

# EXPERIENCES FROM THE FOUR-COUNTRY CBP PROJECT

## 2

# Linking the community to local government: action research in four African countries

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## Introduction

This paper introduces the work on the project Action Research on Community-Based Planning, providing both the background to the topic and findings after two years. How community involvement in planning and management can link to decentralised delivery systems has formed the basis of this DFID-funded action-research project covering Uganda, Zimbabwe, Ghana, and South Africa. Several other papers in this edition focus on the experience of particular partner countries – South Africa, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Ghana.

## Background

The CBP (community-based planning) project was developed as a response to two challenges:

- an analysis of the institutional issues in trying to implement a sustainable livelihoods approach; and,
- a realisation of the limitations of efforts to promote decentralisation, where these concentrated on local government itself, and not also on how local government serves citizens.

## The challenges of implementing a Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) emerged in the

nineties from best practice as participatory holistic development approach building on people's strengths and working in partnerships from the community to the policy levels<sup>1</sup>. Khanya implemented a study funded by DFID looking at the institutional support required to implement a sustainable livelihoods approach (Khanya, 2000). This work was conducted in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa (in two provinces). The key findings are summarised in the need to develop the following six governance issues from micro to macro levels in order to effect a livelihoods approach:

### Micro level (community level)

- poor people are active and involved in managing their own development (claiming their rights and exercising their responsibilities); and,
- the presence of a responsive, active, and accessible network of local service providers (community-based, private sector, and/or government).

### Meso level (local government)

- at local government level (lower meso) services are facilitated, provided, or promoted effectively and responsively, coordinated, and held accountable;
- the region/province (upper meso) providing support and supervision to local governments.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the SLA refer to [www.livelihoods.org](http://www.livelihoods.org)

**A female participant presents her group's work, New Edubiase, Ghana**



Photo: Tay Awoosah, ISODEC

**“The requirement for widely dispersed and accessible services implied by the second suggests a rethinking of service delivery paradigms. Addressing how community involvement in planning and management can link to decentralised delivery systems has formed the basis of this action-research project”**

the focus on developmental local government and integrated development planning (IDPs) in South Africa. The Ugandan and Zimbabwean programmes have been pioneers in how to develop effective local government, but neither has been effective in strengthening community levels, and both recognised this deficiency, and were keen to see how to address this. Similarly while the IDP process recognises the need for participation, it lacks the appropriate methodology for doing this.

The first of the governance issues above implies community involvement in planning and management of local development. The requirement for widely dispersed and accessible services implied by the second suggests a rethinking of service delivery paradigms. Addressing how community involvement in planning and management can link to decentralised delivery systems has formed the basis of this action-research project.

### **Action-research on community-based planning**

The purpose of the project is that:

*Realistic plans have been developed in each country for policy change, implementation or piloting of community-based planning systems, which participating institutions are committed to take forward.*

The project has involved a range of partners in the four countries, including:

- the key national organisation involved in decentralised planning (to consider promoting policy impacts);
- a local government where the learnings are being implemented immediately; and,
- a development facilitator involved in participatory planning.

In this way it has micro-macro linkages imbedded in the design. It is an action-research project, building on committed partners for whom these questions are critical.

The project has involved in-country reviews of

### **Macro level (policy)**

- The centre providing strategic direction, redistribution, coordination and oversight;
- The international level supporting capacity of nations and regions to address poverty.

It is also essential to ensure effective linkages between the different levels.

This research highlighted the major gap between the micro and meso levels, where most communities in Africa do not receive many services from government, and depend rather on community-based services such as traditional healers, local crèches, advice from other farmers, local shops, local markets, and various forms of reciprocity. There are some very interesting examples of work at the meso level, and setting the appropriate macro/policy environment, e.g. the Local Government Development Programme (LGDP) in Uganda and the Rural District Council Capacity-Building Programme (RDCCBP) in Zimbabwe, and

**Table 1: Proposed approach to community-based planning linked to the IDP**

Pure empowerment CBP approach	Proposed 3rd Way for CBP in this project	Conventional participatory planning
Directly related to local action	Starts with community view. Planning for local action, municipal, provincial, and other inputs	Primarily related to municipal budgets, decisions, actions
Intensive, time-consuming	Limited time, e.g. three to four days plus follow-up contacts, budget cycle related	Limited time, budget cycle related, typically two hours
Process oriented	Partnership approach including capacity-building and empowerment	Delivery oriented
Decisions primarily on members' own resources	Decisions on own resource proposals, proposals for government, and other resources through IDP	Decisions primarily on government-controlled resources
Learning process crucial	Mutual learning crucial	Learning process as a side-effect
Not necessarily inclusive, initiative-based	Inclusive, covering whole ward/parish/area	Inclusive, area-covering, (democratic right)
Focus primarily on rights, strengths, opportunities, as well as needs	Strategic planning: linking people's strengths, opportunities, needs, and local knowledge with external specialists' know-how, to find effective solutions for many	Strategic planning: linking people's needs and local knowledge with external specialists' know-how, to find effective solutions for many
No consideration of municipality-wide approaches for community needs	Focus on the ward, but some consideration of municipality-wide issues	Consideration of municipality-wide approaches through negotiation across communities

experience, cross-country sharing, development of pilot and revised methodologies, and visits to other countries from whom lessons can be learnt. The design did not envisage piloting during this project, but as a subsequent phase. In fact, piloting has happened in all the four countries and full-scale implementation has happened across at least one local authority in each country.

The approach being adopted in the CBP project is that we need to address all the focuses of CBP in a manner that is implementable and sustainable using the resources available to local governments and in local communities. The four focuses include:

- to improve the quality of integrated plans by incorporating more accurate information from local communities;
- to improve sectoral plans and so the quality of services, once again by incorporating more accurate information from local communities;
- to promote community action, sometimes as a means of releasing latent energy of communities or to reduce the demands on government by shifting responsibilities to communities (e.g. for maintaining infrastructure in countries where government is seeking to reduce its responsibilities); and,
- to promote community control over development, either

in improving their influence over decisions, or in managing development directly.

Therefore the CBP project has focused on the question of what sort of community-based planning system can be implemented which is holistic, which reflects the complex reality of people's lives, is linked to the mainstream planning system (usually local government, but also sectoral), can be empowering, and is realistic within the resource envelopes (human and financial) available within a local government area. This is further expanded in the overview.

This article focuses on the generic approaches developed in the project, and the articles on each country bring out the specific adaptations and experience of each country.

**Principles underlying this approach to CBP**

Key principles were developed that underpin the approach to CBP being followed in this project (and which emerge from the principles of the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach). These include:

- ensuring that poor people are included in planning;
- systems need to be realistic and practical, and the planning process must be implementable using available resources within the district/local government, and must

**Table 2: Planning activities**

Stage	Planning activities
Preparation	Preparatory meetings with ward committees and opinion leaders one to two weeks prior to the planning being due to start.
Situation analysis (2 days)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meeting different social groups to analyse their livelihoods.</li> <li>• using a Venn diagram process to analyse local support institutions, whether CBO, government, NGO, or private sector.</li> <li>• mapping the resources and problems of the community.</li> <li>• doing a timeline of key historical events in the community.</li> <li>• doing a SWOT analysis of the community.</li> </ul>
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in a community meeting all the outcomes and key vulnerabilities identified by different social groups are prioritised, and a vision statement drawn up for the ward.</li> <li>• based on the top five priorities, groups then work on each of the development priorities to develop objectives, strategies, and projects/activities including what the community will do, what the local government needs to do, and what others need to do.</li> </ul>
Action planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• proposals are then made for projects to be submitted to the main local government plan, and in SA for the approximately \$2–5,000 that was guaranteed to each ward to support their process.</li> <li>• the ward committee draws up an action plan to take the plans forward.</li> </ul>
Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• project groups take forward implementation of community activities, in some cases with support from local government.</li> <li>• monitoring by ward/parish committees, and reporting to local governments and citizens.</li> </ul>

link in and integrate with existing processes, particularly local government planning;

- planning must be linked to a legitimate structure that can take funds, such as a ward/parish;
- planning should not be a one-off exercise, but be part of a longer process;
- the plan must be people-focused and empowering;
- planning must be based on vision and strengths/opportunities, not problems;
- plans must be holistic and cover all sectors;
- the process must be learning-oriented;
- planning should promote mutual accountability between community and officials;
- systems should be flexible and simple; and,
- there must be commitment by councillors and officials and there must be someone responsible to ensure the plan is implemented.

The **clients** of the planning are communities/interest groups/individuals, local politicians as well as technical staff of local governments, and service providers (including national and provincial government departments, and NGOs).

Table 1 compares some different approaches to CBP, and illustrates the approach being undertaken in this project.

### Challenges of this approach

Some of the key challenges that this type of CBP raises are:

- the need for a short process (and so not too resource-intensive) and yet sufficiently in-depth to address the needs of poor people, and to be empowering in how the planning is conducted;
- in order to have sufficient facilitators, there is a need to develop a facilitation capacity not just in local government, but by ward/area committee members, as well as in a range of service agencies operating within an area (e.g. departments of social development, agriculture, health, education, who also need to get to know the priorities themselves), and who need to provide their time at no cost;
- the need for a community budget to be available immediately to support local action after the planning, and avoid planning without a budget which has been a common problem; and,
- the need to train people to undertake planning, including ward/parish committees, and developing their ability to plan and manage development in their wards.

<sup>2</sup> This tool can be found in the generic CBP manual available at [www.khanya-mrc.co.za/cbp/SA.htm](http://www.khanya-mrc.co.za/cbp/SA.htm)

**“This is part of the process of changing the relationship between state and citizen, from one where the citizen is passive, begging for resources from a supposedly all-powerful and beneficent state, to a more realistic and empowering relationship”**

### The core methodology

The core methodology that was developed involved the use of a variety of PLA tools, combined into a three to five day strategic planning process. This was not done at the lowest level of organisation (e.g. a village), but rather at the next level above (e.g. a ward, parish), typically of 5–10,000 people. At this level all countries could conceive of the whole country being covered using the resources available in terms of staff and finances. Table 2 summarises the elements in the planning process.

Some of these planning methods used established PRA/PLA tools, such as the Venn diagram, seasonal calendars, mapping, timelines, etc. However, there were some critical innovations developed across the four countries:

- Basing the analysis on a participatory livelihoods analysis of different social groups (or in some cases interest groups) which assumes that communities are diverse and that the interests of these groups differs. A tool developed by Khanya in the prior research was used, which analysed peoples' assets, vulnerabilities, preferred outcomes, livelihoods strategies, and also developed some semi-quantitative data, to avoid the generalisations which are a problem in much PRA-type data collection<sup>2</sup>.
- Development of priorities based around **outcomes**, not needs, and the use of these outcomes to develop a community vision.
- A fairly typical planning process based on goals, strategies, and then projects and activities. Many of the countries focus on projects – this planning focused more on activities which the ward/parish could undertake themselves, as well as the support they needed from the local government, or other service providers (see Table 2).
- Building on the strengths of groups in the planning process.
- Making proposals for larger projects for incorporation in the local government plan.

The combination of these elements led to a strengths-

**Villagers from Dour Yarce village, Burkina Faso, presenting plans**



Photo: David Vannier, World Bank

based plan based around local action, rather than a problem-based plan usually about pieces of social infrastructure, implemented and funded by others, and usually a fanciful wish list which can never be implemented. This is part of the process of changing the relationship between state and citizen, from one where the citizen is passive, begging for resources from a supposedly all-powerful and beneficent state, to a more realistic and empowering relationship, where the state provides a supportive environment, people act on their development, and the state listens to people's views and supports where possible.

### Results

In the first year of piloting, some two million people were covered by the methodology in six local governments in the four countries. In South Africa and Uganda this was integrated immediately into the local government's plan. Some independent evaluations were carried out in Uganda and South Africa. These were positive, finding that the methodologies had worked, and had led to community action as a result. In the case of Uganda there were some questions as to how far the priorities of the poor were incorporated and the decision was taken to upscale. A range of areas where the methodology needed to be strengthened were identified which have been the focus during 2003. These were notably:

- improving the linkage to the local government plan and developing tools for analysing information from the community plans (deepening);
- improving the quality with which the methodology was applied (for example in some places the use of outcomes was not systematic, leading to a reversion to a problem and infrastructure-based approach);
- a recognition that the use of community-managed

**A resident drawing a base map for mapping exercise, Mangaung local municipality, Bloemfontein, South Africa**



Photo: Ian Goldman

**“An important spin-off has also been the development of a positive relationship between participating NGOs and the state, with a recognition by government of NGO’s knowledge of participatory methodologies, and by NGOs of the need to link to macro-level processes to make a significant impact on systems and so on poverty”**

funds was an essential component, either through a direct funding allocation (as in SA), or through local revenue raising (in the other three countries) which should be linked to knowledge of the funds available;

- strengthening local government’s support for implementation;
- improving the use of monitoring tools, and accountability by community structures as well as local government;
- develop a mechanism for promoting budget allocation for **disadvantaged groups** (i.e. in the guidelines, use of prioritisation criteria, etc.); and,
- integration of **traditional leaders**, opinion leaders and service providers effectively in the planning process.

An important spin-off has also been the development of a positive relationship between participating NGOs and the state, with a recognition by government of NGO’s knowledge of participatory methodologies, and by NGOs of the need to link to macro-level processes to make a significant impact on systems and so on poverty.

### Upscaling

The challenge of such projects is the uptake and upscaling in country championed by government. As the project is a learning project, based on partnerships from the beginning, this has occurred. In Uganda’s case CBP methodology was incorporated in a Harmonised Participatory Planning Guide (HPPG) for parish and subcounty planning, and an attempt was made to the cover the whole country in one go, later scaled down to about half the country. This is part of the next phase of LGDP. In SA’s case the decision was taken to cover eight local governments, covering about five to eight million people, with a range from the city of Durban (eThekweni) to a small rural municipality. In Zimbabwe the wish to mainstream CBP led to a change in the approach to decentralisation, and the addition of a priority around community empowerment. One of the important realisations was that if this was to be upscaled a training of trainers methodology would be needed, and a manual and training programme were developed, and are being applied and rolled out in Zimbabwe and South Africa.

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 Reports on each country and examples of manuals are available at: [www.khanya-mrc.co.za/cbp.htm](http://www.khanya-mrc.co.za/cbp.htm)