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A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP IN THE  
NAMWERA AND CHIPONDE AFFORESTATION PROJECT**

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## **PARTICIPATION, SPONSORSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP IN THE NAMWERA AND CHIPONDE AFFORESTATION PROJECT<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** This paper questions the application and viability of a participatory development model through an examination of the barriers to community ownership apparent within the Namwera and Chiponde Afforestation Project (NCAP). The NCAP is a community initiated forestry project, created in response to high levels of wood-fuel scarcity in the Mangochi District of Southern Malawi, which operates within a government endorsed participatory framework. However, despite the project reflecting the articulated desires of the community, project stakeholders express an aspiration for increased material sponsorship that project facilitators consider to be incompatible with the central component of the participant driven development model – ownership. This paper explores how the participatory ideals of the NCAP are challenged by the contextual reality. Conflicting views concerning sponsorship illustrate the degree to which the regional development context, defined by satisfying immediate needs, is undermining community ownership of the NCAP. It argues that a constructive theoretical response must recognise and account for the disparity between the immediate desires of project participants and their long-term interests.

**Keywords:** Deforestation, participatory development, Yao, development assistance, Malawi, capacity building, sustainable development, community ownership

### **Introduction**

Participatory approaches to development, documented in the work of Robert Netting (1993), Robert Chambers (1989, 1994, 1997) and Michael Mortimore (1998), emphasise the necessity of incorporating local knowledge and community requirements into project design, implementation and appraisal. This framework emerged from the apparent failure of large-scale institutional development and has redefined how development assistance is provided to the world's 'underdeveloped areas' (Riddell, 2007). In this framework, stakeholder participation is viewed as a solution to some of the negative aspects of development intervention documented in the work of James Ferguson (1990). Abraham and Platteau (2004: 210) contend that contemporary strategies stress the importance of agency, resulting in beneficiaries assuming a pivotal role in the development process. This approach becomes less compelling when the desires of project participants are at odds with the participatory model. The data presented in this paper highlights a tension within the NCAP between the project facilitator, Global Interaction (GIA) (a Christian not-for-profit non-government organisation (NGO)) in conjunction with the relevant government forestry authorities, and the project participants, concerning material sponsorship.

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“The things that we are wanting to receive from the project are: money, maize, fertilizer and small gifts<sup>2</sup>.”

Participants are actively seeking sponsorship as a recompense for their contribution to the project while community ownership of the woodfuel shortage, as opposed to clientalism or dependency, is a central concept that defines the facilitator’s objectives for the NCAP.

This paper seeks to highlight some of the problems associated with micro level participatory development projects. The theoretical assumption, embedded within the participatory model, is that participants will prefer a project that reflects their articulated needs and requires their input. What if they don’t? What if, when offered the choice, participants decide they prefer a project that provides participants with a tangible material outcome, through a client-like relationship, at a cost to their agency? The disparity between the NCAP facilitators and participants demonstrates some of the problems associated with long-term community initiated projects in an environment defined by poverty and aid relief. In this instance, the participant driven approach to development assistance is under severe pressure from various barriers to ownership that exist in the broader socio-cultural context.

The data presented in this paper is drawn from a grounded theory investigation, using semi-structured qualitative interviews, into the NCAP. Interviews were predominantly conducted at participants’ homes with the assistance of an interpreter. All interviewees have been de-identified for the purpose of this document.

Ferguson (1990) states that development is not only the name of a value but is a dominant problematic or interpretive grid through which impoverished regions of the world are known. Accordingly, this paper acknowledges the contested nature of the term development, and uses it in its most normative form to describe the broad attempt by industrialised and wealthy nations to improve the economic and material conditions in areas commonly referred to as ‘underdeveloped’

### **Area Profile**

The NCAP is geographically located in the Republic of Malawi along its eastern boarder with Mozambique. Malawi has a predominantly rural population of 12.6 million (2004 estimate), most of whom live in densely populated (117 inhabitants per square kilometre) rural areas (Simmonds, 2006:4). The United Nations (UN) ‘Human Development Report 2006’ ranks Malawi 166 on its Human Development Index (UNDP, 2006:286). This is comparable to its regional neighbours: Tanzania ranked 162, Zambia 165 and Mozambique 168. The geographical areas of Namwera and Chiponde fall under the Traditional Authority (TA) of Jalasi. TA Jalasi is located in the North East of the Mangochi District. Over 90% of the Mangochi District’s population are involved in subsistence agriculture with 59% of the District’s arable land used to manufacture tobacco for export (Malawi Government, 1999). The predominant ethnic group in the Mangochi District, is the Yao<sup>3</sup>. The Yao live largely

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<sup>2</sup> This response was made by the CNC Chairman. At this interview around forty women from the project attended. They sat and listened to the questions and the Chairman’s response. At the mention of sponsorship the group of women applauded spontaneously, indicating the popularity of the Chairman’s comment, specifically, the references to the types of gifts identified.

<sup>3</sup> According to Yao tradition, the various Yao tribes scattered from their original home on Yao Hill, which is generally believed to be located somewhere in north-western Mozambique (Abdallah, 1919;

in Southern Malawi and Northern Mozambique and their contemporary identity is principally defined by their adherence to the Quadariya or Sufi form of Islam, often practiced concurrently with more traditional spiritual beliefs, combined with linguistic difference and distinctive initiation practices (Thorold, 1995:74-89)<sup>4</sup>.

### **Deforestation**

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

Deforestation has left the landscape of Namwera and Chiponde denuded with Miombo woodland almost non-existent outside the government protected forestry reserves. The few visible trees occupying the landscape are either bluegums planted with a view to future harvesting by tobacco estates, isolated coppices around graveyard sites, or mango trees that are preserved for their fruit. Explanations by interviewees regarding the causes of deforestation vary. Most participants emphasise the role of the tobacco estates while others highlight unsustainable community harvesting and the practice of charcoal burning as reasons for woodland decline. In certain villages, near the Mozambique border, participants claim that the influx of people in refugee camps, which were established as a result of conflict in the late 1980's and early 1990's, contributed to the high levels of deforestation. This multi-layered response reflects the complexity of woodland resource use in the area.

Despite the diversity of causal explanations present in the literature, including by neo-Malthusian discourse, the most palpable cause of deforestation, and the most commonly expressed by project participants and facilitators, is the woodfuel consumption of tobacco estates. Malawi's post colonial economic development policy is defined by its adoption of a market driven liberal philosophy (Pryor, 1990). This has involved heavy investment in export orientated agriculture, including tobacco (Pryor, 1990; Pryor and Chipeta, 1990, 50-74). Despite the majority of Malawians having no personal use for it, tobacco makes up 15% of Malawi's Gross Domestic

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Alpers, 1969:405-420). David Livingston (1865), on his Zambezi expedition, gives an account of the initial Yao migration into the area now called southern Malawi. The Yao were in contact with Swahili traders on the East Central coast of Africa from as early as the 16th century (Alpers 1976) and they formed a vital part of a long distance overland trade network established to transfer ivory and slaves to the various coastal ports (McCracken, 1968b; White, 1987). A key feature of Yao contact with the Swahili traders was exposure to Islam. Large-scale conversion of the Yao to Islam occurred in the late 19th century (McCracken, 1968b).

<sup>4</sup> Yao villages are organised around a matrilineal system of descent (Mitchell, 1966; McCracken, 1968b). Clyde Mitchell's (1966) seminal work describes a Yao village as a complete unit within an organised whole. The leader of each village is the Headman. The Headman represents the village in all public transactions. Amongst a group of villages one is raised above the level of the rest. The headman of this village is a Group Village Headman (GVH). Both Namwera and Chiponde are GVH, they are also townships located on the Bakili Muluzi Highway.

Product and 70% of its exports (FAO, 2003a). The bulk of tobacco in Malawi is burley, which is grown by smallholders and some estates (Simmonds, 2006). The environmental cost of this variety is relatively insignificant compared to the Virginia Flue Cured tobacco grown by estates around Namwera and Chiponde. Flue production in Malawi reached 90 million pounds in 2005, an increase of 40 million since 2004 (Simmonds, 2006:14). Curing flue tobacco requires a slow smoking process. Demand for wood is typically met from customary land supplies which are often harvested in excess of sustainable yields (Tobin and Knausenberger, 1998, 405-424).

In Namwera and Chiponde, woodlands are the primary source of household energy and they are also a vital source of essential subsistence goods<sup>5</sup>. (French, 1986; Dewees, 1995a, 1995b; Brouwer et al., 1997; Bekele, 2001; Kayambazinthu et al., 2005). Anderson (1986:853-863) claims that approximately 90% of Africans use fuelwood for cooking. In Malawi, this is estimated to be as high as 94%. In order to slow environmental degradation the World Bank and the World Health Organization have recommend Malawi restructure its economy away from tobacco production (Tobin and Knausenberger, 1998, 405-424). The lack of available substitute energy resources highlights the nexus between deforestation and poverty. Households cannot afford to use electricity or gas and as a result are forced to exploit the natural environment (Park, 1997, 221- 227). The cyclical nature of shortage is similar to other instances of resource scarcity, including famine, with the marginalised and disenfranchised the most severely affected (Devereux, 1993:108). For villagers who cannot walk the distance to access government forest reserves, the only viable alternative option is to purchase woodfuel or charcoal from the market. Interviewees established the cost of a wood bundle (enough for one meal) at the market to be 20 Kwacha (estate employees are paid approximately 100 Kwacha per day<sup>6</sup>). The declining availability of fuelwood has significantly altered household labour allocation with women required to travel longer distances to collect less wood (French, 1986, 531-540). This is particularly evident in TA Jalasi where women leave home twice a week, at four in the morning, to walk to the government forest reserve in the hills, before returning at three in the afternoon carrying several large logs.

The Forestry Department is the primary government organisation concerned with the administration of Malawi's woodlands. The Forestry Department's woodland management plan is outlined in its "National Forestry Policy" (1996) and the "National Forestry Programme" (2001). The Forestry Department (1999, 2003, 2005) claims that participatory forestry contributes to the sustainable management of forest areas through promotion of local stakeholder involvement. Their approach aims to be people centred, transparent and equitable. They claim to empower communities to take responsibility and promote collective action for the sustainable utilisation of their forest resources. Despite the robust policy framework, based on extensive stakeholder research, apparent in the National Forestry Programme, the effectiveness of the Forestry Department is compromised by capacity constraints (Malawi Forestry Department, 2001). The District Forestry Officer (DFO) in Mangochi District is theoretical supposed to have over five hundred employees (including administrators

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<sup>5</sup> Forests play an important role in the firing of the mud brick kilns used in constructing houses (Simmonds, 2006). They also provide poles and grasses for use in building houses, fences and bridges. Forests are a source of traditional medicine, fodder, rope, fruit and honey (Bekele, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> At the time of this research, 100 Kwacha was exchangeable for approximately \$1 AUD.

and forest guards) but only has the resources to employ one hundred and sixty (Malawi Government, 1999). GIA regularly donated tyres and fuel for the DFO's one operational vehicle to that he could attend project meetings and provide input.

### **The Namwera and Chiponde Afforestation Project**

The aim of the NCAP is to equip the communities of Namwera and Chiponde with sustainable forestry methods so that they can produce and maintain sustainable woodland resources closer to their homes. The initial idea for an afforestation project in the Chiponde area was conceived in 2004 when the headmaster of the Nasato Primary School approached a member of GIA with a plan to plant trees around the local school site. The motivation for his request was to acquire a windbreak for the school that recently had its roof blown off by high winds (wind damage is a relatively common regional occurrence generally attributed to deforestation). The project was setup with GIA providing the tools required to plant around 5000 trees while the school children provided the labour (the teachers also used the project to facilitate education about forestry and environmental sustainability). Once the trees had been planted a celebration was organised to mark the community's achievement. This celebration was attended by local dignitaries, including a number of village headmen who were impressed by the project and requested involvement and expansion.

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

Empower rural communities to manage the forest resources fostering ownership or usufruct of trees, and ensuring that such trees are sustainably utilized for the benefit of both present and future generations (National Forestry Policy, 1996).

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

The target for each nursery in Year 2 of the project was to plant 10,000 trees with the Forestry Department providing training in critical skills. At the end of Year 2, the first year the project ran in its expanded form, 80,000 trees were planted. The planning for Year 3 began with the project leadership group (including the CBNRC) evaluating the project and ascertaining what had and had not worked throughout the previous season. This process concluded that the lack of an immediate return for labour was frustrating participants who expressed dissatisfaction with the inability of the project to improve their present living conditions.

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

“I wanted them to feel it was their project and that we were helping them to achieve their goals. If they didn't want to do it, well that's fine, I'm not going to push them or make them. Sounds brutal but in the end if it's not owned by them, it's nothing”<sup>7</sup>.

Despite attempts to clarify this rationale with participants, this point of difference remained. Consequently, to address the desire for immediate benefit, it was proposed that fruit tree-grafting workshops, amongst other improvements, would become part of the project in Year 3.

In Year 3, the project planted over 100,000 trees. However, there were still several problems associated with its implementation and the fruit tree grafting was not as successful as anticipated. While some people interviewed had begun grafting their own trees, the majority had not. The project planted 1,900 fruit trees in Year 3. However, while participants took home a tree for their work in the project, the trees were not yet producing fruit so the desire for an immediate return was not entirely satisfied.

### **The Ownership Rationale**

Despite the initial success of the NCAP in meeting its tree planting targets, a disparity between the expressed aspiration of participants for sponsorship and the position of the project facilitators, who emphasise the need for community ownership<sup>8</sup>, has emerged. Unresolved, this tension has the potential to undermine the projects longevity. Many of the participants believed they would benefit directly from their involvement in the project. In the short-term, they expected to receive gifts and material support while in the long-term they would harvest the trees they planted. Summarised, many participants expected a client-like relationship with the project. In contrast GIA and the DFO were heavily motivated by the need for community ownership of the wood shortage problem. They aimed to implement an independent and sustainable project. In their view, forestry management was a practice that needed to become embedded within Yao culture. Like planting maize or thatching a roof, forestry needed to become an annual routine.

Ownership is a theme that has dictated the involvement of GIA from the projects inception. “People need to plant trees because they need trees” or as expressed by the Yao proverb:

Yao Proverb: Jwakulwala m'matumbo ni jwokusawugula litanga

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<sup>7</sup> Interview with a GIA member.

<sup>8</sup> Ownership, in this context, does not refer to the possession of land, property, assets or belongings. Rather, ownership refers to an idea or practice that is embedded within or reflective of Yao culture. Yao ownership of the NCAP and woodfuel scarcity would require little or no external aid or monetary assistance, but would necessitate cultural change so that planting and maintaining trees became entrenched practice, similar to sowing maize or making bricks.

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

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

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

“... people's minds become shifted from doing something on their own to doing something else where they are paid.”

In the DFO's experience, projects where participants are paid for their work generally stop once donations end. From GIA's perspective, development involves the necessary objective that people will be able to take over management of the project in the long-term, without donor support. Ownership is considered by the DFO and GIA to be a key aspect of the NCAP because community forestry requires a long-term vision. Unlike short-term aid for infrastructure projects or drought relief, reforestation is a necessary reality for future generations. The scale of deforestation requires sustainable forestry practices to become embedded within annual agricultural systems. The DFO argues that what is required is a 'sustainability spirit'. This involves acknowledging the role that the environment plays and fostering understanding that trading the environment for short-term benefits will have a detrimental long-term impact.

The NCAP is under constant pressure from its participants to provide sponsorship equivalent to other projects like Food for Work. Sponsorship can have a negative impact as demonstrated by an instance when a local Member for Parliament gave a speech in which he promised of 'gifts' as reward for a year's hard work. While the project leadership (including the CBRNC) requested that the money was not distributed, the District Commissioner's office decided to proceed regardless. The money was given randomly to three of the eight nurseries. Both the DFO and GIA concede that this donation had a detrimental effect on the project and has placed increased pressure on the leadership committees. The donation had two immediate effects. Firstly, the nurseries that didn't receive donations were incensed at the unevenness of the contributions. Secondly, the leadership observed that the nurseries which did receive gifts lost motivation in the following season as they were now unlikely to obtain more sponsorship in the near future. Overcoming this problem required the leadership team to undertake extensive visits to the community nurseries where they requested participants look beyond the gifts to the long-term benefits of a community forest. The DFO reflected that it would have been better if the money hadn't been given at all:

“The government resources are not enough, it cannot afford to give money to the whole community. If it did for one year, next year if there is no money people won’t go and do the project.”

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

### **The Desire for Sponsorship**

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

“The donors should give gifts. If you encourage us with gifts we will cover the whole hill with trees”

“Changes will only happen if the donors give us more gifts”

“What we need is someone to empower us”

Interviewees identify declining participation rates as the key impact resulting from the absence of sponsorship. Six of the eight nurseries reported a decline in participation during Year 3. This trend was reflected in CBRNC interviews which highlight increasing difficulty with motivating participants.

“It seems that people are leaving the job because people have been working for three years without any pay. That is why they are leaving the project.”

“People are complaining for a sponsor because most of them are poor. They left their jobs at their houses for a free job. For them it seems like they are wasting time.

“If we were given more gifts and money many people would come and join the project. Like Food for Work, we just need regular encouragement”

These responses are echoed by participants who have left the project.

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

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

The belief that the project would provide ‘gifts’ can partially be attributed to involvement in other projects. All participants were aware of the Food for Work schemes that provide workers with food at the end of each month as payment for their labour. The impact of Food for Work schemes on the NCAP and the broader economic culture is just one example of many instances where aid has had unintended negative consequences. One interviewee commented that he felt the proportion of the population expecting handouts had increased over the previous decades. Certainly the project participants were familiar with way the development industry operated. When asked if they would prefer the NCAP to operate on similar principles to Food for Work the responses were overwhelmingly positive:

“If someone would make it as a Food for Work it will be a great encouragement to the people who are working in the nursery. The ones who have left will come back again.”

“So if some sponsors come and make it like Food for Work it will be a big encouragement for the workers. It will give them hope in their hearts. That will be good to them.”

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

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

“The Food for Work normally helps just for a short time, as a result it causes problems for a long time.”

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

Declining participation is also reflected in the choices people make regarding their labour allocation. Many of the villagers, particularly men, who are not involved in the project, choose to search for paid employment:

“The people who leave the project are mostly working in order to buy fertilizer”

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

When asked why he thought that participants who had instigated the project, and expressed a commitment to its longevity, continued to request sponsorship, the DFO replied:

“Most of the projects in Mangochi are actually initiated by the communities themselves, but it changes direction as soon as it gets of the ground, as soon

as the project commences they wish to change direction and they ask for some donation. They don't come openly, they wait for something to start and then when it's started they are going to ask for things.”

The DFO's analysis highlights how the project participants actively engage in the development 'game' and that even in interviews they were seeking to illicit sponsorship.

### **Conclusion**

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

All participant interviewees expressed a desire for sponsorship. This sentiment is recognised by GIA and the DFO who are aware of the context, defined by poverty and aid dependency, within which the project operates. While they understand the aspiration for immediate material support, GIA and the DFO have resisted the pressure to provide payment in return for participation. They are motivated by the desire to implement a project that would become independent and sustainable. “People need to plant trees because they need trees”. The belief that ownership is the key to project sustainability reflects the Malawian Government's policy framework, which privileges community participation, and personal experience with similar projects that have failed as a result of sponsorship. Participant ownership is apparent in the leadership and decision making structure of the project. However, the continued requests for sponsorship indicate that project participants, relative to the project facilitators, do not share the same aspiration for ownership.

Development is big business in Malawi with the Public Sector Investment Programme registering over 700 separate development projects in 2004 (Malawi Government, 2005). The tension between sponsorship and ownership is a reflection of the context within which the NCAP operates and the diverse motivations and expectations that exist amongst stakeholders. These expectations are influenced by past experience with development assistance, which has created a shared expectation concerning how benefits should flow from involvement in a development project. Altering this perception, embedded over decades of intervention, is difficult. Woodfuel shortage is a serious regional problem but often participants have more urgent requirements, including food security. Efforts have been made by members of the project to reach an arrangement where necessity and idealism engage in constructive and proactive dialogue. However, in a context defined by poverty, the willingness of other institutions to fulfil immediate needs continues to compromise the project's long-term objectives.

Despite their willingness to initiate the NCAP, participants anticipated sponsorship in return for their involvement in the NCAP, and are dissatisfied now that it has not

eventuated. Participants are often enticed away from the project by the additional income they can generate elsewhere, despite awareness that this will not produce a viable long-term solution to the woodfuel problem. This dilemma highlights an underlying problem with a participatory development approach. How do facilitators respond when confronted with persistent participant requests that they deem to be incompatible with the projects long-term goals? By attempting to promote ownership over sponsorship are facilitators empowering participants or reducing their agency? These are the questions that face the facilitators of the NCAP but also development theorists generally. Development theorists and practitioners have long recognised the historical, cultural, linguistic, economic and postcolonial context within which they operate. It is an awareness and sensitivity to this context that has driven the adoption of participatory development approaches. However, does development theory and practice adequately account for the context that it is currently creating? As illustrated by the NCAP, uncoordinated and ad-hoc attempts at raising the living standards of the people of Namwera and Chiponde are jeopardising the long-term sustainability of their environment and their associated livelihoods.

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