

KYANGUNGA: THE PUSHED BECOME THE PUSHER

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Kyangunga sublocation is the southeastern most sublocation of Mulango location in Kitui district. It is one of the four sub locations. It has a population of 500 households. The major economic activities in the area, before SASOL started working there, were subsistence crop agriculture coupled with limited livestock keeping. The main crops were maize, cowpeas, beans and pigeon peas.

The rainfall is estimated as about 600mm per year. It is erratic and comes in short storms. Given the limited and erratic rainfall, which is coupled with high runoff as well as high evaporation, there is limited available moisture for crop agriculture. Consequently drought and famine are endemic.

The drainage system comprises of three seasonal streams namely Nzeeu, Kiindu and Nduni. Runoff is high for the land is undulating, has scanty ground cover and farmlands and grazing lands are un-conserved. The riverbeds run dry after about a month. There is ample sand in the riverbeds given the high rate of erosion in the area.

Residents of Kyangunga have been constant recipients of food for their production is not sufficient. This is usually delivered through food for work by either government, NGOs, churches or politicians. They show dependency on outsiders and have allowed the traditional community organisations to atrophy over time. They have been captives of the **NO FOOD NO DEVELOPMENT PROJECT SYNDROME**. This led them to being pushed with food so as to undertake their own development. Characteristically, the food donors identified the projects. The community therefore was at the mercy of the relievers. There were no releasers working with them for those who suffer community anomie are dependants addicted to the relievers.

There was very little community mobilization and planning for development projects of choice before the onset of the SASOL project. When SASOL started discussing the possibility of building sand dams in the community in 1995, the community insisted on being paid in kind- preferably food. Since the sand dam project strategy called for community participation and management, the onset and implementation of the project was very slow. The provincial administration ultimately got so embarrassed by the lack of cooperation by members of the community that they begun to mobilise/compel people to take part in the construction for they understood that the community could be left out of the construction if attendance at construction sites continued to be low. Leadership of the sand dams committees was problematic. When the community was asked to identify community people to be trained in natural resource management and leadership, it was expected that 70 persons would attend. It turned out that less than half of those identified ultimately attended the training Attendance at construction sites was very poor. There are dam sites where on average only 2-5 people showed up most days even though daily attendance per dam had been projected at above 50 people per day. The fact that sand dams would lead to improving food security through growing of vegetables for consumption and market over and above enabling tree nurseries for desired trees and the market as well as providing water for households and livestock was not enough to mobilise the people of Kyangunga.

Kyangunga perceives itself as the underdeveloped orphan of Mulango location. It is true that it is less educated than the sub locations, which are to its west and near Kitui town. It was in the western part of the location, near Kitui town, where education came first at the turn of the last century. As a result, most of the key local and national notables -teachers, preachers, tax gatherers, politicians, traders and provincial administration people come from that area. Kyangunga people argue that the other parts of the location as a result of historical disadvantages have dominated them. This argument may be socio-economically objective but it does not address the natural resources aspect for there is more land per capita in Kyangunga than in the Mulango areas near the town. It also is arguable that the soils in Kyangunga have more potential than in the crowded peri-urban area of the location.

Ultimately the dams were completed. For seven years, they languished without their potential for impacting on food security being utilized at all. People only drew water from the dams. Most of the time people ignored using the wells provided at dam sites. Cattle roamed over the dams for the river channel was the cattle road. The publicly zoned roads had been fenced. Nobody wanted to address the issue of damage to the dams and river as a result of cattle trekking. People washed themselves and their clothes within the dams. These facts were documented in great detail in 2001 when the social economic study field workers were in the field. External people were treated to very hostile reception in this community, which seemed to have inexhaustible sources of local liquor. During field interviews, it was significant that out of every ten interviewees, more than three quarters –both men and women- were always drunk. The local leaders were as much involved in this as everybody else. Interviews were done all day long and some women complained that in this community most men did no work other than drink. The field workers had direct experience of this when they had to drag local officials from illegal brewing drinking sessions at times as early as eight o'clock in the morning

In community development theory, the issue of drivers of community change is handled in unsatisfactory ways with regard to identifying triggers, contexts and approaches. We therefore will not present and evaluate the conflicting conclusions on this in this short write-up. What we want to present is the impact of one of the Kyangunga sons becoming the location Chief and raise questions towards thinking about the transformation of Kyangunga in less than a year.

When SASOL returned to the community to train on sanitation, in 2002, they found that the person who had been an assistant chief- in charge of the sublocation- had been promoted to become the Mulango location chief. As sub chief, he had been caught in the web of the anomie social relations driven by dependency obtaining in the sub location as documented during the study in 2001. He had little time for the researchers then. Neither was he worried about the community deviant behavior with regard to ignoring the health and production potential of the dams. One community leader was openly agitating that he should be fired as sub chief for he was part and parcel of the community anomie.

Being appointed Chief seems to have been a trigger of change for the former sub chief. He has reduced local liquor drinking during working hours. He has mobilized the community to start vegetable growing. He is pushing for dam protection, which includes planting napier grass and keeping cattle out of the river. When he was approached by SASOL on the community sanitation training, not only was he enthusiastic about it but also offered to open the training himself. He personally and on behalf of the community apologized to SASOL for having participated inadequately in the building of the dams and not having utilized the dams until this year. He pushed his community to get aggressive for the things to be taught were clearly to be for their benefit. He also emphasized the need to coordinate what the community was to do not only in terms of sanitation but also about development specifically emphasizing conservation of community natural resources.

64 participants, selected by the community, attended the sanitation training. Not only did they attend faithfully but confessed that they have now realized the importance of the sand dams in terms of enabling them to diversify their production. They also said that they now recognize the importance of working together. They are also aware now that knowledge from outside can be useful to them in their planning long term development of their community and thus they know they do not need to be overly suspicious of all foreigners.

Why has this community of the pushed become pushers? Is the chief the trigger for the community? In turn what triggered him? What is the source of the new hope found in this community? Is it going to stay the course? It is true Chiefs have been significant actors in mobilizing communities to do what is essential for their own sustainable development. However, why would they change so rapidly after seven years of ignoring the use of the dams remains a question in our minds.

We will be reporting on Kyangunga from time to time. Stay tuned.