

ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PROJECTS.

SAM MUTISO
FIELD MANAGER
SASOL Box 85
KITUI.

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INTRODUCTION

Development is the process of change in order to improve the standard of living in the community. It can be seen as endeavours to improve peoples basic needs, life, resources, skills, knowledge, incomes, health, etc. For this change to occur, there has to be participation by all actors in the process, whereby, ideas will be generated from both the community and the external actors. The ideas on their own are not useful unless they result in action. In many communities collective action will speed up the process of change than individual action.

In order to facilitate an understanding of this process, the thesis of this paper is therefore that, change of attitudes towards public assets through community organisation is the road to achieving sustainable development.

THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

Through the 1960's-1980s the development industry spawned women groups as conduits of goods and services into the rural populations. Goods and services delivered ended in the hands of the officials and their cronies. These resulted in new formation of groups to give official positions hence gain the benefits. Also development became women business, men had no place in the groups.

Clearly this was a situation, which created division in the community and promoted hostile competition. The rivalry between group leaders to reap maximum benefits for themselves limited the size of the group. This was so since everyone in the group had to receive some benefit. The normal group consisted of 30 members. The membership was therefore too small to influence the wider community, which could not benefit directly from the closed system. You alternatively found one person belonging to several groups to maximize benefits.

Many of the activities undertaken by the groups were individually driven and were not relevant to community problems. Further more the projects undertaken were personalized and the wider community had no access to any group project for example a group well. In such a case, how does one explain, the existence of a well, which only serves group members while the surrounding community has no access?

Group activities then became tantamount to social occasions with no payback, existing and justified only by the handouts from the development industry. How otherwise can anyone, justify 30 grownups running a nursery to which they attend everyday for six months to produce 1000-2000 tree seedlings. The estimated cost for each tree seedling is about Ksh. 1000. These tree nurseries, which have existed in the community for many years have no results to show in the way of improved afforestation schemes. However, there are numerous examples of wheelbarrows, Ploughs, Shovels, Jembes, Mattocks at group official's households.

The onset of these driven groups undermined the social organization of the

community by throwing up officials who had no legitimacy in the community. Many of these officials were opportunists who could not find a place in the normal community structures. The disruption and fragmentation weakened the bargaining power the community structures might have had. The opportunists sought to fill the vacuum by trying to represent the community. As they could not compel the people to listen to them, and since they had access to the powers outside the community they blocked many initiatives, which were started without their sanction. Where these group leaders could not benefit they blocked community initiatives.

It is the group leaders who attended all the courses given by the donors or the government. They privatised the knowledge therefore the community never acts on it. They took the role of spokesmen for the community though illegitimate. Dominant characteristics seen of these group leaders and officials are those of exhibitionists and know it all (Peacocks and giraffes). They were therefore not open to ideas originating outside their groups. This is how they held the greater populace at ransom.

Community wide based organizations elicit the involvement of all community members without favour or rancour.

Conventional wisdom dictates that one gets involved in an activity in which he has a vested interest. Different people will get involved for different reasons. If therefore we have to keep the interest of all the people, there needs to evolve an organizational structure, which would cater for the varied interests of the people involved. For example, a game organization has to cater for people interested in playing; those in watching the game and also those who want time to relax.

In essence, a communal organization must have the potential for long life, must have the capacity to collect and evaluate communal information and must include a cross section of all sectors in the community. Every ones interest must be represented, otherwise they will fall out condemning the whole organization. Leaders should be elected by the people according to their ability to contribute to the well being of society not imposed on them from without.

Each role played by any section of the community must be respected and recognized . If this is not done the community devours itself.

In the Kamba community existed an organization for communal work, the Mwethya, to tackle huge tasks, which were difficult for individual management. Each set of the community had a role to play. Take for example the building of a hut. The old men would dig the holes; the young men would collect the poles from the forest, the young women would fetch the grass and the old ladies would do the thatching. The hut was thus built in a day.

The council of elders, which was responsible for the village, called the Mwethya on request of an individual. They were responsible for the compliance rules. They had the power to discipline, even ostracize a person who was not compliant from the community. They employed enforcers who could arrest deviant members, bring them to the disciplinary council (King'ole) and mete out the sentence delivered by the council. Scouting for useful knowledge for the community was a routine affair in this organization.

The organized community has the capacity to absorb and process external knowledge for integration into the communal mind.

A succession process ensured the survival of the organization throwing up leaders from the community. These leaders learn from their predecessors and utilize available knowledge at their time.

LATENT COMMUNAL ENERGY AND RESPONSIBILITY.

In the event of death, the road to household is cleared and levelled in one day, for the body to be transported for burial. In this person's lifetime, the person used that impassable road and got major problems of transport. Not so when they die. This is a vivid example of the apathy to public assets in our society. It also shows the inherent potential capabilities to undertake work when inspired.

Thirty years back there was a program of building earth dams in Kitui. Alongside this program there was a program of terracing, grass planting and rehabilitation of bare lands. People were rounded up to form the labour corps in these programs. Many young people ran away to escape this forced labour. The dams, which were done have already silted and the bare lands, were neglected again after the program. Even more tragically, there was apathy to terracing land created in the community.

Structures erected by the government have slowly fallen into decay. We have become looters of our communal resources, making no effort to enhance them. This mind set is at the root of the neglect we see in public property and utilities. This can only change when the community assumes custody of communal assets.

ASSET DEVELOPMENT

The logical steps taken by anyone when they need to develop a dwelling place is to answer, the questions, Why? What? Where? When, and How? The appropriate dwelling structure, which fulfils the felt needs and achieves the aspired values, is thus developed.

Similarly on a community front, for any meaningful and lasting development to occur, the same questions must be asked and answered by the community in an appropriate forum. The community must know: what they want to do? why they want to do it? where they want to do it? when they want to do it? and how they will do it? At each stage, in this process, the value of resources employed must be counted in order to arrive at the true value of the undertaking. The realization of the community that they have invested their effort and resources into an asset of great value, which is their own, is an incentive for its protection and gives enormous satisfaction and sense of achievement.

To get to what should be done, the community must form an organization, which will identify the communal problems and prioritise them. In the problem identification stage, audience/input must be sought from all members of the community. It is paramount here that no one feels left out; everyone has to be assured that his problem will be addressed.

Once prioritisation is done according to the criteria set by the community, the most important of which is the number of people afflicted by the problem, solutions can be sought. So far the first two questions what and why are answered. What ensues is the planning to affect whatever action has been deemed necessary.

Convenience of location of a facility to fulfil the discerned desire by solving the identified problem is the answer of the question where. Mis-location of a facility for the benefit of a section of the community will generally lead to poor participation in

its preparation, operation and maintenance. Time is of essence in any undertaking. It becomes more so, if there is competition between normal chores and communal chores. It is therefore necessary to plan communal activities not to clash with peak labour demand periods in the community. To do so would be to court dissent to the activity.

To answer the question how, is to deal with the mobilization of human and material resources, which are required to accomplish what one needs to do, and carry out the necessary activities to completion of the project. Apart from giving the satisfaction of solving a problem and fulfilling felt need, an asset needs to have an ownership. Only those who have invested in it can own it. In a poor community, the most important resource is their labour; it is their major investment in projects. Organized communities using their local resources together with external help to provide inputs, which need financial support, can achieve great progress in a short time. This is the result of the knowledge that in doing so, they are expanding their resource base by creating assets, which will impact on their livelihoods. As they create insurance for their future, they not only protect their present assets, but also seek to expand their asset base.

When costing a medium sand dam project for example, we find the following: Take for example, for a sand dam taking 150 bags cement, total cost external inputs is Ksh. 90000/= . This structure would need 64 tons of stone @ Ksh .300 per ton: 30 tons of sand @ Ksh.200 per ton and 7 1/2 cubic meters of water @ Ksh. 250 per cu.m. for construction and a further 5 cum of water for curing. The cost of local material would be Ksh. 22000. To this we add the cost of labour, which is invested in the construction. For this structure the labour would be 600 person days @ Ksh 100 per day equivalent to Ksh. 60000. The community contribution for this structure is Ksh. 82000, which is equivalent to the external inputs. Further to this there are peripheral activities associated with dam construction of toilets, terraces and afforestation. Considering only 5km. of terracing to be associated with the dam @Ksh.15000 per terrace km., and 10000 tree seedlings raised @Ksh. 10 per seedling, a further Ksh 250,000 investment is realised. Thus with Ksh.90, 000 as seed money, the community has invested Ksh.330, 000. This investment can only be realized if the community invests in its own organization, which will help it, benefit through planning its activities.

When people know the value of their asset, they are motivated to maintain it in a proper working order. They realize the need to sustain the facility, provide for the function it was made for.

RECORDS ARE ESSENTIAL TO MEASURE PROGRESS

Up to the 50s, it was common occurrence to see old men sit by the entrance of the homestead with a pile of stone as the herds came home from the grazing fields. The old man would pick a stone for each animal one of the herd. He would then know instantly if the herd is whole or some animals are missing. New stones were added for any additions to the herd. The appropriate numbers of stones were removed for any deductions from the herd. Different animals were identified by using different size stones or sticks large sticks /stones bulls, smaller stones for cows and pebbles for calves. Payments for bride price, for example, when made, the record of animals to the bride's family was kept by the bridegroom family.

The break down of this system is largely due to being deemed primitive. There was no immediate transition to any other form of records. It was not allowed to evolve in any other practical form. Ironically this system was legitimised as the basis of PRA.

The use of sticks, stones, leaves and seeds to depict and represent different items in the community are based on this old system.

A community must know its present position by analysing and recording the existing situation. This will enable the community to plan what facilities they require. Without knowing the number of people, it is difficult to decide the capacity of facilities to be developed. It is paramount to develop the baseline data at a point to which future changes can be compared.

CONCLUSION

Promotion of effective community organization through participatory methodologies and sensitisation of the community to appreciate their resources is basic to continuous sustainable development. This requires time and understanding of the communities by the community itself and external actors. Concerted efforts, between the community and external actors, helps to highlight community needs and community organisation. training to fill knowledge gaps and leadership for implementation and maintenance of sustainable projects. In cooperative effort, the barriers that prevent a community from achieving their ultimate goals are elucidated and eliminated.

Continuous evaluation, monitoring and planning of activities are key functions of a community organisation aspiring to achieve sustainable development.