

# Process Makes Perfect

*Monica Mutuku, Kenya Community Development Foundation*

*Monica Mutuku is the secretary of the East Africa Association of Grantmakers. She was the founding executive director of the Kenya Community Development Foundation where she served from 1996 until 2004. Ms. Mutuku was an original member of the Kenya Community Development Foundation advisory committee. Previously, she worked with UNICEF in East Africa and has been involved in community development in Kenya for over 30 years. Ms. Mutuku is a senior fellow with the Synergos Institute.*

Community foundations in developing countries like Kenya are, of necessity, part of the development process and involved in the politics of who participates, how they participate and why. Some development experts see the process in terms of deliberately planned interventions governed by projects or program cycles that include: identification, planning, preparation and design, implementation and evaluation. Critics of this approach to development argue that it is easier to focus on benefits and beneficiaries, as this method appears neutral, forgets victims and provides safe prescriptions for immediate gain and maintenance of the status quo.<sup>1</sup>

## Social Justice Philanthropy as a Process

Community foundations that focus on social justice philanthropy need to devise effective ways to reach large segments of the community that suffer from various forms of disadvantage, including disability or physical weakness and isolation, poverty and vulnerability and more importantly, the common underlying cause of all powerlessness<sup>2</sup>. Development analysis of powerlessness reflects the ease with which the elite in rural villages intercept benefits intended for the poor. It also shows how this practice stretches from the villages, towns and major cities through to governments and international agencies. Interception of benefits by the elite contributes to disadvantage and poverty in several ways:

- \* **Exploitation in the labor market by the powerful:** the poor are denied bargaining power for fair wages due to corruption and poor organization among trade union leaders.
- \* **Prevention or limits on access to resources from the state:** the poorest areas suffer all forms of marginalization and the urban poor pay more for some services.
- \* **Lack of legal redress for abuses:** legal costs are not affordable and, in Kenya, the poor lose their most important assets in land disputes.
- \* **Absence of influence on government policy:** the poor and marginalized areas are least likely to have powerful representation due to insufficient education and the ability of those in power to buy votes and generally corrupt the voting process.
- \* **Inability to build personal assets due to lack of investment opportunities:** lending institutions compound this problem by demanding repayment of loans and being unwilling to negotiate appropriate repayment terms. They often threaten prosecution, fine or imprisonment, demand bribes and engage in other forms of intimidation.
- \* **Reinforcement of physical weaknesses:** because of their inability to access medical services and their poor nutrition, the poor remain sick even during times of famine and natural disaster and cannot access relief that is meant for them.

As community foundations debate “social justice grantmaking,” they need to address the underlying causes that produce social justice issues, bearing in mind that:

- \* Community foundations are not operating in an ideal situation, but in the real and messy world of corrupt politicians and government officials, and with an elite intent on maintaining the status quo.
- \* Society must be transformed to end marginalization.
- \* The marginalized poor must be empowered and participate meaningfully for transformation to take place.

## Participatory Development

As development practitioners struggle with project and program deadlines, participatory development is commonly seen as a means to complete and achieve their objectives efficiently and cheaply — hence the term sweat equity. Too often in this scenario, project and program planners and implementers determine the terms and circumstances under which participation

takes place. This participation is often used to legitimize and contribute labor to the project.

On the other hand, for participation to be more than a palliative, it must become an end and an investment in its own right. True participation requires a shift in power in which a community or group sets up a process to control its own development. Participation becomes a tool for empowering the weakest and poorest<sup>3</sup>.

Advocacy for community empowerment nevertheless remains a problem. Writers on the theory and practices of participatory development have noted an inherent contradiction in the idea that outside intervention can enable people to act on their felt needs and empower them. There is also a problem in the notion that people need to be educated to understand their problems and needs and recognize the appropriate corrective actions. Yet, as the late Julius Nyerere, former president of the Republic of Tanzania, famously noted, “The truth is that development means the development of people. Roads, buildings, the increase in crop output and things of this nature are not development. But people cannot be developed. They can only develop themselves. There is only one way you can cause people to undertake their own development, and that is by education and leadership.”

Advocacy for education and leadership or social justice philanthropy can seem idealist and elitist. Yet, as earlier noted, powerlessness is the major contributor to the absolute disadvantage — a near complete lack of access to food, education, health and shelter. Absolute disadvantage usually evolves into a self-reinforcing mechanism, sometimes described as a vicious cycle or a culture of poverty, and is often used as an excuse to do nothing beyond offering palliatives.

Some believe that the culture of poverty is a failure of the state or the macro-level policies usually driven by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank who advocate total privatization<sup>4</sup>. In a country like Kenya, where the number of people living below the poverty line of one U.S. dollar per day increased from 20 percent to 50 percent over the last 30 years, the state's failure to provide education and leadership cannot be minimized as a cause of the problem. But even with a well-functioning state, governmental systems are by nature conservative, never ahead of people's aspirations and unable to reach all citizens equally.

In developing countries, the state rarely takes a people-centered approach with a constitution or promotes an institutionalized devolution of political power with freedom of expression and association. Even in developed and wealthy

nations, it is acknowledged that the state no longer is the all-knowing, all-powerful and paternalistic entity that is all things to all people. Hence, we see an emerging plurality of power sources, noted by demonstrations and multi-cultural dialogues at the G-8 meetings<sup>5</sup>. Consistently, we see dynamic growth in the civil-society sector and other non-state institutions, such as the press. This is the niche into which the community foundation movement fits so snugly.

### **The Kenya Community Development Foundation (KCDF) Focus on the Process**

The Kenya Community Development Foundation uses a process that attempts to break the vicious cycle. It is based on the belief that sustainable development is about *people*, and that communities *do* need to act. When KCDF began to promote community development, we decided to provide development resources to disadvantaged communities through grants. The question was how to maximize benefits. The Foundation examined the popular development adage, “give a man a fish and you feed him for a day, but teach him to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.” In general, this rather over-used slogan has been

useful in helping international agencies move their operations from relief to development or from “giving fish to teaching how to fish.” People do more for themselves. Nevertheless, teaching skills does not address control and sustainability of the development activity.

The Foundation created its own motto of “going beyond fishing,” empowering the fisherman with as much control as possible over all factors that affect fishing. Is he aware of motorized boats, or is he dependent on the traditional canoe? If he received a motorboat, would he own and maintain it? Is he aware of the broader issues and the greater environment? Can he organize around threats to fishing such as pollution of the river, marketing and bad roads? Does he know how to obtain better prices? Can he deal with exploitation by middlemen or will he just settle for a bribe? Does he know about potential government allocations to the fishing industry or what his local representative can do? If there is no allocation, can the community organize and vote differently for better representation?

To empower the fisherman to gain sustainable control over factors that could affect his ability to fish, he will require:

- \* belief in a better future to sharpen his vision
- \* information and learning opportunities
- \* technology that is appropriate
- \* confidence in his ability to organize
- \* belief in the power of organized people
- \* linkages to networks and enabling environments.

“Beyond Fishing and Behind the Well”<sup>6</sup> as crafted by KCDF is focused on helping the fishermen build their capacity to gain access and increased control over resources to which they have a right.

As a community, the people must believe in their own ability to affect circumstances that may require a shift from playing victim to exerting control. In other words, people must break away from the vicious cycle, or the so-called culture of poverty. Helping disadvantaged communities build capacities and gain control requires bringing people together in a process of self-propelled analysis in which people can freely say, “We want to deal with issues of education as a community. We are very concerned about the lack of water in this area and we want to do something about it.” Or, they can say, “This is us, this is who we are, this is what we can do and this is the help we need from outside.”

Two key elements in this approach to community development are ownership and responsibility. Ownership relates to the power and ability to decide, while responsibility is about contributing to the achievement of established goals. KCDF expects people to contribute based on the belief that every community has the assets of people, money, skills and natural resources. Most importantly, they have the people and their traditions of giving.

One story of a United States Peace Corps volunteer who worked in a community where people often got sick from drawing water from a contaminated river illustrates the importance of community ownership. He contacted people in the United States, raised money, dug a well and installed a water pump. At the end of the volunteer's two-year term, the community had clean drinking water. He rightly went home with pride about his achievement, but on a return visit ten years later, the volunteer found that the water pump no longer functioned. When community members saw him, they said "Oh poor thing! His water pump broke." The community had neither the necessary skills and information to maintain the project, nor the level of community organization to make demands on the governmental systems — usually the only source of technical capacity.

## Development is the “Story Behind the Well”

Kenya, like many other countries, can cite numerous examples like the story above, especially stories about bore holes sunk by well-meaning NGOs, international agencies and even the government. If we believe in the need to empower and give control to the people, we need to question the success of the current development paradigm. The “story behind the well” is about the development process. It is about decision-making, and asks:

- \* How were the decisions made?
- \* How were the discussions organized and held?
- \* Who participated and who was left out: the women, the poor, the youth?
- \* How was the work organized, supervised and done?
- \* Were the unique skills, talents and community resources utilized?

The most important question is: does the whole process represent growing capacity and organization for the community, or has independent thought been sacrificed on the altar of an implementation schedule established by outsiders?

Planners, development officials and evaluators who are preoccupied with the final product, such as the

well and its water pump, rarely address these and other critical questions that highlight the political economy. They fail to ask questions such as: Who gains and who loses? What are the flaws in the process? Were lies told and truths withheld? Do political careers depend on the project's success or failure? If success would give credit to an opponent, would special interests, the elite and local politicians prefer failure, regardless of the cost to the community? Finally:

- \* Does the process promote better leadership, governance and improved local capacity for production?
- \* Are a better appreciation and a growing desire for protection of human rights and an increasing ability to organize to meet community needs evident?
- \* Can the people overcome entrenched fears and vote differently?

Participatory development writers note how project analysis, planning, design, implementation and evaluation focus only on benefits because it is safer and appears neutral. But their approach is deceptive because it covers flaws, increases cynicism by community members, such as, “we’ve seen it all before” and fails to identify sources of strong resistance to a

paradigm shift. Furthermore, an understanding of who gains and who loses enables the process to go beyond the “what” and “why” to “who gets what, why and how.” This information is often a precondition for a realistic intervention that benefits the poor<sup>7</sup> if process is seen to determine the answers.

Experience shows it is necessary to deliberately invest in empowerment processes by working with organizations that are truly community based. Such community based organizations (CBOs) as women’s and youth groups, and even the traditional social groups (clans, burial and other social and welfare associations) always exist at the community level and must be a part of community development activities.

Even with all of its shortcomings — co-optation by governments and utilization by development agencies to promote unjust self-help that amounts to little more than free labor from the poor — community development was always conceptualized as a process, as indicated by this United Nations’ definition: “... community development is the process by which the efforts of the people are united with those of the government authorities to improve the economic, social and cultural conditions of communities...” While clearly shying away from the concept of power, facilitation, enabling and participation have endured as part of commonly held notions about community development.

Another concept popular with non-governmental organizations is the idea of “conscientization,” a process through which outsiders can interact with communities to raise the people’s awareness, or consciousness, of their condition. This process leads to various kinds of action\*. KCDF builds on these community development concepts.

The Foundation provides capacity building grants with two objectives in mind: (a) stronger community development organizations that can; (b) empower their communities. The grants are administered in a process that is, itself, capacity building. Key steps of the process include:

- \* **Get Acquainted Workshops:** Capacity building begins with *get acquainted* workshops. We discuss the meaning of capacity and empowerment at the organization and community levels at length. Experiences are shared, possible exchange visits explored and the people begin to understand what it means to be a grantee.
- \* **Site Visits:** The Foundation visits the grantee to study current activities, meet the community and its leaders, look at internal and financial procedures and get a clearer overall picture.

- \* **Capacity Assessment Workshops:** The Foundation uses a capacity assessment tool to help organizations evaluate and analyze their capacity building needs. We analyze their: attitude; vision, mission, strategies and objectives; systems, structures and procedures; staff capacities, skills and knowledge; and financial, material and internal and external relations resources. Another key objective in the assessment is reviewing program performance. We focus on how various activities *give fish, teach to fish or go beyond fishing*, and if they empower the community. This is a participatory process in which CBOs are encouraged to discuss and identify their strengths and weaknesses, and more importantly, where they are on the *giving fish to going beyond fishing* continuum.

- \* **Funding Proposals:** Organizations then prepare proposals based on this capacity assessment.

The part of our grants aimed toward strengthening organizations includes funding for:

- \* **Staff allowances** since most organizations do not qualify for salaries.



- \* **Knowledge and skills** to enhance project design and proposal writing, resource mobilization, appointments and contracts and financial management (budgeting, bookkeeping, banking and personnel issues).
- \* **Supplies** such as equipment and inexpensive office space in the local market.

- \* **Governance** issues such as constitution and related legal status, elections, board management and committee training. This kind of institutional support is also commonly given to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that work on a broader regional or national scale.

Another part of the grant covers activities to build community capacity. We provide support for community members to undertake study tours, exchange visits and community workshops to enhance skills in farming, fishing and animal husbandry. Support for village banks, savings programs or other credit schemes can also be included.

KCDF's funding support for the community empowerment process stands out because it exists for its own sake, and not in support of projects the Foundation funds. As indicated in the story behind the well, the objective is to enhance the ability of the community to mobilize and organize themselves politically, economically, socially and culturally. The Foundation's work usually incorporates experienced local participatory development experts who understand the key values of sitting, asking and listening<sup>9</sup>.

- \* **Sitting** implies patience and humility, without hurrying.
- \* **Asking** implies that the outsider, in this case a KCDF staff or participatory development expert, is the student.
- \* **Listening** implies respect and learning, accepting that the community has knowledge and expertise about their needs and problems.

This approach is different from lectures, teaching and training workshops, and instead moves to shared learning where community members are the teachers. It uses peer instruction or focus group discussion, while staff and consultants remain facilitators, catalysts and learners. Community members create time and space to do their own analysis. In the participatory collection of baseline data, for example, a team of villagers gathers information about each family in their village. They document the number of families and how many men, women, girls and boys are in each family. They learn which families are very poor, which are without land (squatters) and which have pieces of land too small to feed the family, or if the land is too eroded or stony to be productive. They may gather other data as well.

- \* **Education:** They learn how many children do not attend school, are school dropouts and have single parents.
- \* **Water:** They collect information about permanent water springs that can be protected and rivers that are seasonal or perennial.
- \* **Health:** They find out the location of government clinics or other health facilities and if the facilities have drugs. They learn about the relationships that exist between medical personal and patients, and if people go there or prefer traditional doctors.

Community members are able to map their areas, showing rivers, schools, health and other facilities. The information is discussed openly to identify which groups are most underserved and which areas have the greatest disadvantage. The process is also used to set priorities. A similar process can help resolve leadership issues. It may even help the troublesome issue of local elite and other powerful personalities who divert development benefits to their own uses. The Foundation uses a set of questions on leadership, asking villagers to identify common leadership problems — their causes, their affect on development and their impact on suffering in the community. They discuss what community members can do and what help may be required from outsiders in the form of training workshops, tours and visits to communities with better leadership.

The investment in consultants and staff, transport, stationery, community members, time and space helps people to organize and mobilize around problems they want to correct. It brings people together who might otherwise not share a platform, and gives them all a sense of who they are. In the process, the people begin to:

- \* build individual and community capacities to transform their circumstances,
- \* change and create a more enabling environment,
- \* address economic, social, cultural and gender issues,
- \* build networks and broader linkages, thus enhancing their social capital,
- \* develop a better appreciation of democracy, which leads to voting differently,
- \* learn about their rights and make demands on governmental systems, and
- \* increase their understanding of the broader civil society environment including NGOs and donors.

The extent of the benefit will, of course, differ from community to community depending on the context, general atmosphere, prevailing attitudes, experience, caliber of facilitation and methodology used, support from local government officials and perceptions of community leadership. Other affecting factors can include levels of democratization and freedom of expression and association in a country. Also important is the support institution and its own level of decentralization, understanding and commitment. Lastly, the organizational structure and democratization of the local CBO itself are critical.

Despite all the differing characteristics, the fact remains that community empowerment or social justice philanthropy is always a process and never a final result. No community is ever fully *developed*. As any community grows, changes and becomes more prosperous, there are always attendant issues of poverty, powerlessness and the disenfranchised. Therefore, community empowerment processes must be ongoing as long as communities exist.

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