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**ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A PATH
TOWARD AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
PRACTICE**

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Abstract

Over the last fifty years, approximately \$2.3 trillion has been spent to alleviate global poverty. Even so, the economic disparity between the poor and the non-poor is wider and continues to grow, while restlessness grows among civil societies, and socio-political power remains in the hands of an elite few. It is this development paradox with which the case for an Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model purports to offer an authentic solution. Using secondary research, this paper examines three case studies of asset-based development from Ethiopia, Taiwan, and Guatemala. These case studies expose how ABCD can be utilized as a tool globally yet modified to a local context. More importantly, the case studies will illustrate the sustainable nature of ABCD by raising social capital and challenge existing power structures in an authentic way. When given the opportunity, ABCD allows vulnerable and marginalized groups to drive the future of their own development, and moves away from the current model of dependency.

INTRODUCTION

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) emerged in response to global economic, political, environmental, and social changes. Environmental catastrophes and human disasters derived from wars, ideologies, and ethnic movements have raised the gap between rich and poor relational tensions between nations (Lindenberg & Bryant, 2001). Since World War II the growth of NGOs rose dramatically. Due to the growth of multinational corporations and reduction in government capacity to care for its citizens, the role of NGOs has become increasingly critical to providing human services in the developing world. According to the Human Development Report 2000, almost 45,000 NGOs were in operation internationally by the turn of the 21st century. With financial incentives from major donors such as USAID and the World Bank, NGOs have

become the primary channels for humanitarian relief and development projects.

Over the last fifty years, approximately \$2.3 trillion has been spent to alleviate poverty. But the economic disparity between the poor and the non-poor or the have and have-nots is wider and continues to grow. Around the world civil societies have grown restless, while socio-political power remains in the hands of an elite few. It is this development paradox in which Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) calls for a participatory approach in order to offer an authentic strategy that addresses the structural causes of poverty.

In this paper the two primary modes of development practice are examined: the needs based/dependency approach and the ABCD community participation approach. It also provides a foundational understanding of ABCD, and the understanding of poverty which it uses to justify the necessity for a participatory strategy. It focuses on ABCD as the authentic path to addressing the challenges of vulnerable and marginalized populations across the globe. It illustrates ABCD practices using cases from Ethiopia, Taiwan, and Guatemala, regions to which a large percentage of international development aid has been funneled.

These case studies demonstrate how ABCD can serve as a tool globally while allowing for variations tied to the local context. More importantly, the case studies serve to illustrate the sustainable nature of ABCD by its emphasis on raising social capital and challenge existing power structures in an authentic way. When given the opportunity, ABCD allows vulnerable and marginalized groups to drive the future of their own development, moving away from the current models of dependency.

Literature Review

A considerable body of literature exists on structural poverty, aimed at defining the concept, determining whom it impacts, and how it can be measured. The definitions and ways of measuring structural poverty have changed over time along with prescriptions for how to address it, correlating to the changes in global policies, techniques, and practices (Birdsall and Londoño, 1997; Thérien, 1999; Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001). Today themes of ‘powerlessness,’ ‘vulnerability,’ ‘social exclusion,’ ‘empowerment’ (Edwards and Hulme, 1996; Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001), and ‘capabilities’ (Sen, 2000) are back on the agenda for leading donors such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and these are concepts which must be implemented by NGOs. The World Bank’s (1996) source book for participation measures poverty qualitatively using a Living

Standards Measurement survey to produce quantitative information. The survey measures *opportunity* for a community to obtain a livelihood, education, healthcare access, including modern infrastructure conveniences. They also measure a community's level of *vulnerability* to risks and shocks, social protection, and the ability to both formally and informally mitigate and cope with crisis. At the household and community level, the dimension of *empowerment*, has also gained relevance. The latter includes a community's perception of their own poverty and exclusion, as well as size of social capital (and their ability to create it).

The Nature of Poverty

There is extensive literature available in the social sciences and government documents summarizing the causes of poverty, pointing primarily to circumstantial and generational effects (e.g. Shah, 2010; Collier, 2007; Bradshaw, 2007; Payne, 2005; Du Toit, 2005 Moore, 2001). Circumstantial poverty affects individuals for the short or long term as a result of employment and financial status, social isolation, poor health, etc. Examples at the macro level include geographical location, environmental disasters, poor structural policies, and economic and political corruption. When poverty affects the subsequent generation, it becomes defined as generational poverty. In either case, the effects of poverty can result in physical, psychological, social, and spiritual-moral deficiencies (Ansari, Munir, & Gregg, 2012; Boon & Farmsworth, 2011; Lund, Breen, Flisher, et.al, 2010; Lipina & Colombo, 2009; Brooks-Gunn & Duncan, 1997).

The three levels of poverty, extreme, moderate, and relative, are widely known in economics and social science research (Sachs, 2005). According to the World Bank, approximately 1.4 billion live in extreme poverty, earning between \$1 per day and \$2 per day. Also defined as absolute poverty, this bottom billion can't afford the most basic needs to survive, such as food and water. Those living in moderate poverty may be able to afford some basic materials for survival, but barely (Sachs, 2005). Those who live in relative poverty exist below the national average income level; although in countries with high income, relative poverty means lack of access to quality health care, quality education, and cultural attractions (Sachs, 2005).

Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, where the majority of the world's poor reside have been major targets for development work (The World Bank, 2000, 2010; Sachs 2005; Easterly, 2006). In the United States, the 'missing class' reside in urban and rural

areas, constantly straddling the poverty line, and living in fear that any given circumstantial event could negatively transform their lives (Newman and Chen, 2007). Sliding in and out of poverty, they are largely ignored by government assistance as they are neither poor enough nor wealthy enough to attract the attention of policymakers and social service agencies (Newman and Chen, 2007).

Causes of Poverty

Amartya Sen, the pioneer behind the “capabilities” construct, defines poverty as more than monetary matters, but as the deprivation of capabilities—of freedom from the opportunity to choose the course of one’s well-being (Hulme & McKay, 2005; Kingdon & Knight, 2006; Nussbaum, 1999, 2006; Sen 1999, 2005; UNDP, 2010). In his book, *The Bottom Billion*, Collier (2007) outlines several development traps that have caused some countries to remain in poverty, including poor governance and fiscal policies, poor geographic location with bad neighbors, persistent conflict, and struggles over natural resources. For decades, the same countries have been dependent on humanitarian aid; ultimately shaping the approaches and operations of the NGOs, as these countries are characterized as poor developing countries (Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001). Today on-going forces of poverty have complicated the development sector. The sporadic violence in transition states, inequality and social exclusion in both the global north and global south including Western economic dominance, point to underlying issues of unequal power (Escobar, 2004; Collier, 2007; Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001).

Two Tales of Aid

In the matter of alleviating the circumstances of the impoverished there are two dominant perspectives that underlie how public, private, and non-governmental organizations conduct activities across the globe today. These perspectives are upheld by the two major organizations taking the lead in eradicating global poverty, the World Bank and the United Nations (Thérien, 1999). Hoksbergen and Ewert (2002) state that, “one of the central issues in understanding development is whether it is essentially about having or being” (p 7). This is the underlying struggle, between the World Bank and the UN paradigms.

Hoksbergen and Ewert (2002) further elaborate “*having* as an economic focus to development by which technology and production are necessary to progress out of suffering; ultimately, everything in life is a

means to an end” (p 7). This approach is widely popular and can be measurable, as Jeffrey Sachs (2005), a Harvard economist, predicts that poverty can be eradicated in our lifetime with the right output. *Being*, according to Hoksbergen and Ewert (2002) is “less related to production; it’s about social and political organizations and how they contribute to growth” (p 7). While the UN promotes effective economic strategies, “truly lifting people out of poverty means social attitudes and ethics must change by conforming to laws and principles” (Thérien, 1999 p 736). Nevertheless, remedies by external organizations have focused their efforts on addressing global challenges using development policies that operate through the lens of materials-output and needs-based assumptions, despite growing research on the utility of social concepts and human well-being and its capacity to discourage local conflict and promote a broader understanding of existing issues (e.g. Coulthard, Johnson, & McGregor, 2011; Eastery, 2006; Moyo, 2009; Sachs, 2005).

Participation

Since the late 1960s, the term ‘participation,’ a fundamental concept to community development, has been used across various institutions often with as much ambiguity, referring to the involvement of people (Cornwall, 2008). Across local and global organizations, the private, non-profit, and public sectors have used the term ‘participation’ interchangeably when referring to the giving of information and empowerment to consultations that involve some level of public input (Cornwall, 2008). Other manifestations include “home grown development” (Easterly, 2006); “appreciative inquiry” (Coorperrider and Srivasta, 1987, Hipwell, 2009); and “empowerment framework” (Scheyvens, 1999). German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, upon his reaction to Western modernity’s façade, referred to people’s proactive movement as ‘active ethics’ (Deleuze, 1983; Nietzsche, [1874] 1983) and empowerment as ‘will to power’ (Nietzsche [1901] 1967b, [1882] 1974: 349, cited in Ames, 1991: 131; Williams, 1996; cited in Hipwell, 2009). Despite the ambiguity, the concept of participation includes the engagement of community members in the process of building capacity, empowering, and educating individuals and communities to improve their social and environmental condition.

Because participation in community development can take various forms with different (and unintended) outcomes, it’s important to note the different philosophies when it comes to involving people. Derived from the World Bank’s Participation Sourcebook, Russell (2009) outlines five categories of participation as shown in in Figure 1, which are widely used

by NGOs, CBOs, CSOs, government organizations, businesses, and faith organizations.

Russell (2009) compares the difference between three participation methods, Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), and the Rights Based Approach (RBA). Although some may argue the effectiveness of one participatory method over another, the author asserts that any use of participation (particularly when merged with concepts of ABCD) can have a more significant impact on communities than a needs-based approach.

Needs-Based Approach

The needs-based approach to community development remains a common practice, despite the growing popularity and evidence of successful ABCD programs. Conducting “needs assessments” for example, has become a common procedure for researchers in the social sciences, as well as foundations and NGOs, to meet organizational and funding goals. The unfortunate consequence of approaching challenges with this negative mental map is the debilitating impact it can have in a community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Mathie, 2006).

From a psychosocial perspective, and as cited by ABCD pioneers Kretzman & McKnight, 1993, a deficiency (need) outlook solicits negative images of the poor and stereotypes of individuals who bear the description of such a profile. Within poor urban neighborhoods across the United States, the perception of ‘needy’ and ‘deficient’ has become a reality for both residents and outsiders. Accordingly, human social services, social researchers, mass media, and foundation funds direct their resources and program strategies in hopes to tackle the most attractive needs (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

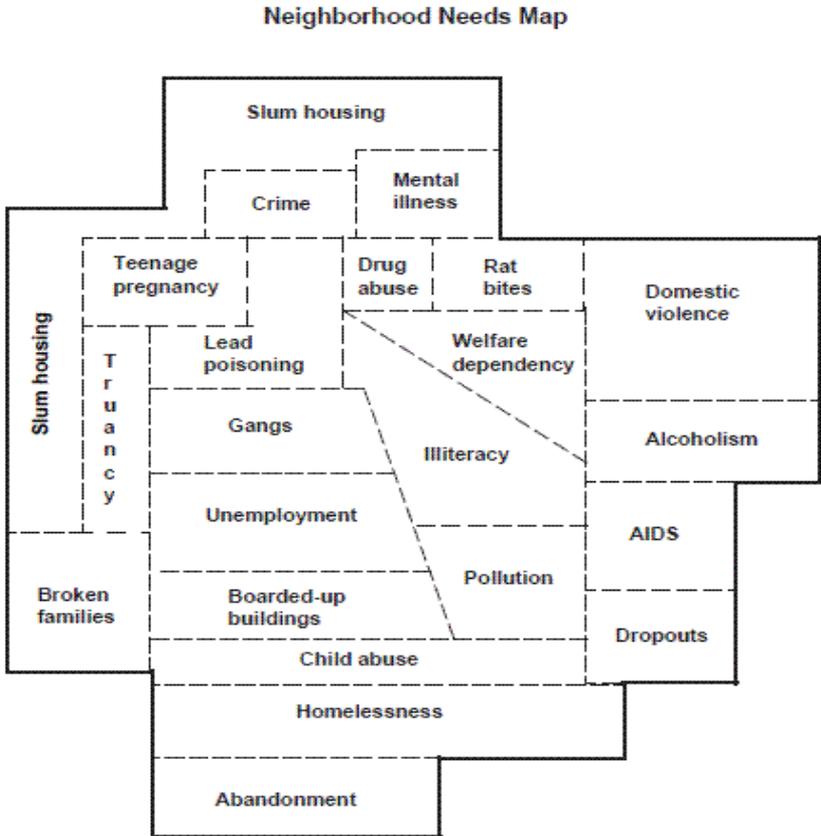
Figure 1: Variations of community participation in development and humanitarian aid, Summarized by Russell (2009).

Approach	Needs Based	Participatory Rural Appraisal	Sustainable Livelihoods Approach	Rights-Based Approach	Asset-Based Community Development
Orientation	External	Internal/ External	Internal / External	Internal/ External	Internal
Assessment	Needs, problems, and what is missing	Assets and Strengths	Assessment of human rights policy and practice	Assessment of human rights policy and practice	What has worked, community strengths and assets
Relationship between institution and community	Community as passive recipients of aid and programs	Co-designers of services and programs	Co-designers	Institution aims to empower and protect rights	Co-producers and Citizens
Development of solutions	Experts, externally driven	Local knowledge to co-develop programs and projects	Local knowledge and area-based solutions	Citizens as center of development process and directors of development	Citizen driven and internal solutions
Capacity building	External, professional/ institutional	Professional/ Institutional	Economic development in response to specific shock and on-going poverty	Institutional and citizen	Citizen and associations
Social capital	Not a deliberate strategy	Linking Capital between NGO and community	Linking Capital between NGO and community	Linking Capital between institutions and citizens	Creation of bonding, bridging and linking capital

Source: The World Bank Participation Sourcebook, 1996

When communities begin to see and believe themselves as having any valuable contribution to their challenges and brokenness, external assistance becomes attractive to the extent that it is perceived as the only viable solution (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993; Mathie and Cunningham, 2002; Green, Moore and O’Brien, 2006; Russell, 2009). When communities remove themselves from problem solving, they become incapacitated to their own problems. Ultimately, needs based approaches lead to dependency and weakens civil society. Without communities guiding and challenging perceptions of their needs and assets map, both residents and service providers will fail to achieve authentic solutions and understand the real challenges of the community (Russell, 2009). The neighborhood in Figure 2 demonstrates how stereotypes and negative mentality can result in problem solving that focuses on needs.

Figure 2: Neighborhood Needs Map



Source: From Kretzman, J.P. & McKnight, J.L. (1993). *Building Communities from the inside out*. Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University Press. © 2006, Northwestern University. Retrieved from <http://ocw.tufts.edu/Content/31/lecturenotes/392153/392170>

According to Kunstler (1996), a leader in the new urbanism movement, the way we build and define our communities gives us not only a sense of identity, but a place to connect. When a community relies heavily on outside resources, there is always a level of disappointment that ensues (Russell, 2009). More importantly, communities who behave as consumers

rather than producers become reliant on their role as clients rather active citizens; while funding institutions and human service organizations sustain themselves as stakeholders of the real cause (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Russell, 2009).

The Case for Asset-Based Community Development

A process tool of community development, Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) is a participation model that gained popularity in the 1970s amid diminishing industrial jobs from neighborhoods and city centers. The economic shift resulted in highly professionalized or low-paying service jobs, leaving the poor with limited opportunities to climb the economic ladder. As urban conditions became stagnant, new approaches were called on to address poverty, public health, human services, education, and criminal justice, in which citizens would be provided an opportunity to rebuild their lives (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; Walker, 1996).

Central to ABCD is a “glass half full” mentality. Working against the needs-based approach, McKnight and Kretzmann at Northwestern University’s Institute for Policy Research advocated for a positive approach to deal with community challenges by nurturing existing assets to strengthen the capacities of a community and its individuals rather than become dependent (McKnight and Kretzmann, 1993; Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). Figure 3 challenges the conventional needs-based approach by focusing on existing opportunities that can foster community transformation.

Fundamental to the ABCD framework is the organic development of social capital (Russell, 2009). Like an invisible bank account that builds compound interests, social capital includes time, skills, energy, and vision (Russell, 2009). Additionally, the ABCD process speaks to growing evidence across literature that authentic development occurs when citizens are invested, while well-intentioned efforts of external organizations have had little success without the participation of its beneficiaries.

Understanding the nature and causes of poverty is essential to the justification of why and how internally driven Asset-Based Community Development presents an authentic strategy to addressing deep-rooted causes of poverty. Under participation approaches (see Figure 1) ABCD may manifest as a complementary strategy within the frameworks of PRA, SLA, or RBA. Consequently, it is critical to examine the intentions of projects and programs before endorsing them.

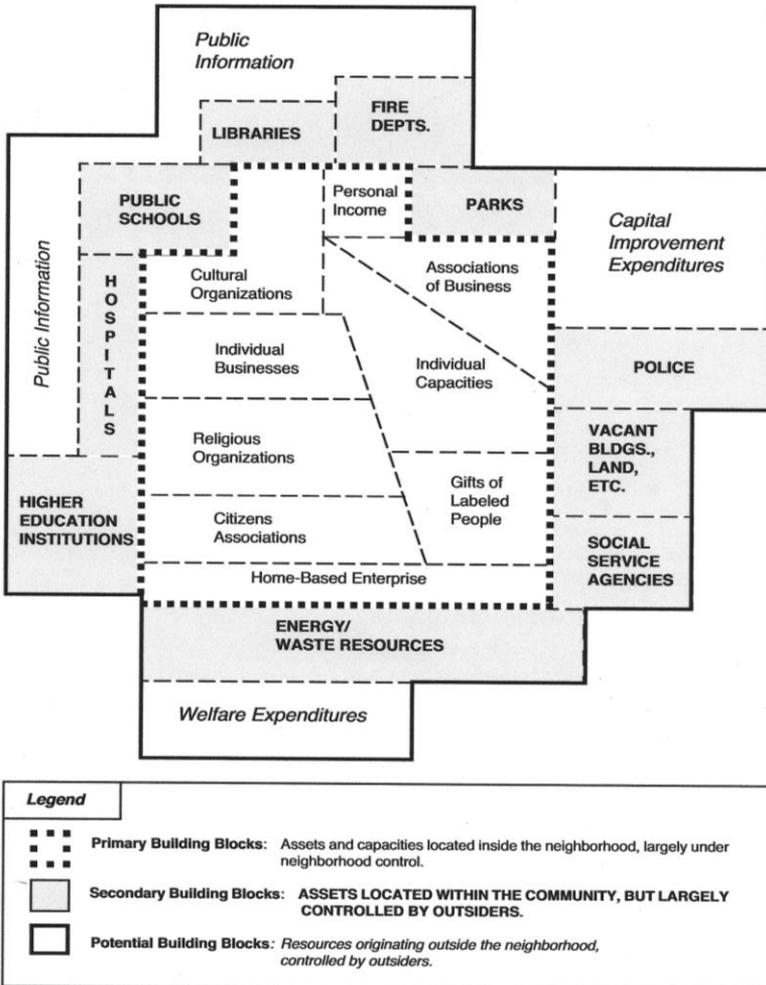
Practicing ABCD

When conducting ABCD, the initial step for practitioners is to assess the community's resources by conducting an inventory of its individual capacity. This process can be done through mapping the neighborhood's resources. By fostering a dialogue with community members, we may discover skills and experiences that can potentially enrich the community.

Kretzman and McKnight (1993,1996) offer a capacities inventory list, which can be conducted through a survey or personal interviews by community leaders. The next step is to seek the types of improvements the resident would like to make in their community. Finally, residents and community leaders must collaborate to determine how the summary of skills can be leveraged in order to achieve the community's desired improvements and goals.

When mapping community assets, the function of individuals, citizen associations, including public and private institutions, are foundational players within a community. According to Kretzmann & McKnight (1993), the strategic process of ABCD begins with recognizing the community's assets and building on the existing resources. Characteristically, 'asset-based' must also be 'internally focused in its development strategy to utilize its own problem-solving capacities, while stressing the primacy of local definition, investment, creativity, hope, and control.' Giving particular focus on vulnerable individuals and marginalized groups, ABCD stresses a 'relationship driven' strategy that works on building and rebuilding relationships within and among community groups (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

Figure 3: Neighborhood Assets Map
Neighborhood Assets Map



Source: From Kretzman, J.P. & McKnight, J.L (1993). *Building Communities from the inside out*. Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Northwestern University Press. © 2006, Northwestern University Retrieved from <http://ocw.tufts.edu/Content/31/lecturenotes/392153/392172>

Methodology

This paper argues that ABCD is an authentic development strategy because it allows communities and individuals the opportunity to drive their own development and move away from structural forces of dependency. Using secondary research, three cases in which ABCD is utilized are reviewed. Because ABCD is context specific, the cases examine vulnerable and marginalized groups from Latin America, Asia, and Africa—three regions that have consistently received the largest amount of humanitarian aid.

Case 1: An ABCD Approach to Indigenous Development in Taiwan (Hipwell, 2009)

‘Formosa’ is a term used to refer to Taiwan’s first dwellers, the indigenous or aboriginal peoples. The Formosa of Taiwan comprise of three different ethnic groups in the highlands, the Tsou, Taroko, and the Tayal, who are experiencing a cultural revival and reestablishment of autonomy. The ABCD concept occurred organically for the indigenous Taiwanese. Despite potential conflicts in tribal differences, their common historical experience and shared sense of identity to their land propelled self-organization. All three groups are utilizing their community assets to regain their land and improve their livelihoods through income-generating projects.

The current challenges facing Formosans stem from their historical experience with Chinese colonization and waves of migration from several countries. Today the majority of Formosans make up the Han Chinese who arrived over the last ten centuries. But sustained conflict began upon the arrival of Fujianese and the Bensheng people of China. Generations of colonization followed by the Dutch, Han Chinese throughout the Ming and Qing dynasty, and finally the Japanese, resulted in more conflict. Unless they assimilated, many Formosans were killed or driven off their lands and into the mountains.

With each wave of migration, the Formosan people became increasingly vulnerable. The ruthless use of Formosan land by colonizers led to the ecological degradation and diminishing relationship between place and Formosan identity. Issues of sovereignty also rose when the state built a national park in Taroko territory, which they had deemed sacred for the regeneration of plants and wildlife. This encroachment was viewed as a human rights violation, as the government began to regulate the park, impacting the Taroko’s subsistent way of life.

In working with indigenous groups, the Hipwell (2009) designed an ethics protocol approved by Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee. His qualitative research was composed primarily of recorded, semi-structured interviews and focus groups (number not disclosed). Data was triangulated with literature and consultation with Taiwanese scholars. The author also led participatory research workshops with the Tsou and Taroko communities as part of the Aboriginal Sustainability Network (ASN). ASN participants were given opportunities to define the aims and methods of the research, and given opportunity to receive copies of the research report. The Tayal community research was conducted on a separate research project.

Case 2: Applying ABCD in Ethiopia (Peters, Gonsamo, Molla, & Mathie, 2009)

The case of Ethiopia offers a unique perspective not only because they have been the largest beneficiaries of food aid and have become dependent on external resources, but have expressed high interest in driving their own development. These factors, or sense of “readiness,” became the foundation upon which external organizations felt ABCD could be implemented. After a brief survey of Ethiopia’s participants, it was discovered that community groups and individuals possessed untapped assets.

Oxfam and Coady International Institute conducted a study of twenty-one communities using ABCD in Ethiopia to assess if, after ABCD training, there were significant changes identified by the community members themselves. Oxfam and Coady were particularly interested in changes regarding organizational capacity, and assets at the community and household level; but participants were not limited in their reports. A second objective was to anticipate long-term livelihood outcomes. The third objective was to ensure that enough information was collected at baseline to compare to a future study (conducted in 2011).

The study participants included external organizations, Oxfam, Coady International Institute and three local NGOs (HUNDEE, Kembatta Women’s Self Help Center, and Agri-Service Ethiopia). Community groups came from urban, peri-urban, and rural areas of Ethiopia. The number of participants in these communities ranged from thirty-five to two thousand members. The study was held from 2003-2006 in intervals of five consecutive days, or at the discretion of the NGO.

In their effort to practice an alternative form of development, support for the project came from Oxfam Canada and Coady International

Institute, along with the Comart Foundation—organizations whose main interest was to find innovative development strategies to addressing challenges experienced by vulnerable and marginalized groups. To allow for an exchange of learning, staff from Oxfam Canada, local NGOs and Coady International Institute participated in the Program Monitoring & Evaluation (PM&E). For example, an NGO staff was invited to attend the PM&E process of another, and vice-versa. The idea behind the PM&E was to share and learn the different ways ABCD was utilized in various local settings.

In order to promote conversation and draw information, researchers utilized a historical profile and a community economic analysis tool (“Leaky Bucket”). Discussions were held with focus groups, individual households, and government officials. In addition to the meetings, Coady and Oxfam held information gathering sessions with women and households of different income and asset levels. Effort was made to build consensus and note differences among communities and individuals during meetings and some activities, such as the “Most Significant Change.”

Case 3: An NGO-Facilitated Approach to ABCD for rural Guatemalans (description based on author’s personal involvement, and through their website at <https://www.agros.org/>)

“Agros,” meaning “land,” is an NGO based in Seattle, Washington. The mission of Agros to enable landless communities to achieve land ownership and economic stability in Central America was spurred by the on-going civil war in Guatemala. Prior to the civil war, a series of coup d’états occurred. In addition to general poverty and political repression, fraud elections, socio-economic discrimination, and racism were not uncommon. In particular, the dark-skinned Mayans (50% of the population) suffered the most, cultivating land they would never own from descendants of European immigrants.

From 1960-1996 the government of Guatemala and the country’s civil society was infiltrated by military dominance. The military exercised totalitarianism. They committed genocide against the Mayan population and violated human rights, from civil to labor issues (a problem which begun two decades earlier). Fighting against the government were various leftist groups, disenfranchised students and professionals, including indigenous-poor peasants. In the 1980s the government’s military obtained absolute power within the country’s social, ideological, and political realms. Towards the end of the civil war, the military remained quiet but continued control of the State. Consequently, the 36 years of civil war constructed

deep distrust between the government and its people, while thousands of Mayans fled to the mountains to hide and find shelter.

Agros addresses their vulnerability and marginalization by assisting in the purchase of land through private market-based land reform. Working with families who have gained access to land through government redistribution, Agros invites families into a seven to ten year development journey. If this is not possible, Agros provides capital loans to buy enough land for families to start their own farming community. During the journey Agros concentrates on training and developing communities in market-led agriculture, promoting health and well-being, as well as financial empowerment. Instead of hand-outs/or conventional dependency inducing humanitarian aid, Agros offers families a chance to escape the generational cycle of poverty by providing resources to build socially and economically sustainable lives. Today Agros supports many internally driven (with assistance) villages in Central America and Chiapas, Mexico.

While Agros does not state that they implement ABCD, the NGO facilitates the process by assisting and teaching families to self-organize and promote the benefits of creating a diversified agricultural culture. Agros implements this by connecting isolated rural families with each other to establish an agricultural village community, then allows each family to choose their livelihood. Once families are able to sustain themselves, Agros encourages village communities to build local resources of their own choosing, such as schools, access to health, and community centers.

Findings

In all three cases ABCD facilitated the organizational capacity of communities to realize or strengthen their existing resources. It also improved livelihoods, social capacity, and challenged the existing power structures. Although these occurred at varying rates and levels of impact, ABCD addressed their disempowerment and improved livelihoods. True to ABCD's assertion, social capacity proved to be fundamental in transforming all three communities. In addition to building social networks within and outside, social capacity inspired improvements in livelihood. It also allowed communities to resist current power structures through organized cooperation and leveraging of resources (see Figure 4- next page).

Ethiopia

In Ethiopia, ABCD generated genuine ownership and drive by community members, strengthened leadership, participation, confidence,

and encouraged relationship building within and outside communities. The results from the ABCD exercise found an increase in organizational capacity to mobilize resources in order to achieve development goals. These results were obtained through the “Most Significant Change” based on five to seven communities.

Group organizing has a negative stigma for Ethiopians because of perceived control, due to their historical experience with the Dergue Regime from 1984 -1991. Despite this, the study found an increase in cooperative action and appreciation for skills of community members that had previously gone unnoticed. Since the ABCD training, five additional group members joined the project, ranging from 18-200 per group. ABCD also encouraged individuals and communities to create more effective links. Many reported they began to access community services such as financial resources and other institutions. Groups were also more motivated to link, reporting that while the capacity existed before the exercise, there was no motivation to take initiative when orders came from outside their community.

With the facilitation of ABCD, individuals and communities were able to come together to build trust and rapport. People were also more willing to contribute if they were part of identifying the priorities. Motivation to link networks and coordinate projects together increased, upon seeing magnified impact. Such social organization strengthened leadership or created new ones, and sometimes both. Because of collaborative visions and development of new strategies, additional roles and responsibilities were developed. Groups also reported a more democratic and inclusive environment since the start of ABCD. Researchers, Peters, Gonsamo, Molla, & Mathie (2009) from Coady and Oxfam, presumed the cause was due to the diverse age and gender or broader segment of participants. On the program level participants were given more responsibility and ownership to design their project action plans, where NGOs, government, or pre-established leadership had been deeply involved. The success of some ABCD groups has also garnered the interest of external actors, to the extent that they were invited to share their expertise.

The study results in Ethiopia revealed an increase in over-all asset base, but outcomes varied between individuals and community groups depending on the amount of resources and collective experience with which they began (human, physical, natural, social, and financial resources). Over a three-year period, the skills and knowledge acquired at the group meetings allowed Ethiopian communities to increase their supplemental income both at the individual and group levels.

Figure 4: Benefits of ABCD among three communities in Taiwan, Guatemala, and a Summary of benefits for communities in Ethiopia. (prepared by author)

ABCD	MAYANS	ETHIOPIANS	FORMOSANS
POWER	Used "reproductive democracy" to transform power relations	Chose to participate in ABCD training	Reestablished cultural heritage and autonomy
	Chose their communities	Learned skills to leverage their development goals	Established Tanayiku Natural Ecology to resist modernity
	Chose a plot of land in their preferred price range, after receiving training on land quality	Given responsibility to design their goals and action plans	Used "active resistance" against the state to reestablish land territory
	Chose their crops and micro enterprise ventures	Voices and opinion were taken into account	
	Chose their community leadership	Personal and community experiences were shared and validated	
	Communities became landowners		
SOCIAL CAPITAL	Organized with other families to build community	Connected with other villages, NGOs, and government officials on planning	Built a community kitchen to host cultural and educational gatherings (with some assistance)
	Rebuilt relations with government organizations	Learned skills in consensus building	Partnered with farmers to revive culinary traditions
	Developed partnerships with NGOs, local and regional government	Increased organizational capacity to mobilize resources to achieve development goals	Worked with the government and university to identify ancestral land
	Connected with local, regional, and global markets	Began to access community services and financial resources	Organized regionally and globally to make indigenous rights known
	Learned skills in consensus building with families in community	Perceptions changed between genders, increasing appreciation and value for roles and responsibilities	Built a pedestrian-friendly ecological park to reach out to community and media
		Built trust and rapport across communities and development actors	Mobilized small community to cooperatively and collectively guard resources
		Pooled assets among groups to take larger risks	
New strategies created new roles and responsibilities			
SUSTAINABILITY	Villages graduated out of NGO assistance and became self-sustaining	Participated in income-generating projects	Used eco-tourism business to generate income and preserve culture
	Received education and training in agricultural practices and markets		Practiced resource conservation
	Education in health and nutrition	Received financial and business training	Utilized traditional skills to live subsistently
	Families chose income-generating projects		
	Utilized traditional skills in agriculture and crafts		

Community mapping and economic analysis generated new ideas among groups for development and learning where resources could be leveraged. Pooling their assets in cash and labor also allowed groups to take larger risks. The "Leaky Bucket" (Cunningham, 2011) exercise was also

implemented as an educational tool to help them understand the concept of savings. For example, by teaching groups to compost instead of buying fertilizer, communities were not only to save but gained environmental insight. Because of the “leaky bucket” exercise, six communities reported an increase in their cash and in-kind savings to which they could reinvest into current or new endeavors. At the end of the three-year study, communities expressed more ownership in their projects compared to previous initiatives because their skills were better utilized and collaborative effort was self-initiated.

Formosa

The Formosa’s cultural heritage and reverence for their environment was both a social and economic asset. Recognizing this opportunity, Tayal took advantage of the tourism culture, turning ecotourism into capacity building. They transformed their community culinary kitchen (previously serving elders and mobility-impaired community members using the produce from a nearby farm before the 1999 earthquake), into an economic and social hub.

The L’olu Café has produced a number of empowering results. The Tayals began serving indigenous food to non-Tayals and tourists, operating as a farm-to-table restaurant in which they are able to support local farmers, while collecting additional revenue through land rentals from urban farmers. This revenue has allowed them to become independent of government and charitable support. The café continues to serve its community, but the space is also used to train youth on new skills, for networking, and as a classroom to affirm Tayal history, traditions, and beliefs.

One of the impacts of colonization was the damage to the Tsou’s sacred creek. Once a breeding-ground for many animals, it became polluted and nearly depleted due to unsustainable practices and abuse for economic and recreational intents by colonizers and tourists. To revive this cultural asset, a Tanayiku Development Committee was formed to guard the ecological reserve. The Tsou mobilized a small community to act cooperatively and collectively to police the creek. Those guarding were given traditional clothes to stand out as a collective identity. Young people were encouraged to volunteer as conservation officers. They also set ground rules for conservation use against trespassers. Slowly, the creek revived.

To reach out to the broader community, they built a pedestrian-friendly ecological park and publicized it to the media. Through the establishment of the Tanayiku Natural Ecology Park, the Tsou were able to

eke out a living through eco-tourism activities, operating souvenir shops and performing cultural dances for tourists.

Of the three Formosan tribes, the Tarokos were last to be dominated by waves of colonizers and continue to prefer their mountain retreat, away from tourism. The Taroko had been most resistant to assimilation and continue to resist free market ideas of development. The mountain forests had been an integral part of their way of life until it was clear-cut for timber by the Japanese, displacing the Tarokos.

Development, for the Taroko people, does not align with the eco-tourism ventures of the other tribes. Instead, they began to restore their traditional skills of hunting, crafting plants, and utilizing local materials to build architectural projects for place-making in the mountains. Although they are far from the hub of tourism activities, the Taroko are still able to utilize their land for their own economic interests.

Today their largest challenge is a cultural conflict with the state regarding land conservation and state sovereignty over the Tarokos. Taiwan's national park was built on Taroko land without permission and established rules against road permits and hunting. Because hunting has been a way of life for Tarokos, road access is necessary to their villages and thus the Taroko view this as a human rights violation. Using 'active' resistance, they are working with a Taiwan university to reestablish their territories by using historical knowledge and GIS to identify their ancestral land. At the local level, they are challenging the rules on hunting and road permits. Internationally, they have made efforts to have their issues known, working with United Nations Working Group on the rights of indigenous people.

Mayans in Guatemala

Before Agros' intervention, the Mayans living in the mountains of Guatemala were isolated, with exception of the sporadic marketplaces and vacation resorts. Even in the mountains, family-communities were scattered, disconnected from other families who had fled from conflict at some point over the last sixty years. Today hundreds of small village communities have formed, connecting within and outside their towns to participate socially, politically, and economically.

Significant growth of social capital developed with the assistance of Agros, benefitting over 9,500 people over the course of only fifteen years. Upon Agros' initiative, hundreds of families are now landowners and business owners, able to send their children to school. At the direction of village communities, small schools and health centers and community

centers are now available for the benefit of mountain communities, having been recognized by the government as well as regional and global commerce. The facilitation of social capital has allowed families to form relationships that not only promote their livelihood, but also gain recognition as stakeholders in the broader community.

Discussion

There were additional findings from the Ethiopia case that were not explored with the Formosans. Individual and community perception as poor, destitute and dependent began to change in correlation with the increase of community and household assets. Those who were without land could now garden, while those who were unemployed gained new skills to generate income. During the PM&E sessions the change in attitude was highly important for the groups. Such confidence stemmed not only from having ABCD as a tool that could be replicated for their future, but the increased social capital from cooperation and collaboration between groups.

Additionally, there were gender differences that perhaps call for further exploration. In their study, Peters, Gonsamo, Molla, & Mathie (2009) found that women had the tendency to prioritize tangible assets, while men were concerned with matters regarding organizational capacity and attitude. By and large, perception between genders and their roles improved, providing better insight into how men and women divide their time. Both genders were encouraged at the prospect of what could be accomplished when husbands and wives engaged in work. The ABCD process served as an impetus for womens' participation, while their economic efforts increased mutual respect.

In its villages, Agros promotes equal representation of both genders in the early formation of communities, however, it remains unclear how exactly village communities follow through in long-term; particularly when the culture is paternalistic. The role of gender was not explored in the Formosan study, neither was attitude. However, based on their proactive efforts and incremental achievements, the Tayal, Taroko, and the Tsou may have experienced some changes in their attitude. Additionally, the Formosan study demonstrates an ancillary benefit of ABCD in that it can serve as a tool for cultural preservation, a challenge that remains significant in the field of international development. In either case, the hallmarks of an 'asset-based community development' effort which "seeks to work with communities to identify, understand, (re)imagine and mobilize the past, present and future assets" (Hipwell, 2009), hold true for both Formosans, Mayans and the communities in Ethiopia.

The communities in all three cases were in need of some form of livelihood, but there were some differences in their motivations. For the communities in Ethiopia, gaining economic capacity related not just to their survival, but a sense of personal worth and pride as contributing members of their community. The Formosans were motivated largely in reestablishing their cultural heritage and autonomy. The Mayans, isolated from civilization, needed an intermediary partner to restart their lives.

The historical experience of each case was largely influential. For example, in Ethiopia, the dependency created from decades of aid may have led to a loss of pride in their personal capacity to develop and practice their assets. The desire of Formosans to regain their land and identity was strongly associated with the repeated waves of colonizers who displaced and abused Formosan land. Neglected by the government and other sectors of community, the Mayans needed to rebuild their sense of dignity.

There are differences in how Guatemala, Ethiopia and the Formosa of Taiwan have been disempowered. However, all three groups suffered the same consequence—the deprivation of their capabilities to thrive as human beings with the freedom to express and drive their own happiness (Sen, 1999; 2005).

Sen's argument that poverty should be measured beyond economics (1999, 2005), although widely favorable, is difficult to operationalize (see e.g. Chiappero-Martinetti 2000; Du Toit, 2005). On the other hand, the World Bank's model, while measurable, has been inadequate in their approach to poverty reduction, as in the case of Latin America over the last few decades (see e.g. Birdsall and Lodoño, 1997). It is difficult to challenge the evidence of improved economic capacity in the developing global south, which justifies the beneficial impact of trickle down economic development practice. But statistics reveal this perception is not entirely correct.

The percentage of improvement has been nominal, as the 'bottom billion' has actually diverged from development by 2% each year since the 1980s (Collier, 2007). According to Easterly (2006), an economics professor from New York University, the countries that received significantly less aid and spent the least amount of time under IMF loan repayment programs have had the most success in development. This indicator will not only affect the poor in global south countries but may have implications in the global north countries where the poverty gap continues to increase (Long and Clark, 2000; Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001).

In recent years the World Bank has begun to consider issues of vulnerability and powerlessness, with a special focus on capacity,

empowerment, and security. While the European Union's goal is to address 'social exclusion' as part of their policy on the fight against poverty, (Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001) the difficult truth is that such goals can be challenging to measure, and therefore hard to implement—not by NGOs, but funders who insist on bringing such issues to the spotlight.

The issue of power in the economic, social, and political realm continues to be problematic, despite progress. In the case of Ethiopia, access to services outside their communities remained challenging without the advocacy of NGOs. Consequently, taking on the responsibility as social brokers for marginalized groups must become a priority for NGOs until the plight of the poor is recognized. Agros has done exactly this.

Agros' neoliberal method often receives criticism and in theory, is not totally consistent with ABCD thought. Agros falls into the perspective of neoliberals while meeting the characteristics defined under alternative development. Agros sets themselves apart from the World Bank's view of economic capacity, the accumulation of materials and resources for a better life. By providing opportunity for ownership and the education to sustain it, "the economic powers are placed in the hand of people directly and cooperatively" (Peet and Hartwick, 1999). In essence, Agros participates in "reproductive democracy;" an idea which sees the "production of goods as a means to satisfy the needs of a wider strategy of transforming power relations in society at large" (Peet and Hartwick, 1999).

Evidence of successful empowerment projects in Asia with NGO involvement eventually gave locals full control. However, the success required flexibility, support, and willingness from donors to see the projects through the long-term (Edwards, 1999). Similarly, the Comart Foundation, funder of the Ethiopia study, was interested in exploring an innovative method to address poverty authentically, regardless of whether or not it would fail.

CONCLUSION

The World Bank paradigm, which places its focus of poverty on *having*, is certain poverty can be eradicated. The problem with measuring poverty under economic terms is the exclusion of underlying causes, specifically, that the poor have remained in a structure of systemic poverty that will follow their children and the generation after. Over the last several decades the assistance to the poor, while it has provided relief, has led aid beneficiaries to dependency on external help. And despite the level of generosity the non-poor countries exhibit, aid recipient communities have become increasingly frustrated and resentful of the hands that feed them.

Development practice has grown and continued to define itself in the last 50 years. But the development paradox incites further conversation into the future roles, responsibilities, and accountability for the trillions given in aid and the modest results. The argument for an ABCD approach holds that change is effective when it comes from within (Kretzman and McKnight 1993; Lindenberg and Bryant, 2001; Easterly, 2006; Toomey 2009).

The ABCD strategy, when complemented with participatory frameworks, can have astounding impact in a community (Russell, 2009). Specifically, ABCD can be pivotal to a healthy civil society because it raises social capital; not only for solidarity among the poor, but more dialogue between the poor and the non-poor; the client and the donor. And when projects and programs are internally driven, power relations between donor and aid recipient begin to shift. As communities are recognized and encouraged in their ability to contribute to society, they become less dependent on external resources. The advantage of an ABCD process is that it is multidimensional, addressing a broad spectrum of humanity in which the solution to structural poverty may be derived.

Implications

Although large aid donors and social service agencies are beginning to see the positive results of internally driven programs and projects, the cost and time required to employ the strategy can make needs-based methods more attractive to fund. To avoid this trap, organizations must be willing to see the long-term benefits not only in terms of finances but also the improved quality of their service delivery. Therefore, examining models of best practice may be helpful. On the other hand, is it the responsibility of donors to ensure the sustainability of their assistance or the benefactor? Given that ABCD promotes citizens to be designers of their projects and external organizations as partners, further theoretical explorations are needed. For external organizations serving as partners in assisting internal, community-driven projects, the question on length of involvement and appropriate exit strategies are worth further investigation.

As aid organizations recognize the benefits of community-driven projects, many are allocating funds directly to community based organizations (Edwards, 1999). This places NGOs in a predicament as

village communities reach self-sufficiency. Toomey (1999) describes many of these potential relationships as having both empowering and disempowering effects. Moving away from traditional roles of

‘modernizer,’ ‘rescuer,’ or ‘provider,’ NGOs must now consider their position in development. Should NGOs act as ‘facilitators,’ ‘advocates,’ ‘ally,’ or primarily a ‘catalyst’ for ideas; and where can they be most effective for a given context? (Toomey, 1999)? While the success of ABCD depends upon empowerment of communities from within, the role of external partner organizations remains necessary for continued growth. Mathie and Cunningham (2003) emphasize the central notion of projects and programs being community driven; that it must ‘foster leadership within the communities’; and that it must be ‘participatory’—one that is inclusive and representative of a community’s profile.

Equally critical but related to the position NGOs may take is the organization’s view of power, their understanding of power, and how they choose to manifest it in their work. Inside developing communities, the role of power also requires further consideration. As communities grow in self-sufficiency, structures will develop with roles and meaning attached to them. Thus the issue of power and its potential abuse may not yet be eliminated. Because power can influence how participation is conducted, those seeking involvement in areas of social and environmental justice must carefully seek the intentions of any organization.

Central to many of these implications is an organization’s culture. An organization’s ability to adapt to changes and its ability to articulate and influence new ideas to power holders can make significant differences not only in organizational survival, but also in its impact on services. Perhaps, by encouraging a culture of learning, many organizations will arrive sooner towards long-lasting, meaningful solutions, where both donor and beneficiary can act as citizens in equal partnerships.

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