

*Full Length Research Paper*

## Perceptions of development by residents of a rural community in Kenya: A capability issue

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Despite the acknowledgment that participatory approaches in development have potential in understanding and designing development programmes and policies, perceptions of development continue to be dominated by outsiders including professionals and other development agents, most of who do not experience the conditions. Using qualitative data collected from residents of Makueni County of Eastern Kenya, this paper attempts to involve Makueni community members in the conceptualization of development in their context and outlining possible strategies to address the identified development issues. The study finds a community keen on participating in development and who are able to rank their development needs and priorities, emphasizing the importance of water in driving development, as well as the perceived hierarchical nature of development. The study recommends the use of both macro and micro approaches to development where development recipients are involved in development plans and decisions.

**Key words:** Development; perceptions; participatory development; Kenya; sub-Saharan Africa.

### INTRODUCTION

Although the key factors singled out in neo-classical approaches as being key in development are the standard of living and income, in recent development studies, it has become increasingly important to recognise also the importance of non-monetary factors, particularly in understanding the dynamics of socio-economic development (Sen 2010; Ledwith 1997; Sen 1999; Szirmai 2005; Laderchi, Saith, and Stewart 2003). These measures include viewing income as a means to development and reduction of poverty rather than the end

by itself. In addition, the multidimensional nature of poverty has necessitated a proposition of various measurement approaches, including using both qualitative and quantitative measures that go beyond the conventional measures of using income and expenditure (KIPPRA 2004; Alkire et al., 2013; UNDP 2010a; McKinley 1997; Laderchi, Saith, and Stewart 2003; Laderchi 1997). Based on these approaches, one key aspect in the efforts to advance development is the involvement of other development actors in development

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efforts, most notably the beneficiaries of development efforts, an approach that is however still rarely applied. Participation in development, which entails enlarging the capacity of the socially and economically marginalized individuals and involving them in decision making over their own lives is rarely sought, especially in development efforts implemented in developing countries (Guijt and Shah 1998; Chambers 2005; Sen 1999). Yet, it has been advanced as an approach that holds great potential in ensuring faster and more sustainable outcomes as it helps understand communities' felt needs thereby helping prioritise them in development initiatives (Chambers 1983, 2005). There is therefore a need to revisit such approaches, since many communities in developing countries, especially those in the rural areas, continue to experience poverty, stagnated development and poor wellbeing outcomes (Fotso 2006; Sahn and Sahn 2004; Smith, Ruel, and Ndiaye 2004).

This approach is important in the sub-Saharan region where many of the countries face poor wellbeing and development progress. The rural areas of the region fare even worse. For instance, although sub-Saharan Africa nearly doubled the number of people using an improved drinking water source, from 252 million in 1990 to 492 million in 2008, this progress was greater in urban areas, compared to the rural areas of the region. (United Nations 2011). Consequently, an urban dweller in sub-Saharan Africa is 1.8 times more likely to have access to an improved water source than a counterpart in the rural area (United Nations 2011). The improvements, favouring the urban areas, have also been reported in other areas of wellbeing. Reports of child malnutrition indicate that the rural population is worst affected, with children in rural areas of developing regions being twice as likely to be underweight as their urban counterparts (United Nations 2011). In comparison to the urban and the non-poor, less progress in sanitation has been registered among the poor and those in the rural areas (World Bank 2010). Food shortages are also a major problem during years of drought, and nutritional intake in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa is consistently poor (Maxwell 2001).

In Kenya, there are high poverty levels and unequal development between regions and between rural and urban areas (IFAD 2010; Muhula 2009; Alwy and Schech 2007; World Bank 2009). Yet, despite the distinct gap between the 'rich' and the 'poor' regions, as well as between rural and urban areas (IFAD 2010; Muhula 2009; Alwy and Schech 2007; World Bank 2009), very few of the development initiatives implemented incorporate participatory approaches where the views of community members are sought in order to prioritise their needs. At the same time, in cases when this approach has been used, this has either been incomplete or has been applied at a macro level, disregarding the resource and

cultural variations between the regions of the country. Consequently, development inequalities can be observed not just between regions, but also within regions and between the rural and urban areas of the country. Makueni district, for instance, is reported to be one of the poorest in Eastern province and in the country (73.5% of households are poor) (NCAPD 2005). The district is also reported as making the highest contribution to the national poverty level (5.1%) compared to other districts in Eastern province where it lies, at: Nithi (4.5%), Kitui Central (4.4%), Mbooni (4.2%), Kangundo (4.2%), Kibwezi (4%), Igembe (3.9%), Mwingi North (3.9%), Mwala (3.7%), and Machakos Town (3.6%). These dynamics support the need to consider context when planning and implementing development projects.

This paper seeks to answer these three questions; How do residents of Makueni County understand 'development'? What are the various aspects of development that are perceived to be important to Makueni residents? What aspects of development/wellbeing are viewed at individual/ household, community and national levels? To do this, the paper employs the United Nations' definition of 'development' as a process of enlarging people's choices with the most critical choices entailing a long and healthy life, acquiring knowledge and enjoying a decent standard of living, outlining political freedom, guarantee of human rights and self-respect as other important choices in development (UNDP 2010b). The approach of 'development' used in this paper incorporates its multi-faceted nature that encompasses economic, social, political, cultural and environmental factors as defined and used in other studies in the country (Republic of Kenya 1979; Bahemuka et al. 1998). The study uses 'participation' or 'participatory development' defined as a methodology where the capacity of the socially and economically marginalised is enlarged and their involvement in decision making over their own lives is sought (Guijt and Shah 1998; Chambers 2005; Sen 1999). The study is based upon the concept of community proposed by MacQueen et al (2001) as a result of the study among respondents in the US where it was referred to as

"...a group of people with diverse characteristics who are linked by social ties, share common perspectives, and engage in joint action in geographical locations or settings" (MacQueen et al. 2001).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Study area and population

The study was conducted in Kitonyoni and Mwania sub locations of Kathonzi district in Makueni County, Eastern Kenya. Following

the enactment of a new constitution in 2010, the Kenyan government implemented a devolved system of governance which came into effect in March, 2013. Makueni which was a district at the time of study is now a County. The study sites therefore now fall in Kathonzwani district which is within Makueni County. There are instances in this paper where this area is referred to as a district especially in regards to statistical presentations. Kitonyoni sub location is an area covering 27.1 sq km with a total population of 2,500, which is comprised of 1,284 males and 1,306 females, while Mwanja is 62.9 sq km with a total population of 3,239, which is comprised of 1,569 males and 1,670 females.

Makueni area is inhabited by the Akamba-speaking Bantus who form about 97% of the population of the County with the remaining 3% comprising people from other communities, who live mainly in the town areas of the County (Republic of Kenya 2009). The two study sub-locations like most of Makueni are semi-arid in nature receiving just with minimal rainfall between November and December during which the people grow maize, beans, green grams, chickpeas, cowpeas and pigeon peas for subsistence. Other than this subsistence agriculture, the other main economic activities in the sub-locations include beekeeping, small scale trade and subsistence goat farming (Oxfam 2006). The minimal rainfall received in the area causes acute food insecurity especially during the long dry spells, thereby leading to high dependency of a large proportion of the population on government or donor food aid (GOK 2006).

Although traditionally relying on farming as a means of livelihood, the Akamba people are now shifting from farming and are incorporating other means of livelihood, in particular migrant labour to the towns and cities as a result of increased poverty in the County (Nzioka 2000). Like many other indigenous African communities, the Akamba people consider a family unit as a very important entity in their lives, because it is the basic unit of production, consumption, investment and insurance (Tiffen et al., 1994). 99% of household in Kitonyoni use water from streams, springs, wells or boreholes while in Mwanja, 99% use water from streams (Republic of Kenya 2011b). Regarding energy, only 13.1% of households in the district use electricity with 81.2% using paraffin for lighting (Republic of Kenya 2011a). Health outcomes are also poor, whereby Eastern province where Makueni County is located had the highest percentage of stunted children, at 41.9% (KNBS and ICF Macro 2010).

### Data collection and analysis

This paper uses qualitative data collected in 2012 using focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) to understand the community's perceptions of development. Ethical approval of the study was obtained from the University's School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee and from the Kenya National Council for Science and Technology (NCST). Informed consent was obtained from participants before the discussions were held. A total of 36 groups of men and women and two community leaders were interviewed on their perceptions of development.

The FGDs comprised community members aged between 18 and 60 years who were sampled using the stratified sampling technique, from the 11 and 16 villages forming Kitonyoni and Mwanja respectively. The respondents were categorised by age and gender in order to limit inhibitions during the discussions and to understand their perceptions based on these categorizations, as gender has been found to be important in perceptions (Maccoby 2002). Each group comprised between 8 and 12 participants to make it easy for

the moderator to manage the group and to ensure effective interaction among the participants of the discussions. For the purpose of conducting the interviews, the interviewees were approached and a consent form was administered. After that, the appointment for the discussions was made. Replacements were done in instances where those selected were either unavailable or unwilling to participate. In total, 36 FGDs and 2 KIIs were held (See Table 1 for respondents' details).

Four experienced qualitative research assistants (2 male and 2 female) were trained on the research tools and conducted the group discussions in Kamba language, the language spoken in the study area. The KIIs were conducted in English since the two interviewed community leaders in charge of Kitonyoni and Mwanja sub-locations could freely express themselves. The areas of investigation in these discussions included the respondents' overall understanding of development as well as the understanding of development at personal, community and national levels. These issues were discussed one at a time. The training given to the research assistants covered rapport-creation and encouraging discussion of the issues raised amongst the respondents, allowing divergent views as well as consensus-building amongst the discussants. In all the questions/issues under discussion, the moderator probed for all possible responses from the respondents.

The data were audio recorded and later, those obtained from the FGDs transcribed and translated into English. A second examination of the translations after transcriptions was done in order to check for any inconsistencies and ensure reliability of the data.

### Data processing and analysis

The data was coded in NVivo 9 software and analysed using the grounded theory approach whereby emerging themes from the data were summarised. In some cases verbatim quotes are used to illustrate responses on the relevant issues/themes. Selection of these quotes is done ensuring there is a balance along gender, age and sub-location. The first question posed to respondents was "What is development?" translated and administered in the local Kamba language as "Meendeonikyau?". The translation of the word "Development" into the Kamba equivalent "Meendeo" is derived from the Kiswahili translation "Maendeleo" which means progress, advancement or improvement (University of Dar-Es-Salaam 1981).

Kamba and Kiswahili languages belong to the Bantu group of languages hence the construction of the Kamba language is similar to that of Kiswahili, as is the example of the grammatical inflexion taking place at the beginning of the words and within the words (Ma-Maendeleo in Kiswahili and Me-Meendeo in Kamba) hence an intimate relationship in the conjugation of their nouns and verbs (Nurse 2006; Bryan 1961; Hinde 1904). In addition to this translation, the understanding and comprehension of the word 'development' by the respondents in this study could have been influenced by the community's experience and familiarity of the use of the word and the associated activities, given that language is dynamic and meanings attached to words and phrases may vary depending on context, historical experiences and previous uses attached to the words (Catford 1967).

The word 'Maendeleo' in the Kenyan context, with its variants depending on the location and community/language has been widely applied in the country to refer to the progress, advancement or improvement in the livelihoods and wellbeing for local communities, as demonstrated by the work of one national organization known as 'Maendeleo YaWanawake (MYW)' which also

**Table 1.** Characteristics of respondents

<b>Method and respondent</b>	<b>Age-category</b>	<b>No. of individuals/groups</b>
Household interviews	-	1065
FGD Women	18 to 24 years	6
FGD Women	25 to 40 years	6
FGD Women	41+ years	6
FGD Men	18 to 24 years	6
FGD Men	25 to 40 years	6
FGD Men	41+ years	6
KII community leader	-	2

derives its name from the word 'development' (MYO 2014). MYW's development agenda reflects the understanding and definitions adopted in this study, to improve the quality of life of rural communities in Kenya with some of these efforts including gender equality in development and improvement in governance (MYO 2014). The organization was registered in Kenya in 1952.

The approach adopted in this investigation is based on the recommendations proposed by Hennink et al. (2011). According to these recommendations, the respondents were allowed to mention, discuss and deliberate on the emerging issues and in some instance reach a consensus amongst themselves on the factors considered to mean/indicate personal, community and national development (Hennink et al., 2011). The moderator guided the discussions and if necessary probed to get more clarity on issues mentioned or to encourage discussants to exhaustively mention all the issues as they perceived them, sometimes following the mentioned issues to get more information.

## RESULTS

### Meaning of development

As demonstrated in these two quotes, the overarching definition of development in this study emerged to be its characteristic of upward mobility and a constant improvement in all spheres of life:

"...if I used to borrow a donkey from my neighbour, I stop and buy mine ... If I was using kerosene for lighting then I buy solar"Female 25-40 FGD, Mwanja.

"...even moving from a grass thatched house to one that has corrugated iron sheets" Male 18-24 FGD, Kitonyoni.

This study found that improving one's status through nurture and education, having a family and meeting basic needs were considered to be the most important indicators of personal development. At the community level, improvement in infrastructure and access to services, while addressing obstacles to development and involving community members in development projects were cited as the important pathways to community development. National development, on the other hand was reportedly

achievable through representative leadership and competent judicial systems.

In addition, availability of electricity was reported mainly by the youth to have potential in facilitating improved communication through internet connectivity thereby facilitating development at all the three levels. Development was also viewed as a hierarchical process where preference was given first of all to achieving personal/household development followed by community and finally national development since development at the lower level(s) was viewed as contributing to development at the subsequent levels. Further, although development was considered to be a responsibility of the government, with help from the donor community, those responding were also supportive of their community being involved in development initiatives. This involvement ranged from just being constantly kept informed of plans and progress of development initiatives to actual involvement in development activities through offering of labour or locally available resources such as community land, for implementation of development projects.

### Personal/household development

Asked about what personal/household development meant to them, respondents in this study gave an overriding description of development meaning improvement in one's status in such areas as acquisition of education as a pathway to a better job, better incomes and therefore improvement in one's status as well as acquisition of assets that make life more comfortable and which also raise one's status. Having a family, specifically a spouse and children was also considered important as it raises one's social status.

### Empowerment

Self-improvement through the acquisition of adequate

education as well as life-skills was reported to be an avenue through which personal or household development could be achieved. A majority of discussants in this study (regardless of age and gender) viewed education as an avenue to improve one's communication and avail more economic opportunities, as a form of empowerment whereby one's autonomy in decision-making, self-reliance, direct democracy and social learning is enhanced. In this study, education was considered crucial such that the inability to access education beyond primary and secondary levels was viewed as a characteristic of less-development, due to its limiting nature in accessing social and economic opportunities. The perceived importance of education in development in this study is emphasised in these quotes:

"Like getting enough education because the education that we have is not enough that can give us development that can match the times we are living in" Female 41+ FGD, Mwanja.

"Enough education is like going up to the university level and having the ability to communicate in any way because like now we have internet, the Facebook and you know, you can't do such without having enough education" Male 25-40 FGD, Mwanja.

The other form of empowerment reported to be important in fostering personal development relates to parental nurturing (physically, morally, religiously and culturally) enabling one to become self-reliant thus:

"In my opinion, development is from the time I was born by my parents [sic], bringing me up and showing me what is right and what is wrong ...what can harm me and what cannot, and they brought me up by teaching me how I can live in this Gods' word...took me to school..." Female 18-24 FGD, Kitonyoni

### **Asset-acquisition**

In the quest to raise standards of living, this study found that people (across age and gender) considered acquisition of such assets like electricity, own source of water, radio, mobile phone, a car and businesses as indicators of progress. Acquiring assets to enable access to water was considered paramount, thus:

"I feel like I have some 'development' in my home because I have a small borehole that I have dug, and I use the water for my goats and irrigate a tree, so I feel I am doing well" Female 25-40 FGD, Mwanja.

Ownership of assets was important as it enabled households to meet other needs such as lighting,

communication and water.

### **Family**

The most common social measures of personal development highlighted, especially by the older male respondents were marriage and children both as indicators and pathways to development. Yet, not only getting a spouse and children, but also providing for them was considered a sign of development. In addition, it was considered to be an important avenue of societal-continuity and empowerment, education and other forms of nurture. In this regard, having a family was given high importance as it accords one respect and a higher status among peers and in the community. In this study, having a family also had economic benefits since wives were considered to be important initiators of development through their interaction with other women. Consequently, many aspects of home improvement were handled by women while the 'bigger' development efforts like schooling and investment were reported to be preferably handled by men. To younger respondents, marriage and family were however not frequently mentioned as important aspects of one's personal progress, rather this was mostly emphasized by male older respondents:

"As you have heard, all of us have wives so a man who doesn't have a wife basically has nothing, what can he possibly discuss among men? He doesn't have a child, no goat, no dog. So that man who does not have a wife has basically nothing because she [wife] is the pillar to that man, anything even if it is a child is always under the care of the woman because even in my home I don't know the things that we have, but my wife does. So women are the foundation and pillars of us men in this area" Male 41+ FGD, Kitonyoni.

This perception may arise from the influence of global urban culture which values individualism and personal achievement and one that the younger generation are increasingly imbued with, including the youth in Kenya.

### **Community development**

Community development was perceived as a state of availability and access of community resources and services, specifically, improved infrastructure and associated services such as having easily accessible and adequately equipped health facilities, good quality schools, accessible markets and good quality roads all of which were reported to have potential in helping improve the community's well-being outcomes.

Accessible roads' dual role emerged in this study

whereby it was reported to enable the opening up of the community to trade while at the same time enabling access of services and ensuring ease of transportation of farm produce to the markets, thus:

"...and if someone who is unwell, they can be taken to the hospital through good roads so that they won't suffer a lot by taking them to the hospital through the bushes" Female 18-24 FGD, Mwanja.

"Then, the mangoes just get lost (they go to waste), because where will the vehicles pass? ... that is a loss which would have brought profit to Kenya. They just end up rotting and yet they were to go to (be exported) abroad" Female 25-40 FGD, Kitonyoni.

Adequate and consistent supply of water at household and community levels was perceived to be important both as an indicator of individual/household development and a pathway to household and community development. Its importance as a recipe for development centred around its enablement of households to irrigate farms, thereby cultivating enough food and eliminating malnutrition and resultant illnesses and in the improvement of hygiene both at households and community levels, specifically at the health-facility level. Further, it was recounted that adequate water supply to enable house-hold to build bigger houses (which in itself was considered a form of development) and engage in businesses that require use of water. Most importantly, it was reported that this could significantly reduce the cost of water, which was Ksh. 8 to 10 for 20-litre jerry can (Ksh. 80 is approximately equivalent to USD 1) at the time of study and also reduce the time spent accessing it.

Absence of electricity in the community was highlighted as an impediment to the development of the community, as it is an obstacle to the acquisition and use of life-skills by the youth who miss formal higher education, forcing them to migrate to cities in search of opportunities, therefore denying the community their expertise. In the present study, electricity is perceived to have potential to spur growth through entrepreneurship while at the same time helping with provision and access of important services including health services such as maternal health, cold chains for vaccines and antidotes for snake and dog bites:

"Yes! If electricity comes within our area, the women will not have to go and be cut (undergo caesarean section) at Wote (the nearest town, which is approximately 50km away) since our dispensary here will have the theatre section" Female, 25-40 FGD, Mwanja.

"But if we had electricity just here around, such a person can work from within. They can weld doors and windows for people to buy and at the end of the day, that person

will just go and sleep at his home (own his own home), no one will ask him for rent" Female, 25-40 FGD, Kitonyoni.

It also overwhelmingly emerged that community development could only be improved once personal/household development had been achieved. For instance, even with availability of schools and health facilities as indicators of development, the community would still require trained expertise in order to provide the necessary services. Achievement of adequate education, cited as one of the indicators of personal development, would in turn ensure the community benefits from such training and expertise. In addition, most of the indicators of personal/household development were basics that were necessary for improvement in capabilities, thereby contributing to improvement in the community status. A male respondent said this to support this view:

"Development for me as a man from this community... I should be in a position to work and contribute something to this sub location. For example, I am a businessman and I spend my profit just within the community...I also educate children and if they would perform well, they would come back and help the people of this community as a whole" Male 41+ FGD, Kitonyoni.

The main custodian of development at the three levels however remains the government, supported by non-governmental organizations, with community members making contributions. Community participation in community development initiatives implemented was considered important, at all stages of development, including at initiation and monitoring of the projects.

## National development

Some of the important factors for national development emerging in this study include good leadership which has potential to ensure sustained peace and progress for all Kenyans and credible facilities and institutions alongside poverty eradication efforts as well as gender, age and regional balance in leadership and equitable development. Similar to community leadership, it was reported that national development could better be achieved once individual/household and community development efforts are met. It was perceived that having improved leadership and other systems at the national levels was important but this would be pointless unless people's livelihoods at the household and community levels are met since an empowered populace would best participate in governance and leadership, a situation that would be difficult to achieve in the absence of improved capabilities for the populace and improved infrastructure and community services. Figure 1 shows a summary of Makueni

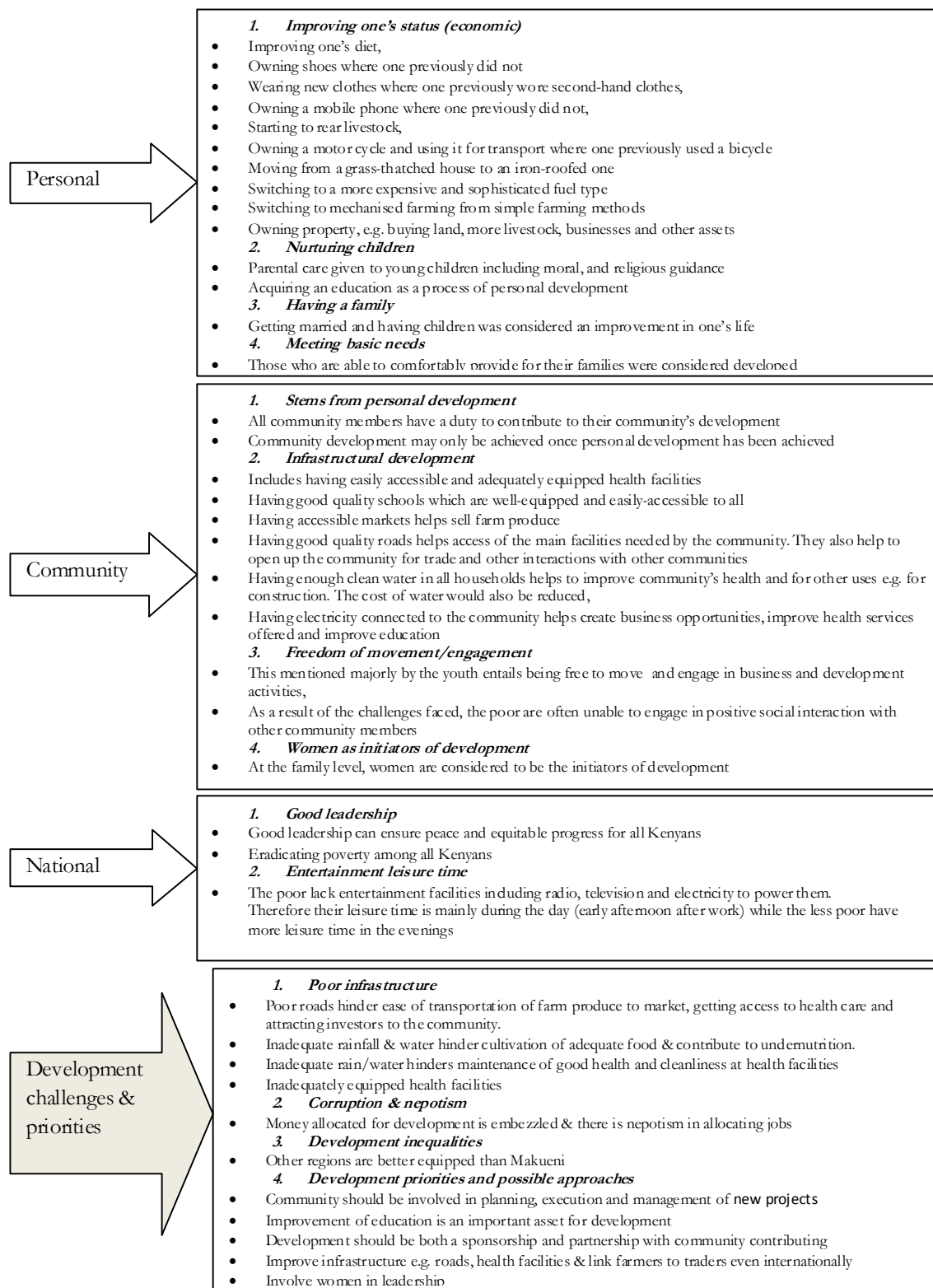


Figure 1. A summary of Makueni community perceptions of development.

community perceptions of development.

### **Willingness to participate in development**

The community's perceived willingness to participate in community development was demonstrated through their actual participation in development initiatives at the time of study. Community engagement in development work was already being incorporated in development projects in the study community. A quote from a community leader emphasizes this ongoing process:

"Whenever there is a project to be implemented, my office facilitates the coming together of community members to fundraise for the project. At such times, we may even approach the CDF, LATF etc and we may also request well-wishers. At the same time, if the government has funds, we can access them. We may also bring women groups together where they plant trees in nurseries to sell so that this money can facilitate the projects" KII Community leader

### **Development as a hierarchical affair**

This study reveals the community's perception of development to be hierarchical where it trickles up from the personal/household level, to community and to national levels. Perceptions of those responding in this study argued that although national and community development were considered important, prerequisite was given to personal/household development, otherwise, community and national development may take longer to be achieved. To those responding, meeting personal and household needs such as food, education, water, clothing, housing, was considered paramount as most are basics needed for survival, while community and national development efforts were more related to improvement in infrastructure and other community-level services that are not basics needed for survival. This trickle-up effect of development from the individual, to community and to the national level was highlighted by both community respondents and government leaders responding in the study. This quote from a community leader clearly outlines this importance:

"It should be a personal issue because the development of a nation depends on the development of an individual, therefore if an individual is developed, then the nation becomes developed too. Also a personal issues so that collective efforts of each individual can bring about greater change. It will be pointless if there is development at the national level when the individual person is not

developed" KII Community leader.

## **DISCUSSION**

The purpose of this paper was to investigate how residents of Kitonyoni and Mwanja sub-locations of Makueni County perceive development, with the view of informing development studies and development approaches. This is particularly useful in the Kenyan and sub-Saharan context where there is existence of inadequate factual data about the development situation at the micro-levels from the perspectives of those residing in these areas. It is even more important focusing on a rural context in the region where a majority of the population reside, especially since the United Nations population division projects that a majority of Kenya's population (53%) will still reside in rural Kenya by 2025 (UN Population Division 2010). This study, presenting results from a qualitative study, provides a rich and dynamic understanding of development from the point of view of residents of these two study areas, which has potential in helping development practitioners to focus on communities' development priorities in these areas and others within the County.

Responding to the perceptions of development at the personal/household, community and national levels, development at the personal/household level mainly revolved around improvement of people's capabilities in order to improve their livelihoods and wellbeing. Having a family, specifically a spouse and children was considered important as it raises one's social status, a factor considered important in other studies (Trani, Bakhshi, and Rolland 2011; UNDP 2010b). This finding also corresponds to that in a study by Biswas-Diener and Diener (2001) in Calcutta slums of India where the importance of social relationships specifically family and friendships was articulated as it was reported to contribute to life satisfaction (Biswas-Diener and Diener 2001).

Although conducted in a different region and setting (urban slums whereas the current study was conducted in a rural setting), the findings from Biswas-Diener and Diener (2001)'s study mirror those in the current study, which found family to be an important social relationship. The other personal/household development areas that have potential to improve people's capabilities were reported to include having an adequate education, good nutrition, adequate shelter, absence of disease and freedom of movement, self-esteem and freedom from servitude (Sen 1999). Education has indeed been emphasized as being important in personal empowerment, for instance in Friedman (2001)'s study of inequality around the world (Friedman 2001), with Amartya



Sen also viewing education as an important factor that enables self-sufficiency (Sen 1999).

While personal/household development was largely perceived to be the improvement in people's capabilities, community development was viewed as a state of availability and access of community resources and services, specifically, improvement in infrastructure and associated services such as having easily accessible and adequately equipped health facilities, good quality schools, accessible markets and good quality roads all of which were reported to have potential in helping improve the community's well-being outcomes. The effect of good health infrastructure on access to health services cannot be underscored, based on findings from other studies in sub-Saharan Africa (SHDRP and UNDP 1998; Ahenkora 1999). For example, in Ghana poor health infrastructural development, such as the lack of electricity, was an obstacle to the provision of services requiring electricity while long distance to health facilities, poorly qualified health personnel and constant drug stock outs or high expense accessing drugs also emerged as major health infrastructural constraints (Ahenkora 1999).

The importance of electricity has also been emphasized in other studies investigating the importance of rural electrification in development and poverty reduction (Barnes 1988). At the national level, the most important factor perceived to drive development is good leadership. This emerged important due to its perceived potential in ensuring sustained peace and equitable development for all the regions of the country. In Malawi, people perceived corruption and nepotism to be constraints to national development, findings that are on the flip-side of those in this study, where respondents emphasized the positive aspect of good leadership in improving national development (Chipimo-Mbizule 1997).

This study also revealed the community's perception of development to be hierarchical where it ideally trickles up from the personal/household level, to community and to national levels. Those responding in the study emphasized on taking care of personal/household needs, most of which revolve around improving people's capabilities and functioning, factors that have been considered to be important in achieving equitable and sustainable development in other studies (Sen 1985; UNDP 2010b; Beard 2007; Binns and Nel 1999). A study in Indonesia found that households contributed to community development according to their own level of development or well-being (Beard 2007). Another study in South Africa found that involvement of communities in development initiatives through identification, implementation and management of development projects leads to development at the personal/household level through improvement in overall socioeconomic conditions benefiting households (Binns and Nel 1999).

It emerged in this study that unless efforts to improve education, health and livelihoods of individuals and households was achieved, most infrastructural development, like schools and hospitals, would lack the people with capacity to either use or offer services. In addition, the United Nations' definition of development reflects these development priorities. The UN emphasizes the importance of enlarging people's choices with the most important ones including, ensuring they have long and healthy lives, acquiring knowledge and enjoying descent standards of living (UNDP 2010b). Based on this study's findings, it is thus expected that personal/household development is likely to have a trickle-up effect in development at the higher levels, for instance by improving the country's human development index, a measure of development defined and supported by the United Nations and incorporated in development studies and approaches. The human development index (HDI) combines indicators of life expectancy, educational attainment and income, regarded as factors that are achievable at the personal/household level, into a composite human development index that assesses a country's level of human development (UNDP 2014).

Following the discussion of this study's findings, some similarities and differences have been drawn in some of the main findings, indicating that perceptions of development vary by context. This study reinforces the existence of variations in perceptions of development, where the interpretations and indicators are influenced by context (Ebdon 1995; SHDRP and UNDP 1998). Ownership of poultry and livestock as an indicator of wellbeing in Makueni for instance, was also reported in a study in Mongolia, a context that varies from that of Makueni (Ebdon 1995). Makueni residents – being a farming community – consider livestock and poultry insurance assets while in Mongolia those having smaller herds were considered to be poor because they are exposed to risk of losing all their stock and were therefore vulnerable to a rapid decline into poverty. Closer to Makueni, in Tanzania, livestock was considered an investment which can be converted into cash, food and other farm implements when needed (SHDRP and UNDP; 1998). Further, the study in Tanzania found some variation in the perceptions of wellbeing, in the various villages enumerated, depending on the main economic activities engaged in.

Variations in the main means of livelihood therefore influence how development is perceived since the Mongolian community depends on livestock for subsistence while Makueni and Tanzanian communities engage in farming as a means of livelihood. Further contextual variations were observed where water was regarded as the first development priority in Makueni. While water was also regarded as an important need in a similar semi-arid

context, this was however not ranked as the most important need (Brock 1999). This indicates that even in similar circumstances, people's perceptions may vary. In addition, discussants in this study clearly outlined the potential benefit that an adequate and constant supply of water at household and community levels could have on development and poverty reduction, a clarity that has yet to be made in other perception of development studies, indicating that if development priorities were based on this, improvement in the wellbeing and development of Makueni residents could be enhanced. The study therefore also adds to the known indicators of wellbeing and areas that development efforts in Makueni County could target. While the Makueni district development plan articulates orphan-hood, disease, disability and environmental conservation as some of the challenges faced in the County and which development efforts seek to target (NCAPD 2005), the present study expands the list and shows the priority areas of need as articulated by the study's respondents.

## CONCLUSIONS

Following the findings of this study, emphasis is placed on the importance of rethinking development and ensuring that both macro and micro approaches are given equal importance since context may influence importance and ranking of development needs. This importance cannot be better emphasized than through the existence of variations in macro and micro indicators of poverty in studies in the country and the region. In Uganda for instance, household quantitative data was found to be inadequate in understanding poverty (McGee 2004) while Kenya's poverty reduction strategy paper (PRSP) was found to vary with the problems and priorities articulated by residents of 80 rural communities in 10 districts of Western Kenya (Swallow 2005). The present study also emphasizes prioritization of development such that while community infrastructure and access to services and national leadership and judicial systems are important and although they need to be improved, in the face of limited resources, priority needs to be put in place to improve the living standards at personal/household levels before moving to community factors. Community potential in embracing and participating in development is also possible as found in this study. Kitonyoni and Mwanja communities were found to be keen in participating in development projects, demonstrated by their involvement in already on-going development efforts as well as in their ability to articulate and rank their needs and priorities. This lends support to the need for development practitioners to adopt more participatory development approaches which have potential in

unearthing needs that may be overlooked when development priorities are determined by outsiders or when development and poverty studies and initiatives are approached solely from a macro-level disregarding the importance of micro-level approaches.

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