What Is Community-Driven Development?

Community-driven development is an approach to development that supports and empowers participatory decision making, local capacity building, and community control of resources. The five key pillars of this approach are community empowerment, local government empowerment, decentralization, accountability and transparency, and learning by doing. With these pillars in place, CDD approaches can create sustainable and wide-ranging impacts by mobilizing communities, and giving them the tools to become agents of their own development.

What Is Scaling Up?

Scaling up is a multi-dimensional process through which the impact of a community-driven program is broadened and deepened. Dimensions of scaling up that have been identified include quantitative (physical replication); programmatic (new activities and programs); social (increasing the capacity of the community to engage in development activities, and mobilization of increasing numbers of local residents, including the vulnerable and marginalized); organizational (increasingly effective internal management and financial viability); and political (incorporation of the CDD approach by higher levels of government, and the direct entry of grassroots organizations into politics).

Zambia: Issues of Scaling Up in Peri-Urban Areas

This note is part of a series that examines the factors that facilitate the scaling up of Community Driven Development (CDD) programs. The note highlights the experience of CARE Zambia’s Program of Support for Poverty Elimination and Community Transformation (PROSPECT) initiative, which applies a community based approach to reduce poverty in peri-urban areas of Lusaka, and discusses the importance of linking CDD with structures and processes outside community boundaries, to ensure that they are able to scale up in more dynamic and sustainable ways than simple replication. It also examines the difficulties of doing so in the face of opposition by entrenched political interests.

Background

Living conditions in the peri-urban settlements around Lusaka and other cities in Zambia deteriorated markedly over the past 15 years, as a result of stabilization and structure adjustment measures in the late 1980s and the severe drought of 1991-1992. Without legal standing or representation in local government, inhabitants were unable to demand basic services to cope with disease, crime, illiteracy, and other life difficulties. The situation changed very little until 1991, when democratization brought with it an emphasis on decentralization of planning and decisionmaking, strengthening of local government, greater participation, and the creation of an enabling environment for community-drive development. As part of this movement, the Lusaka City Council legalized a number of squatter settlements surrounding the
city, and in 1994 ordered that a Residents’ Development Committee (RDC) be established in each settlement as a mechanism for community participation in planning and development. The RDCs, created with the assistance of CARE Zambia’s food security program, PUSH I (Peri-Urban Self-Help, 1991-1994), replaced the old Ward Development Committees, which had functioned as extensions of the ruling political party. However, these early RDCs were unable to attract the broad-based participation needed to effectively address the range of deeply entrenched problems in the settlements.

Origins of the CDD Approach

The need for broader participation in the RDCs became apparent just as CARE was seeking to move away from the direct implementation model of PUSH I, in favor of building the capacity of communities to identify and address their own development needs. Operating in the same three settlements as PUSH I (Chipata, George, and Kanyama), PUSH II (1994-1997) ended the food-for-work program and established a three-level structure of local organizations. In addition to the RDCs – which were charged with coordinating settlement-wide efforts to improve market facilities, roads, water and sanitation; promoting economic and cultural activities; ensuring that women and men received business training; and engaging residents in monitoring, evaluating, and maintaining projects – PUSH II also set up several Zone Development Committees under each RDC, which were charged with bringing grassroots concerns to the RDCs. Both were given the legal status of community-based organizations – known in Zambia as area-based organizations (ABOs) – to ensure that they remained legally independent of the municipal government. PUSH II quickly energized and empowered the ABOs by involving them, first, in rapid assessments of institutions operating in the area; and then in more in-depth assessments of their communities’ problems, capacities, and opportunities for change. PUSH II also provided training for members of the ABOs in leadership skills, community mobilization, and project management.

Scaling Up Difficulties

PROSPECT was designed to scale up the PUSH II model from 3 to 12 peri-urban areas outside Lusaka over a five-year period, raising the number of beneficiary residents from about 180,000 to about 600,000. PROSPECT did manage to scale up along multiple dimensions, both internally, in ways relating to project operations (entering new areas, incorporating new activities, building community capacity); and externally, in ways affecting other programs and organizations (integrating the ABO structure into municipal governance, influencing City Council and national policy, catalyzing similar efforts by other organizations). However, the program ran into difficulties because it became a threat to the authority of the city councilors. During the period in which microfinance groups were expanding and beginning to generate their own capital, and a water trust was being established that was refining the payment system to allow individuals to pay as they went - the councilors suspended the constitution of the RDCs and outlawed further elections of RDC and ZDC representatives. That action, in 1999, created a crisis that threatened the future of CDD activities in the settlements and prevented the program from scaling up beyond the three original target areas. This episode showed the political sensitivity of CDD and cast serious doubt on the wisdom of PROSPECT’s approach of avoiding involvement with government.

To resolve the crisis, CARE commissioned an outside team of municipal governance experts to facilitate dialogue among RDC members, city councilors, and PROSPECT and CARE staff, about all aspects of the RDC-City Council relationship. The RDCs and City Council eventually agreed that:
• The ABOs were part of the local government system, not civil society organizations;
• The Council would delegate authority to the ABOs, which would work in partnership with the Council;
• The Council would not interfere with the operation of the ABOs, but could intervene according to certain guidelines if the ABOs did not follow clearly defined rules;
• The RDCs would create five-year community development plans, as well as annual working plans, in consultation with councilors, residents, and other actors.

With this agreement in place, elections were permitted in 2002, and PROSPECT was able to scale up to eight more settlements, for a total of eleven.

The Incorporation of CDD Structures into Local Government

The legal incorporation of ABOs into the local government structure has had both positive and negative aspects. On the positive side, the ABOs gained more stability and authority, and are able to communicate more directly with local government about the needs of the peri-urban areas. Councilors have become more aware of the problems in these areas and more supportive of participatory development. With their new status, many ABOs have been able to establish working relationships with other agencies and international donors, such as Ireland Aid and the Zambian Social Investment Fund (ZAMSIF). In addition, ABO representatives have gained seats on municipal and national policymaking committees; and the City Council scaled up the ABO structure to another 24 settlements outside of the PROSPECT areas.

On the negative side, councilors gained the authority to dissolve the ABOs at any time – a possibility from which the ABOs were protected when they had the status of civil society organizations. In response to this potential threat, the RDCs plan to form a federated body to represent their interests, which could include going to court to fend off any attempts to dissolve them. Thus, trust between the ABOs and the councilors is still an issue. Another concern is the politicization of the ABOs. As a number of ABO members have progressed to political roles as elected councilors, grassroots participation and trust in the councilors remains low, and there are complaints of elite capture. Politicization of the ABOs has also led some councilors to complain that the national government does not fund their initiatives because the councilors belong to the opposition party; and that the Neighborhood Health Committees created by the national government are competing with the ABOs for local development resources.

CARE itself is concerned about the loss of separation between development and politics in the PROSPECT program, although independent analysts argue that this concern is unfounded, that development is central to democratization and improved governance. The one caveat is that fragile CDD structures and initiatives must be sufficiently strengthened and protected by organizations such as CARE until they are strong enough to engage with politicians on equal terms. PROSPECT has been criticized for exiting before the ABOs have been sufficiently strengthened, but on balance, the relationship between the ABOs and local government seems to be proceeding on course.

Conclusion

The PROSPECT program has been successful in scaling up in three important respects: (i) it increased community capacity to plan for development and engage with a range of development actors; (ii) it influenced the thinking and actions of government and civil society organizations; and (iii) its structures were
incorporated into local government. Although critics claim that activities were not as well planned or effective as possible, and the exit strategy left some ABOs without sufficient organizational support, the program has helped democratization to take hold in some of the poorest urban areas of Zambia, while improving social ties among residents as they continue to work together.

This Note is based on James Garrett (2003). *Community empowerment and scaling-up in urban areas: the evolution of PUSH/Prospect in Zambia*. Washington DC: International Food Policy Research Institute, for the Social Development Family of the World Bank. Additional copies can also be requested via e-mail: socialdev@worldbank.org

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i ibid.