



Graduate School of Development Studies

**Does Local Knowledge Count in NGO-driven Community Development Processes? The case of participatory approaches in water projects in Kitui District, Kenya**

A Research Paper presented by:

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in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of  
MASTERS OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Specialization:  
**Local and Regional Development**  
**LRD**

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The Hague, The Netherlands  
November, 2008

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## **Acknowledgement**

First and foremost I acknowledge Henk Haring of Edukans Foundation who through his patronage I secured a scholarship to study at ISS. I thank the director of Edukans, Kees de Jong and Dick Huijsman of Rotary Bussum for accepting to co-finance my study. Many thanks go to SASOL through the directorship of Prof. Mutiso for support and granting me the opportunity to further my career.

I pass my gratitude to the women and men of Kitui who offered their time to participate in the interviews and focused group discussions. Without their input this paper would have been just a story. I pay tribute to Sam Mutiso my manager who numerously speaks against marginalization of local knowledge with passion. Many thanks go to SASOL staff who arranged all my field visits, Kennedy Mutati and Fredrick Kimwilu for notes taking and my research assistant Diana Kalekye who braved the odds and crisscrossed the terrains to interview the Community Organizers.

I acknowledge the love and moral support given by my girlfriend Hilda and my son Dick and for bearing with my absentia. Special thanks to my mum Beth Peter for filial love and teaching me tolerance and humility and my brothers and sisters who have never failed in their sibling love. Not forgetting my loving nieces Milly and Lydia who ceaselessly pray for me.

Lastly but not least many thanks go to my supervisors, Nicholas Awortwi and Erhard Berner for their professional guidance and numerous comments which shaped this paper to be what it is today. Not forgetting my discussant Paula Ellinger for her critical comments and the 2007-08 LRD batch for the gross happiness.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this paper to my son Dick Mutinda who celebrated his 5<sup>th</sup> birthday on the 24<sup>th</sup> September 2008, the day I had my research seminar. What a coincidence!!

## List of Acronyms

ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
AMREF	African Medical and Research Foundation
CBO	Community Based Organization
CO(s)	Community Organizer(s)
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DDC	District Development Committee
DFID	Department For International Development
FGD(s)	Focused Group Discussion(s)
GNP	Gross National Product
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
ILO	International Labour Organization
KDC	Kitui Development Centre
KFSM	Kenya Food Security Meeting
KIHBS	Kenya Integrated Household Survey 2005-2006
MDG(s)	Millennium Development Goal(s)
NCAPD	National Coordinating Agency for Population and Development
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NWSS	National Water Service Strategy 2007-2016
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PLA	Participatory Learning and Action
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
RRA	Rapid Rural Appraisal
SASOL	Sahelian Solutions
Sida	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Education Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VDC	Village Development Committee
WB	World Bank



## Abstract

The last two decades have witnessed a proliferation and a continued professionalization of NGOs in not only Kitui district but the so called developing countries. These NGOs have been critical in facilitating local communities build capacity, reduce inequalities and alleviate poverty (Esman and Upholf 1984, Fowler 2000, Thomas and Allen 2000). This has been enabled by embracing participatory approaches which recognize that the poor know better their socio-economic situations and are no longer passive in development processes (Berner and Phillips 2005, Long 2001). Generally there is no NGO in the 21<sup>st</sup> century which does not profess to utilize bottom-up approaches which recognize the importance of local knowledge and community involvement (Stirrat 1996). PRA is one of the consultative approaches employed by NGOs to aid local communities in sharing local knowledge (Chambers 1992).

However in reality the rhetoric might be too pronounced than the practice as marginalization of local knowledge is one of the key problems facing contemporary community development. Taking the case of water projects in Kitui District in the marginal easterly province, there are many cases of failed projects which attest to concealed or blatant marginalization of local knowledge as illustrated in the Kanziku brackish water case. In a world reeling with scientific imponderables and stereotypes, indigenous perspectives are viewed as inferior to western, external and science based knowledge (Heneriko 2000, Ocholla 2007).

This paper analyses how NGOs in Kitui District in the process of facilitating local communities to realize water projects, identify, validate and integrate local knowledge in the development process. It posits to do this by following the processes of participation (consultation and contribution) and community organizing. It looks on how the donor-NGO relationship is structured, how COs relate with communities, and whose voice in the community counts and implications to local knowledge integration. This is supported by primary data collected in the field from FGDs, key informants, COs, and other NGO officers plus my own experience as a CO with one of the NGOs. The data is analyzed and discussed against the concepts of Community, Community Development, Participation, Local Knowledge, Community Management and Empowerment.

From the findings it is clear that Kitui communities hold immense local knowledge (environmental knowledge, beliefs and values) and NGOs have recognized its importance and embrace participation and its off-springs (PRA, PLA) to capture local ideas and solutions. However the process is riddled with structural rigidities that emanate from the NGO-donor patron-client relationship hence not flexible enough to permit integration of local knowledge. Further the COs fail to transcend their professional biases and attitudes hence lead to ‘facipulation’ and marginalization of local knowledge. Also communities are not homogenous as sometimes depicted by NGOs and the process is hijacked by the powerful and dominated by men hence the voices of the poor remain unheard. In general the whole process is expert-driven and outsider-driven hence more often than not is structured to serve outsider interests with vague reasons for integrating local knowledge.

However all is not lost. In fact NGOs are doing the rights things but they are not doing things right. What is needed is readjustment of methodologies and relaxation of donor conditionalities to make it more conducive and flexible for local knowledge integration. After all external intervention is necessary to alleviate the water shortages and if the community is left to their own devices (Berner and Phillips 2005) they would be worse off.

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

In contemporary academic landscape, the study of development cannot be complete without the mention of the role played by NGOs. Civil societies have been in the core advocating for inclusion of local knowledge in development. Local knowledge has the potentiality to contribute to ideas and solutions needed in the fight against poverty and global inequalities hence contributing to the achievement of the MDGs. This study will contribute to the content of Course 4201: Actors in Local Development offered in the LRD specialisation especially in the role played by NGOs and community organizations.

## **Keywords**

Community, Community Development, Participation, Community Organizers, Non-Governmental Organizations, Local knowledge

# Chapter 1

## General Introduction

*"When people are oppressed or reduced to the culture of silence, they do not participate in their own humanization"*

*(Goulet 1989)*

### 1.1 Background

There is sufficient evidence that NGOs play a critical role in facilitating local communities build capacity, reduce inequalities and alleviate poverty. This has been facilitated by community participation and empowerment whereby local communities are involved in decision making, implementation and running of projects with a goal to inculcate ownership and foster sustainability (Esman and Uphoff 1984, Fowler 2000, Mayo and Craig 1995, Thomas and Allen 2000, Woodhouse; 2000).

Community participation and empowerment are a recent phenomenon of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century which have revolutionized intentional<sup>1</sup> development, from the dominant top-bottom approaches to bottom-up approaches. The classical top-bottom development approaches of the 1950's and 1960's; the rightist modernization and leftist dependency approaches, which sidelined local knowledge as the view of the powerless were replaced in the 1980's by the rightist market-liberal and leftist neo-populist approaches which recognizes the potentiality of local knowledge (Preston 1996; Potter et al 1999; Sillitoe 2002).

Development has over years been undertaken on behalf of citizens by the state and development agencies- NGOs and CBOs in what can be summed up in the concept of trusteeship<sup>2</sup> though its legitimacy is highly contentious. These institutions in their whims command extensive inputs – financial and technical, enough to turn the Sahel into a flawless verdure. But the Sahel has continued to encroach despite the vast sums that have been invested. Today 1.1 billion people in developing countries have inadequate access to water. Something must be wrong somewhere as Hobart (1993:1) simply puts it “instead it would seem that development projects often contribute to the deterioration”. Religiously mismanagement bears the blame and surely developing countries especially Africa is prone to endemic mismanagement and grand corruption hence increased polarization. Critics have referred to development as big business not only for the western world but also for the receiving states, development agencies, and NGOs (Hobart 1993:2).

The main argument of this paper is that, development agencies over the years have marginalized local knowledge, even in the contemporary bottom-up development landscape where community participatory approaches are not a preserve but the prescription leading to failed projects. Dysfunctional projects attest to the blatant or concealed hegemony in which outsider-expertise knowledge takes precedence over local knowledge. Anthropology provides prove that local communities have operated some of the most sophisticated institutions in human history and possess a fund of immense knowledge, ideas and expertise valuable in development. I agree with Emery (2000:10) that local knowledge is not just a mere compilation of simple “facts drawn from local and often remote environments” as sometimes depicted by academic imperialism but “a sophisticated system of knowledge drawing on centuries of wisdom and experience that also grows and changes with new information”. But as Hobart (1993:2) sums it “the relationship of developers and those to-be-developed is constituted by the developers’ knowledge and categories..., (and) the epistemological and power aspects of such processes are often obscured by discourses on development being couched predominantly in the idiom of economics, technology and management. What is significantly absent in most public discussion of development are the ways in which the knowledges of the peoples being developed are ignored or treated as mere obstacles to rational progress.” Such criticism cast against development agencies may sound

cynical but “when people are oppressed or reduced to the culture of silence, they do not participate in their own humanization” (Goulet 1989:165).

I recognize that projects also fail due to mismanagement but this paper is concerned with the consequences of sidelining local knowledge. I will focus on how NGOs in the process of project formulation, implementation and evaluation treat local knowledge in the realization of water projects. The area of study is Kitui District, a semi arid peripheral region in the easterly province of Kenya. There are no special characteristic leading to the choice of Kitui besides my familiarity and experience working in the area. Based on the nature of the subject under discussion and given similarities in operations of NGOs, this study could be replicated in another region leading to similar findings. Water projects have been chosen since Kitui is semi-arid and projects aimed at ameliorating the problem are prioritized. Most of the NGOs if not dealing with water per se will have a water component.

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Marginalization of local knowledge is one of the key problems facing contemporary community development not only in Kitui District but in most developing countries. Donors and NGOs even though committed in facilitating local communities to achieve own development have their own interests. This leads to a donor-NGO-community relationship that is shaped by the developers’ perceptions of knowledge and may be structurally too rigid to allow for holistic integration of local knowledge hence stumbling participation. Projects (state schemes or NGO-driven) that ignore local knowledge can have a foul start, faulty implementation or total collapse hence failing to deliver the expected outcomes. The Kanziku brackish water case is just one example of the many evident failed projects due to disregard to local knowledge.

The 1990s witnessed a proliferation of NGOs in Kitui District with an active number of 17 by 2007 (NCAPD 2007). They have contributed in realizing water projects shaped by modernistic technologies including water tanks, spring protection, sand-dams, wells, boreholes, and rock catchments. This has been accompanied by continued professionalization to enhance the competence of field staff to embrace accountable management and participatory approaches. While enhancement of the caliber is a prerequisite for service delivery, it also generates a higher social status and bestows power to the field officers. Kitui people have been complaining of being manipulated by field officers who may do it consciously or unconsciously especially towards their professionalism in the process of facilitating project implementation.

The new genre of field staff is a result of a competitive process of recruitment which has brought on board male and female experts from within and without the community. Organic organizers have a mastery of local area dynamics, knowledge and language while external organizers have general wide experience (Constantino-David 1995). I will look at how these genres of community organizers transcend locality, class and professional biases to facilitate development. The issue is to find out whether it counts at all if one is drawn from within or without the community and what implications has it on integration of local knowledge.

Like any other social action, the donor-NGO-community relationship is hierarchical and a system of power. Within and between each level there are diverse categories and differentiations that have profound impact on the way development is couched (Berner 1998, Kabeer 1994). While NGOs will talk about having consulted communities it is always questionable whose voice they refer to as community voice and what methods do they employ to reach all the diverse groups. In other words how do those smart professionals

circumvent the layers of community leadership and masculinities to establish rapport and listen to the poor women who bear the blunt of water shortage in fragile ecologies? One also wonders whether NGOs really have their own voice or just blow the tune of the donor (Hulme and Edwards 1997). Are NGOs flexible enough to integrate local knowledge without upsetting their ‘masters’?

NGOs more often than not access donor funding through a process of competitive proposal writing whose terms of reference are stipulated in the proposal guidelines and contract agreement and evaluated through the logframe input-output process. A process in which terms of contract are drafted even before the community needs are identified, proposals formulated even before communities are consulted and technologies chosen even before projects are identified leaves one wondering when, where and how useful will be local knowledge in the process. A simple question can be, suppose in the process of identifying sites or implementing the project the water engineer learns from the community that the technology prescribed will not be appropriate or sustainable, does (s)he have the mandate to shift the technology to a more appropriate one? These and more questions surround the dilemma of the power hierarchy exhibited by the donor-NGO-Community tripartite relationship and elucidate my desire to study how this structure is flexible enough to permit local knowledge integration.

### *1.2.1 Kanziku, the Place of Brackish Water*

Kanziku, a rusty dusty market dotted with weathered bricked and earthen houses attests to a long history dating to colonial periods with water projects that never saw the light of the day. Situated approximately 100km from Kitui town (the district headquarters) in the relatively marginal Mutomo region (classified ecologically as Zone 4), is characterized by dryland trees of acacias and commifora species. Water scarcity is the order of the day and Muvuko stream, a seasonal watercourse is the main source. Scoop-holes<sup>3</sup> in the streambed going to a depth of up to 10 metres yielding less than 400 litres per day provide water to the thirsty households. During the six dry months, May to October, families (women especially) have to queue even overnight to draw a quota of water not exceeding 80 litres (respondents, personal observations). The problem is aggravated by the situation that only a few sections of the stream provide fresh water, the rest is saline and the community knows all the freshwater points.

In mitigation the government for the last 5 decades has sunk 4 boreholes around Kanziku market within a radius of approximately 1 kilometre. Two of them have been sunk within the last 10 years while the latest was in 2007. The truth is none of them is functional to date. The earliest date back to 1960s and stands as a rumble of ruins with a derrick and vandalized pump house jutting from the thickets. From my respondents, even though this serves as a case of mismanagement of resources, during its functional heydays the borehole produced saline water not fit for human consumption. At its worst it was used for cleaning and watering livestock. None of the other three went beyond the drilling and testing stage. In a turn of events all yielded saline water not fit for human consumption hence abandoned. The most interesting bit is the circumstances surrounding the latest one (2007 borehole). This borehole is drilled in the precincts of Kanziku dispensary and was meant to serve the dispensary, government offices, Kanziku market and adjacent villages.

For the last 7 years Kanziku has enjoyed the services of stable VDCs who deliberate on implementation of new projects. This is a participatory development structure which allows for local knowledge, ideas, needs and resources to be integrated in projects. This case is interesting because in an era where bottom-up approaches are the order of the day, the government planted a borehole without consulting the local community structures.

The sad news is that the borehole hit very saline water which even after two sampling and testing attempts proved to be unfit. This news did not catch the community off guard since their expectations were not high; they knew somehow the water will be saline. Throughout the drilling session they watched in dismay as experts crisscrossed the area making transect points with hydrometers to locate ground water hence never bothering to consult their experience. After the disappointing water testing results, the drilling company and government officers left leaving behind a corked stump of a borehole pipe as witness to their efforts. Today Kanziku suffers from the same water shortage besides intermittent small scale sources realized with assistance from NGOs; SASOL with sand-dams<sup>4</sup> and school water tanks and ADRA with wells, rock catchments and earth pans.



**Remains of the 1960s borehole**



**The 2007 borehole in the precincts of Kanziku dispensary that will never be ( Stump of corked piping)**

This case opens up the theme of this study and provides a background to the dilemmas surrounding integration of local knowledge in community development projects.

### **1.3 Research Objectives and Research Questions:**

#### *1.3.1 Objectives*

The objective of this research is to analyze the processes of local knowledge identification, interpretation, and integration in water development projects in Kitui district, Kenya.

#### *1.3.2 Research Questions*

1. What local knowledge is relevant to community development processes and how do they affect the development of water projects?
2. In the relationship between the diverse community categories, community and NGO, and NGOs and Donors, whose knowledge counts?
3. How do COs identify validate, interpret, communicate and integrate local knowledge into the development process?
4. How competent and flexible are COs in adjusting their methods in development projects in view of local knowledge?
5. Using Kitui water projects what are the challenges and lessons to be learnt?

## 1.4 Methods of Data Collection

This study is qualitative in nature and posits to answer the aforementioned questions by largely utilizing primary data but of necessity substantiated with secondary data. Three main sources of primary data have been variously utilized including semi-structured interviews with 5 key informants, 2 focused group discussions (10-13 persons each drawn from the participating community inclusive of men, women, and leaders), 5 NGO COs, and personal observation (including my 6 year experience working with one of the NGOs in the district).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen as a good source of in-depth wide ranged data. Focus group discussions were selected as a way of providing widely acceptable data with minimum personal biases. Key informants were chosen from people with vast knowledge and considerable experience in local development processes but not holding government or political positions.

Secondary data included:

- The 2002 Masters thesis of Maarten Onneweer “*Ithembo the place of offerings*” who followed the landscape of shrines and their implications to development in Kitui
- District profile from the District Development Office
- Water Act 2002 from the District Water Office

## 1.5 Practical Limitations

- Having worked with most of the people I interviewed, my presence had the potentiality to influence responses no matter how I tried or advised the respondents to be objective.
- I do not pretend that my sample size was representative enough. Most of my respondents were drawn from the western and southern regions. A period of one month is not adequate to collect comprehensive data.
- Semi structured interviews run a risk of collecting data with wide variations hence difficult to analyze. I have tried to include most of the key aspects reported by the respondents.
- One of my key informants in Yatta got caught up in a school committee meeting and I ended finding a quick replacement.

## 1.6 Organization of Paper

This paper is organized in five chapters. Chapter 2 brings together all major concepts on participatory community development that will be used to analyze the process of integrating local knowledge in water projects. Chapter 3 will discuss factors that influence integration of local knowledge at the Identification and Planning phase including local conditions, government policies and NGO-donor relationship. The next chapter will discuss how in reality participation and community organizing are applied and their effect on local knowledge. The last chapter will provide a summary of major findings and conclusions.

## Chapter 2

### Conceptual Framework

*“Some development ‘fads’ clearly dominate and outlast others, but the impetuosity with which they are advocated impede critical examination”.*

*(Awortwi 1999:7)*

#### 2.1 Introduction

This research is based on the people-centred approach to development (Chambers 1993, 1997) which recognizes that, the voice of the local communities has to be put first in determining and implementing development projects. The following concepts related to the people-centred approach will be referred variously in this paper.

#### 2.2 The Concept of Community

In the world of development the concept of community can easily camouflage in one of its three dimensions- spatial, political, and social. No wonder Berner and Phillips (2005:23) say that “the concept is fashionable to the point of ubiquity, but remains deeply problematic”. In its simplistic version, the concept of community has been paraded to represent a perceived isolated group of homogenous and harmonious individuals with common past, present and destiny. In its common daily usage Berner and Phillips wonder and ask;

“When NGO activists and social scientists talk about how ‘a community’ lobbied local government, build a well, borrowed money or decided on a development strategy, who are they talking about? Do they mean everyone in the community, or just the majority, or just the older ones, just the rich ones, just the men, is the will of ‘the community’ the same as the will of the community leadership?”

Societies are a complex diversified and differentiated systems of interactions fragmented in lines of culture, religion, division of labour, class, gender etc. NGOs often isolate the poor as a homogenous tangible entity hence ignoring or obstructing the underlying systems of authority and control. According to social relations framework (Kabeer 1994:282), communities as institutions are composed of rules which govern them, resources and their distribution, categories of people, different objectives and activities to achieve them, and systems of power. Berner (1998:7) agrees that “categories are a means to describe the diversity, or horizontal differentiation, of a society. They reflect and try to grasp the fact that social structure consists of a multiple of groups, positions, roles, etc”. I agree with Awortwi (1999:4) that even though common sense dictates that the concept of community involves people living in an area, “not only the people and the area are important but also the relationships, interdependencies and interactions among them”. I will argue that different categories will hold diverse context specific knowledge vital to development and only when they have all been give equal chances to contribute their knowledge can the process be said to be inclusive. Therefore if development has to be successful and inclusive this diversity has to be recognized and reflected in policies and projects.

#### 2.3 Community Development

The concept of community development has its roots in the politico-administrative transformations of the nation-state in the post Second World War era to provide social development through welfare programmes in Europe and America (Arce 2003, Atampugre 1998). Even with its espoused aims of solidarity, equality and grassroots democracy



community development in the 1950s through the early 1970s was essentially a bureaucratically institutionalized instrument of control and collaboration with national development efforts (Oakley 1998:366).

This approach to development was criticized for addressing only the physical and infrastructural symptoms of underdevelopment rather than the core causes of poverty, undermining local cultures and practices, and being divisive as strategy against popular will (Arce 2003:201). The hullabaloo of social and cooperative movements of the time could be labeled as a smokescreen to cover up the political nature of community development as an instrument of state control (Dore and Mars 1981). The 1970s saw a paradigm shift in development practice which gained momentum in the 1980s and was consolidated in the 1990s ushering in community-led development initiatives with multiple players.

The neo-liberal ideologies of the 1980s presented the market as the epitome of natural regulation and transparency fit to replace the developmental state which was largely accused of being corrupt, replete with rent seeking and political patronage behaviour. The focus was now on mobilization of individual resources for generating local capacity, vitality, competition and rise of new intellectual ideas rather than state intervention (Arce 2003: 202). One decade along the line and the dream never came true though. The failure of the Bretton Woods Institutions<sup>5</sup> structural adjustments programmes in countries in the South (Rodrik 2006) led to the 1980s to be infamously referred as the “lost decade”. These neoliberal stabilization prescriptions failed to rejuvenate governments in stimulating a favourable environment for effective and efficient service delivery to citizens. The third-sector<sup>6</sup> emerged as a key player in developmental affairs to compliment and check the state whose emphasis is countervailing power, and views community development as a liberating, empowering and negotiation process (Galjart 1982).

Awortwi (1999:5) says that “community development can be defined as the organization of people in a settlement to deal themselves with problems and opportunities that affect their lives and patterns of living. This can be described as a community-driven development process that involves groups of people at the community level (rural or urban) to come together to initiate collectively some action to improve their wellbeing”. This definition pinpoints the common elements of local development as a process emanating from the local people themselves, utilizing local and external resources and embracing participatory processes.

Community development has metamorphosed over decades with changes in political landscapes and “in what some continue to call the Third World, the term has lost much of its early potency and has been replaced by a wider body of concepts and terms which reflect the liberation from centrally-directed community development initiatives and their replacement by a more political and power-focused perspective” (Oakley 1998:366). These include sustainable development, participation and empowerment.

## **2.4 Participation**

“It is now widely agreed that the poor are not passive in the development process” (Berner and Phillips 2005:17) “because who better than the poor themselves can understand their economic and social conditions and the problems they face, and have insights that can help shape initiatives intended to benefit them?”(Long 2001:2). Participation is advocated to inculcate ownership, motivate a sense of self-reliance, and ensure equitable distribution of resources (Awortwi 1999:7). This consensus has been arrived after a long enduring search to find sustainable ways of delivering development after decades of failed top-down approaches.

African anthropological research and mythology is full of stories of self-help as the driving societal force in pre-colonial history. Cases on participation have been traced even during the colonial times in Africa. In the 1940s and early 1950s, a Senior District Officer in Eastern Nigeria, E. R Chadwick is known to have numerous written on the potentiality of self help drive in increasing the capacity of local communities to meet their needs (Guimãraes 2007:1). In Latin America, the doyen of adult education, Paul Freire is known to have written in his 1970s famous work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, how illiterates when provided with necessary tools can deal critically with their social realities (Long 2001:7). Berner and Phillips (2005:19) say that “community self-help as such is of course nothing new but rather the default strategy of the poor. As documented by their very survival, poor people are experts in making the most of scarce resources under adverse circumstances, and have always used institutions of mutual support and risk-sharing in order to do so”.

NGOs started to adopt participatory processes in the 1970s, but national governments and international agencies were hooked to externally-driven expert-designed development programmes despite registering more casualties than successes. Several conferences were held on the theme on participatory development and initial donor interest in participation can be traced to the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization organized World Conference on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development (WCARRD –Rome) in 1979. Advocacy on participatory development amassed a critical mass to trigger all major donors to join the bandwagon; Sida and GTZ in the 1980s, WB, USAID and DFID in the 1990s (Long 2001:2-3).

Since then participation gained wide accolade and promoted as the whimsical magic to jumpstart sustainable development. But what it entails remained a mirage as there was no blueprint for participation. As Guimãraes (2007:2) puts it “inevitably, at the same time as participation became a ‘good thing’, there was also a trend towards greater diversity in the interpretations of what it really means and in the forms of its application in practice”. In the 1990s participation as a term was radically and controversially used, overused and misused in the development world in different forms to mean different things (Awortwi 1999:6; Botes and Rensburg 2000:41).

Its ambiguity is vested in its resilience as an end in itself (equity and empowerment argument) or a means to an end (efficiency argument) (Berner and Phillips 2005, Guimãraes 2007, Long 2001). As an end from Amartya Sen’s point of view, freedom to make meaningful choices between various options is the essence of development and a precondition for personal wellbeing and as a means, a process to increase efficiency and inculcate ownership. It can also be criticized as a well devised scam since development is a power play arena and development agencies cannot willingly relinquish decision-making power to beneficiaries (Berner and Phillips 2005:18). Participation itself has been problematic in meaning and application, has been used to mean either the mere contribution of resources (money, labour and local materials), or consultation of local communities or both contribution and consultation. The contribution bit is more pronounced to the extent that it is a common phenomenon to see groups of poor people working for excessive hours and/or contributing their last penny in projects in the name of inculcating ownership. Whenever consultation is done there are high chances that the process is skewed, flawed, entangled in the existing power structures, and often seen as a window dressing activity to secure donor funding (Tuzzie and Tuozzo 2001). When participation is applied to mean contribution only, more often than not it is viewed and resented by the poor as a social and economic burden which renders them more vulnerable. Vulnerability exposes the poor to working for extended hours in diversified livelihood activities hence left with less spare time for leisure and/or collective action.

The two most referenced typologies of participation are Arnstein's 1969, 8-rung Ladder of Participation and Pimbert and Pretty 1994 Participation Hierarchy. They are a typical theoretical reflection of what different perspectives of participation can be generated. However both of these typologies are limited as they depict participation as a desirable higher goal which can be achieved through going up the hierarchies hence in this paper I will not refer to them.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there is no NGO which does not profess to utilize a variance of bottom-up approaches that embrace beneficiary involvement and recognize the importance of local knowledge (Stirrat 1996:67). While several scholars (Cohen and Uphoff 1977, Pearse and Stifle 1979, Ghai 1990, Chambers 1995) and institutions (OECD 1994, WB 1994) came up with some of the many definitions of participation (see annex 1), some of the key principles emanating from these definitions include:

- Voluntary active involvement without coercion or manipulation.
- Inclusive and diverse: open to everyone and all groups without distinction.
- Power is decentralized and shared.
- Transparency and accountability. Business conducted openly and publicized widely and information availed at due time in the right way.
- Respect for all and all ideas. All ideas welcomed as source of inspiration with potential value.
- Open minded without being controlled by any single organization, group or philosophy.

I concur with Berner and Phillips (2005:17) that community participation is now mainstream management theory. It implies the involvement of local communities, as citizens not beneficiaries, in provision of resources and decision-making process at all levels of project cycle (Chambers 1995, Uphoff and Esman 1984). This echoes what Awortwi (1999:8) says "in other words, it involves households taking initiative and action that is stimulated by their own thinking and deliberations, and over which they can exert effective control.....no longer will people passively wait for the technicians or favour-pandering politicians to come around with solutions, rather solutions are the outcome of participatory planning".

#### *2.4.1 Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)*

There have been attempts by development theorists, practitioners and academia to capture local knowledge in development practices and discourses in participatory processes. PRA approach (and its predecessor PLA) is one of the methods utilized by NGOs in community organizing that emphasizes local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis, and plans (Chambers 1992, WB participation Sourcebook). PRA is one of the consultative approaches employed by NGOs (and other actors). It is a label associated with Robert Chambers, although highly adapted by acclaimed institutions including the WB.

In this paper I will adopt the WB definition even though it is a mere rephrase of Chambers (1992), and Chambers and Blackburn (1996) definitions not because of any semantic superiority but comprehensiveness. The WB defines PRA as "a label given to a growing family of participatory approaches and methods that emphasize local knowledge and enable local people to make their own appraisal, analysis, and plans. PRA uses group animation and exercises to facilitate information sharing, analysis, and action among stakeholders". Some of the methods used include transect walks, seasonal and historic diagramming, participatory mapping and modeling, semi-structured interviews, focused group discussions, ven and flow diagrams, and triangulation (Chambers 1992:15-17; Guimãraes 2007:7; The WB Participation Sourcebook).

PRA recognizes the value of outsiders and external experts but limits their input to facilitation thus differing from its predecessor RRA. Chambers (1992:1) says “in RRA information is more elicited and extracted by outsiders; in PRA it is more shared and owned by local people”. Poverty and powerlessness of the poor are PRA’s central concern and its applicability is not limited to rural areas as may be construed from its name, but equally replicable in urban areas. So far PRA has aided government officers, development practitioners- researchers and civil society, and local communities to plan and execute context related interventions. Cornwall and Guijt says “PRA’s potential to deliver ‘locally owned’ and ‘community-based’ solutions led to meteoric uptake-in speed and scale”. It is a respectable way of involving local communities in decision making at all project phases while tapping on local knowledge (Guimãraes 2007).

While so far PRA has been taunted as the best bottom-up approach it has not eluded the criticism of being professionally outsider-driven. Borrowing from Awortwi (1999:7), some development ‘fads’ clearly dominate and outlast others, but the impetuosity with which they are advocated impede critical examination. PRA has been accused of being:

- Just another outside and expert driven agenda. Experts and NGO officers arrive in a village to do a “PRA” within a stipulated period of time.
- Based on too many assumptions on methods and homogeneity of community.
- One time show. No follow ups or continuity plan.

Despite all these criticisms which, from development practice are too real to be ignored, PRA “has been influential in contributing to bring participation in many forms into the mainstream of development practice” (Guimãraes 2007:9)

## **2.5 Community Organizing and Organizers**

Community organizing provides the framework within which community organizers operate and serves as an interface for integrating local knowledge. It stems from the premises that the poor are disempowered and need to be organized to participate and assert their rights in development (Constantino-David 1995:156). It is rather wrong to assume that by virtue of being poor, communities have spare time which if well organized can be utilized in development projects.

Communities have the sole legitimacy to organize themselves even spontaneously for social action when faced by calamity but not without difficulties due to lack of capacity and resource constraints (Awortwi 1999:8, Berner 1997:126, Berner and Phillips 2005:17). This call for external interventions and NGO officers play a role as facilitators. In response NGOs have embarked on continued professionalization to “enhance the caliber, commitment and continuity of field staff to embrace a people-centred approach (Chambers 1993:85). Berner (2008) says for community organizers to be effective interpreters of development between local communities and development organizations, they need to have some basic competencies in form of skills, knowledge and attitudes. More often than not this necessary competence is lacking within NGOs (Korten 1989:153) and Constantino-David (1995:163) says, “even though community organizers are conscious of their facilitative role, the reality of their power and potential to manipulate cannot be denied thus a risk of “facipulation” (facilitation and manipulation).”

In this paper community organizing will mean much more than just establishing organizations, but as a voluntary empowerment process of building awareness, strengthening leadership and networks, promoting new values and behaviours to enable communities take collective action (Awortwi 1999:9, IDRC 2008:1). COs mobilize and organize local

communities for collective action and according to Korten (1987:153), “program officers serve as facilitators of the process, identify prospective working group members, support their involvement in relevant activities, and help them establish distinctive roles within the working group. At the same time they play a key role in agenda setting and in helping resolve conflicts among working groups participants.”

A relatively good organizer has to have the following attributes:

- Guided by voluntarism
- Committed and trustworthy
- Advocacy
- Negotiator
- Conflict management
- Consensus building
- Good communicator and listener
- Intelligent and literate
- Ethical and respectable
- Open, sensible with flexible pragmatism
- Relationship building.

#### *2.5.1 Does it count being an organic or external organizer?*

In her study in the Philippines, Constantino-David (1995:163) observed that NGOs tried out two genres of community organizers; organic organizers who are drawn from the local community and external organizers, who tend to be competitive and more professional. Based on efficiency argument, it would be easy to assume that organic organizers operate effectively than external organizers but they can be compromised due to local ties and low level of skills and knowledge hence preference to external organizers. Constantino-David further says that the romanticism with organic organizers was short-lived as NGOs found out that the benefits accruing were more ambiguous than expected. While external organizers were accused of reinforcing class hierarchy, local organizers could not get away of being accused of graduating to elitism.

## **2.7 Intangible/Traditional/Indigenous/Local Knowledge**

The last decade has witnessed a proliferation of movements and conferences advocating and lobbying for integration of local and indigenous perspectives in development processes including; Bridging Scales and Epistemologies: Linking Local Knowledge and Global Science in Multi-Scale Assessments in Alexandria, Egypt 2000 and Vth World Park Congress in Durban 2003(Brosius 2004).

Marginalization of local culture and knowledge is multifaceted. Besides its colonial overtones it is nuanced with academic imperialism and can emanate from two reasons. One, the development process may be structured in a way to inhibit local knowledge integration. This means that the donor-recipient relationship and the project cycle (formulation, implementation and evaluation) may be structured to favour outsider-expertise knowledge. Two, the process may be limited to the developers’ perception of knowledge, which is more often shaped by the experts’ professionalism and discipline of orientation. The coexistence of the two problems in contemporary community development processes may not be mere coincidence as long as development is both outsider-driven and expertise-driven.

With a world reeling with scientific imponderables and stereotypes, indigenous perspectives have been viewed as inferior to western, external, tangible and science based knowledge (Hereniko 2000:78, Ocholla 2007: 3). However time and space has proved them

wrong as wherever development interventions have been undertaken with such hegemonic academic impunity the results have been heartbreaking or catastrophic as shown by many cases and studies (Anthropological, sociological, environmental, and developmental).

Defining 'local knowledge' has been problematic and the terms 'local' and 'indigenous' have been used separately and/or interchangeably. Alternatively other terms used include 'rural people's knowledge', 'insider knowledge', 'indigenous technical knowledge', 'traditional environmental knowledge', 'peoples' science', 'folk knowledge', 'intangible knowledge', 'ethnoecology', and 'traditional knowledge' (Ellen and Harris 2000: 2; Sillitoe 2002:8). What is "local" or "indigenous" is highly suspect and obscure. Whether the antithesis for local/indigenous is non-western or non-scientific or both leaves a lot to be desired. But lack of a consensus of a definition does not render a subject redundant, what is necessary is a working definition. To find a definition Ellen and Harris (2000) provide commonly asserted characteristics which partly include localness, transmission through oral, imitation or demonstration, and practical engagement constantly reinforced by experience, trial and error and deliberate experiment. Nonaka and Takeuchi define intangible knowledge "as personal knowledge that is created through individual experiences. This knowledge is largely embedded within the culture and traditions of individuals or communities" (Ocholla 2007:2). The WB (1998:2) provides some special features of indigenous knowledge which include:

- Local, in that it is rooted in a particular community and situated within broader cultural traditions.
- Tacit knowledge and therefore not easily codifiable.
- Transmitted orally or through imitation and demonstration.
- Experiential rather than theoretical knowledge
- Learned through repetition.
- Constantly changing, being produced as well as reproduced discovered as well as lost

Sillitoe (2002:9) says "indigenous knowledge in development contexts may relate to any knowledge, held more or less collectively by a population, informing understanding of the world. It may pertain to any domain, particularly natural resource management in development. It is community based, embedded in and conditioned by local tradition. It is culturally informed understanding inculcated in individuals from birth onwards, structuring how they interface with their environments."

Richards (1994:165) warns that even though "social anthropology is replete with examples of beautiful, rich, intriguing, ennobling, inspiring, beliefs (or opposites). It is one thing to celebrate these beliefs as exhibits in a display of human understanding and quite another to assert they have more transient relevance to the shaping of the material world". He argues for a "knowledge that is in conformity with general scientific principles, but which because it embodies place-specific experience, allows better assessments of risk factors in production decisions" and can be validated normally.

In my view to elude the otherness cacophony of categorizing as *we* versus *them*, *superior* versus *inferior*, *western* versus *non-western* etc, as often depicted by the so called Indigenous Peoples associations, local knowledge is that which embodies place-specific experience, in any society, western or non western, tested in the rigorous laboratory of survival, and relevant to development (Chambers 1983:91, Richards 1994:165, Sillitoe 2002:113). In this paper the terms local knowledge and indigenous knowledge will be used interchangeably to mean the same thing as they carry the same semantic load and address the same issue with no consequential differences in the development landscape.

Formal knowledge produces and synthesizes scientific data but also identify trends, scenarios, tradeoffs, and response options. Information produced is credible, salient and legitimate. Knowledge is salient if it is perceived to be relevant or of value to particular groups who might use it to change management approaches, behaviour, or policy decisions.

It is legitimate if the process of assembling the information is perceived to be fair and open to input from key political constituencies, such as private sector, governments and civil society. Local knowledge will be evaluated through these criteria.

Fundamentally integrating local knowledge with other forms of knowledge can be viewed within four steps which are recognized by the WB (Emery 2000, Ocholla 2007, WB 1998).

**Table 1**  
**Four Steps of Integrating Local Knowledge**

Step One	Local knowledge has to be recognized, identified and selected from a multitude of other knowledge
Step Two	involves local knowledge validation/affirmation by identifying its significance, relevance, reliability, functionality, effectiveness and transferability
Step Three	Involves codification/recording/documentation.
Step Four	Consists of storage for retrieval which requires the creation and development of repositories, taxonomies, databases, recording, indexing and preservation for easy access and use.

*Source: Ocholla 2007:3*

## 2.8 Community Management and Empowerment

At the core of participatory development is the creation of a transparent and accountable community management system which is expected to inculcate ownership and enhance sustainability. The essence of community management is to empower local communities to build on local capabilities and priorities to be able to negotiate favourably with other stakeholders (Awortwi 1999:10). It involves a creation of a planning, monitoring and evaluation system with good leadership to control and assess risks, manage resources, and project future prospects. My argument is that a viable and robust management system will empower local communities hence provide a viable environment for local knowledge integration for project sustainability.

According to UNDP (1990), community management is more than involvement and is key to project sustainability as it empowers and equips communities to own and control their systems. It requires capacity building on areas of resource management, equitable distribution and gender equality. Women should be encouraged to play more active roles in water management while men should be willing to give equal opportunities to women. National plans and policies should be responsive to local needs and aim at decentralizing and delegating water management services to community user groups. The focus has to be not just new techniques but new ways of thinking about social, environmental and economic goals and how to achieve them by utilizing maximum community participation, empowerment and local activism (Warburton 1998:3).

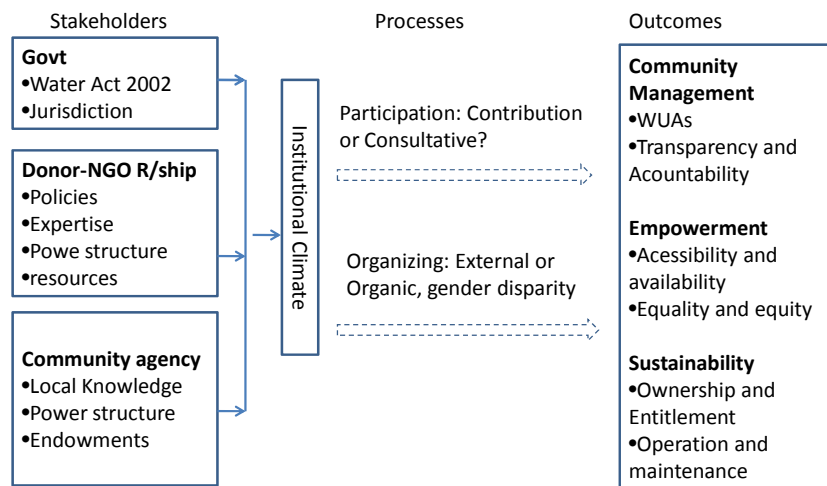
According to Narayan (2002:14, 2005:5) from an institutional perspective, “empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives”. All these sentiments have been echoed by other scholars. Frits Wils (2001:7) says, “empowerment has been related to control of community resources (as in Korten 1987), as a means required for an escape from poverty (as in Scheneider 1999), and as involving “participation in decision making” on matters important to the empowered subjects (as in Friedman (1992), Galjart (1987), Stiefel & Wolfe (1994)”.

But power can be conceptualized in different ways. From a functionalist sociologists view like Parsons, power in society is a variable sum which means power is not fixed and can increase in a society as a whole. From a Weberian point of view power is the ability of one or more individuals/groups to realize their will, even against the resistance of others and as Mayo and Craig (1995:5) says “whether this involves the use of force or the threat of force, or whether the powerless acquiesce in any case because they accept the legitimacy of the authority of the powerful”. From a Marxist perspective economic power is displayed in capitalist societies whereby profit making is the driving force of entrepreneurs and transnational corporations and political power cannot be separated from economic power.

This paper assumes the Weberian perspective; as a zero sum game which is representative of the social action surrounding development agreeing with Wils (2001:7) that, when it comes to capturing basic elements of “power” in empowerment: “the power of decision-making, of choosing between alternatives, also when others don’t like it” is the clearest and more relevant perspective.

### Diagrammatic view of Analytical Framework

#### ANALYSIS: Community Development Process



Source: Own construction

This shows an ideal community development process in which the stakeholder inputs through community organizing and participatory processes are converted into positive outcomes. If the whole process is participatory the outcome will be an empowered community, increased equitable accessibility and availability of sustainable sources of water. But the reality is different.

The reality is that there are cases of faulty or failed projects in the district as a result of marginalization of local knowledge. The community development process even though is supposed to be a bottom-up process is dominated by outsider-expert views. Participation itself is more taken to mean contribution of resources and consultation is not done in key decision areas like project formulation. Community organizers by their virtue of position and



professionalism manipulate communities consciously or unconsciously hence inhibiting integration of local knowledge. Local knowledge itself is contentious in definition and identification thus would be important ideas are marginalized. Community is taken as a homogenous group while in reality the heterogeneity of the underlying groups has influence on how development is couched. The views of community leaders and men are taken to represent community voice. The end results are not impressive as cases of saline water projects, drying wells and boreholes, malfunctioning projects and unmaintained water sources exist.

## Chapter 3

### Identification and Planning Phase

*“The unseen is as much a part of a society as which is seen-the spiritual is as much a part of the reality as the material”.*

*(Darrell Posey 2002:28)*

#### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter we will analyze and discuss the factors that influence the integration of local knowledge in the identification and planning phase in water projects including; social-economic situation of Kitui District, the government policy-Water Act 2002, the Donor-NGO relationship, and relevant local knowledge.

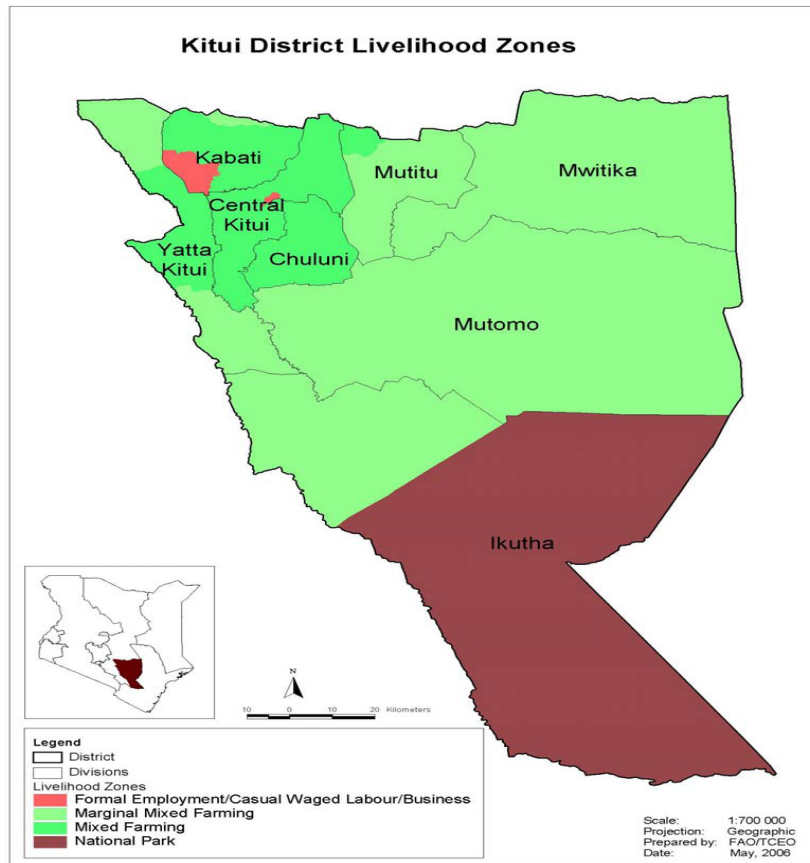
#### 3.2 Situational Analysis of Kitui District

The 2007 national drive in Kenya to carve out new districts saw Kitui divided into Kitui and Mutomo districts respectively. In this study the term ‘Kitui district’ refers to the original wider unit since the new units are not yet autonomous to generate relevant data. The district has a projected population of 866,000<sup>7</sup> given a moderated annual growth of 2.2% with 90% being rural based. It covers an area of approximately 20,402km<sup>2</sup> divided administratively into ten divisions: Central, Chuluni, Matinyani, Mwitika, Mutitu, Ikutha, Yatta, Mutonguni, Mutomo, and Mutha.

Kitui is an agro-pastoralist zone within the arid and semi arid fringes of eastern Kenya with very erratic and unreliable rainfall. Most parts of the district are hot and dry throughout the year resulting in very high evaporation rates. Livestock production is the economic backbone and together with mixed crop farming account for 75% of household earnings (KFSM 2008). Due to limited rainfall, water resources are scarce and mainly composed of seasonal rivers which flood during the rainy seasons and immediately dry out after the rains. The two reliable sources are found in the peripheral borders, the Thua River in the eastern border and Athi River in the western border with Machakos and Makueni districts.

Nearly 90% of households in the region do not have access to clean water and have to trek an average of 5km to the nearest water sources (KFSM 2008). Due to geological conditions most ground water supplies are saline or of low yields and “although the water facilities are many, mostly are poorly maintained, unreliable and dry up during the dry seasons leaving households without adequate supplies for domestic and livestock use” (KFSM 2008). Even after the government and development agencies spending colossal sums on water projects, the district still languishes in water insufficiencies. Poverty index are high (overall 69%, rural 70% and urban 39%) (KFSM 2008), thus warranting major interventions from the state and NGOs. Over years Kitui has witnessed entry and exit of NGOs and CBOs. Currently 17 NGOs are actively involved in different activities but water issues form the core business due to the arid inherent nature (NCAPD 2007:4). Main NGOs include SASOL, KDC, CRS, GOAL, ADRA, AMREF, and World Vision among others.

**Figure 2**  
**Map: Kitui District**



Source: KFSM: website: [www.kenyafoodsecurity.org](http://www.kenyafoodsecurity.org)

The Akamba people, whose ancestral language is Kikamba, are the historical inhabitants with insignificant number of immigrants mainly based in the urban surrounding of Kitui town. The Akamba are rated as the fourth largest community in Kenya (though with existence of categories and mini-identities) occupying the traditional<sup>8</sup> districts of Kitui, Machakos, Makueni and Mwingi in the lower part of Eastern province. Trans-border outliers are also found in Mbeere, Kirinyanga, Kwale and Taita districts. The Akamba culture like any other African culture seems to be under siege from the effects of western imperialism. The Akamba Cultural Trust<sup>9</sup> (ACT) speaks about the Akamba people “as among the most disoriented cultural entity in Kenya struggling within a rather transient and inconstant social milieu”.

History has it that, since the Akamba are a sedentary agro-pastoralist community the colonial government could easily impose a ban on their movements (human and animal) exposing them to socio-economic vagaries thus forcing them to recruit in the army or civil service. The Akamba are traditionally a patriarchal community and issues of power, labour, and resource distribution are gendered. In pre- and post- colonial periods, political administrative boundaries in Kenya were divided based on tribal lines. This reinforced the solidarity and identity of tribes even in political party representation. In the recent post-election political chaos in Kenya, ethnicity featured as a key contributing factor to the mayhem.

Christianity and formal education considerably penetrated the Akamba region and the tribe boasts to have some of the top national religious and educated leaders. But this was not without resistance even though the colonial machinery was supreme. When open confrontation proved futile the community resorted to muted resistance through cultural expressions like songs, dances, and poetry. In reiteration the colonial government banned all Akamba events that would involve the same. One of the known Akamba philosophical credo composed as a form of muted resistance to missionary work and passed from generation to generation can be traced in the writings of Prof. Kivuto Ndeti in 1970s especially in the *Elements of Akamba Life* and the prose goes like this:

“I am a Mukamba, *Kivindyo* (complete)  
Who knows that *ng'ondu* (ritual) can bring a child  
And who knows how to sacrifice so rain can fall.  
Who knows the things that can bring misfortune (to a family or community).  
To be sure I am a Mukamba *Kivindyo*  
I know and believe that a barren woman  
When treated with purifying ritual medicine  
Will bring forth a child  
I know right from wrong  
And that worshiping *Mulungu* (God)  
Restores blessings to Man”

The loss of indigenous knowledge due to the destruction of traditional learning systems led to the erosion of local capacities for social and economic development. However the Kitui Akamba still hold knowledge concerning the preservation and protection of the environment which is not documented, fits or does not fit within the known science-based principles. Preservation and protection of water resources is one area where the Kitui Akamba still practice traditional rituals or utilize knowledge gained after years of experience. Onneweer (2002) followed the landscape of *mathembo* (shrines) and found out that cases of conflict between local knowledge and formal knowledge existed in development and projects with little regard to local beliefs had less chances of succeeding.

### **3.3 Policy Reforms: The Water Act, 2002**

To tackle the institutional and operational weaknesses in the water sector in Kenya, the government instituted reforms in the ministry as contained in the Water Act 2002. The Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MWI) remained as the overarching institution responsible for overall sector oversight including policy formulation, coordination and resource mobilization. Other institutions created are: Water Services Regulatory Board (WASREB) to set standards and regulate the sub-sector; Water Appeal Board (WAB) to adjudicate on disputes; seven Water Services Board (WSBs) to be responsible for the efficient and economical provision of water services; Water Services Trust Fund (WSTF) to finance pro-poor investments; Water Services Providers (WSPs) to be agents in the provision of water and sewerage services utilizing acceptable business principles in their operations (The Water Act 2002, NWSS 2007).

The Water Act 2002 vests all water resources on the state while providing a framework for the use of water resources and provision of water services in Kenya. It defines a water resource as “any lake, pond, swamp, marsh, stream, watercourse, estuary, aquifer, artesian basin or other body of flowing or standing water, whether above or below ground” (Water Act 2002:944). It gives directions on how water service providers may undertake water works. It captures NGOs under the category of Water Service Providers (WSPs) which are defined as any “company, NGO, or other person or body providing water services under

and accordance with an agreement with the licensee within whose limits of supply the services are provided". From these definitions all community water development interventions spearheaded by NGOs are well captured under the act. What NGOs are required to have is a permit for the planned works as it is stipulated under the Water Resource Management Authority (WRMA). The Act is not clear on participation of citizens but provides the minister with powers to initiate state schemes and acquire land for the same without consultation.

On the other hand one of the strategic goals of the National Water Service Strategy under WRMA is to "reach at least 50% of the underserved in rural areas with safe and affordable water by 2015 (MDG 7)<sup>10</sup> and thereafter move to sustainable access for all by 2030" (NWSS 2007). Besides promoting investments this will be achieved through "sustainability of rural water systems by promoting beneficiary participation in planning, implementation and management" (NWSS 2007). Some of the relevant inferences we can make from the Act are:

- On community projects, the Act does not hinder but promotes participation and integration of local knowledge in NGO driven water projects. It provides conducive environment for community participatory processes.
- On state schemes the act provides the Minister with powers to initiate state water schemes and acquire land on behalf without consulting the expected beneficiaries. In this case participation and integration of local knowledge may be hindered.

The extent to which local knowledge was included in the formulation of the Water Act 2002 is an area I did not explore and I recommend further research.

### **3.4 Multifaceted Local Knowledge; which is which?**

Unanimously all my respondents (FGD, key informants, Community organizers) acknowledged the existence of local knowledge. For the purpose of elaboration the elements of local knowledge mentioned will be categorized in two different forms; environmental knowledge and practices, and beliefs and values systems.

#### *3.4.1 Environmental Knowledge and Practices*

From the respondents' perspective environmental knowledge is relevant to development of water projects especially at the site identification stage. This resonates with the argument of Long (2001:65) that at the identification and design stage local knowledge is useful in making choice of the technology to be employed and identifying suitable site(s). This environmental knowledge is historical reconstruction of potential water points which could be buried under the rubble of forgetfulness, environmental degradation and shifts in river/watercourse morphology hence attracting the name 'ethnoecology' from some quarters (Sillitoe 2002:80). It helps the local community in identifying potential groundwater channels and aquifers which serve as water sources of last resort like scoop-holes. In this it would inform development on viable sites for water projects.

Certain trees and plants and their seasonal responses, and certain soils and rock types aid in easy identification. *Munina* (acacia spp), *Mukuyu* (ficus) and *Kiindiyo*(reeds) are potential indicators for a high water table zone, while black cotton soils, kunkur and limestone are a possible indication of brackish ground water. This is knowledge that has been gained through years of practice and perfected by trial and error as postulated by Chambers (1983:91) and Ellen and Harris (2000). The use of scoop-holes is a largely embedded widespread phenomenon covering almost the whole district especially in the rural areas since ephemeral streams are the main sources of water (KFSM 2008; personal observation). However supplementary sources are scanty spread in the district including piped water,

water tanks, and shallow wells whose use is limited to certain groups and institutions in the society who can afford the investments concerned as common sense dictates.

There is a tendency that most scoop-holes are concentrated closer to each other because the community knows all the sections of the stream that are potential for high yields and fresh water production. Through practice and experience in digging scoop-holes, they have come to realize that wherever there is a high potential section, the downstream is lined with non porous obstruction (clay, rock or murrum) thus forming a natural aquifer. This obstruction over years of slowing and trapping downward flow recharges the adjacent environment thus creating a shallow underground reservoir. This reservoir becomes the water source of last resort drawn via the scoop-holes. This is the same principle underlying the construction of sand dams as implemented by SASOL which involves the construction of physical weirs across the streams to harvest sand and water for underground storage.

During the rainy season, the stream is flooded with flowing water thus all scoop-holes are filled with sand and flattened since they are often dug in the middle of the riverbed. These streams are ephemeral and dry out immediately after the rains hence leaving the community with no reliable water sources. As the dry period extends and water level deepens, the community reverts back to the excavation of the scoop-holes. It is worth noting that these scoop-holes are not haphazardly dug and/or accessible to everyone but a system of control and ownership exists to protect participants from exploitation by non participants.

#### *3.4.2 Scoop-hole control and ownership structure*

Through clan and family ties households come together as a group to excavate and benefit from scoop-holes. Since scoop-hole excavation is a labour intensive and time consuming exercise households draw their energies together for the same goal; water provision. This kind of self help effort is an extension of the social relations of the community as a whole and a default strategy of the poor as observed by Berner and Phillips (2005:19). African societies are known to have historically utilized self help pools to plan, implement and operate activities for the common purpose of survival. This can be linked to the logic of the poor where sharing ensures survival.

In a legal sense nobody has the right to own a river. But scoop-holes are owned by the households that jointly excavated them and protected by the communal values. The determination of which households own what scoop-hole and where is a more cultural than economic issue. This means that households maintain and re-excavate the same scoop-holes in the preceding seasons. New members join after contribution of agreed reparation. One may wonder how these households keep track of scoop-holes which keep on getting flattened and filled with sand after every rainy season and why at the start of a new dry season a household cannot go to start a new scoop-hole wherever they desire.

Marks made on trees or stones serve as beacons but practice shows that most members remember the exact positions. Every group goes back to their previous scoop-holes and only the errant in society will try to venture and re-excavate another group's scoop-hole without consent. In such a case, the culprit is punishable through the communal system of control and a fine mainly in form of goats is charged. This system becomes more interesting when it comes to enforcement given that scoop-hole ownership is not under the protection of property rights in Kenya thus enforcement cannot be established through the existing policing and court system. Rather a system of community elders, a remnant and variance of the pre-colonial ethnic and clan leadership, metes out the punishment and enforces its fulfillment. The exercise can be supervised by the area chief or assistant chief if the culprit defies the orders from the elders. The chief is actually a government officer in charge of locational administration and security but drawn and a member of the same community. His/her presence in the arbitration is meant to oversee the passing of justice based on

knowledge of local values. More often than not the culprit pays out the fine or else risk sanctioning when he/she will be in need of community support for example in case of bereavement. This account of scoop-hole system of control shows how local knowledge is tacit and not easily codifiable rooted in a particular community and situated within broader cultural traditions structuring how they interface with environment (Sillitoe 2002:9, WB 1998:2).

### 3.4.3 *Beliefs*

While belief can be defined as psychological state in which an individual holds a certain proposition or premise to be true, its relationship to knowledge can be very subtle (Wikipedia). The epistemological difference is that knowledge can be challenged to be true or false while belief cannot be validated. Values on the other hand reinforce beliefs and are the rules by which members must abide, or risk rejection from the culture (which is one of the most feared sanctions known). Without dwelling on the epistemological differences, the Kitui Akamba are known to have thrived through a system of beliefs and values.

From my respondents, past research and experience, some of the local community beliefs and values relevant to water projects are vested in sacred places and trees (*Mathembo*-shrines), and sacred/totemic animals (e.g. the African Boa). These aspects converge in the belief of existence of a super-natural being (God) who has total control of the universe. Onneweer (2002) found out that although shrines are contested places, their implication to social action and development processes are profound and cannot be ignored without consequences. Sacred places are a physical embodiment of the deity and are believed to possess such cosmic supernatural power with potency to influence humanity and the environment. Rain and water are believed to be a natural gift from this deity who controls the seasons, the intensity and spread depending on his/her mood. The mood is a consequence of the behaviour of man and good season means the deity is appeased and bad season, the deity is offended. In actual sense this belief does not differ contextually with other known world religions. Sacrifices have to be unfailingly offered to the deity to appease him/her for prosperity of the community. The institution is arranged that certain men and women of noble character guided by medicine (wo)men and prophet(esse)s perform a ritual of sacrificing at the shrine (mostly under a sacred tree or rocks). This ritual is performed:

- At the onset of a new season for the deity to offer a good rain season
- At the start/end of new water project to place it under the deity for blessings.
- In case a new project is being developed close to a shrine to appease the deity for disturbances.
- In case the materials being used in the development of the new water project are considered a taboo or not consummate with the gender of the deity thus appeasing him/her to allow use.

### 3.4.4 *Shrines in the contemporary context*

While most respondents acknowledge the existence of local beliefs relevant to water projects, the rhetoric is more pronounced than the practice. Only a few individuals still hold firm to this tradition and according to my respondents its prominence has been eroded by years of change brought by Christianity and education through which such beliefs are perceived as irrational.

A good number of cases where rituals have been performed in relation to development of water projects exist as shown by Onneweer including Kwa Lala spring in Mutitu Andoa, Ngulilu in Yatta, Mweini springs in Mutha. Other cases were cited by SASOL COs who reported their experience with cases of sand-dam sites where rituals had to be undertaken before construction. They also reported that in most of the sites developed, a party is held after project completion to commemorate a good work done, but the slaughtering of the

goat(s) that provide meat sometimes involves rituals consummate to sacrificing. One can argue that this implicit ritualistic process makes all participants active or passive partakers to the beliefs. Those who do not attest or conform to these beliefs argue that by participating in the party it does not any way make them partakers, either passively or actively, since such rituals are trivial and inconsequential in their lives.

The landscape of shrines is an interesting phenomenon. Wherever the shrines exist; forest, along a stream or a spring, the surrounding is more preserved than the adjacent environment although degenerating over time. Some of the known shrines like Nzambani Rock were adjudicated and registered as a municipality property and has been concessioned to a private developer as a tourist attraction site. On a worse note trees are being cut in hills and forests where they never used to be cut as a taboo and maybe this can serve as a sign that through observation whenever traditional beliefs and systems of control stand against economic survival, traditional systems tend to lose.

The proponents of the belief system argue that the current trend of recurrent droughts and water shortages is a dire consequence to the disrespect and neglect of the institution of shrines and attendant rituals. While its opponents place the blame on environmental problems (reduced tree cover and erosion), unsuitable technologies, and resource mismanagement. The first is hard to prove but the later is sated with observable cases.

### **3.5 NGOs response to beliefs**

In Kitui there exist professional-oriented secular NGOs who do not attest to inclination to any religion like SASOL, KDC, and AMREF and Faith Based Organizations (FBOs) whose origin and existence is rooted in the mother Christian religious organizations like CRS, ADRA, and World Vision. Secular NGOs adopt a non-interference attitude towards traditional beliefs and rituals while FBOs tend to discourage these rituals as they are perceived irrational and nonconforming with Christian teachings. Onneweer (2002) documents a case in Syomunyu in the expansive Yatta plateau where CRS was interested in developing a spring protection but received opposition from the local shrine believers who believed that the spring was protected by the deity and any act of constructing a masonry wall was a taboo and would upset the deity. When faced with issues on local beliefs secular NGOs create harmony with community easily while FBOs may conflict easily with community.

Accounts of local beliefs are intriguing and inspiring (Richards 1994) but one never fails to pause and ponder, what relevance do they have in development? Can we call the system of shrines, presence of totemic animals, and ritualistic sacrificing as part and parcel of local knowledge and what implications do they have on water projects? In this paper I will argue that the existence of shrines, beliefs and rituals to a supernatural deity is potentially relevant to water projects as environmental knowledge. In this way I will fault Richards (1994:165) who discredit belief as only inspiring and argue only for knowledge that is in conformity with general scientific principles. As Onneweer (2002) observed, projects that ignore local beliefs do it at their peril as it has dire ramifications on community involvement. My argument is that beliefs may not contribute an iota to the technical design of the project or lead to a favourable choice of a site as it can be done with environmental knowledge, but they shape the communal fabric on which community involvement is based. Projects are integrated processes and “the unseen is as much a part of a society as which is seen-the spiritual is as much a part of the reality as the material” (Posey 2002:28). Though proponents hold it that there is direct correlation between the deity and the environment the link between beliefs and rainfall and droughts is obscure. However even though the proponents are a minority



group they are part of the different categories that form the community hence cannot be ignored (Berner 1998, Kabeer 1994).

Communities should be enlightened on the consequences of environmental degradation and attendant implication to water catchment to cushion against wanton tree cutting and encroachment of hilltops, forests and catchment areas though the problem seems to aggravate with increased poverty. Mutha Hill has a historical background of protection through a local system of beliefs and control but now has become the last source of wood for timber, charcoal, carving and special uses (medicinal and essential oils). This may serve as an alarm that with increased competition for survival such traditional beliefs and systems of control are facing a test of their time and their usefulness is shaken. Maybe this is the time for the community to embrace change as local knowledge constantly changes (WB 1998:2).

### **3.6 Whose knowledge counts?**

#### *3.6.1 Community diversity*

From community respondents (FGD, and key informants) there was a general consensus that the information that passes as local knowledge is often gotten from community leaders. Community leaders can be elected as in political (MP or Councillor), VDCs, CBO committees, church leaders, school and other local institutional leaders or government officers (chiefs and assistant chiefs) who speak on behalf of the community in meetings convened by NGO officers. I will argue that there is no problem if what these leaders represent is the voice of the citizens but I doubt how and when these leaders reach the diverse groups to consult them. Also by virtue of their positions and power they are capable of manipulating the system to suit personal interests.

These consultations can be done within the DDC structure meetings held quarterly where only community representatives attend to deliberate development issues with the government, private sector and NGOs. Another forum is the grassroots community meetings (*Barazas*) whose attendance is open to all members. In either forum, my respondents observed that community leaders have an upper hand to speak and be listened to even when their idiosyncratic interests overlap with communal interest. This agrees with Berner (1998) and Kabeer (1994) that communities are not homogenous but hierarchically constituted and power is the overarching component on which decisions are made and those in authority control others. Also the respondents reported that even what they call the voice of community leaders is actually the voice of men as most of these committees are male dominated even though women form the bulk of the members in water projects. Women do the work men do the leading.

#### *3.6.2 Community versus NGO*

All the NGO staff interviewed responded that local knowledge is prioritized than expertise knowledge as according to one CO from ADRA “local communities are engineers on their own”. This is in recognition of the fact that local communities possess immense knowledge, ideas and expertise that is useful in development (Emery 2000:10). He further reported that integration of local knowledge enhances harmony and unity, helps to identify good sites, leads to good workmanship and creates a sense of ownership from inception to completion stage. A CO from AMREF reported that, local knowledge forms the backbone of the water project and the process of integrating local knowledge serves as a learning opportunity for NGO officers. Expertise knowledge comes in to support local knowledge for effective and efficient process. From the NGOs point of view local knowledge emanates from the community as a whole.

According to the community, NGO experts do not listen to them most of the time. The community cited ‘dictation’ in choosing of sites by engineers as one example. A key informant said “engineers come, we walk the area with them, they take measurements along the way, and they identify the sites, without us understanding what is going on”. The same informant took me to a site along the river Mamole where on the left bank he owns a productive well and one NGO came to drill a community borehole on the right bank which never yielded water. From years of practice, perfected by trial and error, the community knew that water is available only in the left bank but even when they informed the NGO engineers this, the engineers went ahead with their water measurement techniques and identified the right bank site. The borehole never hit any water. Today it stands as a white elephant (see the pictures below).



**Non-yielding shallow borehole on the left bank aided by an NGO**



**Yielding community member well on the right bank directly opposite the NGO aided borehole**

The above report is contradictory in that NGO officers report community consultation while the community feels largely ignored. I will make three arguments here:

- Even though NGO officers recognize the usefulness of local knowledge, they have no drive to consult widely since their mission on the ground is to implement predetermined and predesigned projects reflecting on the donor-NGO patron-client relationship spoken about by Hulme and Edwards (1979).
- The frame of reference of NGO officers is constituted by their professionalism (Chambers 1993:85, Hobart 1993:2) hence tending to consciously or unconsciously marginalize local knowledge contributing to what Constantino-David (1995:163) calls ‘facipulation’.
- The concept of community is ambiguous as the groups, categories and power relations surrounding it hence what NGO officers refer to as consulted community could be community leadership whom they can easily access and relate (Berner and Phillips 2005:53, Kabeer 1994:282).

### **3.7 Donor –NGO relationship**

All the NGOs interviewed are dependent on donor funding accessible through a process of competitive proposal writing in which the qualified<sup>11</sup> NGO secures the funding. The project implementation has to be in line with the proposal document and its evaluation is based on

the logframe<sup>12</sup>. As one CO simply put it “what donors are concerned with is accountability. They want to see how inputs have been translated into expected outputs”.

What other words could summarize the dynamics of the relationship between NGOs and donors than that put forward by Hulme and Edwards (1997:8) “he who pays the piper calls the tune”. Donors are “Mr. Moneybag” and NGOs as the “beggars” have to toll the line according to the stipulated policy agenda and standards generating a patron-client relationship. Many policies are determined by donors and local NGOs, CBOs and communities hear of them when they are imposed on projects. This co-optation minimizes inclusion of local knowledge and challenges participation as a process meant to empower communities.

### **3.8 Conclusions**

The formulation phase is the most critical stage in the project cycle as many fundamental decisions are made regarding the overall thrust of the project. Local knowledge is essential for developing a project that will be designed to address local needs based on the local social economic context. Kitui community hold local knowledge relevant to water projects inform of environmental knowledge and local beliefs and values. More often this knowledge is not taken into account in the project formulation as projects are designed by NGOs prior to community consultation and wherever it is done it is dominated by the views of leaders and/or men. Except environmental knowledge the knowledge of local beliefs and values is largely ignored as its validation and relevance cannot be ascertained naturally.

The environment cannot be said to be free and fair. Donors largely dictate the projects to be implemented as required in the proposal guidelines and terms of contract. NGOs patronize donors hence cannot be flexible enough to integrate local knowledge. Further the Water Act 2002 which is the government policy on water projects, even though it gives room for community participation it also provides power to the minister to start state schemes without consulting the citizens.

## Chapter 4

### Implementation

*“What passes for or is represented as the objective is actually ideology and patterns of power, and as such must be displaced by an alternative mode of knowing and seeing”.*

*(John Clammer 2002:52)*

#### 4.1 Participation

All COs and NGO officers interviewed reported to embrace participatory approaches at all different phases of the water projects as recognition to the fact that the poor are no longer passive in development (Berner and Phillips 2005:17). PRA was cited as the common participatory tool used especially at the identification phase for need identification, priority setting, and local mapping of resources. Consultation, information sharing, and joint decision making were reported as the key participatory methodologies for tapping on local knowledge since the poor understand their socio-economic conditions better (Long 2001:2). *Barazas*<sup>13</sup> (general meetings), workshops, seminars, and on-site meetings were some of the arenas reported for NGO-community information exchanges giving the community a wider opportunity to attend. The barazas are often convened through the authority of the local administration; chief in case of location level and assistant chief in case of sub-location level.

The systems of chiefs is a century old phenomenon dating back to the colonial times and over years has been trusted and accepted as ideal for grassroots administration and security. The several attempts by the government to scrap it have been thwarted by citizens who have voted in its favour as displayed in the 2005 constitutional review referendum. However the power vested in their positions definitely influences or may hinder participation since power is the overarching component on which decisions are made (Berner 1998; Kabere 1994).

One CO from CRS reported that sometimes he reads journals, papers and historical write-ups of the local community to grasp any attributes of culture, local knowledge and beliefs available. I do not totally discredit this method but what can be gained in it is a helicopter view since local knowledge is context related and there is no much previous in-depth research done on these communities.

NGOs also involve local communities in contribution of resources towards the implementation of the project in what generally is referred to as ‘cost-sharing’. Community contribution differs from one project to another but generally money, labour and local resources (water, sand, stones, timber, and food) are some of the key inputs. Mainly participation is per household and all households are required to contribute inputs equally regardless of household size with special exceptions to vulnerable groups (aged, invalids, orphans etc). According to SASOL community contribution towards the realization of sand dams ranges from 45-48%. This involves labour, money, water, sand, stones and gravel while the rest (55-52%) is mobilized from donors. From the community point of view the requirement to contribute labour is quite overburdening as most of the times they are required to do so for five days a week. This leaves them with less time to do other household chores, income generation activities, tending to farms, school activities and taking care of children. Attendance fluctuates depending on the season which sometimes causes a rift between them and the COs who often attribute the fluctuation to lack of commitment. This is expected as projects have a timeframe and COs have to work within the expected project planning schedule.

From my own experience in the contemporary development arena community participation (both consultation and contribution) is a prerequisite to accessing donor funding and more often serves the interests of the donor rather than the community. Rarely

are the capabilities and capacities of the local community considered in defining the project inputs and timeframe. In this way participation is more of a window-dressing phenomena (Tussie and Tuozzo 2001:116) which overburdens and overstretches the capacities of local communities and “what passes for or is represented as the objective is actually ideology and patterns of power, and as such must be displaced by an alternative mode of knowing and seeing” (Clammer 2002:52).

From the community point of view, none of the respondents reported to know what PRA is. However, they reported to have been involved in meetings, seminars, workshops, and training sessions, besides transect walks and resource mapping exercises. Contextually these activities are part and parcel of PRA even though the community may not literally understand the label which is designed to enable them to make their own appraisal, analysis and plans (Chambers 1992). But it may serve to reinforce the criticism that PRA is just another outsider-expert driven activity and as Awortwi (1999:7) observed, a fad which has dominated and outlasted others.

Both the community and NGOs had the same views that cost sharing inculcates a sense of ownership and promotes sustainability of the project. They cited cases of stalled projects which were undertaken before the 1990s without community participation and even up to today are verbally referred and identified as such and such NGO project or government project. When such projects need maintenance the community expect the sponsoring NGO or government to provide the services. A good example is the ActionAid funded 1980s ground water tanks and roof catchment tanks spread across the district in schools and villages which stand as neglected and crumbling masses of concrete masonry works whose functionality ceased with the first cracks requiring minor repairs. The cracks extended to gaping holes with years of neglect as the community waited ActionAid to repair them even after several years since the project ended and the NGO moved out of the district. However from some heresies the word goes round that ActionAid projects were rife with mismanagement of resources and poor workmanship: enough factors to lead to immediate collapse but lack of community participation cannot be ignored as the contributing factor to lack of maintenance. Embracing participatory ideology is one issue, practicing participation is another and for NGO-led development projects the process requires permissible community organizing.

## **4.2 Community organizers and organizing**

All NGOs mobilize, organize and facilitate local communities to form water users groups, elect committee members and formulate constitutions with bylaws for governing purposes for project implementation and management. They guide the water user’s groups in matters of inclusivity and equality in representation of youth, men and women, and all different interest groups in the community.

### *4.2.1 Qualities*

Table 2 presents a collection of quality aspects which the NGOs and communities reported as ideal for a good community organizer in terms of character, skills and know how, and attitude.

In summation, the Kitui community views COs as people who should diligently undertake their work exhibiting all professional ethics, treating communities as equal not subordinates, and displaying a positive attitude towards them. Voluntarism seems to have been replaced by continued professionalism (Chambers 1993:85) as NGOs have competitively become equal opportunity employers. A considerable combination of these characteristics is necessary to enable community organizers to adjust their methods, recognize, validate and interpret local knowledge as observed by Berner (2008).

**Table 2**  
**Qualities of a good Community Organizer**

<b>Character</b>	<b>Skills and Know-how</b>	<b>Attitude</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Patience and tolerance</li> <li>▪ Enthusiasm to encourage</li> <li>▪ Well natured and good heartedness</li> <li>▪ Responsiveness</li> <li>▪ Acceptable and exemplified leadership</li> <li>▪ Sociable</li> <li>▪ Time consciousness and disciplined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good listener</li> <li>▪ Well versed with local issues</li> <li>▪ At least average education</li> <li>▪ Ability to make quick decisions, judgments and plans</li> <li>▪ Conflict resolution and arbitration skills</li> <li>▪ Good communicator</li> <li>▪ Ability to simplify issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Setting realistic expectations</li> <li>▪ Views community as equal and knowledgeable</li> <li>▪ Gender sensitive</li> <li>▪ Respectable to local solutions</li> </ul>

#### 4.2.3 *The professional caliber of COs in Kitui*

All the COs interviewed have at least a university degree but I personally know some with diplomas and certificates but at least secondary education. However most of the COs have participated in seminars, workshops and short courses as on-job training aimed at improving their know-how and skills to meet the strategic needs of the NGOs. The community appreciated the technical training of the current batch of COs in the district and cited austerity and precision in duty execution as indicators however to them what matters is not how high one is educated but the ability to establish and sustain good rapport.

#### 4.2.4 *Attitude*

From the community point of view the attitude of COs towards them was questionable and presented a grey area. This was worse at the individual level though it varies from one CO to another depending on personal character, but there were general claims leveled against all COs and/or certain NGOs. COs from the same NGO have a tendency to share similar attitude and behaviour towards the community.

Only COs from one NGO were said to have a positive attitude as the community felt that they treated them equally, they lived closer to the community, shared basic utilities, and listened and respected local views as much as they can. However the rest were accused of isolating themselves from the community and only liaising with the leaders, viewing local views as archaic, using technical language which the community cannot comprehend, organizing very intense short time meetings and hopping in their jeeps immediately after the meeting, and worse off, issuing threatening statements. To quote from one of my key informants, one NGO is popular for using the statement “if you do not want we will move away”. This statement is used to manipulate the community to agree with what the NGO wants otherwise they will lose the project and definitely it works because the community is in need of external intervention.

Another NGO is known for COs who drive in with their 4-wheel jeeps from their urban abodes, drinking only bottled water and minimizing mingling with the community and leaving behind a cloud of dust after the meeting. Of course personal hygiene is necessary but when it is done in a class show-off manner it beats the purpose and downgrades the community. Another CO from the show-off NGO is said to have given a lecture to Kanziku inhabitants on how foolish and backward they were for not utilizing the sophisticated e-marketing channels the NGO had established. This kind of attitude is a clear representation of how the relationship of the developers and those to be developed is constituted by the developers’ knowledge and categories with the idiom of economics, management and technology dominating (Hobart 1993) reinforcing academic imperialism and marginalization of local knowledge (Emery 2000).

#### 4.2.5 *Organic or External organizer, does it matter?*

Ethnicity is a key dividing factor in Kenya to an extent that even the post election chaos following the December 2007 elections were organized in ethnic lines. One would wonder then what would be the verdict over COs who basically do not come from the project area. According to my respondents origin did not matter much but in case the two had to be weighed on preference, the community preferred external COs from organic COs. I would have expected them to prefer organic COs because they are well acquainted with them, they are part of the local knowledge system and it is an employment opportunity to one of their own. The reasons cited are:

- External organizers concentrate in articulating their professional assignments hence distancing and shielding themselves from local politics and trivialities. They consolidate their energies in community mobilizing and organizing.
- Organic COs due to family, clan and historical ties often get entangled in local politics, feuds and patronage hence dividing the community.

These claims hold some water but I would not ignore the fact that history has it that prophets have no honour in their village backyards. However this challenges the efficiency reasoning behind proponents of organic organizers who argue that they help in capitalizing on local knowledge, eliminating language barriers and reducing logistical costs as Constantino-David observed in the Philippines. When asked how they relate with COs who cannot speak the local language; Kikamba, the community responded that “as long as that person is willing to listen and work with us, among us there are learned people who can translate or we can use Kiswahili<sup>14</sup>. It is not the language that matters as long as we can communicate”.

The community has interacted with more male COs than female COs and a scan will reveal that NGOs have more male COs than female COs but they do not mind either. The trend has been changing over years with the disparity narrowing every new decade. There are more female COs now than in the 1990s even though equality has not been achieved. This has nothing to do with the patriarchy of the Kitui Akamba since recruitment is professionally done. I will argue that in a male dominated country like Kenya from the doctrine of social relations framework, (Kabeer 1994) women are excluded in top management positions hence such dominance filters through all cadres and projects implementation is more designed in a masculine way taking into account male related needs and ignoring female related needs hence discouraging would-be female applicants.

#### 4.2.6 *Flexibility*

All COs reported that they had the flexibility to adjust their methods to incorporate local ideas. Some NGOs provided guidelines to this effect and wherever not available consultation with management was possible. I tend to agree with this view but with some reservations. I argue that the mentioned flexibility is to a large extent limited to shaping daily operations but not of much consequence to project design. COs facilitate the implementation of already decided and designed projects in terms of inputs, technology and timeframe which they have no influence on. As staff of their respective organizations they have a job to take care of which they risk to lose in case they do not abide with their terms of contract. Their flexibility cannot go beyond what is stated and agreed upon by the donor and NGO in the proposal document and terms of reference and more often than not COs are instruments to fulfill the interests of the NGO and donor.

### 4.3 Communication Hierarchy

As we saw earlier, most of the consultation, decision making, and information sharing is done in the *barazas* which in theory provide a conducive open-for-all forum for participatory dialog as postulated by Freire. Others include; site meetings, DDC quarterly meetings, seminars and workshops. In *barazas* note taking is possible but mainly done by those in positions who are required to report back especially NGO staff, community leaders and user group committee members. Participants listen and exchange ideas and store the information in their memories (read minds). Such information stored in the memory is prone to forgetfulness and distortion thus may lead to a flawed information system.

In trainings setups; workshops and seminars, information is written down and shared as brochures, booklets, posters, papers, and sometimes audiovisual. Such information recorded is open to retrieval, referral and sharing with minimum distortion. What is mainly written and transmitted is technical and environmental knowledge hence beliefs and values which have equal influence to development of water projects are ignored.

While information sharing in these meetings can be expected to be horizontal as suggested by Servaes (1991), it is striking to follow the sequence of speeches. The chief speaks first, who in turn invites the NGO officers, followed by speeches from community leaders disrupted by isolated interjections from community members. I know there need to be some semblance of order but more often the meetings are hijacked by individuals, a few core groups and leaders to champion their interests (Awortwi 1999), and what remains is marginalization of the voice of the poor, vulnerable groups and women. It is also rare to come along a meeting convened by the community inviting the NGOs but the opposite is the norm hence the whole process can be labeled another top-down agenda. After all, development is a power play arena and even with these seemingly participatory dialogical meetings, how far are NGOs willing to share or relinquish decision-making power to communities (Berner and Phillips 2005:18).

### 4.4 Validating local Knowledge

COs do come across aspects of local knowledge relevant to water projects irrespective of their flexibility to incorporate them in the project cycle. The common way COs validate local knowledge is through analyzing existing past practices in which the information has been instrumentally utilized (Emery 2000, Ocholla 2007, WB 1998). History is the best teacher and in this case it also proves its tutelage. The probability that the information is new is minimal though cannot be ignored but local knowledge more often is a product of years of practice perfected by trial and error (Chambers 1983:91).

Another way reported is passing of the information through an acceptability test through the community to gauge its popularity. As one CO from CRS observed that sometimes the community does not say what they mean and “you should read the answers from their faces”. This sends a message that communities are not that pious innocent lot as often depicted in development but care should be taken to validate all the information they give. Since local knowledge is a product of environmental conditioning, communities living and sharing common problems would tend to share common solutions. If the aspects are not known and accepted by many people, there are chances that the information is invalid or not representative enough.

One of the COs reported that he compares the said local knowledge with known technical knowledge for validation. In some cases this may work well but faces the risk of discarding would be relevant information as long as it does not fit within the scientific principles for example beliefs and value systems. Such a method may be based on the



assumption that scientific knowledge is comprehensively inclusive and superior to local knowledge.

#### **4.5 Conclusions**

In theory all NGOs profess to embrace community participation in all project phases. This is a conditionality set by donors for funding accessibility. But it is evident that community participation starts at the implementation stage. The NGOs come around to mobilize the communities for the already designed and funded projects. Communities are organized in water users groups, facilitated to make constitutions and bylaws, and mobilized to contribute labour and local materials. A lot of consultation is done during the PRAs, *barazas*, workshops, seminars and site meetings. The local knowledge collected goes in shaping the implementation process but cannot be used to change what has already been decided in the formulation stage.

The existing COs have at least secondary education and have been recruited through a competitive process. This has drawn both organic and external COs but the community prefers external COs as they find them free from local politics and family feuds. It is evident that community organizing is no longer a voluntaristic activity but NGOs have become equal opportunity employers. The community feels that to a large extent the attitudes of all COs is not right as they consciously or unconsciously create a class difference between themselves and the community. Sometimes COs do not consult which can be due to the fact that COs are only in the ground to implement already decided projects and they will not accept information which might derail them.

## Chapter 5

### Summary of Findings and Conclusions

*“Development interventions based on local knowledge and experience are more likely to be relevant, ‘home-grown’ and therefore sustainable”.*

*(Uma Kothari 2001:139)*

#### 5.1 Major findings

All NGOs in Kitui embrace a variance of participation in which communities are consulted and contribute resources towards achievement of water projects. Contribution, which is more pronounced than consultation, is in form of money, local materials (water, stones and sand), and labour. Consultation is done through the *barazas*, VDCs, DDCs and site meetings in which mostly leaders and men dominate or presuppose to represent the community voice. Almost all NGOs conduct some form of PRAs, seminars and workshops to share and garner information. While consultation is more useful if conducted before project formulation so as to have inputs in project designs, the reality is that mainly it is done during the project mobilization and implementation phases when all major decisions have already been made.

This participation has been facilitated by community organizers who according to the community are largely qualified in terms of professional skills though lacking in attitude. Most of the COs have been said to associate mainly with leaders, viewing local opinions as archaic, failed in reaching and establishing good relationship with the poor. While in Kitui there exists both organic and external COs, the community would prefer external rather than organic since they found them more harmonious and free from local politics and feuds.

Most of the projects have been funded by money accessed from donors through a competitive process of proposal writing and the implementation and evaluation are stipulated in the logical framework. This donor-NGO relationship has generated a patron-client relationship in which NGOs have limited flexibility in implementing donor funded projects which more often are structured to reflect their own views and interests. In reality the donor views count more than the NGO views and NGO views count more than the community views. The technology to be employed is always stipulated in the proposal document which is always formulated before the community knows of the project. By the time the project is introduced to the community the technology will have been chosen hence the mentioned consultation has little or negligible effect on the project formulation and design.

However Kitui communities hold a lot of local knowledge relevant to water projects in terms of environmental knowledge, and values and beliefs. The scoop-hole technology and attendant system of control attests to this knowledge. But more often the COs and engineers do not consult local communities either because they trust their professional knowledge more or the system is structured in manner not to give room for local knowledge integration. The results have been disappointing as many cases exist (Kanziku brackish water case as an example) where projects that have ignored or failed to integrate local knowledge fully experience faulty implementation or collapse.

What is evidently lacking is a conscious move by the NGOs to document this local knowledge for future reference though the Akamba Cultural Trust has taken an initiative to revive the Akamba heritage. Lack of documentation has made it difficult for transmission and retrieval in the future. To me local knowledge is not people specific as displayed by most indigenous peoples associations but place specific and not superior to scientific knowledge but complimentary. Science has answers to most of the problems affecting water projects in Kitui like salinity and drying aquifers. Science has the capacity to locate adequate aquifers

and freshwater with maximum precision and also desalination kits do exist in the market. However these technologies are too expensive for NGO or local governments to afford. Besides no donor is willing to invest such colossal amounts for equipment since advocacy is on appropriate technologies and simple solutions.

The Water Act 2002 is double edged. While it provides conducive environment and promotes integration of local knowledge in community projects, it vests power on the minister to implement state schemes without consulting local people. No wonder state schemes have more chances of failing. Local knowledge should have a stake in shaping policies and partnerships therefore I recommend that further research be done to evaluate how the Water Act incorporated local knowledge.

## 5.2 Conclusions

Perhaps the most overarching conclusion we can draw is that Kitui communities hold immense local knowledge relevant to water development either as propositional environmental knowledge or cosmological beliefs that can be justified according to some epistemological canons but not necessarily by empirical scientific method (Purcell and Onjoro 2002). NGOs have recognized the potency of local knowledge and in their endeavour to integrate it in water projects have embraced participatory approaches and methodologies including PRA, full involvement of citizens, transparent and accountable leadership, and grassroots meetings. This echoes Kothari (2001:139) who says “Development interventions based on local knowledge and experience are more likely to be relevant, ‘home-grown’ and therefore sustainable”.

Nevertheless these efforts are locked in existing power structures and hierarchies, facing the danger of only supporting outsider-expert knowledge (Schnöhuth 2002). The NGO-donor relationship is riddled with patronage and rigidity although as Abrahamsen (2004:1464) noted, direct domination and imposition is not exhibited always but a variation in promises of incorporation and inclusion shapes the behaviour and interests of the concerned actors”. Therefore as Box (1989:165) observed, “...formal interfaces between parties, instead of permitting, often inhibit the flow of knowledge”

In life, problems occur in space but are made worse if they coexist, and the Kitui scenario is neither safe. While most of the NGOs are keen to integrate local knowledge, the process is constrained, jumbled and disconnected. Constrained in that NGOs have to work within the policy framework set by donors with minimum flexibility, COs have to work within their terms of contract set by their employers with minimum deviation, and communities have to undertake projects delivered by NGOs with negligible choice. Jumbled in a manner that there exist no conscious procedures to include local knowledge systematically in the formulation, planning and implementation, and evaluation project phases. Disconnected in a manner that the existent methods; PRAs, meetings, workshops and seminars are often not collaborative and continuous processes, but isolated one-time NGO-driven events that cannot assure continuity.

Even with all NGOs undergoing through a process of professionalization as observed by Chambers (1983:85), COs in Kitui have basic competence in form of professional skills and knowledge though not driven by voluntarism. But the attitude of most of them is wanting hence making them lose touch with the people they work with.

Lastly, it would be wrong to assume that the process is totally flawed and needs complete overhauling. What is evident is that NGOs are doing the right things but not doing things right. What is required is adjustment of methodologies and relaxation of donor conditionalities to make it more flexible and conducive for local knowledge inclusion. While

recognizing the potentiality of community self help, external interventions are a necessary condition to inject the much needed resources to alleviate water shortages, an acute problem in Kitui district. In general NGOs have facilitated realization of water projects, the community has been empowered, water has been availed in equitable and sustainable manner now than before and as Berner and Phillips (2005:27) observes the debate that the poor are better off when left to their own devices or latent capacities is consequentially futile.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Intentional development implies deliberate efforts to achieve higher levels in terms of set objectives. Differs from immanent development which is the spontaneous and unconscious process of development from within, which may entail destruction of the old in order to achieve the new.

<sup>2</sup> Trusteeship: the intent which is expressed by one source of agency to develop the capacities of another. It is what binds the process of development to the intent of development (Thomas 2000:41).

<sup>3</sup> Scoop-holes are hand dug pits in the sandy/alluvial basement of dry seasonal streams for ground water harvesting.

<sup>4</sup> Sand-dams are weirs mainly of concrete masonry wall built across seasonal streams/rivers to capture sand and water for increased underground recharge

<sup>5</sup> The Bretton Woods Institutions are the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). They were set up at a meeting of 43 countries in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, USA in July 1944

<sup>6</sup> "First sector" refers to state bureaucratic structures, "second sector" to private sector market interactions and "third sector" civil society voluntaristic associations (Esman and Uphoff 1984:21)

<sup>7</sup> Based on the 2008 District sub-census (source: District Development Office)

<sup>8</sup> From Mid 2007 these districts have been sub divided into many other districts

<sup>9</sup> ACT is a charitable trust formed in 2005 by a group of Akamba intellectuals with a aim of awakening the consciousness of the Akamba people

<sup>10</sup> MDG7: Millennium Development Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability, specifically Target 7c; Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water.

<sup>11</sup> The qualified NGO is one who fits the criteria laid down by the donor in the call for proposals, and whose proposal document satisfies and captures comprehensively the interests of the donor

<sup>12</sup> Logframe or Logical framework is a way of structuring the main elements in a project, highlighting logical linkages between intended inputs, planned activities and expected results.

<sup>13</sup> A *baraza* (*barazas* (pl)) is a general communal open air meeting convened as a platform of deliberation on all political, social and economic matters deemed necessary. The word is commonly used and is borrowed from the Kiswahili language

<sup>14</sup> <sup>14141414</sup> Kiswahili is the national language in Kenya and around 70% (personal observation) of Kitui population can speak some basic Kiswahili.

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## Annex 1

### Participation: Some Classical Definitions

**Cohen and Uphof, 1977**

*With regard to rural development ... participation includes people's involvement in decision-making processes, in implementing programmes, their sharing in the benefits of development programmes and their involvement in efforts to evaluate such programmes.*

**Pearse and Stifel, 1979**

*Participation is concerned with . . . the organized efforts to increase control over resources and regulative institutions in given social situations on the part of groups and movements of those hitherto excluded from such control.*

**Ghai, 1990**

*Participation can be seen as a process of empowerment of the deprived and the excluded. This view is based on the recognition of differences in political and economic power among different social groups and classes. Participation in this sense necessitates the creation of organizations of the poor which are democratic, independent and self-reliant.*

**OECD, 1994**

*Participatory development stands for partnership which is built upon the basis of dialogue among the various actors, during which the agenda is jointly set, and local views and indigenous knowledge are deliberately sought and respected. This implies negotiation rather than the dominance of an externally set project agenda. Thus people become actors instead of being beneficiaries.*

**World Bank, 1994**

*Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them.*

*Source: Guimarães 2007:3*