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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/estafrica/294>
DOI: 10.4000/estafrica.294
ISSN: 2790-1076

Publisher

IFRA - Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 May 2015
Number of pages: 63-79
ISSN: 2071-7245

Electronic reference

Edward Ontita, "Catalysts in the Development Terrain: Social Entrepreneurship and Change in Nyamira County, Kenya", *Les Cahiers d'Afrique de l'Est / The East African Review* [Online], 50 | 2015, Online since 07 May 2019, connection on 13 October 2022. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/estafrica/294> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/estafrica.294>

Catalysts in the Development Terrain: Social Entrepreneurship and Change in Nyamira County, Kenya

Edward Ontita¹

Acknowledgements. The author is greatly indebted to IFRA – French Research Institute in Africa for field work funding, Elkanah Mose Achira, Edward Nyabicha, John Nyandiko, Jeremiah Omwenga Nyakundi, Warren Barongo, Samuel Nyatwang'a, Gideon Omambia, Fred Magasi Obara, Wilson Ichwara, George Okioi, Elkanah Momanyi, John Okioi Monayo and Nelson Ontita among others for their time in focus group discussions and key informant interviews.

Development in Third World countries is generally considered to be a product of external intervention. Local people in rural sub-Saharan Africa are thought to be driven to change by extension services, public health promotion, business development, community development and other such programs. It is commonly assumed that local people have no capacity to originate new ideas and initiatives to change their circumstances. When local actors are given the benefit of doubt, it is believed that their initiatives are short-term, haphazard and largely unsustainable.

It is for the aforementioned reason among others that it has been argued that since the Second World War, development in rural areas has been driven by agriculture and allied activities in what may be referred to as an agricultural modernization programs everywhere (Ontita, 2012a:1). Essentially, the gist of the argument being that rural development has been agriculture-led, and in most part and that it was driven by technology transfer from research stations and academies. This for instance explains why the national extension services spread tea growing to smallholders in all suitable districts (cf. Nyangito, 2000: 14) in Kenya after the colonial government opened up tea growing for Africans. This is supported by Leonard's (1991) study of four public servants in Kenya whom he argued had an unusually great impact in Kenyan rural development. These and similar arguments are common in the literature,

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putting the state, officialdom and state resources at the centre of social transformation in Africa.

The major challenge to relying on the foregoing explanations of African rural development is that they attribute African development drama to the state and state corporations, placing local people as spectators and consumers of that development. This is too simplistic. In taking a largely structuralist theoretical perspective, these explanations dehumanize local people and deny them both voice and record in development history. The result is that their contribution to development is largely unrecorded and unaccounted for. Their intellectual property rights in creating and sustaining local organizations that often drive local development are appropriated by officialdom. Their innovations are reported as outcomes of public education and extension work. Their locally constructed infrastructures are reported as public works. Their culture is in theory becomes devoid of development discourse and initiative. All these however, depend on how development is defined and measured, by whom and for what. This paper has the overarching objective of letting ordinary rural people name their World; describe what development is, and who in their opinion brings it about and how.

The main proposition of this paper is that the concept of social entrepreneurship can help explain the process of social change and development more accurately. Goodwin has defined social change as “any substantial shift in a political, economic, or social system. This may be identified through economic or political indicators, population movements, changes in legal statuses, or the widespread and rapid adoption of a new technology that significantly impacts on the everyday lives of large proportions of a population” (2009: 3). Nonetheless, this definition focuses on largescale change that is largely driven by outside forces. This paper on the contrary focuses on change in modes of action and practice, relationships, mind set and behaviour thereto that are largely driven from within the society or community. The foregoing definition of social change ties in well with the one of development that this paper adopts, namely: “A society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment” (Rodney, 1972:4). The concept of environment is understood as complex and multiple, including the social, physical, economic, cultural and political. To this extent the environment is fluid and uncertain; hence cooperation and/or collaboration between endogenous and exogenous efforts in development are critical. A further proposition is that rural Kenya is characterized by many social entrepreneurs busy transforming society, but often informally, slowly and using local resources, institutions and with networks extending well beyond local areas. The gist of this proposition is to use a critical theory perspective to question certain assumptions about rural development that have already been alluded to, and to seek to understand the influence of culture, history and social context on processes and actors in local development processes (cf. Mueller *et. al.*, 2011: 113-114). A critical theory perspective will also enable us to question taken for-granted

assumptions such as, that it is formal interventions with written budgets and funding contracts that drive rural development.

But what is social entrepreneurship? Bornstein and Davis (2010: 1) argue that social entrepreneurs create public value, pursue new opportunities, innovate and adapt, act boldly, leverage resources they do not control, and exhibit a strong sense of accountability. These attributes and functions imply order, discipline and leading edge leadership skills. However, this paper analyses and documents the work of the leading local social entrepreneurs who traversed the areas of education, tea and coffee farming, cooperative movement and housing improvement. The significance of the study rests on the fact that all the contributions of such spontaneous, untrained and modestly educated or uneducated social entrepreneurs are enormous, but taken for granted by research undertakings in rural development as well as by development practitioners and policy makers. Therefore this paper brings to life men² whom as Charles Van Onselen would argue, 'if one went by the official record alone; never were' (Onselen, 1996: 3). And yet these men's work is written all over the Nyamira Landscape. The study took the cue from Bornstein and Davis' argument that a careful reader of history could identify the hidden hand of social entrepreneurs in the creation of many institutions and movements that we take for granted (2010: 3).

Methodology

Study Area

This study was carried out in Manga and Magombo Wards, Nyamira County, Kenya. The county is overwhelmingly inhabited by the Abagusii people as the main population group. Although people from other Kenyan communities live in the urban areas such as Tombe, Manga, Nyamira and Keroka, doing business or servicing the local bureaucracy, the emigrants were few and had not influenced local culture and social institutions in any significant way. Therefore, the Gusii culture was dominant in the study areas.

According to Were and Nyamwaya (1986: 31), Abagusii oral history indicate their reverence of a god, *Engoro* – omniscient with the sun, moon and stars as his agents. However, the religion centred on *Engoro* has generally disappeared. Were and Nyamwaya (1986) add that when the Christian missionaries arrived in Gusiiland, they challenged the indigenous religious beliefs. By 1912, the Catholic Mill Hill Mission and the Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) had established a presence in Gusiiland. The Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Swedish Lutheran Mission, Church of God Mission and the Friends African Mission

² This study focused on men social entrepreneurs by design as a starting point because it was a small-scale and exploratory study centred on the period just before and after Kenya's independence in 1963 and seeking to bring out major contributions of ordinary rural people to development. Detailed studies in the area will certainly bring out women's contributions to the same projects from different perspectives or to other projects. Therefore, women social entrepreneurs can and should be studied in their own right.

arrived in 1940. In the study areas of Magombo and Manga Wards, the SDA and Catholic churches were most dominant. While many of the social entrepreneurs discussed in this paper may have been Christians, it would be inaccurate to subsume their work under missionary work as it was not organized around any particular church program or known teaching.

Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

The study was conducted from September 2014 to February 2015, using qualitative methods. In the first instance, the researcher organized two focus group discussions – one in Manga Ward and the other in Magombo Ward to map out the main strands of social entrepreneurship and the key actors involved. The focus group in Manga had nine participants and the Magombo one had eight. The participants were identified through a reconnaissance study in early September 2014 in which informal discussions were carried out in market centres and by phone with local contacts to locate knowledgeable and forthcoming people willing to take time and discuss local development and change, and the actors involved. The focus groups discussions were held in-doors at recently completed Constituency Development Fund (CDF) buildings and the Manga one lasted five hours while the Magombo one lasted four and half hours. The participants mapped out the most outstanding contributions to developments by local grassroots informal leaders. Following this mapping and deep discussions of each, the study moved to key informants around the initiatives and named initiators or social entrepreneurs in order to capture details and validate focus group discussion data. In total four key informants were interviewed in each of the two wards. The key informant interviews were framed in ethnographic interviewing to develop project biographies and locate the social entrepreneurs in them. It turned out that the focus group discussion data were accurate when compared with key informant data.

Data from the study were mainly qualitative and were analysed manually by identifying emerging themes, patterns and concepts that explained the multiple and drivers of grassroots development and change, as well as the social entrepreneurs implicated therein. In this paper, vignettes from the qualitative data are reproduced and presented to amplify and explain emerging themes and concepts, and to identify social entrepreneurship work in the study areas.

The rest of the paper brings out the contributions of identified social entrepreneurs in the following social innovations: setting up Nyamachemange Primary School; introducing coffee growing and setting up Kemera and Gesonso coffee factories; introducing pyrethrum and dairy cattle and setting up Tombe Farmers' Cooperative Society; initiating tea growing and setting up Nyaikuro, Nyamemiso and Irianyi (Omogwa) Tea buying centres and housing improvement initiatives through *Nyagesio Kiya* Self-help Group. The thrust of the discussion is on the major attributes of the social entrepreneurs, which helped them succeed in their work of realising their accomplishments in their communities. These attributes include:

leadership, networking and influence; consolidation of ideas and coordination; traveling, deployment of own resources and personal drive; tough negotiations and gifting; and trust and track record. The paper then turns to the workings of grassroots social entrepreneurs and ends with some concluding remarks.

Leadership, Networking and Influence in Social Entrepreneurship

Education remains one of the most important avenues out of poverty in rural Kenya. Indeed, Ontita (2013: 2) has argued that 'success in education is the surest ladder out of poverty'. Once a person has been educated and gained employment the ensuing benefits are two-pronged, including both private and community benefits. Private benefits accrue to the educated person through the salaries and benefits shared with the nuclear and extended family. Oftentimes this includes paying for school fees and offering advice to younger siblings, cousins, nephews and nieces on education and life-course problems. In some instances, they may further contribute by buying food for extended family during lean times or paying hospital bills. Community benefits flow when the educated and employed person becomes a resource person in the local community, helping to mobilising resources to build churches, schools and other such facilities.

The impact of education on community benefits illustrates why children's education is critical to community development. It is perhaps for this reason that in 1968 one man Mr Nehemiah Makori Mariga conceived the idea of starting a school in his village near Tombe Market. Participants of Manga Ward focus group discussion explained as follows:

Let's take the example of schools; the truth is that if we wanted to establish new schools now, there would be no space; land is scarce due to population pressure. In the past, people respected each other and understood the facilities they needed and how to realise them. For example, Nyamachemange Primary School was started by an ordinary person, Mr Nehemiah Makori Mariga (Sogota) and assisted by Ateka, Zachariah Achira, Kibagendi, Nyamasege and Samson Ragira. These were selfless people who had very little but shared that with their neighbours. With regard to the school, Sogota called people to a meeting in the village and explained to them that their children did not have to walk long distances to school in Riogoro, Tombe and Irianyi, arguing that there was need to start a primary school in the village. He approached Ateka and Mokaya and persuaded them to give land for the school. They did and that is the land on which the school stands to date. He then approached Assistant Chief Hezekiah Nyakiara for formal arrangements for the registration of the school. Sogota was not literate at all. But he had foresight, was transparent, selfless and forthright. Villagers loved him because whatever he sought to achieve, he followed it through without

excuses and back-tracking. In those days community members loved each other, shared whatever they had and were united. The colonial government had taught people to be united and had promoted community centres as 'places of unity'. People tended to respect ideas without regard to the status of the proposers; they shared drinks, advised each other about families and were socially connected.

Sogota identified a problem of children walking long distances to school, and convinced fellow villagers that it was a problem worth their effort to resolve. At this point he demonstrated 'personal leadership', namely; by identifying his passion for the community and the gap between the social conditions he desired for the children, and the reality of obtaining them (cf. Crosby, 1999: 41). In this sense, he understood the call to leadership in his community and the work this entailed. As Hudson (1995: 284) argues, "leadership is required to clarify the mission, to motivate people, to seek new opportunities, to give organizations a sense of purpose and to focus people on the task". Sogota knew that he needed people and material resources to accomplish the task.

Sogota then mobilized local and external resources to realize his dream. The local resources included reaching out to two other villagers to offer their land for the project. Upon their acceptance, and recognizing that he had put together the critical requisite local resources to start a school, he reached out to an administrator, assistant chief to have the school registered. Thus he understood his limitations, that as a social entrepreneur he could not move the government to act on registration, but importantly, he knew who could provide the necessary influence to achieve his objective. Therefore, he used his influence to scale the policy arena enlisting the support and services of the local assistant chief. At this point the need was already clarified, identified and stated; and the social entrepreneur communicated it to the chief as a community undertaking requiring his intervention. Although, Sogota was skilful in communication and a bold person, his passion for the education of children from the community and his commitment to the school project energized him to enlist the assistant chief. In this case, networking is a necessary trait of successful social entrepreneurship, by allowing the opportunity to bridge resource gaps in order to deliver on their dreams. These findings are in line with Bornstein's (2004: 11) argument that every change begins with a vision and a decision to take action. The context in which Sogota operated was remembered with nostalgia by focus group discussion participants as one in which unity and sharing of resources was central. The ability to unite stakeholders and coordinate collective action is necessary in successful social entrepreneurship at the grassroots level, where resources are scarce and the power of numbers is critical.

A school teacher who was a key informant in this study said, 'villagers talk fondly of Sogota as the founder of this school, he was smooth in his dealings with other villagers and he focused on what needed to be done, often ignoring any resistance from a few people who in 1968 could not see a school as a major need. The school is presently an important facility

in the community. Some of the children who have gone through the school in the past have helped their families out of poverty after gaining employment'. Therefore, Sogota started the fight against poverty in his village during that village meeting in 1968 when he laid out his vision of a school in the village. His leadership to start Nyamachemange Primary School was not just for that moment, it was perpetual because almost fifty years later and still counting, the school continues to contribute to social change and development.

Furthermore, the Magombo Ward focus group discussion participants said, 'in hindsight Sogota in starting the school helped shield children from Nyamachemange and neighbouring villages from passing through Tombe market every day to and from school. As the market grows, the children will not be exposed to negative urban influence of noise, attraction child labour opportunities in the market and petty crime. Other schools are congested due to population growth and without Nyamachemange School, children would be suffering'. It is unlikely that Sogota had in mind the impending learning disruptions, if children passed through the busy Tombe Market to and from school every day, as he dreamt in 1968; but his dream was gaining multiple meanings and significance years later.

Consolidation of Ideas and Coordination in Social Entrepreneurship

Coffee was introduced as a crop exclusively for white settler farmers. According to Kenyanjui (1992: 119), Arabica Coffee was first grown by the Roman Holy Ghost Priests at Kikuyu near Nairobi in 1899. It was taken up in subsequent years as a plantation crop in the White Highlands, and remained exclusively for white farmers. Heyer and Waweru (1976: 193) argue that:

The grounds for resistance were that the introduction of African coffee growing would spread disease, damage the good name of Kenya coffee, make difficult the prevention of theft from European estates, and reduce the supply of labour to European farms. Despite strong representations by African farmers, there was an effective prohibition on African coffee growing until 1933 when it was allowed on a very limited experimental scale in three districts that were isolated, badly in need of cash crops, and relatively far removed from European coffee growing. The three districts were Embu, Meru and Kisii³..... It was only until 1949 that the general go-ahead was given for coffee growing in all suitable small farm areas in Kenya.

Even after this go-ahead was given, support for coffee growing by African was lacklustre. Inputs were not forthcoming, and technical support through extension was weak

³ In 1933 there was no district known as Kisii, the whole area that presently includes Nyamira, Kisii, Homa Bay and Migori Counties constituted one district known as South Nyanza. This was the case until 1961 when Kisii District was carved out of South Nyanza. It is possible that the lower Kisii areas were allowed to experiment with coffee growing in 1933.

and discriminatory in African areas. Europeans had never trusted Africans as capable of doing any orderly farming. It was upon this backdrop that coffee growing slowly spread to Nyamira County. It should be noted that even if Kisii included what is now Nyamira County in 1933 and even in 1949, Nyamira had a higher altitude and it was not cleared for coffee growing. In fact the first coffee factory in Kisii known as Mobamba was built just outside Kisii Town behind Kereri Girls' High School⁴. These data reinforces the view that Nyamira areas were not in the 1933 coffee experiments in Kisii.

Nonetheless, the push for coffee growing in Nyamira areas began to gain momentum in the early 1950s. The Manga focus group discussion participants shed more light on the development:

Mobamba (located behind Kereri Girls' High School in Kisii Town) was the first coffee factory in Gusiland. In this area, Keberenge Bosire and Otworu Atambo were the first to grow coffee. They had collected seedlings from friends and relatives in Kisii areas. These two led other villagers in growing coffee, and the crop spread quickly as the earnings were good. When the crop was ready, it became difficult to transport produce to Mobamba Factory. Keberenge Bosire initiated the idea of Kemera coffee factory. This was supported by Otworu Atambo who convinced Keberenge to offer suitable land next to Kemera River to locate the factory. Patrice Omweri, another early coffee grower led in mobilising people and resources to build the factory and it started operating in 1955. Keberenge was an initiator but could not concentrate on an idea to rally people around it. Omweri on the other hand was visionary and a good organiser who always consolidated ideas and drove action.

Keberenge was the first to notice that transporting coffee produce to Mobamba was difficult, and that there was need for a factory near-by. He saw the possibility of having a factory and was committed to it, but did not know how it could be carried into fruition. Omweri on the other hand, was not on hand to identify the problem, but once a solution had been created, he ran away with it. He provided a vision, strategy, leadership and the action to put everything together into a factory. This case illustrates the importance of understanding social entrepreneurship at the point of where it begins. The instigator or trouble shooter appears critical in stirring thought, raising ideas and corresponding with leaders. Even as the consolidation of the idea and its presentation to the wider community was in this case done by somebody else who put his mind to it and brought his passion to bear on the idea, the role of the instigator remains important. This role was complimented by the coordination and execution of the emerging project done by yet another person, taking a longer-term view to assemble all the necessary resources, plan and get the work done. This case shows that

⁴Data from focus group discussions in Manga and Magombo Wards in 2014 and key informant interviews in January and February 2015.

cooperation and collaboration were essential characteristics that supported the successful flourishing of social entrepreneurship. Respect for ideas was additionally another a major benefit in this scenario. While Keberenge was not a consistent leader, his idea was not brushed aside. Rather it was embraced, and because of that community support, he remained at the centre the planning and execution process, and was at hand to provide land for the factory at an opportune time.

As coffee growing spread to Tombe, Kiogutwa and Sengera-Manga, it became necessary to set up another factory. Key informants and focus group discussion participants described the following concerning the second coffee factory – Gesonso:

By 1962 many people had planted coffee and Kemera Factory was experiencing congestion and delays to weigh farmers' produce. Benson Akuma identified a piece of land for a second factory at Gesonso, upstream of Kemera factory and on the banks of the same Kemera River. He was supported by other farmers including Abner Ondieki Akuma, Erasto Abuga and James Nyarango. They approached Assistant Chief Hezekiah Nyakiara to help them build a foot bridge across the river to link the new factory site to farmers on the East Bank of the river. Once the bridge was completed, the factory was built and started operations in 1962. Benson Akuma was the chairman of the factory committee for many years and increased the catchment of the factory significantly.

Benson comes across in this scenario as a leader who not only relied on his local networks and influences to push his idea, but also on external links with the assistant chief. He brought forth strong coordination and foresight skills to realizing the project. In a nutshell, Benson was able to support his big idea with resources beyond his control to realise the vision of a new factory. His leadership comes across as collegial, as he apparently connected smoothly with fellow farmers and moved them to help achieve the goal.

Traveling, Deployment of own Resources and Personal Drive

The struggle by Africans to grow pyrethrum and rear dairy cattle during the colonial period was tough, especially in marginalized areas like the Kisii Highlands. The settler farmers who owned the dairy cattle and controlled the agriculture and livestock extension as well as the veterinary services believed that Africans were incapable of learning to take the required care for dairy cattle and the pyrethrum fields. In 1954, the Swynnerton Plan finally brought a shift in policy, allowing African smallholder farmers to grow cash crops and rear dairy cattle (Heyer and Waweru, 1976: 195). Heyer and Waweru (1976: 194) further argue that exotic dairy cattle were officially supported in African areas only after 1955. Focus group discussion participants and several key informants paint the following picture:

Zablon Onsare Omwenga was the first to grow pyrethrum in this area. Zablon was born in 1901, at Kiong'anyo near Geturi below Manga Ridge. He was his father and mother's first born child. His father Omwenga Minaro was an only child and had learnt many skills to be self-reliant and survive, including making baskets, thatching houses and weaving the traditional Kisii granaries. Being an only child Omwenga married three wives. Zablon was a son of the first wife. His brothers include Israel Nyang'ate, Thomas Makori, Pius Nyaosa and Crispo Sagero. Zablon had other siblings by his father's second and third wife. By the second wife his siblings were Norah Mokiami Orang'i, Clement Nyandiko, Osebe Omwenga, Perpetua Nyanchera Mogaka, Nelson Ontita, Mokaya Omwenga and Milka Nyaboke Nyangoka. By his father's third wife the siblings are Anasi Omwenga, Kebaga Moraa Ogwora, Nyaboke Nyangweso Manwa and Nyang'au Omwenga. In early 1920s Zablon used to go to Nyanchwa Seventh-day Adventist Mission Centre to follow church teachings. It is at the mission centre that he took literacy classes and followed a carpentry and roofing course.

Zablon travelled to Molo in 1956 and brought pyrethrum planting material which he planted on his farm near Tombe Market. Other people who planted pyrethrum immediately after Onsare were Zachariah Achira Atandi, Clement Aboki, Ishmael Mokaya, Makori Mariga (Sogota), Patroba Oseko, Ishmael Sang'anyi and Azael Momanyi. Others like Joana Oenga and Patroba Obeto later planted pyrethrum. When harvests started Onsare knew that the produce had to be marketed only through a cooperative society. He used his own money to purchase a small plot near the present Tombe Dispensary, built a society house and the cooperative started marketing pyrethrum. However, soon after that the land became too small for the many pyrethrum adopters and a bigger piece of land was purchased at the market where the present cooperative society buildings are located to date. Zablon was the first chairman of Tombe Cooperative Society and he served in that capacity into the 1960s.

In 1960, Zablon Onsare bought dairy cattle from Ishmael Mokaya and started producing milk. Dairy farming also spread quickly among the people who were already growing pyrethrum. So the first batch of dairy farmers included Zachariah Achira Atandi, Samuel Ombwori, Bethuel Nyatwang'a, Ishmael Sang'anyi and Hurun Nyamwaya Ondieki. By 1963 milk produce was good and with government advice, milk was marketed through Tombe Cooperative Society under Zablon Onsare as chairman. In 1969/70 dairy farming spread to neighbouring villages and the cooperative grew tremendously. Those who joined dairy farming in that year included Johnson Orina Momanyi, Nelson Ontita,

Johnson Mareri, Agostino Samani, Ibrahim Ondieki, Momanyi Omas, Peterson Matara, Ndege Omaita and Charles Omas.

The foregoing vignette brings out the passion with which the first pyrethrum plantings were sought through traveling long distances to acquire them. In setting up the cooperative society, it emerges that Zablon took the initiative in mobilising his own resources as seed capital. In the process of doing so, he was able to attract considerable resources from fellow farmers to contribute to the initiative. As a result of this success, he was able to position the cooperative to naturally sustain dairy farming, milk marketing and sales. The extent and speed of adoption of both pyrethrum production and dairy farming in the study areas shows that the social entrepreneur behind the work had great influence in the community. A key informant said, "Omsare was like Omwansa in Nyambaria, they both did not take opposition to heart, they just picked lessons from criticisms and moved on with ideas ignoring and never engaging with people opposed to them". These entrepreneurs therefore focused their eyes and attention on their preferred outcome, and were never distracted. By maintaining their steady commitment to their vision, they stayed above the fray and were able to realize their goals.

Tough Negotiations and Gifting in Social Entrepreneurship

The diffusion of tea growing flowed naturally from the White Highlands of Kericho mainly, west of Sotik, to North Mugirango and parts of West Mugirango (cf. Ontita, 2007; 2012b). Due to what may come across as sibling rivalry, the people of Mugirango resisted all attempts by the people of Kitutu to grow tea. They convinced the colonial extension officer based in Nyamira Town to forbid tea growing in the Kitutu areas. The people of Kitutu responded to this challenge in a shrewd manner as described in the following synthesis of focus group discussion notes and key informant interviews responses:

In early 1957 Zablon Omsare mobilized farmers to collect together eggs and they sent Chanai Mariita to use the eggs as gifts to the colonial extension officer at Nyamira. Chanai was brave and literate, having served as a teacher at Nyanhwa Seventh-day Mission School in the 1940s and early 1950s. He met the extension officer repeatedly and towards the end of 1957, the Kitutu people were allowed to grow tea. This however, did not include the larger Kitutu Chache because it was lower and considered a coffee growing area. By the time the people of Kitutu were being allowed to grow tea, some of them had flourishing tea gardens having stolen tea seedlings from Kericho areas. However, they needed the official consent of the extension officer in order to market their tea. After the consent was given the first tea farmers included Zablon Omsare, Zachariah Achira, Ishmael Mokaya, Momanyi Siteki, Isaac Migiro Oteri, Areba Omariba, Machogu Kerama, Penuel Mototo, Chanai Mariita, Washington Nyamamba Omoro, Bitange

Nyang'au, Ntabo Magare, Peter Omwansa and Dishon Ondari. All these people and others had planted tea in the lead up to 1957 and were harvesting in 1958/59. They delivered their tea to Kipkebe Factory west of Sotik Town, about 25 kilometres away. This became a challenge as more people grew and started harvesting tea leaves. The farmers agitated and with Washington Nyamamba Omoro as the anchor they built the first Tea Buying Centre in Kitutu at Nyaikuro (KIT 01) in 1961. So the farmers started carrying tea leaf in baskets on their heads and transporting it to Nyaikuro. Late in 1961 under the leadership of Ishmael Mokaya the second Tea Buying Centre (KIT 02) was built at Nyamemiso. This made the work easier for the farmers as they delivered tea leaf not too far from their farms. By that year, more farmers had planted tea including Johnson Orina, Wilson Ichwara, Momanyi Omas, Silas Birike, Augustino Samani, Ibrahim Ondieki, Benson Kimoni, Johnson Mareri, Barongo Nyamiaka, Ombiro Orina and Zaniel Nyakundi. These farmers had grown tea with the assistance of an extension officer known as Mr. Oroko Bosire, described as kind, supportive and knowledgeable. With this increasing number of farmers negotiation for a third tea buying centre started. With the leadership of Nelson Ontita and the support of Jeremiah Ondieki at the Ministry of Agriculture in Nairobi, Irianji Tea Buying Centre (KIT 03) was authorized in 1962. The centre was supposed to be built at Irianji, however the access road was poor and although the name was retained the buying centre was built at Omogwa Junction and started operating in 1962.

The journey to tea growing in Kitutu was a difficult one. It was characterized by bribery and tough negotiations with the colonial bureaucrats at Nyamira. All these revolved around Zablon Onsare to bring together the required resources, including the gift of eggs and Chanai Mariita to deliver the eggs to smooth the negotiations. Eventually consent was given, although by that time some impatient farmers had stolen and planted tea seedlings from the White Highlands. Together, social entrepreneurs helped overcome the recurrent problem of delivering their tea leaves far from the farms. Seeking a solution, they negotiated for tea buying centres, offered land on which they were located and mobilized people to build them. Integrity on the part of the African extension officer helped spur diffusion of tea growing in the Kitutu areas during the early years from 1957 to 1964.

Housing Improvement: Trust and Track Record

The rise of cash crops such as coffee, tea and pyrethrum in the Kitutu areas in the 1960s and 1970s, helped to increase prosperity and eventually raise living standards. Despite these advances, not even the combination of these crops with dairy farming could give the local farmers a significantly higher standard of living in the short-term. Nonetheless, the

introduction of these new agricultural technologies formed a firm foundation for fighting poverty in the long term. In the meantime, housing units remained mainly grass thatched. At the time, a majority of farm earnings went into paying school fees for children who were going to secondary school in large numbers by the early 1970s. Only people with formal jobs or technical skills such as carpentry and masonry could manage to put up houses with corrugated iron sheet roofs.

In 1977, Nelson Ontita a tea, pyrethrum and dairy farmer came to realization that it was not possible to build a house with a corrugated iron sheet roof on his own. He had many children in school, and a significant proportion of his income went to paying their school fees. Upon this realization, he mobilized people in Omogwa – Irianyi and neighbouring villages to start *Nyagesio Kiya* Self-help Group. The group was registered as a women's group by matter of political convenience. At the time, social groupings of men were not encouraged as president Jomo Kenyatta was ailing and succession tensions ran high. Nelson Ontita became the founding chairman with teachers Fred Magasi Obara and John Mariita as Secretary and Treasurer respectively. The secretary and treasurer were younger, the chairman was older and a tested leader – having served as chairman of Irianyi Tea Buying Centre (KIT 03) from its inception in 1962, Irianyi Primary School in the 1960s and lately Omogwa Primary School from 1974 to 1982. People trusted him as a dependable leader who would deliver on his promises, by virtue of his long track record leading a number of social ventures in the local community. His strong networks with teachers, farmers and other people in his village and neighbouring ones helped to contribute towards mobilising the initial committed participants to set up the group.

Ontita brought together sixty (60) people – farmers, teachers and business people with the main objective of contributing fifty (50) shillings every month and giving the lump sum to one member to use in changing the roof of their house to corrugated iron sheets. The member to receive the lump sum was chosen randomly through a 'lottery' where small equal pieces of paper were labelled numbers 1 to 60 then each was folded in the same way and all of them put in a big tin. Then members came one by one with the eyes off the tin and picked one. Once every member had picked they were told to unwrap the papers, the one with number one was the winner of the first 'lottery' and was given the lump sum of 3000 shillings. Members insisted that the winner used the money to build a house with a corrugated iron sheet roof. The number of members participating in the 'lottery' reduced every month as those who had won before did not participate but paid their monthly contributions so that subsequent beneficiaries consistently received the constant figure of 3000 shillings from 60 members.

At the end of 1981, the last member successfully received their lump sum. By this time, the self-help group had changed the landscape of the affected and neighbouring villages forever. The self-help group model was subsequently replicated in many villages. As

ordinary peasants began to have houses with corrugated iron sheet roofs, it helped to create a new impetus towards greater village housing improvement. Hence, the social entrepreneur, Nelson Ontita had found a new solution to the old, intractable problem of poor quality housing. This novelty at the grassroots level served to motivate all people to start thinking differently about their housing units. People with means subsequently built similar houses for themselves and their children. As one key informant said, “the main motivation for building houses with corrugated iron sheet roofs was clean rain-water harvesting and prestige. Grass for thatching houses was also disappearing as more land was brought under cultivation”. As a result, people defined themselves socially according to the type of their main houses. Therefore, social entrepreneurs can spur change and development not only by pushing projects over time and space, but by creating ideas and solutions that travel, diffuse and influence people to push those ideas in different directions over time. The Nyagesio Kiya idea was unique in two ways; first, it contributed to clean rain-water harvesting, good housing and prestige all at the same time. Second, the process was simple – pool little money from each member together give it to a randomly selected member and thus exercise fairness and put social pressure on the member to improve their housing unit. It is the simplicity of the idea as well as its multiple benefits that drove its replication across the Kitutu areas and beyond.

The Workings of Grassroots Social Entrepreneurship

This paper has reviewed beginnings and growth of a school, coffee, tea and pyrethrum production and marketing. It has also looked at dairy farming and milk production and marketing as well as housing improvement. Each of these projects had a significant impact on the local community. The study has revealed that each project was started by a leader who had a big idea and a vision. Leadership is understood in this paper as “the will to control events, the understanding to chart a course, and the power to get a job done, cooperatively using the skills and abilities of other people” (Krause, 1997: 3). Thus, leadership power is grounded in mutual consent, expectations and commitment. The various leaders sold their ideas to community members, mobilized resources within and without local areas and produced desired social benefits and change for their communities and people. This scenario is summarized in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Schematic Presentation of Grassroots Social Entrepreneurship Work

Figure 1 shows that the social entrepreneur (SE) becomes one when they have an idea, a vision and social networks. And where did the SEs get the ‘big ideas’ that they pursued? As has been argued, the social entrepreneurs discussed in this paper were ordinary people with modest education and resources, and by no means at the top of their cohorts and communities. But these people situated themselves uniquely at the frontlines of the search for solutions to pressing social problems and challenges. Nonetheless, they were not the poorest and had personal resources and significant social networks, most of them belonging to large families. The SE thus uses their social networks to clarify their idea and sharpen their vision. Then, they draw on further relationships to create organizations (formal or otherwise), which they use to mobilize resources and take action to create social benefit and change for their communities. However, this process is not straightforward. It takes place in the context of complex social realities. For example, in the case of commencing tea growing in the Kitutu areas, the SE ran into policy land mines in the form of a colonial extension officer unwilling to allow tea growing in their areas. The SE responded to this by organizing inducements for the extension officer and dispatching an astute negotiator from the village to speak for the prospective tea farmers. This strategy paid off and immediately neutralized the social problem of neighbouring clans unfriendly to their vision of growing tea. Some of the prospective farmers had also dealt with the challenge of unavailability of tea seedlings by initially stealing them from the settler farms in the white highlands. Soon the SEs were up against the problem of long distances to tea factories and hence transport costs. They summoned their social networks in some instances all the way to the Ministry of Agriculture Headquarters, to start tea buying centres near their farms. Therefore in dealing with complexity and uncertainty in their contexts SEs turned to improvisation – including bribing colonial bureaucrats, putting up tea buying centres using local resources and convincing fellow villagers to offer resources such as land and building materials for free. As Holland, et al (1998: 18) point out such improvisations are the openings by which change comes about from generation to generation. Thus social entrepreneurs are usually not detained by challenges and contextual issues. They free themselves quickly through improvisations and set the stage for change. For instance, it would have been difficult for men who culturally

were responsible for building houses to register a self-help group given the political context at the time. Yet in no time they overcame a huge political problem by creatively registering as a women's group, and proceeding to do what they had to do to improve housing conditions in large scale. By side-stepping a prevailing national policy these ordinary men in the village show that leadership for change and development did not belong with state bureaucrats and politicians as has been consistently assumed. Political control and state policy do not therefore dim the visions of grassroots social entrepreneurs, because the self-help group members in the case under review creatively disguised themselves under a women's group to short-circuit policy. The implication is that the complementarities of men and women's roles in society are critical in driving social entrepreneurship in the grassroots. The prevailing assumption at the time that women's groups did not pose any political challenge to the status quo was thus side-stepped.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has discussed the work of leading grassroots social entrepreneurs and shown the leadership and organizational skills that they displayed in order to realise their dreams and create social benefits and change for their communities. The central argument in this paper was that ordinary people are capable of bringing about positive change in their communities when they combine big ideas, vision and leadership skills to mobilise resources beyond their control, take action and create value for their communities. Leadership skills including networking constitute a common character of all social entrepreneurs studied for this paper.

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