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World Neighbors' experience of going beyond PRA in Kenya

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Summary

The paper is a case study of the way that World Neighbors used PRA in a process of community development in one sublocation in Kenya. The paper gives some background as to the practices of World Neighbors, the conditions in the community, and the role of government in the area. It then explains how PRA was used with a representative body at the sublocation level for analysis and planning. The PRA discussions led to development activities that had impacts on the physical well-being of community members, as well as less tangible social effects. The social effects included new modes of operating for the village leadership, changed relationships between community members, and supportive attitudes of local government officials for community led development activities.

By presenting the specific approach taken by World Neighbors, the case study raises a number of general strategic choices facing other non-governmental organisations using PRA. In what way does the approach to PRA attempt to affect relationships between community groups and government? What new forms of social inclusion and exclusion, intended and unintended, are produced by the way organisations apply PRA? What compromise is struck between representation and direct participation in PRA by different groups of community members, and what are the implications? Does an organisation's approach to PRA create temporary or more enduring openings for different people to participate in decision making processes? How does the NGO introducing PRA adjust its strategy to the organisational context in the community? What responsibilities for different actors to provide development resources is implied by the approach taken to PRA? The case study presents the strengths and weaknesses of the strategies chosen by WN in relation to these questions, given its specific working context. The paper thus presents a challenge to other organisations to think through how they respond to the same questions in their own work.

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Preface

This working paper is part of a series of papers arising from the **Pathways to Participation** project. The **Pathways to Participation** project was initiated in January 1999 with the aim of taking stock of experience with Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA). In the ten years since PRA first began to gain popularity in development, it has come to be used by an enormous range of actors and institutions throughout the globe. Promoted as a common sense, inclusive, accessible and above all ‘people-centred’ approach, PRA has gained currency in diverse circles and given rise to as diverse an array of practices. Yet what ‘PRA’ means to the different people who use, commission and experience it has remained rather opaque. From the generalised promotion of PRA to generalised critiques, there is little of that clarity that Cohen and Uphoff (1980) argued so passionately for at the end of a decade in which participation first entered the mainstream of development practice.

The **Pathways to Participation** project grew out of a linked set of concerns. On the one hand, practitioners had been raising questions about issues of quality, depth and ethics for some years. With the rapid uptake of PRA, these concerns were deepening. On the other, with the multiplication of meanings and practices associated with PRA, it seemed increasingly important to gain a clearer sense of what was being done, as well as what worked, for whom and how. Building on the tradition of critical reflection that is embedded in many participatory methodologies, the **Pathways to Participation** project sought to set the meanings and uses of PRA within the particular contexts in which it is practised and with regard to broader currents in participation in development. As an action research process, the project has sought to catalyse and support processes that share the ultimate goal of deepening reflection in order to identify positive measures that could help enhance the integrity and quality of PRA practice. The variety of activities supported by the project range from collaborative case study research, national and international reflection workshops, networking activities, video and practitioner exchanges.

An initial process of open-ended dialogue with a spectrum of actors engaged in various ways with PRA in three focal countries – Kenya, Nepal and Mexico – formed a preliminary starting point for project activities. Three preliminary, agenda-setting country reflection papers were produced, giving rise to a series of focused case studies which explore different dimensions of participatory practice. The project also supported in-depth field research that sought to explore in depth the practices associated with PRA as set within particular organisational, cultural and social contexts. Studies in India, the Gambia and Vietnam provided further comparative material. National-level workshops and an international gathering of PRA practitioners served as fora for reflection and debate. The latter has given rise to two publications, a detailed workshop report and a collection of papers reflecting on individual practitioners’ own pathways to participation, capturing both a diversity of perspectives on PRA and practitioners’ views on current and future challenges.

This working paper series presents materials from the project, including an overview of key lessons learnt and their implications for practice, country reflection papers from Kenya, Nepal, and Mexico, and three case studies from Kenya, India and the Gambia. The **Pathways to Participation** project was

funded by Sida, DFID and SDC, as part of support to the Participation Programme at IDS. As a collaborative initiative, the project took shape through the involvement of numerous individuals and organisations, who played a vital part in realising project activities and in the processes of reflection that the project helped set in train. While these papers represent some of the formal outputs of the project, the project has given rise to a wealth of informal forms of sharing lessons learnt and reflections on the past, present and future. It is our hope that this project has helped serve as a stimulus for ongoing processes of critical reflection from which so much remains to be learnt.

Andrea Cornwall and Garrett Pratt, IDS, November 2000

1 Introduction

Over the last decade, PRA has been used on an increasing scale in an ever-widening variety of development contexts. The term 'PRA' has come to be used to describe a wide spectrum of practices, giving rise to concerns about quality. Concerned practitioners have tried to demarcate the boundaries of good practice, by creating guidelines, discussing standards through networking events (PAMFORK 1996), and raising attention to key areas for concern (Absolom *et al.* 1995; Adhikari *et al.* 1997). Critics have drawn attention to a host of shortcomings and challenges of PRA practice, not always constructively (Mosse 1993; Brown 1997; Leurs 1996). Yet many critiques tend to treat 'PRA' as a single thing, paying little attention to the sheer diversity of practice and often focusing on particular applications as if they represented PRA-in-general.

If, as Chambers (1997) suggests, PRA is less a blue-print than a mindset, less a defined set of procedures than a highly variable set of practices, it is difficult to make any general assertions about PRA. Since different people use PRA in such different ways for a range of very different purposes, it is hard to arrive at a clear picture of 'good practice' or a clear sense of what 'quality' might mean. For example, if a PRA practitioner is aiming to gather reliable information for research purposes, the standards for good quality practice will be very different than if the practitioner is aiming to support the otherwise marginalised and voiceless in claiming their rights. The diversity of practices called PRA and the debates over 'quality' reflect differences in perspective and position that go beyond the methodological.

By understanding the particular ways that different actors understand and practice PRA in different contexts, a clearer understanding can be gained of the nature of the differences in meanings and practices associated with 'PRA'. This understanding, in turn, can deepen and enrich reflections on quality, and offer important lessons for broader efforts to improve the depth and impact of participation in development processes. Accordingly, this case study seeks to provide a closer look at the ways in which PRA is understood and practised by one organisation, World Neighbors (hereafter referred to as WN), in the specific historical, political and cultural setting of one region of Kenya. It shows how a version of PRA is created through the joint efforts of the many social actors involved, each of whom holds their own interpretation of PRA, participation and development.

The paper analyses the way that WN has used PRA within their community development programmes in Nzuuni sublocation. This case study benefits from taking a relatively long view as compared to much writing about PRA. The research looks back to the situation in the communities before PRA was introduced, and then follows through what has happened in the communities after PRA was used by WN in their work with local people, starting in 1994. The paper draws on information gathered through ongoing monitoring and evaluation work, fieldwork for a dissertation (Muthengi 1998), and new fieldwork to extend the analysis up until 1999. With this medium term view, we can ask questions about the role PRA plays in social interactions and development activities in the communities where it was used over time:

- How do practice, attitudes and interrelations in the community, in the NGO, in government, and between all these groups affect the PRA process, and how are they in turn affected by the process (Lewis 1998)?
- How do different actors understand the processes and how does this understanding in turn mediate the process?
- What are the major challenges of projecting PRA from a catalysing exercise into an ongoing process of sustainable empowerment and development (particularly in terms of leadership, structures and resource access)?

The next section will give a brief overview of the methodology used in preparing the case study. The paper will then look at the context into which PRA was introduced, particularly the history of WN, conditions in the community before PRA was used, and some background on governance in Kenya. The section also looks at the relationships between WN, the community, and government before a PRA approach was tried in Nzuuni. We then describe in some detail the approach that WN took to PRA, including the way in which WN sees PRA fitting into their larger conception of community development. Next, the paper examines the effects of the WN programmes, and particularly the effect that their approach to PRA has had on WN, community members, local government, and the relationships between these actors. The paper then moves into examining some of the challenges that stem from the particular way that WN has taken to PRA. The paper concludes by summarising some of the challenges facing PRA practice raised by the case study.

2 Methodology

In 1998 WN carried out an evaluation of PRA as a communication process, both in terms of its merits and problems as a method of communication and its ability to communicate development issues over the long term (Muthengi 1998). This was conducted in three of the areas in Kenya in which WN operates. These programme areas were chosen because they have all been using PRA processes of development since 1994/5. The study used PRA methodologies for the analysis of the PRA process by those community members who had taken part in the very first PRA assessment and subsequently been key players in the development processes (including Development Committee members).¹ This was followed up by several semi-structured interviews with those community members considered to be opinion leaders, professional intermediaries or cultural authority figures (a total of 24 respondents).

¹ See below for an explanation of WN's use of PRA and forming of Development Committees.

Following interesting findings from this initial study, WN and IDS came together with the aim of developing further understanding by focusing on just one of these three programme areas and particularly on two villages, Itooni and Uongo, within this area.² Nzuuni sub-location in Makueni district was chosen on account of initial indications that they had experienced both some interesting power struggles through the process and a mixed level of success and failure according to their own representation as well as the additional available evidence, including a recent Impact Assessment of the Programme (World Neighbors 1998). This follow-up study involved staying in the community for three weeks and carrying out interviews, focus group discussions and PRA activities with a wide range of actors including WN Programme staff, government officials and community members. Particularly in the case of community members an effort was made to hear a wide range of voices; those who had been closely involved in the process (Committee Members), those who had partial involvement (e.g. attended some PRA sessions, were members of working groups), those who had little to no direct involvement, and a balance of age (including youth members), gender, wealth and levels of authority.

3 The context of PRA

We will begin by describing the context into which WN introduced PRA, focusing on three complex agents: WN, the community, and local government.

3.1 World Neighbors

The case of WN's work in Nzuuni confirms the importance shown in previous studies of ethos and structure in determining organisations' approach to PRA and their relationship with the communities with which they work. This is important both in terms of attitudes and behaviour throughout the organisation feeding into conduct of PRA (Bangalore Workshop participants 1996; Chambers 1997) and in influencing the level of flexibility and signals provided to fieldworkers which feeds into their action (Holmes 1999).

The bottom-up focus of WN and its arrival at PRA through experimentation have allowed its use of PRA to remain flexible and rooted in the needs of the community. Since WN's foundation in 1951, it has framed its development in terms of working with the 'grassroots'. This outlook has led the organisation to constantly seek to make rhetoric meet practice, which over time has led to a shifting conceptualisation and use of the term 'grassroots'. These changes can be seen to have been driven by both promotion of critical reflection on how the organisation can better achieve its broad aims and responsiveness to pressures from

² The researchers brought different experiences and understandings to the studies, through which interpretations need to be understood to have been filtered, but which also served a valuable source of cross-checking and peer review. Kimanzi Muthengi has been the 'Research and Communication' officer of WN for several years, has been involved in PRA practice and is Kikamba speaking. Melanie Speight comes from a more theoretical background and is an English non-Kikamba speaking female and was assisted by a local youth member (Timothy Kasimba) who has experience of PRA and acted as a translator and whose own understandings of the process should also be seen as an additional filter.

the community or those working close to it. The managerial flexibility this suggests can be seen in the shift, during the 1980s, from working through a Church Organisation and Self Help Groups to more participatory work directly with communities. The current Area Representative of WN explains how this arose on the one hand out of a feeling among programme team members that the Church development agency offered too top-down a structure to be a partner for bottom-up development and on the other from evaluation findings that resources were only benefiting small cliques in the Self Help Groups.

Prior to using PRA methodologies, WN staff had had some exposure to both Development Education and Leadership Training in Action (DELTA), in its work with the Church development agency and Learner Centred Problem Solving Approach (LEPSA), in its training in Community Based Health work. WN came to PRA through a combination of programme team experimentation and exposure to training. The Area Representative describes how, in the early 1990s, programme staff such as herself started to experiment with 'strengthening participation by use of visuals, developed by the community as questions were asked', which mostly at this time involved mapping boundaries, resources and population. WN described this evolving methodology as Mirror Reflection Learning and Action, or MARLAA. The imagery of PRA visuals representing mirrors with which the community can see their situation, 'warts and all', and be spurred to do something about it, is still a very important aspect of WN's approach and vocabulary.

Whilst team members were still struggling with ways to develop the use of these 'mirrors', they began to hear about PRA. Two WN staff members attended the second South-South PRA practitioner exchange in India in 1993, coordinated by Robert Chambers, which one describes as 'a chance to sharpen our skills in terms systematically using visuals and in going beyond maps to analyse a further range of issues'. Following this, other staff members were trained in and exposed to PRA practices. Whilst some were initially sceptical, the Area Representative notes that many, particularly those with previous exposure to LEPSA and DELTA, took to it well. The kinds of attitudinal and behavioural changes which PRA requires are testified to by members of WN staff. A member of the Makueni programme team explains how, 'after learning about PRA we started counting people first' and explains the big shift in an approach this required,

We had been looking at ourselves as if we were the ones with the answers. I was a professionally trained agriculturalist, how could the farmers have the answers? But then we gave our trust to the community and this represented a new challenge.

WN has not only embraced but also developed PRA for use throughout their work. Even at that first workshop in India WN-EA staff drew from their experience to highlight the limitation of PRA in terms of moving from visuals to action plans and the wider development process. Over the years they have sought to develop and adapt PRA methodologies to meet this challenge, for example, by distinguishing between initial 'diagnostic' PRAs and later 'thematic' PRAs which deal in depth with issues identified in the initial PRA. WN has also mixed PRA tools with other participatory methods, such as theatre, role

plays, traditional folk music and video. They have also increasingly incorporated Participatory Learning and Action as central to their work, which includes not only reflection within their own organisation, but also a growing level of communication with other NGOs particularly through national networks such as PAMFORK and the NGO Council.³

3.2 Community

Nzuuni sub-location is located in Makueni district, situated between Nairobi and Mombassa. Makueni has been described as ‘one of the poorest Districts in Kenya’ (World Neighbors 1998). The area is semi-arid and hilly. Rainfall is low (500–1300 mm per annum) and falls in two rainy seasons, October–December and February–April. Nzuuni is made up of six villages and in 1995 had a population of 7,400 (World Neighbors 1998). The villages of Nzuuni lie on two sides of a valley with a permanent river, the Kaiti, running through the valley. Houses are fairly widely spread and each household consists on average of ten members. The sub-location is fairly cut off, though just beyond its border is a market which is connected by a road to a couple of major towns.

Itooni and Uongo are two of the longest established communities. They were chosen for focus because they provide an interesting contrast, with Itooni being considered the richest community and being geographically central and the home of the Assistant Chief whilst Uongo is considered the poorest community (commonly described as ‘backward’) and is situated on a steep hillside and the most cut-off. In addition, the villages predominantly represent the two different clans which is significant to the politics of the sub-location.

WN is the only development agency working in the area. The context of their involvement with Nzuuni community is described by many as occurring against a background of conflict. An Uongo villager describes how ‘we were always throwing bitter words at our neighbours’ and the District Officer refers to Nzuuni’s reputation for being particularly inharmonious. This is explained by one of the Programme staff as being a consequence of Nzuuni being only made up of two clans, which increasingly were involved in land disputes and ‘could not even eat with one another, let alone sit down and discuss issues of development’.

When WN started to work in Nzuuni, one of the Programme staff describes how they ‘found a community with many problems’, but one which ‘felt that these problems were such a part of them that they presumed that they would always be there and they didn’t want to do something about them themselves or even think about them’. A Committee Member confirms this impression by recalling that ‘before I was being carried by the waves in any direction, I had no thinking’.

³ PAMFORK (founded 1994) is the ‘Participatory Methodologies Forum of Kenya’. The NGO Council is an elected body representing all registered NGOs in Kenya aiming to coordinate activities, act as a channel for information and advocate on NGOs’ behalf. WN is a highly active member of both (Kilalo, pers. comm.).

3.3 Government

In 1985 the Government of Kenya introduced a policy of District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD). Government rhetoric posited this as an attempt to hand over some of identification and funding responsibilities for development to the district level. In the Kenyan system of government, communities are organised on the basis of administrative units of decreasing size; district, division, location and sub-location. The DFRD outlined a system in which the Assistant Chief and appointed representatives at the sub-locational level should recommend development needs which then go through a process of prioritisation and incorporation as the list moves up the development committees, through locational, divisional and district levels, to the top. Some commentators have suggested that the deconcentration, rather than decentralisation, features of DFRD, with continued use of line-ministries which allocate funds from the centre, has led to difficulties in effectively decentralising decision making, the most cynical viewing it as no more than a tactic to extend greater central control over the peripheries (Smoke 1993). However, in many respects the DFRD represented a positive move to more local positioning of power, which was in line with and therefore assisted WN's strategy.

Another major change which is of importance to the work of NGOs in Kenya was the shift to multi-party politics in 1992 and the beginnings of a process of democratisation. Some community members identify this as a time at which the government became more responsive to development needs of communities, since 'other parties were constantly pressurising them where they failed to perform'. The local District Officer describes how the multi-party system 'makes government work harder and NGO work easier' since 'the government has difficulty bringing so many actors to agreement whilst NGOs are allowed more space and find it easier to find firebrands who will hoist their cause'. WN understand the change as providing a better environment for their work, with greater freedom to act, talk about issues such as gender and human rights and put the government to task. The process of liberalisation has also had the effect of bringing a greater array of actors into development.

Despite these potentially positive moves towards more participatory and accountable community development, many commentators on the Kenyan situation have highlighted the severe constraints on any government-led development efforts in the light of decreasing government resources (Ng'ethe and Kanyinga 1992). This can be traced to the scaling back of development funds as part of Structural Adjustment, economic decline and misallocation and a decrease in development funds provided to government by donors due to concerns about poor governance. As a result, many community members commented that they could no longer rely on the government for service provision or even to provide support for local development initiatives.

3.4 Community-government-World Neighbors relationship

Community members describe a previously highly submissive relationship with the government, under which they obeyed the 'authoritarian dictates' of the Assistant Chief, had any money they collected in groups 'eaten' and lived in fear of government officials, to whom they 'gave a chicken when [they] were commanded' and got 'nothing to the side of development'. These problems extended to the leadership of

the elders and sub-locational development committee. In the Impact Assessment this leadership in 1994 scored an average, in a qualitative perceptive scale marked out of ten, of zero for openness, two and a half for accountability (money), four for accountability (resources) and zero for time management (World Neighbors 1998).

In terms of the relationship of WN and the community, one of the Programme staff describes how the lack of trust between all parties when WN first started working with Nzuuni meant that in their earliest interactions 'yes could mean no and no mean yes'. In terms of the WN and government relationship, she comments that the authoritarian role of the Assistant Chief meant that 'we could sow seeds but before we'd got home they were being removed again' and describes the frustration as they 'talked all day and held meeting after meeting but reaped no fruits'.

4 Context as it feeds into PRA practice

WN's approach to some of the major questions posed by attempts to use participatory development was highly influenced by three contextual factors: an adaptable, sector based but increasingly community driven WN; a divided, 'apathetic' community; and a government using the rhetoric of trying to be more bottom-up but in many respects remaining authoritarian at the village level and becoming increasingly financially constrained. The next section will examine the strategy of intervention that WN pursued, and the particular approach to PRA it chose, in light of this context.

4.1 Level of operation: 'finding the cracks in the state'

The Area Representative explains how WN fulfil neither of the usual stereotypes of NGOs occupying the role which government is failing to fulfil or locating themselves in opposition to (more authoritarian) governments. In contrast, WN strives to cooperate with the Kenyan government, in recognition of the fact that 'this is the state, they have resources and the power to clamp down on us, so why not work with them and try to find the cracks'.

These 'cracks' refer to the areas of 'daylight' which provide potential areas of cooperation. WN's attempts to open these up involve attempts to strengthen some of the more participatory potential of government systems and personnel. On the one hand this involves working at the sub-locational level, the smallest unit of government operation, in an attempt to bridge the gap between the village and the government structures. On the other hand, it means attempting to include government personnel in the process of change right from the beginning, as evidenced by WN consulting with administrators before they even decided to work closely with Nzuuni, and then taking the Assistant Chief on a 'leadership training course' in 1993, some time before they even started thinking of PRA.

4.2 Style of operation: double-digging the ground and building the frames

Although not part of a strategic 'pre-PRA' preparation at the time, reflecting back on the Nzuuni experience, WN staff recognise and have learnt the value of 'preparing the ground before sowing the seed

which is PRA'. One of the Programme team focuses on the importance of trust. She refers to a 'sensitising and mobilising process' in which you 'help them to trust each other as a neighbour so that they can actually work together' and you also 'help them to trust you and you to trust them, so that they will open up and say what they feel, not what they think will please you, and you can recognise the difference'.

The second aspect which WN feel is crucial to an effective PRA is organising the community, in terms of structures and leadership. There is much debate over if and what sort of community based structures are suitable or can feasibly be formed for the management of development (Mosse 1996; Ostrom 1992). The Area Representative explains WN's focus on leaders on the basis that they need to be identified since 'not everyone wants to be involved in everyday analysis' and also that they need to be supported and understood, since 'what happens on the ground is very influenced by them'. The Impact Assessment (World Neighbors 1998) describes how 'on returning to his community [after WN leadership training, 1993] the Assistant Chief held a meeting with the village elders and they decided to increase the number of the Village Development Committee (VDC) members from five to seventeen'. These extra members were voted for by village members and attempts were made to choose a balance of genders, age and economic positions. Those that were elected explain that they were chosen because 'the community believed that we cared for development and would come and report to them'. Following the coming together of these VDCs for the first PRA, a sub-locational Central Committee of 68 was instituted, which they called, '*Kikundi Kya Utetheesya na Kusisya Maendo*' (meaning 'a group of organising people towards development'). The committee members were to be the main focus for analysis of development needs but were also expected to draw from the ideas of the rest of the community and mobilise them for action. The intention was that this could be achieved through village committees consulting and reporting to village level meetings and the Central Committee consulting and reporting to sub-location wide general meetings.

WN claim that in the case of Nzuuni these structures were not based on any previous formal institutions. In other areas WN have been able to build off village-wide institutions such as committees which had originally been traditional village councils or funeral funds and had grown. However, in Nzuuni, both WN staff and community members focus on the fact that previous groups for development had all collapsed through corruption. In spite of this, community members describe a whole range of institutions which can be seen as feeding into or providing some of the foundations of the development committees; for example the system of elders (previously appointed by the Assistant Chief) which also fed into the sub-locational development committee, clan groups which have their own hierarchies and meet regularly, funeral *barros* (insurance groups known as '*Syama sya Mathiko*') and vibrant church groups. In this respect, it seems that there had been informal institutions for decision making and community organisation but that the Development Committees represented a new type of more formal institution which people saw as somehow different.

WN and Nzuuni community only came to PRA together once the ground had to some extent been prepared. The programme staff explain how the committee members asked for some way to understand how they could analyse their problems and move forward. This request came not long after they first started to learn about PRA, so the method was suggested and idea accepted.

4.3 Practice of PRA

The first 'diagnostic' PRA was carried out in 1994 with the 68 members of the sub-locational Central Committee and its honorary chair, the Assistant Chief. The choice to work at the sub-locational level was determined not only by the desire to link with government but also by the recognition of common issues and the necessity of the ever difficult compromise of scale and depth. PRA participants worked on issues in their village groups and then discussed and drew out comparisons and sub-location wide issues in plenary sessions.

The PRA took place over five days in a communal area in Itooni village. A range of tools, including resource, social, mobility and seasonal mapping, time trend analysis and chapati diagramming, were used and four WN staff members, three of whom spoke the local dialect, Kikamba, facilitated. On the fifth day, the PRA participants were asked to prioritise the needs which they had identified and analysed and to draw up both village level and sub-location level action plans. The VDCs were then expected to take the priorities back to their village communities, to verify and draw up plans.

Participatory evaluation of communication aspects PRA in 1998 showed benefits and short-falls of these practices of PRA, as the extracts in Box 1 illustrate.

Box 1 Extracts from findings of 1998 Evaluation of PRA practice in Nzuuni

1 How can you describe the learning that took place in 1994?

All participants clearly remembered the PRA process and even in surprising details. The visual dimension of PRA and its use of locally available materials was instrumental in this. It was considered that the participatory nature of 'doing it ourselves' also seemed to have helped in understand the process.

2 How did you find the methods enabled your understanding of development in your village?

This discussion brought out the fact that the illiterate consider not being able to draw a drawback to PRA understanding. However, when this was pursued it was established that this was a lack of self-confidence because in the end they participated and understood well. Secondly, one participant felt that unfamiliar language can be a barrier but most participant felt that with translation this could be overcome. Some tools were viewed as difficult such as the social map and mobility map.

Muthengi, K., 1998, *A Communication Evaluation of PRA in Selected WN-EA Programme Areas*; pp 88-9

The conclusions of the communication study of the three WN programme areas found in addition that the time period allowed, sequencing and facilitation of the WN style of PRA was conducive to

communication of development issues. Participants reported that the visual nature of the PRA made it easy to understand, regardless of educational level. In addition it was observed that women were able to participate equally, with any initial hesitation being due to 'cultural courtesy' rather than underlying bias (Muthengi 1998).

WN and Nzuuni continued to use PRA over the next five years, but this time to help analyse and plan for thematic issues which had been prioritised in the initial 'diagnostic' PRA, or which subsequently arose. Since 1994 Nzuuni community members have participated in thematic PRAs concerning leadership (roles, responsibilities, skills, methods of integrated development), agriculture and agro-forestry (indigenous food plants, composting and terracing, planting time and spacing, farm accounting), and gender and reproductive health (family planning and family relations). These are carried out on either the village or sub-locational level depending on need and request. Attendance is not restricted to committee members but open to volunteers, either at the village or sub-locational level, depending on with whose need it is dealing. Whilst commonly referred to as 'seminars' by community members, these one to three day workshops use a range of PRA tools and other participatory methodologies.

Indeed, WN's on-going use of participation remains fairly flexible and experimental. PRA methods are also combined with DELTA, LEPSA, PAR and AL (*Action Learning) and include experimental tools, such as the using a visual representation of filling glasses with water in order to assess change and importance (World Neighbors 1998). Programme staff explain how they use a variety of participatory methods, such as song, dance and role-play, depending on what seems an appropriate 'way in' for the session. This can be seen in the use of role-play to open up discussion on the benefits and failings of different styles of leadership and during reproduction health workshops, to both illustrate and overcome lack of communication between couples. WN have also experimented with using video recordings of meetings or story-board drawings of the results of PRA analysis, which the villagers comment upon later to verify and reflect up on findings.

In terms of ongoing PRA practice, the intention is expressed by the Area Representative that VDCs would meet regularly with their village members to discuss development issues which could then be fed back to the Central Committee for discussion and incorporation into action plans. Although she does not go so far as to suggest that VDC leaders should use PRA in their interactions with their villages, the expectation is that they would conduct meetings with at least the attitudes and behaviours instilled through PRA practice and as discussed in the many 'leadership training' sessions.

5 Effects

The following section examines the effects of the approach taken by WN to PRA in Nzuuni. We organise our analysis by looking at effects on different actors and on the relationships between them. We start by looking at the effects on WN, and then study different members of the community, particularly the local leadership and women.

5.1 On World Neighbors

The experience of WN demonstrates that all actors involved in PRA process can be affected by its transformatory potential. Perhaps most importantly is the attitude and behavioural change which is not only seen as an important requisite for undertaking 'good' PRA (Chambers 1997) but can be seen in this case study is shown to be an on-going process of change. One of the Programme staff describes how 'ourselves, our eyes were also opened', realising, for example, that 'the community have a lot of answers for their own problems'. He also talks about how WN switched from a directive role in the community, to being more of a human resource for community members to draw on to fulfil their needs. As he said, 'Writing our programme proposal is just about getting the information from what the people have planned' and 'we respond to the requests of the community for our assistance'.

The community impetus to programme planning forced a more flexible approach to management. The Area Representative encourages Programme staff to plan their activities entirely on the basis of tailoring them to the needs of the community; though WN still has its priority concerns, it is up to the community and programme staff to decide how they will be tackled. She believes that the PRA process has 'provided for skills of listening and understanding which allow programme staff to be more receptive to the community's needs and more willing to innovate'.

The use of participatory approaches has inevitably drawn WN into a more flexible approach to its programme, both in terms of the issues in which they are willing to involve themselves, and the extent to which they are willing to collaborate with other actors. This is in line with WN's on-going re-appraisal of what it means to be a 'grassroots' organisation, as mentioned above. A realisation of the 'non-separable' priorities of the communities has moved WN staff from focusing largely on agriculture, water and primary health care to widening the canvas somewhat to include related issues such as leadership skills and gender relations, and approaching all these areas in a more holistic manner. In addition, they have realised that 'you can't change lives on your own', drawing them to look for areas of collaboration with other actors. Further, since 'your goal is not the only goal', this collaboration requires greater flexibility as an organisation and with your policy framework.

WN has incorporated the idea of participatory learning from action into its own organisational development. Reflection on programme work is systematised through the sharing of reports on every six months of operation and after any PRA workshop as well as periodic Impact Assessments. It is evident from the correlation of references made by WN staff for areas needing improvement that particularly in the case of the Impact Assessment, real lessons and actions are drawn from this process. Programme staff are encouraged not only to think about the development of their own programme, but also that of WN as a whole, the analogy being made that just as WN-EA may need to look to moving to other parts of Africa and WN Kenya to other districts, programme areas need to look to other sub-locations. The embracing of PRA processes have encouraged a dynamic, interactive and iterative approach to change in WN-EA. This is crucial to any attempts to inculcate participatory processes of development in the communities in which they work.

However, there are still areas where the ethos of PRA has not been entirely absorbed within the whole institution, causing constraints on its application. This can be seen in the issue of moving from a focus on sectoral ends to a focus on empowerment processes. The Area Representative draws this out as a tension, seeing empowerment arising through the continuous process of meeting the challenges of everyday needs, which in itself has very particle implications. However, at the community level, it sometimes proves harder to keep this balance. A tendency to move the focus back to sectoral projects is exacerbated by the fact that each member of staff tends to have their own specialisms, in Nzuuni's case in health and agriculture, which can lead to division of community work and interests along these lines and, at times, render the process less holistic and push the empowerment goal further out of sight.

A second difficulty recognise by the Area Representative is that the ability of Programme team staff to respond to community needs is limited by practical constraints of 'being stretched thin' and personal constraints of both not pushing boundaries enough since it is 'just a job' and not listening enough to or guiding the community due to 'sub-consciously knowing what the organisation wants'. This can be seen in the practice of Programme staff outlining previous work WN has done and giving loaded suggestions during diagnostic PRAs.⁴ Given the Area Representative's expression that what 'the organisation wants is response to community needs', it appears that internalisation of the shift in organisational priorities has not been fully absorbed down at the field level.

5.2 On the community

When exploring the impact of PRA on the community, we will begin by analysing the positive impacts. In doing so, we will look firstly to physical changes, which can be measured as direct poverty reducing impacts. We will then analyse the power and institutional changes which underpin and drive these.

5.2.1 Positive impacts on poverty reduction

WN assert that their primary aim is poverty reduction, and in terms of physical signs of change towards this end, PRA processes of development in Nzuuni can be seen to have contributed towards this goal in many areas. The 1998 analysis of the ability of PRA to communicate development issues over the long term pointed to the achievement of poverty reducing goals identified in the Village Action Plans. These include improved farming practices, the building of a resource centre including an office for the Assistant Chief, a new BAMAKO (community managed health) facility and food store, the building of a road to Uongo and an on-going polytechnic project (Muthengi 1998).

⁴ This is based on observation during a 'diagnostic PRA' in a new village of operation near Nzuuni.

Regarding farming, Itooni participants in the 1998 study selected as development indicators and ranked (out of three) improvements in performance in farming (rising from two to three) and in trees (from one to three) whilst Uongo members registered continued low performance in both livestock (at one) and soil conservation (at zero). The Impact Assessment details some of these improvements as improved terracing and planting of indigenous vegetable plots and tree nurseries (World Neighbors 1998).

Itooni participants in the 1998 study ranked improvements brought about by the Assistant Chief's office (from zero to three) and improved Healthcare (from zero to three). The importance of Assistant Chief's office is linked in with issues of leadership outlined below. People explain how previously they did not know where to find the Assistant Chief and the office has allowed for far greater levels of communication. The improved healthcare can in part be seen as the result of the initiation of a BAMAKO facility, which involves the buying and selling on of drugs by a community committee from a dispensary in the same building as the Assistant Chief's office, in Itooni. In addition, the heightened collaboration of WN, the community and the Ministry of Health has led to improvements and greater use of the health centre located at the market just outside Nzuuni. Evidence from the Health Centre cited in the Impact Assessment shows that the number of people infected with sexually transmitted infections have decreased, particularly in Itooni and Uongo, where the greatest work has been done, with reported cases dropping from a total of twenty-five in 1994 to four in 1997 (World Neighbors 1998).

Uongo participants in the 1998 study ranked improvements brought about by the road as a sign of development (zero to two). In interviews community members expressed the importance of having a road for a variety of reasons including speedier and easier transport of goods and people, especially for access to health facilities (patients can be carried in wheelbarrows instead of on shoulders) and greater safety when walking home and for daughters at night.

The most recent project which has come out of the action plans is a food store. Food insecurity had been identified as a major problem and in 1998 a one day workshop was held for leaders (38 men and 28 women) to discuss and start a cereal bank. The intention is that this will reduce the distance travelled to buy food, assist in selling surplus harvest and reduce the amount of money spent on food, as a result of cutting out the middleman and buying outside of scarce times (World Neighbors 1998: 11). A food credit system is also in operation among members. The store was set up in May 1998 (and a committee selected to run it, in a participatory style where decisions are made by the group. Membership enrolment required the contribution of 100/= and five kg of maize. The store now has 150 members and 200,000/= worth of maize in storage. At the last AGM (August 1999) it was suggested that the store extend it's activities to provide credit, which would act both as a service to members and a source of profit for dispersal.

5.2.2 Social change and institutional growth

As can be seen above, there are considerable physical signs of development. These are crucial outcomes of the development process flowing from PRA, but it is also necessary to look at changes in power relations and institutional change underpinning this physical development. These will be treated in turn.

Social change through empowerment: 'now we know our rights'

'Empowerment' is often perceived as one of the key aims of participatory development processes. Though it is a term seldom used by WN staff or community members, it is an underlying theme of many of the changes they perceive. The most frequently phrase used by community members to explain the changes since PRA is 'now we know our rights', some going as far as defining PRA as meaning 'knowing your rights'. Explanations of these rights are broad and varied yet well developed and in almost all cases express what can be seen as genuine feelings of 'empowerment'.

Empowerment of the community: our eyes are opened

The empowerment of the community can be seen as a direct result of mobilisation and communication aspects of PRA. In terms of mobilisation, this empowerment is seen in the community's realisation that they have some kind of control over their lives and can do something about their situation. This can almost be described as a 'power to', received from the analytical and mobilising potential of PRA (Lukes 1974). The Area Representative reports that 'people get very excited when they set the mirror and see their reflection'. Whilst admitting that not all community members react in this way, she states that 'there is always enough of a consensus to move and pressure is exerted so almost all will be mobilised'. In one sense people talk of their right to basic needs and in another, their right to mobilise for good and accountable development to achieve these. One of the Programme staff describes how WN produced a video after the first PRA, 'Our Eyes Are Now Open', since people described how they 'came to see things in an articulate way, things in a way that we were able to do something about them, that we have the potential'. The Area Representative talks of ownership since, unlike the previous system of 'barazas' called by elders, people feel party to the process of PRA, since the agendas are set by the community. In this way a committee member talks about how 'knowing our rights' has enabled the community to have a committee and carry out projects. Another compares the attitude now, when people believe they have to 'care for a project, understand why it is erected, know where their cash contribution is going and how they will benefit' to the situation before, when 'people had no idea why and no-one was interested'. The aspect of needing to know what is happening to money contributions, expressed as being able to 'quarrel for and manage our property', is stressed by many.

Communication is seen to be key to community empowerment, through unity. One of the Programme staff describes how PRA 'brings people together to work as a community, sensitising them to understand more about development in the area, know their area better, start to know how to unify and how to help the less privileged'. The District Officer describes how, 'if you try to mobilise Nzuuni for a big project, the response is quite outstanding, especially given the fact they used to be so divided.' In terms of communication, one Committee Member who has had 'leadership training' reports that 'I have managed to become someone who can talk nicely with others.' During PRA exercises for the Impact Assessment, participants showed 'disunity between sub-location committee and village members', which had been a big problem in 1994 (scoring ten out of ten) reducing greatly by 1998 as a consequence of leadership training (scoring only four out of ten) (World Neighbors 1998).

Particularly in Uongo, where residents report that ‘many bitter words were thrown before’, community members focus on the benefits of co-operation. They describe the formation of three working groups which go to each others’ fields twice a week to dig terraces and other labour intensive jobs. These groups also work as ‘merry-go-round’ credit schemes. They report that whilst Nzuuni people had been members of groups before, they had never lasted since any money collected had been pocketed by the government or a member of the group. One member explicitly refers to ‘friendship’ as the ‘key to the successful working of the groups’, because now they trust and are accountable to one another.

Empowerment in relation to others: ‘the blue book takes over from the red book’

There is much debate over whether empowerment engendered by PRA inevitably means the loss of power elsewhere. The experience of Nzuuni community shows that, where previously the extent of power held over the community was very great, empowerment of the community to take action inevitably means a challenge to some existing form of power. This is seen to dramatic effect in the struggle between the newly ‘empowered’ community and the Provincial Administration, particularly as represented in the figure of the Assistant Chief (see Box 2). Community members claim that ‘we know our rights are the same as the Assistant Chiefs’ and ‘we know what we can talk of, so he can no longer lead us in a poor way’. This shift is explained by many community members as the result of knowing that ‘government can no longer use the red book, now we have the blue book.’⁵

This transfer of power can be seen as the result of PRA providing both a space to assess the current situation and a source of confidence which this process can bring. PRA does not inevitably provide an empowering process and has even in some cases been seen to reinforce existing hierarchies (Guijt and Shah 1998). However, WN largely avoid this, using the discourse of ‘rights’ to push the empowering idea of PRA firmly into the political arena. The inviolable nature of the notion of rights in this context can be seen to have encouraged on-going and confident challenges to mechanisms and institutions of power.

The shifting dynamics of the relationship between the Assistant Chief and the community reveal that there is far from a straight transfer of power. WN’s efforts to keep the Assistant Chief within the process mean that he has also ‘grown’ through the experiences. There is more of a negotiation than transfer of power, with the community at times expressing surprise at how the government has adapted in the light of its realisation that ‘there is no way that they can dictate to us anymore’. A committee member speaks of the Assistant Chief ‘following the community slowly slowly’ and the community realising that ‘we need the Assistant Chief so we built him an office so we knew where we could find him’. The Assistant Chief himself talks positively about the new kind of power he holds: ‘now I know how to talk to the common people, I can tell them how they can stay, how they can talk with others with no fear. It is better because now people perform their duties nicely and are capable of managing some of the projects, now they know that what they are doing is theirs whereas before they were saying ‘this is a government project’. WN see

⁵ The outlines of the DFRD is literally a blue book. Though no red book exists in a literal sense, it is used as a powerful symbol of formerly autocratic governance styles.

their exposure of government officials to the PRA process as just as important as exposure of the community; 'they start to question why they do what they do and the increase in communication breaks down stereotypes on both sides'.

Box 2 'We'd rather have no development than allow our money to be eaten'

One of the Programme staff describes how the relationship of the community and the Assistant Chief has gone through waves of collision and collusion. In 1996 the relationship nearly hit breaking point, an incident which few refer to explicitly but most allude to in their often far from ambivalent references to the Assistant Chief.

'After the 2nd phase of leadership training the Central Committee became very strong. Then it became a threat to the Assistant Chief. The Assistant Chief had been bullying them at the beginning and forcing them but from this point he didn't have any further opportunity to do so. For example, the community had organised themselves and raising fund for building the Assistant Chief's Office and food-store. The Assistant Chief was used to taking money and misusing it and this time he did no differently because he didn't realise that people had changed. When they found out they were furious and they told him "we don't want any development unless we see that development that we have given contribution to; we would rather die poor than come to any meeting you call again".

'One full year passed without doing anything. Then we decided we have to intervene to bring them together. We spoke to the Assistant Chief, who did not know what to do. We suggested that he meet with the community and call the Chief of the Location to mediate. At this meeting the community repeated their position, saying "unless we see where the money went, we won't ever do anything. This man is not one of us - you've abused us and you've eaten our money - you have to pay the money and to become one of us we have to fine you". They talked it all over and in the end the Assistant Chief paid all that was demanded.'

Commenting on the same incident an Itooni Committee Member, recalled that,

'He really pleaded - he knew that if the people see him in difficulty, he will be the one going down - after that he changed - he realised that everybody already knew their rights, especially the 17 Itooni Members who had then communicated them to the rest of the community - he came to realise that he could no longer dictate to us.'

In addition, it is not a sudden hand over or incremental empowerment, but one which requires the re-performance and reassertion of that right through on-going participatory processes. WN recognise that when they speak of PRA empowering the community, 'it is not automatic, empowerment is not just something you can buy from the market place and deliver to people'. The Area Representative explains how empowerment comes out of a process; PRA creates an opportunity for people to get involved in certain activities which change the way they see themselves, the environment around them and what they can change in that environment'.

The community can also be seen exerting their rights in terms of the tapping resources and resisting pressure from government ministries. Community members describe how 'WN made us meet all the heads of the departments at the market so we knew what they were supposed to do and now we can go to

the District Officer's office and request extension workers from any sector'. One Uongo member describes how 'we used to give chickens to government people when they were demanded, but now we know we have the right to refuse', another how they do not allow their group money to 'disappear in the hands of those corrupted government people fixing themselves to the side of councillors'. The Store Secretary states with pride that 'we refused the demand for extra registration payment for the store because we do not give in to requests for money anymore'. He claims that these changes have actually led to an improvement in relations with the government, since 'now they know that we are strong'. The District Officer notes no major conflicts in the area and draws a difference between the strengthened 'capacity' in Nzuuni and those areas where conflict develops with the government due to 'civic education' which 'causes men to say "I have my rights" but not know what they are and not now that even freedom must be restricted'.

Empowerment within the community: the 'neck' finds a voice

As many people argue, the myth that participatory approaches automatically include and empower women as well as men has been proven contestable again and again (Guijt and Shah 1998). However, in the case of Nzuuni, the empowering possibilities for the participatory process particularly for this group are strongly revealed, both in the community and in the household. This is probably in part because of the personal interest of the Area Representative in gender issues, and the specific training which staff members are given, which translates itself into an awareness of gender difference throughout their work. They apply a wide range of tools developed to analyse gender issues, such as a 24 hour clock, analysis of control over resources and decision making about child bearing, and educational analysis.. The Nzuuni Programme is about to start the 'third phase' of a gender and reproductive health series of workshops. The Impact Assessment records that four separate workshops have been held since 1995, attended on two occasions by 200 women and 50 men (World Neighbors 1998). WN describe how they go about promoting gender equity very slowly, 'like peeling off the layers of an onion'. First they encourage women to speak up and the community to listen and ask, then they move to sharing of responsibilities within the household before tackling decision making on critical issues such as reproductive health, education of children and distribution of resources. They see it as a gentle build up to allow for changing of perceptions; 'you can't just jump in there and attack land ownership without doing the ground work'.

The specific awareness and focus on such sensitive issue of power in Participatory gender analysis is shown in the case of Nzuuni to have dramatic effects. The Area Representative recalls how one of the participatory gender analysis PRAs produced so much heat that the facilitators afterwards admitted that they had been scared. She points out that this confrontation illustrates what an 'effective mirror' PRA can be, since 'those tensions mean that people will do something about it'. PRA allows a space for the confrontation and one in which all voices can be heard. However, she is also aware that this confrontation occurs under somewhat 'abnormal' conditions, and participants need to be brought back into a more conformable space after such confrontation, to 'cool things down at the end and allow the community to draw some conclusions'.

Both WN staff and members of Nzuuni comment on changes in the position of women both within the community as a whole and within the home. Within the community, one of the Programme staff describes how, when they first arrived, people held firmly to the Akamba saying that ‘the woman is the neck that supports the family head’. She describes how ‘they had no voice of yes or no, they even didn’t value themselves, they didn’t know they could say something or help the village. Men were there to think for women and tell them what to do’. Five years later, a female committee member reports that ‘before in meetings, only men were allowed to ask questions, now women participate as much as men’. As the Programme staff member says, ‘the neck has found a voice’. The Area Representative dates this ‘beginning of women starting to learn they could be listened to’ to the use of PRA, which ‘creates the space and opportunity for even the most marginalised voices to be heard. Women are present and in certain cases prominent within the committees and their role is recognised by those involved with the development of the community. Both male and female community members agree that the women contribute more (attributed by many to the fact that ‘the men attend themselves to the local brew’) and WN staff talk not only of the importance in itself of women contributing but of the value of their ability to ‘look further than the infrastructure of development projects and understand the human element’.

Closely related to this growing confidence and role in community affairs is the increasing recognition of wives as partners rather than ‘people who should do the work commanded by the husband, because they had married them’. A young wife describes how ‘previously the wife just waited her husband’s command, now she is free to talk anything’. An elderly Uongo man explains how ‘the wife is no longer under her husband but shares decisions and responsibilities’, whilst another states that ‘now we all know what is wrong and what is nice, so there is no need to pin one another to the wall and shout. We know what to do’. There is great emphasis on ‘sitting down and discussing’ not only as a form of conflict resolution, but as an every day part of decision making within households. The greater respect shown for women clearly marks some major changes in gender relations, which have been particularly hard for the men to embrace. Though one Uongo man is derided by a younger woman that his relationship with his wife before ‘dated back to the Mau-Mau time’, he replies that he was not unusual in following the ways of his foreparents and he’d previously not understood the necessity for change. Those who have accepted the change do not, however, necessarily see this as representing an attack on their powers; ‘the husband still has his powers, and the wife also has her own’.

Many women report that this space for discussing the role of women in the family and the greater ‘rights’ accorded to her have had a wide impact on their lives, as illustrated by the story of one Itooni woman (see Box 3). The wider impact is also dramatically illustrated by an Uongo woman who directly relates her family’s increase in food security from two months in the year to twelve months to her increased control over resources which flowed from her improved relations with her husband. In addition, community members frequently speak of family relations and family planning in the same breath. The participatory methodologies used during the workshops revealed to them how important good husband-wife relationships were to discussing and coming to decisions about gapping children. One

male community member describes how it is ‘your responsibility to discuss how many children you can bear before you will be defeated to satisfying the needs of the younger ones’.

Box 3 ‘He looks to the minor responsibilities’

‘The biggest change in my life since we started cooperating with World Neighbors has been in my relation with my husband and family responsibilities. Before I was fearing my husband because we did not sit and discuss if we can be sharing our responsibilities and decisions, but since we attended a seminar on family relations, life began smoothly, due to everyone in the house knowing that they can each carry their own responsibility – that’s how we carry on back to my house, I’m not being paid by somebody so I am free to do anything – the seminar was very important for helping me to learn that. Previously I was working all the hours, I had no time to rest – if it was like before I could not even be discussing this today. Now I share some of my responsibilities with my husband and so sometimes I have some free time. He is a mason so during the rainy season when he can’t go to work he is the one who stays in the house and shares out the responsibilities. He looks to the minor responsibilities and gives them to the children.

‘When I have free time I go and buy vegetables and sell them whilst I am still resting. I carry the money and distribute it back to the home, solving the minor minor problems like buying salt or treating minor diseases of the children. Before these had to wait for my husband to work and bring. If he’s away I can also decide to sell a chicken or slaughter and cook it.’

Itooni woman

Capacity growth: ‘one finger cannot crush a louse alone’

One of the Programme staff describes how ‘after PRA we had another challenge – everyone went back to their village and then they kept quiet – though the needs had surfaced they were waiting for someone to come and collect everyone and say it’s time to act – it was then that we realised that the leadership was poor’. WN have since spent a lot of time in Nzuuni on ‘leadership training’ of the members of the Village Development Committees. WN both represent themselves and are seen by others such as government officials as primarily involving themselves in the rather vaguely defined task of ‘capacity builders’. According to the Area Representative, this includes enabling the community to ‘aspire to and chart their own course towards change’. This also involves encouraging the leadership to work with the rest of the community, since it is acknowledged that, in accordance with the Akamba saying, ‘one finger cannot crush a louse alone’. WN see their role as preparing and developing the social infrastructure in order to ‘release the opportunities for longer lasting governance and control’ in order to allow ‘continued physical infrastructure development that is people driven and controlled’ and ‘maintain the social empowerment process’.

Capacity Building occurs in the context of thematic PRAs and is used as a self-managed process of organisational change by which leaders and other primary stakeholders learn to assess strengths, diagnose key organisational weaknesses, recognise priority issues and devise, apply and assess actions to address this issues. The Impact Assessment describes aspects of the leadership training, including exploring the

roles, responsibilities and skills required of leaders, being trained in organising, planning and implementing a project (including the idea that success requires the involvement of villagers right from the start), managing resources and evaluating results (including the importance of looking to social change as well as physical outcomes). The Assessment states that ‘through these workshops the leaders developed confidence, the community has passed by-laws for managing funds contributed for development and the community leaders have been empowered to build strong institutions to coordinate and undertake development’ (World Neighbors 1998: 11).

When asked to ‘fill up glasses’ with water to show the ability of institutions to perform their tasks, leaders assessed themselves as having greatly improved, especially in the areas of openness and monitoring and evaluation (see Table 1 below).

Table 1 Leadership Self-Assessment (all scores out of 10)

Capacity indicator	1994	1998	Increase
Accountability (money)	3	8	5
Accountability (resources)	5	8	3
Openness	0	6	6
Development activities	5	7	2
Ability address community needs	5	7	2
Ability plan, organise & manage resources	3	8	5
Ability measure progress	0	7	7

World Neighbors (1998)

In addition to building capacity of the Development Committees, WN have held thematic PRAs around the issue of group work. Uongo members particularly stress the importance of this improved capacity to work together for their development. The village now has three working groups which set aside one or two days a week to work together, for example to build terraces in one of the members’ field and conduct ‘merry-go-rounds’, where members pay into a common fund and take it in turns to benefit, for example by buying metal roof sheeting.

The food store represents perhaps the most complex institution so far implemented in Nzuuni in terms of management skills (Bunch 1982). Committee members were trained in the accounting skills required and the organisation is hoping to grow in capacity so that it can take on the legal status of a ‘Community Based Organisation’. In another programme area, Kitui, the Central Committee have got to the stage of setting themselves up as a local NGO, currently in partnership with WN, but with the intention of drawing in resources from other NGOs and donors so that they can grow further. This is the kind of model WN is hoping to move towards, and they envisage being able to facilitate linkages between the different organisations to share learning and gain advantages from networking.

6 Challenges

The previous sections have painted a picture of the many benefits that have followed from the way WN has used PRA in its work with community members and local government. However, as with any PRA practice, there are challenges raised through the process as well. This section will examine key challenges identified by different actors involved, or excluded from, the process of community development.

6.1 Struggles of the old and new: 'keeping the red book on the shelf'

Nzuuni community and WN have found that two of the major challenges after PRA are re-performing and reinforcing the empowerment, and understanding how different actors involved in the process understand empowerment.

Kesby has pointed out that just because community members are able to express themselves in a comparatively more free environment of the PRA, it does not mean that the existing power relations outside of that space do not press in around them once they are out of that space (Kesby 1999). Even given the re-performance of the power shifts, such as through the functioning of committee meetings, old power structures do not merely evaporate and this can lead to clashes of systems.

Some of these clashes come in the more direct form of old against new, such as the current stand-off over Uongo's road (see lower half of Box 4). Others are more complex, such as the problems arising over earlier negotiations concerning the building of the road (see upper half of Box 4) which one Itooni committee member describes as 'just a confusion between the blue book and the red book'. Power relations embodied in the existing institutions ranging from the privileged position of elders to fear of community members believed to have 'special powers' can interlock with the perception and relationships with institutions set up since the use of PRA. This can, for example be seen in the unwillingness of some food store members to challenge one of the committee members who is both close to the Assistant Chief and believed to have magic powers, leaving this confrontation to an elder with comparable powers in another village.

A Committee Member is adamant that 'it is the Assistant Chief who is holding us back. We can't have a meeting unless he calls it because he is the owner of the sub-location'. It seems that even where other provisions had been made, such as for the Central Committee and the food store, he has tried to take over. In these cases, the old networks are brought back to life, since 'he writes to only some members and calls others who are not members'. At the recent Food Store AGM was sabotaged by the Assistant Chief sending out alternative invitations from those of the Secretary to those close to him to meet, on the basis that such a meeting should only happen at his office. Operating without the Assistant Chief is not considered an option; 'If you try to do something without the head of the person, you cannot prosper. If my children go to the field to plant and weeds come, one says let us terrace, another let's dig and so they start the mother can come and say that no-one told them to do it so halts their activity'.

Box 4 Uongo's road to development

Uongo's road, snaking up the steep hill side, bringing access directly to the community for the first time, is both a highly visual physical example and a symbol for the power struggles in Uongo's development process.

The initial decision to build the road is variously reported by different actors.

One Uongo committee member describes how, 'Initially the village decided that water was its first priority, with the road second. Then there was a big tug of war. Some of the committee members favoured the road but the majority of the community favoured the water. I preferred the water, as more community members would benefit from this, but, you know, the strong leaders are always feared by the community members and so in this way the minority beat the majority and the road won. Those who had wanted the water forgot about it and started digging the road. I also decided to support the road in the end because you cannot do anything alone'.

Another Uongo Committee Member tells a different tale, saying that the water project was dropped 'when the ministry for water failed to complete his survey, despite the community making contributions'. In terms of the road, he focuses, with some anger on the later part of the story,

'We came together to build the road, but when we came to bringing the road from Mungeli to the river, the Assistant Chief refused to respond to the community's needs. He didn't want the road to pass the short way of the old path, but to follow the circumference. I don't know why, but when Uongo community tried to convince him, he just refused. There was no resolution, you can see it on the video cassette. We have stopped and waited to see if he will change his mind and we are still waiting. When the community people asked me to ask the Assistant Chief to ask the owner of the land where the road is passing to give permission, the Assistant Chief told me to see the owner, but when I saw the owner, he told the community to wait. If the Assistant Chief wants the activity to continue, he has the capacity to ask the owner of the land and we can continue. Until that time, we won't make the road. You can't prepare something that won't help you. But now I'm the stranded one and I don't know what to do.'

However, a close examination of this experience reveals that, rather than such 'failing' or 'stalled' projects representing the failure of PRA processes, they have been an integral part of the change. Previous systems and understandings do not change over night; as the Area Representative points out, 'you cannot buy empowerment from the market' and it's the struggles to maintain the empowerment process which has started to yield fruit.

6.2 Participation and benefits for the few: 'the early bird catches the worm'

PRA has been described as a process which 'by definition implies that all sections of the community have equal access to, and take part in equal measure in, the decision making process' (Shah 1998). However, achieving this represents a major challenge, especially given the increasingly recognised non-homogenous nature of communities. Organisations often talk about doing PRA 'with the whole community' when practice it is often done with a few dozen members out of a community of hundreds. Assumptions are sometimes made about the ability of these few 'representatives' to both reflect the views of the whole community and spread the benefits of resultant PRA processes.

In contrast, WN's choice to work mainly with a 'leadership group' can in many ways be seen as a more honest and realistic acknowledgement of what is possible with PRA. The difficulty which they have had in Nzuuni of spreading the empowering effects of participation through the rest of the community goes to highlight the often unrealistic expectations of the PRA process. The experience of Nzuuni suggests that there is a difference between the gains of the core group who can gain empowerment through direct participation in PRA and those who do not, since, as the Area Representative notes, 'half the benefits of the PRA process come from the struggles and challenges of being involved in analysing, making decisions, dealing with problems and so on.' The broader pool of people who do not participate in PRA do not enjoy these experiences, although they may gain from some of the development outcomes of this empowerment.

Interviews with both committee and non-committee members reveal how much of the decision making remains in the hands of the committee. Although an Uongo Committee Member asserts that 'the common man must make the final decision' she highlights the practical difficulty of realising this intention, admitting that sometimes the committee just gives the command to go ahead, since 'on the one hand there is absenteeism in the village meetings and in the other some people have so little understanding that you can keep rotating on a thing forever.' Non-committee members from the same village claim that there has never once been a meeting for all village members to participate in decision making. They blame the problems in development on the committee's failure to forge a cooperative relationship with the rest of the community. They consider this to be an even more important factor than the blocking of the Assistant Chief, since they claim that 'if we all cooperate the Assistant Chief cannot defeat us'. An Itooni Committee Member explains how, when the committee takes its 'decisions' back to the villagers, 'they mostly agree and if they don't they always agree once we've explained it properly to them'. He describes the system as 'democratic' because 'we are discussing things which are of benefit to the community in general'. Another Member describes how 'the committee is made up of the enlightened people. They start the development – some people refuse but we persist and attempt to discuss together – not everyone is satisfied – God is defeated by them due to lack of understanding or schooling, so we just leave those who do not want to continue'.

The thematic PRAs reach a few more community members, being open to volunteers. However, in the absence of adequate initial sensitisation about the whole process, the beneficiaries of these can also become somewhat self-perpetuating. Those who participate speak of others failing to attend out of 'ignorance' and 'thinking that they will be taught irrelevant things', suggesting a lack of sensitisation rather than an inherent disposition to abstain. The same patterns can be observed in the working groups whereby only a certain number of people who are already alert to the possible benefits join together, before exercising closure tactics so that the gains remain high. As a prominent Committee member notes, 'the early bird catches the worm'.

In terms of the participants in the thematic PRAs passing on their learnings, the results seem mixed. Although respondents in Nzuuni's Impact Assessment asserted that they achieved a multiplier effect

(people reached for every person directly involved) of 14 for agriculture, 12.5 for gender and reproductive health and 7.5 for leadership and development (World Neighbors 1998), the reality behind the figures is somewhat more complex. One young couple who attended the Family Planning seminars say that they are able to share what they learnt during their working groups but even among these few that they reach, there are 'some who do not want to hear and think you are just wasting their time'. On the same issue, a female Committee Member comments that 'for people with problems at home, they cannot talk to people even when they are in a group'. The Itooni woman whose benefits from changes in her family relationships are clearly demonstrated in Box 3 is nonetheless frank about the difficulty of everyone reaping these gains (see Box 5 below). A non-committee member claims that the committee 'do not exercise leadership. They don't see a reason for sitting back together after training and discussing issues as they are supposed to.' Some Uongo non-committee members claim that since all of the committee save one are in the first working group which formed in Uongo, the participants in the other two have far less access to information.

The experience of Nzuuni therefore shows how difficult it is to make the benefits of PRA processes widespread. On the one hand, this suggests that genuine broad-based participation may be still difficult to achieve. However, it may also point to the need to look for ways to get closer to the high goals of PRA. If, as seems to be the case in Nzuuni, once one power structure, as epitomised by the Assistant Chief, is challenged, a new one, in this case the Central Committee, tends to come up to take its place, then perhaps an environment needs to be developed in which there is also space to contest the new holders of power. This would be enabled by encouraging the widening of direct contact with PRA processes perhaps through encouraging committee members to use PRA to facilitate discussions and analysis with the rest of their village members. However, in this process there would also need to be a way of striking a balance between deepening and widening of participation whilst maintaining the values of the repetitive system in terms of providing continuity in participation and sense of leadership in the process.

Box 5 'They say that it is just cheating to start changing'

'Not all women in Nzuuni have experienced the same changes. During the seminar time it was just a few who understood and they were a very small minority. They go back to their houses and start discussing what they have learned but, especially when men meet together they just discuss the issue of if they have any responsibilities and if we want to share them and they say that it is just cheating to start changing. It's very difficult for them. It is especially hard for those women who go without their husbands. They can only go back home and try to convince their husbands, but it's very difficult him to get the point of view because they just see that they are just words and to start changing and helping your wife share responsibilities is a big problem. Even more so in family planning. In most cases the husbands are not there so now when the women go back to the husbands they are failing to communicate with them and the husbands are assuming that this is a minor thing and they ask "where were you taught all of this?" After I met and discussed with others, some were saying that it's very difficult and a big problem to tell their husbands.'

Itooni woman, as in Box 3

6.3 Marginalised groups: the poorest of the poor and the invisible youth

The case of Nzuuni also shows how especially difficult it is for PRA processes of development to overcome structural marginalisation in communities unless specific attention is paid to their inclusion. This can be seen in the cases of the core of 'poorest of the poor' and the youth.

A core of the 'poorest of the poor' are underrepresented in the participating and therefore benefiting cliques. Ranking of changes over time in well-being in the Impact Assessment reveal that, although numbers show considerable upwards movement among the poor and medium, the poorest of the poor have stayed fairly static (World Neighbors 1998). Though this static number is in part the result of movement both out of and into this group, it is clear from focus group discussions that there is also a core of people who are the poorest and remain the poorest. One possible explanation given by WN staff for this is that well-being ranking has not been used in analysis during PRAs and therefore there has been a low level of awareness of the need to pitch some projects at poorer groups. The perception of the poorer community members is that it is impossible for them to gain from many projects, because, for example, of the requirement of at least some capital to be a member of the merry-go-round or cooperative groups, which is perhaps a consequence of the self financing, income generating style of many participatory projects.

The root of the problem, however, may be less the style of some of the projects but the marginalisation of poorer people from the process of decision making. This could in part be self-exclusion but is also a result, as a committee member explains, of some people not being able to attend seminars due to the expense of cost sharing. The food store should be an example of project which benefits the whole community, particularly the poorest who can buy at a lower rate in times of shortage than previously, when middlemen were involved. Though the project came out of the (broadly) inclusionary community-wide decision making process, by-laws considered necessary for the effective operation of store membership subsequently excluded those who could not meet membership fees and regulations from any further decisions regarding the role of this institution. Perhaps as a consequence of this later exclusion, the potential benefits are not widely recognised. This perception can be seen in the question of one Uongo non-committee; 'How can a poor person benefit? You needed to contribute 5kg of maize and 100/= to be a member. If you don't have this, how can you be helped? A poorer person might be getting poorer and poorer and the membership fee increasing.'

A second group which has remained marginalised from the process is the youth.⁶ Though they make up a significant part of the community, there are no youth members in any of the committees and their participation in other activities or even meetings has been minimal. One Itooni youth claims that 'I have never seen or heard from the Itooni development committee' whilst another one reports that 'the development committee never call the youth to talk about anything, I don't know why'. Another asserts

⁶ 'Youth' are basically understood in Nzuuni to refer to school leavers who are either unmarried or in their first few years of marriage and therefore still 'starting out on their lives'. In Nzuuni migration for work to Nairobi and Mombassa makes youth a very fluid category, particularly for men.

that 'so far WN do not pay any attention to youth...we had a youth project only once but that was set up by Kasimba [an intern] who is not really one of them'. A youth from Mungeli reports that 'once WN called about 30 youth together from my village. They listened to our problems and said they would come back but they never showed up. There was lots of rain at the time, maybe that's why'.

In part this can be seen as the outcome of a tradition which lays stress on the importance of respect for older people, which, in the arena of public discussion and decision making means that it is considered inappropriate for youth members to make their voices heard. The holding of PRA activities in the same community spaces as other village meetings perhaps makes it harder to overcome the association of the activity with the dominance of older community members.

Even outside the public arena, communication between generations is very limited in Nzuuni. One male youth member claims that 'only the minority of adults understand the youth'. He puts this down to 'lack of exposure – at least in the urban areas they see the problems and try to tempt the youth away from them – here they just help you into what you are not supposed to'. Youth members repeatedly refer to the problem of parents not spending enough time with their children so that 'they have no time to talk or understand': 'fathers go out after breakfast and return drunk at night'. In other houses 'they do not discuss the problems of the youth because they assume they will be taught in groups, school or churches'.

The older community members have made few attempts to draw youth in to development processes. There is a frequently expressed belief both that the youth are not interested and that they are not 'suitable' development actors. A female Committee member speaks with resignation about how 'the youth fall under the group who 'know it all'; 'if you call them they do not respond, they think you are wasting their time. Most of them are idle and prefer to spend their time in the market, putting themselves to local brew and bhang'. One village elder believes that the young women 'do not worry, because they are just waiting to get married'. A youth member explains that adults do not see the well-being of the youth as a community issue: 'Many think "mind your own business" – if those are your children then it's your business if they've started to defeat you – they just leave them'. A more sympathetic Committee Member argues that the difficulty is caused both by the difference in educational standard between the youth and their parents, 'their parents are too little educated to persuade them to go to meetings and the learned youth are too busy at the polytechnic to attend', and also their limited ability to benefit from changes due to 'not having the power to do something about it' in terms of ownership. The vacuum in which the youth find themselves, in terms of decision making and a clear social or economic role, can be linked to disjunctions associated with the introduction of the western models of education and economies in fairly recent times. The traditional Kamba initiation of youth to adulthood and decision-making by age set through a system of mentoring and apprenticeship is now considered the role of educational institutions. However, schools are unable to fulfil this function, leaving a void and a general lack of structure regarding the position of various level of youth in the community.

WN staff admit that they also were not thinking about youth as a group who needed special attention to be incorporated into the process. An Uongo committee member says that 'I tried to gather

the youth and arranged with WN to come and work with them but they haven't come yet, so I reminded them to come and check on how they can start collaborating with the youth'. This perhaps reflects the difficulty of staff embedded in communities stepping back from the beliefs which they mirror and identifying groups which are socially and politically marginalised. In addition, generation barriers which make it hard for youth members to speak up and be heard also exist between WN staff and youth members of the community. Talking about her problems, one unmarried girl from Itooni commented that 'if Arnold [from the Programme team] were here we might be quiet'

In addition, the experience of Nzuuni demonstrates the difficulty of moving even further than including youth to also perceiving children as viable voices and actors in development decisions. Children are largely understood as passive beneficiaries of improvements in education or contributors to development through their responsibilities in the family. The fact that PRAs are mostly held during school holidays so that the children can stay back to look after homes whilst their parents are away is illustrative of the low priority of hearing children's voices or involving them in decision making. One possible result is that the effect of changes on their position is not fully considered, as in the case of where a gender focused shifting of family responsibilities led to increased work load for children, passes on to them by the husband (see Box 3).

6.4 Sustainability?

One of the major advantages of participatory processes of development are their supposed sustainability. The main reasons put forward for this can be seen in statements in the WN international brochure, such as: 'WN stays in a program until communities become strong enough to maintain their programmes without help'; 'WN Programmes promote self-reliance rather than dependence on temporary aid'; and 'The goal is to achieve lasting improvement in people's lives, not quick fixes that do not last.' For this kind of sustained development, it is often argued that communities need both the institutional mechanisms to manage their development and some access to resources with which to carry them out.

According to WN's philosophy, part of the building blocks for sustainable development come from having sufficient institutional capacity. However, evidence of institutional and organisational problems even in Nzuuni, where they have been working hard on 'capacity building' for more than WN's 'average 5 years', demonstrate how hard this can be in reality. One of the major problem Nzuuni is experiencing appears to be sporadic break downs in trust, described by people during the 1998 study as resulting in 'finger pointing'. Members note that prior to working with WN many groups dissolved because of lack of trust between members and they are determined not to let it happen again. However, the community still experiences difficulties, as seen in the complaint of a non-committee member that 'the leaders take money and use it for the wrong line. You don't see the contribution being used for the right project'. Another accuses them of 'becoming leaders of eating other people's property'. The 'finger-pointing' can be seen in the example of the allegations and counter-allegations within the food store committee and members accusing different people of embezzling funds. Whether or not corruption is in fact occurring, the lack of trust can undermine the sustainability of institutions.

This mistrust can be seen less in the light, as often supposed, of community members insufficient skills to hold people financially accountable (these are available or have been to some extent acquired) but more the legacy of years of corruption and abuse of power in the area and continuing corruption in the country as a whole, which are proving hard to forget. As for meeting this problem, one deadlock in the food-store committee was largely overcome by members demanding more transparency in information concerning proceedings. Further and wider processes of empowerment may enable the example above of (largely the committee) holding the Assistant Chief to account may be replaceable in terms of the rest of the community holding committees to account (see Box 2). Further possibilities are shaping institutions so that they draw more off previously existing institutional norms, with which, as noted above, there does not consciously appear to be much cross-comparison in people's minds at the moment.

6.5 'To change requires money': who provides resources?

One of the major challenges people in Nzuuni feel they face is in finding resources for their development. As one committee member points out, 'to change requires money. WN staff say the community are responsible for their children – we want to give them a balanced diet but we don't have the income. WN advise us to get even cheap fertiliser,⁷ but even that costs money and so we are told to borrow but if production falls how can we pay this back?'

There are two issues here. Firstly WN finds difficulty in repositioning the role of development organisations as helping to leverage funds rather than simply supply in an unsustainable manner and secondly making this work. WN recognise the issue of resources as one of the greatest challenges in the way they try to carry out PRA processes of development and are convinced in their stand that it is not their responsibility to provide the community with financial or material resources. The Area Representative outlines their philosophy,

Lots of organisations manipulate communities, deliberately gearing them to the resources that are available. WN doesn't work like that – we tell them what allocation we have but that they must focus on their priorities. We create the space and empower communities and then assist them to knock on doors and provide them with negotiation skills.

There is an emphasis in WN on using PRA processes to lessen elements of 'dependency' in communities and they believe that this has had quite a high level of success in Nzuuni. One of the Programme staff explains how 'at first the villagers thought that they would be given hand-out, now they know that what is free is training which we will use and treat with care' (World Neighbors 1998). The viability and possibilities of this approach can be seen in some of their other programme areas (see Box 6).

⁷ WN-EA does not actually advise the use of chemical fertiliser. However, it is still relevant that the community member felt that lack of resources represented problems. This quotation also serves to illustrate the difficulty WN has in working with the government, which is often bringing a different message (see below).

Box 6

WN has been working on capacity building in a community in Taita district since 1995. WN's contribution in terms of resources has decreased from 70 per cent to 30 per cent since the community have been able to take responsibility through raising funds from other donors. The impact of this can be seen most markedly in their water harvesting project, the Ndome Water Project. The community has mobilised close to Kshs 7 million for the implementation of the project. These funds come from the local community and a number of donors, who were presented with proposals generated through PRA analysis. The project covers about 750 households (about 5000 persons), has successfully completed its first phase and has embarked on its final phase. The project is wholly community managed, including the finances.

However, Taita provides a remarkable success story which has proved difficult to achieve in other programmes, sometime leading to disillusionment with the approach. Community members in Nzuuni note with some frustration, even sometimes resignation, that they have had difficulty accessing resources from organisations. A committee Member reports that 'the development of the store is limited since we are only able to get money from our *shambas* (fields) or selling animals. We were given the assistance of a WN grant and alternatives of elsewhere to go, but we have had no results yet.' This restricts further development 'allowing us to supply to other areas' which would allow the project to become a viable income generating activity. Another Committee Member reports that 'we wrote a proposal and they said that they should send one person and things were moving ahead but then it never came about because disagreements arose among the community members'.

These frustrations voiced by communities in accessing resources illustrate not only the time and resources it takes to acquire the skills and capacities to facilitate resources mobilisation but, perhaps above all, the difficulty of accessing funds for development in a mutually respectful way at all, given the broader resourcing environment. Policies surrounding government, donor and NGO 'aid' make it a bureaucratic, top-down and 'dependency creating' process that will continue to negate efforts achieved by PRA.

Not only is it very difficult to achieve the resourcing aims of WN, but it has proved hard to communicate these to audiences coming from different experiences, expectations and hopes. In Nzuuni, the approach has been subject to different and sometimes unexpected interpretations. An Uongo Committee worker reports that

We have been taught that first you need to know what your decision is and take steps to gather resources and take care of them – so it takes time – you start something of your own and then wait for the WN people to assist. After you have stayed for a certain period, other people can assist but first they want to see that people have started and the activity is going on, that you are not just asking for assistance for the sake of it.

At times something of an assumption can grow out of the patterns of resourcing. The problematic aspect of this can be seen in the dismay felt by a youth group, who feel that the WN people never fulfilled their

part of the bargain by encouraging them to go ahead with a turkey farm and then being unwilling to provide funds when they ran out of resources. In addition this example illustrates the problem that this kind of expectation has the danger of leading groups to start projects that are not self-sustaining in the long term.

The different approach of WN and potential benefits arising have also proved difficult to communicate to the government administration, which has been used to working with more top-down NGOs in an more top-down manner. This is demonstrated in the District Officers perception that,

WN have done their capacity building, but we are yet to see the effects. Now I am waiting for them to build on that strength and tap those networks to bring some development to the community. Communities like seeing NGOs like DANIDA because they identify and then *carry out* – if there is strictly capacity building with no other tangibles, people drop off.

The fact that it is the District Officer expressing this opinion also suggests a final tension in terms of the kind of relationship this kind of approach engenders with the government.

7 Influence on policy

WN's Area Representative notes that 'though our micro-focus is highly effective on the ground and affords us to learn, what it achieves is only in small pockets and if we can't translate these lessons to influence the macro-environment, I feel that is a weakness.' This highlights one area which has been of concern to PRA practitioners, who see feeding into government (and other development stakeholder) activity and influencing policy as a crucial element of scaling up bottom-up activities (Holland and Blackburn 1998). Evidence from WN's experience in Nzuuni suggests that though working with government is a key strategy used by WN, limitations such as size of influence, top-down structures and individual agents within government can make the possibility of policy influence at any level and in any respect highly elusive and varied.

Examples of WN attempts to collaborate with and influence government are acknowledged by both parties (though it seems to go largely unnoticed by community members). WN can be seen listed alongside the Government Departments on the District Officer's wall-chart of relevant bodies and personnel and processes were recently initiated by WN for a 'collaboration meeting' between departments, in which areas of operation and tasks were negotiated. The District Officer talks of greater co-operation in part being the result of government's constrained funds prompting a realisation that working with NGOs which have resources provides a viable alternative. Particularly in the case of the Ministry of Health, government and WN can be seen working together on projects which in turn has led to an embracing of PRA techniques (see Box 7).

Box 7**Public Health Technician,
Ministry of Health, Kaiti Division**

The current public health technician has been working in Nzuuni since before WN arrived. He became interested in WN methods of operating and started collaborating with them over areas of health. In 1998 WN sent him to a training workshop on PRA methodologies and he now takes part in WN PRA activities and is hoping to start using these methodologies soon in his own work.

'Previously I was using top-down methods, analysing statistics on diseases and telling the sub-location about their interests. Then I discovered PRA and I have realised that unless you start from the bottom and allow them time to speak for themselves, you can't meet the community's needs and they won't feel that it's their project. PRA empowers and acts as a real eye-opener. I wish I had known before, I could have started earlier.'

**Agricultural Extension Officer, Ministry of
Agriculture, Kaiti Division**

The current Agriculture Extension Officer has been in Kaiti Division for two years. Her Department rarely works with WN, though sometimes they providing technical agricultural input at seminars. She has never heard of PRA and although she considers her department to be participatory, interaction with the community is mostly through 'barazas' held to communicate new technology. Policy is largely developed in her office on the basis of extensionists' reports and within the constrained budgetary provisions from Nairobi. Policy is formulated with the aim to enhance 'development', measured as increased agricultural output. She states that, compared to other areas 'Nzuuni has benefited from WN's attention because they have been made aware of technical know-how so have better prepared lands, terraces and higher output'. She can't comment on the social change because 'Extensionists report on gardens, not people'.

However, comparison of the cases of the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Agriculture shows how varied success in attempts at collaboration or influence have been, both in terms of getting government to adopt more participatory processes or at least respond to some of their findings. Problems of cooperation in general may reflect a need for WN to put greater stress on communicating with other stakeholders about itself and the programmes it supports. The Makueni Impact Assessment puts the variety of ease of cooperation down to both the nature of different department and the character and permanence of the different officers. On this basis, the Ministry of Health is seen as easier to cooperate with and more able and open to adopting participatory methodologies because of the history of Primary Health Care, since Alma Ata, focusing on interaction with the community. On the other hand, the Ministry of Agriculture and most other departments are harder to draw into participatory practices due to their top-down structures; despite the introduction of DFRD, a system of linear accountability to Nairobi still exists and funding and directives still come from the top. This can lead not only to difficulties in cooperation but can go as far as conflicts in policy, such as the government's promotion of chemical fertiliser whilst WN's was recommending organic methods in Nzuuni. The Public Health Technician also identifies the problem that 'some officers were expecting incentives like other NGOs offer' but found WN to be lacking in this respect. A further impediment is the frequency with which government officials move around, on average

every two years. The Makueni Programme has profited from being able to work over a longer period of eight years with the Public Health Technician, long enough to build up a strong relationship and benefit from including him in training processes. In the case of the Agricultural Extension Officer, Arnold notes that they used to have a good relationship with the previous Officer, but then he left and we have to start all over again. Although exposure of these officers to PRA may have knock-on effects in the areas to which they move, in a situation in which the relationship is not institutionalised it is unlikely that WN is able to have enough influence to make any longer term impact on their activities. This is especially in a context in which the Public Health Technician notes that ‘the government wouldn’t accept PRA as valid – they are not conversant with it and it is not a priority’.

It seems that influencing policy at the broader governmental level is even harder than getting individual officers on board. Although the Public Health Technician optimistically predicts that ‘if one sub-location can change the whole country can change so that in 20 years there will be so much development and empowerment in the communities that it will push the government in turn to change to suit and benefit the communities’, others are far less convinced. The District Officer considers that WN has ‘minimal impact’ on government policy, due mostly to its ‘small scale of operation’. He points out that there are many interest groups trying to have an impact on government and in this context NGOs only have a chance of success where they are large in number and widely spread in terms of sectors and areas of operation. WN has indeed recognised this for over eight years and has responded by being instrumental in alliances and coalitions of NGOs. The lack of recognition of this by the District Officer demonstrates the difficulty of translating this activity to influence at the grass-roots level. The government-WN relationship is also set against a tradition of an antagonism between government and especially ‘awareness raising’ NGOs. Although the District Officer seemed to consider WN’s participatory development activities as fitting into the less noxious category of ‘capacity building’, it is clear that the line is fine and evidence of the more ‘awareness raising’ work may lead to a more hostile response. Even from the perception that WN are capacity builders, the District Officer remarks that if they want further influence WN and other NGOs like them would have to ‘co-opt and allow themselves to be co-opted’ when playing the political game.

8 Conclusions

This case study has attempted to illustrate how the particular process and effects of one form of PRA practice must be understood in context. In this case, PRA has been part of a process of community development that has had empowering effects for many community members, and has created important benefits for their physical well-being. The approach taken by WN has influenced patterns of leadership in the community. It has also influenced the way that communities relate to their local government. The paper has focused on the way that several factors influence the particular form that PRA takes in this instance: the history, approach and attitudes of the organisation, and the people within the organisation, using PRA; the nature of the community where it is used; the role and position of the government in the

country and region; and the interaction between these factors. By analysing the particularities of one case, the paper draws us towards some general challenges that face many examples of PRA practice. In conclusion, we would like to summarise some of these more general questions we might ask of PRA practice elsewhere, with reference to the particular way the issues have played out in this case.

One issue facing PRA practice generally is in what way different development actors use it to promote certain relationships between civil society organisations, community members and organisations of community members, and government. In many cases, civil society organisations view PRA as a mechanism for community organisations to proceed with development planning and action without the state, taking responsibility out of the hands of the government and putting it in the hands exclusively of the community. In this case study, we have seen how WN tries to use PRA as a mechanism for renegotiating relations between themselves, communities, and government. WN's strategy is to support changes that enable community members to make new and strengthened demands on government officials, pushing them to do their duties better. The strategy chosen by WN links PRA to the increasingly prominent rights-based development discourse (DfID 2000). Fundamental to the process of empowerment was a stress on community members' *right* to good leadership, transparency and accountability of funds and services from government officials, a discourse which appears to have been internalised by community members and used as a crucial weapon in achieving these ends. By attempting to create a different, more accountable relationship between citizens and the government, rather than neglecting government, or simply filling gaps, WN have created the opportunity for a sustainable process which could potentially influence government approaches to development or be scaled up, either from grassroots pressures or in the light of shifting government policy.⁸

This paper also contributes to the literature that problematises PRA as a powerless space in which all groups can express themselves and be heard (Guijt and Shah 1998; Kesby 1999). From case to case, the forms of social inclusion and exclusion are different in different spheres of community life, and the political orientation of organisations using PRA towards groups within the community are different. The case study illustrates the particular forms in which power relations in the Nzuuni community play out through PRA as used by WN. On top of demonstrating the importance of actively accounting for the marginalised position of women before they are heard, this case shows that other differences, if left unnoticed, can lead to re-performance of marginality. This is demonstrated by the contrast of the benefits to women, who were included because they were on the explicit agenda of WN, versus the continued marginalisation of youth, who were not seen as a priority and thus did not get included. In other words, inclusion does not happen by simply using PRA but rather organisations need to make an effort to identify groups, empower them to join the process and conscientise others to listen. This in itself implies political choices about which groups are singled out for such attention. Any group using PRA can ask questions of its own political choices, and may answer them differently from the way WN did in this case.

⁸ This is particularly relevant at a time when the World Bank and others in the international community are encouraging the development of more participatory national Poverty Reduction Strategies.

A further area of questions raised by this case study, that we could equally ask of any example of PRA practice, is the relationship between participation through representation and direct participation. PRA rhetoric tends to emphasise the importance of the *whole* community participating in *every* aspect of development processes, while in practice this is not the case. In reality, ‘full participation’ is neither possible nor desirable, and instead agencies pursue different strategies to obtain optimum participation in their programmes (Cornwall 2000). The experience of WN suggests that the use of representative committees as the primary development planners deserves more analysis and discussion. On the positive side, delegation to representatives allows for coordinated action at a level embracing a wider area. It also deals with the problem often found with PRA of both unmanageable numbers of participants and the unwillingness of community members to participate due to ‘time-poverty’.⁹

However, the case study also usefully raises some difficult questions that PRA practitioners might ask about working with representative bodies. The transformative experiences of the committee members in Nzuuni suggest that the highest level of empowerment is to be achieved through direct participation in the PRA process. If one wanted to extend the direct experience of PRA, and these corresponding benefits, to a wider number of people, one strategy might be for representatives to carry out PRA processes with their constituents. However, this would require a specific strategy for building the skills of representatives in PRA facilitation. Simply participating in a PRA exercise themselves may not give committee members the confidence or skills to replicate the process on their own. Within development professional circles, it is widely accepted that some formal training in PRA is important in shaping new practitioners, and that practitioners only continue to improve their skills through continuing practice and reflection. The strategy needed for building skills and confidence in facilitation may be different for non-professional community leaders— it is a question worthy of further study.

The experience in Nzuuni showed that for a group of community representatives, PRA was a one-off ‘shake-up’, creating a temporary political space in which existing hierarchical relationships were challenged. In this case, new norms of interaction that persisted outside of the PRA context were to some extent established within the representative group (Jones and SPEECH 2001). This was achieved in part through the ‘reperformance’ of PRA, thus continually challenging the ‘reperformance’ of much more deeply rooted hierarchical models of leadership and decision making. But in relationship to their constituencies, the now more inclusive representative committee settled down into a new but equally hierarchical and unchallenged power structures. The difficulty of convincing the leadership to extend the opportunity to practice new kinds of interactions beyond their own group, by facilitating PRA in their communities, demonstrates the level of work that is needed to achieve attitude and behaviour change, not only in programme staff but also among community members.

The experience of Nzuuni also draws our attention to examining the organisational context in which PRA is applied. In the case study, WN was working with a relatively new and fragile community

⁹ ‘Consultations with the Poor’ found that lack of time, due to overburdening number of tasks to perform, was a real problem for many poor people, especially women (Narayan *et al.* 2000).

organisation, which is true of many projects and programmes that are organised through newly formed committees. WN International uses the imagery of a growing tree for institutional development, and provides an important example of the on-going nature of this aspect in their development of tools to assess the role of community development organisations, current strengths and weaknesses, routes to improving strengths and mitigating against weaknesses and, above all, moving towards taking over full control of their affairs (Gubbels and Koss 2000). The teething problems of Nzuuni's committees are illustrative of the potentially destructive nature of problems which can arise if new institutions are expected to operate in a fully fledged fashion too soon. The case directs us therefore to the wisdom in guiding and building institutions slowly over time and in an iterative fashion if one is to work with young organisations. The challenges would be very different if PRA was introduced into different kinds of local organisations, such as existing informal organisations, or deeply rooted, older formal organisations. When considering the particular way in which PRA is used, the organisational context into which it is being introduced must be considered from context to context.

Finally, the experience of WN in Nzuuni and elsewhere raises the dilemma of resource availability. It seems that, in its emphasis on process, PRA rhetoric often valorises the mobilisation of local resources to carry out some of the more physical changes to which PRA processes can point. Once plans are made, poor people often do not have adequate resources themselves to carry them out, and facilitating NGOs are largely unwilling (and often unable) to play the (traditional) role of provider. WN's approach presents one answer to this dilemma, by building the community's capacity to identify potential resources from outside sources and to present their case to attract them. However, the difficulty communities like Nzuuni have found in actually gaining the resources they demand (and the subsequent stalling of projects and disillusionment) raises questions about the knock-on effects of WN's strategy. WN's strategy requires other development organisations to take up complementary strategies. In particular, government agencies and donors need to find ways to administer grants in smaller amounts, and to make them more rapidly available to community organisations. They also need a change in attitude over what kind of requests for development support is acceptable – to shift from bureaucratic approaches such as logical frameworks to accepting participatory analyses and budgeting.

The case study has situated one particular form of PRA practice in its context. Through this case, we have raised many important questions facing PRA practice more generally. We have also studied the way that one organisation, WN, has addressed these challenges for PRA practice in ways that are explained by their organisational history and values, and in response to their particular working context. The issues raised by looking at this example of practice may be useful for other PRA practitioners in analysing and improving the way their own organisations practice PRA. What strategy towards the relationship between civil society organisations, community organisations, and the State informs particular forms of PRA practice? What political choices do development organisations applying PRA make with regard to the particular forms of social inclusion and exclusion in the community where they work? What compromises are struck between direct participation and representative participation in particular forms of PRA, and

what implications are there for relationships within communities? In what ways are existing relationships challenged or re-performed during PRA processes, and in what ways are those previous relationships and challenges to those relationships re-performed after PRA? Into what organisational context is PRA introduced? What is the strategy taken by organisations using PRA towards providing the resources for activities planned by communities, and what implications does that have given other development actors' roles in resource provision? Organisations and practitioners using PRA address these issues in ways that reflect their development strategy, organisational history, and the broader context in which they work.

The case study has shown how these issues have played out in WN's work in Nzuuni, and the challenges they still face in their work. As the case study shows, WN's particular approach to PRA in their context has led to empowering effects for local people, as well as improvements in local people's physical conditions. It has affected relationships between WN, community members, and government in positive ways. The case study has also shown that despite this success, WN continues to examine its practice of PRA, and to open itself to new ways in which they can deepen and improve their participatory practice.

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