### *The situation analysis*

Prior to the decision to go ahead with a Vanuatu CPP program design, AusAID supported extensive consultation between the churches and GoV. It sought a unique Vanuatu perspective on the role of the churches in governance and service delivery through a participatory review of each participating church. Following training in hands-on empirical research and analysis, church members conducted research among their urban and rural leaders, women, members of the community, young people, village chiefs and other traditional leaders seeking opinions on development issues, the role and effectiveness of the church, and its role in service delivery. As several of those involved recalled:

When all reports were complete, all church leaders and representatives came together to analyse and discuss ... It was a huge learning curve, with churches learning

about themselves, answering questions they had never been asked before ... Each church talked about what they learned about themselves and then talked to other churches — their structure, what was their capacity, who had capacity, what organisational capacity was there and what needed to be developed ... We thought about the role of the churches in Vanuatu society ... and what was the role of government and what was the churches' role in government and governance ... We discussed the mix of social and political structures. What was the churches' role in politics and what was its political structure. (Pers. Comm. amalgamation of multiple participant comments, November 14 2011).

The resulting document — the Vanuatu Churches Partnership Program Baseline Report — is a detailed analysis of each churches' capacity, structure, involvement in service delivery, church leaders' opinions and what their congregations feel they need. It provided the building block for the future program partnership.

### *Participatory design*

The program designer/facilitator worked with representatives of the ANGOs and churches starting from the churches' goals, objectives and capacity and, together with them, considered how the design might look. It was seen by partners to be a collaborative effort and churches saw their ideas incorporated. There was a deliberate attempt to make the design document simple and straight forward so people could make sense of it.

In the words of the designer:

The document is about what people agreed. We protected their integrity and worked within their capacities. There were lots of ideas, but we wanted to focus on what was practical and participatory, but it was a struggle to get AusAID to accept it, so we had to build on what we knew AusAID could live with and yet use a process that people were comfortable with. We needed to take the risk and go with the group and what the churches wanted (Pers. Comm. Paul Nichols AusAID, November 12 2012).

The experience pointed to the importance of having designers with cultural understanding, local knowledge and facilitation experience which could also help overcome a situation where not all partners had sufficient or equal information to participate fully. This was time consuming. The other vital factor in the CPP was a designer with in-depth knowledge of AusAID, its program design requirements and understanding of the extent to which the design could be negotiated within the organisation. The capacity to broker an innovative design that was acceptable to all partners was critical to the establishment of the program.

### **The review outcome**

Although the program had only been operating for two years, the 2011 review found that it was beginning to expand and improve education and health services, school and health service water supplies, church administrative and financial capacity and to create development partner-

ships between the churches. Training for church staff in computing, planning and budgeting had improved administrative systems; in collaboration with the Department of Education training was being provided for rural primary school teachers in teaching literacy in the vernacular; government approved training courses had started for community nurses in rural villages and hands on training for community leaders in monitoring and evaluation were being held on three outer islands. Program support for improved communication between women's church groups had led to joint church involvement in the campaign 'Say No to Violence Against Women'.

Overall, the CPP showed great promise for making a real difference — delivering real results. But, it created considerable difficulties for AusAID in terms of expectations, time required for partners and managing the contracts. In the words of the AusAID Vanuatu partners, 'AusAID has faced tensions between being both partner and donor and the power imbalance that this creates ... the current grant agreements foster a donor-recipient relationship rather than true partnership ... the kind of relationship that AusAID would like to engage in in future would be for:

1. partners to view AusAID as a partner in development with whom priorities can be negotiated, rather than simply tolerated and to share the risks;
2. partners to be prepared to admit to the funding partner when problems/issues arise; and
3. to embrace opportunities to proactively address challenges together rather than awaiting the advice of one, more dominant, partner.

This kind of partnership is to some extent already occurring with the bigger churches, but it is unlikely to be fully successful without AusAID itself recognising that a trusting partnership takes considerably more time than they are currently able to provide. It needs time to negotiate priorities in a culturally acceptable way; the time necessary for encouraging partners to discuss problems and the time to listen to the problems; and the time and available personnel to help partners proactively address challenges. The onus here is on the donor and to a lesser extent on the ANGOs, not the other partners. Above all, the CPP needs time to settle in and explore the new opportunities the partnership offers.

### **Measuring up to the Port Moresby Declaration**

In terms of the Port Moresby Declaration the CPP to a large extent has provided mutual accountability, has shared priorities and values, and its activities are country, and often rurally, driven. It works within well-established partner systems and, after two years, there is a reasonable degree of mutual trust. In addition to the Port Moresby Declaration, the CPP directly supports the rural poor.

But, the future of the CPP is uncertain.

It may be timely for AusAID to reconsider its response to the *Independent review of aid effectiveness*.

We will work with democratic and political structures to support more inclusive and transparent decision-making

and involvement by poor people. In doing so, we will engage with and support civil society groups ... we will build enduring ties with future leaders to help them develop solutions to development challenges, and we will support local leaders (AusAID 2011:38).

As Clarke (2011:3) has pointed out, it is probably instructive to consider that religion or religious organisations should not just be seen as a means to support donor-initiated development.

## Lessons learned

While I am loathe to suggest lessons learned as they never seem to be, the Vanuatu CPP is illustrative of a new way of doing development business and perhaps the lessons might be useful. The program is a genuine effort to allow flexibility, to take advantage of emerging opportunities and to encourage real participation in design, partnership and collaboration. In my opinion it was a risk well worth taking. Given time to build the partnership, trust and knowledge, it could be an example of effective development practice that actually reaches the isolated and the poor.

The lessons learned from the CPP are:

1. Partnerships require a departure from the 'business as usual' approach to traditional program management. As key partners, donors need to invest in allocating the appropriate level of human and financial resources towards its partnerships.
2. Some difficulties can be avoided if partners are proficient in the same language and reside, at least in the same country, if not the same island.
3. Partnerships are likely to be more effective if the partner organisations share values and concerns.
4. Building trust and mutual accountability and true partnership between diverse organisations takes time.
5. The roles and relationships of participating organisations and the structure and operation of the partnership need to be agreed at the outset.
6. Partner engagement in initial research and program design encourages ownership, responsibility as well as partnership.
7. To achieve donor acceptance of an innovative design requires in-depth knowledge of the donor's design requirements and an ability to broker acceptance.

Individuals and individual relationships can impact on outcomes. As inter-relationships can seldom be foreseen any partnership is an informed gamble. The CPP was one worth taking.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Also see James 2009:7 and Clarke 2011 for role of religious organisations in resolving conflict, promoting peaceful co-existence.
- <sup>2</sup> The Anglican Church of Melanesia, the Apostolic Church, Assemblies of God, Church of Christ Conference, the Presbyterian and Seventh Day Adventist churches.

- <sup>3</sup> Anglican Board of Mission, Baptist World Aid, Adventist Development and Relief Agency, Uniting World and Act for Peace (National Council of Churches Australia).
- <sup>4</sup> As expressed by Pastor Kalsakau, CEO, Presbyterian Church, Port Vila, 24 November, 2011.
- <sup>5</sup> See *Vanuatu Daily Post*, Monday November 21 2011:2 'VCC wants to break deadlock over WTO'.

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# Capacity building with LeGGo: Expanding participation in Nepal

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## Introduction

In 1999 the government of Nepal passed the Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) to devolve administrative, judicial and fiscal powers to locally elected bodies. In this context, improving the capacities of communities and marginalised groups to participate in local governance and development activities remains a key priority for international donors and the Nepalese government. Mindful of Baser and Morgan's (2008) five core capabilities, this paper reviews an ambitious attempt by the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in Kavre District to enhance local capacity through a two year Leadership and Good Governance Project. The central question explored is whether a combination of government staff training, community mobilisation and active community leadership in 60 micro projects has resulted in increased capacity of CBOs or communities as actors in a participatory development process.

## Background

Development in Nepal is challenged by a number of factors including difficult terrain and geographic remoteness, lack of institutional capacity, an unresponsive political climate, growing divide between rich and poor, declining returns in the agricultural sector, underinvestment in human capital, caste discrimination and the ongoing legacy of civil war and political instability. While recognising Nepal's progress in improving overall human well-being, it is noteworthy that, 'many groups still appear to have been left out of the development process'. (Wagle 2011:7).

Despite these challenges, with the support of international aid agencies, successive governments in Nepal have sought to increase participation in development and improve access to services through programs aimed towards the decentralisation of governance and service provision. In 1999 Nepal passed the Local Self-Governance Act (LSGA) which devolved administrative, judicial and fiscal powers to locally elected bodies. In theory the Act provides for better representation of disadvantaged groups in local governance and greater participation in development processes.

Innovations such as the Local Governance and Community Development Programme (LGCDP), run jointly by the Ministry of Local Development and United Nations agencies, seek to institutionalise systems and mechanisms for decentralised and inclusive local governance (Scanteam et. al 2009). Provisioning District Development Offices with funding for community led development initiatives is part of this process. However, as is the case in India, building the capacity of local stakeholders and community-based organisations is essential in regards to their ... dignity, confidence, and

courage to demand or seek access to services ... (Subramaniam 2003:1) or to initiate community-led improvements.

## Capacity building

Baser and Morgan (2008) note that capacity is essentially about the ability to do something effectively and to sustain improvement over time. They argue that people function within a range of complex human systems and often suffer from both low levels of capability and system blindness. In this context the challenge for external interveners is arguably one of making systems visible and encouraging the emergence and growth of capabilities on a micro level to engage with and function within those systems. For example, in Nepal this might involve: training leaders of women's cooperatives in leadership and management; raising awareness of legal and political rights; and facilitating engagement with local government and funding partners.

Baser and Morgan (2008:26–32) define capability '... as the collective skill or aptitude of an organisation or system to carry out a particular function or process ...' and identify five core capabilities: the capability to commit; the capability to carry out technical, service delivery and logistical tasks; the capacity to relate and attract resources and support; the core capability to adapt and self-renew; and finally, the capability to balance diversity and coherence, building networks while managing paradox and tension. To some extent all of these capabilities are required by community based organisations (CBOs) in Nepal and while governments would normally assist with such capability development, the reality is that international non-governmental NGOs (INGOs) often play a key role.

In Nepal, capacity limitations and system blindness are very real issues. Local stakeholders and grassroots organisations often have constrained capacity, low confidence, minimal awareness of local governance processes and lack of experience in accessing funding sources. An assessment conducted by ADRA Nepal identified low capacities and lack of management knowledge among government officials, as well as low civil society participation amongst a number of factors limiting the effectiveness of governance strategies for promoting participation and empowerment (ADRA, 2008). In the words of one Nepali cooperative member interviewed in 2012 'We don't know how to approach the government'. To complicate matters, local government is often unaccustomed to working closely and collaboratively with community based organisations (CBOs), including cooperatives.

## LeGGo project

Mindful of the need to develop the capacity of CBOs and local government in Nepal to work together towards local

development objectives, The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in Nepal began to explore new programming methodologies during 2006. Building on these early experiences, the Leadership and Good Governance Project (LeGGo) was implemented by between January 2009 and December 2010 in partnership with local government — the District Women’s Development Office (DWDO), CBOs and communities in 10 Village Development Committees (VDCs) in Kavre District. Small-scale monitoring and follow-up activities for some communities extended into late 2011.

The first component of the LeGGo project focused on improvement of leadership capacities and management skills at the District Government level. ADRA sought to enable officials in Kavre District, ‘to effectively utilize local resources, efficiently manage new development projects, adequately identify local needs, and provide higher quality services to local communities’ (ADRA 2008:3). To do so ADRA Nepal provided a series of leadership and management capacity building workshops for district officials.

The second component of the LeGGo project targeted CBOs for leadership and management capabilities training. ADRA sought to, ‘enable them to more effectively design and implement projects related to health, education, agriculture, literacy, income generation, natural resource management, human rights, and other activities’ (ADRA Nepal, 2008:3). ADRA selected and trained 30 master trainers (MTs) who, using their new skills and knowledge, were empowered to train a ‘total of 300 womens’ and farmers’ group members’ as local facilitators.

Facilitators came from a selection of communities identified jointly by local government and ADRA staff based on the following criteria: poor and marginalised (generally assessed by ethnicity, caste or geographic isolation); communities willing to participate; communities with existing CBOs (either womens’ or farmers’ cooperatives); communities accessible by public transport up to one full day’s travel (ADRA 2008:3). To provide community groups with tangible skills, 60 Challenge Projects were identified by facilitators and CBOs, approved by ADRA staff then provided with a very small amount seed funding (12,000 Nepali Rupees or USD\$130). With coaching and training provided by ADRA and the Master Trainers, Challenge Projects were often undertaken with additional contributions and support from the government Village Development Committees (VDCs) and District Development Committees (DDCs) and/or community fundraising efforts.

The intent of the project was that beneficiaries and CBOs would gain and retain the capacity to independently identify local development needs, form action groups, design interventions, obtain funding and manage the project itself. An implicit objective of these initiatives was reducing system blindness in CBOs and improved confidence to work with local government to apply for funds for community led development projects. In this sense the micro-projects are best seen as a vehicle for participatory development or community driven

development in which communities have ‘direct control over key project decisions, including management of investment funds’ (Mansuri and Rao 2004:2).

## Research methodology

A post-project evaluation of LeGGo was carried out in June 2012, approximately one year after project activities ceased for the majority of challenge projects in Kavre District. The research was qualitative and is best described as mixed-method, utilising a combination of focus group interviews and participatory, visual evaluation tools. For example, participants rated their satisfaction on key outcomes by placing sticky notes beside a range of expressive faces and then moved the sticky notes after discussion and dialogue.

The research team analysed ADRA’s LeGGo project records to identify four categories of Challenge Project that had been proposed by target communities — Water and Health 21/60, Roads and Buildings 16/60, Livelihoods Development 14/60 and Organisation Strengthening 9/60. Maintaining a proportional balance, a total of 16 challenge projects were randomly selected for evaluation.

During the course of the research each of the selected project sites was visited and inspected by a team consisting of the lead researchers, ADRA Nepal staff and research assistants including local translators. The evaluation team met with key stakeholders (over 300) including ADRA staff, district government officials, community facilitators, and community members who were involved in, or aware of the challenge projects. Informed consent was obtained in all cases through a group information, question and consent process. The majority of people involved were community members and facilitators.

Focus group discussions, incorporating a participatory, visual capacity change ranking matrix, were used to assess the perceptions of the primary stakeholders relating to changes in the community and reinforcement of three capabilities resulting from the implementation of Challenge Projects. These were the attainment of leadership and planning skills, enhanced ability to elicit community cooperation, and enhanced ability to mobilise resources. Data was disaggregated by gender to enable analysis of any patterns in the responses of men and women involved in LeGGo.

## Case studies

### *Chamunda Devi Village — Ugrachandi Nala VDC — Kavre District*

The Nala Bridge Challenge Project is significant in that the small amount of seed funding -12,000 Nepali Rupees (NR) — for the initial challenge project and training sessions resulted in a series of community led projects spearheaded by a women’s cooperative that successfully raised more than three million NR. Although the challenge project did not result in large amounts of funding from the Village Development Committee or District Development



Office (just 25,000 NR), the funds mobilised within the community were impressive and appropriate given the wealth evident in the community and the size of the cooperative.

With the cooperation of men, this women-initiated project was able to construct a bridge, widen a village road, divert a creek, make a retaining wall, level a volleyball court, begin refurbishment of a temple and construct a cremation area, significantly expanding on the objectives of the original Challenge Project. Members of the women's cooperative were asked to rate the success of the project out of a score of ten. They unanimously rated it 10 out of 10 stating that *'the amount of funding was small but ADRA showed us the way'*. When asked why the project was successful the research team was informed that *'the project was the number one priority of the community'* and despite some initial challenges *'men and women worked well together'*.

The community scored the project highly in terms of their satisfaction with the level of change in their capacity across all three of the capacity domains studied. In particular leadership and planning skills as well as resource mobilisation were scored very highly with a strong degree of consensus among the participants. Community cooperation was scored lower and with less consensus due to some early challenges that had to be overcome at the start of the project, but participants emphasised that the end outcome had been very positive.

The research team identified several factors that they believe contributed to the success experienced by this community. Firstly, the women's cooperative was a relatively mature organisation and had an established relationship with ADRA Nepal. Existing capacity was at a level that was able to maximise the training and support provided by the LeGGo initiatives so that the project served as a catalyst for community led, participatory development. Secondly, the challenge project selected was one which benefited the whole community and enabled widespread ownership (including support from men despite the project being initiated by a group of women). Furthermore it was closely linked to important community priorities with clear economic, cultural, religious and safety benefits.

#### ***Narayansthan Dalit Village — Hokse VDC — Kavre District***

The Challenge Project selected by the community in Narayansthan consisted of a clay brick community building. The project is significant for its apparently low level of success and an insightful discussion among beneficiaries in which some community members demonstrated reluctance to criticize the project for fear that this would result in reduced future support. For example, one participant said *'If we give low score ADRA will not help in future'*. Once this fear had been addressed, it became apparent that although 50,000NR was successfully obtained from local government for construction their community building, and the project was completed using scarce village labour and resources, the skills and

confidence acquired during the challenge project had atrophied after LeGGo ended.

The limited transfer of skills and capacity was evident in concerns expressed by female leaders. Despite participation in training and the subsequent completion of a Challenge Project, cooperative leaders insisted that they did not know how to plan a much needed additional water project, how to budget it or approach the government or NGOs for help. Community members were critical of their own abilities to initiate change, stating that, *'Water is a big problem here. We have to walk far. We don't know how to go to get help from VDC or DDO'*.

Although they were moderately pleased with the humble building they had constructed, the community scored the project very low in terms of their satisfaction with the level of change in their capacity across all three of the capacity domains studied. In particular leadership and planning skills were scored very low with a strong degree of consensus among the participants. Community cooperation and resource mobilisation were scored slightly higher as participants agreed that there had been cooperation within the community and resource mobilisation from local government to support the building construction, however, overall participants demonstrated a low level of confidence in their ability to retain new capacity.

The research team identified several factors they believe contributed to the lower levels of success experienced by this community. Critically, the leadership group involved in the project was largely illiterate which inhibited some of their engagement in the project training. More importantly, however, illiteracy coupled with a lack of confidence related to marginalisation and discrimination experienced by Dalits in Nepal, contributed to an inability to replicate the challenge project process without external support and facilitation. Significantly, this community began with very low levels of pre-existing capacity and community mobilisation, and was less able to leverage existing capacity for ongoing community development.

## **Observations and learning**

### ***Reduced system blindness***

Eleven out of the 16 community groups included in the assessment accessed external funds (ranging from 4,750 to 50,000 NR) from local government or other non-community sources for their initial Challenge Project or for subsequent, independently organised projects. Six of the community groups attained government funds for additional post-Challenge Projects (ranging from 17,000 to 450,000 NR) despite five of them being unsuccessful in obtaining funds for their initial challenge project. In one case a 12,000 NR challenge project to build a shoe storage facility in a local temple was not matched with any government funding but the skills built in the community enabled them to plan and implement several successive projects with funding in excess of 1.2 million NR. Success in accessing government funds was higher in more established cooperatives and groups with higher levels of literacy.

### *Improved community mobilisation and cooperation*

Fourteen of the 16 communities involved in this study demonstrated relatively high degrees of community mobilisation to plan and implement challenge projects as well as additional follow-up projects in a number of cases, despite frequently expressed concerns that the financial incentive offered by ADRA Nepal was far too small. Only two of the 16 failed to raise any funds within the community. While it was difficult to estimate labour, cash and local materials contributions, the research team found that community estimates of their contributions ranged from 3,000 to 1.5 million NR. After removing those two communities which raised nothing, and one community which raised a relatively large amount, the average per community was 32,000 NR (approximately 435USD). Women's cooperatives involved in LeGGo and the implementation of community challenge projects also reported significant gains in membership. Challenge projects that served genuine community-wide needs rather than just the needs of a small group within the community generally showed higher levels of success in terms of triggering increased (and ongoing) cooperation between larger numbers of people and groups within the community.

### *Leadership and management in the community*

The development and maintenance of leadership and management skills was more difficult to ascertain among community participants. Only one project site provided copies of project documentation, timelines, budgets and written agreements. While the trainings provided were appreciated, it was clear that in some instances newly acquired knowledge was not transmitted to other potential beneficiaries. In the words of one disgruntled villager, *'I was totally left out of the training. I know nothing about what has happened'*. In cases where existing capacity was relatively low it appeared that the single cycle of training and challenge project implementation provided for in the LeGGo timeframe was inadequate to facilitate a sustained transfer of leadership and management capacity to people from marginalised and disadvantaged groups.

### *Leadership and management in local government*

The long term benefit of training local government staff as facilitators or MTs appears to have been limited due to the high transfer rates of government staff in Kavre District. Of approximately 25 government staff trained and directly engaged in LeGGo, only three remained in the area one year after the project had concluded. Comments from government officials who met with the research team indicated that capacity building provided to government staff was appreciated however, the number of staff trained was inadequate. Other comments also suggested that the LeGGo approach was not fully understood or supported by all government staff and the majority of staff wanted greater incentives provided to spend time in the field as MTs. Just one of the government staff indicated that he was still regularly using the skills learned through engagement with LeGGo.

## **Conclusion**

Capacity building by ADRA to enhance the participation of vulnerable and marginalised communities at the micro-level in Nepal's Kavre District was most successful where some form of existing capacity existed and where there was a cohesive group of stakeholders who agreed on a priority. Such groups were capable of mobilising significant community and government support for their own development projects, despite very small amounts of seed funding.

Micro-level capacity building was least evident where smaller groups within a community, with vested interests, allocated resources for self-gain. Where such dynamics were present the inclusion of less powerful groups within the community was hampered, resulting in reduced spread of leadership and management skills, and limited community cooperation. Projects such as LeGGo can also inadvertently result in the formation of temporary groups which lapse, and lose capabilities once the project is complete, unless identifiable risk factors associated with this are managed. Although not included in the two case studies presented above, an example is that of a small group of women who banded together to access a grant and subsequently spent the money on wool for a knitting business that benefited only themselves.

It is evident that the development of sustained management and leadership capacity in recently formed, or highly disadvantaged, community groups, such as a Dalit cooperative, requires ongoing support beyond a single training and Challenge Project cycle. Based on recommendations that ongoing support be provided for community groups with emerging levels of capability, a follow-on project is using a modified and longer term approach involving a graduation process for communities with evidently high levels of capacity. It may be that low capacity community groups would benefit from several concurrent Challenge Projects with proportionally reduced, or perhaps even increased, levels of INGO funding over time.

Nepal faces ongoing challenges related to inclusion and equitable distribution of the benefits of development. Commitment to continued devolution of power and funding to local government remains a key platform of Nepal's development strategies. In this context, ADRA's LeGGo project provides a useful methodology for improving capacity on a micro-scale for a stronger civil society and greater inclusion of marginalised groups in local, participatory development processes. Empowerment and capacity development at a micro-scale is possible and can be catalysed by local NGO staff while respecting the tenets of community-driven development as enunciated by Mansuri and Rao (2004). In the words of one loosely quoted water committee representative, *'Before ADRA came we were not even thinking about this. Now 21 households are benefiting. We are satisfied.'* The ongoing challenge is to sustain such change over time, especially in communities and CBOs where pre-existing capacity is very low.

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# Opportunities and challenges of participation in transitional justice in Nepal

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Transitional justice, which encompasses the processes and institutions employed to address widespread human rights abuses after conflict, has developed in relative isolation from development discourse.<sup>1</sup> However, in recent years, a growing number of academics, practitioners and policy makers have advocated for the adaptation of participatory methods from development studies to transitional justice (see for example, Lundy and McGovern 2008; McEvoy and McGregor 2008; Robins 2011). Generally, openness to participatory methods has coincided with criticisms of the dominant transitional justice agenda which is deemed to be an overly legalistic, 'one-size-fits-all' top down imported blueprint which focuses on state-centric measures, processes and institutions. These criticisms of transitional justice open up space for integration of participatory methods to enable inclusion. Thus, analysis of the use of participation in transitional justice is necessary.

This paper critically analyses participation in transitional justice and argues that a long term, deliberate and considered approach that is sensitive to differences, context and political interests is required. Using Nepal as a case study this paper highlights the opportunities and challenges of implementing such approaches in practice.<sup>2</sup>

## **Brief overview of participation and development**

Participatory approaches emphasise the input of local people in various stages of policy making and program implementation (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Gaventa and Cornwall 2006). When local people participate, they are regarded as agents of change with the ability to transform power and social relations through their own praxis (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995; Gaventa and Cornwall 2006; Rahman 1993). Through participatory approaches, the transfer of knowledge is not just *from researchers/practitioners* to the locals but also *from locals* to the researchers/practitioners and *between locals* (Chambers 1994). This overcomes what is deemed to be 'legitimate' knowledge being solely derived from privileged experts that has the effect of obscuring and under-privileging other forms of knowing and voices of knowers (Gaventa and Cornwall 2006). Yet, it is not only important to consider who are invited to speak and who are excluded, but the extent to which people choose to participate and also who chooses not to participate, which can also be conceived of as acts and varying degrees of power (Cornwall 2003).

While the allure of romanticising the local is hard to resist, these new spaces are not immune from existing power relations and can in fact reproduce and further entrench unequal power relations (Cornwall 2002). The process can also provide a distorted view of people's aspirations and privileged voices of particular, but not

necessarily representative, individuals or groups (Cornwall 2003; Cornwall and Jewkes 1995). Even if we address the issue of who participates or who gains and ask the broader questions of who participates, who does not, who benefits and who loses (Chambers 1994), the difficulty remains of how to translate these voices into a means of influencing policy and on to relevant policy agendas that are vulnerable to political and other considerations.

A key critique of transitional justice is that it is externally formulated and implemented and deprives local communities of agency. Madlingozi (2010:12) contends that the dominant transitional justice agenda, frames locals as either victims to be rescued or perpetrators to be prosecuted rendering 'them incapable or morally unworthy of positive contributions to peace building'. To address these concerns, there has been growing momentum by practitioners, academics and policy makers to take heed of the literature, knowledge and experience derived from development and participatory theory and practice (Lundy and McGovern 2008). However, to date, participatory approaches have been utilised to a limited extent in transitional justice processes, and frequently *after* the transitional justice process had begun or had been completed.<sup>3</sup> Too often the practical complexities of scale, time frames, funding and security trump meaningful and authentic participation. In light of the outline of participation provided above, both in general and in relation to transitional justice, the following section provides a brief outline of the People's War in Nepal and examines how participation has been carried out in the transitional justice process in Nepal.

## **Participation in transitional justice in Nepal**

On 4 February 1996, the Maoists proclaimed a 'People's War' which resulted in an estimated 16,000 deaths over a decade. The Maoists aimed to abolish the monarchy, establish a people's republic committed to the principles of gender and caste equality, set up a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution and to provide services for poor rural areas. The conflict impacted the majority of the country with only two of 75 districts not reporting casualties (Tiwari 2007). The conflict concluded with the signing to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on 21 November 2006 between the Maoists and the Seven Party Alliance. By 2008, ground-breaking achievements had been gained with the official abolition of the monarchy, the elections for the Constituent Assembly and the declaration of Nepal as a federal democratic republic; major objectives of the Maoist insurgency.

### *Transitional justice process in Nepal*

As part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) both sides agreed to provide details of those who

disappeared or were killed during the conflict, including informing family members about it, within 60 days of signing the CPA (CPA 5.2.3). Other provisions include a National Peace Rehabilitation Commission (CPA 5.2.4), a guarantee not to encourage impunity and the right to relief for families of those who disappeared and torture victims (CPA 7.1.3). In particular, the CPA prescribed that a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to probe ‘those involved in serious violation of human rights and crime against humanity in course of the armed conflict and develop an atmosphere for reconciliation in the society’ (CPA 5.2.5). The Interim Constitution provided for the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry into enforced disappearances (COD).<sup>4</sup>

Almost six years since the signing of the CPA, little progress has been made on the transitional justice front. In fact, it has been alleged that the TRC and COD are means to *avoid* accountability and that the interim relief payments are being used to quell calls for prosecutions and establishment of the TRC and the COD. As will be seen below, participation in this process has been limited.

### *Participatory attempts in Nepal*

Attempts at participation fall under four main themes.

First, participation in relation to the key transitional justice institutions. In 2007, the International Centre for Transitional Justice (an INGO) and Advocacy Forum (a national human rights NGO) undertook a quantitative and qualitative study entitled ‘Nepali Voices: Perceptions of Truth, Justice, Reconciliation, Reparations and the Transition in Nepal’. This was the first study of its kind in Nepal. The study was intended ‘to bring victims’ voices to the forefront of the national debate’ and to ensure that ‘transitional-justice mechanisms involve stakeholders, especially victims and their families’ (Advocacy Forum and ICTJ 2008:10–11). Most of the victims surveyed stated that their most urgent concerns and needs were of an economic and social nature. These findings sit in contrast to the push for legal accountability by Advocacy Forum and other human rights organisations.

In response to intense lobbying from civil society and victims groups, the newly established Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction (MoPR) conducted consultations for victims and civil society to examine the draft TRC and COD bills. While some of the suggestions were incorporated into the draft bills, the bills retained controversial provisions which civil society, the international community and victims’ groups were opposed to (see above).

Second, participation in studies on women. In 2010, Advocacy Forum and ICTJ published a pilot qualitative study on women. The report states that: ‘The process listened to the voices of women, and sought to document their experiences and opinions on how the conflict affected their lives, how they coped with the situation at the time and after the conflict ended and to identify their present needs and demands’ (Advocacy Forum and ICTJ 2010:11–12).

Third, participation in relation to reparations. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights

(OHCHR) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) conducted strategic meetings and consultations where ‘internationally established principles and best practices of reparations were shared and victims were invited to share their expectations of the reparations policy being developed’ (IOM 2011). In 2010, ICTJ’s study assessed conflict victim’s experiences with the Interim Relief Program (ICTJ 2011). It found that the voices of victims helped to identify the gaps and additional elements are required to implement a reparations policy (MoPR 2010).

Fourth, participation in projects by individual researchers. Simon Robins’ participatory ethnography of family associations of disappeared victims found that victims’ needs were primarily to know the truth about their loved one who had disappeared and for basic economic support; and, while the respondents were in favour of justice, this was of relatively lower priority (Robins 2011). A subsequent study found the participants’ priorities were (in decreasing order) livelihood, truth about the missing person and retributive justice. Families also reported that family associations were a source of information and advice about the transitional justice process and services available (Robins and Bhandari 2012).

### **The challenges of participation in Nepal’s transitional justice**

I will discuss four primary problems with the way participation has taken place in transitional justice in Nepal: (1) the role of external actors; (2) hearing authentic victims’ voices (3) language: finding the ‘right’ words; (4) creating safe spaces.

#### *1. The role of external actors*

Given that the transitional justice mechanisms were first incorporated in to the CPA, the first issue in relation to participation is the process and the means by which transitional justice commenced in Nepal. An ICTJ report alludes to the impact of Hannes Siebert, a South African consultant contracted by USAID as part of the US’s Nepal Transition to Peace Project and who was instrumental in the adoption of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission model and yet prior to his involvement there was limited discussion on the adoption of a truth commission (Farasat and Hayner 2009). Not only is the importation of a foreign model problematic, a prime participatory opportunity to ask the threshold question about whether or not transitional justice should be pursued, when and how, was missed.

#### *2. Hearing authentic victims’ voices*

To date, most human rights work is done by specialists *speaking for and about victims* which has the potential to further perpetuate victims’ marginality and disempowerment rather than ensuring these victims act themselves (Robins 2011; Robins and Bhandari 2012). It is here that victims’ groups have much potential to offer. In Nepal, some victims’ groups represent victims of both sides (the Maoist rebels and the State) while others focus

on certain types of victims (for example, women or families of the disappeared). Some victims' groups have the institutional backing of specific organisations (e.g., ICRC, OHCHR, the Informal Sector Service Centre or INSEC, Advocacy Forum, Amnesty Nepal). These supporting organisations have arguably helped to make these victims' groups more visible and have given them greater recognition, particularly by the government, and provided varying degrees of financial and technical support. Victims' associations are generally more accessible than trying to identify individual victims unattached to organisations. Thus, over time, these associations have been invited to various meetings and workshops in Kathmandu and regional headquarters.

While victims' groups have much to offer, they are not without challenges. There is a danger that by inducing victims' groups to be formed, rather than being created organically groups that are the most organised and accessible will be privileged and heard at the expense of less accessible (or uninvolved) victims. The extent to which victims are aware of these groups and/or participate in them is also worth asking (see Robins and Bhandari 2012). Although one human rights activist reported that they encouraged uninvited victims (who were not part of victims' groups) to also attend consultations. This shows the challenges of selecting various individuals or groups as representative of the voices of victims. With funding and institutional support provided to some of these victims groups there is also the danger that victims' groups will be pitted against each other.

It is unclear the extent to which these groups consult with their members and the scope of their representation. Some self-designated victims' group leaders may not necessarily (re)present the views of their members, those for whom they purport to speak. Obstacles to inclusive participation of minority groups are exacerbated as many of these groups have had fewer education and professional opportunities. What happens if victims within these groups have divergent or conflicting voices? There is a danger in that different voices both within and between victims' groups are hushed to ensure that at least some voices are heard. Several victims' groups have spoken about the need to present a united front in order to have their voices heard by the government and donors. There is also the danger of framing policy narratives on transitional justice as being about victims as a homogenised group. This is particularly the case when victims' groups are comprised of different categories of victims and different voices within these groups can become conflated, and submerged within the generic category of the victims.

The source of institutional and financial support provided to these victims' groups should also be considered as they can shape participatory outcomes. According to a human rights advocate, you can predict what a victims' group will ask for based on the position of the organisation that supports them. Thus, there is a need to find avenues through which these organisations can independently pursue their goals while being provided with adequate technical, financial and institutional support

without sapping their momentum and making them prone to 'projectisation'.

### *3. Language: finding the 'right' words*

In Nepal, terms such as 'reconciliation' and 'forgiveness' have been confused and at times appropriated for political agendas. A transitional justice practitioner at an international organisation cited a time when 'reconciliation' was translated to 'friendship' and spoke about idea of producing a Nepali Transitional Justice Glossary. Also, politicians frequently speak about the 'reconciliation' when it seems they are referring to 'settlement' or even 'amnesty'. In a country where there are over 100 languages, the choice of language is also significant. Most meetings and surveys are conducted in Nepali or English, which limits (or even excludes) the extent to which people not fluent in these languages can participate. Participatory attempts can be circumscribed by the language used and who chooses and defines these key terms, however, this challenge can be minimised if there is greater attention provided to the meanings the participants prescribe (rather than the facilitators or the program designers and sponsors).

### *4. Safe spaces*

Many of the consultations conducted appear to have made varying attempts to ensure that the participants were representative of different types of victims and geographically representative. However, an issue that was perhaps not adequately addressed was how safe people felt expressing their voices in these spaces. Frequently, victims, perpetrators and political and army personnel were in the same space which poses problems given the high level of mental health issues that have gone unaddressed in Nepal and the lack of reconciliation activities.

## **Conclusion**

It is evident that calls for bottom up victim-centric transitional justice processes are growing and much can be learned from participation and development discourse. Giving victims the space to be heard not only ensures that transitional justice process addresses their needs but it 'can also address the larger agenda of ensuring that the most marginalised voices are heard in that transition.' (Robins and Bhandari 2012:14). Victims' groups are a key avenue through which to ensure participation and they can provide a means to mobilise victims and their voices but ultimately these victims' groups have their own limitations. Participation offers the potential for transitional justice processes not to be functionally divorced from local communities but care must be taken to ensure that the bottom up/local priorities are not overridden by pre-determined top down agendas and transitional justice packages.

## **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> One area of inquiry has been the relationship between transitional justice and development with socio-economic rights or distributive justice. See Selim, Yvette (2012),

- ‘Transitions: creating space to address injustice after conflict or political turmoil’, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/opensecurity/yvette-selim/transitions-creating-space-to-address-injustice-after-conflict-or-political-turmoil> and Waldorf, Lars (2012), ‘Anticipating the Past: Transitional Justice and Socio-Economic Wrongs’, *Social & Legal Studies* 21: 171–186.
- 2 To date, there have not been comprehensive consultations conducted in Nepal. Efforts to acquire documentation about consultations were quite difficult. In particular, it was difficult to determine how participants were selected, the method of invitation and degree of representation and how the input from these consultations was fed back and to whom. Accordingly, this article relies heavily upon semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders (including victims, and individuals/organisations involved in the consultation processes and studies) and publically available information. This article provides a snapshot of some of the studies on various issues (e.g. women, relief and draft legislation). This is offered only as a starting point for determining what participatory work has been done in Nepal. While care has been taken to ensure that details contained are correct, owing to the exploratory nature of sourcing information, further research is required.
- 3 The most popular approach has been the use of public opinion surveys. National Human Rights Commissions (e.g. the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission) have played a role in these consultations but often these surveys have been conducted by (I)NGOs (e.g. the International Center for Transitional Justice) or academic institutions. OHCHR has also provided expertise and material support to Governments, National Human Rights Commissions and civil society. For example, the Berkeley-Tulane Initiative for Vulnerable Populations, Human Rights Center at the University of California Berkeley has done several qualitative and quantitative studies in a number of post-conflict countries seeking to provide ‘evidence-based transitional justice’.
- 4 On the basis of provisions contained in the CPA and Interim Constitution, and following the Supreme Court’s June 2007 directive order, the newly established Ministry of Peace and Reconstruction draft bills for the establishment of a TRC and the COD were made public in July 2007 and November 2008, respectively.

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# Using a community development approach for Aboriginal development in Central Australia

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## Introduction

Research on agreements between Aboriginal people and extractive industries suggests that equitable benefits from such activity on Aboriginal land are rare. In Central Australia the Central Land Council (CLC) has developed a new approach to generating benefits from land use agreements by establishing a Community Development Unit (CDU) and encouraging Aboriginal traditional owners to apply some of the income from land use agreements with mining companies and similar parties to community development activities to assist them to 'live well in two worlds'. The paper discusses the strengths based community development approach that the CLC is using and outlines the latest findings from independent monitoring of five of the major community development projects the unit is undertaking with traditional owners and Aboriginal community members.

## Background

The CLC is a Commonwealth statutory authority operating under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act (Northern Territory) 1976 and the Native Title Act 1993. It represents some 24,000 Aboriginal people speaking 15 different languages and living in very small communities across 771,747 square kilometres of the southern part of the Northern Territory (NT). Its Council comprises 90 elected Aboriginal members all of whom are traditional owners of the land under its jurisdiction. In 2005, building on 30 years of operating successfully in Central Australia, the CLC established a dedicated CDU to develop a program to support land owners to utilise some of their money through community development processes. This included developing an organisational community development framework (CLC 2009a), and implementing and evaluating community development processes with interested landowning groups. The long term goal of the CLC's community development program is that Aboriginal people will be able to achieve their dual objectives of:

- maintaining Aboriginal identity, language, culture and connection to country; and
- strengthening their capacity to participate in mainstream Australia and in the modern economy by improving health, education and employment outcomes.

The program's objectives are:

- to maximise opportunities for Aboriginal engagement, ownership and control, particularly in relation to the management of resources that belong to them;
- to generate service outcomes that benefit Aboriginal people and are valued by them, including social, cultural and economic outcomes;

- to build an evidence base for the CLC's community development approach and its contribution to increasing Aboriginal capabilities; and
- to share lessons learned with other government and non-government agencies.

## The community development program approach

Internationally accepted community development principles including empowerment, community participation, capacity building and good governance underpin the CLC approach. Staff facilitate participatory planning with local people to identify their priority issues and develop appropriate solutions. The resulting projects, once given final approval by the relevant group, are implemented largely with landowners' own money (CLC 2009a, b). In this way, the CLC's community development program is inherently strengths-based. It starts with Aboriginal people defining the issues they want to address; it uses their own financial resources; it draws on their local knowledge and involvement to design appropriate solutions; it utilises Aboriginal decision making bodies and enhances these local governance structures to oversee project implementation. It also draws as far as possible on local resources, infrastructure, facilities and networks of support. The program recognises that people understand their local context and what is likely to work. Respecting local knowledge requires accepting that Aboriginal people will value some things in their cultural and social life which are different to Western values (Campbell and Hunt, forthcoming). This acceptance is essential in effective cross-cultural collaboration. This strengths-based approach is extremely important in the Aboriginal Australian context where a deficit model informs most policy and program design.

Currently the community development program includes six major regional projects, each with numerous sub-projects:

1. Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) Project. This has sub-projects relating to early childhood development, youth and media, language and culture, secondary school support and adult learning centres.
2. Uluru-Kata Tjuta Rent Money Community Development Project (URM), which includes outstation infrastructure upgrades, regional projects and specific projects in the Mutitjulu community close to Uluru.
3. Granites Mine Affected Area Aboriginal Corporation (GMAAAC) Project which involves nine communities each with their own GMAAAC Committees. Projects are diverse but often relate to sports, youth, aged services and other social needs.
4. Tanami Dialysis Support Service Project, now servicing 27 patients who receive dialysis services close to home.



5. Northern Territory Parks Rent Money Community Development Project, which is utilising rental income from 16 Parks for community development initiatives.
6. Community Lease Money Project, still in the early stages of design, this major new regional project initiated in 2012 will involve 24 communities which have chosen to direct substantial rent money to community benefit projects.

These six projects each have distinctly different management arrangements, decision-making models and management processes, but common to all are the principles of Aboriginal decision-making, and a focus on outcomes sought by Aboriginal people, using significant amounts of their own money.<sup>1</sup> In all cases, sub-projects are implemented by local organisations with oversight by the CLC and the relevant Aboriginal governance group.

The role of CDU in facilitating local governance, which is both culturally appropriate and robust in terms of corporate governance requirements, is a critical aspect of the approach. CDU staff focus on working with strong, capable, local Aboriginal leaders who are committed to improving their communities and developing the capacity of local governance structures. This requires time and involves helping people develop the necessary skills to run their organisations and committees. For example, the GMAAAC project involves working with nine community committees across the Tanami Desert in an annual process of setting priorities, developing projects, allocating funding for implementation and reporting on outcomes.

The CLC's participatory approach contrasts strongly with Aboriginal experiences of the broader operating environment, which is extremely disabling. In Central Australia Aboriginal people are routinely marginalised and disempowered. In particular, the 2007 Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER) saw the Australian Government abruptly take much greater control over many aspects of Aboriginal people's lives and communities, including their town lands and the income of everyone in receipt of any type of government payment.<sup>2</sup> The myriad changes created an environment of confusion and mistrust, further disempowering and marginalising Aboriginal people (CLC 2008, Commonwealth of Australia 2008). The 2008 dissolution of many small local community councils, which were replaced with just three shires responsible for vast tracts of Central Australia, combined with major changes to the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) since 2007, have also reduced people's sense of control over local government services and related programs. Taken together, these and other policy changes in the areas of urban development<sup>3</sup> and bilingual education<sup>4</sup> have created significant challenges for community development approaches that seek to increase Aboriginal control.

### The monitoring and evaluation program

In 2009, with very limited resources, CLC developed a monitoring plan and began annual monitoring of the community development program, drawing on the expertise of an independent expert in monitoring and evaluating community development. Three annual

monitoring reports for 2009 (CLC 2010), 2010 and 2011 (Kelly 2011, 2012) indicate that, while still in its early stages, the CLC community development program is making steady progress on each of its four key objectives. The purpose of the monitoring is to provide Aboriginal people with information about project outcomes, enabling them to learn from their experience, undertake more informed management of their resources and improve the projects. It also provides accountability to landowners for the expenditure of their money. Monitoring also assists CLC staff to learn, it enables sharing of the results and the processes of their work with other organisations, and it is building an evidence base for CLC advocacy of this approach to other agencies in Central Australia.

In 2011 the process included monitoring of individual projects and sub-projects through analysis of reports from those projects, independent interviews with community members and service providers within the relevant communities, and reporting by CDU staff. The findings indicate that the CLC is successfully engaging Aboriginal people in planning, implementing and evaluating initiatives that are beginning to achieve Aboriginal development objectives.

In relation to the objective of maximising opportunities for Aboriginal engagement, ownership and control, the most recent findings indicate 'considerable ongoing achievement' (Kelly 2012:8), particularly in the two large regional projects which have been operating the longest, WETT and URM. In the 2010 monitoring report, Kelly (2011) noted that in these two projects there was evidence of improving decision making, including a capacity to obtain and consider all relevant information prior to making a decision. The most recent report also noted that there has been considerable improvement in the sense of ownership and control in GMAAAC projects over the last two years, which is also encouraging. Governance capacity of local GMAAAC committees is noticeably strengthening:

We are getting new ideas from people; having a vote — learning and participating with each other. Everyone respects each other; it works well. Men talk with men, women with women. Then we get together and talk in big group. No problems.

Committee is working better this year — we are sharing stories — what we need for the future. What actions are happening now (GMAAAC Committee members, Mt Allan) (Kelly 2012:24).

There are also reports in the monitoring of committee members requesting services to provide itemised accounts (e.g. for bus repairs) to ensure greater accountability, requiring conflicts of interest to be declared, reforming how they allocate funds, and generally strengthening their governance procedures. All of these indicate the development of greater governance capacity.

In the NT Parks Project, which began much more recently and is constrained by a lack of operational funding, while people are focused on control of their resources, at this point they 'did not identify that the community development process had maximised this control for them'.<sup>5</sup>

However, across the community development program the external environment is perceived to be disempowering. Overall the monitoring report found that:

People are able to identify the greater control they have over resources in CDU-facilitated processes. On the other hand, people feel disempowered by some other processes, and this sense of disempowerment in turn undermines and conflicts with their experience of the CLC's community development approach (Kelly 2012:8).

Turning to whether people identified and valued service outcomes, the 2011 report makes clear that they could identify benefits, and how these were of value to them, particularly in the three large longer-running projects, WETT, URM and GMAAAC.<sup>6</sup>

For example one GMAAAC local committee member observed:

The GMAAAC Project is making a big difference to community and improving our livelihood. Like we put money aside for grass on the oval, to make a better life. We also put money aside for a swimming pool. All good things that GMAAAC is doing, making a big difference to people's lives. Really helping out. Otherwise, if weren't for GMAAAC funding different projects and positions, who would we go to? (Kelly 2012:17).

A staff member of an organisation in the same community commented:

GMAAAC projects have made a difference. We have projects here that are great, like funding for Art Centre enables younger guys to learn skills, making furniture. The set-up is to be commended. Same towards Wulaign projects — they administer outstations, do roads and upgrading of tracks. They enable guys to go out bush. Some go out everyday hunting. WYDAC<sup>7</sup> program does a great job. GMAAAC doing a great job. People are looking after things from GMAAAC a lot more — more respect and accountability for things. They didn't look after things so well before (Kelly 2012:17).

In the 2010 monitoring report the same sense of benefit was identified in the WETT project by a community member:

WETT services are really benefiting the community, kids and elders and with jobs. It does really help everyone. They are using WETT money in a really good way, like Mt Theo<sup>8</sup> is doing a really good job of what's been asked of them (Kelly 2011:36).

Within the URM Project, community members at Mutitjulu were able to identify real benefits for the community, a community which has been through some difficult times in recent years:

The Rec Hall has been a really good thing for the community. It's giving kids interesting things to do, so they don't get bored.

Mutitjulu has been a good place this year ... Rec Hall is good, making it good for the kids (Kelly 2012:39).

However, there were some issues which could affect the value of the benefits from these projects. Some of these are internal to Aboriginal communities, 'such as intercommunity fighting or sorry business', while some can result from the actions or often inactions of other organisations which leave 'communities feeling frustrated and stressed by the lack of services' (Kelly 2012:10).

A related challenge is that in Central Australia, key community leaders and influential decision makers are few in number with a multitude of competing demands. Consultation by a raft of government and non government agencies operating in the region is seemingly constant. In many places there is also a limited sense of 'community' beyond one's close kin and thus little priority is accorded 'community' projects with their planning meetings and related activities. In more extreme instances, there is entrenched conflict and community-wide division. The challenge is to work in such conflict-ridden situations in ways which 'do no harm' (Anderson 1999) and prevent projects exacerbating conflicts. A scarcity of appropriately skilled local conflict mediators can delay progress, but in at least one case, we have witnessed an easing of conflict within a community following the success of a community development project.

Another issue relates to the value outsiders place on particular cultural and family-related activities. This issue was raised in 2010, and was less pronounced in the latest monitoring, but indicates that some external stakeholders 'do not grasp the differences in world view that operate in the communities in which they work' (Kelly 2012:10) and the importance of maintaining cultural practices to Aboriginal people. The experience of the CDU is that landowners often prioritise expenditure on cultural and social initiatives. Government policies emphasise economic priorities including enterprise development and employment, English language, numeracy and literacy. Thus, there is a disjuncture between the approach of the CLC in its support of Aboriginal aspirations to 'live well in two worlds' and the approach of other service providers. The resulting impasse frustrates attempts to generate any sort of development — whether it reflects Aboriginal or other priorities. It is not that priorities (rather than policies) are necessarily so different — Aboriginal people seek education for their children, and opportunities for adult education and employment; they seek better health; they are generating income from arts and crafts and building small scale economic activities — but, on their own terms. Government policies very often appear to frustrate rather than support Aboriginal development.

The monitoring report also notes that 'monitoring is now becoming an established part of the project management system' (Kelly 2012:10). Work with partners to improve the quality of their reports is starting to show results, although for some partners, such as local government Shires, reporting is 'meagre and/or non-existent', making CLC monitoring of projects they manage difficult. Two challenges for the future will be:

- i. to increase the involvement of Aboriginal communities themselves in framing the questions they would like to

see the monitoring processes answer and in the collection and analysis of data, and

- ii. to develop a better understanding of how 'the community development approach supports and intersects with the capacity development of Aboriginal people' (Kelly 2012:11), particularly to know which capacities Aboriginal people want developed, and the value they place on these capacities. Targeted independent evaluation of some of the larger sub-projects which focus on impacts are also recommended for the future.

## Conclusion

The CLC's efforts to undertake participatory development with Aboriginal communities of Central Australia is showing clear signs of success in empowering Aboriginal people to take control, make decisions, build their governance capacity and deliver social, economic and cultural benefits which people value. However, the challenge of the surrounding policy and governance environment which is antithetical to these endeavours remains. The CLC is now beginning to advocate for this community development approach to be used more widely by other actors in Central Australia, but at present the policy frameworks, skills and attitudes of other service providers are not supportive of this and threaten to undermine the very gains which have been made to date.

## Notes

- 1 In 2011 the CLC CDU undertook planning in many remote locations across the then five regional projects which saw over \$7 million approved for 105 sub-projects.
- 2 This policy has been subsequently amended but remains controversial.
- 3 Since 2008 the Federal Government has identified 15 'priority towns' for enhanced infrastructure support and service provision, with only three of these in the CLC region. In 2009, the NT Government followed this and added five more 'growth towns' in the CLC region. This has made it difficult to leverage complementary government funding in locations not so designated and has encouraged landowner groups to focus their resources on places not designated as priority or growth towns by the governments.
- 4 In 2008 the Northern Territory Government withdrew support for bilingual education in primary schools and instead prioritised English language teaching. The WETT project has funded various Warlpiri language-based initiatives which were consistent with previous government policy. It is now difficult to get schools to factor

these initiatives into the school curriculum as Warlpiri people wish.

- 5 Some TOs around certain National Parks were unhappy at the initial decision made by the CLC Council that rent money from the parks must be used for community development purposes, and this may also be shaping some attitudes to the CD program.
- 6 The 2010 report reported a similar appreciation of benefit in the Tanami dialysis project; in the NT Parks project there were mixed views, hardly surprising as no projects had been implemented at the time of the monitoring.
- 7 WYDAC is the Warlpiri Youth Development Aboriginal Corporation which runs a youth and media program funded by WETT.
- 8 Mt Theo is another name for WYDAC.

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# The implementation of the capabilities approach in Cape York: can paternalism be a pre-condition for participation?

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## Introduction

The turn of the 21st century is seen by many to mark a paradigm shift in Indigenous affairs. In response to ‘crisis’ conditions in remote Aboriginal communities, the orientation of the self-determination era was called into question. Across the country, policy makers adopted approaches previously deemed unacceptably paternalistic.

Sutton (2009) described this shift as the ‘end of the liberal consensus’, however the theoretical foundations of the new paradigms are unclear. Politicians have obscured this issue by claiming evidence-based approaches now replace ideological ones, ignoring the reality that evidence is only a tool to help policies achieve their philosophical ends (Sanders 2009). The policy makers who have gone the furthest to clarify their normative orientation are the architects of the Cape York Welfare Reform Trial (CYWRT).

The CYWRT is a social experiment designed by Aboriginal intellectual Noel Pearson and his Cape York Institute Policy of Leadership (CYI), and is being implemented by Cape York Partnerships (CYP) and the Queensland and Federal Governments. The trial, which has been in place since 2008 in the remote Aboriginal communities of Aurukun, Coen, Hope Vale and Mossman Gorge, contains a range of housing, education, health and financial management programs. The cornerstone of the scheme, and the most controversial aspect of the CYWRT, is the Family Responsibilities Commission: a statutory body established in each of the communities made up of local commissioners and one ex-magistrate, who have the unprecedented power to quarantine welfare payments based on reports from government agencies.

Since 2005, Pearson and the CYI have framed the CYWRT using the capabilities approach to development. This interdisciplinary development paradigm, first articulated by Amartya Sen, has been widely adopted as an alternative to GDP based models of development. This paper speculates as to why the policy makers in Cape York appealed to the capabilities approach to rationalise their reform, and examines how they have used it to justify paternalism as an apparent precondition to participation in development.

## Pearson’s original proposals

The origins of the CYWRT lie in the work of Pearson. In his treatise, *Our Right to Take Responsibility* (2001), the land rights lawyer from Hope Vale offered a revisionist history of Cape York. Rather than identifying colonisation as the start of Indigenous peoples social problems, as most sympathetic Australians and Aboriginal activists were inclined to, Pearson (2007:26) posited events in 1970s led to a ‘descent into hell’.

Pearson claimed that the loss of jobs in the pastoral industry and the introduction of alcohol and welfare benefits left the Indigenous people of Cape York with spare time, access to recreational drugs, and unconditional funds from an impersonal source (Pearson 2000a). This ‘toxic cocktail’ undermined pre-existing Aboriginal authority structures, which were based on responsibility and reciprocity (Pearson 2000b). Resilient communities were subsequently transformed into dysfunctional townships, ridden with alcoholism, violence, ignorance and apathy.

*Our Right to Take Responsibility* shared some of the diagnoses and policy prescriptions of so-called Third Way theories. Proponents of this philosophy positioned themselves within the social democratic tradition, but argued that large bureaucratic welfare states have had a pacifying effect on their citizenry. Like other Third Way thinkers, Pearson called for the decentralisation of service delivery to local stakeholders, who could use their moral authority to encourage and enable people to take personal responsibility.

The most innovative aspect of Pearson’s work was the way in which he used Aboriginal tradition as the basis of this critique of the welfare state. By stating ‘my elders did not need the Third Way to tell them about the importance of our young taking responsibility’, he justified his agenda as a revival of distinctly Aboriginal authority, rather than a replacement of Aboriginal social norms by outsiders (Pearson 1999). This can be seen as both an attempt to ‘Indigenise’ his proposals and a reflection of Pearson’s experience of growing up in Hope Vale.

The modern town of Hope Vale on the South East of Cape York grew out of the Cape Bedford Lutheran mission which Pearson described as ‘one of the most successful missions to black people in Australia, at least in terms of converts’ (Pearson 1989:65). He was able to locate ‘positive social norms’ — such as concern for formal education and labour market employment, the upkeep of public and private spaces, health-consciousness and sobriety — in recent Aboriginal history, because the community leaders in Hope Vale’s past held and upheld these values (Gibson and Pearson 1989).

As Pearson was aware, however, the governance arrangements and values that prevailed in Hope Vale past were not universal to the socially and historically disparate Aboriginal communities of Cape York (ibid.). Indeed, in his 2001 critique of *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, Martin (2002:324) — an anthropologist with extensive experience in Aurukun on the West Cape — noted that many features Pearson identified as recently developed ‘dysfunctions’ were deeply embedded and meaningful social practices that have origins within the Aboriginal domain.

Martin also noted that, as traditionally oriented Aboriginal communities like Aurukun are ‘essentially acephalous’ and internally divided, there are no clear centres of authority to be revived (Martin 2002:321). For these reasons, he claimed ‘active intervention’ would be required to produce the kind of social change Pearson envisaged (loc.cit.). Observations from the design and implementation of the CYWRT seem to support this assertion.

Former CYP employee Phillip Martin (2008:37) claimed the goals of the community engagement phase, conducted prior to the CYWRT proposals being put to the Queensland Government in 2007, were largely to convince local stakeholders of the merits of pre-conceived policies rather than to inform the policies themselves. In a recent review of the FRC in Aurukun, Le Marseny described the commission as a form of ‘externally supported leadership’, not a ‘purely community grown and owned governance system’ (Le Marseny 2012:25). Le Marseny argues that this arrangement has contributed to the FRC’s success, as it has made it less vulnerable to ‘internal family, clan, and community pressure and the factionalising common to Indigenous communities’ (loc.cit).

This suggests that while the FRC employs participatory means, by entrusting the local commissioners with the task of social change, its ends are largely pre-determined. It is therefore difficult to see Pearson’s aims as purely the restoration of Indigenous authority and responsibility. It is this tension in *Our Right to Take Responsibility*, this paper suggests, that prompted the CYI to look for a broader justification as they moved to institutionalise and implement the CYWRT.

The following section introduces and explains their new framework, captured by the organisation’s mission statement:

The people of Cape York Peninsula will have the capabilities to choose lives they have reason to value (Pearson 2005a:4).

## The capabilities approach in Cape York

In his 1979 Tanner Lecture, ‘Equality of what?’, Sen (1979) first articulated the two key concepts of what would come to be known as the capabilities approach to development: functionings and capabilities. The term functioning denotes an individual’s ‘beings’ (for example, being literate) and ‘doings’ (for example, reading a book). Capabilities refer to the positive freedom, or real opportunities, a person has to function in different ways and their ‘ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being’ (Sen 1993:30).

Sen attempts to reconcile the welfarist emphasis on equality with the liberal emphasis on freedom by calling for development schemes to focus on equalising capabilities rather than functionings or resources. As noted in the introduction, he has been successful in influencing policy makers, particularly since the 1990s. Yet an unresolved debate exists among development theorists about whether the capabilities approach can actually be

considered a liberal theory, in the sense that it respects differing concepts of the good life (including the right to self-harm), or whether its implementation leads to perfectionist and paternalistic public policies.

Pearson’s use of the capabilities approach played directly into these debates. In an opinion piece in *The Australian* entitled ‘Choice is not enough’, he offered the following interpretation:

Sen’s starting point is the powerful liberal premise of individual choice. Ultimately it is individuals who will determine the kind of life they value. But in order for individuals to have choices, Sen argues, they must have capabilities. Health and education are the most basic capabilities, but political freedom and economic freedom are also essential capabilities. Without capabilities, choice can be a hollow conceit (Pearson 2007a).

By arguing that there is a capabilities deficit in Cape York, Pearson positioned the CYWRT as a freedom-enhancing scheme; one that will enable Aboriginal people to determine the kind of life they value:

Indigenous children will be able to choose their own life path only after they have received the best education and have been protected from ill health and neglect (ibid).

Many undoubtedly agree with Pearson’s characterisation of health and education as essential or basic capabilities. However, in describing them as such, he overlooks an important feature of Sen’s capabilities approach. While Sen (1988:18) claims that capabilities are an important space for evaluation, he deliberately avoids articulating a list of essential or basic capabilities. In this way, he hopes to make room within his theory for human agency and diversity.

Due to the intentionally incomplete nature of Sen’s approach, it is described as the thin or technical view of capabilities. As outlined above, Pearson’s use of the capabilities approach to justify interventions into Aboriginal community life is not consistent with the thin view. However, for reasons that I will now explain, it can be argued that the Sen’s thin view is itself inconsistent.

## Applying the Human Development Index

The first inconsistency in Sen’s thin approach relates to his involvement in creating the UNDP’s *Human Development Index* (HDI). Sen, along with economist Mahbub Haq, created this composite measure of wellbeing for the United Nations as an alternative to GDP-based country comparisons. Following Sen’s approach, the UNDP describe human development as the ‘process of widening people’s choices’ (UNDP 1990:9). As Denluin (2002:497) points out however, by comparing countries based on a set criteria — literacy, longevity, good health, and economic growth — the HDI preferences certain choices above others.

In 2001, Australia was ranked fourth of the 187 countries in the HDI. For the same period, however, Cooke et al. estimated that the Aboriginal population would be ranked around 104th (Cooke et al. 2007:10). The Northern Territory population taken on its own was lower

still, being ranking around 145th, close to Bangladesh and Sudan (Biddle and Yap 2010). The application of the HDI therefore strongly supports Pearson's idea that there is a capabilities deficit in remote Aboriginal communities.

### The dilemma of adaptive preferences

The second critique of the thin view relates to Sen's appeal to the idea of adaptive preferences. Commonly known as sour grapes, the adaptive preference theory presumes that the downtrodden often adjust their expectations in light of adverse conditions. Sen uses the example of women in rural India who report good health, even when they are very ill. He claims that this subjective assessment reflects the fact that these women have grown accustomed to ill health and to putting their families' welfare before their own, and thus their desires have been distorted (Sen 1990:126).

Sen employs the theory of adaptive preferences in his critique of utilitarianism, which aims to maximise wellbeing by satisfying people's desires. To remedy this situation, he argues that education and the cultivation of critical reasoning is necessary *before* these women can choose lives they have reason to value. Critiques of Sen's approach point out that, even though he posits non-paternalism and values pluralism, this analysis of adaptive preferences opens the way for restricting people's choices particularly when that choice is not to seize educational opportunities (Deneulin 2002).

This paternalistic potential can be illustrated in the context of discrete communities. Despite their low position on the HDI, Biddle (2011:8) suggests that people in remote communities are less likely to report ill health or feelings of unsafety than Aboriginal people living in urban areas. Applying the theory of adaptive preferences, it could be argued that poor health and violence have been normalised in discrete Indigenous communities and thus the resident's self-assessment and preferences have been distorted. This explanation could be used to justify the interventions such as the CYWRT, which uses coercive measures to increase school attendance.

### Nussbaum's 'thick' alternative

Due to these tensions in the thin approach, American political philosopher Nussbaum has offered a 'thick' version of the capabilities approach. Nussbaum (2011:33) offers a list of ten central capabilities, which she claims are essential for people to pursue a 'dignified and minimally flourishing life'. Her list includes:

- life;
- bodily health;
- bodily integrity;
- development and expression of senses;
- imagination and thought, emotional health;
- practical reason;
- affiliation (both personal and political);
- relationships with other species and the world of nature;

- play; and
- control over one's environment (both material and social).

Nussbaum's list is intentionally vague, as she believes that these central capabilities need to be adapted to specific contexts. However, unlike Sen, she claims that certain capabilities, particularly health and bodily integrity, are so important for the development of other capabilities that they can be considered 'legitimate areas of interference with choice up to a point' (Nussbaum 2001:95).

While it is Sen who Pearson cites in his opinion pieces, his idea of 'basic capabilities' is more compatible with the work of Nussbaum. As this paper has illustrated, however, there are features of Sen's work that implicitly support Pearson's more paternalistic approach. In light of this observation, we can agree with Deneulin (2002), that Nussbaum's thick version of the capabilities approach is a more honest alternative.

### Conclusion

Despite their definition of choice and freedom frequently deployed by Sen and the UNDP, this paper has demonstrated that the capabilities and human development can be used to justify interventionist and paternalistic policies. Put another way, it is inconsistent with the ideals of participatory development where schemes are fully informed by the stakeholder's values and desires. It could be argued, however, that the capabilities and human development approach is still oriented towards producing a *type* of participation; albeit a different one from that enshrined in the participatory paradigm.

As outlined in this paper, the notion of participation embedded in the capabilities approach is that of a rational, informed citizen making reflexive choices about their lives and others. It is an ideal that lies behind Sen's description of education one of the 'basic conditions of participatory development'. However, as is clearly illustrated in the implementation of the CYWRT, cultivating this democratic ideal can lead to what Baumeister (2006:145) describes as a 'peculiarly illiberal liberalism'; particularly when it encounters people who are not embracing educational opportunities available to them.

Whether or not we accept these justifications for top down social change it is important to fully appreciate the theoretical foundations of projects like the CYWRT. For there is a certain truth to Pearson's statement that paternalism has become one of the 'hot buttons that stifles thought', as commentators 'feel no need to examine facts or try to understand the rationale and the intentions of the policy so branded.'

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# Participatory gender monitoring: Sharing learning from Plan's WASH program

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## Background

Plan International Australia's experience in water, sanitation and hygiene initiatives (WASH) show that as gender relations are integral to the effectiveness of WASH programs (Leong 2012:2) the promotion of gender equality demands significant attention in every WASH intervention. This includes ensuring an explicit focus on monitoring the changes in gender relations in all monitoring and evaluation.

The literature suggests that measuring change in gender relations presents ongoing challenges. In their recent critical overview of current monitoring and evaluation frameworks and approaches, Batliwala and Pittman (2010:9) noted that very few monitoring and evaluation frameworks are structured to understand change in gender relations. Plan International Australia (Plan Australia), in collaboration with Plan Vietnam has recently piloted a participatory gender and WASH monitoring tool in order to further develop Plan's own practice and capability in monitoring changes in gender relations in WASH programs. As a participatory tool, the gender and WASH monitoring tool (GWMT) aims to support the engagement of women and men in WASH communities to explore gender relations at household and community levels in the context of WASH, identify areas for change or improvement, and then monitor changes in gender relations over time.

This paper provides a descriptive overview of the tool and its development and identifies some of the key insights, challenges and opportunities that emerge from Plan's piloting of the tool.

## The gender and WASH monitoring tool

The GWMT comprises a series of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) activities used in a community meeting setting. These activities were developed for and with Plan's WASH program in Vietnam. The objective was to enable local Plan staff and Government partners to explore and monitor gender relations with women and men in WASH communities, in a facilitated community workshop structure. The PRA tool builds on four key principles of a WASH Resource Guide developed by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA) and the Institute of Sustainable Futures (Halcrow et al 2010) as outlined in Table 1.

Cornwall (2003:1332) reminds us that as a methodology, PRA is generally gender neutral but can be a powerful approach that highlights diverse views within a community, reframing current engagements and offering new opportunities. It is our position that rather than having a neutral effect, gender-neutral approaches often tend to reinforce gender inequality. Hence, we would agree with

Cornwall's insight that PRA methodologies should be gender responsive.

Table 1: Principles that underpin the gender and WASH monitoring tool

Principle	Description
<b>Principle 1:</b> Facilitate participation and inclusion	Focus on ways of working that enable women, men, girls and boys to be actively involved in improving their water, sanitation and hygiene situation.
<b>Principle 2:</b> Focus on how decisions are made	Use decision-making processes that enable women's and men's active involvement, within the project and activities.
<b>Principle 3:</b> See and value differences	See, understand and value the different work, skills and concerns of women and men related to water, sanitation and hygiene.
<b>Principle 4:</b> Create opportunities	Provide space and support for women and men to experience and share new roles and responsibilities.

Source: Halcrow et al 2010

## Development of the tool

At the time of the development of the GWMT tool, Plan Australia was providing support to a large WASH program implemented over a four and a half year period by Plan Vietnam, with funding support from AusAID. The project goals specified both health and gender equality outcomes. Discussions between Plan Australia and Plan Vietnam staff about project monitoring identified gaps with respect to measuring progress towards gender equality. These gaps were identified as a lack of attention to *both* women's practical needs and strategic interests in project monitoring:

Practical needs refer to immediate needs of women, girls, men and boys for survival which do not challenge existing culture, tradition, the gender divisions of labour, legal inequalities or any other aspect of female's lower status or power. Strategic interests focus on advancing equality between males and females by transforming gender relations in some way, by challenging female's disadvantaged position or lower status or by focusing on/challenging men's/boys' roles, responsibilities or expectations (Hunt 2011:22).

We found that while our existing WASH project monitoring in Vietnam was able to identify and monitor a range of practical WASH changes for women and men in households and communities throughout the project implementation period, the existing monitoring approach was not sufficient to monitor changes in gender relations. Discussions with other WASH development actors in



Vietnam highlighted that other organisations were experiencing similar challenges.

In developing the GWMT Plan Vietnam and Plan Australia sought to address the gaps in Plan Vietnam's own monitoring, with a view to sharing the tool and lessons with Plan globally, and with other actors, pending its successful development and piloting. The initial tool was developed with external consultants and has been revised by Plan Australia staff working with local Plan Vietnam staff and counterparts over two successive pilots. It is important to note that the GWMT is not designed or intended to be a stand-alone tool for gender monitoring in WASH. Rather, it should be seen as **one** tool that can contribute to an intervention's overall approach to monitoring changes in gender relations.

There were some key catalysts that enabled the development of the tool. These included support from AusAID for a twelve month follow-on phase of the WASH project to be focused on evaluation and good practices, known as the Learning and Sustainability Project (LSP). The LSP provided an opportunity for the identified gaps in Plan's gender monitoring to be addressed through the development of the GWMT.

### Steps within the GWMT

Table 2 outlines the seven steps of the tool which are grounded within the four gender principles outlined in Table 1. In addition, a preparatory workshop and debriefing session for project implementers are considered essential stages that support the GWMT.

Table 2: Steps of the gender and WASH monitoring tool

Step	Format	Purpose
1. Introduction	Plenary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To explain meeting purposes and process</li> <li>To establish the ground 'rules' of the meeting</li> <li>To 'warm up' the community meeting</li> </ul>
2. Women's and men's work in household and community WASH	Small groups (divided by gender and age)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To learn about women's and men's participation in WASH activities (household and community level)</li> <li>To learn about new opportunities WASH program has provided for women and men of different ages</li> <li>To identify how women and men are represented in leadership bodies in the community</li> </ul>
3. Women's and men's role in household decision making on WASH		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify how women and men of different ages are involved in household decision making on WASH activities</li> <li>To learn how different household members view their own influence and the influence of others within their household</li> </ul>
4. Gender-disaggregated discussion	Two gender groups (women sub-groups, men sub-groups)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To make 'visible' divisions of labour and decision making across the different age groups in households and the community</li> <li>To promote discussion about division of labour and decision making roles</li> </ul>
5. Desired changes for women and men		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To identify the future vision of different community members around the 4 indicators.</li> </ul>
6. Sharing results and closing	Plenary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To make 'visible' women's and men's work, decision making, participation and leadership activities in household and community WASH</li> <li>May encourage increased respect for women's and men's work (within the different age groups), and a more equitable distribution of work burdens and influence over household decision making</li> <li>Sharing desired changes of women and men around the 4 indicators</li> <li>To close the monitoring activity</li> <li>To affirm joint community aspirations</li> </ul>
7. Assessment and documentation of results	Facilitators' meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To analysis and document the status of the communities (and any changes) regarding gender relations against the 4 indicators</li> <li>For the facilitation team to debrief</li> <li>To provide recommendations from the monitoring process as to how project activities could be improved to promote better outcomes for women and men in the community</li> </ul>

The GWMT is designed to generate data relevant to the four key indicators regarding the changes in gender relations:

- **Indicator 1:** Level of shared WASH workload in the household
- **Indicator 2:** Level of participation in WASH activities in the community
- **Indicator 3:** Level of shared WASH decision making in the household
- **Indicator 4:** Level of women's leadership in the community for WASH

The GWMT is also designed to create opportunities for women and men to explore and share their perspectives on gender relations at the household and community level through the WASH lens. It is anticipated that the tool be used every six to 12 months with data developed at the first community workshop providing the baseline information. This includes identifying and agreeing men's and women's shared aspirations for greater gender equality in WASH activities and decision making at the household and community level.

### Trialling the tool and insights

In the initial development of the tool a number of important local contextual considerations were taken into account through discussion with Plan Vietnam and Government partners. This included ensuring there is an equal number of women and men participants across six appropriately defined age groups giving a total of 36 participants for each community meeting. For example:

- 6 young women (aged 15–18)
- 6 young men (aged 15–18)
- 6 middle aged women (aged 19–40)
- 6 middle aged men (aged 19–40)
- 6 older women (aged 40+)
- 6 older men (aged 40+)

The GWMT requires six facilitators and six note takers, each working with a different aged sub-group. Only female facilitators worked with the women sub-groups, and only male facilitators worked with the men sub-groups.

The GWMT utilises activities of a 'typical' nuclear six-person household (comprising older woman and man, middle-aged woman and man and young girl and boy). However, it is recognised that not all participants will be living in this 'typical' household structure, for example, female-headed households. How the tool and/or its implementation at the local level can be adapted to accommodate diversity and ongoing changes in Vietnamese society, including in household structure, was highlighted as an issue for further exploration in the ongoing development of the tool in the trials.

### The GWMT in action

Plan Australia and Plan Vietnam have undertaken two promising trials of the GWMT within ethnically diverse communities of central Vietnam, utilising a train the trainer (ToT) approach.

The first trial in 2011 involved a two day preparatory training workshop with WASH staff and Government partners (as the facilitators of the GWMT) to explore the principles that underpin the GWMT and to run through the steps of the tool. The trial was then conducted in six communities with approximately 50 people attending at each community meeting, including children. A debriefing workshop was then held with the facilitators. The second trial included three days preparatory training and

community trials were undertaken in a further 10 communities, with approximately 36 people per community.

Whilst the first trial showed promising signs, a number of areas needing improvements were identified. The facilitation skills of staff and Government facilitators varied and as such, additional practice using the tool prior to the field trials and/or training in facilitation would have been beneficial. In addition, it was agreed the GWMT facilitators' notes need to provide more detailed and specific guidance and questions for facilitators to ensure that questions were consistent and to provide guidance/prompts for discussion. In the second trial, the ToT approach allowed more time for facilitators to practice the GWMT in the workshop prior to trialling the tool in communities. Those facilitators who were more confident were able to be identified and matched with those who needed additional support during the field trial.

An important revision made to the tool after the first trial was the development and introduction of photo cards depicting WASH activities at household and community levels. Literacy rates in Plan Vietnam working areas are variable and the photos were introduced in order to address barriers to participation based on literacy. For example, in the initial design of the tool some of the key PRA activities involved writing down WASH activities on cards and referring back to these to identify the different WASH activities undertaken by men and women. The photo cards are also designed to reflect positive WASH images of ethnic men and women, and to challenge gender stereotypes, by depicting both men and women in all age groups undertaking the full range of WASH activities (see Table 3).

Table 3: Example from the photo card set of ethnic females and males undertaking positive WASH actions

Positive WASH action	Female's photo card set	Male's photo card set
Hand washing with soap and clean water	Two photos of a small girl washing hands with soap under water tank tap with running water. Close up of hands being rinsed.	Small boy washing hands with soap under running water from water tank tap. Close up of hands with soap.
Collecting water	Young woman crouching by water tank filling a red plastic bucket with water from tank tap.	Young man pulling up a bucket of water from a well — the well has high surrounds.
Covering a lid on a toilet	Old woman covering hole in ground toilet with a wooden lid.	A young man beside hole in the ground toilet with wooden toilet cover.

The first trial included children (under 15 years of age) as participants. However, the trial illustrated that the tool was more appropriate for older young people and adults. It was concluded that a different process was required to engage younger children in discussions about

the roles of women and men and boys and girls in WASH activities and decision making.

The PRA activities within the GWMT are designed to serve as enablers to encourage discussions and reflections. However, there were some activities within the tool that proved complicated, and the focus became more on the activity process itself, rather than generating the intended discussion. These tools were simplified in the second trial.

## Strengths and enablers

Institutional support is vital to invest and nurture explicit commitments made to improving gender equality within an organisation's practice. There has been a positive response to the GWMT from WASH staff and Government partners. Based on the positive indications of the two trials, Plan Vietnam plans to incrementally roll out the application of the GWMT within its entire WASH program. This began in 2012. Plan staff with gender expertise provided critical support, facilitation and dedicated time to support the trials, particularly with respect to the ToT workshops and debriefing processes. Government counterparts at the community level had a genuine willingness to learn and a strong interest in improving their practice. The GWMT also represented an opportunity for Government staff to enhance their broader roles in Government. For example, for the Vietnam Women's Union, improving gender outcomes at the community level aligns with their core work.

The tool does not require facilitators to be gender specialists. The ToT approach enables facilitators to gain increased awareness and knowledge about gender equality through exploring the principles and practicing the steps of the GWMT with support from trainers with gender expertise. The tool has provided an important opportunity for demystifying gender monitoring for WASH implementing staff.

The development and application of the GWMT has provided healthy input into ongoing organisational discussions of contemporary approaches to M&E. There is also a keen interest amongst WASH staff within Plan's Asia region to learn more and potentially adapt the GWMT within different contexts.

## Conclusions and looking forward

The key lessons and challenges that emerged after the two trials have implications for the refinement and application of the GWMT, and for Plan's WASH program more broadly. The quality and depth of discussions within the GWMT activities largely rests on the ability of individual facilitators to have good facilitation skills. Plan Vietnam is

exploring opportunities within its WASH program to build ongoing support for improving gender monitoring facilitation skills for WASH monitoring staff. This includes exploring opportunities for incorporating the GWMT within the existing community-led total sanitation (CLTS) 'triggering' training and follow up support.

The development of GWMT is at a nascent stage and the tool will continue to be refined and adapted as Plan Vietnam and Government partners learn more about its application in different local ethnic communities' contexts.

From the perspective of participatory development, while the tool to this point has demonstrated the potential to engage women and men in local communities in dialogue about gender relations through a facilitated process with Plan staff and Government partners in Vietnam, the most recent trial identified an interest in taking women and men's participation to a different level. In particular, there is interest in exploring opportunities for supporting local communities in the use, and or adaptation of the tool for their own purposes.

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# Insignificant inclusion and tokenistic participation of women in development: A case study from Pakistan

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## Introduction

Participation in development interventions is often debated in terms of who participates, to what extent and whose priorities are served. The idea of participation becomes more complicated when marginalised groups, such as women, are encouraged to take part in development processes without addressing structural factors which could contribute to women's subordination and disempowerment and without considering the personal beliefs of both participants and the implementation staff. This case study shows that when these factors are ignored women's involvement can be tokenistic and can contribute to maintaining gender inequality.

The study outlines the results of research carried out to assess the unintended outcomes of a program widely known for its participatory and holistic approach towards poverty alleviation. The program is one of 11 Rural Support Programs in Pakistan that employ a similar approach to the principles of social organisation of rural poor through three grassroots institutions providing capacity building, capital formation through savings and provision of microcredit, and linkages development for better service delivery (Ahmed et al. 2008). Nearly 40 per cent of program borrowers and members of the community organisations (COs) are women (RSPN 2012). Their participation is encouraged by involving female staff and providing easy access to loans and training.

For this research, six village-based case studies were undertaken in different areas of Punjab with a maximum variation in context, yet having similar features with regard to program implementation. Interviews were undertaken with a variety of respondents including program participants, non-participating community members, dropouts and program personnel.

## Findings

The study revealed that in the villages studied, although the program targets women, it was not contributing to their empowerment. It found that women's involvement, in most cases, ranged from symbolic membership to tokenistic participation where women were merely conduits for benefitting men and considered by the implementers as 'safe clients'. At all study sites, separate COs had been formed for men and women while a few had mixed membership. Officially, women leaders managed their organisations, with few exceptions. However, women's contribution as leaders varied significantly in different areas. At two sites located in districts with poor socioeconomic indicators, the leadership and management of the village organisations (VOs) was completely male dominated. Women leaders were usually a spouse, daughter or a close relative of the male leaders or from a

family of their influence. In most cases, women had very limited knowledge of the program. Male leaders managed the COs, including the records, and women signed the registers. The president of a women's CO and a member of a village organisation pointed out:

They needed an educated woman to look after the (women's) CO business. No woman was ready to take the responsibility. The staff asked me to be the leader. I told them that I am illiterate. They said, Kabeer (her husband) would take care of everything and I should not be worried. I thus became the president of my CO.

This CO, now into its eleventh year of operation is still being managed by her husband. Similarly, in another village, women's restricted mobility was provided as the reason for a man being the manager for the last 10 years though women now go to bank and offices of other micro-finance providers in the area to obtain loans. Not surprisingly, most of the women 'office bearers' were not able to distinguish between the VO and a CO at these locations.

In contrast, in more urbanised and industrialised districts such as Lahore and Sialkot (Cheema et al. 2008) women from slightly better-off families (though not the wealthiest and largely teachers, health workers or beauticians) were managing the COs. They maintained the records and ran the microcredit component quite successfully. Nevertheless, they were never consulted or involved in the development initiatives of the VO such as village infrastructure improvement, liaison with elected representatives or government line departments, as these activities are traditionally undertaken by men.

A worse situation was 'symbolic membership', where women were registered with the CO by the male family members to obtain loans or by leaders of the VO to increase household coverage at the demand of the organisation. In such cases, women were not even aware of the name of the CO, or of other members or initiatives the village organisation had undertaken with program support. Their knowledge about the program was limited to microcredit and at times, even that was incomplete or incorrect. Nevertheless, all these women were required to attend meetings to obtain loans, deposit savings and go to the bank to get loan money, resulting in an increased burden on their time. The use of loans, and women's responsibility with regard to repayment, varied among different segments within a community.

Women from farming families, even with very small landholding, had not considered any economic activities for themselves but stuck to traditional reproductive roles and/or assisted men on their own farm. They had joined the program to obtain loans, mainly used for agricultural inputs, consumption smoothing in lean periods or for other non-productive purposes. These six monthly or annual

loans were paid on harvest with the women's role in the transaction no more than a conduit. When the loan was used to rear livestock, it 'belonged to the family' and women had very limited, if any, control over the asset. In most farming families, men had taken responsibility for repayment of loans, but it was the women who faced threats and pressure when there was a delay in repayment caused by a crop damage or death of livestock. In case of delay in payment, women were forced to pay from their own income, engage in additional work if available, or borrow from relatives.

In comparison, women from landless farming families or non-farming castes engaged in paid farm labour independently, such as cotton picking and/or assisting male family members. At a few locations, they also earned money by soccer ball stitching, carpet weaving, running a small shop or working as domestic help. Despite engagement in active economic activity, women seldom obtained a loan to start an independent income generation activity. Loans were taken with the knowledge of the male family head and at times, against women's will. Such loans were used for investment in an ongoing enterprise of the male family member, or to meet an emergency need, and were generally repaid from existing income.

The situation was more complicated where several micro finance institutes were working in the area and people had taken multiple loans for household consumption. In extreme cases, women had started working in factories to repay the loans. Nevertheless, this additional responsibility had not spared them from their traditional roles. While livestock was the first resort, other belongings such as furniture or jewellery given by a woman's parents as gifts were the main assets sold to repay a loan. Pressure to repay and fear of social humiliation were reported by women as the major stressors that, in some cases, had affected their health and increased household tension.

While savings could have been an asset for women to fall back on, in reality, they were not saving with the CO and maintained only the amount required as a precondition to obtain a loan. Limited access to savings when needed, no profit and having no money to contribute were the reasons provided by women for not saving with the CO.

Membership in the group had not increased social capital through group solidarity (Todd 1996). Rather, at times, existing social relations were spoiled and already limited networks were strained due to program related frictions such as peer pressure to repay. Relatives remained the source of support for women in difficult times, not the CO.

It is evident that program participation was not benefitting women, rather it has increased their burden and in some cases they had become worse off. Various factors contribute to such outcomes.

### **Contributing factors**

Program design and policies, the attitude of the implementation staff towards gender issues and personal beliefs of the participants were identified as the main

factors determining the extent and consequences of women's participation in the program.

### ***Program design and policies***

In the rhetoric, the program encourages women's participation and claims to be contributing to their empowerment with the assumption that this will happen by virtue of membership of a group or by access to microfinance. An additional assumption seems to be the equal capacity of men and women to benefit from the program activities. In so doing, the program does not take into account local gender-related norms, nor does it consider the opportunities available to men and women in the local context. As a result, patterns of inequality and exclusion are not only maintained but reinforced. For example, while the number of women participants is significant, they are restricted to the activities least threatening to men or ultimately serving men's purposes. Although, the organisation had made it mandatory to have women represented in the VO, as Cleaver (1999:603) argues,

the mere setting-up of formal organizations and the specification of their membership does not necessarily overcome exclusion, subordination or vulnerability.

With no procedures in place to ensure that participation is meaningful, women go to meetings whenever called, particularly during officials' visits. Traditional decision making patterns remain intact, women's attendance just corroborates development priorities of men. The program design does not incorporate mechanisms to challenge or attempt to alter stereotypical roles. Rather, program activities help strengthening the structural factors shaping and maintaining these conditions and thus women's participation remain tokenistic. As a male community member commented:

What will they [women] do? They don't have any skills and there are not many opportunities. People here don't like their women to go outside to work. What they can do is take loans and give to their husbands.

In addition, the focus of the group meetings remains credit transaction. As Kabeer (1994) has pointed out, membership, without providing any alternative way of thinking or a dialogue, could not form a 'collective identity' which could guide actions pertaining to women's benefit. The program does not initiate dialogue with men either and therefore, they cannot be expected to think unconventionally and involve women in non-traditional domains.

The program naively assumed that in regard to microfinance women would do 'something' to enhance their income and that increased individual economic empowerment would result in political and social empowerment (Mayoux 2002). In reality, neither the loan products were in line with women's needs nor were any measures taken to address their aspirations. For example, in a number of cases, women wanted to engage in income generation activity while staying in the village. However, with their existing, limited exposure, they could not think

of anything except stitching clothes. While women wanted the program to guide them how they could enhance their income, ironically, the opportunities provided were mainly learning stereotypical skills such as stitching and dyeing which had almost no market in their neighbourhoods.

In a nutshell, interventions that encourage women's participation without putting mechanisms in place to address social and cultural constraints and extending loans to women considering them secure clients, is just taking advantage of their vulnerability. Markedly, such token participation is unlikely to bring any real change in women's situation (Mayoux 1995). Therefore, the program design needs to be altered to incorporate measures that ensure benefits to women.

### *Beliefs of the implementation staff*

Although it can be argued that if the program design does not include explicit measures to empower women, the implementation staff cannot be held responsible for outcomes such as those discussed above. Nevertheless, staff understanding of gender issues and of the politics of participation can significantly enhance meaningful participation.

Being part of the same patriarchal society and without any training in addressing gender issues, staff members themselves strengthened the stereotypical gender roles. Instead of making efforts to build women's capacity to take leadership positions and to act like leaders, staff continued to rely on men in the community. No effort was made to enable women to assume CO positions. In situations where women were managing COs, staff had their own ideas of gender roles and excluded women from certain activities considering them 'unable' to perform or that the activity was not in 'their domain'. As a male staff member asserted:

Usually where we work with women, we work with men as well. The situation analysis is done with men only as women do not have that much knowledge.

This becomes increasingly problematic with regard to village level initiatives. No effort had ever been made by the staff to involve women in analytical activities, nor was any dialogue ever initiated with male or female community members with regard to gender roles. Though the program strategy does not bar women's participation in any activity, conformity to stereotypical roles was the easiest option for the staff and thus women's participation was confined to access to microcredit only. A male staff defended the tokenistic participation of women in microcredit by saying:

...women here are not used to being involved in financial matters. Finances are men's domain and they are decision makers in that regard.

The female staff member of the same team admitted:

We are answerable for women borrowers. Therefore, we have to sit there and pressurise women to pay.

This indicates that the staff did not realise that they were conforming to a practice that favoured men. For example, not objecting to men using loans taken in a woman's name at the same time going against the traditional male domain of borrowing money.

Gender roles and power relations within the household seem unproblematic to staff. While explaining why not one woman in the village used a loan herself for an income generation activity, a female staff commented:

...mainly people here are farmers. Men and women work at fields. If husband is irrigating fields, the wife would cut the fodder. They work equally in wheat harvest ... Therefore, they spend loans on farm and work together.

Also, they might be strengthening the status quo without realising its longer term implications for the poorest women. For instance, a field staff responded to my query of why all women leaders in the village were from better-off families as:

...when people from better-off families lead, they can call these very poor. They can ask them to come under all circumstances. They can call them when the organisation staff visit or the district manager is coming. They can tell them we have to do this or that.

Therefore, it requires a practical commitment on the part of the organisation to ensure that the field staff have a clear understanding of gender issues. Policies need to be in place that will give field staff confidence to spend their time and effort in making women's participation meaningful. Otherwise, they are justified in saying:

We have to prepare credit cases, receive recovery, update the register and other records in this short time. How many COs can we attend? With how many COs can we have a dialogue? It is just touch and go.

### *Personal beliefs of participants*

The participants themselves could be instrumental in maintaining gender inequality. It is highly likely that an intervention denying any effort to provide an alternative view to its participants may strengthen the current belief system. Like other patriarchal rural societies, men and women in these villages of Punjab believed men to be bread winners and decision makers. Traditional gender roles and norms in the minds of the program participants remain the same even after years of membership. Both men and women generally remain within the boundaries of their prescribed roles. For instance, members of 'women only' village organisations believed:

Women should stay at home. They should not be going everywhere. It is men who should go and talk to others.

Men too, believed in certain gender roles and see women's involvement in the program as insignificant. A male community member said:

Who listens to them? It is men's work to do things at the village level. They give loans and take back. It is between women. No one bothers about them.

No explicit debate or discussion ever took place within the community with regard to stereotypical gender roles and the belief system was not being challenged. A leader of a 'women only' VO, proclaimed after four years of participation:

There is no forum at the village level to solve the collective problems of the village. Women cannot do anything from the VO's platform as the decision makers are the men here.

Rather, program activities, intended entirely for a different objective could be perceived differently by women participants. For example a member commented:

...They give loans to women only. Maybe because Bajji M, R and other women can hold women accountable but not to men.

Therefore, women might participate but this would remain tokenistic unless the program design incorporated strategies to alter stereotypical personal beliefs of the participants. Otherwise, it is highly likely that the program may contribute to further marginalisation and exploitation of women.

## Conclusion

Although many findings of this study have been found elsewhere during the course of research on women's participation in the development process this paper highlights the lack of realisation on the part of program planners and implementers that they can contribute to maintaining gender inequality through women's involvement in a development intervention. The need for cautious efforts to not strengthen the structures that marginalise the already disadvantaged while planning and implementing

development interventions, is stressed. Without a careful analysis of gender roles, norms and culture of an area and a review of the economic opportunities available to both men and women and without challenging the existing stereotypical beliefs, women's participation will remain tokenistic.

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# Indigenous African communication systems and participatory development in rural Africa: The case of a Nigerian village

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## Introduction

Communication is a very important component of development (MacBride et al 1980; Akpan 2012). Through dialogue, development facilitators and communities work together on projects that will improve the latter's living conditions. But taking communication for granted can frustrate development programs. It is necessary to ensure that communities are informed about the objectives of development initiatives, as there have been instances where communities have rejected well thought-out projects due to ignorance of government's or development agency's intentions. In other words, poor communication can affect grassroots support for and acceptance of development projects.

This study examines the role of Indigenous African communication systems (IACS) in participatory or people-oriented development in Nigeria's rural areas. In doing so, it looks at the World Bank assisted Local Empowerment and Environmental Management Project (LEEMP) program at Umunahihie village in the Ihitte-Uboma local government area of Imo State.

## Participatory development

The optimism that followed the development initiatives of the 1950s and 1960s and the consequent widespread cynicism generated by their subsequent failure, 'led in the 1970s to a broadened and more contextually relevant re-thinking of the development process' (Soola 1988:18). Prior to this time, people were not the focus of development (Dare 1993; Soola 1988) and local contextual realities were ignored by the so-called development experts. This development approach, popularly referred to as the 'dominant paradigm' was also criticised for its top down, one way approach and its propensity for looking down on local communities. Hence Sparks (2007:53) points out that the starting point of this approach is: 'we know it, they need to know'.

Consequently, alternative paradigms began to emerge, including the participatory paradigm, a bottom up approach, which sees development as a process initiated through the people for the people. Here, communities are seen as stakeholders rather than beneficiaries. Ordinary people are seen 'as key agents in the process and development initiatives usually focus on their aspirations and strengths' (Servaes 1999: 93). The goal of this paradigm, therefore, is to involve communities in any effort aimed at improving their quality of life.

But the paradigm has also had its fair share of criticism. For instance, it has been dubbed 'the new tyranny' (Cooke and Kothari 2001) and described as a smart means of getting grassroots approval for an already decided project (Hilyard et al 2001). Given that the paradigm seeks to

achieve equality by empowering ordinary people, it is doubtful how this can be achieved in a jiffy without generating conflict — especially as established power blocs in the communities will feel threatened (Sparks 2007).

## Indigenous African communication systems and rural development

Information is crucial for participation in development programmes. Adequate information, Aboyade (1987) notes, will not only make for a better understanding and appreciation of the relevance of new programs to people's everyday living conditions, but will also encourage a closer link between the initiators and beneficiaries of development efforts (cited in Mboho 1990:235). However, poor knowledge of the communication system of an area can lead to a mismatch between media and audience, an avoidable situation which can frustrate a meaningful development initiative. In rural Africa, for instance, where the bulk of the people get their information from the IACS, it will be counter-productive to utilise any other communication channels or media to mobilise people to participate in development programmes.

IACS, also called traditional communication (Wilson 1990; Ikpe 2012), are crucial in rural mobilisation because of their centrality to the everyday life of rural people in Africa. They are a complex system of communication which pervades all aspects of rural life in Africa (Ikpe 2012:73). They are complex in the sense that they are not only one system but a network of communication systems which operate at various levels of African society (Wilson 1990). These communication systems met the communication needs of Africans of yore effectively and are still meeting the communication needs of people in rural and semi-urban areas in Africa despite the attractions of the modern mass media. IACS are 'identifiable ways of sharing ideas, meanings, opinions, and facts of all kinds between and among Africans' (Nwabueze 2006:236). They include music and musical instruments, objects, colour schemes, chants, cryptic writings, symbols, folk theatre, forums and institutions. Due to the multicultural nature of Africa, there is no uniformly agreed taxonomy of IACS but researchers in the field are in agreement that they are credible, authoritative and non-alienating, and derive meaning and relevance within a defined cultural and linguistic context (Ojebode 2002).

While IACS carry everybody along, both literate and illiterate, the modern means of mass communication tend to influence only the educated (Popoola 2004). However, IACS go beyond communication or message to include the communication source. Hence Wilson (1997:98) notes that they include all social conventions and practices whose chief concerns may not necessarily be with communication. He categorises them into two: source related



and message oriented, pointing out that the source related characteristics are authoritative and credible whereas the message related characteristics are transactional, integrative, non-alienating and definitive.

Several empirical studies have also underscored the importance of IACS in rural development. Bame (2005) shows how Indigenous entertainment, an integral component of IACS, forms are more successful than the mass media in family planning education in rural areas in Ghana while Bourgault (2005) reveals how ritual and theatre engender community participation in Liberia. Similarly, William and Udo (2012) have chronicled how IACS have been effectively utilised to resolve a 100 year old conflict between two villages in Nigeria.

Udoakah (1996), however, contends that IACS can only perform limited functions. For instance, he argues that the literacy level of the town crier is usually low and as such leads to distortions in messages he passes across to the people. He insists that these disadvantages place the modern mass media ahead of IACS as media for communication of development to rural people in contemporary Nigeria.

Indeed, a larger percentage of the Nigerian population live in rural areas (UN 2010; IFAD 2012) where IACS dominate the communication milieu. Rural areas are usually characterised by poverty, lack of infrastructure, high level of illiteracy, lack of good healthcare facilities, dilapidated school buildings, aging population and subsistence farming, among other things (Umanah 1992; Udoakah 1998; Anele 2012). The poverty level in rural areas particularly limits access to the mass media. Brieger (1990) notes that the cost of dry cell batteries required to power a portable radio set in the absence of electricity could feed a family of four for one day, hence many rural households Western Nigeria do not own a radio set. Besides, much of the modern mass communication media in Africa has been used as megaphones by political leaders and their parties and do not necessarily promote development (Boafo 1985; Oso 1993). The foregoing suggests that mobilising rural people for development will require the use of cheap, accessible and non-alienating media — characteristics which IACS possess.

### **Local Empowerment and Environmental Management Projects (LEEMP)**

LEEMP was considered for this study because of its participatory approach to development. The scheme is a five-year partnership between the World Bank and the Federal Government of Nigeria designed to combat poverty through community empowerment and sustainable and effective management of the environment. Information on LEEMP's website says it 'puts ordinary rural people in the driving seat when it comes to spending public money for local development'.

A LEEMP-assisted scheme at Umunahihie village in Ihitte Uboma Council in Imo State, Nigeria is the focus of the case study. Umunahihie, which is one of the participating villages chosen in the first phase (2004–09) of the scheme, has an estimated population of over 5,000

people (based on projected figures of the 1991 National population census). Predominantly farmers, there are also traders, artisans, and civil servants (both serving and retired) in the village. Lack of potable water has been the village's major problem over the years as its only source of drinking water, a stream, is easily contaminated.

### **Findings and discussion**

The study revealed that IACS are part of the manifestations of the culture of the people of Umunahihie village. They 'speak' the people's language and the people have over the years relied on them for their everyday interactions. This is thus what makes the IACS distinct.

A component of IACS which the study found central to the success of rural mobilisation is the traditional institution. In fact, almost all the respondents attested that rural mobilisation usually start with the traditional institutions. They pointed out that without the *Eze* (the king/ruler) of a community and the kindred heads it would be very difficult to mobilise rural people. The diffusion process of IACS starts with him. He gives orders to the kindred heads who in turn gives orders to the family heads. Explaining the process, the ruler of Umunahihie community noted that if there was a decision that the *Eze* wanted the community to take, he would first call his cabinet members (ward heads) to a meeting. The ward heads would then either meet with the kindred heads who would in turn meet with their family members or they (ward heads) would instruct the town criers in their various wards to convoke a general meeting. Decisions taken at each village meeting would then be aggregated at another meeting of the *Eze's* cabinet. The village ruler noted that the water project followed the same pattern:

For this water borehole, I always meet with the ward heads in my house before we call for a general meeting at *Ukwu Okwe*<sup>1</sup>. The town crier<sup>2</sup> usually informs the whole village on the eve of the meeting. This is done so that a good number of people will attend the meetings. It is when people attend these meetings that they become part of decisions we take and will not feel short-changed by us.

The importance of traditional rulers to rural mobilisation is understandable given that they are the custodians of the people's culture. Their houses are sites of power within villages, and their orders are usually carried out to the letter. But the concentration of power in the traditional authorities also poses the danger of misuse of power. Corrupt traditional overlords can manipulate IACS to their advantage. For instance, since development agencies visit them before commencement of projects; chances are that the traditional overlords could frustrate development projects that would bring more benefits to the people and less to them (traditional rulers). This may be why West and Fair (1993) argue that there is the possibility that village elites can manipulate IACS.

LEEMP appreciated the importance of IACS in rural mobilisation; hence it adopted this culture-based development communication strategy. A LEEMP official insisted that the success of any rural mobilisation effort could be

determined by the level of involvement of the traditional institutions. He said that in the Umunahihie water project, LEEMP only sensitised the traditional authorities and left the mobilisation to them. LEEMP's approach is clearly a deference to the warning by Mushengyezi (2003:107) that 'extrapolating communication models of the West and applying them wholesale to African environments that are quite unique' would only be a wasted effort as 'such communication strategies often do not impact on the rural masses for which they are meant because they are not "contextualized" to the local settings, cultural dialectics and worldview of the people'.

However, the importance of the town crier in mobilisation efforts in Umunahihie village reveals the centrality of that office in contemporary rural Nigeria. The town crier is the information conduit for the community leadership. The rural people rely on him for information about events and decisions taken at cabinet meetings. The accuracy of his message may depend on his level of understanding of issues at stake. However, since the authorities in rural communities rarely make use of the mass media, there is no doubt that even the most 'cosmopolitan' rural dwellers need IACS to be abreast with daily occurrences in the village.

As findings showed, IACS were effectively used in mobilising Umunahihie people toward the completion of their water project. The findings, in part contradict Udoakah's (1996) claim that traditional media cannot meet the information needs of contemporary Nigerian rural dwellers. While the results partially invalidate Udoakah's argument, they also confirm to an extent his observation that the IACS, despite their uniqueness, need refinement to eliminate distortions.

Communities participating in LEEMP's programmes tend to have a relatively high level of freedom in the selection and management of projects, at least going by the case of Umunahihie's water project. From interviews with LEEMP's officials, notes taken from the organisation's documents and interviews with some indigenes of Umunahihie village, it could be said that LEEMP neither chose nor imposed projects on communities.

According to LEEMP's desk officer at Ihitte Uboma council, the agency ensured that every section of the community was represented during sessions when the project to be carried out was chosen. He informed, too, that at the same meeting, election of the members of the Community Project Management Committee (CPMC) also took place. According to him,

We believe in social inclusiveness. If we went to a community and we didn't see the women, the elders or the youths, voting wouldn't take place. We would postpone it till another day when they would all be represented. That is the process and that was how the water project was chosen by this village.

Considering that the goal of the participatory approach is grassroots participation in the decision-making process and grassroots' control over their commonwealth, the LEEMP project in Umunahihie village shows that the approach is practicable. At least, the lack of potable water

was a major problem for the village and the water borehole was the people's solution. Members of a Community Project Management Committee (CPMC) were elected by the general assembly of the village under the supervision of LEEMP and the members were ordinary people who did not seem to wield power in the village. This showed strong community participation in the project and also addressed the Hilyard et al (2001) contention that the approach is a smart way of getting bottom up approval for already decided projects.

However the water project did not totally clarify the ambiguities inherent in the participatory approach. For example, LEEMP's electoral guideline states that only 'ordinary' people are elected into the CPMC. But, is electing 'neutral' people into the CPMC not tantamount to creating a new power block? The attempt to change the balance of power in the village, as Thomas (1995), argues, may result in a violent power struggle (cited in Sparks 2007). LEEMP also supervised the project selection exercise and the election of CPMC members (and was also monitoring the water project in conjunction with the CPMC), thus showing a tilt towards the 'we know better than you' approach of the dominant paradigm. This affirms Sparks' (2007) and Waisbord's (2005) scepticism over the practicability of the participatory paradigm without a retention of elements of the dominant paradigm.

## Conclusion

This study has shown that the promoters of IACS have a point to prove. The small populations of clustered villages, poverty and low literacy levels are critical issues, which make the use of mass communication in such settings difficult. Besides, the traditional nature of most African rural communities, relying on age-long traditional modes of engagement and communication, limited, to a large extent, the effectiveness of the modern mass media in rural mobilisation. The findings revealed that neglecting IACS in mobilisation for rural development in Nigeria is a recipe for failure. Strict adherence to the stipulations of the participatory paradigm of development has also been shown to be almost impossible without borrowing from the much criticised dominant paradigm.

## Notes

- 1 Ukwu Okwe is the village square where elders meet to discuss matters of importance.
- 2 The town crier is the village announcer; the publicity secretary who goes round the village to inform the people about a meeting in the traditional rulers palace or village square, and in other cases inform the people about decisions taken at important meetings.

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# Fostering social change through participatory video: A conceptual framework

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While development projects themselves often subscribe to tested theories and methodologies, participatory video is often brought into these initiatives without the same rigour in design and implementation. This is especially true as cameras become more accessible and affordable in developing countries. To strengthen the use of participatory video for social change — and to build a stronger understanding of how participatory video can be used as a development tool — this paper offers a conceptual framework for using participatory video based on participatory action research (PAR) theory. The framework highlights the value of generating grassroots knowledge to raise awareness to help shift decision making power; the importance of building local capacity and ongoing support for community members and stakeholders to act on this knowledge; and the need for people-centred advocacy as a vital component that can ultimately lead to social transformation. This paper will also include the process and lessons learned in applying one element of the framework in Kenya within a development program related to climate change.<sup>1</sup>

— knowledge, consciousness, and action — provide a strong foundation for building rigour into the design and implementation of participatory video projects for social change.

The participatory action research (PAR) framework shares many similarities with participatory video in that its role is ‘to enable people to empower themselves through the construction of their own knowledge, in a process of action and reflection, or “conscientisation” to use Freire’s term’ (ibid:179). Within the PAR framework, Gaventa and Cornwall (ibid) define ‘knowledge as a resource which affects decisions; action which looks at who is involved in the production of such knowledge; and consciousness which looks at how the production of knowledge changes the awareness or worldview of those involved’. Building on the PAR framework, I therefore offer a conceptual framework for participatory video containing three similar elements (see Figure 2):

## The conceptual framework

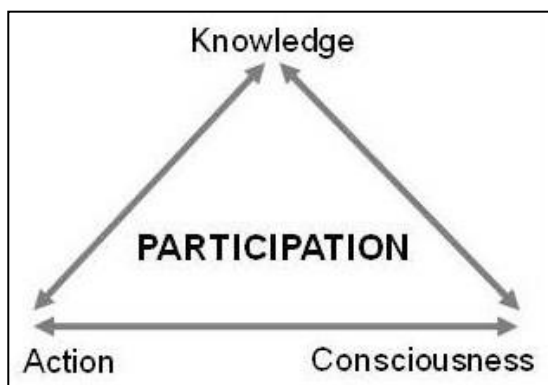
With its visual nature and ability to capture the voices of people from marginalised groups, participatory video holds the potential to educate, persuade, and advocate in ways that can bring positive change. To do so, participatory video projects designed explicitly for social change need to go beyond a process of community members telling their stories through video mainly for an external audience, to one that addresses power issues through ‘more inclusive participation in order to address embedded social and economic inequities’ (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008:172). A process of transforming power relations is core to Gaventa and Cornwall’s participatory action research framework (see Figure 1. Thus, its three elements

Figure 2: Framework for Participatory Video



- *Awareness and knowledge:* Using participatory video as a means to raise awareness to help build knowledge as power. Fostering such power can help shift inequities that hinder decision making action;
- *Capacity for action:* Building on the strengths of local actors in using participatory video with communities to ensure that knowledge not often heard in wider dialogue can be generated in a participatory manner and shared both during the participatory video workshop and through its long term use; and
- *People-centred advocacy:* Using participatory video as a strategic process to communicate the knowledge generated by communities to influence decision makers at local, national, and global levels.

Figure 1: Gaventa and Cornwall Framework for PAR (Gaventa & Cornwall, 2008, p. 172).



## Awareness and knowledge: Digital photo storytelling in Kenya<sup>2</sup>

Gaventa and Cornwall (2006:122) argue that ‘perhaps as much as any other resource, knowledge as power deter-

\* In collaboration with Care International.

mines definitions of what is conceived as important, as possible, for and by whom'. When used as a community-led, knowledge gathering tool in the context of a development project, participatory video can help the participants to identify key topics and to explain them as *their own issues* to be addressed. This idea of building 'agency in the process of knowledge production' is one of the first steps to citizen action (ibid.).

The participatory video process can thus be used for community-led knowledge generation to help amplify and strengthen the voices of the people involved in making the videos. In Kenya, CARE International applied this element of the framework through a digital storytelling process whereby community members developed videos explaining which effects of climate change in the region affect them the most, and how they are coping.

The program that incorporated participatory video — through the Adaptation Learning Programme (ALP) for Africa implemented by CARE — is located in Nanighi community, Garissa district, north-eastern Kenya. Nanighi is an agro-pastoral area with the majority of people generating income from crops and livestock. Approximately 10 per cent of its nearly 4,000 residents are nomadic pastoralists whose livelihoods are threatened by increasing drought frequency, a decrease in rainfall intensity and distribution, and floods.

The purpose of developing the photo story videos was to raise awareness about the effects of climate change on women, young men and older men in the community to highlight differential vulnerability; to understand and monitor change over time; and to advocate with local and national adaptation policy makers and practitioners. The videos are integral to the ALP's process of working with communities in setting adaptation priorities, and as part of its participatory monitoring and evaluation strategy.

For this project, staff wanted to ensure that the process was scalable, replicable, and respectful of community members' time. We thus designed a photo storytelling video process to uniquely fit into the ALP context. The process included pre-workshop knowledge gathering, a two day train the trainer workshop, and a five day community digital storytelling workshop.

### *Pre-workshop knowledge gathering*

Prior to the participatory video workshop, ALP staff worked with a large group of Nanighi community members to identify and prioritise how they are vulnerable to the effects of a changing climate, people's coping mechanisms, and proposed adaptation strategies. The community members selected nine workshop participants to share this information through digital storytelling videos.

### *Train the trainer workshop*

During a two day workshop, local journalists and ALP staff learned how to facilitate a digital storytelling workshop within the context of the ALP. They reviewed CARE's climate change adaptation work, learned how to use a participatory scriptwriting process, refreshed their photography skills, learned the required software, and

discussed ethics of working within a CARE program. They also learned how to facilitate the following steps:

- decide story topic;
- use mind mapping to develop proposed story lines, using drawings to help people who cannot read;
- select the most compelling story line from the mind mapping exercise;
- transfer the information from the mind map to a visualisation script (a story outline that lists supporting visuals for each narrated section);
- develop the outline into a script with facilitator support;
- record the narration in the local language;
- work with the community to take the photos they want for their stories; and
- edit and show the videos to the village.

### *Five day community digital storytelling workshop*

In the workshop, three separate groups of women, young men, and older men discussed the effects of climate change previously identified in the Nanighi community to decide which one affected them most. The women chose human and livestock diseases; the older men chose degradation of pasture and range land; and the young men chose livestock deaths. Within each topic, the newly trained journalists and ALP staff led the community members through the digital storytelling steps. On the third day the teams met in Nanighi to photograph the story scenes, as directed by the community members. Using their script, the journalists and ALP staff edited the photos and narration into animated videos to show in the community. They used easy to learn, free editing software selected to avoid ongoing licence fees so the process would be replicable. The journalists and ALP staff then returned to the Nanighi village on the fifth day to show the videos to community leaders and the storytellers.

In this case, the video showing process supported ongoing women's empowerment efforts by the ALP team who are working to ensure community adaptation strategies in the Nanighi community are inclusive of women's **concerns**. Because the Muslim, agro-pastoralist women have never worked with or welcomed media before, they had fears about sharing their videos in the community as they usually do not talk in group meetings with men. The facilitators thus agreed to show the videos only to the women who made them. However, after watching the men's videos in a group setting, male community leaders expressed the importance of also seeing the women's film since they are part of the community. The women agreed, and the men responded positively. Makay Barrow Shuriye, who is featured in the video, said, 'the elders talking here have appreciated what we have done. This has given us more confidence because no one is criticising. This is important because sharing information with the local community makes people understand more about the activities of women in our community.' After the presentation and discussion, the women decided that not only could their husbands and fellow community members watch their videos in future screenings, but that they wanted their story told widely.

As this case study highlights, participatory video has the potential to support an empowering process that VeneKlasen and Miller (2007:45) describe through the concepts of *power within*, *power to* and *power with*. The *power within* builds a person's sense of self-worth and self-knowledge. This supports a tradition of 'grassroots efforts that use individual storytelling and reflection to help people affirm personal worth and recognize their *power to* and *power with*'. The *power to* is the emergence of 'the unique potential of every person to shape his or her life and world,' and is especially important for collective action, or *power with*, that can help 'promote equitable relations'. This empowerment process can be especially valuable for marginalised groups who are often shut out of policy debates and decisions that affect their lives. However, it is important to reinforce that the short process of community digital storytelling described here is not empowering in isolation, but can support such efforts when embedded in a longer term project inclusive of such aims. The learning process using visuals could be strengthened by a longer cyclical process of dialogue and community review using photographs taken over time prior to making the final video product.

### Capacity for action<sup>3</sup>

In this section of the conceptual framework, capacity for action focuses on sustainable use of participatory video. It encompasses drawing upon and raising the skills of local actors to become participatory video facilitators who can use participatory video for social change in the communities and countries where they live. Because participatory video learning workshops are often led by participatory video practitioners on short term contracts, capacity for action focuses on ensuring long term use of the tool and resulting videos after the initial workshop through a train-the-trainer approach, and through incorporation of participatory video within a larger development project.

Fostering capacity for action through the participatory video process thus requires more than a skills based video workshop and community screening of the final video. It promotes a long term vision from the start, integrating the participatory video process into development project proposals in both design and budget, incorporating a train the trainer model for participatory video facilitation, and including funds and strategies for ongoing awareness raising and advocacy activities.

Capacity for action thus recognises that researching and making participatory videos is both a process and medium for people to raise their own awareness as well as the awareness of local to global audiences. This supports the argument of Gaventa and Cornwall (2006:122) that 'through access to knowledge and participation in its production, use and dissemination, actors can affect the boundaries and indeed the conceptualization of the possible'.

For example, while it is easy to improve the resource capabilities of people trained in participatory video by providing video or photography equipment, a more difficult task is strengthening human capacities. This, selecting appropriate technology is a vital component in

strengthening peoples' capacity for action. For example, Gumucio-Dagron (2006:983) points out that technology should be 'adequate for the needs of the communities, not in terms of technical standards alone, but in terms of utilization, learning and adoption'. In the Kenya case study, for example, appropriate technology choice was integral to the design of the participatory video so it could be easily replicable and sustainable. The process thus used photography cameras and laptops CARE already owned, as well as easy-to-learn software available for free download. For the process to be more replicable, still photography was chosen as the main visual medium to reduce the learning curve in building simple videos using photos, narration, and music. The Kenya Participating Video Project also built on the photography, audio editing, and storytelling skills of local journalists so they can work with CARE and the community for future stories.

### People-centered advocacy<sup>4</sup>

Samuel (2002:9) explains that people-centered advocacy 'enables and empowers marginalized people to speak for themselves,' which is a vital first step in having their specific needs met. He argues that 'people-centered advocacy encompasses a rights-based approach to social change and transformation' by promoting the belief that 'people are not passive beneficiaries or charity seekers of the state or government' but citizens with the 'right to demand that the state ensures equitable social change and distributive justice'. This extends to the right of participation, which is at the core of participatory video work.

Thus, the participatory video process must strengthen the agency of the people creating the videos by helping them to challenge and overcome inequities in decision making due to social status, gender roles, literacy, cultural traditions, or age. Participatory video alone cannot achieve these goals. The participatory video process and use of the final videos must be embedded into larger development projects and processes that incorporate empowering initiatives for community-led advocacy. Towards these efforts, I agree with Chapman (2005:15) who quotes Samuel in her description of what is necessary for effective engagement in policy:

If human rights are to have real meaning, they must be linked to public participation. And participation must be preceded by empowerment of the people. A sense of empowerment requires a sense of dignity, self-worth and the ability to ask questions ... A process of political empowerment and a sense of rights empower citizens to participate in the public sphere.

The ideal action for using participatory video for social change is for community members themselves to show the videos and be part of discussions that drive decision making. Due to the digital nature of the final videos, they can be disseminated relatively easily at the global level through media such as CD, flash drives, and the internet. Local sharing that can support an empowering process, however, requires much more planning and effort (for example, showing in areas without electricity, incorporating into local government meetings, etc.). If

social change is the participatory video project driver within the project, it is imperative that local use is prioritised and alternatives included in funding (such as also printing the photo stories for more localised use in areas without electricity, so those who made the films can share their stories for on-going dialogue, learning and influence at the local level).

## Conclusion

As participatory video practitioners working in development, I believe we must continuously be asking ourselves: 'Who are we doing participatory video for, and why?' to help ensure the use of participatory video reflects the integrity and vision of the projects in which they are embedded. Designing and implementing a participatory video project in a manner that generates awareness and knowledge, builds capacity for action, and advocates from the bottom up requires — from the start — a realistic vision of how this process can foster long term social change. By understanding how a conceptual framework for participatory video can support social change, participatory video projects can be better designed to help achieve long-term development goals with the same rigour as the projects the videos support. This helps ensure that future participatory video projects ultimately do what we are all striving to do. That is, to benefit the people we work with in using video to foster social change.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Full article in 'The Participatory Video Handbook' inclusive of case studies from Vietnam and Nepal.

- 2 Kenya Digital Photo Storytelling videos available at [www.careclimatechange.org/videos/africaalp](http://www.careclimatechange.org/videos/africaalp).
- 3 Full article in 'The Participatory Video Handbook' inclusive of a case study with Plan Vietnam illustrating this element of the framework.
- 4 Full article in 'The Participatory Video Handbook' inclusive of a case study with Children in a Changing Climate and ActionAid Nepal illustrating this element of the framework.

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# Achieving participatory development communication through 3D model building in Timor-Leste

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Participatory development is now widely accepted in principle. In practice, however, institutional obstacles, resource constraints and perceived capacity weaknesses conspire to undermine genuine community participation in project design, implementation and evaluation. The question is no longer *whether* communities should participate in development initiatives but *how*. In this paper I draw on recent exploratory research in Timor-Leste to discuss the potential of structured 3D model building as a tool for promoting substantive community engagement in development projects.

## Participatory development communication through serious play

Limited uptake of development initiatives has recently been linked to over-reliance on ‘expert’ knowledge and inadequate appreciation of local development priorities (see Smucker et al. 2007:387, Tufte and Mefalopulos 2009:18). Meanwhile, increasing emphasis on the need for local participation in development projects has generated new interest in how development researchers and practitioners alike can better engage the communities in which they work. Participatory development communication (PDC) offers one approach to enhancing stakeholder engagement at all stages of the project cycle. Contrasting this approach with conventional development models, advocates of PDC contend that sustainable development results not from hierarchical, top-down data extraction or transmission of knowledge, but rather horizontal processes of knowledge exchange (see Figueroa et al. 2002, Mefalopulos 2008, Quarry and Ramirez 2009).

While few would contest the objectives of PDC outright, the nexus between principles and practice is considerably more disputed. Insufficient skills and resources to maintain substantive community engagement over a protracted period is certainly part of the problem. PDC does not come cheap. However, commonly relied on methods of communication must also be interrogated. For instance, the literature on PDC emphasises the importance of dialogue — of co-determining the content and parameters of a conversation *in situ* (Bessette 2004, Hamelink 2002). By contrast, survey, interview and focus group questions contain *de facto* terms of reference that inevitably open up particular avenues of discussion while closing off others. Similarly, the standardised language (dare I say jargon) commonly used to discuss highly complex development challenges is hardly conducive to identifying fundamental differences between how development ‘experts’ and local communities perceive, explain, and rationalise particular behaviours or outcomes. Prescriptive language is a common condition of the power

imbalance characteristic of development work. It is not, however, inescapable.

A growing body of literature demonstrates that serious play can create opportunities for knowledge exchange about complex issues while eschewing — or even upending — conventional power relations (Andersen 2009, Gauntlett 2007, Statler et al. 2011). Briefly, serious play, distinct from general play, is a goal-oriented activity that provides structured space for reflection and critical analysis. It corresponds strongly with Freire’s idea of ‘conscientisation’: an act of critical reflection through experiential learning and dialogue (Thomas 1994:51). Crucially for the pursuit of PDC, serious play invokes conscious reflection on the activity itself in a way that directly connects the play space to real life issues and concerns. The 3D model building technique, discussed at some length below, offers just one example of how serious play might be harnessed to achieve PDC objectives.

## 3D model building in Timor-Leste

The remainder of this paper will examine an exploratory study on the potential of 3D model building as process for structuring grounded dialogue in a development context. This research was conducted alongside the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) funded project ‘Enhancing smallholder cattle production in East Timor’ during the initial site selection and needs assessment phase of this initiative. Research participants included members of the local research team as well as community leaders and farmers in one village under consideration as a possible site for project implementation.

The 3D model building process piloted in Timor-Leste was significantly informed by the LEGO® SERIOUS PLAY® methodology. Originally developed in 1998 to help overcome stagnation within the Lego Group itself, LEGO SERIOUS PLAY consists of a progressive sequence of model building exercises that encourage participants to think abstractly about complex problems using the iconic, plastic Lego bricks (Roos et al. 2004). After each building challenge, participants share the story or meaning of their model with others sitting around the table, creating opportunities for self-expression and cooperative learning. In other words, this distinctive approach to communication is purposefully designed to (a) allow time and space for individual reflection, and (b) provide opportunities for all participants to express their thoughts on an equal footing.

The immediate objective of adapting LEGO SERIOUS PLAY for use in a rural development context was to design a research communication framework that would empower participants to express their experiences



and aspirations in their own terms. Research in Timor-Leste started from the premise that different project stakeholders (i.e. the local research team, community leaders, livestock farmers) hold discrete types of expertise. In other words, it anticipated that knowledge about persistent obstacles to rural farmers' achieving a more sustainable livelihood would be varied and dispersed. The research design also recognised that many people — particularly those with low literacy skills or minimal formal education — may not be readily able to articulate this expertise. The sequence of 3D model building challenges purposefully designed for this research were intended to create a context in which participants could analyse — and effectively communicate to others — how they understand their own lived experience, aspirations and local development challenges.

Exploratory fieldwork using 3D model building as a situation analysis tool was conducted in Timor-Leste from 4–12 September 2012. Members of the local research team affiliated with the national university and the Ministry of Agriculture participated in separate model building sessions held in Dili. Two additional sessions were conducted with community leaders and farmers in one rural village in Liquiça district. Each session lasted approximately three and a half hours and included warm up exercises (intended to familiarise participants with the bricks) as well as topical building challenges designed to provoke discussion about livestock management practices.

There is not space here to discuss the sequence of building challenges at length; this process is described in richer detail elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Briefly, the topical building challenges used with each group of participants followed a similar pattern, although the exact wording differed slightly in accordance with each group's defined role. First, participants were asked to build a model representing their own role or context with regard to the ACIAR project, either as a researcher, community leader or farmer. Next, they built a model or models identifying challenges associated with current livestock management practice. Participants then built models to represent what a more desirable situation might look like. Time permitting, some groups were also asked to build an additional model to identify the resources they would need in order to achieve the situation they had already identified as desirable.

### **Some initial findings**

The findings that can be drawn from such a small, exploratory study are somewhat limited. Even so, the results of this research indicate that 3D model building has considerable potential as a method for achieving the sort of meaningful, substantive engagement envisioned by PDC.

The primary objective of this project was to design a research communication framework that would empower participants to express their experiences and aspirations in their own terms. One clear strength of the 3D model building process employed here was that participants were never asked direct questions that could be interpreted

prescriptively. Instead, they were encouraged to respond to broad challenges such as, 'build a model representing current cattle farming practices' or 'build a model of what you hope to achieve in the future'. The open endedness of the challenges allowed participants to respond in very different ways indicative of their own experience and point of view.

For instance, the challenges identified with current livestock management practices varied considerably between stakeholder groups. The university researchers pointed to lack of market access and 'traditional culture' as considerable obstacles, while field researchers from the Ministry of Agriculture were more concerned about animal health. Community leaders, meanwhile, discussed local capacity weakness and lack of basic infrastructure. Farmers, like the field researchers, identified food and water shortages as major challenges to livestock management; however, they often situated these challenges within a particular social context. From the farmers' perspective, the problem of inadequate food and water supplies for their animals is not only an issue of scarcity but also the management of complex social relationships.

Another advantage of the 3D model building process discussed here was that it afforded participants time to work through their responses before they were asked to speak. Quiet periods of individual model building and an opportunity for each participant to explain what he or she had built always preceded group discussion. Not only did this process largely prevent one or two individuals from dominating the conversation, the physical presence of the model ensured that each participant had something to talk about. The model also served as a prop that could be used to demonstrate complex relationships or nuanced information that participants struggled to express in words alone.

Interestingly, preliminary feedback from the farmers indicates that they found this technique more meaningful than the traditional participatory situation analysis activities that they had taken part in the previous day. When asked whether they liked building and discussing the models, the response was unequivocally positive. Several farmers said that the models made it easier to understand their problems, describing the other situation analysis activities as 'only theory'. From a researcher perspective, the kinaesthetic activity of making something concrete also appeared to help the farmers imagine and visualise how things might be different, something they had previously struggled with.

The process was not only popular with the farmers, however. The field researchers completed the 3D model building challenges before setting off to conduct a situation analysis with farmers, and said that they found it useful for recognising their own preconceptions. One field researcher pointed out that he would now be alert to these expectations when he goes out to the field, rather than taking them for granted. Another field researcher commented that visualising a situation through the models 'helped to unravel the problems'. Without jumping to the conclusion that this particular technique is always appropriate, the initial participant feedback suggests that

3D model building could be a beneficial communication tool in some contexts.

### **Potential and limitations of 3D model building**

Knowledge is both constructed and partial. Likewise, the methods that we use to conduct research are complicit in the data — and knowledge — that we produce. This is as true of research conducted according to the principles of PDC as it is of research conducted in any other way. The difference, however, lies in the nature of the partiality. Whose views are given preference? Why? How?

In designing the 3D model building process described above, I attempted to privilege the knowledge, experience and understanding of a select group of project stakeholders. The results of this admittedly limited exploratory study exceeded even my own expectations. While participants from different stakeholder groups often identified similar problems and possible solutions, the ways in which they described and contextualised these issues varied considerably. This raises the prospect that *how* development initiatives are implemented might, in this instance at least, be as important as the solution itself. Moreover, participants sometimes raised issues that I might not have thought to ask about directly. My own knowledge of livestock management practices is quite limited. However, one strength of this approach was that I did not need to be an expert myself in order to successfully prompt participants to share their own expertise.

Applying this method in the field also exposed several weaknesses. First, 3D model building takes time. This point cannot be overemphasised. The process that I developed was almost equal parts reflective, individual building and active conversation. After factoring in about forty minutes for warm up exercises, a three and a half hour session allowed for approximately 75-90 minutes of discussion. With three out of the four groups (ranging in size from four to eight participants) I could have easily used another two hours. The fourth group (university researchers) only had two participants, so each individual could claim a larger share of the 90 minute discussion. Standard applications of LEGO SERIOUS PLAY take a minimum of four hours and can last for up to two full days. It is not difficult to imagine how a larger investment of time than was available for this study could produce greater returns in terms of data. None of the participants who took part in this research had prior experience with Lego bricks and all of them initially struggled to work out how the pieces fit together, highlighting the importance of allowing plenty of time for warm up exercises. However, they soon caught on — the farmers more quickly, perhaps, than the researchers. By the end of each session participants had started to untangle highly complex realities. What insights were missed by stopping prematurely, we will never know.

Second, documentation and data collection proved particularly tricky. The 3D model building method described above is not like a typical interview in any number of ways, not least because of the existence of the

model. During discussion, participants invariably point to or manipulate their models to emphasise particular locales of meaning. Data collection, therefore, entails not only audio recording and intense note taking of what participants are saying, but also careful photographic documentation of the models themselves. The task of rigorously linking the textual, audio and visual evidence is also challenging, and something that I am still struggling to perfect. However, cutting corners here would largely defeat the purpose of the exercise. While 3D model building did seem to have some intrinsic value to the participants in that it helped them to better understand their own realities, PDC implies that this knowledge gets communicated up the project ladder. Onward communication requires full and reliable documentation.

Finally, the bricks themselves represent an ethical problem that turned out not to be a problem at all. Before conducting field research, it had been widely suggested that some participants might take offence at being asked 'to play with toys'. Several colleagues also noted that the mini figures are yellow skinned, and suggested that they might not be appropriate in places where people have darker skin tones. Acutely aware of these criticisms, I landed in Dili hypersensitive to the possible cultural overtones of the bricks. If necessary, I was prepared to locally source whatever modelling materials I could find.<sup>2</sup> None of the participants in this research took issue with the bricks; indeed, most seemed to thoroughly enjoy themselves. In this particular context at least, the 'ethnicity' of the yellow mini figures proved similarly inconsequential. However, these concerns cannot be written-off entirely and remain valid when taking Lego bricks into new contexts and communities.

### **Conclusion**

This exploratory study in Timor-Leste has gone some way toward confirming my suspicion that 3D model building has considerable potential for achieving PDC in a rural development context. Much work remains to be done, however, and this method will not be suitable to all projects. Development researchers and the communities they work with are often time poor and the temptation to cut back on the amount of time allocated to development research activities can be strong. With further research using this 3D model building method, I hope to demonstrate more clearly than I am able to here that the quality of PDC achievable using this technique warrants the investment of further time.

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> I have written a short booklet that provides additional information about the 3D model building process developed and piloted for this research. Colour photographs of typical models built by participants are included alongside discussion of the research findings. If you would like a copy of the booklet, please contact me at l.hinthorne@uq.edu.au.
- <sup>2</sup> For a thorough discussion of the advantages of using Lego bricks over other modeling mediums, see Said, Roos and Statler (2001:11).

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# The power of pictures: Using Photovoice to investigate the lived experience of people with disability in Timor-Leste

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## Introduction

This report describes the processes of using Photovoice within the researcher's broader study of the lived experience of disability in Timor-Leste. Some background to the study is provided and Photovoice is explained as a method within qualitative research. The participants are briefly described and the complex roles of the interpreters are outlined. The experiences of the interviews and camera training are presented and observations and comments are provided to help inform those interested in making use of a visual method of data collection, such as Photovoice.

Photovoice in this pilot study proved to be relatively easy and effective as a data gathering tool and this report describes the experiences of the researcher while using the method.

## The experience of disability in Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste has made progress in the provision of support and services for people with disability. However in practice, life for people with disability continues to be difficult. Most people with disability are poor in Timor-Leste where family and community ties are strong and attitudes are based on long standing hierarchical values.

Popular belief is that people with disability are dependent: for example a person with a spinal cord injury may return home from hospital or rehabilitation in a wheelchair. Her family will probably expect that she is now unable to contribute in any way to home making or income earning activities. If she is fortunate, a local disability support field worker may encourage her to take a more independent approach and may reassure her family. If she lives in Dili she may, for example, hear about and want to join the wheelchair basketball group, and she may eventually be able to get a loan to start a small kiosk. If she lives in a remote district she may have fewer options.

In practice, the influences on the quality of life of people with disability in Timor-Leste may come from:

- Traditional explanations, for example the belief that a deceased family member has been displeased. This may be put forward as the explanation for a child born with a disability or becoming disabled in early childhood. Families may consult a local healer and be advised to carry out traditional practices such as sacrificing an animal, and/or families may develop a fatalistic approach to the limitations of a disabled family member.
- The charity model of disability can still influence some organisations providing support to people with disability in Timor-Leste. In this approach people with disability are seen as helpless recipients of 'charity' from a 'caring' society, rather than individuals with rights and interest in directing their own lives.

- Infrastructure is still being put in place in Timor-Leste. Roads are often in poor condition and may be closed during the rainy season making travel difficult for all Timorese and especially difficult for people with disability.
- Poverty is one of the burdens of disability worldwide and Timor-Leste is still one of the poorest countries in the world.

## The site of the pilot study — Oecusse enclave

Oecusse is one of the thirteen districts of Timor-Leste. It is unique in that it is situated on the northern coast of the island of Timor, surrounded by Indonesian West Timor. Because of this isolation, Oecusse experienced extended violence after peace was restored in the rest of the country following the referendum of 1999.

Oecusse is lagging behind the rest of Timor-Leste in the development of infrastructure. Roads are mostly in a very bad state, and many of the thatched-roofed houses are also in poor condition. Oecusse can be reached most cheaply by the twice weekly ferry from Dili, although there is no jetty. There is a light aircraft owned by MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) which is frequently chartered for medical missions. Land access is also possible by road through West Timor, although immigration requirements make this 80 km overland trip quite difficult.

The isolation, recent history, poorly developed infrastructure and poverty affect people's daily lives and subsequently affected the results of the research project.

## The pilot study

A pilot study for 'lived experience of people with disability in Timor-Leste' was carried out in Oecusse enclave in Timor-Leste in August/September 2012. The researcher was sponsored by the Leprosy Mission Timor-Leste (TLMTL) based in Dili. Oecusse enclave was chosen as it was well serviced by experienced TLMTL fieldworkers.

The visual data from Photovoice was triangulated with key informant interviews and a community audit. A meta-synthesis of academic articles written about the lived experiences of disability in countries in East and Southeast Asia was carried out prior to the pilot project which helped inform the pilot study.

## An overview of Photovoice

Photovoice is a form of qualitative research that combines documentary photography with storytelling. Individuals often excluded from decision making processes are able to present their views and give voice about their lives, their concerns and their communities (Wang, Burris and Xiang 1996).

The Photovoice approach combines two particular theories: (1) feminist theory which describes power imbalances and gender inequality in particular, and (2) participatory methods of research, which call for action which has been identified by the participants i.e., the Photovoice participants. Photovoice was developed in rural China by researchers from North America working in the field of public health, carrying out asset mapping and needs assessments with women farmers (Wang and Burris 1997). Since that time Photovoice has been used widely in the fields of education, public health, mental health, understanding racism, in Latin America, Australia, Asia, Europe and North America.

Benefits of Photovoice include:

- the ease in which photographs can be taken and viewed;
- literacy is not a requirement for photography; and
- the photographs are excellent prompts on which the researcher can base her enquiries.

Some difficulties have been noted when using Photovoice:

- There may be pressure by friends and family to be in the photographs or to influence the photographer in some other ways. Wang and Burris (1997) noted this risk in their initial description of Photovoice.
- The photographers should be aware of the need for informed consent when taking photographs of others. This may be difficult to explain through translators.

### **Photovoice: Method**

The researcher worked with two TLMTL field workers who acted as cultural mentors and interpreters. The field workers selected possible participants for the research based on whether these people had the potential to enjoy interacting with a foreigner. This personal attribute was important as people with disability in remote Timor-Leste are reportedly shy and reluctant, or their families are reluctant for them to interact with outsiders.

Three visits were planned for each participant. Both interpreters attended each interview and at the end of each visit there was time for debriefing. Because of difficulties finding a printer in Oecusse all photographs were viewed on the screen of a laptop computer and each photograph was discussed with the photographer.

### **The participants**

The pilot study consisted firstly of interviews with six people with disability and their families in Oecusse district. Four of these people subsequently took digital cameras for four to five days and took photographs.

Of the four people who finally took cameras and participated in the pilot study, two of these individuals had relatively recently acquired their disability- both had fallen from coconut trees and were wheelchair users with paraplegia. The other two participants had longer term disabilities probably resulting from polio, both had severe mobility problems. There were two male and two female participants, their ages ranged from 29 to approximately

50 years of age. All the participants were members of poor families and had little or no education.

### **The interview process**

The interviews were carried out with the help of the two TLMTL field staff. One staff member translated from English to Tetun and the second interpreter translated from Tetun to Bikeno. The conversations frequently appeared to be sprinkled with Indonesian words mixed with the combination of Tetun and Bikeno. Some participants seemed to need longer explanations in Bikeno when concepts were new or difficult to grasp. Notes were taken at each of the initial visits and were later transcribed. During the third and final visit, small recorders were used and notes were taken, as the participants reviewed and explained their photographs.

The study consisted of three sequential interviews: firstly an initial interview where the project and the research were explained, the participants decided whether to participate in the study and initial data was gathered. This interview lasted about an hour. Three of the four interviews involved the subject together with a group of family and neighbours watching and joining in the discussion.

A second interview was carried out one or two days later, where the digital camera was explained and trialled. Initially there was an expectation that the participants would learn about the cameras in a group setting, however this turned out to be too difficult as transport was limited and distances were great. The participants generally appeared excited and interested in the cameras and enjoyed taking practice shots of the people around them. An explanation was given about the need to be careful to take pictures only of people who wanted to be photographed, and we gave basic instructions on care of the camera. Each photographer was given a small lanyard so the camera could safely hang around his or her neck.

The third interview was held five or six days later. All the photographs taken by the participants were displayed on the researcher's laptop computer and reviewed and explained to the researcher, with the help of the interpreters. Some of the photographs were clearly taken by the person with disability and other photographs were taken by another person to highlight a particular activity, such as cooking, or weaving. During this interview the photographers were asked if they would like to display their photographs in an exhibition in Dili. All declined this option.

At the end of the final interview the participants were invited to select particular photographs they would like printed. These were eventually printed in Dili and returned to the participants by the interpreters.

### **Observations from the study**

The use of photography with this group of people was surprisingly successful and informative. There were also some ambiguities and limitations described below.

The method was successful in that:

- The little digital cameras were easy to use. They sparked initial excitement relating to handling when taking pictures. There were no problems, no cameras were damaged and there were very few unclear shots. Three of the participants took more than 150 photographs over five days; the fourth subject took 19 photos.
- Some of the photographs were surprisingly candid, for example, shots of two individuals bathing – these were taken by a family member.
- It was subsequently possible to have an understanding of some detail of each individual's life during the course of a day and night, which is not usually available to a visiting interviewer.

The complications and ambiguities included:

- The need for two translators which made these interviews long and complex and it was not always clear whether the translation accurately captured the subject's message.
- It was not clear why the photographers were not interested in having their photographs exhibited. In the past the researcher has encountered people from Oecusse who were afraid that their personal information would be sold to a third party (Shamrock 2009), a similar fear may have led to this response during this pilot study.
- When taking photographs, others may have insisted on being photographed, for example there are three photographs of a subject being embraced by two young women. The participants' explanation, via two translators, was that the girls wanted the researcher to see that they were his friends.
- There appeared to be expectations from participating in the study that the researcher had not foreseen. For example, one woman thought that the researcher would report back to the Alola Foundation about the weaving project that the subject had photographed at length. (The

Alola Foundation had supplied materials for a small income generation project where a group of women were weaving traditional cloth for sale.)

## In conclusion

Photovoice provided fascinating glimpses into the lives of four individuals in Timor-Leste, the cameras were easy to use and the photographers appeared to enjoy the process.

Some problems arose due to the remoteness of the research site and the distances needed to travel to visit the participants. There were difficulties related to cultural differences and the need for two interpreters described above. The researcher was also constrained by lack of time and resources limiting the way that Photovoice was eventually used.

The researcher found that Photovoice has significant potential to clarify the realities of the lives of people with disability. Learnings from the pilot study will inform changes to the next stage of the research.

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# People with disabilities and civic engagement in policy making in Malawi

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## Introduction

This paper critically analyses Malawi's effort towards disability-inclusive development, in particular, in ensuring civic engagement of people with disability in policy debates that are oriented towards Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). It also analyses the policy Equalization of Opportunities for People with Disabilities and the manner in which it accommodates development concerns of people with disability in the country. In doing so it identifies issues of critical concern to people with disability in Malawi and further highlight the challenges and opportunities.

Citizen engagement in policy making has become a fundamental process in any democratic society. While various scholars have made significant inroads in highlighting the importance of civic engagement through active participation in the decision making processes, in practice, challenges remain. People with disability which, according to the UN, numbers one billion people worldwide, have always been, and continue to be, marginalised in civic engagement. In Malawi, while there is a Ministry responsible for people with disability, they continue to experience marginalisation. This paper highlights the challenges of participation by people with disability in Malawi and suggests practical ways in which to enhance advocacy that may engender greater inclusion in civic engagement.

The plight of people living below the poverty line has become, and continues to be, an issue of major concern worldwide. It is particularly challenging for people with disability (Yeo and Moore 2003; Ingstad and Eide 2011). While the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) gave a glimmer of hope in 2000, the absence of people with disability in any of the goals and targets has since been a point of contention in policy debates. Almost 12 years since the MDGs Declaration, countries have differed in their responses to the call for inclusion of people with disability in policy debate and, more importantly, in development. The initiative by the African Union, through the support of the United Nations, to declare the period 1999–2009, '*African Decade of Disabled Persons*', has done little to put disability-inclusive development into the dominant policy discourses, let alone, into national development plans. However, some countries have made some strides to be as inclusive; although a great deal needs to be done to satisfactorily engender civic engagement. Malawi is among the countries in Southern Africa that established the Ministry of People With Disabilities in 1998 which was renamed Ministry of Social Development and People with Disabilities in 2004. While this is a milestone in a bid to respond to the challenges encountered by people with disability, civic engagement among people with disability in Malawi remains problematic.

## Disability and development in Malawi

Malawi is among the least developed countries in the world. The ascendancy of disability and poverty issues in Malawi has given impetus to further analysis of the situation. In Malawi, like other developing countries in Africa, disability and poverty issues continue to escalate amid intertwined challenges in the social and economic sectors of development. According to the findings of two surveys conducted in 2003 and 2004 (see Mcheka n.d.; Leob and Eide 2004), 4.2 per cent of Malawi's population of roughly 14 million people are people with disability as opposed to 2.9 per cent in 1983. Alarming, the surveys further revealed that 35 per cent of the children with disability never attended school. However, lack of reliable data on disability issues in Malawi has compromised not only the extent to which disability-inclusive development can be mainstreamed in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers but also in national development plans like the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS). Despite this, there have been attempts to understand the living conditions of people with disability in Malawi which, so far, reveal that:

- the percentage of people with disability who have never been to school is twice that of the general population;
- unemployment of people with disability far outweighs the share of the normal population;
- women with disability are more disadvantaged than men;
- only five per cent of people with disability who need occupational training or welfare services do in fact receive these services or training; and
- only 25 per cent of people with disability have access to medical treatment, technical aids, counselling, or education (Leob and Eide 2004; Wazikili et al. 2011).

This evidence confirms not only the degree of prejudice and discrimination but also the structural violence against people with disability in Malawi.

## Disability People's Organisations and politics in Malawi

The disability sector in Malawi has a long history. Hauya and Makuwira (1996) observe that until the 1950s, there was hardly any organised effort to attend to people with disability except in an ad hoc and sporadic manner. While there were efforts to respond to issues of disability, it was in the early 1950s when some faith-based organisations, especially the Church of Scotland and The African Evangelical Fellowship, first established a residential school for the blind in two places in Malawi. These were later followed by the establishment of the Montfort

Education Centre for the Blind in 1950 and the Deaf in 1971 (ibid). In the same year, Malawi passed the Handicapped Act which also facilitated the establishment of the Malawi Council for the Handicapped (MACOHA), a statutory organisation under the then Ministry of Community Services. The Handicapped Persons Act dictates all matters concerning the wellbeing, education, training, employment and rehabilitation of peoples with disability in Malawi. In 1984, Cheshire Homes, a British-based charitable organisation was established in Malawi under the Trustees Incorporation Act of the Laws of Malawi, to provide care and rehabilitation services to children and young people with multiple disabilities from birth to 18 years old.

Upon recommendations from the International Labour Organisation, clause 168 paragraph 38, the Malawi government and MACOHA moved swiftly and facilitated the formation of the first disability NGO called *Disabled Persons Association in Malawi* (DIPAM) on 20 March 1990. The main focus of the association was to enhance meaningful and equal opportunities for the disabled persons in all aspects of life in society (MACOHA 1990). The role played by DIPAM in the lead up to multiparty political dispensation in Malawi not only helped to put disability issues on the government's development agenda but it also acted as a catalyst in the formation of other organisations with similar goals.

The change from single part political system during Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda to multiparty politics in Malawi in 1994 paved the way to the growth of NGOs in Malawi. While NGOs in social service provision enjoyed the support of the government, those in advocacy, particularly those whose focus was human rights, had a rough ride under the leadership of Dr Hastings Kamuzu Banda (Rogge 1997; Makuwira 2006). However, the new era of political pluralism under President Bakili Muluzi (1994-2004) and Dr Bingu WaMutharika (2004–2012), ushered in an enabling environment for the operations of NGOs. Poverty alleviation was a priority on the government's development agenda. Discourses of inclusion of disability issues in policy documents surfaced. For example, the Ministry of Education's 'Education Policy and Investment Framework 1999-2009, on Special Needs Education clearly states: 'Government will work in close collaboration with the private and non-governmental sectors through support to the National Association of the Disabled' (GoM 1998:19). The intersection between disability and poverty was further acknowledged in the Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers under Pillar 3 — '*Improving the Quality of Life of the Most Vulnerable*' (MEJN 2004:30).

The most significant change in the history of disability movement in Malawi was the formation of The Federation of Disability Organisations in Malawi (FEDOMA), as an umbrella organisation of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs). FEDOMA's formation was to provide a unified voice through:

- promotion and advocacy for the rights of people with disability;

- advocating for and monitoring the equalisation of opportunities for people with disability as stipulated in the United Nation's Standard Rules; and
- coordination and strengthening the capacity of affiliated DPOs (FEDOMA 2006).

Since its establishment, FEDOMA now has eight affiliate organisations as shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: FEDOMA membership organizations

Member organisation	Year formed	Major objective/ focus	Number of members
Malawi Union of the Blind	1984	Cater for the needs of the visually impaired	1,762
Malawi Disability Sports Association	1998	Promote sporting activities for people with disability	562
Disabled Women in Development	1996	Women's social, political and economic empowerment	300
Association of the Physically Disabled	1999	Enhancing participation and self-reliance of people with disability in social life and development	1,000
The Albino Association of Malawi	1995	Inclusion and promotion of albinos' interests in social issues	Data not available
Parents of Disabled Children Association in Malawi	2005	Promote the interests and voice on the rights of children with disability	3,214
Malawi National Association of the Deaf	1990	Cater for the needs of the hearing impaired	2,396
Disabled Widows and Orphans Organisation in Malawi	Data not available	Enhance the voices of widows and orphans in social and development issues in Malawi	Data not available

Source: Makuwira and Kamanga 2011:6.

The issues DPOs in Malawi pursue gravitate around equity', 'equality' and 'wellbeing'. While these are not 'stand-alone' issues, they are however central to human rights conventions. Equity, according to Jones (2009: iv), 'comes from the idea of moral equality, that people should be treated as equals'. Similarly, equality is about equal treatment of those presumed to be equal. Equity recognises pre-existing disadvantages, and therefore the focus is on correcting those, and achieving *equality of outcomes*. Equal life chances; concerns for people's needs; and meritocracy, are some of the elements fundamental to achieving equity. Wellbeing, on the other hand, is a



concept that is extremely hard to define, as how the concept is understood is context-specific. White (2010) sums up the meaning through various qualities attached to it. According to White, there are three dimensions which are critical to the wellbeing debate. First is *the material aspect* which is concerned with practical welfare and standard of living. The second is the *social aspect* which concerns social relations and access to social goods. Lastly, but not least in importance is the *human aspect*, which is concerned with human capabilities, attitudes to life and personal relationships (White 2010:7). It is on the bases of these three interrelated issues that DPOs in Malawi have seized upon the prevailing social, political and economic environment to advance the voices and aspirations of people with disability by forming associations and networks whose common themes are underpinned by equal rights and equalisation of opportunities.

### **Civic engagement and equalisation of opportunities**

Civic engagement is a difficult concept to define. However, in its basic premise, civic engagement is understood to mean community service; collective action; political involvement; and social change (Diller 2001; Adler and Goggin 2005). It is the last two to which this paper makes reference. People with disability in Malawi are, by and large, fairly engaged in community service through collective action. However, the challenges they encounter are very political in nature, hence the emphasis of this paper on political involvement and social change. Social change is a complex process; so too is development which is not only complex but political (Makuwira 2011). Therefore, any mention of *Equalisation of Opportunities* means not only engaging in a political process in order to change power structures in favour of the vulnerable, but it also a social process that must acknowledge the complexity and dynamics between politics, society, and resource transfer and the role of the agency in the process.

The preamble to the Malawi Policy on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities acknowledges the fact that people with disability in Malawi are among the poorest of the poor (Braathen and Kvan 2008). Furthermore, the policy's emphasis on 'inclusion' and 'creating an enabling environment' is an acknowledgment of the presence of both systematic and cultural stigmatisation and marginalisation of people with disability in Malawi. Chapter 1 of the policy clearly states: 'Persons with disabilities in Malawi...face numerous challenges that result in their exclusion from the mainstream society. Many make their way through life ... abandoned ... neglected and vulnerable' (Government of Malawi n.d.:1). Systematic marginalisation is further authenticated by the statement: 'This means that there must be integration of disability issues in all government development strategies, planning and programmes.' (ibid:1).

Over the past two decades Malawi has implemented a number of national development policies which, so far, have included Vision 20:20; Malawi Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (MPRSP), Malawi Economic Growth

Strategy (MEGS) and Malawi Growth and Development Strategy (MGDS1). Currently, the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy 2 is the overarching strategy for Malawi's development vision and serves as a reference document not only for policy makers in government but also in the private sector, civil society organisations, donors and other stakeholders (including the general public) on socio economic growth and development priorities.

It is the processes leading to the development of these documents that merit some attention to highlight limitation in civic participation by people with disability in Malawi. A comprehensive study on 'Social Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Poverty Reduction Policies and Instruments' (see Wazikili et al. 2011) affirms some of the concerns raised in the Equalization of Opportunities Policy. The study observes how the process of PRSPs was:

- conceived and dominated by international donors, especially the IMF and the World Bank;
- initially not consultative as most of civil society organisations and DPOs were excluded; and
- government-dominated, that is, the organisational structure had very little presence of CSOs and/or DPOs.

Further findings of the study conclude that the Thematic Working Groups (TWGs) responsible for drafting PRSPs had no representatives from DPOs. While the development of the first MGDS had reasonably wider consultation, the final output lacked clear policy and direction about disability-inclusive development. The paper makes this point clear:

A common theme in our discussion with key stakeholders was that people with disabilities and DPOs, including some statutory organisations such as Malawi Council for the Handicapped, were significantly marginalised in the formation of Malawi's initial PRSPs and the subsequent MGDS paper...Disability seemed to have been included at the last minute, and its presence in the document reflects the 'charity model', characterised by a provision of handouts; thus failing to meet the aspirations of people with disabilities in Malawi (Wazikili et al. 2011:22).

The parallel between the mainstreaming of disability issues in the MGDS and the lack of clarity in the current Malawi National Policy on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities is a matter of critical concern. While creating an enabling environment has become a buzzword in the policy formulation arena, one would think that creating an enabling environment for people with disability in a policy context has elements of creating a stronger economic base, access to information, development of positive attitudes, and a stable environment of equality. The absence of political will, accompanied by inadequate resource allocation and supportive legal and administrative frameworks, is indicative of systematic marginalisation institutionalised in structures and systems that are supposed to be supportive of people with disability in Malawi. It is therefore not surprising that the Malawi

National Policy on Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities has, up to now, not been enacted into law (policy passed in 2005).

## Challenges and opportunities of civic participation

The current social and political environment prevailing in Malawi since the introduction of multiparty politics in 1994 offers more opportunities. This is not to ignore that challenges will always be there. In the first instance, the increase in number of civil society networks established since 1994 is a good starting point to muster support for advocating for more civic participation in the policy debates both at the macro and micro levels. Makuwira (2011) warns that while it is useful in having networks that coalesce around issues of common interest, attempts should be made to guard against competition that can potentially erupt among such entities. However, Yeo (2005) advises that to achieve social change requires building strong horizontal alliances with a wider movement. This, obviously, calls for taking advantage of other existing sectoral networks besides those in the DPO fraternity.

Another major challenge is society. Hurst and Albert (2006:26) point out that the poverty and powerlessness experienced by people with disability are less to do with biology; rather they are very much to do with society. As aptly articulated in this paper, marginalisation, stigmatisation and discrimination are resultant effects of how society perceives people with disability. Raising awareness about disability-inclusive development is a challenge that requires a focus on human behavior. Not an easy thing to do however. Awareness raising is a kind of education. It is an education that targets attitudes and mindset. This is a role that well coordinated DPOs can do with the support of other organisations and, indeed, the government. If, for example, disability policy awareness initiatives are initiated at a community level, the chances are that knowledge about disability and development may increase, paving the way to more coordinated efforts between communities and local government as well as other public institutions. This requires high level facilitative skills by stakeholders concerned in engaging in awareness campaigns such as human rights NGOs, churches, and donor agencies.

## Conclusion

In order to have vibrant DPOs that can engage actively in matters of concern, requires clarity about how DPOs and government can work together. A lot can be achieved if mainstreaming of disability issues is espoused by non-DPOs. The complexity of this debate squarely rests on our understanding of the interconnections between poverty, culture and disability and how these factors dictate the kind of policy instruments to effectively respond to poverty reduction among people with disability. As I have argued in the preceding sections, there are plenty of opportunities despite the challenges. The level of

awareness of disability issues among DPOs and their constituencies is an asset which can be utilised to advance issues of prime importance for people with disability in Malawi. However, civic engagement among people with disability in Malawi will require simultaneous top down and bottom up approaches. From the top I envisage a government that will translate its commitment to mainstreaming disability issues in the development agenda by constant monitoring of its mandate and the performance of various institutions/ministries. From below, it is about 'rights' and not 'fights'. It is about having an open minded society willing to accommodate or engage policy makers in a non-confrontational manner and demand its rightful place in the development agenda.

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# Practicing inclusion? Participatory approaches to researching road usage by people with disabilities in Papua New Guinea

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## Introduction

One of the obligations conferred upon states which have ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is that development activities must be inclusive of and accessible to people with disabilities (CRPD Article 32). As well as the obvious impact for development programs of Article 32 and the broader rights based focus of the Convention, these have implications for those conducting research in the international development space. This is particularly true for research which focuses on people with disabilities as, arguably, if such research is to accurately represent the views and perspectives of people with disabilities and focus on areas of significance to them, then they must be genuinely involved as full partners in research activities.

This paper discusses a participatory research project undertaken in Papua New Guinea (PNG), which examined the impacts of road developments on people with disabilities, as well as the extent to which they were consulted or involved in decisions around road infrastructure projects. Given the focus on promoting the participation of people with disabilities in road infrastructure, it was particularly important for the research to also adopt a participatory approach and strive for full inclusion of people with disabilities at all stages of the research. As well as the findings generated regarding road accessibility and usage, the research project also offers learnings about strategies to promote the involvement of people with disabilities and Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs) in research.

## Travelling together: Road access issues for people with disabilities in PNG

'Travelling together: Improving access for people with disability through inclusive infrastructure development in rural and urban PNG' was a three year research project funded through an AusAID Australian Development Research Award (ADRA). It was implemented from May 2010 to April 2013 by partners including the CBM Australia-Nossal Institute Partnership for Disability Inclusive Development; the PNG Assembly of Disabled Persons; the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning, University of Melbourne; and Cardno Emerging Markets, a company involved in several road projects in PNG.

The research sought to answer four key questions:

1. What are the barriers and facilitators for people with disabilities accessing roads in rural and urban PNG?

2. What are the outcomes of rural and urban road projects on the lives of people with disabilities and their families?
3. How have people with disabilities participated in rural and urban road planning?
4. What are the recommended approaches in disability inclusive consultation and participation in road planning and development in PNG?

'Travelling together' took as a key principle maximising the participation of people with disabilities at all stages of the research. The major national level DPO in PNG, the PNG Assembly of Disabled Persons (PNGADP) was a partner in the research alongside Australian research bodies and Cardno. At all stages the research partners worked together to set research directions including development of research focus, questions and methodology. A PNG Advisory Committee and an International Advisory Committee, both of which included people with disabilities, were established to advise and guide the project at a high level. The PNG Research Officer, herself a person with disability, oversaw project implementation within PNG. The project explicitly sought to build the capacity of local people with disabilities, both men and women, in order to promote ownership of the project by people with disabilities and ensure they were able to utilise its findings to conduct advocacy on their own priorities and concerns.

## Tools and methodology

The project used participatory methodology to conduct qualitative research in five locations, both urban and rural, where roads had either recently been built or upgraded or were currently under improvement. In each of the locations two local people with disabilities were recruited by the Research Officer as data collectors — one male and one female.

The data collectors participated in two weeks of training on use of the four selected qualitative data collection tools, which had been developed in consultation with the project's PNG Advisory Group. These were:

- Interviews with road decision-makers about processes for planning and implementing road construction or improvement, and their knowledge of use of roads by people with disabilities.
- Group discussions with groups of 7–12 people with disabilities in each location, exploring how they used roads, particular barriers and facilitators to accessing and using roads.
- 'Moveabouts', in which the groups selected and moved along a small segment of the road and identified specific issues regarding access and road use.

- Photo elicitation and poster-making: group members took photos of good and bad aspects of the road and associated infrastructure, and then used the photos to make posters identifying these issues.

The tools themselves were pilot tested and refined during this training period, incorporating the feedback of both the data collectors and people with disabilities who were involved as research participants in the testing phase. Data collection was then carried out in the five locations during the second half of 2011.

## Context and key findings

Investment in road infrastructure is a recognised strategy for facilitating poverty reduction and development, primarily through promoting access to key services in developing countries (ADB et al, 2005). In PNG, about 35 per cent of the population live more than 10 km from a major road, and 17 per cent have no road access at all (World Bank 2010). Significant donor and government funds are spent on road infrastructure projects, particularly maintenance and upgrading but also construction of new roads.

Research in PNG has demonstrated that road and bridge developments can lead to positive changes in income and travel time to schools and health clinics, as well as reduced school drop-out rates, for villagers who live nearby such developments (World Bank 2008). This in turn can contribute to increased economic opportunities and reductions in poverty, and enhanced health and education outcomes. However there is a lack of evidence as to whether in PNG or elsewhere benefits from roads are equitably distributed and enjoyed by people with disabilities, or whether people with disabilities may in fact experience negative outcomes from road developments. Given that an estimated 10–15 per cent of the population of PNG (or 1 million people) have a disability (Department for Community Development, 2009), this is a significant gap in knowledge, which the research sought to address.

‘Travelling together’ identified that people with disabilities in rural and urban PNG use roads extensively, primarily as pedestrians but also using local buses to access neighbouring towns, schools, stores, health facilities, churches, to visit friends and to conduct livelihood activities. Construction and maintenance of roads generally increased the ability of people with disabilities to access such essential services. However issues of both access and safety were key barriers to them using the roads to the extent they would like.

Roads typically lacked features to facilitate safe use by pedestrians, particularly people with disabilities. Key issues identified by participants that affected their ability to access roads were:

- Lack of marked crossing points, even in busy areas such as schools or markets where people often cross the road.
- No footpaths or narrow, steep, poorly maintained or overgrown footpaths, forcing people to travel on road verges or roads and navigate fast-moving traffic.

- Narrow bridges with poor pedestrian access, including lack of footpaths forcing pedestrians to walk on the road, or overgrown or narrow footpaths often built without ramp access.
- Open drains alongside roads (a particular danger to people with vision impairments), and poor drainage resulting in water pooling across roads.
- Potholed and bumpy roads, which are difficult to travel on for wheelchair users and others with mobility impairments, and can cause vehicle traffic to swerve and endanger pedestrians.
- No marked bus stops, and lack of facilities such as seats and shade in bus stop areas.
- Lack of public and driver awareness of the access needs of people with disabilities as pedestrians and road users, and the need to drive at safe speeds.

While the majority of issues raised by research participants were barriers to access, they also highlighted some features that would facilitate accessing roads. Important features included quiet, well-maintained roads that were easy to navigate; amenities such as street lights, bus stops and suitable footpaths; and public assistance in crossing or navigating roads when necessary.

Roads in PNG often seem to have been planned for use by vehicle traffic rather than by pedestrians, hence there has been little consideration given to the safety and usability for pedestrians as road users. This is despite the fact that the primary means of road transportation in PNG is walking (World Bank 2008). While road access and safety are issues for all road users, people with disabilities are likely to be disproportionately affected. Firstly, they may require different or additional features such as ramps or wide footpaths in order to use roads safely, or be less able to adapt to the lack of facilities than other community members. Secondly, people with disabilities are often amongst the poorest and most marginalised in a community. This existing disadvantage can be compounded by physical access issues, and result in people with disabilities not accessing education, health care and other basic rights.

## Techniques for inclusion in research

The data collectors employed various methods to include people with varying impairments and of different ages and genders in the data collection activities. Participants were identified through a range of methods including DPO contacts, working through Community Based Rehabilitation officers or disability service providers, suggestions from other local people with disabilities, and information from village councillors. This resulted in the involvement of people of various ages, from children to the elderly, and both genders, who had a range of different impairments including mobility, vision, hearing and intellectual impairments. The majority of participants were aged below 30. This may have been because of the greater enthusiasm of this group for involvement, as well as the fact that in some locations, potential participants were identified via service providers that worked primarily with younger people.

The research protocol aimed to maximise participation by people with a range of impairments. Despite some limitations, the research was able to fairly successfully involve members of the disability community that often face particular barriers to participation, including people with hearing impairments, children and those with intellectual impairments. Specific techniques used included holding separate focus groups in some locations for people with hearing impairments, which better allowed for translation into sign or use of alternative communication methods (usually with the assistance of a personal assistant or parent who accompanied the person). In the locations where this did not take place, data collectors found it more difficult and time consuming to involve this group in the wider focus discussions. Similarly, involvement of people with intellectual impairments was sometimes challenging and separate focus groups allowed for extra time to repeat or rephrase questions. Data collectors did find that for both these groups, and particularly for children with intellectual impairments, there was a tendency for parents or carers to speak on their own behalf rather than attempting to present the perspective of their child/relative.

The use of a range of data collection tools helped to encourage meaningful participation by all research participants. For instance, the photo elicitation allowed each participant to highlight their own likes and dislikes individually: for some this acted as a prompt and helped them to better recognise and articulate issues. The poster making also helped to elicit responses from those who found participation in focus groups difficult — some people with speech and/or hearing impairments gave their perspectives by writing captions on photos. The moveabouts or access audits along the road also proved important in gathering information, as most participants found it easier to discuss road usage in the real life setting.

It is also important to recognise the limitations of this project in terms of inclusion of people with disabilities. One notable gap in inclusion was people with psychosocial impairment, who were not represented in any of the groups (or at least no such impairment was disclosed by participants). This could be due partly to the wider exclusion of people with psychosocial impairments in many communities — they are often stigmatised, and may be less likely to be in contact with service providers, DPOs or other networks. There may also have been an impression in communities that research on infrastructure was most relevant to people with mobility or sensory impairments, hence people with psychosocial impairment were not identified as potential participants. It is perhaps not surprising that none participated in the project; however this also indicates a need for future research activities to specifically target this group and identify appropriate ways to try and involve them.

It is also true that for individuals who participated in data collection as informants, the research process was probably more extractive than participatory. Notwithstanding that the data collectors themselves were people with disabilities, the participants largely provided

information, rather than having an opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the data analysis and shape the research findings or outcomes. The focus in the final year of the project on advocacy may have provided opportunities for research participants to become involved on road access issues of relevance and interest to them.

## **Research as advocacy**

The research team found that the process of including people with disabilities as data collectors and co-researchers also assisted with the advocacy impact of the project, particularly in influencing decision-makers. The data collectors reported that the very process of meeting with road decision-makers helped to change the perspectives of those they met about people with disabilities, and about disability itself. During interviews decision-makers typically initially displayed an understanding of disability largely as a health issue, but fairly quickly developed an appreciation that it was also a key development issue and relevant to road infrastructure. It is likely that the fact that people with disabilities themselves were discussing these issues with them was an important element of this transformation. In some cases the meetings themselves also helped to highlight accessibility issues, for instance if the data collectors were unable to access a decision-maker's office due to steps or other access barriers.

## **Participatory tools and resources**

The participatory consultation tools used in 'Travelling together' are not only relevant in the context of this project: the research team felt that they were demonstrated to be cheap, replicable and largely effective for use with people with disabilities. The project showed that these tools can be successfully implemented by people with disabilities themselves even where they do not have previous research experience, particularly where there is a strong capacity-building commitment within research projects (Whitzman, James & Poweseu, 2013). In addition to training on the research methods, data collectors were involved in a six day data analysis workshop, ensuring their participation was not limited to gathering information but also encompassed interpreting and analysing findings. This helped to build the capacity of PNGADP and the data collectors to be involved in or initiate future research activities.

It was a key aim of the project to not only produce research findings and contribute to the evidence base around disability inclusive infrastructure development and road usage in PNG, but also to translate these into tools and practices to support and promote consultation processes and disability inclusive planning and implementation of road infrastructure. Following the write up of the findings, the project provided advocacy training for DPO members and developed tools and resources to promote understanding and improvement of access in road infrastructure projects. PNGADP then developed advocacy strategies on accessibility at both the provincial and national levels, suggesting that the research findings and

tools are being genuinely ‘owned’ and utilised by people with disabilities, rather than just benefiting more traditional research institutions and reaching a largely academic audience.

## Conclusion

The ‘Travelling together’ project has demonstrated that not only is it possible and desirable for research projects to meaningfully involve and partner with people with disabilities when conducting research about them from a rights-based perspective, but that it also results in better outcomes. It is unlikely that the depth and richness of findings would have been achieved had the data collection and analysis been carried out by outside researchers, rather than by people with disabilities themselves who were members of the communities under study. The involvement of PNGADP as a partner throughout the research has meant that the focus of the project has been on issues of relevance to PNGADP and its members at both the national and local level. It is hoped that the lessons from this project will not only encourage increased involvement of people with disabilities within development research, but provide practical strategies and learnings that can

inform others when planning and implementing inclusive research projects.

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# Misdirected good intentions: Volunteering and the impact on participation

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## Introduction

Contemporary development theory stresses the critical role of participation from all stakeholders as key to successful development practice. This paper examines barriers that can occur for national counterparts' participation in development when the good intentions of volunteers are not directed. Case stories are used to highlight what can go wrong when volunteers drive project priorities concluding with reflections of what can help, and principles of engagement. The paper is written from the perspective of an international development practitioner who has been a volunteer, managed volunteers and worked in a volunteer-receiving organisation.

## Volunteering: Impact and participation

Volunteers contribute enormously to international development projects, programs and partners bringing expertise, energy and physical resources. The research literature on volunteering and participation focuses upon the:

- impact of the volunteer experience on the volunteer (Rietschlin, 1998; Strange et al, 2002; Campbell et al, 2011; Lough et al, 2009);

- impact of the volunteer on the project, program or scope of work (Block et al 2010); and
- impact of the organisation, and their management, on the volunteers' participation (Geletko et al, 2009).

There is, however, less literature on volunteers' impact on volunteer-receiving organisations or communities (Sherraden et al, 2008). This paper specifically explores the impact of foreign volunteers on local staff participation in development processes.

## Methods of volunteering

There are a variety of methods through which volunteers become engaged with organisations that may receive volunteers, including those summarised below (Table 1). These methods can have advantages and disadvantages for the receiving organisation, including the impact on staff and organisational participation in development processes. Students and technical advisors working in developing countries present similar issues.

Method three may be most likely to have success in encouraging participatory development, given the receiving organisation has identified a need which cannot

Table 1: Key types of volunteering

#	Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Volunteer approaching the receiving organisation directly.	Volunteer highly motivated, often driven by personal experience and ideological alignment with that of the receiving organisation. Can activate receiving organisation to consider a new direction that could add value and align with existing priorities/ plans. Potentially quick to initiate; responsive.	Lack of supportive system/ structure — particularly important for all involved if problems arise. Resource-intensive, particularly if not aligned with organisational priorities. Volunteer-receiving organisation may agree to save face or sustain relationship. Supply rather than demand-driven. Can encourage participation in development project/ activity, however at the cost of an alternative activity; the 'can't do everything' principle.
2	Volunteer-sending organisation approaching receiving organisation directly.	Can stimulate receiving organisation to consider usefulness of volunteer contribution to particular organisational tasks/projects/needs. Sending organisation provides training, support, structure, dispute resolution, and often quality assurance/ oversight.	Resource-intensive, particularly so if not aligned with organisational priorities. Possibly receiving organisation more likely to say no to a sending-organisation than an individual. This may be a good thing at times, particularly if no structure in place to sustain continued volunteer program.
3	Receiving organisation approaching individual or volunteer-sending organisation directly.	Ensured alignment with receiving organisation's priorities. Demand, not supply, driven. Increased likelihood of ownership of the volunteer and their tasks by the receiving organisation.	Resource-intensive, (however investment can be returned as volunteer is meeting organisational priorities).



be met within existing staff resources of the organisation or country. Similarly the receiving organisation may have more control over determining what type of assistance is needed, in what sort of way and for how long. All types of volunteering however can hinder or help participatory development.

## How can it go wrong?

Volunteers want to help and have ideas of how to do so. So, given the good intentions of volunteers and the expertise they do have (or perceive themselves to have) to contribute in situations where there are fewer resources, how can it go wrong? The following four case stories illustrate difficulties that can arise when these ideas do not fit within, or compete with, the plans or programs of the country or organisation, or undermine local actions that may have occurred without volunteer involvement. The nature of technical assistance may hold even greater risks of overriding local ownership and participation in the process, based on being able to contribute expertise towards a need that, seemingly, cannot be fulfilled in country and the time bound nature of this assistance. All case stories are regarding self-initiated, self-funded volunteering.

*Case Story 1: 'We know Timor has nutrition problems, so we're planning to come and do a nutrition workshop.'*

Well-intentioned health professionals from Australia contacted an NGO seeking to volunteer during their annual leave. Having heard of the nutrition problems in Timor-Leste they planned to run nutrition workshops. The volunteers had not looked into what were the existing policies and systems in the country to address these problems or what would be most helpful for this need or for the organisation.

The volunteers had strong technical skills however lacked both awareness of national policies and systems as well as the language skills and other resources to implement a workshop, even if this had been determined as the best activity to address these problems. The technical skills of local qualified staff were overlooked and undermined or, for staff with limited technical skills, less space and opportunity was available for development of technical skills. Instead volunteer-initiated and run workshops relegated qualified local staff into logistic roles; organising the venue, catering, travel, per diems and interpreting. The training did impart some knowledge to participants, however could not link with local knowledge or circumstances or be followed up, given the short-term nature of the volunteer input and the different cultural background from which they came. Staff with expertise to make these links during the training or beyond could not. They were often out of the room whilst the training was occurring, busy organising lunch. Dominance of the hierarchical expert paradigm undermines local skills and ownership by the hosts (Devereux, 2008) and is likely to

result in less accountability for work undertaken (Holmgren and Benzian, 2011). The risk is that such projects undermine the skills of local staff, whereby they are busy organising the logistics for volunteer-initiated projects, rather than being supported as health workers to deliver training or other activities in their area of expertise.

*Case Story 2: 'That's a nice photo. Let's do a hand washing project.'*

Self-funded volunteers had previously worked with a local NGO in Timor-Leste on a project which dovetailed with one of the NGO's core program areas. This was a very welcomed input and relationship. In a subsequent year the volunteers proposed a hand washing project, using a photo of one of the staff member's children as impetus for the idea to run a hand washing campaign. Although water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) issues are important this was not a program focus of the NGO. Had the NGO proceeded with the volunteer's hand washing project suggestion it would have been at the cost of other work that the organisation was already involved with (including contractual responsibilities), and difficult to follow up or sustain without additional resources. Additionally community expectations could be raised without adequate resources to sustain WASH activities or create confusion in the community as to the scope or purpose of the organisation's work (Dickson, 2006; Reisch, 2011).

In this situation there was a person-to-organisation fit, shared values of the organisation and the volunteers, however lack of programmatic fit. After some debate, the volunteers were linked with another NGO and, following further exploration of their skills and interests which included statistical analysis, later matched with a need within the organisation to analyse results from operational research the NGO had conducted.

*Case Story 3: 'Usually we find the person after we know what we need'.*

- A self-funded health professional presented herself to the Fijian Ministry of Health (MoH) with the offer to work with their staff and patients in an allied health role, of which there are no similar roles within their human resource structure. Although this volunteer was very experienced clinically and had the best of intentions, the senior MoH Manager, already overstretched, was presented with the difficulty of utilising this person. The presence of this volunteer may have highlighted needs and future possibilities for this area of allied health, however risked:
- setting up a standalone add-on project that could not be integrated within current systems (Holmgren and Benzian, 2011);
- competing with existing systems (Dickson, 2006); and
- resulting in limited sustainability with the departure of the volunteer.

The volunteer was able to provide some frontline services to patients and nurse training, however, had financial and visa limitations which cut short their work. Like the two case stories above, this case illustrates the potentially negative implications of volunteerism for the receiving organisation (Sherraden et al, 2008). The resources needed to manage uninvited volunteers can undermine the capacity of the receiving organisation to deliver on their existing priorities.

Had the volunteer gone through a volunteer sending organisation, this may have both reduced the stress on the volunteer in terms of visa, financial support and in negotiating scope of work, including timeframe, with the Ministry, freeing the volunteer up to focus on clinical training and mentoring. This also may have provided increased continuity for the Ministry as, had they wanted these interventions to continue, a volunteer-sending organisation would be better placed to source a replacement.

*Case Story 4: 'Just get the Danes to do it'*

A Tibetan refugee youth community based organisation in Nepal had three objectives: to build leadership qualities in young people; to preserve and promote the Tibetan culture and to create employment opportunities for Tibetan young people. The organisation had only one part-time paid staff member and all other members, trainers and leaders were volunteers. Danish young people were coming to the organisation on a 'volunteer work trip' to work with the different Tibetan youth micro-enterprise and other groups. Prior to and during the visit, Tibetan male youth members who in the past had been involved in cleaning their refugee camp home stopped doing so. The group attitude, succinctly put by one member was, 'Just get the Danes to do it'. Volunteers can be used as free labour and, at worst, the presence of volunteers can undermine local action. Simpson (2004) refers to volunteer-tourists 'doing development'. This is most dangerous when this prohibits people doing it for themselves, such as the Tibetan young men in this community.

### **What can help?**

Numerous strategies from volunteers, volunteer-sending and volunteer-receiving organisations can help facilitate local staff participation in development.

#### **1. Knowing local context: Policies, systems, culture and people**

Understanding the relevant national and organisational policies, systems and culture is a step towards appreciating the priorities and targets of the country and receiving organisation. Such policies and organisational structures also help align volunteers and their tasks. Volunteers in case story one and two would have been better situated with more knowledge of policies nationally and organisationally. This puts onus not only on the volunteers and

volunteer-sending organisations but also on the volunteer-receiving organisations (point 2). In case story 1 the volunteers could have learnt or been told of the work that was occurring in the nutrition sector, led by the Ministry of Health and supported by a Nutrition Working Party with members International and Local NGOS and UN Agencies. There may have been alternative activities they could have supported, such as technical review of draft National nutrition strategy, rather than having directly implemented nutrition training which could have been conducted by local staff.

Systems relate to a range of processes from local customs to procurement systems. Longer volunteer placements allow for relationships and trust to be built and a good understanding of who can do what in the organisation and nationally and the background or some rationale to existing systems. Where there are not these relationships, for example prior to being in-country and/or for shorter assignments, asking questions about who is usually responsible for similar activities is critical. Volunteers can begin this process, drawing on volunteer-sending and volunteer-receiving organisations' knowledge and understanding.

#### **2. Receiving organisations identifying their own plans and needs and setting their own targets**

One of the most critical elements of maximising and directing the good intentions of volunteers is receiving organisations being clear on their own plans and needs and being able to articulate these. Organisations that are clear on their own strategic direction and organisational needs are better placed to either attract suitable volunteers to support any gaps or channel volunteer interest and skill. Without such clarity, the organisation runs the risk of being distracted from their own priority tasks through being caught up in implementing the volunteer's priority tasks. The organisation in case story 2 did such strategic planning; forming an organisational one page strategic plan and a detailed three year strategic plan, complete with self-set targets on what the plan aimed to achieve in specific timeframes from the maternal and child health section.

In addition to strategic plans assisting direct organisations and volunteer intentions, this also helps set targets for volunteer placements as contributing to overall plans. Receiving organisations can consider how they will know if the volunteer has made a difference, which can not only help the receiving organisation but also the volunteer. 'Use the measures of the measured not the measures of the measurers' (Fowler, 2012 ACFID- University Linkage Network Conference).

As a colleague once said, 'We don't even know if we are making a difference'. Following the development to the strategic plan with self-set targets, the team (and subsequent volunteers) were better equipped to know their priorities, work collaboratively to achieve these and to know whether they (and the volunteers' contribution) were making a difference. Self-set targets engage staff and communities in achieving the change they ascertain as

being needed. Chambers' (a keynote speaker at the conference this paper is connected with), 'Whose Reality Counts' (1997) is still relevant today; starting with people's knowledge as the basis for planning and change. This not only helped set the priorities for the organisation but provided a tool to direct volunteer enquiries and actions and monitor and evaluate results.

### **3. Focus on creating an enabling environment and sustainability; do so through relationships with mutual grace and humour.**

Creating space for local staff and all community members to input into all parts of the development and project cycle is critical. Considering what will enable this project to work, and what people to involve, leading and continuing it into the future. This includes being realistic about the time needed to implement activities and see results.

Working together with people towards a common cause and seeing positive change can be one of life's rewards. Relationships, mutual grace and humour are often the glue. In case story 2, the volunteers did not implement the hand-washing activity they originally proposed with the organisation they had a pre-existing relationship with and instead did this with an alternative organisation. Sherraden (2008) cites warnings regarding short term volunteer placements, including that they can interrupt continuity of service, which would have been a risk had the original proposal been implemented in an organisation where there was not a programmatic 'fit'. The ongoing relationship, common values and the strategic plan made it possible to maintain relationship (and save face) and redirect the volunteers' interest and time to another organisation in the first instance and then an alternative activity (statistical analysis of baseline survey) where there was a need.

## **Principles of engagement**

Principles to direct the good intentions of volunteers can be taken from those outlined in Aid Effectiveness Forums; what works for development and what doesn't. Many volunteer-sending organisations base their work on such principles. Three of the five core principles from the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness are especially important; ownership, alignment and mutual accountability.

1. *Ownership*: 'Developing countries (or in our case, organisations within), set their own strategies. Donors (or in our case volunteer-sending organisations and volunteers themselves) will support by respecting countries' priorities (in our case, finding out about National and organisational needs, plans and programs) and investing in their human resources and institutions.' (Italics from 2005 Paris Declaration, 2008 Accra Agenda for Action)

The aforementioned Strategic Plan is a good example of increasing an organisation's ownership of their program. Once created, volunteer approaches were then considered in the context of achieving the objectives specified within

the plan. This avoided a scatter gun approach from the receiving organisation, where previously when volunteer assistance was offered it was difficult to refuse. As discussed previously, doing one thing can mean not doing something else. Strong leadership is needed from the host organisation to have a strategic direction, being clear as to what the organisation can do to achieve positive development outcomes. Volunteer enquiries and placements can then be directed accordingly, aligning with the organisation's strategic direction.

2. *Alignment*: Donor countries (or in our case, volunteer-sending organisations or individuals volunteering independently) *align behind these objectives and use local systems*. (Italics from Paris Declaration, 2005)

Know and understand the local system and, if this is not possible ahead of time or is difficult to ascertain when in-country, then at a minimum realise that there is one. Volunteer-sending organisations can do some of this at a national level and encourage volunteers to also do so within their sector or organisation. Investigate — use the internet, ask questions, for example: training 'How does training usually take place? What have been some of the best examples of training workshops that have produced results?' Or procurement, 'How are medical supplies usually arranged? How does funding work? What happens in situations where you run out?' It is easy for volunteers to determine activities which they believe will meet identified needs, such as hand-washing to address particular health problems, however this activity did not fit within the organisational priorities nor did the volunteers have means to influence the larger political and economic systems that influence water, sanitation and hygiene issues. Similarly some short-term volunteer health professionals bring medical supplies to another country. This response can meet an immediate need, however, does not align with local systems or training programs and can undermine the system whereby local staff may decrease their local advocacy efforts to have this problem rectified, instead relying on outside supplies, which are likely to be unsustainable.

3. *Mutual accountability*: Donors and partners (or in our case volunteer-sending and receiving organisations and volunteers) *accountable for development results*.

In short being responsible together for whatever is planned and done.... 'We will demonstrate that our actions translate into positive impacts on people's lives'. 'We will be accountable to each other.... for these outcomes' (Italics from Paris Declaration, 2005). Emele Duituturaga (2012 ACFID- University Linkage Network Conference), quoted a Gangulu woman from the Aboriginal Activists group, 'If you have come to help me you are wasting your time, but if your liberation is bound up with mine then let us work together' (1970's). It is still about doing something with rather than doing something for or to. A clear terms of reference for volunteers and how their work contributes to that of the organisation's needs and how this will be measured can be useful. The process is as important, if not more so, than any tool and great care

from volunteers and volunteer-sending organisations to 'read' the cross-cultural messages from colleagues, whose communication style may be very different and less direct (Hofstede, 2010) is needed, as is a recognition of the power dynamics and political factors (Parkinson, 2009) inherent in participatory monitoring and evaluation processes.

## Conclusion

Volunteers can, and do, make positive contributions to development and enabling counterparts to participate in development in multiple ways. However undirected or misdirected good intentions from volunteers, particularly volunteer-initiated projects, can risk impeding national counterpart capacity to take on leadership roles or direct development processes. To end, do everything to encourage the participation of local people and organisations to plan and implement the change they see is needed in their community and country. Use power to empower (Chambers, 2012 ACFID- University Linkage Network Conference) or don't get involved. Use your whole self to enable participatory development. Volunteers and volunteer-sending agencies' skills, interest and passion can encourage, support and promote this to occur, including joining with local counterparts to address the barriers that stand in their way.

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# Shifting from capacity building towards valuing existing capacities of local organisations in Cameroon

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## Introduction

This paper looks at current discourses around capacity development and the paradigm shift in thinking within the context of aid. It is argued that there is a need for external development agencies to support local development actors to value local capacities, skills and knowledge and only solicit external capacity assistance when identified gaps cannot be filled by existing local expertise. It highlights a practical, successful and sustainable approach called 'The demand and supply of learning using a market approach; an innovative approach to valuing and developing local capacity'. It is used by the North West Association of Development Organisation (NWADO); a civil society network organisation in Cameroon.

## Local humanitarian actions in global humanitarian aid discourse

The world financial crisis has resulted in cuts in development assistance budgets despite the continued increase in needs in many developing countries. Needs are intensified by natural and anthropogenic drivers, for example, climate change with projected increase in impacts especially in poor and disaster stricken countries (IPCC 2007). The impacts of disasters are often fuelled by poor governance especially in top humanitarian aid receiving nations, for example, Somalia and Afghanistan which show very little prospect for sustainable peace (Oxfam 2012).

Although aid in the form of grants, loans, and expertise is invaluable, it is not the ultimate solution to these challenges. Building the resilience of states and civil society capacity to prepare and respond to these challenges is crucial (Cairns 2012). As humanitarian assistance records a continuous shortfall (38 per cent shortfall in the UN appeal for a decade), a remarkable part of humanitarian action is likely to come from developing countries themselves. This calls for more recognition of domestic actions as a contributor to the global humanitarian aid rather than focus only on international humanitarian aid. There is thus a need to rethink the definitions of humanitarian aid which currently lay emphasis only on financial flows (grants and loans) and deployment of expertise from the developed countries (Gyoh 2009:42). The following examples show the impact that the contributions of local organisations have made in the lives of millions in disaster situations. Examples include the provision of water to communities in drought and famine stricken Somalia by local NGOs, the response to Haiti's earthquake, and the 2011 floods in Pakistan (Cairns 2012). When this assistance was evaluated, it revealed that the Western donors had

overlooked the contribution of civil society and local governments and the views of those communities affected by the disasters.

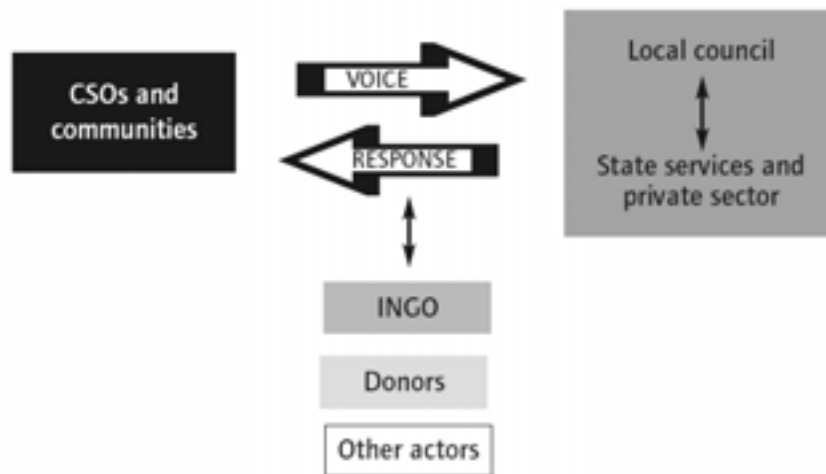
The perceived notion, which is seemingly a traditional westernised humanitarian perspective, is that local responses based on local capacities which are hinged on an understanding of the local realities are often slow and ineffective. However, to contribute to meeting the growing and challenging needs, there is an urgent need to focus on respecting and valuing the existing capacity of local civil society and local authorities in the global aid discourse. This was also re-echoed in 2011 by the president of MERCY Malaysia when he argued that:

a greater role for Southern national and local NGOs is the only way to respond to increasing disasters, and the realisation that climate change adaptation, preparedness and risk reduction are as 'humanitarian' as immediate relief.

The international development agencies (INGOs and donors) need to give more support and play a brokering role at the interface between governments and civil society, supporting more favourable environments and space for local efforts and capacities to be developed and deployed to enhance development at all levels (See Figure 1).

Although the role of international agencies is vital, especially as new development challenges are emerging needing innovative approaches and capacities, their greatest responsibility will be to help local organisations value the existing capacities acquired over the years and using these capacities in a sustainable way. This will contribute to break the cycle of dependency with local civil society organisations asserting themselves and contribute to make a difference in the lives of many. This role will be more visible even when governance challenges cause international aid agencies not to be present. For example, the role played by local civil society organisations in saving many lives amidst political pressure, conflicts and minimal external support in Darfur, South Sudan, after the expulsion of aid agencies including Oxfam in 2009. Emphasising the creation of an enabling environment where local expertise is valued, will give room for the generation of new knowledge. It also facilitates the identification of challenges that feed into new proposals from the bottom-up, especially when new capacity development programs are envisaged. This is in contrast to the top-down approach which is often prescriptive, does not adequately understand the local needs and realities, and is not people oriented (Ngang 2010, Frukuka-pera 2002, Gyoh 2009).

Figure 1: Good governance model showing role of stakeholders in basic service delivery and capacity development (Ngang 2010).



### The NWADO case study

#### Background

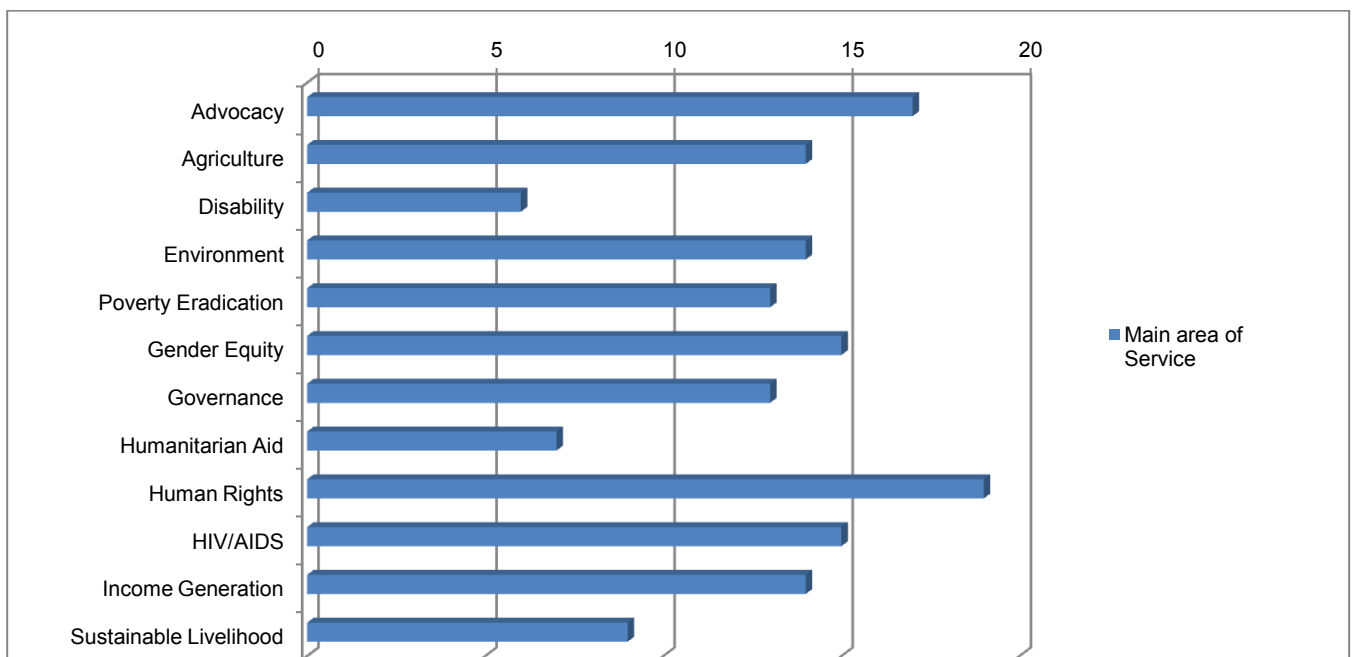
This case study covers the ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ of learning and provides new approaches to valuing and developing local capacity. Prior to 1980, development actors in Cameroon placed a high premium on knowledge, skills and expertise coming from abroad, undervaluing or underestimating the indigenous expertise and capacities that had been locally built over the years. These prescriptive or top-down approaches to capacity development showed a distrust of local, indigenous and innovative approaches to capacity development although these local and indigenous approaches had the potential to contribute

to a remarkable growth and development and the generation and dissemination of contextualised new knowledge.

Since the 1980s, there has been a gradual shift in thinking with the overdependence on external resources, (information, capacities, expertise, knowledge skills etc), giving way to new and innovative approaches that value local and indigenous expertise, experiences, and knowledge. The North West Association of Development Organisations (NWADO), a network of development organisations in the North West of Cameroon, with a membership in excess of 60 has been at the centre of the approach to valuing local and indigenous capacities.

A survey of a cross section of the membership reveals that the members work in domains, shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Domains intervention of NWADO members (NWADO Member survey 2011).



The NWADO initiative is titled ‘The demand and supply of learning using a market approach: an innovative approach to sustainable local capacity development’. It is worth mentioning that the ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ used in this context does not entail the use of money. In doing

these two mutually interdependent levels of capacity development with a clear focus on what is needed at each level there has been a contribution to the overarching goal of societal development. The method is shown below:

Level	Focus
Individual	Engaging individuals in a continuous process of learning and recycling of knowledge, valuing existing knowledge and skills and taking advantage of new opportunities requiring application of learning.
Institutional	Building and valuing existing capacities within CSOs, local councils, and other institutions. Seeking for innovative ways to revitalise existing initiatives and enhance their growth. Creating and finding different kinds of opportunities, whether in the public or private sector, that enable people to continuously grow their capacities, preventing these from becoming obsolete.
Beneficiaries	The primary beneficiaries of this initiative have been the NWADO members and organisations with observer status. However, the local councils (facilitating twinning for capacity development), the media and other thematic networks in Cameroon are replicating the NWADO experience.
Approach	Appropriate space, conference paper, bold markers pens, etc.

In a joint working session, members, staff and board, are encouraged to brainstorm and come up with areas of individual and organisational strength in terms of capacity. They are encouraged to reflect on their existing capacity and focus on those they are able to ‘supply’ or offer to other individuals and organisations interested in acquiring those skills. These are recorded clearly on a flip chart or appropriate conference papers. Secondly they are encouraged to brainstorm on their weaknesses, generating those areas of capacity gaps where they will like to ‘demand’ or request for assistance for capacity development. These are equally clearly recorded on the flip chart.

Participants through an ‘open market’ are encouraged to share their strengths and weaknesses with other participants. In this process, each participating organisation and individual take notes on areas where they will like to ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ capacity.

Mutual identification of what shall be ‘demanded’ and ‘supplied’ is encouraged as the initiative hinges on a barter system to make use of the existing capacities. Participants who identify areas for mutual sharing are encouraged to discuss the possibilities of the exchange happening as much as possible. Participants then share in plenary what individual and organisational capacities shall be ‘demanded’ and ‘supplied’ as post workshop services. At this stage, participants agree on clear timelines for ‘demand’ and ‘supply’. Once these are agreed upon, they are clearly documented to enable follow-up.

A list of capacity gaps ‘demanded’ which cannot be bridged by participating organisations is documented. This constitutes a basis for the demand of support first locally and the externally from capacity building partners like Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) and the Commonwealth Foundation.

The members hold quarterly reflections during which a joint evaluation is done on the mutual ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ of capacity, the learning generated and new plans developed to continue the process. The process is iterative and could be repeated until the desired results are achieved as shown in Figure 3.

As the process goes on, formal and informal ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ of learning links are being established between and amongst participating individuals, groups of CSOs, local councils and the media in Cameroon. In essence, through a process of mutual coaching, mentoring, participants, individuals and institutions, assist each other go through the process of building the identified capacity gaps.

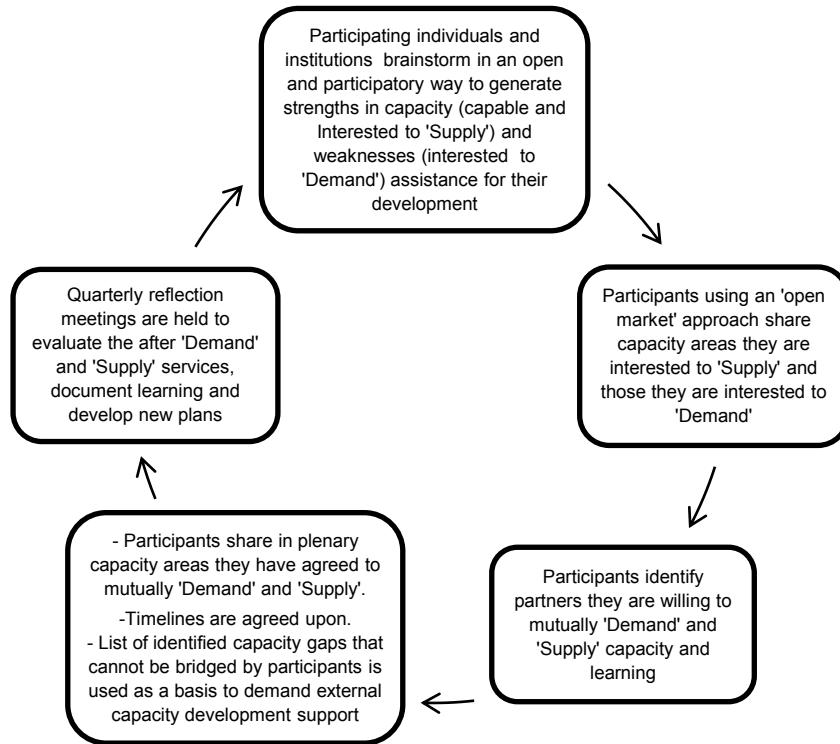
This approach of capacity development has been referred to as innovative as individuals and institutions are currently mutually developing their capacities without having to mobilise huge external human and financial resources as was the case in the past. Some areas where participating individuals and institutions have mutually ‘demanded’ and ‘supplied’ learning for capacity development include:

- promotion of national volunteering;
- capitalisation of results and best practices;
- advocacy and lobbying;
- fundraising;
- monitoring and evaluation;
- project proposal development;
- skills on advocacy on issues affecting communities at the grass root levels;
- networking, communication, and partnership development;
- gender sensitive development;
- reporting;
- development oriented journalism; and
- use of ICT tools in communication.

### Feedback from the evaluation

Evaluation of this experience shows participating organisations were amazed by the level of knowledge and expertise available locally. This local approach to capacity development has been applauded by participating individuals and institutions because it is truly demand driven. Also, it offers the opportunity for

Figure 3: A schematic representation of the process.

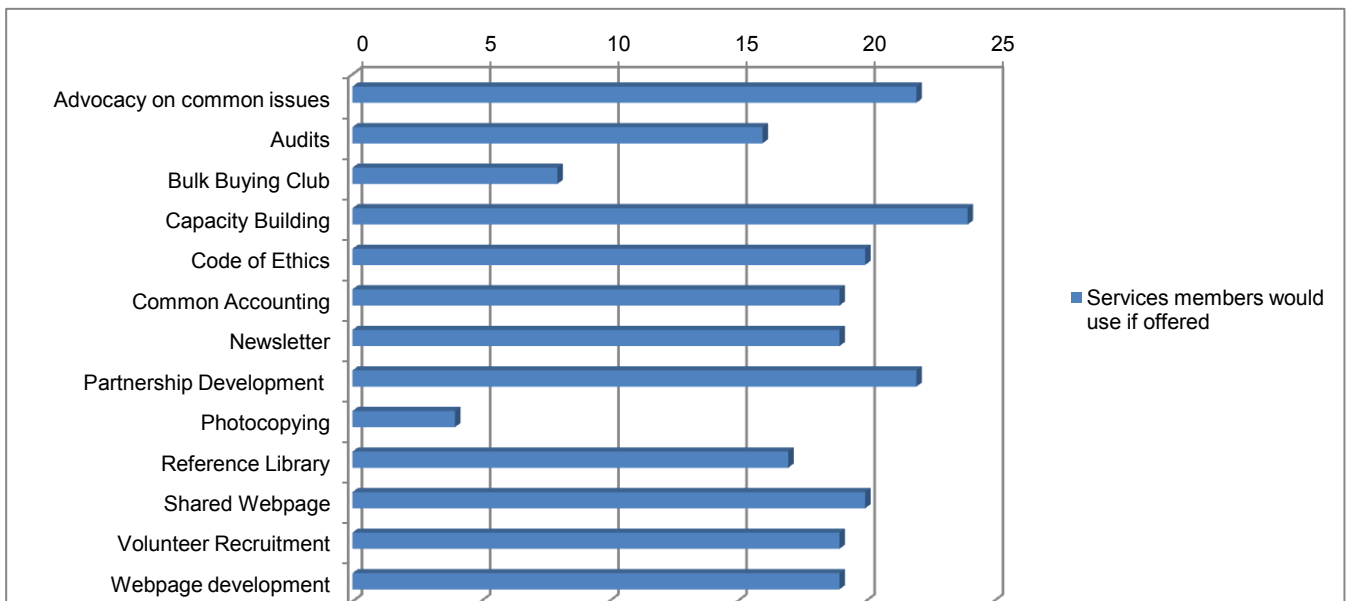


sharing and exchange of varied information, experiences, ideas, successful and unsuccessful methodologies, and moral support amongst peers.

In addition, demand driven capacity building support has been solicited from external partners (VSO and the Commonwealth Foundation) in areas including good governance, accountability and transparency, financial management, codes of ethics and quality assurance,

internal auditing. By promoting a truly open, participatory and demand driven need for capacity development, the pressure is less on capacity building networks like NWADO and also the need for constant request for external capacity building support is reduced considerably. For example some of the needs solicited by members have been addressed through this initiative. See Figure 4.

Figure 4: Services including diverse capacity building requested from NWADO as a capacity building network (NWADO Member survey 2011).





## Conclusion

This paper looked at the critical issue of capacity development as one of the precursors to sustainable development especially for countries in the global South. It affirms that capacity development support from the developed countries has been crucial in fostering development of the receiving countries. However, opportunities have not been created to enable the nurturing of these capacities with inputs of local experience. Given the significant financial challenges faced by many developed countries that have been at the forefront of capacity development, the paper advocates for a strong consideration of alternatives to the existing model of one-way North-South capacity development flow. It emphasises the need for valuing the existing capacities and for North-South capacity development relationship to be more demand driven. The NWADO experience capacity development using the marketing theory of ‘demand’ and ‘supply’ was presented as a good and reliable approach which helps reduce dependency on external resources. It enhances the valuing of existing potentials through mutual and reciprocal capacity development. Also, initiating open platforms and forums like NWADO’s, greatly encourages local linkages for capacity development in every direction — between and within individuals, and institutions. It is hoped that as this experience is nurtured it would be developed for sharing with development actors in the global South.

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# Participation towards building sustainability in delivering services for the urban poor in Sri Lanka<sup>1</sup>

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## Introduction

This paper discusses the challenges of sustainability in participatory development projects based on an action research project 'Community-based Assessment and Improvement of Living Environment in Underserved Settlements and the Environs: The case of Gothamipura-Colombo, Sri Lanka'. The project was initiated in June 2006 with financial support from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada.<sup>2</sup> It was part of a wider global initiative that included a series of action research projects in eight cities<sup>3</sup> around the world with the aim of building a body of knowledge on improving the living environment of the urban poor through service delivery. Two main areas of focus were encouraging community participation and institutional strengthening.

Colombo, Sri Lanka was one of the focus cities, led by the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC),<sup>4</sup> and implemented in one underserved settlement (USS),<sup>5</sup> Gothamipura. It was carried out in partnership with Sevanatha Urban Resource Centre<sup>6</sup> and the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA).<sup>7</sup> Operational components of the project were undertaken by the CMC while community strengthening activities and operationalising the Community Action Plan (CAP) were undertaken by Sevanatha. CEPA provided the research and monitoring inputs to this project.

The project had the following specific objectives:

- Improving CMC operations: Using water and sanitation (focusing on sewerage) as an entry point, to develop a model of participatory service provision.
- Learning about poverty: To improve knowledge on the link between poverty as expressed through financial, socio-political, resource and human assets — and environmental burdens.
- Learning about land tenure security: To assess how improved access to services contributes to an improved sense of land tenure security.
- Long term institutional improvement: To use the integrated model to improve on other CMC initiatives and policies related to urban service provision and poverty reduction in the USS.
- Team capacity building: To enhance team capability in carrying out participatory research and communication through involvement in a learning network with other Focus City teams and in the project community.

The project was carried out through four interventions.

1. Constructing a sewer system for Gothamipura (new sewer line constructed within the settlement and connected to the city's main sewer system, through a pumping unit) and facilitating individual house connections.

2. Constructing a rain water drainage system and improving conditions of the access road.
3. Improving the solid waste disposal system.
4. Strengthening capacities of the Community Development Council (CDC).<sup>8</sup>

Maintaining community interest and community integration into the project were seen as critical factors for sustainability of any development project. Therefore factors that will influence community interest needed to be identified. Some of the key elements that were used to create community interest in this project were addressing community priorities, community empowerment through allocating responsibilities to the community, widening linkages with external parties, capacity building through trainings, workshops and exchange visits. The project adopted several participatory methods including strengthening the CDC and establishment of an Operational and Maintenance Fund (O&M).

## Establishment of an Operational and Maintenance Fund

The maintenance of the constructed sewer system involved the cost of electricity incurred from using the pump and payments for two workers at the pumping unit. During the course of the project attempts were made to devise an O&M fund using a contribution of 10,000LKR from each household. This was included as part of the valuation fee that the households had to pay for land deeds to the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA), because they had shown more interest in obtaining land deeds than connecting to the sewer system. Hence, including the O&M contribution into the land deed program helped in getting people automatically connected to the sewer system. The NHDA was expected to transfer the relevant amounts to the bank account of the O&M fund, and the monthly electricity bill would be paid from the interest, which is managed by the CDC and Sevanatha under the guidance of the Project Coordinating Committee of the CMC.

This activity created a sense of ownership of the project by the community through the CDC and was an essential component in maintaining project sustainability. The project encouraged the community to take over the operation and maintenance of the pumping unit by the CDC, and to train some selected community members in its operation and management. This initiative can be seen as part of a wider process of creating awareness of what this entails, who needs to be involved from the community and other stakeholders, as well as ensuring that the skills required for the job exist within the community.

Some essential capacity building was carried out to strengthen CDC capacity in order to manage the sewer system as well as to help community members engage in the O&M process. This was determined to be the best strategy under the given circumstances. It is also necessary to ensure that community engagement in managing the sewer system would continue and the support from CMC and other stakeholders would be provided in the future, which is the challenge in the context of the sustainability of the project.

### Addressing community priorities

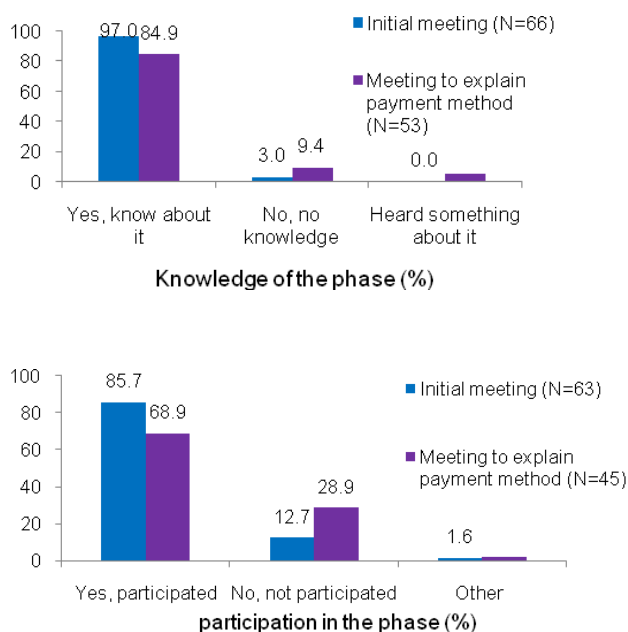
*Land tenure:* Community priorities were addressed through a Community Action Plan (CAP) which was formulated with active community participation. A priority identified by the community in the initial stages was land tenure. Therefore, measures were taken by the project to facilitate issuing of land titles to the community members through negotiations and working closely with the National Housing Development Authority (NHDA), the land owning institution. It was also seen as a way of encouraging community participation in other project related activities, helping to mobilise the community and improve land tenure security. The community had to pay the NHDA for initial valuation of the land and part of this money was transferred to the O&M fund for the sewer system as agreed among the project partners and the NHDA. These agreements accelerated the process of connecting houses to the sewer system and establishing the O&M fund. This transaction cost influenced the project process, because land deeds were highlighted as a priority issue for the community, and addressing this issue helped to create trust and confidence in the community towards the project.

The community appreciated both monetary and non-monetary benefits of having deeds. Monetary benefits related to being able to get bank loans and access to credit facilities as well as being able to sell land. People who have lived in the settlement most of their lives, sometimes for generations, feel that this gives them rightful ownership. Non-monetary benefits were also mentioned including assurance that the land belongs to them. The link to improving the settlement environment was another aspect raised together with the impact a deed can have on the social stigma faced by these people. Residents felt that having the deed could act as a means of reducing stigma and creating opportunities for residents, particularly in relation to access to schools and financial institutions. Also impacts of personal security were noted. This is seen in respect to safety but also in relation to having a voice which they can use as a way of demanding justice and ensuring their protection. Residents felt that their level of dependency on others, especially state institutions, would diminish.

However, there were a number of constraints to getting deeds. Many residents highlighted the lack of economic stability and the means to make the required payments and suggested alternative ways of making these payments. As a result, payment options for title deeds were

developed by the NHDA to help households make payments in a manageable way; people could pay outright or on an installment basis with loans facilitated by the Women's Development Bank (Women's Co-operative Society). People were more inclined to contribute towards the land title deed because it would offer them something more tangible at the end of the process.

Figure 1: Awareness and participation in meetings and activities related to obtaining land deeds through the project, end of project evaluation (percentage)



Source: Household survey, End of Project Evaluation 2011

*Solid waste management:* A solid waste management program and an urban agriculture program were implemented as a demonstration on re-using the biodegradable waste generated in the project community. The most common method of solid waste disposal is through collection by the CMC or dumping waste in designated dumping sites or undesignated sites. At the baseline phase of the project, it was noted that the majority of households in the community faced problems when they tried to manage their waste. They noted irregular collection, the lack of adequate space, and improper storage facilities. They also cited that programs that were in place to control waste management were ineffective because they lacked collection practices. As a result, the issue was raised in the CAP and a solid waste management program was implemented along with an urban agriculture program.

Urban agriculture was planned as a way of managing waste; especially biodegradable waste. Interest in participating was mainly attributed to a liking for gardening and as a means of reducing household expenditure, followed by creating an appealing environment. During the awareness stage of this intervention, the community was interested in participating and keeping their environment clean. They gained experience through several exchange visits organised by the project. The CDC will now manage a community led compost production centre with the support of the CMC.

*Strengthening the Community Development Council (CDC):* The CDC in Gothamipura was problematic in the past, due to lack of community support and its political subversion. Its effectiveness had suffered as a result of the lack of activities that members could pursue. The project has been able to revive the CDC and help improve its functionality and also address its operational constraints.

The CDC is now identified as the entry point for external parties to establish their service delivery mechanisms within the community. This strengthens the CDC as it allocates responsibilities based on the project activities. It is now well positioned to improve living conditions in Gothamipura and to act as a mechanism for addressing community grievances as well as a mediator between the community and the other stakeholders of this project. The CDC had the key responsibility of introducing community priorities, coordinating community input and implementing the construction of sewer lines and other action components of the project. The project identified community mobilisation and the revival of the CDC as an important mechanism to establish community participation and ownership.

The CDC was given the authority to handle the O&M fund and managing compost production by transferring it into a financial organisation and establishing community ownership of this project. The CDC was given the responsibility of O&M of the pumping unit, including managing the two workers under the supervision of CMC. They also have the responsibility of operating the compost production yard and its maintenance. The profits of both these interventions are transferred into the CDC and could be invested to solve any other issues of the community. This empowered the CDC to represent the community in its involvement with other state and non-state institutions to resolve community issues.

Community dynamics and the perceptions of people did affect the way that the CDC functioned. Yet, it was proved that engagement of the community was an integral if not essential component of the project. Hence, it is recommended that future projects could incorporate effective community engagement with adequate plans in place from the onset, to help smooth implementation of project activities. Given the community dynamics there is a need for the CDC to continue to be involved in community/settlement level activities and for the CMC to continue its support and endorsement of the CDC beyond the life of the project.

## **Conclusion**

This project revealed that participatory methods can be adopted in order to provide essential community services in underserved settlements, and to assure their sustainability. The active participation of project stakeholders ensured the effectiveness of the project in achieving sustainability. The project involved various stakeholders equipped with different skills, at different phases. The project adopted several multi-stakeholder monitoring systems. Weekly partner meetings, stakeholder meetings, monitoring and evaluations meetings provided opportunities for all the stakeholders to meet and discuss the

project processes and take necessary action if required. There was, however, a lack of clarity as to why different stakeholders were involved in different phases and their role in the project at community level. This was addressed at different gatherings, and community meetings. Increased project information availability helped the community to recognise the needs of different stakeholders and their role and responsibilities within the project. This also improved communication on project activities, partner involvement and created better linkages among various stakeholders. Community participation in project activities was significant, and extended to project management as well. The community was represented through the CDC in monitoring meetings; giving them the opportunity for involvement in project steering at the management level.

The main focus of the CMC in this project was on improving the quality and access to sanitation within the USS by providing a better managed sewer system. However, the community did not necessarily see the infrastructure investment as a priority need. Hence the project had to come up with a CAP initiative that addressed community priorities such as land deed and solid waste management which were used as incentives to get support for the sewer system. Since the community benefited from the sewer system, it created a win-win situation. The benefits of addressing land rights improved the sense of land security and ensured a commitment to taking care of the environment. This had considerable impact on winning support for the sewer system.

Creating a source of funds for the community through O&M and profit from the solid waste management program were connected mechanisms that went beyond the life of the project. This created an incentive that empowered the community by transforming the CDC into a financial organisation to handle community issues.

The leadership role played by the local government authority (CMC) in coordinating and implementing project activities and strengthening linkages between the community and other stakeholders, has been exemplary. Confidence placed by other stakeholders in the strength of the project leading organisation has assured the sustainability of the project.

Having multiple stakeholders meant that those with different skills were able to carry out the tasks as needed. Although this integration enabled service providers, both government and nongovernmental, to establish their services proactively within the community, this was sometimes challenged by their agendas, deadlines, procedures and bureaucracy. Hence this experience highlighted the need for negotiation and clear communication in order to achieve desired outputs and sustainability of project interventions. This was seen as one of the main factors for the delay of project completion. One method of managing this situation was to have regular meetings, minute proceedings and assign responsibilities through open communication.

The lifetime of the project saw many internal transfers and changes of positions within the CMC and other institutions. This had implications on the effective

implementation of the project as new staff members needed to familiarise and adapt themselves to project processes. This had a negative influence in achieving planned project outputs and factored to some extent in the overall project timeline. Hence, more effective planning was cited as a solution. Although this project had an M&E and steering component built in, it was not always possible to use this information to generate reflection. This was due to the community and other stakeholders failing to recognise the importance and necessity of this component. Changes were sometimes made in an ad-hoc manner reducing the efficiency and effectiveness of the project. The research partner also needed to play a more prominent role at community level gatherings, which would have helped build familiarity and rapport. At the same time, the role of monitoring and evaluation and its assistance in project steering and consolidation of project learning should have been given more importance.

Managing community aspirations from the project design stage to completion and phasing out was a clear achievement of this project. It was achieved through creating adequate awareness among the community, handing over responsibilities necessary to handle project activities, and rewarding achievements. This assured the sustainability of the project. The participatory development methods used in this project can be considered for replication in similar environments.

## Notes

- 1 Lessons learned from an action research project in Gothamipura-Colombo, Sri Lanka.

- 2 For More information, visit [http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-81920-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://web.idrc.ca/en/ev-81920-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html).
- 3 South America (Lima – Peru, Chochabamba – Bolivia, Moreno – Argentina), Africa (Ariana – Soukra – Tunisia, Dakar – Senegal, Kampala – Uganda), Asia (Colombo – Sri Lanka), South East Asia (Jakarta – Indonesia).
- 4 For more information, visit <http://www.cmc.lk/>.
- 5 Underserved Settlements (USSs), as opposed to slums, refer to urban settlements in Colombo and its suburbs that are situated on unauthorised land areas. It is characterised most often by high densities of populations (approximately 820 persons per ha. or four times the average of the city of Colombo), situated on land that is state or privately owned and not owned by the residents. Housing has been constructed on small land parcels and is not legally constructed. These areas have limited service provision as a result of not falling within the purview of local government.
- 6 Sevanatha Urban Resource Centre is a local NGO which engages in urban community development including shelter, community empowerment training and livelihood improvement of the urban poor.
- 7 For more information, visit <http://www.cepa.lk/>.
- 8 Community Development Council, an organisation of community members, has been the formal facilitator of services in USSs.

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# Assessing the contribution of participatory approaches to sustainable impacts of agricultural research for development in the Northwest Highlands of Vietnam

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## Introduction

Harsh natural conditions, poor economic conditions, increasing population pressure, low levels of education and limited involvement of local communities in agricultural extension and research programs are often identified as major causes of unsustainable development of many upland regions of Vietnam. It is generally assumed — but increasingly debated and mostly not proven — that farmer participation enhances the applicability of research outputs. Therefore, understanding the contribution of a participatory communication approach to sustainable development outcomes will be very important for informing appropriate agricultural research for development strategies in the future. This paper reviews existing impact assessment approaches for agricultural research projects in the Northwest Highlands of Vietnam and discusses their limitations. It suggests developing an alternative impact assessment framework for agricultural research for development projects that is approached from a comprehensive livelihoods perspective.

## Overview of the Northwest Highlands

The Northwest Highlands of Vietnam are characterised by high ethnic diversity and mountainous topography. The Northwest Highlands include six provinces with a total natural area of 5.07 million ha, which accounts for 15.32 per cent of the whole country (NOMAFSI 2012). These provinces are home to over 30 ethnic minority groups. The highlands are not only diverse in culture and ethnicity but also in the degree of connectedness to markets. According to the General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2011), by 2010, the total population of the highlands was 4.15 million, the lowest population density in the country at 82 people/square km. The poverty rate of the highlands is around 40 per cent compared to 14.2 per cent nationally, making the highlands one of the poorest regions in the country (MOLISA 2011).

Recognising the problems of the Northwest Highlands, since the early 1990s there has been a great deal of investment from both the Vietnam Government and international development agencies (for example, Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Agricultural Research for Development) through various social economic development policies and agricultural research initiatives. Most agricultural research projects, conducted by the Vietnamese Government and national and international research institutes since the 1990s have aimed at economic development through increasing agricultural production and improving market engagement for local people (Van

de Fliert et al. 2010). However, a shift towards a research for development approach, targeting the immediate use of research outputs for development purposes, became visible in the late 2000s. Notably, participatory communication approaches have been adopted in several of these agricultural research projects in an attempt to better link research with development. These approaches have ranged from using farmers only as information providers and field labourers to the involvement of farmers as information sharers and co-researchers.

## Limitations of conventional impact assessment in agricultural research

Conventional impact assessment of project or programs tend to focus principally on the economic dimension of poverty (Mayoux and Chambers 2005) or economic variables such as increased production, cash, income and job generation and internal management issues (Ashley and Hussein 2000). The impact indicators used in such assessments are usually defined by outside researchers and independent evaluation specialists at the start of a project. Evaluation of impacts is often carried out at the end of a project or program with the main objectives of better understanding expected and unexpected outcomes, cost-benefit justification and guidance for future project implementation (Owen 2006). In the Northwest Highlands, conventional impact assessment approaches have been applied by most national research institutes and international development agencies.

The Northern Mountainous Agriculture and Forestry Science Institute (NOMAFSI), the research unit of the Vietnam Academy of Agricultural Sciences (VAAS), is the leading organisation carrying out agricultural research in the Northwest Highlands. In the last five years, the institute has carried out more than 140 agricultural research projects, most of which have been conducted in the Northwest Highlands. Participatory communication approaches have been adopted in the implementation and evaluation process of these projects. However, assessing the impacts of participatory practices remains very limited. Most NOMAFSI agricultural research projects have carried out end evaluations when agricultural research projects ended, rather than impact assessment. After reviewing several evaluation reports completed by NOMAFSI, we found that they heavily emphasised quantitative analysis of research results, with a focus on scientific findings and research performance indicators. Limited evidence has been connected with how participatory approaches have contributed, or may have

contributed, to the improvement of local livelihoods and development strategies. Results of evaluation reports aim to show the scientific conclusions of researchers rather than the conclusions of farmers involved in the research processes. Mechanisms used to report research results and obtain feedback from the local community are not clear.

The Sustainable Land Use and Rural Development in Mountainous Region of Southeast Asia (the Upland Program) has been implemented in the Northwest Highlands since the year 2000 by University of Hohenheim in collaboration with Hanoi University of Agriculture, Thai Nguyen University and Vietnam National Institute of Animal Husbandry. This multi-disciplinary research program aims at making a scientific contribution to the improvement of natural resource conservation and living of the rural people in the Northern Uplands of Vietnam through a wide range of activities in agriculture and food science (Neef and Neubert 2011). Participatory approaches have been seen as a key cross-cutting issue in the implementation of activities under this program. The strengths and weaknesses of participatory approaches are also given attention (Neef and Neubert 2011). However, only limited efforts are made at assessing impacts of participatory approaches to sustainable impacts of agricultural research. Reviewing several reports and publications by this program in the highlands (The Uplands Program (2012), Schad (2011) and Neef and Neubert (2011)), we observe that participatory approaches including semi-structured interviews, group discussion, and utilisation of other PRA tools appear to have been adopted by the program in order to increase the involvement of local communities in the research process rather than to equip them with the capability to change their own circumstances. Impact evaluation remains focused on measuring scientific indicators rather than identifying the contribution or potential impacts of participatory approaches of the program to sustainable livelihoods development of local communities.

Other newly implemented agricultural research for development projects funded by ACIAR have also been carried out by multidisciplinary teams in the Northwest Highlands. Unlike conventional agricultural research projects, participatory approaches are adopted in these research projects through all stages of a project cycle: diagnosis, planning, intervention or experimentation, assessment and feedback- through collaborative research mechanisms. The strategies for impact assessment and impact dissemination were mentioned in research proposals and evaluation reports for this ACIAR research (Beattie et al. 2010; Van de Fliert 2008; Lane and Vu 2010). However, impact assessment of these agricultural research for development initiatives tend to look at scientific and short term outcomes and impacts especially economic indicators — rather than human, social and natural capital development indicators. Compared to the government funded projects, international donor funded research projects in the Northwest Highlands have had a stronger participatory orientation and a broader scope of impact consideration. However, there is still no clear strategy for assessing long term social, economic, human,

physical, and natural impacts of participatory development on the livelihoods of local communities. In typical social, cultural and political contexts of the Northwest Highlands, the adoption of participatory approaches also vary among agricultural research projects.

### **Value of holistic approaches**

A holistic approach towards the assessment of impact of participatory communication approaches underpinning agricultural research for development is very important to support sustainable social change. The results of impact assessment are not only crucial for learning about impacts of research for development but also for how appropriate measures and strategies towards sustainable development should be formulated in the future. However, by reviewing various existing evaluation approaches and schemes for agricultural research carried out in the Northwest Highlands, we observed that the assessment of impact of agricultural research and the contribution of a participatory approach to agricultural research projects remains problematic in terms of both objectives and methods.

First, most agricultural research for development initiatives only undertake short term impact assessment while research for development often takes time, and long term impacts may not be immediately apparent. Evaluation of agricultural research projects is mainly carried out at the end of a research project without having a clear scheme for assessing impacts in the longer term.

Second, impact assessment of many agricultural research project pay more attention to the interests of researchers and donor agencies rather than communities. The result is an intense focus on economic impacts that ignores livelihood resources such as human, social and natural capital.

Third, despite employing several participatory techniques (for example, RRA, PRA), the top down oriented communication approach still seems dominant, especially in most government funded research projects, leading to a weak empowerment of local communities.

Fourth, gaps exist between researchers and local communities in evaluation due to the lack of facilitation skills, gaps in understanding social culture and local aspiration and barriers in languages sometimes leading to low reliability of findings.

Fifth, the results and findings of current impact assessment approaches have been sometimes misinterpreted or are weak due to a lack of evidence of impacts, caused by having little consideration of overlapped synergies of different initiatives in the same area.

Finally, the impact indicators and feedback mechanisms currently used for impact assessment also aim to look into returns on investment or cost effectiveness for donor organisations, rather than the sustainability of these for key stakeholders. The weaknesses mentioned above have led to unconvincing evidence showing how and why specific research and development approaches have contributed to — or rather failed to deliver — sustainable impacts in the Northwest Highlands.

## An alternative impact assessment framework

Weakness in both objectives and methodology of past and present impact assessment strategies clearly demonstrate the need for a holistic impact assessment framework. A more comprehensive impact assessment framework would measure outcomes and impact attributed by a research project based on deep understanding of relationships between technologies, vulnerability contexts and household resources, intervening institutions, and livelihood strategies. The adaption of the sustainable livelihoods framework offers a basis for measuring impact indicators, livelihood impacts, intermediate impacts, and direct research outputs. Sustainable livelihood frameworks with specified capital groups (economic, human, social, natural and physical) could provide a good direction towards achieving expected impact assessment indicators. These could contribute to better understanding of both short term and long term contributions of participatory approaches to sustainable development. In addition, using participatory development communication theory for impact assessment will help to enhance the active involvement and empowerment of local communities in the impact assessment process.

Finally, shifting from top down to bottom up impact assessment in which impact assessment indicators are designed and assessed by local people with their own methods and resources, including their indigenous resources, skills and knowledge, will be very crucial for sustainable development because they have more opportunities in decision making for change. A participatory impact assessment framework could not only help to strengthen collaboration between and among stakeholders, but could also enhance involvement in the impact assessment process. As a result, both high validity and reliability of impact assessment findings and empowerment of local communities could be achieved.

However, even a comprehensive impact assessment framework like the one briefly proposed above may not work well if the people implementing it lack facilitation skills or deep understanding of typical social, cultural, and political aspects of the local community. Challenges of application of participatory approaches in the Northwest Highlands with conventional top down practice should also be well considered. In addition, participatory communication tools for impact assessment should be modified and flexibly adapted to different groups and local communities. Finally, paying attention to indirect technology, knowledge related spillover outcomes could also help to improve understanding of outcomes of participatory approaches to sustainable development.

## Conclusion

An appropriate impact assessment approach is crucial for understanding the contribution of participatory processes to sustainable development in the Northwest Highlands. A holistic impact assessment framework for agricultural research for development that is blended from sustainable livelihood frameworks, participatory impact assessment

theories and participatory development communication techniques could help to measure more fully the impacts of agricultural research for development to support sustainable social change in such a culturally diverse region. Understanding both technical and institutional contexts of the Highlands is necessary for developing a more suitable impact assessment framework for agricultural research for development in this complex region.

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# Peer review: An emerging research method in international development

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## Introduction

Participatory action research (PAR) is a dominant paradigm in international development, and engages many innovative research methods. One such method, peer review, is significantly under-explored in the literature. It is a process of mutual trust, value sharing, transparency, and a high level of commitment involving participatory and democratic values and principles that emphasise capacity building and mutual learning without conditionality. The emphasis is on dialogue, a culture of criticism, credibility and peer pressure, and requires accountability, compliance and honesty from both the reviewer and the reviewed. Drawing from the available literature and a water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) case study by Oxfam Australia, we present a model of peer review as a PAR method in cross-cultural international development research.

## Background

Peer review is used for policy dialogue, transparency, capacity building, compliance, feedback, improvement and professional development (Blackmore 2005; OECD 2003). It challenges the traditional extractive/expert research orientation, with collegial entities (individuals, organisations, communities or countries) reviewing and learning from each other's practice. This paper discusses peer review as a PAR method in international development.

## Participatory action research literature

PAR is a cyclical, collaborative and localised approach to research and action (Kindon et al. 2007) involving community stakeholders designing, implementing, analysing, and taking action throughout the research process. It is integrated into development programming through an ongoing cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting.

McTaggart (1997:34) explains that in this self-reflective cycle the collective decides where to exert effort, and reflects on actions to inform future activity. Stakeholders actively engage in this cycle as a process of consciousness-raising and individual and collective transformation. We suggest that peer review is useful in the 'observing' and 'reflecting' stages of PAR.

## Overview of peer review

Cole et al (2006:11) define peer review as:

... the systematic examination and assessment of the performance of an entity by counterpart entities, with the ultimate goal of helping the reviewed entity improve its policy making, adopt best practices, and comply with established standards and principles.

Peer review has numerous principles:

- *Voluntary*: Participation in peer review is voluntary.
- *Trust*: High mutual trust between entities is necessary, requiring openness and constructive dialogue to share information, thoughts and ideas. Both parties have equal control in the process. [Note: openness and honesty are difficult when rival entities compete for resources].
- *Honesty*: Peer review has a culture of criticism but is non-judgmental.
- *Non-adversarial*: Peer review is cooperative, non-adversarial and non-punitive.
- *Learning*: Peer review is a mutual learning and capacity building process.
- *Peer pressure*: Peer review relies on influence and persuasion through peer pressure, influencing entities to change, achieve goals and meet standards.
- *Value sharing*: Participating entities share clear, collective aims.
- *Commitment*: Entities provide adequate financial contribution, and are fully engaged as reviewers and hosts.
- *Credibility*: Credible reviewers are objective, impartial and independent, providing hosts with fair, expert, and timely feedback;
- *Neutrality*: Performance criteria are not linked to funding requirements.
- *Confidentiality*: Confidentiality is paramount.

(Victorian Government 2010; Purcell and Hawtin 2007; Cole et al. 2006; Blackmore 2005; Reddy and Heuty 2005; Kasper 2005; Dalal-Clayton 2004; OECD 2003; Piggot-Irvine 2003).

The three key roles in the peer review process are those of reviewers, hosts and mediators.

1. *Reviewers* conduct the peer review. They need to be objective and fair (OECD 2003:14), with integrity, objectivity, expertise, professionalism, commitment, engagement and clarity. Reviewer competencies include analysing information, constructive criticism, collaborative working, effective communication, developing people, organisational sensitivity and promoting diversity (Purcell and Hawtin 2007).
2. *Hosts* cooperate with the peer review process, providing documents and data, responding to questions, facilitating contacts, and establishing context (ibid; OECD 2003).
3. *Mediators* oversee the peer review process (see OECD 2003), ensuring the Terms of Reference are followed, and mediating disputes.

## Peer review as a research process

The literature identifies numerous peer review data collection methods including secondary document analysis, interviews, contextual analysis, mapping, review of internal systems, processes and strategies, previous

surveys, media analysis, case studies, significant event analysis, direct observation, client feedback, workshops, consensus development, practice visits, quality circles, small peer group discussions, teaching, and mentoring (Victorian Government 2010; Blackmore 2005; Wren 2004; Breyer et al. 2003; Kim et al. 2000; Grol 1994). Although peer reviews are not fully fledged evaluations, they should adhere to a rigorous methodology (UNEG 2011).

Peer review processes that have been empirically tested are generally considered to be positive. Studies found that peer review enables professional training and development (Breyer et al. 2003), enhances performance and continuous quality improvement (Kim et al. 2000), and provides alternative perspectives through action research (Wren 2004). However, challenges include: participant anxiety (Blackmore 2005), particularly in cultural contexts where it may be viewed as inappropriate to provide critical feedback, the fear of being impolite (Kim et al. 2000), the time it takes, and variable quality of data collection and reporting (Wren 2004). Additionally, peer review is impacted by lack of clarity of purpose, lack of staff engagement, antagonistic organisational culture, fear of criticism, and limited reliability with poorly standardised processes (Victorian Government 2010). Peer reviewers can also be too self-congratulatory and encourage conformity of practice (Blackmore 2005).

Nevertheless, the literature identifies best practice in peer review as: participatory methods, with open, trusting relationships between the entities; a structured process which is transparent, fair, consistent, and agreed upon by all parties and flexible to contextual needs. Reviewers need to be critical and thorough, and training should be provided for all entities. Triangulation ensures rigorous data, and the peer review should collect evidence of improved practice. Finally, the process should include an evaluation of methodological learnings.

In summary, as a process for change, quality, and learning, peer review appears to be an exciting and innovative method for development research, particularly when integrated with the principles and cycle of PAR.

### **Case Study: WASH Linking and Learning project**

In 2010, Oxfam Australia, funded under AusAID's Access to Clean Water and Sanitation Initiative (ACWSI) program, designed and implemented WASH projects across six countries: Zambia, Mozambique, Bangladesh, Timor Leste, Cambodia and Papua New Guinea. An additional project, the WASH Linking and Learning project (L&L), was also developed. L&L aimed to strengthen WASH programming with an evidence-based approach to deepen current understanding of three key themes: capacity strengthening, gender, and appropriate technology. The study objectives were to increase effectiveness in Oxfam's WASH programming, improve the knowledge base of WASH good practice within Oxfam

and the sector, and contribute high quality evidence, behaviour and policy to the broader WASH community.

Reflecting PAR principles, the methodology involved peer review to investigate, contribute and inform the objectives and key thematic areas. Peer review was selected to optimise cross culture/cross country learning and sharing. Importantly, peer review was not considered a monitoring and evaluation process, nor did it represent a complete picture of the WASH projects. Rather, it was an opportunity to observe, explore and review key issues and areas of interest to host and reviewer teams.

The L&L peer review process emphasised the following principles:

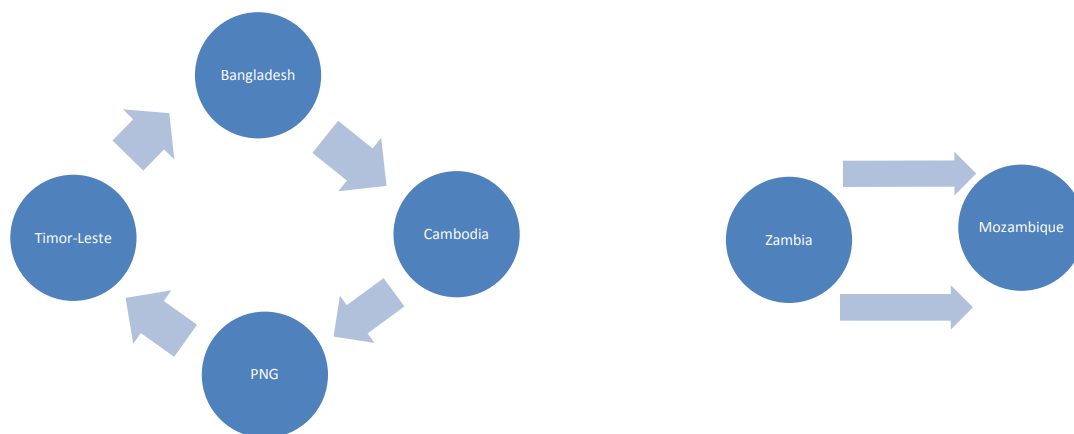
- *Connecting*: Connecting Host and Reviewer teams before, during and after the peer review visit, supporting them to identify cultural, environmental, and political contextual links, and similarities and differences in WASH programming. Thus, peer reviews were a mechanism to build a WASH community of learning across different countries.
- *Sharing*: Hosts shared their country contexts prior to the peer review visits, and hosts and reviewers shared materials prior, during and after the field visit. Sharing was coupled with sensitivity to the country context, and respect of different cultural backgrounds, levels of experience, approaches, and ideas.
- *Challenging*: Peer reviews sought ways to maximise engagement and input from all stakeholders, and participants were encouraged to openly embrace a respectful approach to being challenged.
- *Learning*: Peer reviews were an opportunity to expand skills and knowledge by working closely with other professionals, learning through comparative analysis and inquiry. Oxfam staff also supported research skill development.
- *Documenting*: Peer review involved documenting the WASH success factors and constraints, with innovative documentation methods.

### **Peer review process**

L&L peer reviews occurred between October and December 2011. Oxfam WASH staff and implementing partner organisations in all six countries participated in planning the peer review process, and a collaborative TOR provided guidance regarding roles and responsibilities. Reviewer teams visited a host country for five days of data collection (two days in the office and three days in the field). Data collection involved discussions with team members, WASH project site visits, and discussions with community members. Reviewers collected data, had an initial reflective discussion with the host teams, returned to their country offices to analyse the results, wrote a peer review report and integrated learnings into their WASH practice. Throughout the process, teams connected and continued sharing through an online hub. Repeat peer reviews did not occur.

After completing the peer reviews, participants also completed a qualitative questionnaire regarding their peer review experiences. Fifteen people answered questions

Diagram 1: L&L Peer Review process



regarding the strengths, challenges, learnings and recommendations of the peer review process. They stated that L&L was helpful for teams to collaboratively learn, identify strengths and gaps in programming and share ideas. The participants identified several factors that enhanced the peer review process.

- Reviewers and hosts built knowledge in numerous areas, such as programs, projects, technologies, strategies for gender mainstreaming and capacity strengthening, policy, program management, community engagement, and monitoring and evaluation.
- Hosts provided significant logistical support.
- Reviewers and hosts were mutually committed and engaged.
- The peer review approach was open ended, flexible, participatory, and enabled informal discussion.

In contrast, factors that challenged the L&L process included the short time allocated to data collection, difficulties with language and translation (particularly the lack of interpreters), some logistical issues (such as accommodation and food), and cross cultural differences. Nevertheless, the L&L peer review project was overwhelmingly considered to be highly successful.

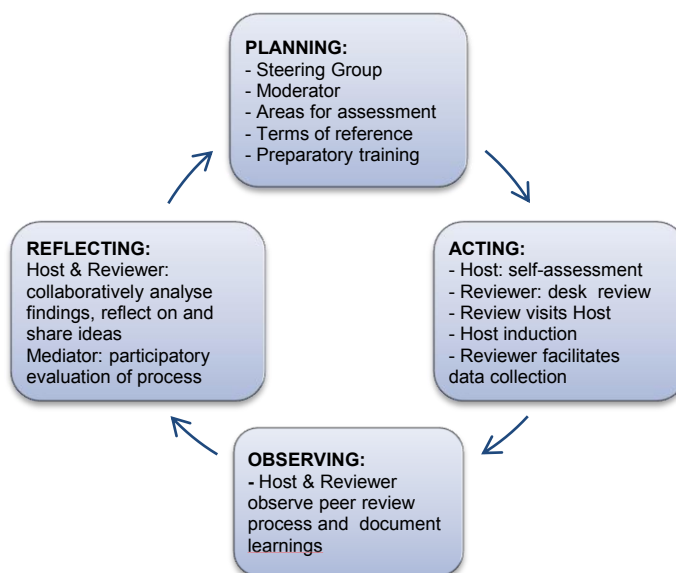
### Proposed peer review as a PAR method

Drawing from the literature and the L&L case study, we have designed the following peer review process, embedded in two cycles of PAR.

#### Peer review cycle 1

**Planning:** The peer review process begins with representatives of each entity forming a steering group, and selecting a neutral mediator to facilitate the process. The steering group develops common goals and objectives for the peer review, including areas for assessment. It designs the peer review methodology that is participative, ethical, and flexible to local context, and develops a Terms of Reference. All entities participate in preparatory peer review training.

• Diagram 2: Peer review cycle 1



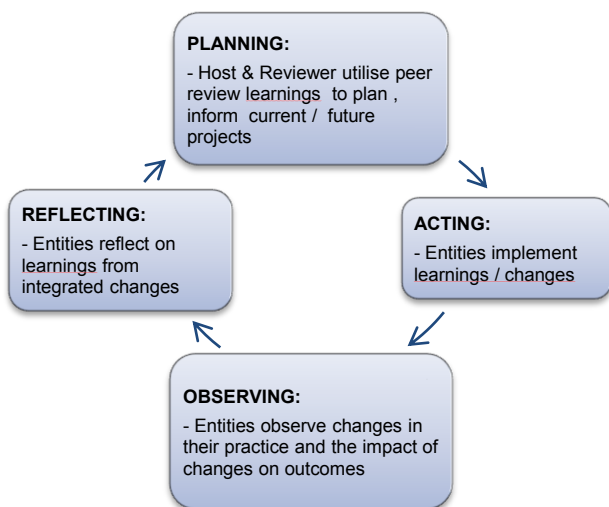
**Acting:** Based on collaborative criteria, the host conducts and shares a self-assessment, and the reviewer conducts and shares a desk review of relevant documents with the host. The reviewer (and mediator, if useful) visit the host, and begin with a cultural awareness induction. The reviewer then facilitates participatory data collection and analysis.

**Observing:** During data collection, the host and reviewer observe the peer review process, including their personal reactions, learnings and changes in thinking. Ongoing discussions support their personal transformation.

**Reflecting:** Both entities collaboratively explore the findings, reflect on and share ideas, and provide feedback to stakeholders through meetings or workshops. Both entities engage in individual and group reflection of the process and learnings with their colleagues, and collaboratively write and disseminate a report. The mediator facilitates a participatory evaluation of the peer review process. The reviewer and host then swap positions and repeat the same process.

## Peer review cycle 2

Diagram 3: Peer review cycle 2



*Planning:* Both entities utilise the peer review learnings from the previous peer review process to plan changes to current programming.

*Acting:* The entities implement these changes.

*Observing:* Entities observe changes in their practice and their impact.

*Reflecting:* Entities reflect on their learnings from integrating changes into programming.

Entities can then engage in ongoing peer review cycles to review changes and further inform projects and programming using the PAR cycle.

### Peer review models

The proposed peer review process is useful in three peer review models: singular peer review; bilateral peer review; and multilateral peer review. These models are applicable at many levels, for peer review between individuals, CBOs, communities, local NGOs, INGOs in the same and different countries, INGO affiliates, and others.

#### Model 1: Singular peer review

The singular peer review involves a single learning exchange between two similar entities, with one PAR cycle.

This peer review is contained, easily managed and operationalised, and time-bound, with clear outputs. The entities build a one-off relationship, but there are no expectations for ongoing interaction or mutual learning.

#### Model 2: Bilateral peer review

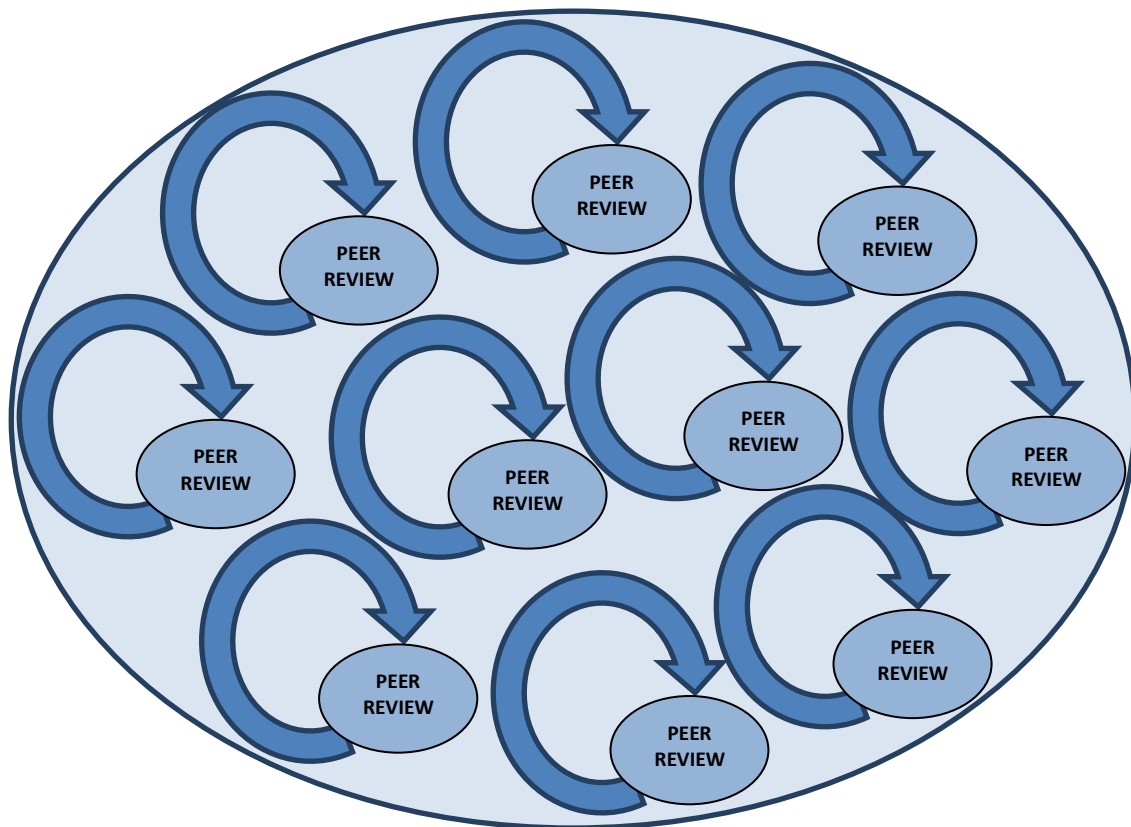
The bilateral ongoing peer review involves two similar entities establishing a relationship for multiple peer reviews. The entities conduct the first peer review within the PAR cycle. They then share and reflect on their learning, plan and then enact these changes. When useful and appropriate, they re-engage in another peer review to review their changed practice. The relationship continues, following the PAR cycle, as required and appropriate.

This model emphasises ongoing sharing and learning. The entities build a relationship beyond their first peer review, continuing to engage, share learnings and critically reflect on their own and each other's practice. Their collaboration is not time bound. Instead, peer review is a reflexive method within a trusting relationship framed by shared needs and objectives, with mutual commitment and initiative. A key risk is homogenisation of the entities, which could limit critical reflection and innovation. Furthermore, the continued relationship is potentially unsustainable.

#### Model 3: Multilateral peer review

Multilateral peer review occurs within a learning community (also known as a community of practice). Multiple entities join a network (open or closed) and conduct formal peer review with a variety of peers. The community also has ongoing processes for collective sharing (such as online fora or networking events), enabling entities to build relationships, widely share their learnings and be innovative beyond the peer review process. Rather than the bilateral peer review of 'one to one', multilateral peer review can be described as 'many to many' or 'one to many'.

This model requires entities to be particularly open and trusting. All participants need to be comfortable with vulnerability as they 'expose' themselves to multiple peers. This is challenging in a donor environment with competition for resources. However, this model also enables entities to select whom and when they engage with others. Fluid and open membership ensures that entities are not coerced into peer reviews that are not trusting or equal, and that, entities come in and out of the learning community. The learning community requires common principles and a thematic connection to link participating entities. Importantly, the community exists beyond the formal program cycle. However, the learning community can be constrained by timeframes, resources, and donor requirements, and the key challenge is managing donors' needs, while ensuring that members benefit from the learning community, and can undertake peer review when it is appropriate. An example of the multilateral peer review is Oxfam Australia's WASH Linking and Learning project.



## Conclusion

In international development, peer review enables a dual focus on process and outputs. Ongoing peer reviews can embed and sustain learning when supported by a learning community for critical reflection and providing information of current development theory and practice. Peer review as a research process can also build the transformative potential of participants, supporting them to recognise and confront vulnerabilities, and openly critique, share, and learn alternative practice methods. Non-traditional data instruments, such as film, can also maximise community participation. The Oxfam case study also highlights the importance of reflexivity — being aware of and critiquing one's own power, position and perspectives. Through peer review, reviewers and hosts can objectively analyse critical areas of power imbalance, such as gender sensitivity, cultural awareness, and community relations.

Peer review is an emerging innovative method in development research. It is participatory, fluid, and reflexive, and emphasises strengthening the capacity of reviewers and hosts. Embedded in cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection, and nestled in communities of learning, peer review can provide opportunity for development practitioners, organisations and communities to critique and improve their work, and ultimately increase development effectiveness.

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# Ideal versus actual: A comparative study of the application and results of World Vision's external stakeholder assessment methodology

*Katie Chalk, World Vision International*

## Introduction to the external stakeholder assessment

World Vision, the world's largest NGO working in around 70 countries, delivers its programming through locally established national offices with over 95 per cent local staff. The organisation works under corporate federal principles of autonomy (Handy 1992) and no particular entity — national office, support/donor office, regional office or the central strategic body known as the Global Centre — can be considered to be in charge. Hence the division of accountability between World Vision offices for effective community development is a topic of much interest. World Vision has risk audits in place to ensure accountability to minimum financial, operational and ethical standards. However, while it is likely that this massive organisation is making a positive contribution to development and opportunities for children, measures of this have been inconsistent. In 2010 World Vision's Global Centre introduced the Programme Capability Review (PCR), to help offices measure their organisational contribution to the objectives shared with their partner communities. The PCR generates a framework of program support so that appropriate relationships between entities meet shared and contextual accountabilities for programming outcomes.

This paper aims to explore the participatory evaluation component of the PCR. For this reason, while the PCR is a triangulated review, the focus here is on just one third of the PCR triangle — the External Stakeholder Assessment or ESA. In brief, the following background on the full methodology will provide the ESA appropriate context:

- Each national level World Vision entity — the 'office' and a small sample of its donor office partners respond to the same questionnaire; for each, they rate their capability against 10 areas of operations and attach evidence to justify their decision. The office's own response is the first corner of the triangle; a collation of donor office responses provides the second.
- The third viewpoint is not evidence based; it is a synopsis of stakeholder feedback, including NGOs and civil society, government and beneficiaries — the ESA.
- The triangulation analysis is conducted by an impartial panel with panel members internal to World Vision but without any direct interests in the office under review. They prepare and present to the office a panel report containing recommendations in the 10 operations areas under review and a final overall rating.

When the PCR methodology was tested in 2009, the emphasis — and for the authors, the purpose — of the ESA was to allow communities and external partners the opportunity to set measures by asking the question, 'What

is important to you, or what would you expect, from an organisation like World Vision?' Though the ESA does not drive social accountability by mandating response mechanisms, the hope was that each office would pick up the challenge directly to address common community and partner concerns revealed through the assessment process. It was projected that over time consistencies and trends in community-based measures would become apparent that could also contribute to meta-analysis of World Vision community partnerships regionally or globally.

The ESA methodology was used as part of the PCR from 2010–2012 in around 60 offices across Asia, Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe and Latin America, as well as in support offices. Despite a significant design shift between Year 1 and Year 2 implementation of the PCR,<sup>1</sup> there remains tension between creating a product that faces the PCR — aligned with what the panel needs to know to triangulate — and a product that supports program effectiveness — aligned with what the office and its leadership need to know in more general terms. This paper considers the effectiveness of the ESA in its two different approaches and attempts to answer the question: What should happen next?

## Summary of methodology

When devising the methodology for the ESA (Fowler 2008), there was a strong will within the project team to problem solve on current gaps to community-based evaluation and to contribute to evaluation methodology more broadly. While World Vision had just completed an upgrade of its project cycle design, monitoring and evaluation (DME) tools, there was nothing in place for the organisation to measure outcomes against external expectations — and the very nature of external expectations implies that World Vision cannot define them. From this logic emerged a methodology that allowed local external partners to dictate the benchmarks under discussion. Ideally this could take place as a natural component of project evaluation, so that the ESA was considered a short-term requirement until World Vision's social accountability capacity grew to absorb it. An important design principle was to minimise the cost and disruption to normal field-based activities, so a 'quick and dirty' snapshot of stakeholder perceptions was undertaken. It was highly qualitative with a bare minimum of data. The methodology around sampling and data collection has similarities to UN endorsed field capacity assessments (UNDP 2010), but without a quantitative phase, which keeps the sampling framework simple and allows for quick turnover of information. A fully qualitative approach also creates space for discussion, where variations are valued rather than homogenised, and where bias, hearsay and misconception are all relevant.

Three different types of stakeholder were sought — local/national duty bearers, local/international NGOs, and beneficiary communities. Purposive sampling was important for the government and NGO representation while community engagement was expected to be highly reliant on volunteer sampling. To encourage transparency, the consultant made the final sample choice, including children and vulnerable groups within focus group discussions. A deliberately short timeline — ideally 10 days — did not allow opportunities for immersion and observation as a data technique. Instead, the consultant spent a day on desk review of core documents, as a starting point to explore World Vision’s own perceptions of profile and goals before comparing this with external perceptions.

To consolidate the widely variant data resulting from interviews, Year 1 methodology contained a simple rating scheme; once the person or group had identified what was important to them, they would numerically rate World Vision’s performance against it. The consultant would then collate similar measures and present a score for key partner priorities as part of the ESA findings. A key difference between Year 1 and Year 2 methodology was the instruction to lose the goal-free questioning in favour of a structure that matched with that of the self and partner assessments. The time allocated increased to a minimum of 20 days so that a greater sample could be taken and to allow for more in-depth analysis and writing. The consultant also had a more rigid structure, required to answer around 30 questions using interview results and her or his own observations. The panel would then make the final decision based on three perspectives of the same element, and there was no longer a need for scoring within the ESA.

### **What worked, and why?**

The strongest examples of community-focused ESA in both years came out of offices with an interest in the principles of the methodology. These offices took more time to contextualise the standardised Terms of Reference (ToR) to focus on areas (geographic, social or programmatic) where they desired to understand more about their current impact. The offices that were performing well in general (and who therefore received a high rating in the final PCR report) were the most likely to deliver a quality ESA to the panel, indicating a level of capacity in consultancy management as well as an openness to new ideas. These were not necessarily the offices likely to benefit the most from a better understanding of their external stakeholder perspective. The offices under review in Year 1 in particular were not always in favour of the PCR or the ESA as a part of it and several ESAs were considered weak by panel members because they reported only positive or compliance-focused data. This is a common pitfall for evaluation processes which can imply an overly bureaucratic organisational culture (Chelimsky, in Wholey 2010:657).

While more than half of the Year 1 ESAs did not meet the needs of either the office or the panel, the best quality examples also come from Year 1 implementation. For the

panel, a 40 page report with simple summaries and plenty of direct stakeholder observations was preferable to a longer document with complicated data comparisons. In fact, the influence of ESA individual comments on panel decisions, particularly those comments critical or advisory towards World Vision, raises the question of whether several days of data analysis and writing are actually necessary for the PCR triangulation, or whether transcripts of interviews would suffice.

Year 1 methodology called for consultants to be external to World Vision, partly to meet the principle of independent evaluation, and partly to ensure minimum disruption to national office staff and their schedules. In Year 2, however, offices from the Middle East and Eastern European region elected to band together to coordinate ESAs. The rule was relaxed to state that consultants need only be external to the office under review, and not to World Vision. While some hired labour was still required, most of the work was done through secondments of staff between offices. This ESA ‘community’ held regular online meetings to discuss their progress and flag questions on intent and principles with the Global Centre and regional office teams. The model encouraged enthusiasm for the task and good cross-pollination of ideas, as well as providing individual capacity building opportunities for DME practitioners. It also allowed for greater immersion, with seconded staff able to ask questions and cross-check observations with a variety of staff members before writing the final report.

Overall, Year 2 reports showed greater consistency in their quality, were insightful and balanced, and largely followed the recommended structure. This made them useful to the panel but, unfortunately, less useful to the office under review than the good examples from Year 1. The suggested terms of reference had drawn consultants’ attention away from freeform social feedback in favour of internally set goals and benchmarks. The consultant, and not the stakeholder sample, became the evaluator of World Vision’s success. Without a truly alternative perspective, many consultants were simply duplicating or collating what was already known. One Year 2 consultant reported that the leadership team in the office under review found nothing new in her research, as all elements had already been documented during normal evaluation cycles for World Vision’s programs.

### **Limitations: What didn’t work?**

In order to identify what *didn’t* work, intent needs to be clearly defined. Therefore the challenge in considering this question is that, not only the methodology, but also the intent itself, changed between Year 1 and Year 2. The ESA returned to internally defined measures in Year 2 because of the sense that ‘measuring with the measures of the measured’ (ACFID 2009:21) was not working or, more specifically, that the reality of managing and applying data of this nature could not live up to the ideology except in very experienced hands. The majority of Year 1 PCR panellists gave feedback that the effort of ESA preparation was not justified; given the significantly different focus of



the ESA to the self and partner input, triangulation was rarely occurring. At the same time, it remained important to Year 2 designers that external stakeholders, and in particular beneficiary communities, should continue to provide direct input to the data around program capability. The revisions to the product aimed very specifically to dovetail the final report structure with self and partner information. To make this shift indicates that decision makers within World Vision have prioritised the success of the PCR over the potential of the ESA to create useful participatory measures and benchmarks. However, many other aspects of Year 1 implementation besides the methodology probably contributed to the poor uptake of the ESA, including unfamiliarity with the principles, lack of centralised advice and guidance, an overly simplistic ToR template and insufficient engagement with office DME teams on the value of the ESA in its own right. In several countries, consultants also reported hesitation from communities and other stakeholders to answer questions openly, particularly in fragile contexts (see also Parkinson 2009).

The Year 2 ESA designers expected that the increased time allowed would result in greater rigour of data collection and accuracy of conclusions. The expanded ToR was intended to trigger a collaborative phase of planning between office and consultant to devise a product that went beyond the framework required for PCR to address specific contextual requirements. However, in reality there was little contextualisation, and while the more specific instructions of Year 2 achieved their goal to create consistent output, they also fell short of ideal in consistent quality of conclusions and recommendations. The prescribed structure and standardised questioning was easier for consultants to understand but also appeared to lead in many instances to ‘cookie cutter’ output, with minimal space allowed for perception-related reporting or tangential material.

In both years, the intent for participatory measures and anecdotal data appears to have been overlooked by consultants used to dealing with more rigorous and unshakeable data ‘truths’. Many attempted to provide full triangulation and analysis within the ESA rather than allowing the stakeholder viewpoint to emerge as a standalone element. This is particularly noticeable in consultants’ approaches to the desk review component. Though intended as an orientation to World Vision rather than an analysis of documentation quality, it often appeared in final reports as a literature review over several pages. As nobody knows better than the office under review their own background, programming scope, goals and strategic priorities, reporting these elements or analysing their quality is a remarkably inefficient use of consultancy hours. Around half of the Year 1 consultants provided substantial rewrites and analysis of desk review documentation. The structure mandated for Year 2 reports does **not** include any mention of literature review; even so, several consultants persisted in providing analysis.

### **Conclusion: Year 1, Year 2, Year 3?**

The ESA was originally praised as an innovation (ACFID 2009:21) that could bring an impartial and truly reflective external viewpoint to the triangulated PCR. However, Year 1 assessments failed to apply the methodology to good effect for the panel, while Year 2 assessments (for the most part) failed to contextualise the methodology for localised, meaningful results. Neither was particularly useful to the office under review. Before the PCR is repeated, a decision needs to be made within World Vision’s Global Centre; is the ESA likely to serve the organisation best as an audit-style evaluation against internally set indicators or should further refinements be made in the other direction, to retain and refocus the ‘measures of the measured’ to inform the office directly on stakeholder perceptions?

Improved social accountability or, providing the mechanisms for communities to hold World Vision accountable to their core purpose and promises – is an important goal for World Vision as it is for many NGOs (ACFID 2009). Given this, a third option is to build the organisational emphasis on social accountability within each office independently of the PCR process through more effective and systematic reporting of community viewpoints, including their inputs into crafting evaluations of this nature. As this data begins to be captured for each project individually, a more comprehensive meta-analysis to inform leadership of organisational change requirements would serve requirements of PCR and the office equally. Subjectivity would be replaced by evidence at the organisational level, but remain important for full and contextual consideration at a local level; the need for primary data collection from a consultant would also be removed. World Vision’s accountability practitioners would need to take up and drive this strategy for it to be successful; this type of organisational change cannot reasonably be expected to be led by a review team. As such, it is a long-term prospect dependent on greater strategic will within World Vision to strengthen their social accountability focus.

In the meantime, the PCR is currently scheduled to return to national offices for a repeat review in 2014. This creates an opportunity for ‘Year 3’ methodology to take the best of both previous attempts, taking into consideration the following suggestions:

- Greater clarity that this research can be done at field level (and at any time) as part of existing evaluations, so long as they are conducted by independent third parties rather than project staff.
- A more intuitive contextualisation of the product at national level, based on the understanding that the office, and not the PCR, is the true client.
- Access for consultants and internal teams to a secondary set of documentation around qualitative, consultative stakeholder evaluations as a field of knowledge, including potentially centralised support to enhance knowledge base and skill sets.

- Greater involvement of centralised advisors in choice of consultant, application and adjustment of ToR, previous practices etc.
- The option of hiring previous consultants or specialist consultants to create a pool of expertise on community led evaluation.
- Replication to some degree of the secondment model used by Middle East/Eastern Europe offices in Year 2.
- Clarity to remove the possibility of desk review analysis or direct commentary on project effectiveness as a result of desk review data.
- A more standardised set of desk review documents that identify World Vision's profile, presence and goals, rather than their activities, to give each consultant a consistent starting point to research.
- Space for contextualisation of approach in cultures or contexts that struggle with honest and open feedback.

In addition, Hatry et al (2010:669) suggest that quality checks for evaluative techniques can be enhanced by reflective peer review, response or input from stakeholders. To date, this has not occurred with the ESA, and it is unlikely that the reports are being shared outside World Vision including with the stakeholders who contributed data. A challenge for World Vision to overcome (and NGOs in general (ACFID 2009)) is the tendency to talk and learn only among themselves. This was one of the original motivators for World Vision wanting to do better in capturing and incorporating external viewpoints through the ESA. The product is unlikely to become the flagship accountability tool once hoped for unless it is shared and its methodology further improved directly with the groups it consults — and, ultimately, impacts.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> The first set of instructions was used in 2010 and 2011, with revisions to the Statement of Work made in preparation for 2012. However, to keep things simple, I shall refer to the original methodology as Year 1, and the revised methodology as Year 2.

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## Levels of NGO cooperation and their empirical importance

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In sociology, civil society is often understood in terms of what it is not (Brown 2012:11): it is not the world of political power, and it is not the economy. In more positive terms, it is the sphere of ‘uncoerced human association’ (Waltzer 1995:97), or voluntary cooperation. In capitalist society the economy is about *competition* for economic capital. In liberal democracies political life is the sphere of *competition* for power and influence. But civil society is the sphere of *cooperation* for social capital (Brown 2012:13). The concept of social capital is contested (see Bourdieu 1986 and Putnam 2000 for the conceptualisations that are most commonly contrasted), but it commonly refers, like economic capital, to something that reproduces itself, and it implies ‘the development of *trust, civic spirit, goodwill, reciprocity, mutuality, shared commitment, solidarity and cooperation*’ (Ridley-Duff, Seanor and Bull 2011:83–84, original emphasis).

This paper emphasises the importance of trust to NGO cooperation, especially small-scale local cooperation, and to civil society more generally. Accordingly, it could be viewed in theoretical contexts such as Muhammad Yunus (2010) on social business and Amartya Sen (2001) on development as freedom. Cooperation and trust are also important within those theoretical frameworks (cf. Brown 2012:20, Ridley-Duff, Seanor and Bull 2011:83–84), but this paper shows examples of their *empirical* importance. It is based on ethnographic fieldwork in Fang, Northern Thailand, in 2011, during which I studied an NGO called the Blood Foundation,<sup>1</sup> and also made a short trip to Phnom Penh in Cambodia to observe the work of the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia, which is unrelated to the Blood Foundation, but a good source of comparative data and policy applications. There is, increasingly, a preference to refer to NGOs as CSOs, or Civil Society Organisations, because they are a part of civil society (in contrast to the world of political power and the economy), although civil society is a broader concept. While I use the term NGO in this paper, my central problematic concerns the elusive quality of voluntary cooperation in civil society.

While NGO cooperation might seem to denote, obviously, cooperation between NGOs, the term is widely used to refer to cooperation between NGOs on the one hand, and economic and political actors on the other — namely governments, inter-governmental organisations, and the private sector. However, NGO cooperation in the sense of cooperation between NGOs is something that exists, but not always in the sort of institutional way that allows us to find a relevant website, or, in the words of one of my informants, an entry in the Yellow Pages.

### National NGO cooperation

The Cooperation Committee for Cambodia (CCC) could justifiably claim to be the world leaders in NGO cooperation on a national scale. They have over 400

member NGOs throughout Cambodia, which is about 25 per cent of *active* NGOs in the country, and about 10 per cent of all NGOs. The CCC emerged from the Thai-Cambodian border area during the period of the Vietnamese occupation, after the downfall of the Khmer Rouge, when the need for cooperation became clear. NGOs were very politicised with regard to the Vietnamese occupation: some were happy to work within the situation, whereas others felt they should be aligned with the resistance. About 60 to 70 NGOs, which had been acting more or less independently and sometimes replicating each other’s work, began to hold weekly meetings focusing on common issues and collective action. With the fast influx of returning refugees after the Paris Peace Treaty, they formed the Network of Assistance to Cambodian Refugees, which produced various working groups and thematic discussions, and eventually grew into the CCC.

Member NGOs must meet three criteria: be fully registered as an NGO in Cambodia; be apolitical; and have a functioning board. The ‘apolitical’ criterion is particularly important in terms of the relationship, or demarcation, between civil society and the state, not least because Cambodia has introduced an NGO law which is partly designed to curtail political activity by NGOs. CCC members are of different sizes, from large International NGOs with annual budgets in excess of US\$1 million and more than 40 staff, to small Cambodian NGOs with budgets below \$0.25 million and fewer than 15 staff. To be members, they pay dues amounting to 0.1 per cent of their income.

According to the executive director, the CCC is the only organisation in Cambodia that is ‘cross-sector’, that is, not thematic or issue-based, though there are more specialised networks of medical NGOs, or NGOs with a particular concern for Indigenous protection, land mines, agriculture, fisheries, etc. Larger NGOs pay heavier dues so that the CCC can serve the smaller NGOs more effectively, but the larger NGOs benefit from links to ‘implementers’: larger NGOs often fund projects while smaller NGOs carry them out. This arrangement benefits the implementing partners themselves, and contributes to an atmosphere of solidarity and cooperation. The CCC publishes reports that are of use to NGOs in Cambodia, and they facilitate a ‘learning forum’ where different NGOs can share experiences and ask questions. The CCC includes what we might term experienced NGOs in its membership, as well as beginners. So the learning forum produces a ‘manual’, but one that is based on a community of practice model rather than a consultancy.

The learning forum is not funded by the dues paid by member NGOs. They have to fundraise, and smaller networks will have to do that on a local scale. The CCC director stated that, compared to Thailand, Cambodia has a very strong charity culture, but a lack of long-term

planning and sustainability. This concurs with my own impressions. Cambodia may also lack a strong social enterprise culture, and could learn from Thailand in this respect, while Thailand could learn from Cambodia on NGO cooperation. Regional and international networks are developing — Cambodia hosted the Second Global Assembly for CSO Development Effectiveness in 2011, and the CCC is keen to internationalise its scope so that their ‘communities of practice’ can draw on wider expertise. This facilitates a sharing of ideas on effectiveness, accountability, and research methodologies.

The CCC has in many ways become a representative body for NGOs in Cambodia, and this pushes it towards NGO cooperation in the other sense mentioned earlier; namely, it is in a position to represent the NGO sector in discussions with government, and this can have the negative consequence of undermining the autonomy of civil society from government.

### Provincial NGO cooperation

Such undermining of the autonomy of NGOs from government would seem to be less of an issue at the more local level. The CCC report *Provincial NGO Networks: Local and global linkages* (2009), lists 22 provincial networks and includes a statement of their ‘primary purposes’. Treating these statements as data and post-coding them, fifteen purposes appeared in the listing for two or more local NGO networks:

1. cooperation and unity among NGOs;
2. good relations between NGOs and government (including local government);
3. coordination on problem solving;
4. coordination on service delivery (including continuum of services);
5. sharing knowledge and experience, and improving communications infrastructure (including internet);
6. collecting information and doing research;
7. advocacy, training in advocacy, building capacity for advocacy by NGOs and at the grassroots, and influencing policy;
8. human rights (protecting and improving, respect for, culture of, investigating abuses, enforcing laws, making recommendations) and democracy;
9. rights of women;
10. land rights and preventing land grabbing;
11. strengthening civil society;
12. capacity building (e.g. in Human Resources);
13. fundraising;
14. raising awareness and support from the community, and changing community attitudes; and
15. working for the wellbeing of people and the environment.

To expand more fully on the significance of this would require another paper; however, these are useful in understanding the value of such networks, and in helping other local networks to reflect on their own purposes and

practices. Some of them could be situated in a grey area between apolitical and political, which, as is stated above, is significant in terms of the membership criteria of the CCC and in terms of Cambodia’s NGO law.

### Local NGO cooperation

However, these purposes could be construed as quite general and aspirational, so I now turn to *actual* NGO cooperation on a local level. The Fang Valley Development Network was set up in 2011 and includes a number of NGOs in the Fang area. Most of them are quite small, but some are linked with larger international organisations. For example, Fortune is a mental health NGO that works with Shan refugees who have suffered from trauma as a result of human rights abuses in Burma, and they are part of the international organization, Salus World, which does similar work in Guatemala, South Africa, and elsewhere. World Vision also has an office in Fang but has not yet been involved. I have not seen any evidence of its staff being involved in the more informal NGO networks in the Fang area, and those informal contacts seem to be a gateway into the more formal Fang Valley Development Network.

I was at the second meeting of the development network on 13 August 2011. In the first meeting, the participating NGOs were all asked what they could offer to the network, and the results of this discussion were posted on the development network’s website (<https://sites.google.com/site/fangvalley>). The second meeting was held in the Phumanee Hotel in Fang. Phumanee is run by members of the Lahu hill tribe, and is involved in a number of development projects in the area. There were 14 people at the meeting representing six NGOs: Way of Life, Fortune, Echo, the Upland Holistic Development Project (UHDP), Blood Foundation, and Full Life Development; a mixture of secular and faith-based NGOs. The meeting was held in English and Thai with translation provided by two of the participants (one Shan and one Norwegian). Way of Life was there for the first time, so its representatives introduced themselves. It was started by Norwegian missionaries and, although the missionary ethos has not entirely disappeared, there is more of a focus on educational work with Shan children, teaching Shan, Thai, English and Mathematics.

After that there were two ‘trainings’. One was on Learner-Centred Teaching — which was relevant to a number of the NGOs present — and the other was on making fermented plant juice. I also spoke about my research and the meeting with the CCC in Cambodia. There was discussion of what each group hoped to *gain* from the network, complementing the discussion from the first meeting.

The presentation on Learner-Centred Teaching emphasised that none of us can know everything, that this is an important premise of the method, and that it is also an important premise of a development network. For example some people and organisations know how to dig a well, some know if fish will do well in ponds, some know where to send Shan children to school. This discussion,

which was also relevant to the discussion of what the different groups hoped to gain, was done in breakout groups, so I could not listen to everyone, but the discussion in my group was frank and constructive — everyone was happy to acknowledge their weaknesses and talk about how they could help other NGOs. For example, Blood Foundation wanted to teach skills to prisoners — written Thai, agriculture, massage — and UHDP said they could probably help with gardening and handicrafts. Blood Foundation also needed help with teacher training, and Fortune was able to offer help. Echo was looking for advice on identifying traditional local knowledge, e.g. of seed saving, and asked other NGOs to report old knowledge, innovation, and seed for under-utilised crops. Some seeds and plants have cultural significance: for example, some plants were taken from Shan State generations ago, but sometimes refugees have left hurriedly, without their plants, and as a consequence have felt they have lost something.

There were suggestions of speakers for future meetings of the development network, which was interesting from a cooperation perspective because different NGOs were in effect putting their own contacts at the disposal of the network.

For me, the major shortcoming of this meeting was that the group was effectively split into two language groups, and each group tended to chat during translation into the other's language. The English speakers were more guilty of this than the Thai speakers, but, irrespective of this, it does not enhance the interpersonal trust and cooperation that, we have observed, are intrinsic to social capital.

I also spoke about development networks with a senior NGO worker in the region, who emphasised the importance of participation and the need to have local people in key roles very quickly. A few people can establish a network, but those people need to be present, and NGOs have a high turnover of staff, which can make continuity difficult to achieve. Furthermore, Phumanee Hotel charged for the use of its meeting room, but allowing it to be used for free would have helped gain custom and customer loyalty. At the second meeting people were asked for donations and Blood Foundation covered the shortfall. The senior NGO worker commented that people would probably be willing to pay a nominal fee of 20 baht (approximately \$0.65), but not much more, and suggested that if Phumanee was unwilling to allow the development network to use its room for free then it might be worth going elsewhere.

This is precisely what happened. The third and fourth meetings were held at UHDP, on their property just outside Fang. At the fourth meeting there were 11 people from four NGOs, fewer than before. Fortune gave a presentation on their Migrant Worker Empowerment Program, which helps migrants — especially Shan — to obtain the relevant papers for working legally, getting into school etc. UHDP spoke about raising chickens and ducks at home, followed by a discussion about the development network's website and Facebook page. There was a presentation about UHDP, and a tour of its property including the biosand water filter and seed bank. This was less instrumental than

much of the discussion in the second meeting, but still interesting and conducive to building civil society, including relationships, trust, and social capital.

### **An NGO-centred perspective**

I will now look briefly at NGO cooperation from the perspective of a single NGO, namely the Blood Foundation, which was the focus of my research. In the development network I observed that there was a continuum from the informal networks that exist between Westerners in rural Thailand, some of whom were also neighbours, and participation in the more formally constituted development network.

Blood Foundation, then, has its own networks of cooperation and 'circuits of sociability' (Valverde 1998: 168). It is a member of the development network, has informal networks in that geographical area, has cooperated with other NGOs on some of their projects, and receives funding from a Foundation that enables it to educate Shan teenagers through the local vocational college. This creates 'bridge relations' to other 'clusters' (Burt 2005:12) of educational work on the Thai-Burma border, and produces 'bridging social capital' (Putnam 2000:*passim*, Fukuyama 2002:27). Blood Foundation concentrates on elementary education, but there is also this vocational education, and even some tertiary liberal arts education for Burmese refugees in the Mae Sot area, with which the Australian Catholic University and others are involved.

In late 2011, Blood Foundation divided itself into two entities: Blood Foundation the development arm, and World Weavers, which is a social enterprise offering spiritual experience packages. The original package was Monk for a Month in Fang, about which I will say more in a moment. There is also Muslim for a Month and Sufi for a Month in Turkey, and Monk for a Month (Tibetan Tradition) in India. This creates a wider international network, which includes a virtual community, particularly on Facebook.

### **Micro-level NGO cooperation**

For the sake of conceptual completion, I would like to mention that NGO cooperation can exist on an even smaller scale, namely when a single NGO is itself an embodiment of cooperation. There are examples in the Fang area, but perhaps the closest we can get to an ideal type is the cooperative. Cooperatives, like social enterprises, embody a strong nexus between the commercial sector and civil society. Social franchising is another way in which a single NGO can embody cooperation — and expand to become more than one NGO (cf. Brown 2012:13, Munoz 2010:85).

### **Problems**

Finally I want to look at what happens when NGO cooperation goes wrong. Like any NGO, Blood Foundation has had tensions: for example between those who want it placed on a more professional footing, clearly demarcated from the people who founded it, and the founders

themselves, whose personal relationships are crucial to the social capital on which a small NGO depends.

Something that became more public concerns the original Monk for a Month program in Fang. This was offered in conjunction with a local Buddhist temple. People were able to stay at the temple for up to a month, for a fee, and participate in its life, discuss Buddhism, visit some of the Blood Foundation's development projects, and men could ordain as monks for a short period of time (temporary ordination for men being quite normal in Thailand). The problem arose from the accusation that the temple and Blood Foundation between them were 'charging for Buddhism'. This is widely regarded as unacceptable in Theravada Buddhism, and the Buddhist hierarchy demanded the program be discontinued in that form. They moved to a donation-based model, but monks at the temple from English speaking backgrounds told guests they were not obliged to donate anything. However, the Blood Foundation was depending on those donations to fund its development work.

Clearly, the two partners in this cooperation had very different purposes. The temple wanted to make Buddhist teachings available. Blood Foundation wanted to provide a spiritual experience but within a social enterprise model, in other words making money through capitalistic trading for a good cause. It was announced on Facebook that the relationship had broken down and the Monk for a Month program would be discontinued. This was perceived by members of the virtual community as an attack on the foreign monks, who had effectively been the faces of the program. So the announcement was received negatively.

## Conclusion

This paper has identified levels of NGO cooperation from the national level to the micro-level. NGO cooperation at the national level is valuable and facilitates engagement with political society, but it can have negative consequences for the autonomy of civil society from government. The comparatively bureaucratic nature of such cooperation makes it harder for the researcher to observe trust and cooperation in action, although their effects can be seen in links between funders and implementers, and in resources such as the CCC's learning forum. At a provincial level, NGOs may be freer to espouse publically an agenda that could be seen as political, for example by working for human rights or against environmental degradation, and the development of provincial networks takes on a more organic and less bureaucratic form. The autonomy of civil society is enhanced at a local level, where the importance of interpersonal trust becomes evident and observable to the ethnographer, and where the damaging effects of trust

breaking down are equally observable. Informal networks are important in themselves, because that is where the ethos of voluntary cooperation is at its most fundamental, but they are also important to the success of more formal networks. Although NGOs are often goal-oriented, they depend on social capital, and therefore it is necessary for them to build trust, network, and cooperate with other NGOs.

Rather than adding to the extensive *theoretical* literature on social capital, this paper has provided *empirical* examples of the phenomena that are associated with it, particularly cooperation between NGOs. This is partly in order to stimulate such cooperation, and partly to be of value to other researchers. Empirical, ethnographic data facilitate the development of a grounded perspective on social capital and NGO cooperation, taking these concepts out of the realm of grand theory, and demonstrating their practical importance.

## Note

- <sup>1</sup> I acknowledge funding from the University of Southern Queensland, which allowed this research to be undertaken.

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# Narrowing the gap between grassroots rhetoric and top down practice in community development

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## Introduction

Community development is a long-term value based process which aims to address imbalances in power and bring about change founded on social justice, equality and inclusion (Community Development Exchange 2012).

This definition is one of the latest of many attempts to define both the process and the outcome that is community development.

This paper refers to community development as practiced by community development workers and funding bodies. The community development workers are very often, but not always, employees of NGOs. The funding bodies can be government or private bodies which mostly provide an amount of money for a specified time to enable some form of 'community development project'. These projects may be in any sector, local or international and are generally designed to address a need or to rectify a deficiency of some kind in the community however defined — as a specific socioeconomic or ethnic or racial or religious group; the population of a place. While this type of community development may not be 'grassroots' the methodology described below tries to ensure that the values, knowledge and people involved are acknowledged and respected and that they are real driving partners in the community development projects that concern them.

There are commonly three stages to a community development project — the design phase, the implementation phase, the evaluation. Too often in community development projects, community members have direct engagement with the project only during the implementation phase. In the design phase and in the evaluation they are mostly informants in a data collection process organised, analysed and reported on by others. The rhetoric of 'grassroots', which implies community initiated, ownership and control, falls victim to the timeframes and obligatory requirements of donors. While there are stakeholders such as donors, implementing organisations and paid/salaried community development workers involved in community development projects, there will always be a gap between grassroots roots rhetoric and top down practice. Real grassroots activity is initiated from within communities and is carried out by or in close association with community members. The Macquarie Dictionary (1990) definition of grassroots 'pertaining to, close to, or emerging spontaneously from the people' is seldom apparent in practice. What is often called grassroots often results in people becoming non-decision making recipients of largesse or at best minor partners in a project that outsiders believe is in the community's best interest. They seldom have ownership of the decisions.

\* *Author's spelling*

The methodology outlined below shows how ownership of both the process of the project implementation and ownership of the content (the activities and outputs) of a community development project can be a shared ownership which is an empowering process in itself for members of the target community as well as a process which will enhance the sustainability of the benefits derived, by the community, from the outcomes of the community development project.

## Ownership

... the first act of power people can take in managing their own lives is 'speaking the world', naming their experiences in their own words under conditions where their stories are listened to and respected by others (Friere and Macebo as quoted in Labonte, Feather and Hills 1999:3).

For grassroots development to happen, the words of Friere and Macebo must be adhered to. Listening to people tell their stories can be effectively done during a well facilitated appraisal process (participatory rapid/rural appraisal — PRA) which informs the design of the project by establishing the objectives of the community members for their community and for themselves. By using appropriate PRA tools in a strength based approach manner, communities can identify their strengths, values and assets past and present, and identify what they would like for their future. Good facilitation can direct this information into a context which fits with donor strategies and objectives so that there is alignment between what can be funded and community objectives. No false expectations are created within the community.

The recognition by the community that their objectives are different to what is currently in place, the status quo, is the beginning of a locally owned change process. A recognition that things need to change or that change is wanted and can be achieved through certain action is the basis of a local 'theory of change' (ToC). While at the community level this is not called a ToC it is nevertheless a locally owned and understood ToC.

The next step in this process is to establish how community members will know when their objectives have been met and/or achieved. The situation or the information that would indicate that the desired objective has been met is the indicator of the desired change. When each objective has one or more indicators these can be measured to establish the present situation in relation to these indicators. This is the baseline for the project.

To measure these indicators it is important that the tools used to measure them are tools that are understood by all community members regardless of sex, age, status

or ability. Such tools should also be transparent, user friendly and encourage participation by all who wish to participate. They must also establish the baseline from the perspective of the community, collectively and individually to ensure that ownership of the knowledge and data generated remains with the people to whom it refers and who are the source of that knowledge and data. By allowing for self selection of informants to an open data collection process, ownership is shared by the community with those facilitating the process. It is not given away to be manipulated by persons outside of the community. The knowledge and data provided by community members forms their 'story' and by ensuring that the ownership of this story remains with those to whom it belongs ensures equity for the community and is a respectful way to treat such knowledge and data. This can be empowering for communities and individuals and is in line with Friere and Mecabo.

## Tools

A strengths based approach suitable for grassroots data collection and outlined here involves three tools: Appreciative inquiry (AI) informed discussion groups, pocket charts (PC) and the ten seed technique (TST). These three tools and their benefits are discussed below.

The methods and tools outlined in this paper are not restricted to use in developing country situations, nor are they restricted to use in discrete remote village communities. Indeed these tools can be used in any situation where inquiry into the views of an identifiable population or group is required. Such groups could for example be the population of a village on an island in Vanuatu, or it could be a group of single parents in a suburb of an Australian city.

Implicit in this approach at the grassroots level and the use of these tools is that they are user friendly for informants and data collectors alike; they encourage participation; and they draw on and reflect an oral tradition. While oral traditions are often seen as belonging to mostly developing societies they are not restricted to them. Oral communication is generally the mode of communication with which most people are most comfortable.

### *Appreciative inquiry informed discussion groups*

This tool is very appropriate for PRA activity and can be used in conjunction with many other tools. Appreciative inquiry (AI) is an inquiry into the best and valued things or, finding out what is good, worth keeping and building on. It does this by focusing on examples of success and the causes of these successes (New Paradigm 2009, Cooperrider and Srivastara 1987). AI asks positive questions to generate a constructive dialogue between the inquirer and informants. The ensuing dialogue provides data for the inquirer and also provides informants with the opportunity to clarify for themselves (if they had not already done so) what their strengths, goals and opportunities are. The facilitator uses questions framed in positive terms, which align with the four stages of AI:

1. *Discover* — finding out the good, valued aspects of people's lives that they attribute to the project.
2. *Dream* — what do the participants wish for their own/family/community's future?
3. *Design* — how will they know when they have achieved their dream?
4. *Destiny* — what will the participant do to achieve their dream?

In using this approach for the facilitation of groups it may be necessary to change the fourth D, Destiny, to 'Do' because do is more easily understood by both local people and local facilitators.

By encouraging people to focus on their strengths people are more likely to consciously make the effort to utilise these benefits for their future wellbeing. Using the best of the past to build the future is a key aspect of a strength based approach to development. As Schwandt (2010) suggests, 'The past is our future'.

The context of the discussion groups, which can, if necessary, be segregated by sex, age and/or status, is public, personal and flexible. Public in that all present are able to hear what is said and see by whom it is said. Personal in that people express that person's view about the question asked to initiate the discussion. Flexible in that good facilitation is able to respond if necessary to dynamics of the dialog within the discussion group.

### *The pocket chart*

This tool can be used to establish a baseline measure of indicators identified during the PRA. The PC is a simple data collection tool that allows people to express a view anonymously. It involves a person placing a voting token into one of a number of pockets arranged on a display and upon each pocket is depicted an issue, situation or outcome they see as their preferred option. Issues, situations or outcomes are depicted in a way that is able to be understood by all and is most often pictorial. Women and men use different voting tokens to allow for the disaggregation of data. Such disaggregation can also be done for age groups. The PC also provides a degree of quantification to issues that lend themselves more to qualitative data collection methodologies and does this without intrusive questioning. Each time the PC is used, the results are counted in front of all those who participated in its use. In this way everyone is aware of the results.

As a data collection tool the PC is very appropriate for grassroots level community engagement because it is anonymous, user friendly, personal and allows for the easy disaggregation of data by age, sex or status. Anonymous in that if a person wishes to preserve their anonymity they can do so. This may be very important when inquiring into what may be sensitive issues. It is user friendly because a person does not need to be literate, articulate or possess any other skill than to have their own opinion/view. It is personal because it asks for an opinion/view that relates to them alone or how they perceive their community. The use of different tokens for different groups allows for easy disaggregation of data when counting.



### *Ten seed technique*

Like the PC, this tool can be used to establish a baseline measure of indicators identified during the PRA. The TST (Jayakaran 2002) is a participatory tool that can be used for rapid assessments related to the current status of the community in relation to an issue. The TST uses ten seeds (or similar) to represent an entire (relevant) population. The seeds are placed on a contrasting background of a depiction of the issue being discussed and the group (discussion group) of people involved move the seeds to represent the proportion of the population depicted (or otherwise) by the picture/question. In response to a question such as, 'How many families have a rainwater tank?' and, for example, if three seeds were placed over a picture of a water tank this would mean that 30 per cent of families had a rainwater tank.

TST enables all people to be involved and it is public, non-personal but communal and the result is based on consensus. The non-personal nature results from the fact that the TST is asking for a response from the group about the total population/community. In this way it is a safe environment for vulnerable individuals as it does not identify the individual. It is public in that all present are able to participate and observe the process and the result. The consensus nature of the technique is very important and reflects traditional decision-making processes which applies in many indigenous communities. The consensus nature of the result also means that it may take considerable time to conclude. It is important that this time is available and that the facilitator plays no part in the process other than initiating it.

A particular aspect of the TST activity and the AI informed group discussions, is that facilitators are able to observe body language exhibited by participants. In relatively small population groups involved in grassroots community development work, body language can be an interesting pointer to factors affecting the data collection process and activities.

### *The three tools combined*

The benefits to the facilitators and to the community of using all three tools are:

- They maximise participation — everyone can participate if they choose to do so.
- They provide a transparent process of data collection — everyone present can see and hear and observe the whole process and knows the results of the activities.
- Everyone knows what knowledge is being shared with the facilitators.
- All knowledge is left behind at the site and is only taken away as shared knowledge.
- The three tools provide triangulation in analysis by obtaining data regarding the same issues from different processors. Discrepancies that arise (e.g. in data from segregated focus groups or between men and women in PC results) can be very enlightening to evaluations. Such discrepancies are dealt with as they would be with discrepancies in data from any collection tool.

The tools also provide a degree of quantification to what is predominantly a qualitative methodology. However the quantification is as sound as that which may be obtained from other more traditional quantitative tools such as surveys.

### **Participation across the project**

Participation needs to be more than just the provision of information — it also needs to result in a sharing of decision making throughout the implementation period of the project. When community members have a degree of control over the decisions that affect the implementation of community development projects the power gradient that often exists between community development donors and implementers and the target community. As Arnstein (1969:218) notes, without a shift of power, nothing changes:

Participation without redistribution of power is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power holders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It maintains the status quo.

When community development as it is so often practiced, does not provide the opportunity for real control by communities then the notion of sustainability is also questionable. By allowing the community to be an active partner in monitoring and the decision making that results from monitoring, community members' share of control and power is more equal with that of the donor and the implementer.

When monitoring of a project is seen as a shared process beginning with an understanding of the intended change process, a baseline that is understood by all with agreed activities to bring about the desired change, then community monitoring can be effective.

Figure 1 shows a monitoring table which can easily be used in community monitoring. The data collected during the PRA period is used to complete the objectives and the indicator columns. By using the PC and the TST the baseline is established. The periodic monitoring columns are for when the PC and the TST activities are repeated as per the baseline. This allows an easy, visual comparison between the situation at the baseline stage and subsequent assessment points throughout the implementation of the project.

When the information is depicted on the table (or similar) in a manner that is understood by all (this may be pictorial, written or a combination) and the table is located in a public place the change (or not) resulting from the project can be easily seen. Because this occurs in real time, those providing the information to the periodic monitoring are able to be included in a discussion regarding the change (or not), the rate of change, the activities intended to bring about the desired change and what to do in response. Communities are included in the analysis of the monitoring data as it is collected. (The use of a tick to represent a desired or preferred aspect of the indicator and a cross to represent the non-preferred is optional).

Figure 1

Objectives	Indicators	Baseline		Periodic Monitoring		Periodic Monitoring	
		√	X	√	X	√	X

Source: Donnelly consultants 2010.

When this monitoring table, or similar, is in a public place it can act as a stimulus for discussion and as such becomes a learning tool for those involved in the project and the provision of data to the table as well as those who may not be directly involved in the project but have an interest.

### Conclusion

While community development is supported by outside funds and inputs such as outsider personnel it cannot truly be called grassroots development. However by following a methodology similar to that outlined above the development activity is more closely aligned with those who are its intended beneficiaries. The sharing of knowledge, data, control and power across all aspects of community development projects can at least narrow the gap between the ideal of true grassroots development and the too often reality of top down practice.

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## An assessment of empowerment through highly participatory asset-based community development in Myanmar

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### Introduction

Asset-based community development (ABCD) is a highly participatory approach to development that seeks to empower communities to draw on tangible and social community assets to manage their own development. The strength of ABCD is its ability to facilitate people imagining their world differently, resulting in action to change their circumstances. Previous research has shown international non-government organisations have found highly participatory, community-led approaches to development to have been particularly effective forms of poverty mitigation and community empowerment within Myanmar, even before the current reforms, which is surprising given the restrictive socio-political context created by authoritarian rule by a regime with an international reputation for human rights violations.

This paper documents ABCD programs within Myanmar, one of the poorest countries in Asia suffering major underdevelopment and ranking poorly across a wide range of socioeconomic indicators. It explores the operation, effectiveness and reasons behind the success of ABCD programs in this environment, and reflects on the role of outsiders in ABCD in the light of underlying theory and this contemporary experience. This research draws largely on recent field interviews and personal experience working in this sector within Myanmar, as well as surveying a number of evaluation reports which have been made publically available.

### ABCD theory

The significant innovation of ABCD beyond most participatory development practice is the focus on an appreciation and utilisation of pre-existing community strengths and assets as the primary resources for development, and reliance on community leadership, social networks and advocacy to bring about substantial change. A key distinction of ABCD approaches is therefore that ABCD practice often does not make much outside finance available to the village development committee, instead continually redirecting community attention back to tangible and social community assets. Outside workers, therefore, act as facilitators of community processes rather than as a channel for financial assistance.

Highly participatory development based on empowerment has a long history within philosophy, sociology and development studies. Nietzsche's critique of modernist thought, for example, called for empowerment such that people are able to reclaim ownership of their own futures; utilising their own strengths, resources and culture to move beyond oppression and deficiency (see Hipwell 2009). Nietzsche's ideas of *active ethics* and the cultivation of the *will to power* are reflected, at least implicitly, in the rationale of ABCD.

Freire, in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), argued that traditional processes of teaching in which a teacher transfers knowledge to students is both ineffective and a form of oppression. This, he suggests, is especially true in development, where the teacher comes from the supposed superior position of being more 'advanced'. Learning, according to Freire, should be a process of people rethinking their own assumptions and acting upon their own ideas, not merely consuming the ideas of others. But he lamented that the poor were trapped in a 'culture of silence' and lacked a voice in learning and development.

While not freeing development from outside help to the extent Freire might have hoped, this paradigm has become a foundation underlying the theory behind all participatory approaches to development, including ABCD.

Participatory action research Fals-Borda (1987, 1991) argued is an approach that development professionals need to shift to from being on 'on-top' to 'on-tap', emphasising they should approach their role with the values and disposition of facilitator rather than expert. Building on this foundation, Chambers (1983) conceptualised poverty not as a lack of income, assets, services or even knowledge, but as powerlessness due to marginalisation. Highlighting the often inappropriate knowledge outsiders bring to development contexts, Chambers argued for a reversal in the management of development, transferring decision making primarily into the hands of recipients. Chambers advocated methodologies in which local knowledge, participation and decision making is central to the planning and management of projects, and that the marginalised are empowered 'when individuals and organised groups are able to imagine their world differently' and take action to change their circumstances (Eyben, Kabeer and Cornwall 2008:3). Such participation has become widely accepted, at least in theory, as the minimum requirement for successful and sustained development outcomes (Chambers 2005).

ABCD seeks to combine all these elements, replacing professional development workers in the communities with individuals willing to facilitate community processes, but often without the same level of education, status or access to finance. In so doing, true development experts are networked to the community, with the community being empowered to access their resources or the resources of others on a needs basis.

McKnight and Kretzmann (1993, 1997) coined the term 'asset based community development' after observing that most development initiatives relied on external people and agencies delivering services to meet deficiencies, despite the fact that the poor possess a wealth of under recognised and under-utilised assets. ABCD is a practical expression of highly participatory development which seeks to reignite hope in the future and release an entrepreneurial imagination which empowers people to look for ways they can take control of their own futures, working with them as facilitators in a process of deliberate capacity building. Mathie and Cunningham (2003:474) observe that, 'the appeal of ABCD lies in its premise that people in communities can organise to drive the development process themselves, by identifying and mobilising existing (but often unrecognised) assets, thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity'.

This community development strategy starts with what is present in the community: the capacities of its residents and workers, the associational and institutional base of the area — not with what is absent, or with what is problematic, or with what the community needs. ... The development strategy concentrates first upon the agenda

building and problem-solving capacities of local residents, local associations, and local institutions (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993:9).

The practice of ABCD thus involves assisting communities to see value in existing assets and strengths of the community which would otherwise have been ignored, unrealised or dismissed, especially social assets inherent in the collective knowledge of individuals, and social capital in informal networks and community-based associations (Kretzmann and McKnight 1993, 1997; Mathie and Cunningham 2003).

The application of ABCD therefore follows a process of trust building, where assets are identified, documented and mapped, a new story of the community is formulated, and new skills and relationships are developed (Ennis and West 2010). This involves both internal focused community work (such as asset mapping and developing community processes), as well as external focused activities (such as understanding and entering into dialogue with political, economic, cultural and legal structures). The greatest criticisms of ABCD are made when the focus on internal assets obstructs impact upon the external structures affecting communities (Mathie and Cunningham 2003). Thus, active citizenship, advocacy and engagement with both authorities and structures must be an integral aspect of successful ABCD.

## **Participatory approaches to development in Myanmar**

Previous research (Ware 2012) has shown that even prior to the current political reform in Myanmar, INGOs found highly participatory, community led approaches to development to be particularly effective at poverty mitigation and community empowerment. This is a surprising finding, given the restrictive socio political context associated with two decades of highly centralised and authoritarian military rule on the back of three decades of a centralised, socialist, military led bureaucracy. Many, including Alston 1995, have suggested that it is quite unrealistic to expect highly participatory development to succeed in a country which is fundamentally authoritarian in nature. Anthropological studies also found a debilitating climate of fear in Myanmar in the decade prior to the recent major reforms (Fink 2000, 2001; Skidmore 2003, 2005; see also Aung San Suu Kyi 1995).

What this previous research found, however, was that with deliberate planning and time dedicated to getting the process right, and through elite cooption, participatory development was both possible and highly effective in Myanmar. Senior managers with INGOs in Myanmar suggested that when achieved, highly participatory development may be even more effective in Myanmar than many other developing countries because of the high levels of volunteerism, self-reliance, self-motivation and independence within the culture (Ware 2012). Such traits are seen to make highly participatory programs particularly suited to the context.

## ABCD programs in Myanmar

### *ActionAid's Change Maker Fellowship program*

The ActionAid *Change Maker Fellowship* program is the largest ABCD program in Myanmar. It commenced in 2006, in partnership with local NGOs Metta and the Shalom Foundation. Based on early successes, the program was quickly expanded to now have numerous local partner organisations, and more than six hundred young 'agents of change' supported to work full-time in communities.

As with many highly participatory development programs in Myanmar, *Change Maker* has both local grassroots development and broader democratisation goals. It seeks to both stimulate development and change at the local level through ABCD, based on the communities' priorities and resources, as well as contribute to broader macro change by developing the potential of idealistic and passionate educated young people (Action Aid 2010). Fellows are usually recruited through direct contact with communities by a local partner organisation, inviting them to nominate suitable young people to receive intensive training in ABCD skills and personal development with Action Aid, before being sent back with minimal financial resourcing to facilitate participatory processes in the community for two years (Löfving 2011; Ferretti 2010). Fellows are provided a minimal support salary, networked personal support, and intermittent ongoing training opportunities.

Fellows are usually in the 20–30 year old bracket, and commonly have completed a tertiary degree. Many graduates, however, don't have many employment opportunities in Myanmar's narrow economy, and many of the fellows are recruited after having returned home to their rural communities. They are recruited for a two-year placement in their own village, or are at least sent back to their own region and ethnicity. They commence their work by facilitating a range of self help groups in the community, then later forming and training village level community development organisations to take responsibility for the planning and implementation of asset-based community development projects and processes in the community, as well as offering training in rights and advocacy. The establishment of a community based organisation (CBO) out of these committees in each community to oversee ongoing development is an express goal of the program.

Fellows usually commence through the promotion of community action around tangible areas such as health, education, livelihoods, and developing an environment of cooperation and social cohesion. Later, the focus more on development of inclusive participatory decision making structures, and community engagement with state and non-state actors to obtain the space and resources required for development.

The program views communities as inherently resourceful and capable of identifying their own needs, formulating ideas and initiating and leading processes of change. ... [It] seeks to inspire communities to realize their development aspirations through advocating to and forging linkages with state and non-state actors. ...

Underpinning [the program] are the complementary concepts of *self-reliance* and *empowerment* (Löfving 2011:2).

Fellows are seen as catalysts for change, as opposed to field staff, and work alongside local village volunteers. It promotes a model of low cost interventions that emphasise self-reliance. It makes a 'conscious investment in the long term empowerment of communities ... the processes of community led development are anticipated to extend far beyond the duration of the program itself' (ibid).

### *GraceWorks Myanmar's Community Development Education program*

Developed independently, the Community Development Education (CDE) program is remarkably similar to the ActionAid *Fellows* program. GraceWorks Myanmar (GWM) recruits adults rather than youth as facilitators, through local partner faith based organisations, and provides training one week per quarter without a month long intensive at commencement. Training relies on oral learning techniques as much as literary teaching styles, as rural adult facilitators are not necessarily as well educated. However, this allows facilitators to naturally reproduce oral learning approaches when training community members in ABCD principles, so it is advantageous even for better educated facilitators. Facilitators also commit to four years in a community, rather than two, allowing a longer project cycle, but like the ActionAid program, workers are only supported with a minimal subsistence level of financial support.

Given that GWM facilitators often come from outside the community within which they work, facilitators spend the first half to full year building rapport with communities through a series of simple relationship-building 'seed projects'. After six to 12 months work in the community in this manner, in an act of deliberate empowerment, facilitators request an informed invitation before commencing a full CDE program. To allow this, facilitators arrange an open community awareness seminar with community leaders and members, which runs for several hours over several nights to clearly communicate ABCD principles and the details of the operation of the program. The community is then given opportunity to invite a full CDE program to commence in their community, or politely decline, allowing the facilitator to move to a different community. Upon formal invitation, though, facilitators help the community elect a participatory committee, then train the committee and volunteer team in community processes, PRA assessment tools, project planning and management, and advocacy, all the while attempting to place their networking to their organisation 'on-tap' to connect the community to other resources where community connections alone are insufficient. The four year project cycle allows facilitators more time to focus on process, and help a strong, independent CBO emerge out of the community development committee.

### *Other ABCD programs in Myanmar*

A number of other ABCD programs are operating in Myanmar, including programs operated by Dan Church Aid

and SWISSAID. Two complementary programs operated by Norwegian People's Aid places trained workers in villages either for approximately two weeks followed by frequent visits and support, or three months, followed by less frequent visits. In both cases, the initial time spent in community is aimed at organising and training the community committee in community processes, PRA planning tools, and project cycle management. Their rapid departure from the community aims at rapidly delivering control back to the local community.

## Effectiveness of ABCD programs in Myanmar

Yeneabat and Butterfield (2012) propose evaluating the effectiveness of ABCD programs against five key building blocks of the ABCD approach: effectively *mapping the capacities and assets* of individuals, citizen associations, and local institutions; *convening a broadly representative community group* who plan and build community vision; building relationships for mutually beneficial problem solving within the community; *mobilising the community's assets* for information sharing and economic development; and, *leveraging activities, resources, and investments* from outside the community to support locally defined development. On this set of criteria, these ABCD programs have proven highly effective in Myanmar.

ActionAid report that almost all communities develop a representative committee within the life of the two-year *fellow's* presence, and the mobilisation of local assets plus those from outside the community has very impressive outcomes. They had 160 *fellows* in communities by their first national *fellows* conference in January 2011, when they compiled known outcomes to that point (Ferretti 2010). In the education sector, results included the opening of 40 early childhood centres, the construction of schools in 30 villages (with a mix of government and non-government funding), local community members providing voluntary teaching in 30 underfunded primary schools, 22 villages negotiating for government paid teachers, and over 1,600 people in adult literacy groups. Health and sanitation outcomes included 77 wells in 33 villages, well cleaning in another 50 villages, 45 ponds constructed in 26 villages, 1,500 new toilets across 75 villages, health clinics built and staffed in 11 villages, vaccination programs in 44 villages, and 19 villages obtaining health workers, with another 27 villages negotiating new mobile health services from other NGOs. Similar outcomes were seen in the livelihood sector, with 152 savings and loans groups established, plus 60 rice banks and many other self-help groups supporting livestock, farming, and so on.

These results are significant, particularly given the minimal level of funding supplied by the international agency and the youthfulness and relative lack of training of the *fellows*. Also significant is the impact of this ABCD on the external structures affecting communities. Achieving these outcomes often involved using community social assets to approach officials, government agencies, or sometimes other NGOs, asking or advocating for additional services and resources. Based on the

significance of these outcomes, ActionAid have almost quadrupled the number of *fellows* in this program since these statistics were compiled.

GWM's CDE program has not had the same length of time to generate more than anecdotal evidence on impact, however, the initial results are extremely encouraging in terms of community ownership, and the breadth and effectiveness of the program. Anecdotally, the ABCD programs of Dan Church Aid, SWISSAID, and Norwegian People's Aid also appear effective.

## Reasons for success in the Myanmar context

A number of reasons were proposed by INGO managers and project staff for the success of these ABCD programs in Myanmar. First is the emphasis given by these programs on building trust and respect, both internally within the community and with officials and other stakeholders. This is a significant factor in a society that has seen significant abuse of personal power and has long been fractured along political, ethnic and religious lines. The second is the emphasis on facilitating consensus decision making processes and community organisation. The third and most emphasised reason for success by those interviewed was awareness raising.

For a population long fearful of authority and scared to risk change, awareness raising of the opportunities the current political changes present, and the means of affecting additional social change on factors impacting negatively their situation, provides significant empowerment to impoverished communities. Thus, beyond raising the ability of communities to analyse their context and problems, and their awareness of local assets and resources, ABCD in Myanmar has emphasised training in how communities might obtain the resources they need or change the social structure around them. ABCD has also extended the culturally strong spirit of volunteerism and charity to highlight the inequalities, marginalisation, and power relations undermining these efforts both within and impacting upon communities.

## Conclusion

ABCD programs appear to have been surprisingly effective in the difficult socio political context of Myanmar. A number of reasons have been proposed for this, not the least of which being that ABCD *fellows* and *facilitators* have taken an educative, awareness-raising role. Such a role challenges, and is challenged by, Friere's idea that the process of teachers transferring knowledge to students is itself a problematic power relation. ABCD in Myanmar appears to have been particularly effective precisely because of the educative dimension of the projects, albeit with very careful selection of topics about which to educate communities, and careful selection of the status of the *fellows* and *facilitators* and their approach to communities in order to mitigate in part the inherent power relations in taking a teaching role.

It is found that an educative process of awareness-raising about local resources and opportunities, social change processes, and the socio political structural context

impacting the community, have led to significant change in a substantial number of communities. Together with training in advocacy and deliberate capacity building of a community development committee, this training has been a key factor in empowerment and community change. The success of these programs in Myanmar thus suggests that there is still a significant place for a carefully constructed educative role from outside workers within highly participatory development contexts, provided power issues are carefully considered and power differentials minimised.

## Note

Anthony Ware is a voluntary adviser and project manager for GraceWorks Myanmar's *Community Development Education* program.

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# Mapping accountability processes in Cambodia

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## Introduction

When communities are faced with life-changing events, accountability for those events and their impacts and the capacity of affected communities to have their voices heard are crucial issues. Such events could include forced eviction and resettlement to make way for a major infrastructure project or an economic concession or land redevelopment, or the alteration of river flows by a dam, or the reprisals instigated by the interests behind land concessions. Understanding accountability in this context first requires an understanding of how the affected communities perceive their own needs and claims, how they discuss the issues, make decisions and pursue recourse within their own communities, and whom they see as the person or body most responsible for the situation and best positioned to assist them.

When the financiers of development projects talk of accountability, they are generally referring to the formal mechanisms established for hearing grievances arising from the project — such as the mechanisms of the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank, or equivalent project specific mechanisms — or to the community consultation phase of project implementation, often focused on compensation and resettlement in the case of projects involving forced evictions. Implicit in that framework is an assumption that community needs, grievances and decision making processes will be consistent with the recourse and consultation mechanisms provided.<sup>2</sup>

Our research project, undertaken under the Monash University–Oxfam Australia Partnership, examines communities' own perceptions of accountability and their approaches to decision making and seeking redress in that context. It does so through three case studies of communities in Cambodia, each with different geographic location (urban/rural), different levels of engagement with local and international NGOs, and affected by different projects or other challenges to their way of life. The first case study examines communities in two rural areas of Cambodia with whom Oxfam Australia has been working. While some of those communities face threats from future development projects — particularly a hydroelectric dam and agricultural land concessions—this case study focuses more broadly on the effects of Oxfam's particular model for working with these communities over a 20 year period. It seeks to understand the ways in which community members hold local government representatives accountable for their work, as well as the accountability of Oxfam itself. That case study is the subject of this paper.<sup>3</sup>

The second case study examines urban communities in Phnom Penh who face eviction to make way for a commercial land development, as well as those who have already been resettled as a result of that project. Those communities have had significant ongoing contact with international NGOs and have utilised formal recourse

mechanisms, including the World Bank Inspection Panel. The third case study examines remote communities in the north east of Cambodia who face eviction from their land alongside the Sesan River and its tributaries when a planned hydroelectric dam is constructed. Field work in the second and third case studies is ongoing, so it is premature to comment on observations at this stage.

## Oxfam Australia's ICD program in Cambodia

Oxfam Australia has been involved in Cambodia for more than 30 years. Its program approach, which was in place until the closure of Oxfam Australia's program in June 2012, was formulated in 1993 as Cambodia began its period of transition after its brutal civil war. The program was designed around two central aspects: the integrated community development (ICD) approach, and the use of a tripartite model for implementation.

Oxfam developed its ICD model as a response to conditions in Cambodia at the time. The war had broken down both physical and human resources, but had also undermined the social fabric of the country. People and communities needed to establish the basic foundations for rebuilding their lives, and this involved first addressing basic needs. The program aimed to adopt an integrated approach, recognising that individual development needs and challenges are often inter-linked, and that single issue responses, such as 'stand-alone' projects, are often insufficient. For example, it attempted to directly tackle food security while also ensuring access to clean water, and while taking into account gender equality issues.

Oxfam established the tripartite model as the implementation mechanism for its ICD approach. The model includes roles for three specific groups: communities, government counterparts and Oxfam staff. Oxfam identifies several advantages associated with the involvement of these three groups: government counterparts bring important skills and local knowledge; the involvement of counterparts strengthens communities' access to government services and decision makers; and Oxfam itself can play a role in influencing government on issues such as transparency and accountability (Barter 2011:15). Oxfam's financial and logistical support makes it possible for government officers to serve the community, while also helping facilitate connections between those officers and the community.

Oxfam Australia also facilitated the establishment of community committees to enable communities to manage and oversee the development activities themselves. These are discussed further below. In addition, Village Development Committees, which are part of the government structure in each village, were strengthened and supported through Oxfam's involvement.

In recent times, Oxfam's tripartite development work has taken place in a politically charged environment in



which communities are faced with major development projects, such as infrastructure projects and large agricultural and logging concessions, encroaching on their land and their way of life. In many cases, communities' livelihoods are threatened by these projects over which they have very little control. Their ability to have their voices heard on these issues is crucial to sustaining the livelihoods that Oxfam has been assisting them to develop.

This paper examines whether Oxfam's tripartite model has been effective in assisting communities to have their voices heard, particularly when confronted by major development projects or land concessions. The paper is based on two detailed case studies in rural areas in Cambodia where Oxfam has been working: one in Kratie and another in Stung Treng.

### **Perceptions of accountability**

While there is a great deal of academic literature on the concept of accountability and its definition, criteria and application in different contexts, our research specifically seeks to uncover the perceptions of community members of accountability within each of the case study contexts, rather than testing previously determined criteria. As such, we took a broad approach to the concept of accountability, asking questions about the issues that concerned the individuals in their daily lives and with regard to the future of their community, and about their involvement in decision making and dispute resolution in addressing the issues of concern that they had identified. We thus deliberately avoided suggesting particular criteria for accountability, while ultimately eliciting views that identified which issues warranted accountability, from whom, to which standards and through what process. If accountability can be defined as 'the responsibility of one party, the accountability holdee, to justify its actions to another, the accountability holder, according to a pre-existing set of rules, standards or expectations' (Day and Klein 1987; Hodge 2008), our open-ended process sought to ascertain who the accountability holdee and holder were perceived to be, what the standards or expectations were, as well as the issues to which these standards were seen to attach and the processes through which they might be pursued.

### **Identifying issues of concern**

Our case studies in Kratie and Stung Treng commenced with a series of mapping exercises: a time-line, to get a sense of the history of villages and the major changes that have occurred from the perspective of villagers; a Venn diagram, to map the different actors involved in decision making, internal or external to the village, and to understand how they relate and influence each other; and finally a force field analysis which aimed to identify the positive and re-enforcing factors and the opposing or blocking factors to the action or positive change they want in the village in relation to a particular or agreed project. Through that process, each group identified issues they thought posed a significant challenge or threat to their community, and the kinds of changes they hoped to see.

The mapping exercises were then followed by a series of individual semi-structured interviews with a cross-section of community members.

The main concerns — both positive and negative — identified by participants were the events that took place in or visibly affected their village, such as construction of schools and roads (the latter both a positive and a negative), crop harvests and health of the local people. Feeling secure in ownership of land, particularly farming land, was another major concern. External threats identified in the village of Kampong Roteh in Kratie, which is located on an island in the Mekong River, included the planned Sambor hydroelectric dam, which would submerge the island and force the relocation of the community. In Sre Kresaing village in Stung Treng, the incursion of a private company into the community's farming land was raised as a major concern.

The one exception to the very local focus was the repeated mention of global warming as a concern in Sre Kresaing. A local NGO, the Cambodian Rural Development Team, had recently run a program in the area, highlighting the relationship between global warming and landslides and other natural disasters.<sup>4</sup> No mention was made of global warming in Kampong Roteh, which is a reminder of the influence of NGO contact in shaping community perceptions of concerns and accountability.

### **Decision making and dispute resolution**

Participants were asked how they went about making decisions as a community, how they would resolve a dispute and how they might pursue a grievance on behalf of the community. In some instances those questions were framed with reference to the major challenges identified by the participants, while in others they related to everyday life.

Community members universally nominated the village chief (or occasionally commune chief) when asked who they go to for help to resolve some problem or issue in the community. The unanimity of that response strongly suggests that the community members consider going to the village chief to be the 'correct' process.

However, when interviewees discussed specific examples of problems or issues and how they sought resolution, different avenues of recourse were identified according to the type of problem. Such responses suggest that although all interviewees nominated the village chief as the principal (and usually only) decision making, dispute resolution and grievance avenue, in practice they clearly employed a wide variety of informal mechanisms, as appropriate for the situation.

The reliance on the village chief as the accountability conduit was particularly pronounced in the context of addressing community fears about outside threats, such as the hydroelectric dam or the encroaching agribusiness activity. When participants were pressed about what avenues they might pursue if the village chief proved unable to help them, the typical answer was: 'The village chief is like our father. Why wouldn't he help us?' However, local officials invariably have little information

about major development projects and little if any involvement in their planning and implementation.

A significant disconnect was evident between the local officials (the village chief, the commune chief and commune council) on the one hand and the provincial and national government officials, as well as private developers, who actually control the large scale projects, on the other. Community perceptions of accountability appeared unable to penetrate beyond the village or commune level.

## **Specific elements of the Oxfam tripartite approach**

### *Impact of committee system*

A key element of Oxfam's ICD program was the use of community committees to implement and run the various community initiatives. These included rice banks, buffalo banks, savings groups, livestock associations, community fisheries, village health support groups and women's self-help groups. Local people were trained to manage and run the committees, encouraging community ownership of the projects, while building skills in project management and decision making.

When participants were asked to identify benefits of Oxfam's involvement in their community, they invariably referred to physical items (water filters, toilets, furniture and utensils for a wedding hall) or spoke in terms of donations ('they give us cows and buffalos') rather than mentioning skills, self-sufficiency or community-building changes. That was equally true of those who were members of committees and those who were not.

When committee members were specifically asked about the committee system, many spoke of improved skills, particularly in planning and in some cases book-keeping and other specific skills, and their consequent self-confidence. Many reported a newfound willingness to speak out in meetings; this was particularly evident among women, often describing themselves as 'brave', whereas previously they had been 'shy'. That change was noticed by others in the community: one community elder observed, 'In the past, when we asked the women, they knew nothing, but now they can answer quickly'.

Committee members appeared to have greater information about the activities of the community than those who were not on a committee, including in areas beyond the purview of the particular committee, such as the proposed development projects. Knowledge dissemination between committee members and the broader community appeared to be somewhat limited (though not completely absent). Non-committee members, especially women, were more likely to give a summary, deferential answer, such as 'I don't know'.

### *Interaction with government*

Oxfam Australia sees the benefits of engagement with government counterparts through its tripartite model in the following terms:

Building counterpart and community relationships strengthens communities' access to government services and decision-makers, and local government's understanding of community needs. Once Oxfam Australia leaves, these relationships provide a strong foundation for ongoing development.

Oxfam Australia can influence local government through promoting and modelling 'best practice' for development, such as transparency and accountability (Barter 2011:15).

Despite the explicit engagement between Oxfam staff, local government officials and community members in the tripartite model, interviewees tended not to distinguish between Oxfam and the government; all interactions with 'outsiders' were assumed to be with Oxfam. At one level, Oxfam staff saw this as a positive indication of the seamless co-operation between their organisation and their government counterparts. However, it raises clear concerns in terms of accountability, particularly in fostering a relationship between government officers and the community they are supposed to serve, if all such interactions are presumed to emanate from an NGO. It remains to be seen how this situation will resolve after the withdrawal of Oxfam staff following Oxfam Australia's closure of its Cambodia country program in June 2012. It is of course exceedingly difficult to hold someone accountable for service delivery or for potential community harm if one cannot identify which entity is actually responsible for that service or harm.

Regardless of the formal mechanisms used, it is clearly very important that communities have an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns, to do so safely and without undue repercussions, and that they have 'direct or indirect means to sanction poor performance or behaviour' (Roche 2009:1014) in their interactions with government.

In a practical sense, the foundations of various community services at the local level, including fisheries management, irrigation, schooling and sanitation, have been established and have the capacity to be sustainable without a continuing Oxfam presence. It remains to be seen whether community involvement and the co-operation and accountability of government will prevail over time, but the roots are at least established at the village and commune levels.

Beyond those levels, there is very little evidence of the capacity of the communities studied to influence government, to hold government accountable, or even to obtain meaningful information about and have substantial input into imminent major projects that are threatening their way of life. Indeed, communities seem unable to conceive of how these external forces — both government and private — might be held accountable beyond appealing to the village or commune chief. This seems consistent with previous findings that citizen-state interaction in Cambodia, particularly in rural areas, rarely reaches beyond the local level (ANSA-EAP 2010:16).

## Concluding remarks

The current environment in Cambodia is replete with land grabs by private interests, often facilitated by government and backed by fierce intimidation, including arrest, imprisonment and violence. Also prevalent are official development projects backed by foreign aid donors and development institutions, but which face tremendous odds for the empowerment of local communities and their capacity to seek accountability, given the intensely corrupt and intimidatory context.

This first case study of communities facing existential challenges in that environment has observed certain successes in the advancement of accountability processes at the local levels, some of which may be attributable to the tripartite model used by Oxfam Australia in those communities, as well as substantial accountability gaps. However, there appears to be a profound absence of any capacity for accountability beyond that local level.

This study is still in its early stages and this paper should therefore be seen as no more than preliminary observations. It is hoped that data from the second and third case studies, encompassing communities with very different demographic profiles and histories of engagement with local and international NGOs and with government and international agencies, will shed more light on the variables that increase or reduce community capacity for accountability in this context, as well as identifying the wishes of the various communities themselves in terms of their interests, preferred outcomes and preferred methods.

## Notes

- 1 This paper results from a broader research project on community driven accountability funded by the Monash University — Oxfam Australia Partnership. The project team includes Adam McBeth, Kate Macdonald, Shelley Marshall, Pauline Taylor McKeown, Michael Simon, David Pred, Eang Vuthy, Net Virak and Ruth Bottomley. The field research team for the Oxfam Australia case study comprised Depika Sherchan, Kol Leakhana, Chhoeng Sotheavann, Ngoun Marinat, Soeun Sokkhim, Pic Ratana

- and Kim Dararith. The assistance of Bill Morton in preparing this paper is also gratefully acknowledged.
- 2 That presumption could be consistent with what Easterly (2006) attributes to ‘planners’ — those who ‘think of poverty as a technical engineering problem that their answers will solve’ — as opposed to ‘searchers’, who ‘believe only [local community] insiders have enough knowledge to find solutions, and that most solutions must be homegrown’.
- 3 For further findings of this case study in the context of accountability and active citizenship, see Bottomley (forthcoming).
- 4 Our team has no direct knowledge of the focus of the CRDT program on global warming, and in all likelihood it was broader than this reference implies, however those were the issues that resonated with community members when our team visited a short time later.

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# Barriers to child participation in Timor-Leste

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## Introduction

Save the Children (SC) believes child participation is a key mechanism in the development of children's health, education, survival and protection, and integral to children reaching their potential and attaining their rights. SC global initiatives aim to facilitate practices that enable children to express their views freely and safely, potentially enhancing the decision-making processes (Save the Children Australia 2010). The end goal of these initiatives is to support an upward progression for children to reach the top rung on Hart's 'Ladder of Participation', where ideas are child initiated and child led, with decision making being comfortably shared with adults about matters that affect children, leading to a more cohesive society (Hart 1992).

Hart's ladder has eight rungs with the first three rungs reflecting non-participatory processes in which children are either 'manipulated', used as 'decoration' or in a 'tokenistic' manner. There is an increase in participation as one climbs the next three rungs: children are 'assigned and informed', or 'consulted', or 'share decisions within adult-directed initiatives'. The final two rungs reflect substantial progress in that children 'initiate and direct the ideas' or 'comfortably share their ideas with adults whilst concurrently directing the initiative'.

Studies of child participation in Southern Africa and South East Asia found that in countries where child participation was encouraged, there was an actual shift in the behavioural relationships between the adults and children, children have greater levels of confidence, perform better academically and have high levels of critical thinking and better interpersonal communication skills. This enables them to resolve problems, including conflict without resorting to violence.

Participatory activities for children carry many benefits, but there are barriers to implementing sustainable and meaningful child led initiatives. Adults may obstruct child participation purposely or unconsciously based on their innate beliefs that children are incapable of forming rational ideas. And children are often limited by inexperience, lack of education and absence of opportunities to participate.

In Timor-Leste SC facilitates and promotes child participation through Children's Clubs (CC) in Manufahi and Ainaro districts, and through other community and national level development initiatives. In October 2012, SC facilitated children to participate in the Race for Survival event, a global SC advocacy initiative providing children with a fun, team based and engaging event (collectively running a marathon) which concurrently provided a platform for children to express their views and concerns about nutrition directly to district and national level decision makers.

This paper aims to identify and understand the complex barriers of child participation in Timor-Leste and how to effectively circumnavigate them. The success and challenges of current SC initiatives combined with interview results of community stakeholders are used to illustrate barriers and how these barriers can be overcome.

## Defining child participation in Timor-Leste

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) 1989 established child participation as a fundamental right, with Article 12 affirming every child's right to express their views and have their views duly weighted and considered.

In 2009, Prime Minister Xanana Gusmao officially launched the Timor-Leste National Commission on Child Rights, stating that it would ensure children have 'opportunities to participate in active decisions affecting their lives' (UNICEF 2009). The national commission's mandate is to promote a national culture of respect for children's rights, defend and monitor children's enjoyment of their rights, and is to be guided by the views and opinions of children and young people.

The initiation of the commission demonstrates the government's recognition of the importance of child participation, however, in practice, there is very little implementation. Interviews conducted in the districts of Ainaro and Manufahi found a low level of understanding of child participation in local communities. Interviewees, aged 13 stated:

I did not know what child participation was...at home my family would not involve any of the children. They would tell us to go away, go play somewhere while they sat down and had important discussions about the family, like money spent on cultural ceremonies which could be spent on school instead or which pre-secondary school I will go to. These decisions would directly affect me and the other children but we were not allowed to be a part of the decision making process.

Adults do not understand that we should be involved in activities. On the 1st of June this year we were involved in Children's Day. Parents and teachers were involved as well as children from around the district. We gathered to talk about children's rights and the program of the event. But most of the teachers, parents and leaders of the community had trouble giving over control of the event to us, they didn't let us speak much and they all gave very long speeches. It was supposed to be a day to talk about our rights, but they didn't really want us to participate.

An Ainaro Sub-District Chief stated:

In my village, parents and family have a low interest in child participation in local development processes. We just think about how to send them to school. Their

participation in family decisions are given little attention or not considered at all, because they are young.

These answers were not surprising. Timor-Leste is a country that traditionally and culturally does not involve children in the adult world, especially in regard to decision making. There are two main cultural factors contributing to barriers to child participation. Firstly, Timor-Leste is heavily influenced by Southeast Asian culture, where a strong familial hierarchal system and authoritative parenting exists. Secondly, due to decades of civil unrest, the majority of the population consists of low-income families with low levels of education (UNICEF 2003), who tend to value and perceive child obedience as a factor of future economic success (Hart 1992). Timor-Leste's strong social and ethnic norms resist and block child participation.

### **Barriers to child participation in Timor-Leste**

Lundy (2007) identified the following three groups under which adult's concerns and mentality about child participation commonly fall. The following perspectives form a cycle of thinking which inherently excludes children from participatory activity:

- Scepticism regarding children's ability and capacity to form productive opinions;
- adult reluctance to release control and share power and authority with children; and
- concern that compliance of child participation requires too much effort.

Adults in Timor-Leste have the same thinking. For example, Timorese culture is patriarchal and children are seldom involved in discussions because adults do not believe they possess the capabilities to contribute informed ideas. Adults habitually regard children's opinions as childish and immature and instinctively assume that since they themselves were children they therefore know what is best for children, reinforcing adult authority. Even in instances where adults do comply with and may even facilitate child participation in decision making forums, if the child's views are not taken seriously then adults unconsciously deny the right for meaningful and valid participation.

One child interviewee commented:

In the community and family all the thinking is done by adults, they find it hard to ask and consider children's ideas, maybe they think children don't have bright ideas like them.

Timorese parenting values and lack of understanding of extra-curricular activities also create a barrier to child development and participation. Parents do not value 'after school' development activities, rather there is a culture for children to contribute to household work and income or to simply be at home. This mentality can be linked to the economic situation of families as child labour is an issue with 19.9 per cent of children aged between five and 14 years working to financially support the family (United States Department of Labour 2011). Children are also

expected to perform household chores and take care of younger siblings allowing parents/adults to work. Despite contributing monetary support to the household they are not included in household decisions.

Barriers to child participation also arise if adults do not provide a space for children's activism or are ill equipped to facilitate participatory activity — even if they do believe in it. A lack of space or opportunity for children to freely engage in and practice meaningful decision making greatly encumbers child participation. In the home, children's views are ignored, at school a rote learning style curriculum does not include participatory activism, and social groups like school councils, scouts and girl guides are not common in Timor-Leste thus severely limiting platforms or forums for children to gather and discuss their ideas.

School is the primary place of learning where children can increase their knowledge and skills. However research conducted in Ireland aimed at identifying areas of ignored or underplayed child rights found that many teachers did not have the capacity to foster an environment for meaningful child participation. Children commonly reported teachers were 'always shouting at them' (Lundy 2007). Timorese children report the same scenario with teachers heavily controlling the classroom and educating the children with violence. Teachers are not qualified or trained in child centred learning which is a methodology that guides and supports child participation and cognitive learning in the classroom. Interviewees said:

At school we are not allowed to speak unless asked a direct question.

I was afraid that if I messed up that the teacher would beat me.

The Sub-District Administrator noted education quality as a challenge for child participation as schools focus only on science and rote learning. There are no public speaking classes, no effort to encourage community engagement or cultivate children's analytical and organisational skills through cognitive learning. Without this cognitive learning, there is then a lack of developed skills and self-confidence so children are restricted by their own inabilities to partake in effective participation.

At a community meeting held in Ainaro related to elections, children were invited to speak and contribute to the discussion, however the sub-district administrator noted that the children said nothing, demonstrating that even if an opportunity is presented, it is wasted if children are not equipped with the skills to enable meaningful participation. The District Administrator said:

The problem is our children in Timor-Leste, especially in Ainaro, are still weak in their thinking and in expressing of their ideas. They are shy to talk and present in public even if they do have good ideas and ability.

This situation is not confined to Timor-Leste. Hart states 'a child's ability to think and speak is the motivation behind his or her behavior. A child who is troubled or who has low self-esteem is less likely to demonstrate her

competence, to think, or to work in a group' (Hart 1992:31).

An essential component of participation is the availability and accessibility of information enabling children to increase their skills, self-confidence and maturity. As mentioned earlier, the school curriculum in Timor-Leste does not offer students the appropriate information or education regarding meaningful participation, thus creating a barrier. Children themselves often reported how a lack of ability, knowledge and skills affected their self-esteem and hindered their ability and willingness to speak up about issues important to them.

I was afraid of the community leaders. They are big important people who I never thought I was allowed to talk to.

I remember one time when I was asked to stand up in front of the class and speak, I was so afraid because I had never spoken in front of the class before, I was afraid that I wouldn't be any good at it and my friends would laugh at me.

### **Save the Children's child participation initiatives in Timor-Leste**

Many child participation programs have initial success but fail long term as they fail to create longstanding dialogue between children and decision makers and do not allow children to take up decision-making positions (Tisdall and Davis 2004 ). SC initiatives are designed with child rights and governance as key components, not only targeting children as immediate beneficiaries but also focusing on how to promote enduring participatory activity through children becoming principal actors in solving their own issues, engaging with the community and self-governing.

SC is currently running two Timor-Leste initiatives — Children's Clubs (CC) and Race for Survival (RFS), which have overcome some of the above barriers and are now being further integrated into community structures thus enabling sustainability.

Two CCs have been operating for two years in the districts of Ainaro and Manufahi, and SC is expanding this model to four other sites. Current CC activities sit in the middle of Hart's ladder at rung five and six, with children being 'consulted and informed' or with initiatives being 'adult-initiated that include shared decisions with children' (Hart 1992). To encourage progression up the ladder and sustainability, SC staff and children from existing CCs will support and conduct peer-to-peer learning by training, mentoring and monitoring the new CC members. A Child Club member noted:

We have existed for almost two years now and have enough capacity to contribute to our friends to establish four more clubs so they can become strong like we have, we will promote participation in the sub-village, village, district and national level. We will train in public speaking, how to become a good facilitator, training in child participation, rights and protection, DRR, health and facilitate comparative studies between sub-village clubs.

Although the CC model results in small individual changes at the local community level, advocacy events like Race for Survival (RFS) give children opportunities at the national level to interact with high level duty bearers, and this is an effective way to create national momentum and sustained influence through national level mainstreamed child participation (Save the Children Sweden 2010).

The RFS captured the attention and increased awareness of child participation on a national level. As part of the event, members from the CCs met the Vice Prime Minister, who was very impressed with the children's ability to articulate health and nutrition issues that needed to be addressed in their local district. The Vice Prime Minister encouraged the children.

The CC members also met with a representative of the President's office and appeared on national TV and radio. In the weeks following the RFS, the President's wife visited the Child Club in Manufahi to meet and greet members and to gain an understanding of the CC model. She was also very impressed with the calibre of these children and is currently advocating for the SC Child Club model to be replicated throughout the country as a great example of how child participation can influence adult perceptions, behaviours and attitudes.

One child interviewee said:

My participation in the CC and RFS has slowly changed the mind of my parents, now they listen to me and allow me to talk about the activities I have done in the CC and they support my participation in any activities that involve children.

Four months after the RFS event, CC members demonstrated their sustained confidence and how they are in fact progressing up Hart's Ladder of Participation — from children being 'assigned but informed' to 'child-initiated and directed' levels of participation (Hart 1992). CC members initiated a meeting between themselves and the Vice Minister of Education, when he visited Manufahi. They contacted the Vice Minister's office, made an appointment and developed their own discussion agenda without the aid of SC or other adults. This is an amazing achievement, and reflects the children's own personal growth in self-confidence, capability and motivation, as a direct result of two years of SC education, advocacy and mentoring.

The CC model teaches children the skills to enable meaningful child participation, however it was the Race for Survival event that played the pivotal role that gave the children the confidence which led to an initiative that was completely led by children. RFS allowed children to put into practice the skills they had learned in an environment that was 'outside their comfort zone' but within their capabilities. This experiential learning in a challenging but supportive environment is a key ingredient in truly developing children's belief in their own abilities and increasing their potential to continue to try new life experiences. One CC member interviewed commented:

The CC provided us with great preparation in speaking and running which gave us confidence in our abilities and capacity to succeed when we raced and spoke to the government.

Before the RFS we just saw leaders on TV, because of this event we have seen them in real life. This gave us the opportunity to meet the Vice Prime Minister and other officials.

Both initiatives have led to an increased acceptance of child participation in the local community, with one mother of a CC member telling SC:

A thing that made me proud was that after the children were seen on TV, people were coming up to me from everywhere saying congratulations and thanking me for helping the children. I hope that the children use this opportunity and take the issue further next year.

Comments like this from the community reflect a positive shift in adult's resistance towards child participation. A change in attitudes of child participation is one of the first steps to overcome barriers and is another step towards moving up Hart's Ladder of Participation (Hart 1992).

Although achievements have been made there is still more work to be done with regards to educating adults and children how such participation and subsequent development can be facilitated. There is a need to support further activism, promote community understanding regarding enabling processes of child participation before Timor-Leste can truly reap the benefits of meaningful child participatory activities.

## Conclusion and recommendations

We have shown some successful practices that facilitate and promote child participation and progression up Hart's ladder, however the list of barriers is far longer. Barriers are deeply set in cultural norms, so to break through these complex social barriers and improve child participation, adults' perceptions must be challenged and changed to enable the voices of children to be heard and seriously considered. Adults must give children the opportunities to learn new skill sets which permit children to confidently and meaningfully contribute to the decision making process.

The following recommendations are made to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of future programs involving child participation:

1. Facilitate programs that empower duty bears and adults to facilitate successful child participation initiatives, by focusing on increasing their knowledge about Article 12 (child's rights in participation), and by giving adults the support required to enable them to 'let go of power' and give decision making space to children.
2. Implement development programs for children (Children's Clubs), to increase their knowledge and their participation capacities and abilities. Also facilitate practical initiatives that support children to apply their new knowledge and skills.

3. Facilitate regular large scale and publicised events (Race for Survival), to increase community awareness and acceptance of children's views, which in turn can initiate national momentum and provide 'out of comfort zone' experiential learning opportunities for children to participate.
4. Improve the quality of education pedagogy. This can be done by updating teacher training to include child centred cognitive learning and the promotion of teacher-student dialogue in school and meaningful child participation. Introduce school subjects or extra curriculum activities that emphasise cognitive learning and the development of child engagement and analytical skills.
5. Strengthen existing child participation structures in country to create sustainable participatory activities. Support and develop the capacities of the Commission of Child Rights, so they themselves are a great and innovative leader that advocates and leads child participation initiatives.
6. Integrate the Children's Club model into government structures so they are supported and driven by the Ministry of Social Solidarity.

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# Participatory development: Community-based initiatives towards community ownership in Cambodia

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## Introduction

In Cambodia, people's participation in local development is a major challenge and can lead to poor ownership and unsustainable development. Allowing citizens to participate in local development planning, project designers had hoped to bring a sense of community ownership to development activities which would result in poverty alleviation. Currently, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) is in the process of promoting local participation through a decentralisation reform program. According to the Proclamation on Commune Development Planning, in the local planning process, specific groups such as women, youth, the poor and minority ethnic groups, are encouraged to represent their interests and contribute their knowledge and ideas to the preparation of commune development plans. However, participation of these groups is low due to their limited knowledge and poor accessibility. A high proportion of people in these groups are among the 22 per cent of the population who are illiterate and the 28 per cent of the population living below the poverty line. These groups spend their time maintaining their livelihoods rather than having time to join in development work, thus limiting their opportunity for participation. Subsequently, development initiatives generally respond to the needs of the whole community rather than the most vulnerable groups and do not enable community as a whole to take the lead and manage their local development processes on their own. In most cases, project implementation is based on top down planning in which community only plays a role as followers.

## Project background

Recognising the situation and being aware that ownership and sustainable development is more likely to exist if the whole community is in control of their development initiative, in 2008 Life with Dignity (LWD) began implementing a community-based project entitled Village Partnership Project (VPP) in 59 targeted villages of three provinces in Cambodia. It had generous financial support from the Australian Lutheran World Service (ALWS) and Finn Church Aid (FCA). The project aims to enable the whole community, including women, youth and the poor, to participate in making informed decisions and to take the lead in their own initiatives following a rights-based empowerment approach through building community capacity and knowledge. The local people conducted a consultative meeting to identify their priority needs and solutions according to their community critical issues for the basis of their proposal to LWD. This included road access, small scale irrigation construction and awareness raising on domestic violence and human rights.

Once LWD approves the proposal which the community prepares and submits for funding through a

competitive process, the community manages the project by themselves including the procurement process, financial management and reporting as well as monitoring and evaluation. LWD provides minimal capacity building and technical support to community leaders when requested and necessary.

## Project implementation process

The objectives of the project are to:

- empower the community to be able to manage their own development works;
- build their ownership over their community resources; and
- strengthen their networks both horizontally and vertically to support future projects.

The implementation process is divided into three steps.

First, the project provides the communities with an orientation on the process of project planning and implementation and criterion for selection of villages.

Second, the project selects villages for funding. This step starts with calling for concept notes from interested villages; conducting village assessments to confirm the situation on the ground; confirmation of village selection selecting those villages in which representatives from commune councils, the local government, act as chief of the evaluation committee; calling for full proposals from selected villages, then making a final selection and awarding contracts to successful villages.

Third, the project provides minimal capacity building and technical support through training, coaching and mentoring to community leaders on key topics such as project management, procurement, financial management and reporting and finally the community leaders lead and facilitate the project implementation for a one year cycle. To reflect on and replicate the project implementation, annual reflection workshops are held and documented. This documentation is shared widely with government, NGOs, development partners, and research institutions.

## Methodology

To assess the success of the project, LWD gathered information and lessons learned through a variety of methods including community workshops, the review of a variety of reports including the project monitoring reports and evaluations done by an external consultant in mid-2012. Importantly, a reflection workshop was also conducted in 2012 to review the project implementation process and to examine the relevance and effectiveness of the project and to understand the critical challenges and suggestions from the project stakeholders. The major



stakeholders are the Village Development Committee, who are the project implementers, and the Commune Councilors, who play important roles as the committee to select the villages to be the project grant recipients. There were 41 participants of the workshop which included key LWD staff and 15 women. The key questions discussed were:

- to what extent the community members were satisfied with the project;
- what was the overall impact of the project on the communities;
- would the community continue to take over such projects in the future; and
- what were the critical challenges of the project and how would they be overcome.

## Results

The results showed that the communities felt they were the masters of their projects. Most vulnerable people actively and equally participated in the process to share their needs, raise their concerns, share their views and implement the project under the lead and facilitation of community leaders. According to the consultation during the recent reflection workshop communities have gained knowledge about how to improve their livelihoods. In particular, they have increased their participation and collaboration, as well as improved community solidarity and project

ownership. The project had a positive impact on the community as a whole, while attention was given to the needs and concerns of most vulnerable groups. Moreover, the project has built competency and confidence of local leaders in project management and resources mobilisation both locally and externally. Essentially, it has increased their capacity in planning, budgeting, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation and reporting and contributed to improve self-reliance and self confidence in leading village development towards sustainability.

The recent study on sustainability carried out by an independent consultant confirmed that given the success of the project, replication should be considered (Cossar, 2012). LWD will replicate the project in other target areas and share with aid practitioners the best practices and successes and facilitate their links to trained communities to help them apply for other external funding sources.

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# KISS my aid:<sup>1</sup> A journey in search of simplicity

Christopher Chevalier, Consultant

## Introduction

This paper reflects on changes in aid and development during my career, in search of simplicity and lessons learned. I also interviewed ten development workers with an average of 25 years experience to reflect on what had changed significantly and what they had learned. My respondents, four women and six men, still work in the sector. Our experience includes:

- Ten working overseas with NGOs
- Nine Australia based program or project managers
- Seven consultants (four full time)
- Four volunteers in emergencies and development
- Areas of field experience: Asia (five), Africa (five), Pacific (five), S. America (one)

Several key questions guided our semi-structured conversations:

- When did you start in development and where have you worked?
- What do you think have been the major changes since you started?
- How did technology change the way you worked?
- What has changed for the better and for the worse?
- What do you think works?
- How can we simplify the work?

Four major *themes of change* emerged from content analysis and internet searches to check facts and concepts:

- Professionalisation
- Technology
- Political economy paradigms lost and found

## The professionalisation of organisations

NGOs and for-profit managing contractors have grown in number, size and influence over the past 30 years, part of a public service delivery mechanism in a competitive industry.

NGOs operate as both development organisations and contractors, which creates a tension between development values and income values, between doing the right thing and doing the thing right (Edwards 1995). The number of Australian NGOs nearly doubled in the 1990s, growing by 84 per cent (Crooke 2003). NGOs and for-profit managing contractors grew through takeovers and alliances. Larger agencies and managing contractors benefited most, allowing them to get the lion's share of funding. NGOs also enjoyed flexible small-scale funding sources, such as the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). Large agencies have become corporate brands and multinational organisations, such as Save the

Children, CARE, Oxfam, and World Vision. An inner core of a dozen larger NGOs and a swarm of smaller Australian agencies developed, creating tensions between them (Crooke 2003).

Following the 1984 Jackson review of Australian overseas aid, more government funding was directed through NGOs, especially emergency aid. In the 1990s, the proportion of NGO budgets from government funding grew from 28 per cent in 1993 to 49 per cent in 1995 (Crooke 2005). This created a situation of '*He who pays the piper calls the tune*' as government has demanded more accountability from NGOs to access government funds and leverage their own funds. In Australia, sloppy practices and a fraud scandal in 1992 involving CARE led to closer surveillance and administrative control of NGOs. The Australian Council for Overseas Aid (ACFOA) supervised an accreditation process for NGOs in 1995-7 based on assessment of administration and bureaucratic processes. NGOs and contractors were forced to become professional and to rely less on the inherent goodness of their causes.

The change to a conservative government in Australia in 1996 also saw cut-backs to the public service, including AIDAB/AusAID, which became more risk averse. AusAID minimised risk by managing contracts and contracting out, a 'Teflon policy' that ensured mistakes stuck to the contractor, not AusAID. Accounting, monitoring and evaluation processes had to conform to AusAID requirements, particularly logframe approaches and other formats. In the process of demonstrating accountability and transparency, a massive paper chain between the field and the head office was created.

The balance shifted from technical competence to compliance; accounting and control became more important than good development practice. The tendering process led NGOs and managing contractors to become more competitive than cooperative. Project proposal promised too much too soon in order to win tenders and get proposals accepted. Development increasingly became more about project management and tighter monitoring and evaluation (M&E). A shift to results based management has privileged quantitative indicators and 'evidence based' M&E.<sup>2</sup> Qualitative data in evaluation has struggled to be treated with respect. Although participatory tools, change stories, and interviews can provide good evidence of change, they do not summarise neatly or convert easily to measureable indicators for project logframes. The Paris Declaration of 2005 further enhanced government control by emphasising the role of recipient and donor governments, as well as quantitative measurement of development outcomes.

Like Doppler effects of light and sound, professionalisation has shifted the development spectrum in significant ways since the late 1990s. Working in

development has become more a career than a vocation while many NGOs have become more conservative and less controversial over time. Development has shifted to service delivery, from a people-centred approach to a results-based approach, and from empowerment to efficiency.

Shifts due to professionalisation from the 1990s	
Development	_____ Service delivery
People centred	_____ Results based
Empowerment	_____ Efficiency & effectiveness
Vocation	_____ Career

Development workers have been required to become more disciplined, managerial and professional. Managerialism has had benefits, such as better analysis and a more systematic approach. The skills set required of development workers and NGOs have improved, along with the range of tools available to use. And people in developing countries certainly deserve development workers who behave and manage projects professionally.

Results-based frameworks, especially the logframe matrix,<sup>3</sup> have become a common template to design and assess programs with measurable targets. The logframe originated as a US military planning tool and was adopted first by USAID for development projects and then by European agencies in the 1980s. By the mid-1990s, it had become a requirement for accessing AusAID funding of any size.

All recognise that it has many weaknesses ... it is the best of a bad bunch of options available for planning and monitoring development work. Hence it carries on being widely used against all objections (Bakewell and Garbutt 2005:1).

Development workers learned to use logframes under sufferance. Their attitudes could be summarised as 'Love 'em or hate 'em, couldn't work without them'. On reflection, most of my respondents viewed the logframe as useful for design and planning projects but much less useful for implementation. Combined with competitive tenders, logframes promote results that cannot be delivered, called a 'false expectations system' (Smillie 1992). Because development contexts and problems are not logical, more than logical thinking is needed — for example, evaluative thinking, systems thinking, lateral thinking, and emotional intelligence (Crooke 2003). Logframes privilege quantitative targets, box-ticking, buzzwords, and dense jargon, resulting in a management style that has been described as 'technicist, sterile and has no soul' (Bornstein 2001:8). 'Design by numbers' can be compared to 'painting by numbers'— producing reasonable resemblance but providing little space for dreaming or inspiration.

The 1980s generation of development workers often came into development by travelling and volunteering.

More opportunities were then available for gaining overseas experience in newly independent countries, which had fewer qualified local staff. Later generations of aid workers were more likely to start or secure employment in Australia. Volunteering is still probably the most useful and time-honoured pathway to becoming a development worker. The Liberal (Conservative) government introduced competition into the volunteer sector after 2000. This reduced opportunities for extensive in-depth cross-culture experience causing later generations of development workers to come into NGOs and consulting with less field experience.

In the 1970s and 1980s, courses were more likely to be short course certificates in technical and practical training to equip people to work overseas.<sup>4</sup> The growth of academic, particularly masters level, development studies since then has proved very helpful in preparing and professionalising development workers but it has been a mixed blessing. Although there is now much better access to theory, analysis and evidence, it is difficult to learn technical skills, field craft and leadership in seminars and libraries. While postgraduates may have theory but little practical experience, many NGO workers have the experience but resist theory or critical reflection on their work. NGO staff need to learn new ideas and methods and other areas of social research (Crooke 2003).

### Technology — 'welcome to the machine'

Many of the changes in development over the past 30 years have been generated by technology. Both managerialism and technology have shifted the locus of development from the field to the office. In the 1970s and 1980s, working in the field usually meant having no phones, telex, or mail beyond large towns and capital cities. It used to be said of Australian volunteers in the 1980s that by the time a volunteer in the field received a reply to his letter or telex, the problem was either solved or the volunteer had died. As fax machines became available in the mid-1980s, field workers lost some of their autonomy and freedom of movement while head offices could communicate with the field much faster. Two-way radios are still extremely useful for communicating with rural areas but are becoming superseded by mobile phones.

E-mail became available in developing countries from the mid-1990s and transformed development work, although often very slow, expensive and unreliable in many regions. Reporting and communication became almost instantaneous but this had a downside, increasing expectations and demands on local partners. Email can be a huge distraction, a 'constant white noise' that has increased the magnetic pull of the office. Skype and internet phones have also speeded up communications. The internet is replacing print as the main access to information and learning.

Outside the office, the premises of contractors, multilaterals and NGOs have come to resemble Toyota car yards. After the 4WD, the most visible technological change has been the computer, which arrived in the mid-1980s in Australian NGO head offices and in field offices

over the next 10 years. Staff spent inordinate time in front of screens and keyboards, much of it unproductive. Computers were most useful for managing data and finances but otherwise were hardly more than electronic typewriters and filing cabinets. Experienced development workers were unqualified typists, often very bad ones. Productivity was often reduced with the computer while jargon and documentation grew exponentially. Previously, reports were written by hand and sent by mail or to the secretarial staff. While reports may now look better, they were usually more straightforward, thoughtful and often better written. Technology has also created an undemocratic digital divide, a dual speed economy between the haves and have-nots of technology and development. However, computers and printers have replaced the stencil and duplicating machines from the early 1990s. This has allowed development workers to produce their own materials and manuals, although collateral damage has meant ‘death by PowerPoint’.

### Political economy — ‘It’s the economy stupid’

Technology has also transformed banking and global financial markets while trade liberalisation in the 1980s and 1990s opened up many developing countries to industrialisation and consumer goods. Economic growth has lifted many people out of poverty but has also increased urban and rural poverty in many countries. Neoliberal structural adjustment policies in the 1980s and 1990s did untold damage to the poor and continue to do so. Aid and development budgets have grown in step with the global economy, increasing between two to three-fold from 1990 to 2010 — although only just over almost half of it is available for spending in recipient countries (OECD 2010).

Demographic and environmental changes are other tectonic forces that have changed the world profoundly since the 1970s. Unsustainable economic growth and unrestrained population growth (almost trebling since 1950 and by 50 per cent since 1980) have resulted in major threats to development, including climate change, land degradation, impaired food production, loss of biodiversity, rapid growth of cities and urban drift (McMichael 1993). Despite warnings of population and planetary overload since the 1970s, the scale of problems and disasters has increased each decade and pose even greater challenges for present and future generations of development workers in this millennium.

### Paradigms — ‘lost and found’

...it is ideas, not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil (Keynes 1936).

Paradigms and narratives underlying development have come and gone since the 1970s. The table below lists some of the most salient concepts that have been found and lost.

One can be cynical about why paradigms and ideas are abandoned in favour of new ones, fawned upon at first

<b>1970s:</b>	Independence and Self Determination; Welfare, Conscientisation (Pedagogy of the Oppressed), Non-formal Adult Education
<b>1980s:</b>	Basic Needs, Primary Health Care (PHC), Training for Transformation, Community Development, Integrated Rural Development, Market based approaches/Neoliberalism
<b>1990s:</b>	Rights Based Approach, Environmental Sustainability (Rio 1992), Gender and Development, Population and Development (Cairo 1994), Pacific 2010, Poverty Analysis/Poorest of the Poor, Sustainable Livelihoods
<b>2000s:</b>	Millennium Development Goals, Paris Declaration, Disability, Good Governance, Failing States, Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change, Strengths Based Approaches, Market Value Chain
<b>2010s:</b>	Evidence Based Approaches, Strengths Based Approaches

and then exposed, like the emperor’s new Clothes. But on reflection, respondents viewed the changes more positively. Changing paradigms reflect the need to adapt and change as ideas are put into practice and lessons are learned. Creating new lenses, such as gender, sustainable livelihoods, environment, disability, and HIV allowed us to see and work in the world differently. Topics such as disability, sexuality, and female genital mutilation have emerged from the shadows and into public discussion. New frameworks allow us to deal with the multiple problems and complex situations in a changing world. Conceptual frameworks such as Primary Health Care, Millennium Development Goals, and Sustainable Livelihoods have made complex problems more manageable and programmable.

Some sound ideas have fallen by the wayside, replaced by ideas imposed topdown in the wrong context. Primary Health Care was one such concept that was hijacked by selective technologies like immunisation and oral rehydration delivered in silo-ed programs. In the 1990s, HIV/AIDS programs were imposed in areas of the Pacific with very slow fuse epidemics, at the expense of programs such as family planning and much more threatening public health problems, such as non communicable diseases. When the threat of HIV had finally become significant after years of donors crying wolf, the circus had moved on to focus on other priorities; for example, good governance, a concept that became so faddish after 2000 that almost one-third of the aid budget was devoted to governance programs (OECD 2010).

### What works in development

Apart from significant changes in aid and development, my respondents also discussed what makes development work and lessons learned. To keep it simple, their ideas are presented below in bullet points.

#### *What works with people*

- Listen to people to understand them.

- Focus on people, on value for people rather than value for money.
- Cultivate relationships, get close to people, have genuine conversations and discussions.
- Be passionate about people and their lives.
- Build quality relationships with counterparts, listen to them, treat them as colleagues not workers.
- Build leadership and people who are competent to take over.
- Get out of the office and into the field as much as possible, learn field craft.
- Use commonsense.

### *What works with projects and programs*

- Good people and relationships make good projects.
- Counterparts — sit down with them, let them lead, support them, take them along with you, plan your own redundancy.
- Constructive participation is a learned and gradual process — be aware of degrees of participation, at different levels, and at different phases.
- More local partners, more local accountability.
- Provide consistent funding and reliable support for local partners.
- Don't flaunt money; less can make people more self-reliant; more can be done with less.
- Make relationships with donors and stakeholders horizontal and less top-down,<sup>5</sup> talk truth to power.
- Administration works for operations and not the other way round; administration is there to help you do your job better.
- Focusing training on what people have to DO (functional training); focus on practical skills; do as much training in-country as possible.
- Learn from successful projects, organise study tours/exchange visits South to South, North to South, and South to North.

### **Lessons learned**

Some key lessons that respondents have learned are:

- Most important are right attitude and cross cultural skills: understand the culture and learn the language.
- It's not just about 'Them' learning, it's about 'Us' learning as well.
- People are central to development — this includes their self esteem and having influence over their own destiny.
- Don't burden local people with your expectations and unrealistic outcomes; don't make assumptions.
- Understand how much local people have to do in their own jobs, extended families, and communities, quite apart from the work you want them to do.
- People make organisations and make the difference in organisations; research and leadership also make a difference.
- More time, less haste: three years for projects is usually not enough, five is much better, 10 years is probably more realistic for behaviour change, and 15 years for programs that will stand the test of time.

- Be humble — don't always take credit for things or put your badge or the donor's on everything.

### **KISS – how to keep it simple**

Finally, some suggestions for keeping development simple (and perhaps less stupid).

- Use less jargon, simplify language and proposals — they're hard enough for us and even harder for people in their third language.
- Use simple principles and questions to address complexities.
- Use clear, simple tools and participatory methods.
- Go visual — maps, diagrams, mind/concept maps, displays, pictures, photos.
- Lower and fewer expectations — don't expect results quickly, don't try to meet all the needs.
- Keep projects small and simple at the beginning.
- Design early success — small wins build confidence and success breeds success.
- Experiment and adapt, be more flexible — it's OK to move away from the script, change designs and switch funds.

### **Seeing the elephant**

While completing this paper, I was reminded of the metaphor of 'The blind men and the elephant.' Six blind men were asked to feel and describe the different parts of the elephant. One described the side of the elephant felt like a wall, while the others said the legs were like a tree, the ear a fan, the tail a rope, the tusk a spear, and the trunk a snake.<sup>6</sup> 'Seeing the elephant' requires us to acknowledge our own blindness and other people's viewpoints. The overall changes in aid and development have been far bigger than the small parts that we have engaged with. And by organising ourselves in circles rather than hierarchies, having conversations, and sharing viewpoints, we are better able to understand the whole. The elephant is more extraordinary, certainly bigger and older, and perhaps wiser than we (visually impaired people) envisaged than 30 years ago.

### **Notes**

- <sup>1</sup> KISS = Keep it Simple, Stupid  
Key informants were Sue Allan, Mike Crooke, Cecily Dignan, Ross Hardy, Tony Jansen, Maggie Kenyon, Nic Maclellan, Bob Smythe, Jo Spratt, and Terence Wood. Chris Chevalier worked as a health worker in Africa in the 1980s; as an NGO program manager and researcher in Solomon Islands in the 1990s; and since 2000, has combined project management, social research, and consultancy work in the Pacific.
- <sup>2</sup> I would argue from my own training in epidemiology that there has been ill-informed adoption of statistical methods with confounding of results, confusion of correlation with causation, badly designed and often useless baseline studies, and inappropriate use of significance levels with non-random samples.
- <sup>3</sup> The classic logframe matrix has a horizontal axis — Narrative Summary, Objectively Verifiable Indicators, Means of Verification, Assumptions — and a vertical axis:

Goal, Objectives or Outcomes, Outputs, Activities and Inputs. (See Bakewell and Garbutt 2005: *The Use and Abuse of the Logical Framework Approach*).

- 4 Early in my career in 1982-3, I was fortunate enough to do two excellent 3-month courses in Teaching Primary Health Care and Tropical and Community Health at the Liverpool School of Tropical Hygiene; many of my fellow students were health workers from developing countries.
- 5 The wearisome clichés of ‘top down’, ‘bottom up’, ‘grass roots’ ignore geography: village, provincial centre, capital city and metropolitan centre co-exist horizontally and just over the horizon.
- 6 David Smaltz’s book *The Blind men and the Elephant, Mastering Project Work* has some very useful ideas, including the notion of aiming for ‘juiciness’ in projects, patiently sitting with mess and discomfort, and making the most generous possible interpretation of other people’s behaviour.

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