

THE AUSTRALASIAN REVIEW OF AFRICAN STUDIES
VOLUME 35 NUMBER 1 JUNE 2014

CONTENTS

Editorial

- Nationalism, Nation Building and the African Diaspora in Australasia 3
Tanya Lyons, Anne Harris and Jay Marlowe

Articles

- Cultural Practice as Resistance in the British Colony of Kenya 10
Christina Kenny

- 'Once Upon a Time there was a Wonderful Country':
Representations of History in Rwanda 23
Deborah Mayersen

- 'But We Can't Make Them Drink': Understanding Community
Ownership in the Namwera and Chiponde Afforestation Project 39
Jack Corbett

- 'I have to be my own mother and father': the African Student
Experience at University, a Case Study Using Narrative Analysis 59
Lynda Lawson

- Narratives of Return Among Refugee-Background South Sudanese in
New Zealand 76
Ryan O'Byrne

Opinion

- Christmas in South Sudan: Fieldnotes from a War Zone 95
Ryan O'Byrne

Book Reviews

- Anne M Harris. *Ethnocinema: Intercultural Arts Education.* 103
Martin Mhando
- Peter Curson. *Border Conflicts in a German African Colony: Jacob Morengo and the Untold Tragedy of Edward Presgrave.* 106
Matt Fitzpatrick
- Goran Hyden, *African Politics in Comparative Perspective, Second Edition* 108
Sam Wilkins
- Daniel Branch. *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963-2011* 111
Anna Rabin
- William G. Martin, *South Africa and the World Economy: Remaking Race, State, and Region* 113
Ainsley D. Elbra

'But We Can't Make Them Drink': Understanding Community Ownership in the Namwera and Chiponde Afforestation Project

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Abstract

This article explores the application and viability of a participatory development model through an examination of the barriers to community ownership apparent within the Namwera and Chiponde Afforestation Project (NCAP); a community-initiated forestry project developed in response to wood-fuel scarcity in the Mangochi District of Southern Malawi. Despite its participatory design, project stakeholders continued to express aspirations for increased material sponsorship, which project facilitators considered to be incompatible with the guiding principle of the participant driven development model—ownership. Conflicting views concerning sponsorship illustrate the degree to which the regional development context, defined by satisfying immediate needs, challenges community ownership of the NCAP. To that end, as a case the NCAP embodies both the possibilities and the constraints faced by these types of initiatives and the development model that underpins them.

Introduction

Local ownership of donor programs has long been the 'holy grail' of development thinking and practice. Participatory approaches to development documented in the work of Robert Chambers (1994; 1997), Robert Netting (1993), and Michael Mortimore (1998), emphasise the necessity of incorporating local knowledge and community requirements

¹ I would like to thank Alan Thorold, Ian Dicks and the journal's reviewers and editors for comments on earlier iterations of this paper, including a version published in 2009 by the University of Melbourne Working Papers in Development Series under the title: 'Participation, Sponsorship and Development: A Case Study of Community Ownership in the Namwera and Chiponde Afforestation Project' <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/120384/20100609-1050/wp1-2009.pdf> (accessed 20 November 2013). I am especially indebted to Patrick Namwera who provided Yawo-English translation and Madison Bwanali for facilitating the interviews. Any errors are of course my own.

into project design, implementation and appraisal. This agenda emerged from the apparent failure of large-scale institutional development projects in the 1970s and 1980s, and has redefined how development assistance is provided to the world's 'underdeveloped areas' (Riddell, 1997). In this framework, stakeholder participation is viewed as a solution to some of the negative aspects of development intervention famously documented in the work of James Ferguson (1990). Abraham and Platteau (2004), for example, contend that contemporary strategies stress the importance of agency, resulting in beneficiaries assuming a pivotal role in the development process (p. 210). However, this approach becomes less compelling when the desires of project participants are at odds with the participatory model advocated by donors

This article seeks to highlight some of the problems associated with micro-level participatory development projects of this type. The theoretical assumption embedded within the participatory model is that participants, when given a preference, will choose a project that they will own. But what if they don't? What if, when offered the choice, participants decide they prefer a project that provides them with tangible material outcomes through a dependent relationship? Drawing on in-depth interviews with project participants, community leaders, government and non-government stakeholders,² this article argues that the divergent views about sponsorship between NCAP facilitators and participants demonstrates some of the problems associated with long-term community-initiated projects in an environment defined by poverty and aid relief. In this instance, the participatory approach is under severe pressure from the various barriers to ownership that exist in the broader sociocultural context.

The data presented here highlights a tension within the NCAP between the project facilitator, Global Interaction (GIA), a Christian not-for-profit non-government organisation (NGO) working in conjunction with the relevant government forestry authorities, and the project participants, concerning material sponsorship. Participants want 'money,

² This case study is based on forty interviews with NCAP facilitators and participants. Interviewees included individuals from different levels of the project organisational structure—from village nursery committees to the Community Based Natural Resource Committee (CBNRC)—as well as key stakeholders (local chiefs, NGO members and the district forestry officer). The majority of interviews were conducted with the assistance of an interpreter. Interviews were also conducted with a selection of former project participants to gain a fuller picture of project dynamics.

maize, fertiliser and small gifts'³ as recompense for their work on the project. Conversely, rather than aid dependency, project facilitators seek to foster community ownership of the wood-fuel shortage.

Area Profile

The NCAP is geographically located in the Republic of Malawi along its eastern border with Mozambique. At the time of this study (mid-2007) Malawi had a predominantly rural population of 12.6 million people (2004 estimate), most of whom lived in densely-populated (117 inhabitants per square kilometre) rural areas (Simmonds, 2006, p. 4). The United Nations (UN) Human Development Report 2006 ranked Malawi 166th on its Human Development Index. This was comparable to its regional neighbours: Tanzania ranked 162nd, Zambia 165th and Mozambique 168th. The geographical areas of Namwera and Chiponde fall under the Traditional Authority (TA) of Jalasi. TA Jalasi is located in the northeast of the Mangochi District. Over 90 per cent of the Mangochi District's population is involved in subsistence agriculture, with around 60 per cent of the District's arable land used to manufacture tobacco for export (Malawi Government, 1999b). The predominant ethnic group in the Mangochi District is the Yawo.⁴ The Yawo live largely in Southern Malawi, Northern Mozambique and Southern Tanzania, and their contemporary identity is principally defined by their adherence to Qadariyya Islam, a Sufi order of Islam, which is often practiced concurrently with Yawo Traditional

³ This response was made by one CNC Chairman. Around forty women from the project were present at this interview. They sat and listened to the questions and the Chairman's responses. At the mention of sponsorship the group of women applauded spontaneously, indicating the popularity of the Chairman's comment, specifically the references to the types of gifts identified.

⁴ According to Yawo tradition, the various Yawo tribes scattered from their original home on Yawo Hill, which is generally believed to be located somewhere in northwestern Mozambique (see Abdallah, 1973/1919 and Alpers, 1976). David Livingstone (1865), on his Zambezi expedition, gives an account of the initial Yawo migration into the area now called southern Malawi. The Yawo were in contact with Swahili traders on the East Central coast of Africa from as early as the 16th century, see Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves*, and they formed a vital part of a long distance overland trade network established to transfer ivory and slaves to the various coastal ports (see McCracken, 1968 and White, 1987) A key feature of Yawo contact with the Swahili traders was exposure to Islam. Large-scale conversion of the Yawo to Islam occurred in the late 19th century (see McCracken, 1968).

Religion.⁵

Deforestation

Forests play a critical role in the economic and social lives of the people in the Mangochi District, and yet the extent of deforestation in Malawi is worse relative to other African nations with forests decreasing by approximately 2.5 per cent per annum since the 1970s (Bekele, 2001, p. 33). Historically, Malawi's landscape was dominated by *Brachystegia* forests, known locally as Miombo (Government of Malawi, 1999b). Prior to colonisation these forests covered a large area of Malawi's landscape but this natural resource has been significantly degraded by various human activities, including, colonial systems of land tenure; agricultural land clearance, including commercial tobacco farming; population increase; conflict migration; and industrial or commercial exploitation (Bekele, 2001, p. 33).

Deforestation has left the landscape of Namwera and Chiponde denuded, with Miombo woodland almost non-existent outside of government protected forestry reserves. The few visible trees occupying the landscape are either Blue Gums, planted with a view to future harvesting by tobacco estates, isolated coppices of indigenous trees around graveyards, or mango trees, which are preserved for their fruit. Explanations by interviewees regarding the causes of deforestation varied. Participants emphasised the role of the tobacco estates, while others highlighted unsustainable community harvesting and the practice of charcoal burning as reasons for woodland decline. In certain villages near the Mozambique border, participants claimed that the influx of people to refugee camps, which were established as a result of conflict in the late 1980s and early 1990s, had contributed to the high levels of deforestation. These multi-layered responses reflect the complexity of woodland resource use in the area.

Despite the diversity of causal explanations present in the literature, including those arising from neo-Malthusian discourse (for review see Leach and Fairhead, 2000), the most common explanation by project

⁵ Yawo villages are organised around a matrilineal system of descent (see Mitchell, 1966; Thorold, 1995; Dicks, 2012). Clyde Mitchell's seminal work describes a Yawo village as a complete unit within an organised whole. The leader of each village is the headman. The headman represents the village in all public transactions. Amongst a group of villages one is raised above the level of the rest. The headman of this village is a Group Village Headman (GVH). Both Namwera and Chiponde are GVH; they are also townships located on the Bakili Muluzi Highway.

participants and facilitators was the wood-fuel consumption of tobacco estates. Malawi's postcolonial economic development policy has been defined by its adoption of a market-driven liberal philosophy (Pryor, 1990). This has involved heavy investment in export-oriented agriculture, including tobacco production (Pryor and Chipeta, 1990). Despite the majority of Malawians having little personal use for it, at the time of this study tobacco made up 15 per cent of Malawi's gross domestic product and 70 per cent of its exports (FAO, 2003). Virginia Flue-Cured Tobacco is the main variety grown by estates around Namwera and Chiponde. Flue-cured production in Malawi reached 90 million pounds (roughly 40 million kilograms) in 2005, an increase of 40 million pounds (roughly 18 million kilograms) since 2004 (Simmonds, 2006, p. 14). The wood fuel required for smoking flue-cured tobacco is typically met from customary land supplies, which are often harvested in excess of sustainable yields (Tobin and Knausenberger, 1998).

In Namwera and Chiponde, woodlands are the primary source of household energy and they are also a vital source of essential subsistence goods (for discussion, see French, 1986; Dewees, 1995a & 1995b; Brouwer et al., 1997; and Kayambazinthu et al., 2005).⁶ In order to slow environmental degradation, the World Bank and the World Health Organization have recommended Malawi restructure its economy away from tobacco production (Tobin and Knausenberger, 1998). The lack of available substitute energy resources highlights the nexus between deforestation and poverty. Households cannot afford to use electricity or gas and, as a result, are forced to exploit the natural environment (Park, 1997). The cyclical nature of shortage is similar to other instances of resource scarcity, including famine, with the marginalised and disenfranchised the most severely affected (Devereux, 1993). For villagers who cannot walk the distance to access government forest reserves, the only viable alternative is to purchase wood-fuel or charcoal from the market. Interviewees established the cost of a wood bundle (enough for one meal) at the market to be 20 kwacha. (Estate employees in the area are typically paid around 100

⁶ Forests play an important role in the firing of the mud brick kilns used in constructing houses (Simmonds, 2006, p. 14). They also provide poles and grasses for use in building houses, fences and bridges, and are a source of traditional medicine, fodder, rope, fruit and honey.

kwacha per day.⁷) The declining availability of fuel-wood has significantly altered the household labour allocation, with women required to travel longer distances to collect less wood (French, 1986). This is particularly evident in TA Jalasi, where women leave home twice a week at four in the morning to walk to the government forest reserve in the hills, before returning at three in the afternoon carrying large bundles of sapling trunks.

The Forestry Department is the primary government organisation concerned with the administration of Malawi's woodlands. At the time of this research, the Forestry Department's woodland management plan was outlined in its 'National Forestry Programme' (2001). The Forestry Department (1999a; 2003; 2005) claims that participatory forestry practices contribute to the sustainable management of forest areas through the promotion of local stakeholder involvement. Their approach aims to be people-centred, transparent and equitable. They claim to empower communities to take responsibility and promote collective action for the sustainable use of their forest resources. Despite the robust policy framework based on extensive stakeholder research apparent in the National Forestry Programme, the effectiveness of the Forestry Department is compromised by capacity constraints. The District Forestry Officer (DFO) in Mangochi District is supposed to have over five hundred employees (including administrators and forest guards), but at the time of this research had substantially less than that (around 160). The project facilitator, Global Interaction (GIA), occasionally donated tyres and fuel for the DFO's sole operational vehicle so that he could attend project meetings and provide input to the project.

The Namwera and Chiponde Afforestation Project

The aim of the NCAP is to equip the communities of Namwera and Chiponde with sustainable forestry methods so that they can produce and maintain woodland resources closer to their homes. The initial idea for an afforestation project in the Chiponde area was conceived in 2004 when the headmaster of the Nasato Primary School approached a member of GIA with a plan to plant trees around the local school site. The motivation for his request was to create a windbreak for the school, which had its roof blown off by high winds (wind damage is a relatively common regional occurrence

⁷ At the time of this research, 100 kwacha was exchangeable for approximately \$1 AUD.

generally attributed to deforestation). The project was set up with GIA providing the tools required to plant around 5000 trees, while schoolchildren provided the manual labour (the teachers also used the project to facilitate education about forestry and environmental sustainability). Once the trees had been planted a celebration was organised to mark the community's achievement. This celebration was attended by local dignitaries, including a number of village headmen who were impressed by the project and requested involvement and expansion.

The Nasato school straddles the border between the jurisdictions of two Group Village Headmen: Namwera and Chiponde. Consequently the project expanded into both areas. The expanded project was conceptualised with the assistance of the DFO using the guidelines outlined in the Malawian Government's 'Participatory Forest Management Field Manual'. The emphasis of this document is to implement projects that:

empower rural communities to manage the forest resources fostering ownership or usufruct of trees, and ensuring that such trees are sustainably utilised for the benefit of both present and future generations. (Malawi Forestry Department, 2003, p. 3)

This participatory framework encourages joint assessment and analysis of forest resources, the discussion of appropriate management strategies, and the formulation of resource use rules or by-laws that are locally relevant and locally enforceable (Malawi Forestry Department, 2003, p. 3). Consistent with this model, the community negotiated key decisions concerning where nurseries would be located, what type of trees would be planted, and who would be on the Community Based Natural Resource Committee (CBNRC) and Community Nursery Committees (CNCs). The primary motivation for participants was the need for a community forest that could be harvested for firewood and building materials. Secondary reasons included combating soil erosion, increasing rainfall and harvesting medicine and honey.

The target for each nursery in Year Two of the project was to plant 10 000 trees, with the Forestry Department providing training in critical skills. At the end of Year Two, the first year the project had run in its expanded form, 80 000 trees had been planted. The planning for Year Three began with the project leadership group (including the CBNRC) evaluating the project and ascertaining what had and had not worked

throughout the previous season. This evaluation concluded that the lack of an immediate return for labour was frustrating participants, who expressed dissatisfaction with the inability of the project to improve their present living conditions.

The issue of immediate returns highlighted a tension between the vision of the project facilitators and the expectations of the community. The project facilitators were adamant that the project would not emulate other projects, like Food for Work schemes (usually short-term infrastructure projects), that paid participants with bags of maize to plant trees. While effective in the short term, these projects usually failed once donor sponsorship ended. Community ownership was the driving rationale for GIA's involvement:

I wanted them to feel it was their project and that we were helping them to achieve their goals. If they didn't want to do it, well that's fine, I'm not going to push them or make them. Sounds brutal but in the end if it's not owned by them, it's nothing (Interview with GIA representative).

Despite attempts to clarify this rationale with participants, the point of difference remained. Consequently, to address the desire for immediate benefits it was proposed that fruit tree-grafting workshops, amongst other improvements, become part of the project in Year Three.

In Year Three, the project planted over 100 000 trees. However, there were still several problems associated with its implementation and the fruit tree grafting was not as successful as had been anticipated. While some people interviewed had begun grafting their own trees, the majority had not. The project planted 1900 fruit trees in Year Three. However, while each participant took home a tree for their work in the project, the trees were not yet producing fruit so the desire for an immediate return remained unsatisfied.

The Ownership Rationale

Despite the initial success of the NCAP in meeting its tree-planting targets, a disparity between the expressed aspirations of participants for sponsorship and the position of the project facilitators, who emphasised the need for community ownership,⁸ had emerged.

⁸ Ownership, in this context, does not refer to the possession of land, property, assets or belongings but rather to an idea or practice that is embedded within or reflective of Yawo culture. Yawo ownership of the NCAP and wood-fuel scarcity would require little or no external aid or monetary assistance, but would necessitate

Unresolved, this tension threatened to undermine the project's longevity. Many of the participants had believed they would benefit directly from their involvement in the project. In the short term they expected to receive gifts and material support, while in the long term they hoped they would harvest the trees they had planted. In sum, many participants expected a client-like relationship with the project. In contrast, GIA and the DFO were heavily motivated by the need for community ownership of the wood shortage problem. They aimed to implement an independent and sustainable project. In their view, forestry management was a practice that needed to become embedded within Yawo culture. Like planting maize or thatching a roof, forestry needed to become an annual routine.

Ownership is a theme that has dictated the involvement of GIA from the project's inception. 'People need to plant trees because they need trees' (Interview with CBNRC member) or as expressed by the Yawo proverb:

Jwakulwala m'matumbo ni jwakusawugula litanga

Translation: The one who has diarrhoea is the one who opens the door.

Meaning: People should take initiative in solving their own problems (Dicks, 2006, p. 58).

The ideal of ownership is reflected in the community forestry policy framework, produced by the Forestry Department, and is guided by the principles of empowerment and participation. One member of GIA claimed that his personal belief in the need for community ownership had grown from an awareness of several similar forestry projects recently attempted in the region, and previous experience with other development projects which had been aborted once donor assistance ceased. A nearby forestry project, run by a different NGO, had recently failed after its leaders bowed to community pressure and instigated a Food for Work type scheme. Another forestry project was very successful in nursery construction and seed propagation. However, during a dry period, an organisation providing drought relief handed out money to participants. The participants planted trees in that season but didn't continue in subsequent seasons. For the DFO, paying people

cultural change so that planting and maintaining trees became entrenched practice—similar to sowing maize or making bricks.

to do forestry work is counterproductive:

... people's minds become shifted from doing something on their own to doing something else where they are paid (Interview with DFO).

In the DFO's experience, projects where participants are paid for their work generally stop once donations end. From GIA's perspective, development involves the necessary objective that people will be able to take over management of the project in the long-term, without donor support. Ownership is considered by the DFO and GIA to be a key aspect of the NCAP because community forestry requires a long-term vision. Unlike short-term aid for infrastructure projects or drought relief, reforestation has significant intergenerational consequences.

They argue that the scale of deforestation requires that sustainable forestry practices become embedded within annual agricultural processes. The DFO called this a 'sustainability spirit', which acknowledges the role that the environment plays and fosters understanding that trading for short-term benefits will have detrimental long-term impacts.

The NCAP is under constant pressure from its participants to provide sponsorship equivalent to other projects like Food for Work. Sponsorship can have a negative impact, as demonstrated by an instance when a local Member of Parliament gave a speech in which he promised 'gifts' as a reward for a year's hard work. While the project leadership, including the CBRNC, requested that the money not be distributed, the District Commissioner's office decided to proceed regardless. The money was given arbitrarily to three of the eight nurseries. Both the DFO and GIA conceded that this donation had a detrimental effect on the project and placed increased pressure on the leadership committees.

The donation had two immediate effects. Firstly, the nurseries that didn't receive donations were incensed at the unevenness of the contributions. Secondly, the leadership observed that the nurseries which did receive gifts lost motivation in the following season as they considered it unlikely that they would obtain more sponsorship in the near future. Overcoming this problem required the leadership team to undertake extensive visits to the community nurseries where they requested participants look beyond the gifts to the long-term benefits of a community forest. The DFO reflected that it would have been better if the money hadn't been given at all:

The government resources are not enough. It cannot afford to give money to the whole community. If it did for one year, next year if there is no money people won't go and do the project (Interview with DFO).

A number of participants and members of the CBRNC and the CNCs acknowledged this view but still expressed a desire for sponsorship.

The Desire for Sponsorship

The common theme evident in all CNC and CBRNC interviews was the desire for a sponsor or donor to provide project participants with material support as recompense for their involvement. By sponsorship, participants were not referring to the inputs they currently received collectively to plant trees (wheelbarrows, watering cans, tubes, seeds, etc.) but individual gifts or payments that could improve their immediate living conditions. These included items like money, maize, and fertiliser, which they would euphemistically refer to as 'soap' when asking for assistance. Interviewees were asked 'what would you like to see changed in the project?' Without exception, all participants responded with some reference to the desire for additional sponsorship. The desire for sponsorship came in various forms but the basic theme was the 'encouragement' that participants would feel from sponsorship and how this would 'empower' them to increase the project's productivity. Examples of responses from the CNCs include:

The donors should give gifts. If you encourage us with gifts we will cover the whole hill with trees (Interview with CNC member).

Changes will only happen if the donors give us more gifts (Interview with CNC member).

What we need is someone to empower us (Interview with CNC member).

Interviewees linked declining participation rates with the absence of sponsorship. Six of the eight nurseries reported a decline in participation during Year Three. This trend was reflected in the CBRNC interviews, which highlighted increasing difficulty with motivating participants.

It seems that people are leaving the job because people have been working for three years without any pay. That is why they are leaving the project (Interview with CBNRC member).

People are complaining for a sponsor because most of them are poor. They left their jobs at their houses for a free job. For them it seems like they are wasting time (Interview with CBNRC member).

If we were given more gifts and money many people would come and join the project. Like Food for Work, we just need regular encouragement (Interview with CBNRC member).

These responses were echoed by participants who had left the project.

I was involved in that project with the aim of getting something from that project. I have been working on the project for 6 months. I felt that I was working without getting anything. I was thinking that I would get something so that I can help my sons here at my house. I kept on waiting until I lost hope and then I stopped doing the job (Interview with former project participant).

What I was expecting to get from that forestry project is money because I was knowing that if I got money from the project I could be able to buy maize and fertiliser. With the same money I could buy sleeping mats, since I look after some orphans. That is why I became involved in the project, so I can have something for orphans (Interview with former project participant).

The belief that the project would provide ‘gifts’ can be partially attributed to the involvement of NCAP participants in other projects. All participants were aware of the Food for Work schemes that pay workers with food at the end of each month. The impact of Food for Work schemes on the NCAP and the broader economic culture is just one of many instances where aid has had unintended negative consequences. One interviewee commented that he felt that the proportion of the

population expecting handouts had increased over the previous decades. Certainly the project participants were familiar with the way the development industry operated in this regard. When asked if they would prefer the NCAP to operate on similar principles to Food for Work, the responses were overwhelmingly in the affirmative:

If someone would make it as a Food for Work it will be a great encouragement to the people who are working in the nursery. The ones who have left will come back again (Interview with CBNRC member).

So if some sponsors come and make it like Food for Work it will be a big encouragement for the workers. It will give them hope in their hearts. That will be good to them (Interview with CNC member).

The government has been here with a couple of projects like Food for Work. After the work those people used to receive something. After working 2 or 3 months in the forestry project they realised they are working with nothing to gain and then they lose hope. As a result they decided to leave the nursery (Interview with CNC member).

In contrast, one participant from the CBNRC expressed his dissatisfaction with Food for Work projects:

The Food for Work normally helps just for a short time, as a result it causes problems for a long time (Interview with CBNRC member).

He argued that they usually only ran for a few months and did little to provide long-term assistance for the people of the area. In his view, this had a detrimental impact on the forestry project. Not only did it place pressure on the leaders of the project to secure sponsorship but, in the absence of an immediate benefit, project participation declined. This view was echoed by a member of GIA who acknowledged that Food for Work projects were very successful in achieving their stated aims. However, in their view, projects like Food for Work were creating a culture of dependence amongst the Yawo of Namwera and Chiponde.

Declining participation was also reflected in the choices people

made regarding their labour allocation. Many of the villagers, particularly men, who were not involved in the project chose to search for paid employment:

The people who leave the project are mostly working in order to buy fertiliser (Interview with CNC member).

The problem is a lack of sponsor. If some sponsors come they will keep on going. But others are lazy or want to go to the estates so that at the end of the month they will have something (Interview with CNC member).

When asked for his thoughts about why participants who had instigated the project and expressed a commitment to its longevity continued to request sponsorship, the DFO replied:

Most of the projects in Mangochi are actually initiated by the communities themselves, but it changes direction as soon as it gets off the ground. As soon as the project commences they wish to change direction and they ask for some donation. They don't come openly, they wait for something to start and then when it's started they are going to ask for things (Interview with DFO).

The DFO's analysis highlights how the project participants actively engage in the development 'game', which, judging by the emphasis on sponsorship in interviews, included the way they interacted with this research.

Conclusion

The participatory approach incorporated into the NCAP was highly successful in mobilising the communities of Namwera and Chiponde to plant trees. In an environment where immediate benefits can be gained by harvesting woodland or joining Food for Work projects, the NCAP operated without issuing any planting payments. During its initial three years, the project successfully propagated and planted more than 200 000 trees. Interviewees expressed a commitment to continue the project. While this does not entail ownership, it does indicate that the project is reflective of community needs. Despite the success of the project in exceeding its tree-planting targets, an underlying tension concerning sponsorship and ownership presents a significant challenge

for the future of the NCAP.

All participant interviewees expressed a desire for sponsorship. This sentiment was recognised by GIA and the DFO, who were aware of the context of poverty and aid dependency within which the project operates. While they understood aspirations for immediate material support, GIA and the DFO resisted the pressure to provide payment in return for participation. Motivated by the desire to implement a project that would become independent and sustainable, they believed that project aims should reflect community needs. The belief that ownership is the key to project sustainability reflects both the Malawian Government's policy framework, which privileges community participation, and personal experience with similar projects that have failed as a result of sponsorship. Participant ownership was apparent in the leadership and decision-making structure of the project. However, the continued requests for sponsorship indicated that project participants, relative to the project facilitators, did not share the same aspiration for ownership.

The tension between sponsorship and ownership is a reflection of the context within which the NCAP operates, defined by the substantial presence of the development industry, and the diverse motivations and expectations that exist amongst stakeholders. These expectations are influenced by past experiences with development assistance, which have created shared expectations concerning how benefits should flow. Altering this perception, embedded over decades of intervention, is difficult. Wood-fuel shortage is a serious regional problem but often participants have more urgent requirements, including food security. Efforts have been made by members of the project to reach an arrangement wherein necessity and idealism are engaged in constructive and proactive dialogue (fruit trees for example). However, the willingness of other institutions to fulfill immediate needs continues to compromise the project's long-term objectives.

Despite their willingness to initiate the NCAP, participants anticipated sponsorship in return for their involvement and became dissatisfied when it did not eventuate. Participants were often enticed away from the project by the additional income they could generate elsewhere, despite awareness that this would not produce a viable long-term solution to the wood-fuel problem (indeed, in cases where participants left to work for estates they are helping to perpetuate it). This dilemma highlights an underlying problem with participatory development approaches. How do facilitators respond when confronted with persistent participant requests which they deem to be incompatible

with the project's long-term goals? By attempting to promote ownership over sponsorship are facilitators empowering participants or reducing their agency? These are the questions that face both facilitators of projects such as the NCAP and the development enterprise more generally. Critical development theorists and practitioners have long recognised the historical, cultural, linguistic, economic and postcolonial context within which they operate. It is awareness of and sensitivity to this context that has driven the adoption of the participatory development approach. However, as a case, the NCAP illustrates why theory and practice need to also consider how past interventions shape the context in which current projects operate. As illustrated by the NCAP, uncoordinated and ad hoc attempts at raising the living standards of the people of Namwera and Chiponde are jeopardising the long-term sustainability of their environment and their associated livelihoods. In this respect, more reflexive donor practice might recognise the extent to which their programs shape the political economy of resource use and allocation. In turn, this would provide a greater awareness of how successes in one policy arena—road building by Food for Work schemes for example—may have adverse effects in another.

Postscript⁹

Five years on and six of the eight nurseries are still running. The CBNRC no longer meets but the DFO still visits. GIA withdrew support from the project shortly after the initial research in 2008-09 as a result of key personnel changes. Only one of the six nurseries has received additional inputs from the government; otherwise, the gifts of occasional well-wishers (like local political parties) aside, the nurseries are self-sustaining. Of the remaining six, four are doing better than the others and one has intentionally established another nursery in a village several kilometres away. Two nurseries plan to plant 10 000 seedlings this year. The other four will plant between 5000 and 7000. Two have diversified into honey production with beekeeping training provided by the government. In the most successful nursery, CNC members provide monthly financial contributions to sustain project running costs which they plan to recoup through honey sales.¹⁰ The activities of the other

⁹ This postscript is based on an interview with the former GIA project coordinator in November 2013.

¹⁰ They currently have around K270,000 in the bank from these contributions. As of November 2013, 400 kwacha was exchangeable for approximately \$1 AUD.

four have been more spasmodic. Planting has occurred but not at the same regularity or scale. For the most part, those nurseries that have retained momentum are the same ones that took up the project most enthusiastically in the early phases. Leadership and village cohesion in particular are cited as reasons for the disparity between nurseries, with internal disputes involving either leadership or land dogging less productive nurseries. As yet, no trees have been harvested.

So, were project participants exaggerating the need for sponsorship given that in the absence of donor support the core of the project remains functional? Perhaps. Certainly we can infer that there is a degree of opportunism at work here: participants continue to ask for sponsorship from those who show an interest in the project, and it would certainly make their lives easier, but they also retain an underlying commitment to the imperatives that drove the initial arrangement. For example, one CNC chair recently commented to the former GIA facilitator that he was upset when they did not get money initially but overtime he had come to see the wisdom of this decision as the project was now producing benefits, including the provision of poles for housing and honey. To this extent, the project has achieved its aim of generating community ownership of the wood-fuel problem. On the other hand, the numbers involved in the project have dwindled, in no small part due to the problems identified in the initial study: participants have not received any material benefits and so many have become disillusioned and left (and some of those who remain are still holding out for donor support). In the case of the two defunct nurseries these pressures are believed to have contributed to work ceasing altogether. Moreover, while the project had the potential to alter wood-fuel availability across the district, only one other group was initiated in the subsequent five-year period. GIA has been approached to help other communities—and the impact of its involvement in facilitating the initial phases should not be underestimated—but there has been no groundswell of similar initiatives despite the pressing need.

So, do the relatively pessimistic conclusions of the initial study still hold? To a large extent they do. The participatory design can certainly explain why some nurseries have persisted despite the odds. Hundreds of thousands of trees have been planted and, even if the rewards will only be harvested in the future, people's lives will be impacted in a positive way as a result. However, these benefits are incredibly localised and the broader resource management context has not changed. The facilitators achieved their aims—they did not force participation and a degree of ownership has ensured the project has outlasted donor

involvement—and yet to a large extent the initial problem that these communities set out to solve together remains undiminished.

Perhaps broader socioeconomic change is too much of a burden to place on one project. Certainly, stakeholders believe that contextual factors, including other donor interventions, are working against the NCAP. At the same time, this actuality raises questions for the participatory model. Despite identifying a problem and providing a plausible solution, participants pick and choose how to spend their time and, in many cases, the available options, including Food for Work Schemes, make more sense to those involved. The alternative is either heavy-handed government intervention or paying people to participate. Neither course of action is likely to generate ownership. To that end, as a case the NCAP embodies both the possibilities and the constraints faced by these types of initiatives and the development model that underpins them.

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