

Neighbourhood Assemblies (NAs) Success, lessons learnt and Actions

Implementing Agency:

Christian Partners Development Agency (CPDA)

Waiyaki Way, AACC Building, Ground Floor

Telephone, 254204 442 838, 4441994

Fax, +254 20 4442838/4441994

Email, info@cpda.or.ke

P O BOX 13968-00800Nairobi, Kenya

www.cpda.or.ke

Funding Support: European Commission, Oxfam Novib, and FARM-Africa

29th November 2008.



CHRISTIAN PARTNERS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

DEMOCRACY AND GOVERNANCE PROGRAMME

CPDA has mooted the structured forums at the grassroots in order to enhance good governance at the grassroots. This is because the leaders had failed to involve the citizens in planning for various devolved funds available to the community from the government such as Constituency Development Fund (CDF), Local Authorities Transfer Fund (LATF), Road maintenance levy funds among others. The structured forums are known as Neighborhood Assemblies (NAs). The NAs were initiated in 1999. By the end of December 2007 under the Vihiga Integrated Food Security and Nutrition Improvement Project we had formed 70 neighborhood Assemblies covering the larger Vihiga and Ikolomani division of Kakamega district. Under the Western Kenya Community Livelihoods Empowerment Project (WEKLEP) November 2008, we had established 49 new neighborhood assemblies which are covering the larger Vihiga.

Leadership Activities NAs have been engaged in

The NAs have been engaged in various activities with both local and national structures of governance. For example at the local level, NAs have engaged local schools, chiefs and their assistants, relief committees, Divisional offices, local councils and counties while at the national level, the Kenya Anti-corruption committee, National Constituency Development Fund Committee. These are some of the highlights of their engagements and achievements and key pending action points;

VIHIGA DIVISION

Relief food mismanagement: In Vihiga division, Magui NA, successfully followed up on the mismanaged relief food supplies by the area assistant chief of Magui sub-location. They forwarded their complaint to the Vihiga District Commissioner and copied to the Vihiga Division Officer. As a result of this, the Assistant Chief was suspended and eventually terminated after he was not able to defend himself of the allegations leveled against him.

Chanda ADC and Chambiti Secondary: Efforts of Chanda Neighborhood Assembly have seen Chanda ADC Primary School and Chambiti Secondary school benefit from the CDF Kitty to a tune of Kshs 300,000 and Kshs 700,000 respectively. Through the efforts of the NA plans are at an advanced stage to compensate community members of Chanda whose land was taken for the expansion of the above institutions. The NA has also applied for the rural electrification under the UMEME PAMOJA PROJECT which intends to benefit the above learning institutions and the community at large. The survey for the above facility has already been done.

Joint Neighborhood Assemblies from the division have been tracking the implementation of the following water projects under the CDF kit which to date have not been completed as follows:

- Madzu- Kisiyenya water.
- Vigulu-Mahanga water in mungoma location.
- Masana water project.
- Muhanda water project lacks pipes to access water to the community.
- The water project in Kegoye sub-location has dry pipes.

Local Access Roads: Lyambogo, Emanda and Kegoye NAs, members were outraged that the funds allocation through the Kenya Roads Board for maintenance of local access roads within their area was biased by the former Member of Parliament. They took up issues with their then area Member of Parliament and councilors who sat in the District Roads Committee. It emerged that local access roads within the MPs area were allocated more money and there was even double allocation to some roads within his area. They did a formal letter of complaint to the Kenya Roads Board which was copied to the Vihiga District Works Officer and the area MP and their area councilors. To date nothing much has been done.

Solving conflicts: At Masiolo NA, members were able to resolve a conflict between members of a local youth group known as Undugu, and some members of the said group who colluded with the area Assistant Chief of Muhanda Sub-location to attach their property belonging to the group. They sent a task force to the Lugaga Location Chief who took up the matter and resolved.

Free Primary Education: This NA also successfully intervened when the CDF funds which Muhanda Primary school was awarded Kshs. 250,000 but had not as yet been released to the school. They also successfully resolved a dispute where pupils were being given six exercise books contrary to the normal twelve under the free primary school policy.

SABATIA DIVISION

Child abuse: The joints efforts of Evojo, Chavakali and Lisaswa NAs have addressed incidences of child abuse in the area which have been on the rampant. This includes the former headmaster of Mudete Primary School who impregnated a pupil of class six by enticing her with as little as Kshs 5 and Kshs 20 in three installments totaling to Kshs 65. It's also alleged that the grandparents received a bribe of Kshs 3000 from the said headmaster to subvert action making the family an accomplice to the alleged crime. Members were amazed that instead of legal action by the relevant authorities, he was transferred to a nearby Keveye Primary School where parents are now concerned about the safety of their children. The same is also being experienced by members of Gaigedi NA. Three teachers of Gaigedi Primary School have been implicated in the case of child abuse by defiling sexually pupils of class

seven and eight. The NA members are up in arms and have reported the matter to the Area Education Officer for further disciplinary action to the perpetrators.

Corruption within the Vihiga Municipal Council: In Sabatia, joint efforts between Evojo, Chavakali, Keveye, Lisaswa and Wenyange NAs followed up on corrupt practices within the Vihiga municipal Council on the issues of five water springs (Walizunga, Woyakobo, Wamugingili, Wagadamba and Wakakiya) funded to a tune of Kshs. 350,000 and the Chavakali-Bendera Access Road previously funded at Kshs.350,000 and currently at Kshs. 650,000 under LATF 2006- 2007. As a result of the concerted efforts, the contractor on the said road was relieved of his contract and the council engineer suspended. The leadership skills of the NA leaders were recognized and as such they were awarded the responsibility of overseeing works on the access road. They also insisted that locals must be given first priority when it comes to recruitment of labour force. Through their efforts the community at large enjoyed the fruits of this intervention as men, women and youths were involved.

Whistle blowers: Under CDF the above NAs also engaged the National CDF Management Committee and Kenya Anti- Corruption Commission to investigate a number of ghost projects sighted in the website but actually did not exist on the ground for the financial year 2006-2007 under the former Member of Parliament. Some of the ghost projects cited included the cattle dip in West maragoli which to date is not there, a piece of land was bought at solongo sub-location where a stadium was supposed to be constructed, the landscape and size of the land is questionable. Though the piece of land is fenced but nothing much has been done. The renovation of West Maragoli chief's office to a tune Kshs 150,000 which even to the surprise of the area chief who was not aware of such an allocation. The NAs did a letter of complaint to the above organizations. As a result of this, the two institutions responded that they shall investigate the issues raised. It is common knowledge that the Sabatia CDF Committee was grilled by officers from the Anti- corruption body. The Royal Media -Mulembe FM a vernacular radio station interviewed members of the NAs in Chavakali and West Maragoli locations to give their opinion on how the Sabatia Constituency Development Fund had assisted constituents. After this outcry the sabatia CDF management committee under the directives of the former Member of Parliament hurriedly initiated a tea nursery project behind Chavakali High School to purporting to spend Kshs 600,000.00. Despite of all the above efforts nothing much seems to have really taken place.

Heath and sanitation: The joint NAs of Evojo, Wenyange, Chavakali, Keveye and Lisaswa raised complaints to the Ministry of Health (MOH) Vihiga on the poor sanitation of the rural district hospital of Mbale. Among the issues raised includes only one door of the four latrines opened despite of the huge number of patients. There's scarcity of running water in the facility which could result into contraction of infectious diseases. To date no action has been taken.

Vihiga Municipal Council Street Lights: During the recent 2007-2008 LASDAP process for Chavakali ward the project on street lights for Chavakali market raised a lot of anxiety as the Vihiga municipal council could not adequately account for the allocation of first installment

of Kshs 600,000/=. It was claimed that ten street light posts were procured each costing Kshs 50,000/= and the remaining 100,000/= for labour. The Municipal Engineer still claimed the contractor is demanding more payment. The meeting proposed Mr Erastus Luvai and Mrs. Jane Ominde to attend the confirmation of projects prioritize for this financial period 2007/2008 which included a further allocation of Kshs 800,000/= .The invitation letters for the above meeting were addressed to different people who are alleged to suit the interest of the council.

Acting town Clerk of Vihiga Municipality Council: Joint Neighborhood Assemblies did raise complains on the mismanagement and embezzlements of funds by the former treasurer / acting town clerk of Vihiga Municipal council Mr. Abdi Shakur. The same was also highlighted in the local media of weekly citizen dated 6th April 2008. They wrote letters of displeasure to the Minister of Local Government and the Deputy Prime minister who responded by transferring him. But the NAs are demanding that legal action should be taken against him to recover the embezzled funds and any malpractices that might have been cited.

Kegondi Health Centre: Chaguji Neighborhood Assembly on behalf of the entire members of West Maragoli location wrote a memorandum to the Ministry of Health -Vihiga concerning the management of Kegondi Health Centre. Among their displeasures was that the nurses and community health workers had decided to offer medical services at their homes for a fee and this was compromising services being offered to the community members who may not be in a position to afford. They also feared that drugs meant for the facility could be used by the two on their private practice.

Those during weekends and after 4.00pm in the evening, emergency cases are never attended to. They already had two cases of two children and an old man who died for not being attended to. They have written letters of complaint to the Ministry of Health (MOH) Vihiga, District Officer Chavakali and the Chief West Maragoli to address the matter and bring sanity to the facility.

TIRIKI EAST DIVISION

Workers Rights: In Hamisi at Shivembe NA, members received a complaint of nonpayment from some of the workers who were engaged on Jeptulu - Kisasi- Mutsusu Access Road. Over 80 people worked on the said road in December 2006 but four months later, the contractor could not be traced as none of the workers including their supervisor had no means of tracking her. The members of this NA sent a task force to the Vihiga District Public Works Office to formally lodge a complaint. They wrote a letter of protest to the District Works Officer. As a result of this intervention, the contractor's cheque was held by the works office until a memorandum of understanding was signed by the contractor, NA leaders and some of the workers representatives. As agreed in the memo, all the workers received their dues.

Abusive teachers: Kalwani NA has engaged Shamalago Primary School after receiving complaints of child abuse. The perpetrators are teachers who are defiling pupils sexually and one such incident was reported to have taken place in a class room at the school. The

members of the neighborhood assembly who acted as whistle blowers of this immoral behavior are being intimidated and some taken to the nearest administration police. The area Assistant Chief of Kalwani sub location Nathan Mulanya Mulei has impregnated a Goibei Girls student, Name withheld, who is an orphan. It's claimed the assistant chief has been visiting the student at the school and claiming to be her guardian and signing visitor's book nine times. The NA has taken up the issue with the office of the DO and even the DC but no action has been taken. Same incident was reported in the *weekly Citizen* newspaper.

Dispensary vs DO's Office: Bumira NA has been up in arms against their leaders and the local administration on the diversion of the identified and prioritized projects in the area. One such project is the local dispensary constructed near the DO'S office using the devolved funds from the CDF and the LATF kitty; it's claimed that the local leaders including the administration want to change the facility to accommodate the DO.

TIRIKI WEST DIVISION

Waterborne diseases: Gavundunyi NA received complaints from a nearby Jeborong Primary School about constant outbreak of waterborne diseases caused by lack of clean water. The NA took up the issue and approached CPDA for assistance. The headmistress of the school applied for the construction of a roof catchment water tank (50 cubic meters) which has already been done. These has contributed to reduction of cases of water borne diseases and students are now concentrating on their studies and lesser time being spent searching for water.

Constituency AIDS Control Committee(CACC): Givogi NA raised complaints to the area Constituency Aids Control Committee for the delay in disbursement of the funds to assist the orphaned children. They had already written a proposal which was approved at the constituency level. They have tried to address their concern through the CACC office but nothing much seems to be taking place.

Gamoi NA in Tiriki west division was taken through the procedures of applying for the youth fund by CPDA staff. Muzatsi and Gimomoi youth group were able to apply under the umbrella of the NA and have received funding to a tune of Kshs. 50,000 respectively to assist them initiate income generating activities within the areas.

EMUHAYA DIVISION

Community Policing: In Emuhaya at Esia- Musalwa NA, members were taken through the entire concept of community policing. This sharing generated a lot of emotive reactions as the security situation in this area is bad. Members pointed out that known criminals cannot be rooted because they work in cahoots with the local police. To confirm the security concern of the residents, the same night the convener of the NA Mr. Elphas Palia who is partially blind was robbed of all his belongings by people known to him. They demanded to now who has given him mandate to discuss the security situation of the area. This matter was pursued by

the NA in conjunction with the community policing office for the newly created Emuhaya District. However, the matter has not been finalized.

Police posts: Members of Ematsuli and illungu NAs have been experiencing insecurity incidences connected to a gang known the forty two brothers. The forty brothers who have been associated with cattle stock theft. Appoint in time the gang were involved in a robbery incident cattle theft and the combined effort of the members of this NA and the local administration the gang was ambushed and the gang leaders was killed. As a result of this the NAs have been working in close collaboration with the local administration and have even set up security committees. They raised the issue with their local leaders including the area MP demanding for a police post which has now been set up per market centre.

Ematsuli bridge project: Through Ematsuli NA, Ematsuli bridge project was able to receive funding to a tune of Kshs 6 million from CDF kit. The project was implemented under the supervision of the NA to its completion. The residents can now be able to be able to access most of the public utilities which includes the Provincial administration office, nearby health facility and learning institutions in the area.

Water springs: Protection of three water springs (Omole, Wakunda and Wamalenje) was done by Ematsuli NAs in collaboration with CPDA. This has reduced incidences of water borne diseases in the area as the community can access clean water.

LUANDA DIVISION

Tuition Fees: Ebusakami NA have received complaints from parents of Ebusakami , Emutsa and Asiongo primary schools in Ebusakami sub-location concerning education of their children as they are being chased away because of exam and tuition fee which subjects them to denied exercise books. The NA was sensitized by CPDA staff on the free primary education policy which prompted the assembly to summon the headmasters of the above schools in collaboration with the local administration and the respective school committees to address the issue. They demanded for the accountability of the funds allocated for each school under the free primary education. They also resolved that before pupils are sent home parents needed to be notified of the issues at hand whether it could be addressed by the free primary education kit. The NA has also set up support groups within its structures to address the plight of people living with HIV/AIDS. The NA approached KIMA integrated a local NGO to assist PLWA by providing them with a Home based care relief kit of maize floor, millet floor, eggs and other detergents. With collaboration from Ministry of Gender children & Social Development the NA has been able to set up Area Advisory Council with representatives from the sub-location to identify Orphans and sensitize them on their rights.

IKOLOMANI DIVISION

Disaster response: Through Mutondo NA sanity has returned to Shibuname Primary School. This was after the NA officials visited the school and addressed the following issues;

Reinstatement of the school management committee, performance of the school, discipline in the school and tracking the implementation of the free primary education programme. The school incurred a disaster when the entire roof of the school was ripped off by a storm. The NA approached the area MP and funds from the CDF kitty Kshs 500,000 were allocated for the schools renovation.

Assistant Chief: The NA was able to lobby for the vacant position of the Assistant Chief which was then filled.

Umeme Pamoja Project: The NA has applied for rural electrification under the UMEME PAMOJA PROJECT to the Kenya power and lighting company in Kakamega and is yet to receive a surveyor who will be approving those registered under the scheme. The NA members have set up a revolving fund where each member is contributing kshs. 25 per month. Through this kitty the NA has been able to open an account, lease one acre fund project for those engaged in agriculture, and be able to lend their members who pay back with an interest. The NA is already registered as a community based organization and has been able to partner with Afya II project and have been able to submit their proposal requesting for a tree nursery, farm inputs and mobile VCT clinic.

LESSONS LEARNT

- The above action points shows that information is power given the fact that community members went beyond awareness and took action by engaging relevant authorities and institutions to address their grievances.
- For the communities to address issues of governance effectively, a holistic approach which encompasses livelihoods must be considered for sustainability.
- The NA Concept is engendering gender mainstreaming within local grassroots structures of governance. This is noted by increasing membership of women in school committees and board, local administration, development committees among others.
- There is dire need to upscale the NA Concept to the national level as an initiative to streamline accurate information flow on issues of governance, human rights and democracy. At the moment massive resources such as Constituency Development Fund, Local Authority Transfer Fund, Youth Fund, Women Fund etc are deployed to the grassroots yet the stakeholders have not been sensitized on their roles.
- There is need to identify role models with specific qualities within the Neighbourhood Assemblies to act as motivators especially for the newly formed NAs.

- There is a high level of awareness on the devolved funds and the Acts of parliament which passed them into laws. This has led to increasing engagements with authorities charged with the responsibility of managing the funds.
- This project has also served to decolonize the minds of the local people within the project area. The initial fear of authority and frequent cases of victimization are a thing of the past as most of the "honourable members" now know their rights and obligations as citizens of this country.
- More and more people within the project area have been liberated mentally and have increasingly known their rights, and are demanding for accountability and transparency from the leadership and institutions of governance.
- Community members have come to appreciate the advocacy role of the Neighborhood Assemblies as can be noted by several issues brought for discussions by even non members who have failed to find justice within conventional systems charged with administration of law. Cases of rape, theft, corruption, abuse of rights have been presented for discussions and solutions found at these forums.

IMPACT OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD ASSEMBLIES CONCEPT

- Generally, both men and women have ascended to positions of leadership in LASDAP Committees, local political party branches, community policing committees, anti-corruption committees, and provincial administration among other institutions.
- More and more people within the project area have been liberated mentally and have increasingly known their rights, and are demanding for accountability and transparency from the leadership and institutions of governance.
- There is a high level of awareness on the devolved funds and the Acts of parliament which passed them into laws. This has led to increasing engagements with authorities charged with the responsibility of managing the funds.
- At the onset of the project, local leadership and even influential personalities in government circles casted a lot of aspersions on the need to have such an initiative. Spirited attempts were made to brand it as a parallel outfit meant to demean local leadership and some members were even warned of dire consequences. At the moment, critics have come to see the benefits of the project and even some are now enjoying the widened democratic space it has created.

COLLABORATIONS

- As a result of the good work of championing the rights of common man within the grassroots society, NAs are increasingly getting recognition among institutions at the local, national and regional levels.
- At the local level, the importance of NAs is increasingly being recognized by local assistant chiefs, chiefs. Even the general community members are turning to NAs for interventions when their rights have been trampled upon by chiefs and their assistants, local schools, police and corrupt practices by local councils and CDF offices. They have used this platform to lodge complaints against arbitrary arrests, corruption, thuggery, rape and defilements by teachers and incest.
- At the national level, they work closely with divisional heads and line ministries especially that of Agriculture for extension services, local authorities on the issues of service delivery. They are also engaging the district community policing office to learning more on the concept and also channel their grievances for action.
- The project also worked with the NGO Council as a member of the pro-poor working group in conjunction with government on Poverty Reduction Strategy Programme (PRSP) to collect data in Vihiga District.
- The project has also collaborated with SANA International an NGO based in Kisumu District which is replicating the concept.
- At the regional level, FEWER Africa a Kenyan based NGO has also visited CPDA and NAs in Vihiga District to learn the concept and replicate it in Democratic Republic of Congo and Southern Sudan as peace building initiative.

CHALLENGES

- Initial some local administrators thought that CPDA is empowering communities to fight them. Even MPs and civic leaders feared the NAs. However, the sensitization activities of NAs concept has seen change. The support from the provincial administration is gradually being witnessed.
- Although majority of members in most NAs are women, many shy away from taking up leadership position. However, in the establishment of new NAs deliberate efforts are being made to ensure 50-50 gender representation in the NAs leadership.
- Sustainability has been a major challenge to many NAs. However, some NAs have integrated the sustainability schemes such as merry go rounds, fund raising, engaging in Income Generation Activities, among other entrepreneurial activities. Further, effort are made to ensure that all established NAs are registered as Community Based Organisation (CBO) to be self sustaining entities.

CONCLUSION

- The project endeavors to equip people with knowledge in good governance. This knowledge remains with the people to be passed on orally and through books, brochures, pamphlets, newsletters etc. It is envisaged that the education, information and creation of awareness processes will continue over time as people adopt alternative leadership modes so will convention be established and maintained. This has been well exhibited on the Governance and Democracy desks.
- This project is also seen as people owned by virtue of their direct participation in organizing for meetings, reports and follow ups on their deliberations. Being a village based initiative, running cost for sustainability are very minimal and can be met by the community through their own planning and coordination. Having built the capacities of the community, through NAs and trained conveners, sustainability of the project is assured. We intend to strengthen the networking capacities and linkages with the various community resource own persons (CORPs).
- Being an advocacy forum for human rights, as an organization, CPDA envision a scenario where NAs will increasingly be involved in livelihood issues as rights based concerns. At the grassroots majority depend on agri-based means to meet their basic needs; a lot of rights are trampled upon by various institutions which have a direct link with people. The NA framework is better placed to address these issues among small scale farmers and artisans.