

## **MANAGING DEVELOPMENT: NGO PERSPECTIVES?**

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***ABSTRACT:** We welcomed the term ‘development management’ to our professional lexicon several decades ago in part because of its focus on implementation and on achieving the objectives and values of the development enterprise. Over the years we have struggled with meaning, and how management is somehow different because it is about or for development. We still struggle with issues of power that are inherent in questions of who manages development, how, and for whom. Korten, in 1980, talked about participation and community control. In 2004, we still struggle with the limitations of top-down approaches and with how to achieve participation. This article is built on three mini-case studies prepared by masters degree students in the Sustainable International Development Program at Brandeis University. The cases use the conceptual lenses of ownership, partnership, and capacity building to examine the work of NGOs in Senegal, Malawi and Pakistan and to explore participation and power issues among their key stakeholders. It draws out lessons on managing power differentials, building trust, ownership and capacity, sharing accountability for outcomes, and building partnerships with local governments.*

Development management, as a term, entered the development dialogue more than two decades ago. As a concept it attracts practitioners and scholars because of its focus on implementation and, perhaps, because at some level it communicates deep meaning about the objectives and values of the development enterprise.

Now at the start of the twenty-first century, the nature of development management remains an interesting question. It is true that practice and research, both in pursuit of economic and social growth and of poverty eradication, have taught us much about the constituent features of development management. Despite learning and the passage of time, we struggle with paradoxes inherent in the definitions of development management—paradoxes reflecting power issues that are structurally and individually difficult to resolve. Development management, as we shall see in the next section, implies an empowerment of communities to enact their own solutions. It implies a shift

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in the power relations among the stakeholders in the development process, with donors and implementers ceding space and responsibility to beneficiaries to become actors. Altering power relations may be one ideal implied by the concept of development management, but doing so is difficult in human and institutional terms.

The dialogue about development management is lively, but there is an eerie similarity between the concerns raised in 1980 by David Korten in his article that announced the emergence of the development management approach and those of recent years. Korten examined the need to bring “the poor more rapidly into full participation in development decisions, implementation and benefits” and spoke of the growing interest in “effective community controlled social organizations as important if not essential instruments if the rural poor are to give meaningful expression to their view, mobilize their own resources in self-help action, and enforce their demands on the broader national political and economic systems” (480). More than twenty years later, Monica Das Gupta and her colleagues use similar language in exploring institutional settings conducive to growth and poverty reduction. They note “a growing awareness of the limitations of ‘top-down’ approaches . . . [and that] interest has shifted to the potentially powerful role of the participation of communities . . .” (Das Gupta et al., n.d., 1).

Equally interesting is the similarity between our present and past concerns about poverty. Korten (1980, 480) begins his piece with World Bank estimates that “nearly 800 million people, or roughly 40% of the population of the developing nations, still live in absolute poverty.” Today development professionals routinely refer to the more than one billion of the world’s population living below an absolute poverty line of less than US\$1 per day.

This article examines some continuing challenges for development management today. It starts with a selective reference to development management definitions and constituent elements, with a focus on power relationships. Then, not unlike many other development management studies, it uses a case-based perspective to analyze selected constituent elements of development management: ownership, partnership, and capacity building. It differs from other studies in that it seeks to bring the perspective of developing country nationals to an analysis of management of development change. All three mini-cases involve nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). One is an NGO founded in Senegal, but registered in the United States (in part to take advantage of the connections of its U.S.-born founder). The second concerns an international, northern NGO in Malawi, that is working with a community based organization but forging a partnership with local government. The third is a now independent NGO in Pakistan, which got its start with support from a bilateral donor.

The mini-case studies examine selected dimensions and/or objectives of development management approaches. A primary intent is to contribute to expanding our understanding of development management. A second purpose is to encourage us to think again about the complex value and power issues imbedded in the concept of development management, and about the power relations involved in managing any intervention aimed at serious economic or social change.

## **DEFINING DEVELOPMENT MANAGEMENT: FOR WHAT AND FOR WHOM**

The term development management arose from the thinking of many who recognized the limitations of the traditional term administration to describe the roles of implementing agencies and actors in making development change happen. David Korten was one important contributor to this process, and it is instructive to recall his thinking. Korten believes in a learning process approach that involves communities and people in exploring, creating, and adapting their own approaches to reality. The participatory and empowering processes central to development management concepts often reflect the espoused theory of what should be, rather than the reality of what agencies actually do. Korten noted the reliance on centralized agencies for the planning and implementation of participative development, inadequate support to building community capacities, inadequate attention to social structures in the community, and an inability to integrate the technical intervention with the social components of development action. He pointed to the fragility of our knowledge of what makes development change happen, and how to use implementation as a learning process in order to achieve effective change before reaching to efficiency and expansion. Finally, he suggested that community-based, poverty-focused work is slow to implement and to produce quantifiable results, while donors and their systems are oriented to results that are quick and easy to measure (Korten 1980, 483-484, 495-500).

Defining development is a necessary part of one's definition of development management. The assumptions about development in this article are influenced by Amartya Sen and the human development approach (UNDP 1990).<sup>1</sup> The authors of this article agree that development is about expanding the choices and enabling the agency of individuals, communities, and institutions to shape the course of their own development. How development assistance helps to create that choice or agency can be complex and full of contradictions. Doing so requires a transformation, not only of individuals and institutions in poor societies, but also of people and institutions in the surrounding environment, including funding and implementing development organizations. Seeing development as expanding choice, empowerment, capacity building, or agency implies that development, to be real, needs to be driven by the demand of those for whom development is the goal. A demand-driven approach implies transformation not only of individuals and institutions in the developing world, but also a transformation of the management of development. A paradox of demand-driven development is that it depends in large part on a transfer of resources, especially knowledge and access. Implementing the transfer costs money. Managing development means recognizing and managing the reciprocal accountabilities in the aid relationship.

There is a rich literature on development management, and much of it reflects a value orientation around expanding choice, participation, ownership, and capacity building. Thomas (1999) makes distinctions among management in a development context, managing of development tasks, and managing for development—all three of which are part of development management. The key distinction he makes concerns the values managers bring to the development process. Managing development tasks does differ from managing tasks in another milieu. The difference in managing for development, Thomas says, is that style matters. The way in which activities are

managed should be done in a deliberate way to promote the values and norms of development. He gives the example of microfinance: "If empowerment is taken as part of a particular value based definition of development, then managing in such a way as to empower would be an example of managing for development . . . this could be a justification for using participatory mechanisms even if there were no benefit in terms of improved repayment rates" (13).

Managing for development, Thomas says, is not just about efficiency and effectiveness in getting the job done. It is also about simultaneously building capacity to do future tasks and learning from experience. Thomas refers to the differentiation between development management carried out "on behalf of those in power and on behalf of the relatively powerless. In the former case, either the 'command and control' or the 'empowerment and enabling' mode of management might be employed, depending on the nature of the task, whereas in the latter case 'empowerment and enabling' was preferred because of the particular need of the powerless for empowerment before they could take part in development" (1999, 16). As outside agencies manage for development they are bringing outside resources, financial and intellectual, that may skew the power balance among stakeholders.

The power inequalities among stakeholders and particularly between northern NGOs (NNGOs) and their southern partners has been much noted in recent literature (and internally in some NNGOs), raising particular questions about the use of the term partnership. Power is about the degree to which one person or institution can influence the behavior or practice of another. Where the power relationship may be most inequitable is in the relationship between a NNGO and a southern NGO (SNGO) it is funding. Lister (n.d.) identifies the current literature and suggests the usefulness of frameworks (particularly Dahl) for analyzing power relationships. Among her conclusions are that individual actors and relationships have a strong influence on the nature of the partnership, but that if NGOs are serious about creating a partnership they need to take explicit steps to institutionalize the partnership. Brinkerhoff (2002) takes the exploration further and defines the range, dimensions, and opportunities of partnerships and introduces the concepts of mutuality and organizational identity in an analysis of managing for partnership results.

The discussion of partnership as an abused term seems to focus on the NNGO/SNGO relationship and to overlook the partnership with government. Das Gupta et al. (n.d.) remind us of the potentials of local government agencies. While local governments may have been intended originally to serve central governments, control resources, and maintain law and order, they have the potential to be development change agencies. Das Gupta argues that "the higher levels of the state can catalyze local administrations into improving their development effectiveness and working collaboratively with communities. . . . These changes can be powerful in releasing local energies for development . . ." (2).

NNGO accountability has been another focus of efforts to understand the power relationships among stakeholders (see Johnson 2001; Boonyarak 2002). Some of this work explores the relationships among NNGO back-donor requirements, NNGO missions, and SNGO and beneficiary interests. One can also look at the accountability relationship through the lens of ownership. Who owns the development change being supported? Korten's (1980) analysis suggested that the traditional blueprint approach

was top down, from the planners with their models of change, through the administrators, who implement change on behalf of beneficiaries. Moving to Korten's learning process approach is not so simple. His analysis of successful change efforts tells us that the best ideas emerge from those most affected, from "a learning process in which villagers and program personnel shared their knowledge and resources to create a program which achieved a fit between the needs and capacities of the beneficiaries and those of the outsiders who were providing the assistance" (497).

Das Gupta et al. (n.d.) remind us that outsiders, by their presence, are likely to alter the power balance. When development actors introduce resources to a community with history, existing norms, and social structure, power relations may change among groups and individuals in the community and ownership of the development process is changed. The question is not only what change is owned, but who owns it.

Development management, of course, remains concerned with getting the job done. Esman (1991) reminds us that what distinguishes developed or advanced societies is "precisely the capacities of their institutions and the skills of individuals, including those of management. Together these reflect their differential capacities to utilize resources, capitalize on opportunities, and adjust to changes" (20). Management, then, is the ability to use available resources to get results from opportunities, and also to learn so that managing development can adjust to changing realities.

Capacity, and its potential corollary, empowerment, can be seen as both means and ends. A chapter in the World Bank's *PRSP Source Book*, for example, explicitly identifies poor people and their institutions as assets and partners in the development process. "Community-driven development (CDD) gives control of decisions and resources to community groups" (Alkire et al. 2001). Amartya Sen, who has been, among other contributions, one of the conceptual thinkers behind successive Human Development Reports, provides a philosophical framework for thinking beyond concepts of capacity and empowerment in his *Development as Freedom* (1999). Sen uses the term agent (or agency) as someone who acts and brings about change. Greater freedom allows people to help themselves and be agents in development. Freedom is not limited to the civil and political, but extends to the social and economic spheres. Different kinds of freedoms may reinforce each other, accelerating the development of agency. Exercising these freedoms is development (18).

Three UNDP staff, in their edited volume *Capacity for Development*, discuss capacities in the context of the nature of development. Fukuda-Parr, Lopes, and Malik (2002) call development a transformation, making a distinction between current dominant paradigms that measure development as improvements in economic and social conditions and a new paradigm that defines development as societal transformation including the building of the right capacities at the individual, institutional, and societal levels. Knowledge for development cannot be given or transferred. Individuals, institutions, and societies have to acquire it. It can be argued that there is a potential contradiction between the funding role and direct capacity-building efforts of donors. If donors control the content and delivery of capacity building, the SNGO may not take ownership of the changes. SNGOs may accept the NNGO support as a necessary adjunct to overall funding. Outside funding agencies may be wiser to fund capacity building that SNGOs themselves undertake.

## EVIDENCE FROM EXPERIENCE: MINI-CASE STUDIES

The following mini-cases have been abbreviated to focus attention on aspects of ownership, partnership, and capacity building in order to describe the development management opportunities and constraints. In reality, the mini-case studies cannot be so neatly segregated. They overlap in the light they shed on the concepts. Each of them also provides a description of the nature of learning in management development, and each of them touches on questions of accountability to their clients and to donors. Three coauthors of this article spent six months in 2002-03 working in NGOs in Africa and Asia as part of their master's degree work in the Program in Sustainable International Development at the Heller School, Brandeis University. Each worked in an NGO in his or her own country. The case studies represent their field interviews, observations, and review of documents, plus their own analysis.

### Enabling Ownership

We talk about ownership as an essential characteristic of successful and sustainable development interventions. The question is: how does ownership happen? Khady Ba put together the following mini-case study of Tostan in West Africa. It illustrates an approach to building local ownership and management of a controversial policy change that involves conflicting interests of human rights and national law on one side, and traditional culture on the other.<sup>2</sup>

For a long time, human rights advocates have seen female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/FGC) as a barbaric practice, the ultimate goal of which is the control of women's sexuality and their perpetual subordination to men. If the practice of FGM/FGC is a violation of women's and girls' bodily integrity, this does not in any way undermine the reality that practicing this tradition can be perceived as an expression of one's right to cultural freedom. Unfortunately, more emphasis has been placed on denouncing the practice and its consequences on health and well being than in trying to understand the reasons underlying practicing populations' determination to perpetuate it.

In order for a doctor to cure patients, the causes of the illness must be assessed. Only after doing so can ways of preventing the spread of disease be identified. In the same way, a deep and objective understanding of the cultural underpinnings of FGM/FGC in Senegal should lead to the identification of methods and approaches likely to help stop its perpetuation. The reasons given to justify the practice of FGM/FGC are various. FGM/FGC is seen as preserving chastity and avoiding shame, an Islamic obligation (although we know that FGM/FGC was practiced long before the emergence and spread of Islam in Africa), and a rite of passage that allows for women's purification. This rite of passage prepares girls for adulthood, giving them access to marriage and maternity, and acceptance in and by the community.

Female circumcision is one of many controversial and perplexing practices with which certain communities identify, but which are shocking to outside observers. It is a human characteristic to denounce what is unacceptable to us, forgetting that when it comes to culture, what is acceptable to us may not be acceptable to or forced on others. As academics and development planners, we would gain more by stepping back to look at the tension between a human rights and a cultural rights perspective.

For a start, we should recognize that the language we use is not always neutral. The term female genital mutilation (FGM) carries moral evaluation. Female genital cutting (FGC) retains clarity as to the nature of the procedure, but omits judgment. (This is not to argue against the importance of judgments, but more to say that judgmental terms may preclude the need to understand underlying conflicts between human rights and cultural rights, and the roles of insiders and outsiders in making change.) We have recognized above the long-held community perceptions of FGC and the social constructions communities place on the practice. FGC is deeply imbedded socially and economically, so that women may define their status, and sometimes their livelihoods, through the practice of FGC.

FGC is also a development issue, a legal issue, and a human rights issue. FGC is a development issue because it limits the opportunities of females to achieve their full potential and to make choices about how they want to plan their lives. One possible consequence of FGC, death, is sufficient reason enough to explore ways of educating practicing populations on what they have to gain in questioning the practice, and what they have to lose in continuing it as a consequence of not understanding the impact on girls' and women's health. In other words, practicing populations have the human right to be informed and educated on FGC, a practice that is seen as culturally justified.

There are also powerful moral, ethical, and legal grounds upon which those working to eliminate FGC can stand. Article 24-2A of the *United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child* (<http://www.unhchr.ch/udhr/lang/eng.htm>) outlines the human right and duty to diminish infant and child mortality. Article 24-3 makes it clear that all parties shall take all effective and appropriate measures with a view to abolishing traditional practices prejudicial to the health of children. Article 2-F of the *United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (<http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/e1cedaw.htm>) clarifies that all parties have to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs, and practices which constitute discrimination against women, and, in particular, establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of women.

International norms and laws are not simply an imposition by outside powers.<sup>3</sup> The government of Senegal has acceded to the international agreements above as part of its commitment to supporting the rights of children and of women. In January of 1999, the government of Senegal passed legislation outlawing female genital cutting. Four years later, even with some publicized arrests of a few parents and practitioners, observers believe that there has been limited reduction in the practice. The incidence of genital cutting is estimated at only 20 percent of women, but its practice is confined to specific regions (Tambacounda, Kolda, St. Louis, and Matam) where rates of FGC of women may be as high as 88 percent.

The social environment that legitimizes FGC can operate as a constraint to women's exercise of choice and opportunities for development. Because gender equality is at the heart of economic development, FGC is a particular challenge for development agencies and managers working in community-based poverty reduction interventions. When a practice is imbedded in culture, in perceived religious sanctions, and even in the economy (FGC operations may be the only or primary source of income for some women in a community), how is a local community going to take ownership of

abandonment of the practice? Can an outside agency have a legitimate role in enabling access to women's rights when doing so means overriding traditional cultural practices?

Tostan is an NGO started in Senegal and largely staffed by Senegalese, but receives resources from abroad.<sup>4</sup> Its mission is to support ways of giving men and women, village by village, access to new understanding of human rights and of the potentials of women. Expected outcomes are much broader than giving communities the opportunity to assess their support for FGC. Community education seeks to build capacities to exercise a range of social and economic rights.

Tostan began not with a focus on condemning FGC, but with a broader mission of empowering villagers to take charge of their own development and participate fully in society. Molly Melching, U.S.-born but long term Senegal resident/founder of Tostan, observes that the vocal and international condemnation of FGC by scholars and human rights advocates has had little impact on the actual practice. She believes that it was necessary first to understand the cultural and economic rationales underlying the practice of FGC and then to give access to alternative choices so that communities could freely choose whether or not to continue the practice of FGC. Coercion does not produce sustainable change. Abandonment must originate with the women and men in the community itself.<sup>5</sup>

The Tostan methodology flows from these principles. It relies on basic, nonformal education in good governance (including human rights and democracy), problem solving methodologies, basic hygiene and health, financial management, leadership skills, child development, and natural resources management, combined with access to local economic opportunities. A village empowerment program works with adolescent girls, women, and men to help them find ways to discuss and think about human rights and the consequences of early or forced marriages and FGC. Adult education sessions (in local languages) are integrated with social and economic interventions, for example, microcredit, so that real welfare and livelihood problems are recognized and addressed. The combination builds trust and self-confidence. For women, the ability to have an independent income (as a result of microfinance support) combines with new knowledge to enable them to claim economic rights and rights to bodily integrity. The effect is a transformation of thinking. One participant noted, "The module on human rights opened my eyes to what I am entitled to. The module on problem-solving skills helped me to come up with alternatives I can explore to solve possible problems in my household and move onto community development." For men, the programs allow them space to consider issues that were not previously discussed, and provide support to take action on FGC. One traditional (male) leader commented, "When I learned that FGC could harm women and affect their health, I dared to speak up in front of all the local authorities and [I] felt very strongly about it."

By March of 2003, in areas where Tostan is working, 819 villages made public declarations of the abandonment of FGC. These were villages participating in broad-based programs supported by Tostan. There is no good data on the number of villages practicing FGC when Tostan began its efforts. This makes assessment of the impact of Tostan's programs difficult, but any assessment would have to focus on economic and social changes and not on FGC alone to gain an understanding of the dynamics of social change that enabled villages to take ownership of change. International and national conceptions of rights cannot be imposed, even when they have an intrinsic legitimacy.



Cultural norms can and do change. Finding ways to get community buy-in to a national and international policy change requires a patient and learning process approach.

This mini-case study suggests some implications for organizational leadership and program managers working in areas of human rights and culture:

- Time. Grounding programs in an understanding of local culture and realities requires time for learning and adaptation. Change that originates with communities will occur according to the local timetable, not the donor-funded project schedule.
- Field staff. Nonformal education and participatory approaches that allow communities to assume responsibility and accountability require staff that have a combination of competencies, appropriate value set, and willingness to spend significant time living and working in villages. A major development management task is recruiting, mentoring, motivating, and retaining such staff.
- Donors. Donor funding often requires donor-specific projects that produce identifiable results. But community-based projects need to be capable of adaptation to community perceptions and the evolving model of change, rather than trying to adapt implementation to the donor requirements. Organizational leadership needs to invest time in educating donors and their constituencies in the North. Measuring change, and its sustainability, is often difficult over the life of projects. Stories may effectively convey how change happens. Donor managers and leaders need to structure their work to give priority to their own learning and to the learning of Northern publics.

### **Reexamining the Partnership Relationship**

There are multiple dimensions to partnership, one of the most overused terms in the development enterprise. Partnership is a feel-good label that may mask power inequities. In the narrow legal or business sense, a partnership is a formal relationship among parties who bear equal risk and derive equal benefit from an undertaking. The relationship is expected to operate with trust and transparency. Such equality is rarely if ever possible in the real development world, which struggles to move from the patron-client mode to some form of mutuality. This mini-case study looks at a particular form of partnership among an international NGO, local government, and community-based organizations (CBOs) as a means of using and enhancing existing local capacity to provide ongoing solutions to livelihoods and AIDS-orphans problems.<sup>6</sup> Anderson Kamwendo, who developed the following mini-case study, had as the primary objective of his field work an exploration of how community-based orphan care might be supported and adapted to meet the needs of accelerating numbers of AIDS orphans in Malawi. In doing so he looked at the operating methodology of the Oxfam Shire Highlands Sustainable Livelihoods Program (SHSLP) in Mulanje district to see whether the methodology might be adapted to the work of his own and other NGOs concerned about AIDS orphans. He chose SHSLP and Oxfam because of the apparent success of Oxfam in building local capacity through partnership.

Oxfam's overall modus operandi in Mulanje district is to fund directly institutions at the district level that implement participatory development in an accountable and transparent manner. Oxfam saw local government extension workers' capacity not only

as a means to an end (through helping beneficiaries achieve food security), but also as an end in itself (by building government capacity so that it has expanding and sustainable capacity to use a problem-solving approach at the district level). Originally, the Oxfam-local government collaboration identified problem-solving capacities as a main objective of the partnership. Oxfam funded participatory training of local civil servants in skills, attitude change, and transfer of knowledge that would equip extension workers to foster the active participation of communities. However, a 1993 evaluation found that the impact of training on development in the communities was negligible. Trainees had classroom learning, but they were not given the means to put into practice what they had learned. The problem of means was not simply financial. Funds will always be limited in a country as poor as Malawi. Knowledge and capacities do exist in the local civil service, even under conditions of inadequate funding for services. The gap that needed to be filled was on the demand side. Communities were not accessing the knowledge and services that did exist.

Some of the lack of access stemmed from a spirit of competition, rather than collaboration, between CBOs and local governments. CBOs have the potential to mobilize communities and be a vehicle for linkage to local governments with limited funding for field visits. In practice, CBOs rarely collaborate with government and may even compete with them by recruiting their staff. In this case, by failing to establish links with local ministry offices, the CBOs would exclude themselves from available advice (for example, on crop husbandry practices).

The SHSLP design was built on a recognition of the gap between the supply of local government capacity and the ability of CBOs to access it. After 1997, the program turned its attention to supporting CBOs to focus on social organization and on on-farm and off-farm activities. With a rights-based perspective, they worked with CBOs and communities to understand and demand services from local government (and other change agents and donors). The new program (SHSLP, post 2000) now adds program inputs in terms of funding, transport, computers, and irrigation pumps to both local government and communities.

Oxfam, as a matter of organizational principle, seeks to play a facilitating role; only under rare circumstances does it implement development activities directly. It seeks to work through existing structures—in this case government structures—helping to solve problems as identified by extension staff and communities. The program is not known as an Oxfam program; beneficiaries are encouraged to take it as their own. Government extension staff work in their normal roles as civil servants, ensuring sustainability of interventions in the process.

In the partnership, Oxfam has always emphasized the fact that its role is to facilitate the development process. To ensure that this is put into practice, the following is done:

- Civil servants collect information from communities using participatory rural assessment (PRA) techniques, and on this basis develop interventions, budget and receive funds from Oxfam, use the funds, and account for them.

- Oxfam meets regularly (every four months) with sector heads to check progress and look at exit strategies.
- Civil servants are responsible for maintenance (minor) of motorbikes and conduct of training sessions.

### **Developing the Partnership: Challenges for the NNGO**

The development of this partnership has not always been smooth. Oxfam commenced working in Malawi in 1987, at a time when the country was still under a one-party dictatorship. Knowing that NGO work was new in Malawi and that it would involve working very closely with government departments, Oxfam signed a memorandum of understanding with the government before entering into negotiations with the district (Mulanje) leadership. At that time the Oxfam office was based in Zimbabwe, and the government did not allow any organization to work directly with communities. Furthermore, there was a perception in central ministries that if extension workers were cooperating with an NGO, they were not doing government's work. This was not an encouraging environment for creating a partnership that allowed Oxfam to contribute to building the capacity of civil servants, enabling them to meet the needs of communities. Even when Oxfam had government permission to work, the suspicion of NGOs was so deeply imbedded in the minds of central government staff that instructions were issued that no one should work with NGOs, and any training organized by an NGO from outside Mulanje district had to be sanctioned by headquarters before any civil servant could attend. When a senior staff member from the Ministry of Agriculture came to talk to staff and visit villages where Oxfam was working, he found to his surprise that although civil servants were working hand in hand with Oxfam they were actually carrying out their normal activities and were meeting targets as set by the ministry.

Although building a relationship with the central government took time, local staff (extension workers) on the ground were eager and willing to learn. Their eagerness to work with Oxfam can be attributed to the following:

#### *Shared Vision*

Before initiating any activities on the ground, Oxfam invited key local ministries (Agriculture and Community Development) to a tripartite meeting. The three bodies shared their vision for the district. They discovered that they all wanted to improve the livelihoods of people in the district, and the only difference was that the government departments were using top-down approaches while Oxfam believed in participatory methodologies that use a bottom-up approach. The consultation helped them develop a shared vision by building their common goals and eliminating the differences.

#### *Capacity Building*

Extension workers and other department staff were trained in participatory methodologies, and the impact of this training is visible to date. Initially, Oxfam staff were actively involved in conducting five-day participatory sessions. Today, civil servants carry out the exercise and the session's duration has been cut to three days.

During the training sessions, extension workers together with the villagers identify and analyze community problems. Using their professional expertise, civil servants assist communities in identifying root causes of problems and suggested solutions. On that basis, each ministry develops its own work plan, which is shared with other departments, Oxfam, and the communities. The plans are then consolidated into one. This is the plan that is implemented in the target area by both government and Oxfam. Oxfam's major role is to seek funding for the activities. The process has helped build the capacity of both the civil servants and the communities. Since all players take part in the needs-identification process and suggested solutions are developed openly, the interventions are owned by all—hence the successes that have been scored in the area.

To enhance the movement of information between the various departments and Oxfam and to improve the monitoring process, each ministry has appointed desk officers. The officers have gone through training of trainers sessions and are responsible for the implementation of activities in their particular sectors. They train other government officers and communities in aspects identified during participatory rural assessments, budgeting, implementation, monitoring, and accounting for the funds that are allocated to their respective departments by Oxfam.

Knowing that Oxfam will not be in the district forever and that government can contribute to the funding of local development projects, Oxfam has trained revenue collectors in the district and equipped their offices with computers with the view to enhancing revenue collection. Oxfam has also assisted the district administration in strengthening the district development fund by rendering financial support to the fund. The funds are loaned to communities that come up with community development initiatives.

### *Access to Resources*

Before Oxfam commenced working in the area, civil servants were often frustrated because they had little or no opportunity to attend refresher courses. The knowledge that they gained in college was used for many years, even when the needs of the people and the working environment kept changing. Furthermore, they were unable to effectively implement planned activities because they lacked funds, transport, and other resources. Currently, in addition to continuous training, Oxfam also provides computers, appropriate transport, and irrigation equipment.

### *Motivating Program Participants*

The villagers are excited by and continue to be dedicated to the program. Some of the motivation derives from the following:

- They are involved in all processes. The use of PRAs and other participatory tools allows communities to participate actively in the identification of needs and implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the program. This enables the beneficiaries and civil servants to own the intervention. The sense of ownership is enhanced during the PRA sessions whereby Oxfam provides food and the villagers

bring plates, firewood, and cooks. Oxfam staff is regarded as part of the team—the program is not regarded as an Oxfam program.

- Owning the problems and the solutions. Beneficiaries do realize that they face many problems and that they have to be actively involved in their own development. No one will solve the problems for them.
- Per diem. Oxfam realizes that it is not working in a vacuum. The beneficiaries do interact with other NNGOs that provide some form of incentives to program participants, hence the paying of small per diem during residential training sessions.
- Honoraria. Facilitators, who work ten hours a week, receive a small thank you amounting to K200.00 each month.

### *Impact of the Partnership*

Apart from successes highlighted above, the program has achieved some of its objectives, namely:

- Replication of interventions. The program has expanded beyond the Oxfam funded area. As they experienced success with new approaches, civil servants started replicating them elsewhere. Lessons and approaches they have gathered are thus spilling over to more areas. Oxfam, seeing that the program was successful in Mulanje district, decided to try it elsewhere. Oxfam has initiated a similar program, which falls under the initial program and is headed by a staff member who once worked in Mulanje, in Thyolo district. In order to test the theory even further, Oxfam has funded a local NGO (which was selected after a rigorous process) to implement a similar program in Phalombe district. All three districts are adjacent.
- Expansion to other government departments. Initially, Oxfam was working only with the Ministries of Agriculture and Community Development. Because of successes scored in the impact area and needs identified during PRA sessions, three more departments have been incorporated into the program—the Ministries of Water, Fisheries, and Health.
- Changing attitudes. The program has helped change attitudes of extension staff who in the past saw beneficiaries as empty slates, lacking knowledge on how they could participate in their own development. The civil servants were educated and had all the answers for people's problems. Today, they view beneficiaries as partners in development who have indigenous knowledge which, when tapped, can enhance the achievement of food security. The attitude change flows from the participatory training Oxfam introduced and supported (Training for Transformation). Additionally, extension staff from various departments have learned to work together in the identification of needs, planning, and implementation of interventions. In the past each department had its own program, and staff did not share what they were doing with each other.

Martin Whiteside and Miriam Ndalama, who conducted the program's midterm evaluation in 1999, found that the program resulted in a high degree of ownership of the program by extension staff and the community, and an increase of extension-worker

capacity including a high degree of internalization of participatory approaches. Additionally, there has been a strengthening of CBOs. In Chikondano, for example, a former farmers' group has now developed into a full-fledged CBO that provides training and loans to its members. The village of Ikhamunu has become a model in the Oxfam target area. Beneficiaries in the village have decided to prepare for the phasing out of Oxfam support. Overall, the community has found increased food security, agricultural techniques that conserve productivity of the fields, and successful income-generating activities (ex., a food grains bank which supplies maize to people even beyond their area). They are planning to electrify and to start a grinding mill enterprise. And, because of the many visitors that come to their village, they have discovered that they spend a lot of time conducting tours. To compensate for the time lost, they have decided to charge fees to visitors.

### **Capacity Building**

The international donor community places growing emphasis on capacity building and regards it as a useful tool to help reduce poverty and hunger. According to Fukuda-Parr et al. (2002), "Capacity development is arguably one of the central development challenges of the day, as much of the rest of social and economic progress will depend on it" (19). It is, however, another overworked development term in danger of being discredited. Capacity building is more than investing in people and preparing them to get the job done. Kaplan (1999) points out that "the fact they [capacity-building approaches] are demanding, challenging and strategically complex does not provide anyone with the excuse to opt for ways which clearly have little effect. It does mean, though, that we have to pay more respect to the complexity of development work than we have hitherto" (15). Ellerman (2002), in his comments about the fundamental conundrum of helping people to help themselves, suggests that "perhaps it is time to consider the less-trodden path of the indirect approach, which emphasizes forms of assistance based on respect for the autonomy of the doers [and] start from where the doers are and see the world through their eyes" (57).

The following mini-case recounts the evolution of the work of a local NGO in Pakistan, Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO).<sup>7</sup> Safia Nawaz drew the case information from a larger evaluation project she conducted for SPO. SPO is one of the biggest support NGOs in Pakistan and is a leading proponent of participatory development. Its mission is to increase the capacity of the rural poor and strengthen CBOs to a level where they can be more professional and effective entities and ultimately deliver sustainable development objectives on their own. SPO is also involved in the promotion of civil society movements, sociopolitical awareness raising, and maintaining horizontal and vertical linkages with CBOs, other support organizations, donor communities, and the state. SPO was initially established by the Canadian International Development Agency in 1987 as a Small Projects Office in order to manage the Social Sector Fund through community-based organizations in Pakistan. During this period, SPO's role was primarily project management and administration. In the early 1990s, SPO reassessed its approach, in part using the results of a nationwide review of project achievements. It found that funded projects were stranded, with unsatisfactory outcomes. The CBOs implementing projects were focused on welfare and

dependent on funding. In 1994, SPO shifted its strategic focus from being a funding agency to being a support agency, and became an independent NGO.

SPO meets capacity-building needs largely through its Development Planning and Management Training Program (DPM), which is a comprehensive, eighteen-month training program. DPM aims at broadening understanding of development concepts and developing skills relating to organizational management and the project management cycle. DPM is also combined with a small, one-time development grant (called *choti* funding). This one time grant (US\$165) is given to almost every CBO selected for DPM training. The objective of this funding is to provide practical experience in project management for CBOs via implementing a real project activity. In most cases, funds are used to set up microcredit or income-generating activities. Data gathered during field visits reveals that in Sindh province, between February 1999 and June 2002, eighty-four of eighty-nine *choti*-funded projects were engaged in microcredit activities.

SPO has grown, learned, and adapted since its founding in 1987, and is well established in the NGO community in Pakistan. Its organizational history and implementation experience suggest some lessons for leaders and managers inside national NGOs and in donor agencies. As SPO has developed, it has made changes in its approach. It has, for example, moved toward supporting capacity building at the associational or network (not just CBO) level, supporting the capacity of participatory development coalitions to network and do policy advocacy from a rights-based approach. Many of the groups with which SPO is now engaged are involved in lobbying and advocacy activities around issues like honor killings and water rights. This recent shift in SPO's policy, to incorporate the rights-based approach alongside the project management approach, has both raised concerns about the DPM training cycle and led to an understanding within SPO management that part of the structure and content of its capacity building training program must be changed.

SPO, like many other NGOs, is passing through critical phases of development. It has used evaluation and reflection to reconsider some of its perceptions and expectations about community involvement and their capacity for social activism through microcredit projects. The *choti* funding was intended for a range of small community development projects on which CBOs participating in the DPM could directly apply the management skills they were learning. In reality, most CBOs used the *choti* funding for microcredit projects with the unexpected consequence of sidelining the development management capacity-building function. The microcredit components were quite time consuming, requiring substantial human and financial resources for design of projects, their implementation, monitoring, and assurance of loan recoveries. Due to the small size of the funding and the nature of the microcredit activities, the impact and learning often remained limited to a small number of direct stakeholders, perhaps only five to eight households. Program coordinators, who intermediate between SPO and the CBOs, have had to spend considerable time monitoring the progress of each microcredit project, as well as increasing the number of CBOs participating in the DPM program and its associated *choti* funding. The focus on making the microcredit funding work and expanding the number of CBOs dominated staff efforts.

The original concept—that training in capacity building would be more effective if the CBOs had the opportunity to practice those skills in actual projects—remains valid. The *choti* funding was an innovative way to allow CBOs to initiate a project. The

problem has been the focus on microcredit projects for use of *choti* funding. CBOs in Pakistan have been very successful in implementing other small-scale initiatives or in taking the lead in other rights-based development initiatives. In the DPM program, the availability of *choti* funding may have constrained participating CBO opportunity to think beyond microcredit and come up with their own needs and ideas for small development initiatives that could strengthen their communities. The broad objectives like poverty reduction and improving livelihood, often set in microcredit proposals, were internalized by the SPO staff as key objectives, even though SPO clearly intended that *choti* funding could be used for many types of community projects and was intended to provide practical experience accompanying the training in the DPM. *Choti* funding had not been set up with the expectation that it would have major direct impacts on people's lives.

The difficulties SPO has faced in keeping the focus on building capacity reflect the perverse effects of trying to balance organizational mission with the goals of donors. National NGOs like SPO are torn between two poles. On one hand they are focused on communities and change at the grassroots level, an environment where there is considerable uncertainty. On the other hand they are required to respond to donor needs, which may include a project focus and quick results. In the SPO case, there was pressure to focus on the number of *choti* funding projects given to CBOs, and to measure achievements in terms of numbers of beneficiaries and households. Staff focused on microcredit projects. Balancing the two imperatives sometimes has perverse consequences for these projects. In the case of SPO, there were questions about quality and management of projects implemented with the *choti* funding and about success in building capacity of participating organizations. Internal assessment suggested a low success rate.

## CONCLUSION

Some common themes run through the three cases. First, power inequities exist whenever an outside agency, whether international or national, introduces financial or intellectual resources to a community. Whether local communities retain control over (ownership of) changes in their community is the consequence of explicit operational decisions and of values in practice on the part of the intervening agency. In the case of Senegal, Tostan had a broad economic and social development mission, but a specific objective caught between human rights standards and local cultural practices. It addressed the tension through its values and its operational methodology. On the value side, it believes that changing the practice of FGC cannot be imposed—that change needs to emerge from community understanding. Operationally, it used adult education methodologies founded on a belief in the ability of adult learners to build on their existing capacities and knowledge to assess new information and make new judgments. In the Malawi case, Oxfam had an operational ideology of supporting local groups to implement change programs and set up practical methodologies of participatory needs identification and program development that left the responsibility in the hands of the local partners.

Second, an important characteristic of ownership is that the results derive not only from the participation of beneficiaries and communities in identification and design, but



also from the very identity of the change intervention. In the Tostan case, the declarations were village declarations. In the Malawi case, the notion was very strong that the SHSLP was not an Oxfam project but rather a Malawi effort that Oxfam supported. The challenge for development managers may then be in how they manage relations with their funders, who want to know what their project achieved and who may want a different brand on the project.

Third, time is essential to creating trust, building partnership relationships, learning from experience, adapting programs, and producing results. Tostan and Oxfam recognized the importance of building trust, and in the cases of Oxfam invested years in building a relationship with a government that was originally quite suspicious. SPO has an internal culture that allows it to reflect on practice and to learn from experience, even when the good idea of *choti* funding led to an unproductive focus on tiny but time-consuming projects. It was prepared to make mistakes as it learned how to best serve the evolution of CBOs and networks for effective community participation in development. The time required on the ground is not the same as the time schedule that some donors may have in mind. The SPO experience suggests that pressure for results and measurable deliverables can subvert project intent.

Fourth, the need to show results may be the most difficult challenge facing development managers in NGOs. Showing results is part of accountability, both to communities with which NGOs are working and to the donors. The case studies suggest that the responsibility for results can be shared or even delegated to partners and communities as they participate in the planning and implementation. Legitimate accountabilities to donors may be more difficult when specific outcomes are determined not by a project document with the donor, but out of a planning process in the community. The Tostan case suggests the importance of a continuing dialogue with donors. But donors themselves may need to develop a more textured understanding of development change in communities, and the time required. For development management academics, there is a challenge to help practitioners think about measuring results.

Fifth, all the case studies identify the importance of capacity building. SPO is an interesting case as an indigenous NGO dedicated to building community organization capacity not just for service delivery but also for influencing policies and social practices. The SPO experiences suggest the fragility of our models for building capacity and the challenge of finding outside funders patient enough to support a context-specific learning process.

Finally, learning how to support local governments to become effective development agents is important. Government staff and extension workers at the local level, as the Malawi case suggests, are an undervalued and underfunded resource for managing change and development. Governments, uniquely among development agents, have permanence and are everywhere throughout a country. Lack of skills (particularly for participatory community development), low salaries, poor morale, absence of operating budgets, and even corruption, constrain the effectiveness of locally based government staff. A convergence of reinforcing factors has made it difficult for local government staff to acquire the capacities for effective management of development. These factors include international financial institution policies that mandate privatizing services and shrinking government.

As governments have been asked to downsize, NGOs (first international and then national) and CBOs have emerged. In some cases they have been perceived as effective service providers. From the 1980s on, the roles of NGOs as development service providers multiplied. NGOs, it has been argued, are much better than government departments at reaching communities and delivering programs to people. Even policies intended to decentralize responsibility to local governments were rarely accompanied by a decentralization of the capacities and resources necessary to accept responsibility. Shrinking the role of local government and working around the staff locally posted has costs. International NGOs may come and go, and donor funding for local NGO and CBO programs can be fickle. Government staff remains and offers the potential for continuity. The Malawi case is an interesting example of an outside NGO attempting to fortify rather than displace the vital role that local government can play. It is a model that bears replication.

## NOTES

1. The UNDP 1990 *Human Development Report* proposed measures other than income and growth to define development. That HDR began, "This report is about people—and about how development enlarges their choices" (1). It went on to say that "people are the real wealth of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives" (9). Wealth and income are means, not ends.

2. The information (including quotations) in this mini-case study comes from field work done in Senegal in 2002-03 by Khady Ba as part of her master's degree in sustainable international development at the Heller School at Brandeis University.

3. While there has been a mobilization of governmental and civil society support for children's and women's rights, it is worth noting that not all states (for example, the U.S.) have acceded to or ratified the agreements noted.

4. Tostan is registered in the U.S. and raises funds there.

5. The comments of Molly Melching were gathered from presentations, meetings, and informal discussions with Khady Ba during her work with Tostan in Senegal during 2002-03.

6. The information in this mini-case study comes from fieldwork done in Malawi in 2002-03 by Anderson Kamwendo as part of his master's degree in sustainable international development at the Heller School at Brandeis University. It incorporates material from interviews, observations, and a review of documents. It relies particularly on internal reports by Max Lawson (2000) and Martin Whiteside and Miriam Ndalama (1999). Interviews with Fumakazi Munthali, program officer of SHSLP, and John Makina, program manager of the SHSLP, were conducted at the Shire Highlands Sustainable Livelihoods Program offices in Mulanje district in Malawi on 29 and 30 July 2002 and 1 July 2002, respectively. Kamwendo also interviewed Mr. Aubrey Kambewa, desk officer in the Ministry of Agriculture, at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security in Mulanje district in Malawi on 4 September 2002.

7. The information in this mini-case study comes from fieldwork done in Pakistan in 2002-03 by Safia Nawaz as part of her master's degree in sustainable international development at the Heller School at Brandeis University.

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