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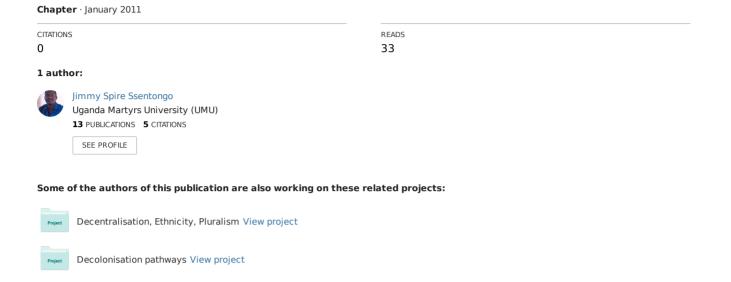
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Rural Poverty Eradication and Sustainability Consciousness in Kyanamukaaka Sub-County's Decentralised Framework

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Key words
Rural poverty; sustainability consciousness; participation

Introduction

Three decades ago, Professor Lipton, a development economist, wrote a book curiously titled *Why Poor People Stay Poor: Urban Bias in World Development.* In analytical depth, he observed that higher education produces "relatively few people able and willing to do research, or indeed any work, relevant to rural needs" (Lipton, 1977: 264). In his view, this trend could be explained by the increasingly non-contextualised education offered in most sections of the developing world and by the predominantly urban-biased policies and development. If Lipton was to make a follow-up statement today, can you and I tell whether he would have stood by his earlier observation? The subjectivity in the possible answers aside, we will notice that, whereas there is comparatively increased rural-focused research and development policy today, rural poverty continues to be a conspicuous phenomenon even under the decentralised framework and its projected benefits.

Poverty is a multi-dimensional phenomenon. It is important to note that it is quite subjectively understood and operationalised. For conceptual clarity, I shall herein adopt Townsend's classical definition of poverty whereby:

> Individuals, families and groups in the population can be said to be in poverty when they lack the resources to obtain the type of diet, participate in the activities and have the living conditions and amenities which are customary, or at least widely encouraged or approved in the societies to which they belong. Their resources are so seriously below those commanded by the average individual or family that they are in effect excluded from ordinary living patterns, customs, and activities (1979: 31).

The above definition clearly connotes relative poverty. This is not to mean that absolute poverty is given any less consideration but it is out of a realization that, despite its

gravity, when we concentrate on it there are some key issues we risk leaving out. Townsend's definition goes beyond the fact of deprivation to include aspects like participation, social inclusion, and social decency which are so vital in contextualising human dignity. As will be highlighted later in this paper, if poverty eradication initiatives are to eradicate this kind of poverty, it means that they will have to go beyond boosting incomes and well-being to realise other values that are simply good in themselves. It should not merely focus on achieving the basics for survival but meeting contextual needs of given societies. And for the fact that these needs are life-long, the initiatives aimed at their realization must be conscious of sustainability.

In the context of Uganda, a number of initiatives[1] have been tried in a bid to 'eradicate' rural poverty at times with some successes though a number of such successes have been short-lived. The decentralised framework itself was mainly conceived and executed on account of its perceived effectiveness and efficiency in improving service delivery within smaller units and hence impacting on poverty, especially in rural areas in this case. As we shall see later, it is another case whether decentralization should be ideally conceived and executed exclusively for its functional value with negligible regard for its inherent value. But, before we get there, it is worth notice that several of the initiatives have not been able to realise sustained achievements in eradicating poverty and that some of the initiatives that are good in themselves seem to be executed exclusively for their functional value. It is on the basis of the above observations that we find it vital to analyse the sustainability consciousness in the initiatives to eradicate rural poverty. While putting my analysis into the context of wider scholarship on the paper subject, I will draw heavily on research I carried out in Kyanamukaaka Sub-county in Masaka District – Uganda.

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[1] We have had initiatives such as the *Entandikwa* Scheme, Plan for Modernisation of Agriculture, Local Government Development Programme, and of late *Bonna Bagaggawale* (Prosperity for all).

Sustainability Consciousness

The world is increasingly realizing that without paying regard to sustainability there may arise several problems from the exclusively growth-oriented trend of development[1] in general and poverty eradication in particular. It is of growing concern that what has been refered to as development in a number of cases has come along with severe inequalities, lack of concern for the future, and disrespect for human dignity. For these and several other reasons, holistic development has remained elusive.

The above concerns have brought the concept of sustainability in the limelight of development discourse and practice. The concept's roots can be traced from way back in the history of European and wider global thinking, but it began to be widely adopted following the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in 1972 (Adams 2009). However, its direct application to development was mainly propelled by the 1987 Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future,* widely known as the 'Brundtland Report' (Dower 1997). In its early days, it was mainly used in reference to the inclusion of environmental concerns in development discourse and policy. But as O'Riordan (1988 cited in Adams 2009) observes, the concept is beguilingly simple yet at the same time capable of carrying a wide range of meanings. It is thus important that whenever one is to use it, they define the sense in which they apply it.

In this paper, the scope of sustainability adopted excludes environmental concerns, not because they are of any less value to the concept but because I want to put more emphasis on other elements primary to the study on which this paper is based. Sustainability is here viewed as the prospect of something conceived to be of value to a given community being able to be sustained. As Dower argues, "sustainability is only good if a value or set of values is there to be sustained. What those values are is logically prior to the value of

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[1] Development remains an ambiguous and elusive concept with a wide range of meanings attached to it. It is here used to mean the progressive achievement/realization of the values most appropriate to the interests of those for whom the change is meant without negatively affecting those outside the given context. It is not to be justified simply in terms of the aggregation of the goods of individuals. Certain social conditions need to be maintained or improved, both because they are conditions for the achievement of individual goods and because they are also inherently valuable or important as social goods (Dower 1997).

sustaining them" (1997: 58). In view of rural poverty eradication, we would have to consider both functional values and those that are good in themselves. If something is of functional value in the eradication of rural poverty, it means that it will have to be sustained for it to realise the end for which it is set. Otherwise, if the thing/initiative of functional value is not sustained, then what it is set to achieve may only be temporarily achieved or not at all. But some values are both functional and good in themselves. For example, as shall be elaborated later, both decentralization and participation are good in themselves and for the improvement of human well-being though they are often mistakenly practically looked at exclusively in terms of the latter value.

Sustainability consciousness will thus be taken to mean the taking into consideration of matters to do with the sustenance of both values that are good in themselves and those that are simply functional in the eradication of rural poverty. It was initially noted that a number of initiatives for the eradication of poverty in Kyanamukaaka Sub-county have been observed to be realizing short-lived achievements or, at times, no achievements at all. Could it be that they are not sustainability conscious? If they are, what values do they try to sustain and under which rationale? If they are not, what informs their lack of sustainability consciousness and what are the implications of such an approach?

Decentralisation and Rural Poverty

Decentralisation worldwide is seen as a way to bring authorities in more direct contact with citizens. In its various manifestations (policies to reduce sub-national inequalities, decentralised provision of public services, or community-driven development), decentralisation is seen - rightly or wrongly - as a way to improve the poor quality of public services, or to resolve the tensions arising from the unequal pace of growth and improvement in standards of living in different regions of the same country (Dethier, 2004). As such, it is viewed to be of functional value.

Previously, much of the economic literature on poverty had ignored the potential of decentralisation in achieving poverty-reduction (rural poverty reduction in this case) objectives such as the promotion of opportunities, empowerment, participation, security

and rights for people who are poor and excluded at the local level (Romeo, 2002). However, today decentralisation is receiving increasing international attention as a tool in the fight against poverty. Though decentralisation would not be implemented solely for the direct purpose of poverty alleviation, the ensuing changes in the institutional architecture are very likely to impact on governance, participation and the efficiency of public-service delivery, all of which are important variables for poverty outcomes (OECD-DAC, 2004). However, OECD-DAC does not specifically give the said 'ensuing changes' in the institutional architecture that are very likely to impact on governance yet nothing, even within the decentralised framework, should be taken for granted.

Sen (2000) observes that the exclusion of the poor from participation in and access to opportunities and activities is a major nonmaterial dimension of poverty that also needs to be recognized and addressed. Bwalya (1985) points out that a decentralised government system has the potential to reach the most remote grassroots levels to reflect the relevant situational needs, and to propose contextual solutions or programmes. Local information can often identify cheaper and more appropriate ways to provide public goods (Bardhan, 1997). But if decentralization is said to provide an opportunity for reaching the grassroots and therefore acquiring local information, which in turn helps to identify cheaper and appropriate ways to provide public goods, why does it not seem to be the case in Kyanamukaaka Sub-county?

Some policy analysts note that decentralisation serves the poor, but only under specific conditions. These conditions should be analysed within a framework that tackles political, fiscal and administrative decentralisation simultaneously while also taking into account different country and location specific conditions (Braun and Grote, 2002). The impact of decentralisation on poverty is not straightforward. In particular, its usefulness as a tool for sustainable poverty reduction varies distinctly between poor countries on the one side and emerging economies on the other (OECD-DAC, 2004). However, the OECD-DAC does not precisely qualify its position since it does not give the reason as to why the usefulness of decentralisation as a tool of poverty eradication varies distinctly between poor countries on the one side and the emerging economies on the other. And if

decentralization cannot serve as an effective tool for poverty eradication in poor communities, do we therefore have to abandon it as a worthless undertaking or even a liability?

Generally, decentralisation is projected to foster local empowerment and eventually poverty reduction if four elements are present: reliance on local information for decision-making purposes, transparency, accountable officials (which presupposes transparency), local capacity, and participation—with the first three elements determining whether participation is effective (Dethier, 2004). In countries where the state lacks the capacity to fulfill its basic functions, there is a definite risk that decentralisation will increase poverty rather than reduce it (OECD-DAC, 2003). Of course our question would still stand here, if decentralisation can (does) achieve local participation and thus empowerment without translating into poverty eradication or even reduction, would it still be worth maintaining? As I will demonstrate later, my answer is yes.

In support of decentralisation's sustainable functionality, it is argued that central state authorities usually lack the 'time and place knowledge' (Hayek, cited in Ostrom et al., 1993) to implement policies and programmes that reflect people's 'real needs' and preferences. Important differences exist between communities with respect to their needs, capacities, and circumstances. As central governments are not able to discern these differences fully, they seek to achieve their policy objectives by relying on decentralised mechanisms that use local information. Jutting et al. (2004) add that with respect to the economic channel, decentralisation is expected to have a strong and positive impact on poverty through increased efficiency and better targeting of services. Enhanced efficiency in service provision could directly improve poor people's access to education, health, water, sewage and electricity, which are highly important poverty-related concerns. Devolving power and resources to the local level may also lead to better targeting of the poor. A more decentralised framework to identify and monitor programmes and projects could not only help to reduce costs but also to reach those most in need.

Still in view of its functional value, Keefer and Khemani (2004) note that there are three ways in which decentralisation can fail to translate into better services for poor people:

i. Governments may misallocate budgets, spending resources on the wrong groups of people.

ii. Even when resources are allocated correctly, they may not reach their intended destinations if organisational and incentive problems in public agencies lead to misappropriation or theft.

iii. Even when resources reach a school, health clinic, or village, providers may have weak incentives, motivations, or capacities to deliver services effectively.

However, although Keefer and Khemani's observations are significant, they overlook other significant deficiencies that may cripple decentralisation. Mis-prioritization may also off-track a well-intended initiative. Others may be sustainability-related deficiencies in general ethics (in public servants and in the public), in initiative sustenance consideration, in transparency, in participation and in local empowerment.

Most of the literature explored above more primarily look at decentralisation from the angle of its effectiveness and efficiency in rural poverty eradication. It is not bad that decentralization realizes poverty eradication, but in my view, it is a dangerous approach to exclusively look at decentralization in this angle. With due regard to human dignity, there are some values (good in themselves) that come with decentralization which I think should be of central focus. These are values such as the enhancement of human autonomy and freedom through participation and local empowerment. Sen (1999) is right in considering freedom as development because ultimately the above mentioned values have much potential of translating into enhancement in human well-being. But even when they do not attain such a result, they remain quite significant.

In Uganda, there are indications that the decentralization reforms have led to greater public participation in local government activities than had previously been the case. Golola (2001) observes that this is considered by many to be one of the most important benefits of the decentralization initiative. On another level, decentralization has also helped overcome a dependency mentality that had developed among many everyday

Ugandans who tended to wait for government to deal with the development challenges facing the country. This led to the weakening of local initiatives to eradicate poverty. With the empowerment of local government, there is a greater willingness to challenge local officials. And the accessibility of local radio has enhanced debate on local issues (Devas, 2005) and demand for accountability from local government officials.

Though we may agree with Golola (2001) that there is some improvement in participation as a result of decentralisation, it still remains of key importance to analyse the level and nature of participation on the ground. It is paramount to know: Who participates? In what? And what motivates the initiation of the participatory initiatives. It is also vital to establish whether the reduced dependency mentality can hold after local governments withdraw their hands from the poverty eradication initiatives in rural areas. In short, how sustainable are the initiatives that are said to reduce dependency? Do they reduce it in the short run or even in the long run?

The Value and Justification of Decentralisation by the Principle of Subsidiarity

The rationale of decentralization espoused in my analysis is basically grounded on the socio-ethical principle of subsidiarity. The principle is rooted in Catholic social ethics, elaborated in the second half of the 19th century in the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and laid down in more detail in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931) by Pius XI. It was advanced as an attempt to articulate a middle course between the perceived excesses of *laissez-faire* capitalism on the one hand and the various forms of *totalitarianism* which subordinate the individual to the state, on the other.

In short the principle states that things the individual [here extended to also refer to smaller units such as local governments] can do him/herself should not be transferred to society (prohibition of action). Problems are best solved in the subsystem where they arise. Subsidiarity conflicts with the passion for centralisation and bureaucracy characteristic of the Welfare State.

> Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to

a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organisations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them (Pius XI, 1931: para. 79).

Shepherd summarises it as "leaving decisions and activities to the smallest group possible, minimizing cooperation, retaining it only where necessary, and then being highly flexible about the form it should take" (1998: 12).

Taken at its most fundamental level, subsidiarity's base is arguably personalistic. That is, its first foundation is a conviction that each human individual is endowed with inherent and inalienable worth, or dignity, and thus that the value of the individual is prior to the state or other social groupings. Because of this value, all other forms of society and institutional frameworks, from the state to the international order, ought ultimately to be at the service of the individual.

While it clearly expresses a presumption in favour of the freedom of smaller and more local forms of human activity, it does seek to balance both the idea of non-interference and that of intervention/assistance. If the individual is not capable to solve certain problems, the society is obliged to give aid (obligation to help). But this help ought to be of the type that can lift up the individual/society towards their freedom to rely on themselves and make their own decisions on matters pertinent to their being.

Through the lenses of the principle of subsidiarity therefore, decentralisation/local governance is justified on the basis of its potential to enable people make their own decisions on matters affecting their being hence enhancing their freedom/ autonomy. Approached thus, decentralization is good in itself as what it comprises in is of the nature to augment freedom/autonomy through participatory empowerment. That it can extend in impact to poverty eradication should be on the basis of the freedom/autonomy that it stands to boost. It is partly for this reason that the help extended to people in a decentralised framework ought not to be purely paternalistic. The local people should be consulted in order to understand their problems in their perspective so that relevant and appropriate solutions are reached. When we view decentralization as a process primarily

geared towards the enhancement of service delivery, some of its inherent values tend to get lost in the mist of 'service'.

The Value of Participation

We asserted with Dower (1997) earlier that for a thing to be worth sustaining, it has to be of value, which value could either be inherent or functional. One of my key observations in Kyanamukaaka was that poverty eradication continued to be elusive because some elements of value had not been sustained. One of such elements is local participation which is here held to be both of inherent and functional value, though its inherent value (as an end in itself) was also found to be given light consideration in the area. But generally, in development theory and practice today, so widespread is the use and belief (rhetorical or otherwise) of participation that authors such as Chambers (1995) talk of a 'paradigm shift' to participatory development.

In Chambers' view, the popularity of participation is due to recognition that many development failures originate in attempts to impose standard top-down programmes and projects on diverse local realities where they do not meet or fit local needs. It is also due to concern for cost-effectiveness, recognizing that the more local people do the less capital costs are likely to be (Rahnema, 1992 cited in Mosse, 2001). To the above, Chambers adds the growing concern for sustainability and the insight that if local people themselves design and construct, they are more likely to meet running costs and undertake maintenance. On the ideological level, he and Cooke and Kothari (2001) identify the belief that it is right that poor people should be empowered and have more command over their lives. This is what we here refer to as intrinsic value as opposed to functional value.

From the functional perspective, decentralisation is expected to offer citizens the possibility of increased participation in local decision-making processes, from which they have generally been excluded through lack of sufficient representation or organisation. Improved representation of formerly excluded people in local areas could, in turn, give the poor better access to local public services and social security schemes, reducing

vulnerability and insecurity (Jutting et al., 2004). A decentralised system of local governance is also supposed to promote participation in planning as a way of improving service delivery (UPPAP, 2002). However, the UPPAP document falls short in identifying the other possible merits of participation in planning. It does not only serve as a way of improving service delivery, it may also reinforce the feeling of initiative ownership in the people hence bringing about support for the initiatives. Besides, as earlier stated, it is also good in itself.

However, literature suggests that there are vast variations in the understanding of the meaning and nature of participation. But in its different usages it normally tends to be given positive attribution. Accordingly, Williams (1976) explained it as a warmly persuasive word which seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term. It is due to this warmness that it can be given several meanings and connotations sometimes simply rhetorically, just as was noted of sustainability. Chambers (1998) observes that as usual with concepts which gain currency, rhetoric has run far, far ahead of understanding participation, let alone its practice.

As earlier indicated by Chambers (1995), participation is also viewed by authors and practitioners either as a *means* (to accomplish the aims of a project more efficiently, effectively or cheaply) or as an *end* (where the community or group sets up a process to control its own development hence enjoying more autonomy, freedom and knowledge). I agree with Oakley and Marsden that this is "a fundamental distinction and one which has enormous implications for the nature of participation and the approaches adopted for its achievement" (1984: 27). But it can as well be understood as carrying both meanings, which is the view held in this paper.

Participation executed as a means was observed way back in the 1980s by Oakley and Marsden to have brought about considerable 'economic' development in some areas. They however quickly add that evidence suggests that it is in few instances that meaningful participation has been achieved by this means. They assert that, for

meaningful participation to take place, there is no necessary notion of fixed quantifiable development goals although these often accompany the process. The major effort should be put on holistic empowerment.

In Uganda, though participation is emphasized in policy (especially in the Local Government Act 1997), in several occasions local people are not involved in planning and other aspects of decision-making. The UPPAP Document (2002) identifies two main reasons as to why plans do not involve local people:

i.   Lack of capacity in Local Councils: Capacity was seen to cover various things. Planning guidelines are inadequate. The LC 2 and LC 3 officials are not knowledgeable about the planning process itself, and there is a belief that involving people would be a very long and tedious exercise. The District Planning Office in Soroti noted that participatory planning is lengthy and expensive and that the district lacks the funds and skills to carry it out; a view echoed in Rakai.

ii.   Lack of motivation and willingness by communities to be involved: District officials, parish councilors and LC 1 chairpersons in Arua, Wakiso and Ntungumo noted that people do not always want to participate in planning and do not attend meetings. In Wakiso, it was also pointed out that lack of money by Sub-counties to implement plans discourages people from participating. In Soroti town, people in the poorest category of well-being reported that they do not attend meetings because it is a waste of time as no body listens to the poor.

Poverty Eradication in Kyanamukaaka

There are several poverty initiatives in place in Kyanamukaaka. We shall however mainly look at those that were noticed to have sustainability issues. This seemingly pessimistic approach is taken so as to illustratively highlight the significance of sustainability consciousness in poverty eradication. The paucity of good poverty eradication practices in the area could not allow for a reverse approach.

Most of the poverty eradication initiatives identified in the area are paternalistically decided. Whereas we would believe that in a number of cases "… people are the best judges of what is best for them" (Raz, 2001: 9), the local people are not adequately involved in decision-making on poverty eradication strategies. Practically, they are mostly involved as recipients of intervention projects. This sets decentralisation back into the hatchets of centralization. In so doing, the people's real needs are sometimes not addressed, they are given bean seeds when they would prefer maize, given vanilla when they would prefer improved banana sackers (*mpologoma[1]*), the list goes on. Even at the functional level, there is need "… to share one another's insight and understanding if we are to create reasonable public policies satisfactory to all…" (Gonsalves, 1989: 10).

The above is not to imply that paternalism is always wrong. Sometimes people's perceptions of their problems are simplistic and misguided due to culture, lack of awareness and social influences. But even under such circumstances, it would be better to first create awareness instead of simply putting in place what the local government thinks is good for the people. Even if we are to leave aside the intrinsic good of the later approach, the former approach carries with it a danger of failing since there would be a limited sense of ownership from the community hence less attachment. This makes such initiatives unsustainable, no wonder most of them have failed. The LC III Chairman was disappointed that people were eating the goats and seeds provided not realizing that this habit was partly due to lack of project ownership and, sometimes, awareness. An initiative may be good in itself and conceived in good faith but once the element of ownership is not catered for it will be rendered useless. Practically, the conviction of the local government that an initiative is good matters less than the conviction of the beneficiaries that an initiative is of significance to them.

There are some efforts towards skills training, awareness creation and general sensitization in Kyanamukaaka. People are trained through workshops on modern farming techniques and project management skills. This is a good measure, especially if

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[1] *Mpologoma* is a name of an improved banana species from Kawanda Research Institute that grows in a shorter period and bears bigger banana bunches.

it steers towards bringing about self-reliance, promoting self-consciousness among the people and empowering them to have a critical approach towards the realities surrounding them. As an outcome, they become much more able to effectively participate in local development and to make constructive decisions at personal level. By this process, the principle of Subsidiarity becomes more meaningfully practicable.

However, one key challenge encountered in the above process is that training and sensitization workshops are poorly attended and are not taken down to the grassroots where they are most needed to impact. The latter may be due to insufficient funds in face of the vastness of the Sub-county as the Bugere LC II Councilor put it. Worse still, the mobilisation of people to attend the workshops is inadequate. Keefer and Khemani (cited in Dethier, 2004: 10) are right to assert that decentralisation can fail to translate into better services for the poor if the providers have weak incentives, motivations, or capacities to deliver services effectively. Most local people have not been made to love and find value in attending the workshops yet they are, in most cases, at remote venues. Good as the workshops initiative may ideally be, the above factors render it semi-wasted and/or an ineffective poverty eradication strategy.

Many Local Government poverty eradication efforts are significantly pathetically out-powered by local ignorance and lack of education (not necessarily formal) among some people. Minimal achievement can be realised in an environment of ignorance and/or lack of education. Ignorance and illiteracy have a corroding effect on almost each and every thinkable strategy. This, to a great extent, explains many of the failures identified in local poverty eradication initiatives. With Universal Primary Education (UPE) there is increased enrolment of children in school, which would be a positive development. Unfortunately, the quality of education offered keeps dwindling as the few schools are overwhelmed by the numbers amidst very limited facilitation. The products of such a system (together with the high drop-out rate) are of little help in the reduction of poverty and enhancement of sustainability.

Participation and Poverty Eradication in Kyanamukaaka

From a functional perspective, all the respondents unanimously held the view that local participation can help in poverty eradication. Its potential is in a variety of effects that, if well practiced, it is bound to bring about. Respondents identified that: it can lead to making policies that favour developmental activities; it makes people ready to support Sub-county projects; it helps in electing leaders who can develop the area and it has the potential to lead to solving the people's problems. It was also held to be having potential roles of bringing about local unity, sharing developmental ideas, knowing which problems can be solved and those that cannot be solved, and bringing about fair distribution of resources.

Though participation is a basic human right and therefore good in itself, the value of participation by the local people for poverty eradication doesn't only stem from such idealistic considerations as basic human rights or the rejection of authoritarian and purely paternalistic alternatives. As manifested by the research findings, it also stems from the inherent strength of participation as a means of articulating genuine needs and satisfying them through self-reliance and mass mobilisation. On the other hand, critical reflection lays it bare that participation is an essential part of human growth. This growth unfolds itself through the development of self-confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility and cooperation. Without such a development within the people themselves all efforts to sustainably alleviate their poverty will be immensely more difficult, if not impossible. This process, where people learn to take charge of their own lives and solve their own problems, is the essence of sustainable poverty eradication. However, for the above to be so, their participation ought to be in all aspects where it is possible and at all levels. Freire corroborates this thus:

> Attempting to liberate the oppressed [the poor in this case] without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects which must be saved from a burning building; it is to lead them into the populist pitfall and transform them into masses which can be manipulated (1993: 36).

In away also, Freire's assertion also reminds us that without local participation most of the key components of good governance (and sustainability for that matter) such as

accountability, transparence, inclusiveness and responsiveness are likely to be either weakened or compromised.

It is rather appalling that despite the fact that all respondents find value in participation in decision-making, it is minimal in the area. From the study, 55% of the respondents (145) found participation lacking in the area while 45% agree that there it is there. The majority (42%) of the total opinions of those who said that participation is there were that it is through electing local leaders, 34% that it is by passing through local leaders to say their needs and 24% that it is through being involved in making development plans.

The effort to put into place adult suffrage at the local level is commendable. It helps local people to elect those leaders that they think shall be responsive, transparent and accountable. It may be instrumental in poverty eradication at local levels through empowering the electorate in expressing their needs through responsible mouthpieces. It is, however, insufficient since the people, in all their numbers, cannot get adequate representation. Also, as the research findings indicate, although it is cost-effective, it is highly susceptible to manipulation, and there is no guarantee that the views of the community members will always be taken on (Republic of Uganda, 2002).

The village (LC I) meetings acting as a forum for people to air out their views and to share experiences with local leaders would be quite a force in local participation. In this way, reliance on local information, one of Dethier's prerequisites for effective decentralisation (2004: 7) would be realised. Through this form of participation people would express their real needs basing on their practical experiences. However, as already noted, local meetings in the area suffer poor turn-ups. Many people find the Local government non-responsive to the needs they express in the meetings most times and they therefore find it a waste of time and energy to keep attending. This partly explains why most poverty eradication strategies are decided paternalistically although among other powers and functions of local governments in Uganda is to make development plans based on locally determined priorities.

According to the UPPAP (December, 2004), LC 1 chairpersons in Wakiso noted that people do not always want to participate in planning and to attend meetings because the lack of money by the Sub-county to implement plans discourages them. According to the findings, in Kyanamukaaka Sub-county the same applies in that the lack of sufficient funds disables the Local Government to be responsive to most of the people's needs hence their discouragement.

However, the assertion of UPPAP that people in the poorest category of well being do not attend meetings because they find it a waste of time as no body listens to the poor, seems to be wrongly attributed to one blanket reason. Most of the poor people have an attitude of lowness and social unworthiness towards themselves and consequently tend to socially withdraw themselves. They also tend to interpret social matters and events in terms of a 'we - them'[1] approach. It is commonly a result of this feeling of unworthiness that they feel that no body is ready to listen to them even if there is one. As a consequence, "many of the rural poor adopt a low profile strategy …" (Bibangambah, 1985: 25). However, this does not totally negate the fact that they also actually tend to be held low by the relatively well-off members of society and that the well off are often looked at with higher esteem thus dominating the meetings and patronising the rest. Once this suppression of the voice of the most vulnerable is not addressed, participation will simply serve to reinforce the unsustainable inequalities that exist at local levels.

Local participation ideally has a potential of making people ready to support sub-county poverty eradication initiatives. As elaborated earlier, participation makes people feel that the initiatives are their own and therefore feel obliged to maintain and sustain them. This is less likely to be the case with purely paternalistically decided initiatives. Above the account of uplifting individual growth and freedom, the support from the local people and the feeling of ownership of the projects helps to overcome practices like sabotage,

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[1]Poor people in most cases tend to approach most social matters and events with a socially dichotomous attitude of the poor on one hand and the well-off on the other. Anything done to them by the well-off class is often interpreted by them as done to them on the ground of their being poor. They tend to think that it is due to their poverty predicament that they are trampled on. This is the essence of the 'we – them' attitude. In Psychology it can be termed as a defense mechanism since it seems to be a strategy adopted by the poor so that they can as well be handled as of equal worth with the well-off and be taken as equally delicate.

carelessness and the lack of responsibility on their side. In other words, it reinforces an ethical sense of duty and obligation towards Local government initiatives. This is because:

> Each person as a moral agent undertakes, as a loyal citizen, the obligation to pursue the common good and also undertakes the further obligation of pursuing the moral good as envisioned by the sub-group of which he/she is a member (Gonsalves, 1989: 10).

The *'bulungi bwansi'* kind of community participation observed in the area is highly commendable and has a great potential in poverty eradication if strengthened to grow into higher forms of solidarity. Participation, to be more meaningful as an undertaking of intrinsic and extrinsic value has to go together with a sense of solidarity. In this, it would not be merely participation of each, on one hand, in poverty eradication efforts, on the other hand. It would be a kind of solidarity where everyone would see themselves as brothers'/sisters' keepers wherever they live. Catholic social ethics is of relevance here since "… learning to practice the virtue of solidarity means learning that 'loving our neighbour' has global dimensions in an interdependent world" (US Catholic Bishops, June 1998: 5).

In the above sense of solidarity, one member of society's state of poverty would not constitute a duty of liberation to him exclusively but also to the other members of society. True solidarity with the oppressed (the poor in this case) means "… fighting at their side to transform the objective reality which has made them these 'beings for another'" (Freire, 1993: 31). This may sound utopian but it is very much practically realizable and fundamentally instrumental in sustainable poverty eradication in decentralisation. Such solidarity functions as a moral category that leads to choices that have a potential of promoting and protecting the common good. As in the words of Burkey, "… participation is meaningless outside the collective context" (2002: 59). It is of necessity for the poor people to come together and pool their human and material resources in order to attain all-inclusive development that can last. Participatory development implies a collective process of self-improvement. However, this is not a move towards pure Marxist

Socialism but towards mutual concern among all members of society to participate in true solidarity towards improved well-being and ensuring lives of dignity.

One of the key informants argued that local people should be involved in planning and other forms of decision-making with much care since most of them are too ignorant to be able to come up with ideal poverty eradication policies. Well as we may not buy his argument as a whole, there are some inherent points that we may have to take from the argument. Participation requires a minimum of literacy and basic capabilities to be operational (Dethier, 2004: 9-10) – which are often not present in very poor areas in developing countries. Much as illiterate and ignorant people may have sound contributions in a participatory development process, it remains generally true that ignorance and illiteracy complicate and harden this process. It always takes a wise man to do a wise man's job. The first step in achieving genuine participation is a process in which the rural poor themselves become more aware of their own situation, of the socio-economic reality around them, of their real problems, the causes of these problems, and what measures they themselves can take to begin changing their situation. This process of awakening, raising of levels of consciousness or conscientisation, constitutes a process of self-transformation through which people grow and mature as human beings. It is for this reason that we earlier emphasized the need for more sensitization and improvement of education in the area.

It should however be cautiously remembered that, since participation is not only of functional good but also good in itself, ignorant and illiterate people should not be excluded from the process. Policies and initiatives may not necessarily be based on their opinions and vision but in the process of participation their membership to the community is recognized and their equal humanity displayed. Where they are wrong, they can be corrected in the participatory setting such that, even when their views are not reflected in initiatives, they may not simply feel left out/excluded. They can thus also stand up in support of the ensuing initiatives and treat them as their own. In such a process, their participatory potential and freedom is also supported to grow. This participatory approach fits well in the prescription of the principle of subsidiarity for the

latter primarily pushes for the optimisation of the involvement of individuals in matters of concern to them where possible. The approach also reinforces the furtherance of participation itself which makes it meet the advice that:

> "It is very important that practitioners and researchers involved in participatory projects work with an eye to the future to create a long-lasting process which is difficult to undermine or reverse" (Nelson and Wright, 1995: 17).

In Kyanamukaaka, it was as well conspicuous that in most households with both spouses present (alive) it is the men that, in case of meetings, do often attend with female spouses attending to domestic duties/chores. In the first place, they ought to be equally involved in order to achieve fairness (social justice) in society to which they are part and parcel. Their participation, apart from its anticipated poverty eradication gains, is good in itself. This would meet the Kantian deontological principle of treating no one as a means to an end but an end in him/herself. Moreover, for participation in poverty-related problem identification, decision-making and implementation to become more meaningful and effective, women ought to be equally involved. They constitute approximately 51% of the total population and contribute approximately 70% to local agriculture. Even if we were not to primarily consider their being members of the community as ethics demands, their key roles and the portion of the total population that they constitute makes it very unfair to lock them out of participation. Once such a vital section of the population is closed out of participation, it would be hard (or even vain) to sustain the 'development' that ensues.

Conclusion

At the heart of this paper was the normative assertion that poverty eradication in general and rural poverty eradication in particular ought to put into central consideration the issue of sustainability. It was observed in Kyanamukaaka Sub-county that a number of initiatives failed to sustainably eradicate poverty mainly due to the lack of sustainability consciousness. But that was not to mean that sustainability necessarily translates into poverty eradication since some of sustainability's pursuits are simply of intrinsic value.

I argued that only things/elements of value befit being sustained and that such value could either be intrinsic or extrinsic. Thus poverty eradication initiatives have to put into

consideration the sustenance of their strategies for the realisation of the two types of values. Participation, for example, is both of intrinsic and extrinsic value and should therefore be treated as so. It should not be abandoned simply because it has failed to translate into reduced poverty levels since even without that its intrinsic value remains. It was however established that in the case of Kyanamukaaka participation was basically envisioned in view of its functional side and thus occasionally sidelined where it couldn't serve its poverty eradicative function.

Even within the functional role, it was highlighted that participation had crippling gaps such as: limited voice for the poor, limited attendance of LC 1 meetings mainly due the Sub-county's lack of responsiveness, and limited involvement of married women. As search, it followed that a number of poverty eradication initiatives were paternalistically decided hence coming up with strategies that were not appropriate in the beneficiaries' view and by extension not sustainable.

On the basis of the above conclusions, it is worthwhile that the following outlined measures be executed:

- Well as it may be important to come up with local projects and to introduce new cash crops, it is necessary for these initiatives to be thoroughly studied in the first place in order to ascertain their feasibility and sustainability in the local conditions and circumstances. Some of the projects have collapsed due to sustainability and feasibility study deficiencies (or lack of sustainability consciousness).

- In order to achieve socially and economically sustainable poverty eradication, there is need to strengthen skills training and general awareness creation. This will not only help in empowering the local people with both general and situation-specific information but also boosting informed participation.

- Certainly decentralisation in general and participation in particular have much potential in the eradication of poverty. But they should not be exclusively put in place or even advocated for on the basis of their functionality. By virtue of their intrinsic value, they ought to be at center stage regardless of their functionality.

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