



## **Full Length Research Article**

### **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT ON A TIMELINE? LESSONS FROM THE 2015 MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND THE AGRICULTURE SECTOR OF SAURI MILLENNIUM VILLAGE IN KENYA**

**<sup>1</sup>Billystrom Jivetti, <sup>2</sup>Stephen Jeanetta, <sup>2</sup>Mary L. Grigsby and <sup>2</sup>Jere L. Gilles,**

<sup>1</sup>Texas College, 2404 North Grand Avenue, Tyler, Texas 75702

<sup>2</sup>University of Missouri, Department of Rural Sociology, Columbia, MO 65211

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#### **ABSTRACT**

For several decades, international development has focused on to helping rural communities in Africa attain economic development. The Millennium Villages Promise is a community-based Development strategy designed to facilitate the attainment of Millennium Development Goals in target sectors of education, agriculture, health, and infrastructure. The aim of this study was on how the relationship between exogenous and internal organizations had impacted community networks and how interventions would be sustained in Sauri. Findings included new structures and reinforced collective action through agricultural interventions. However, the absence of a clear exit strategy puts the sustainability of the programs into question.

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The Millennium Villages Promise (MVP) is a community-based development strategy designed to facilitate the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in target sectors of education, agriculture, health, and infrastructure. This is both a bottom-up and top down approach to community development that seeks to empower rural communities to manage their local development needs sustainably, while harmonizing the activities of all actors involved in the MVP partnership from local, national, non-governmental, and donor agencies (Cabral, Farrington, and Ludi, 2006; Carr, 2008; Konecky and Palm, 2008). Sauri, the Kenyan Millennium Village project located in Western Kenya began in 2004 and has expanded to include 10 additional neighboring villages representing a population of about 55,000 in Western Kenya (Annual Report, 2006; Baseline Report, 2007). The MVP investments were set to expire and the recipient communities expected to sustain the interventions upon the expiry of funding in 2015. Community institutions are used as strategic institutional entry points to the communities because the local institutional landscape includes a variety of community-based organizations and traditional

institutions that influence participatory development in the community. Accordingly, each sector utilizes specific institutional strategies from the individual, organizational, and system levels. Increasing our understanding of the views of the impact of the MVP on community networks in Sauri is central to developing effective interventions for development assistance.

#### **Problem Statement**

Despite the abundance of literature on the role of social capital in creating sustainable communities, there is little literature on the MVP and how its interventions and policies shape and are shaped by social capital in Western Kenya. Investigations are needed that will yield an understanding of the impact of the MVP donor interventions and policies on local social capital (networks) in Sauri, Western Kenya and can help determine the extent to which the local communities will be able to sustain their efforts when MVP funding ends. Existing studies, documentation, and publications on the MVP are primarily in the form of baseline studies and annual reports (Bourgignon *et al.*, 2008; Konecky and Palm, 2008; Annual Report, 2006; Baseline Report, 2007; Sachs, 2005a). Little is known about the effectiveness of this model in terms of how well it facilitates empowerment by building the institutional capacity

**\*Corresponding author: Billystrom Jivetti,**  
Texas College, 2404 North Grand Avenue, Tyler, Texas 75702

of the local actors to work effectively with each other and external actors such as nongovernmental organizations and national agencies. In particular, there is little known about how effective the program is at utilizing the vast network of groups and associations that existed in the villages prior to MVP and will likely be responsible for maintaining and continuing the development efforts once the MVP efforts are complete. One intention of the MVP model is to create sustainable communities and a major factor in sustainability is the capacity of and effectiveness of the social networks to generate social capital. The MVP has been a subject of various concerns because the tendency of the program has been to promote monetary incentives over the role of local institutions, which provide the bedrock for socio-economic and political development in African societies. Other concerns include the formation and constitution of local committees, prioritizing increased income flow, and learning how to effectively tap into external markets outside the village level; all of which previous models abdicated (Cabral, Farrington, and Ludi, 2006; Hyden, 2007). Some studies have questioned the impact and the sustainability of the MVP programs (Clemens and Demobynes, 2010).

Since we know very little about the impact of the MVP on local community networks in Sauri, it is vital to have proper perspective of this program as it is concerned with capacity building, empowerment, and poverty alleviation. This study seeks to fill this gap in understanding by focusing on how the Millennium Village Promise impacts community networks in Sauri, a group of villages in western Kenya, and contributes towards making development sustainable in this part of Kenya. The agriculture sector of the MVP program in Sauri was intentionally used because this sector was believed to utilize community networks in the dissemination of information and in accessing the resources needed for agricultural interventions. By focusing on this sector the findings are expected to provide insights into the framework that the Millennium Villages Project is using to form relationships among the communities where the projects are being implemented. The findings from this study will contribute knowledge important to those involved in policy and practice of international development. This research will extend knowledge about the impact of donor programs on community relations and perceptions (Stiglitz, 1998). Due to the widespread use of social networks in Africa, the findings of this study contribute to the understanding of good intervention programs for rural communities.

### **Theoretical Framework: The Actor-Oriented Approach**

This study used the actor-oriented approach (AOA) as espoused by Long (2001). The AOA argues that structural changes are not a result of external forces alone, but are also influenced by social actors. According to Long, when external interventions enter the prevailing "life-worlds" of individuals or groups, they are equally altered and mediated by the same actors (p. 13). The lives and individual behaviors are altered by the action of external forces operating on their daily life experiences and perceptions for the concerned groups (this happens directly or indirectly). This approach has been widely used in the rural development sphere, which is characterized by a diversity of policies, programs, livelihood interventions,

and actors with different interests based on the myriad of challenges facing rural communities (Long, 2001). Researchers, policy actors, development practitioners, national, and international agencies such as the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), the World Bank, and many development NGOs have used this approach. This study is interested in exploring the relationships among the actors involved with the MDGs and MVP village in Sauri, Kenya and the AOA is suited for that purpose. The MVP is guided by policies that are likely to reconfigure the local communities' aspects of agency, knowledge, and power that are highlighted in this study. Aspects of AOA emerge from the existing power, relationships, interactions, and the shift from short term to long-term goals of the MDGs and MVP in 2015.

### **Profile and Description of Study Area**

Sauri became the UN's first Millennium village in 2004. Geographically, it is located in the Yala Division of Nyanza province in western Kenya. The region is south of the equator. The Sauri MVP is a conglomeration of 11 sub-villages covering an 8km square mile. The sub-villages are Kosoro, Luero, Madiri, Nyamboga, Nyamninia A, Nyamninia B, Sauri A, Sauri B, Silula, Yala A, and Yala B. The Luo are the dominant ethnic group and subsistence agriculture is the primary livelihood strategy in Sauri. Common food crops grown are corn (maize), beans, sorghum and cassava while cotton and tobacco are the two main cash crops. According to the MVP Baseline Report (2005), there were about 975 households with 64% living in abject poverty (less than \$1 a day) and 20% HIV-AIDS prevalence. The area has a bi-modal rainfall pattern with the long rains season March to June and the short rains from September to December. Village administration occurs through a sub-location assistant chief, location chief, village elders, and an elected councilor (Baseline Report).

### **Literature Review**

Beginning in the 1990s and continuing into the new millennium, donors began to shift their approach to rural development programs that confer empowerment and participation on local communities (Ellis and Biggs, 2001; Peet and Hartwick, 2009). The rationale for empowerment is to make development more sustainable and foster the development of effective community infrastructure (Dasgupta and Beard, 2007). Many of these recent interventions have been directed to specific sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, education, and health. Relationships across sectors create bridges that facilitate shared interest in solving problems thereby improving the livelihoods of poor people. Many developing countries that rely on donor funding are now implementing poverty eradication policies that align with this shift towards local empowerment (Ellis and Biggs, 2001). This is the premise guiding the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a current global framework for international development. In 2000, world leaders at the United Nations Millennium Assembly, through the Millennium Declaration committed to reduce extreme poverty, hunger, poor health, illiteracy, and environmental degradation in developing countries by the year 2015 (Haines and Cassels, 2004;

Sanchez *et al.*, 2007). The Millennium Declaration yielded what are now known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The (MDGs) are a set of eight goals focused on fostering development and eradicating poverty. The eight MDGs include: eradication of extreme poverty and hunger, achievement of universal primary education, promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, reduction of child mortality, improvement of maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, and development of a global partnership for development (Millennium Development Goals Report, 2015; Easterly, 2006, p. 9).

The Millennium Development Goals are a culmination of the policies and commitments for international development enacted in the 1990s and guided by the notion that development can be achieved through democratic governance, human rights, peace and security. They are based on time-bound measurable targets, and indicators designed to help monitor progress. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) is the agency charged with the responsibility of coordinating both global and local efforts. One of the main challenges in implementing the MDGs is addressing issues associated with national governance structures. Historically, international programs operated on the assumption of the existence of good governance structures, which have often been absent in the developing nations that have been recipients of bilateral and multilateral assistance (Hyden, 2007). The major reason the development community instituted the MDGs and the Millennium Villages approach was because of the poor national governing structures. The Millennium Villages approach provided development aid to communities at the village level directly instead of through national governments in an attempt to enable them to take ownership of their local development needs. The Millennium Project was premised on the concept of providing quick-impact investments in specific sectors of the economy namely agriculture, education, and infrastructure with the goal of lifting regions from the burdens of extreme poverty. The rationale was that investments could be easily applied, monitored, and adapted to local conditions. (Annual Report, 2008; Sachs, 2008).

The two main regions that are experiencing high levels of poverty are East Asia, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Of the three, Sub-Saharan Africa is the region whose development needs rise to crisis proportions. This can be attributed to the interaction between its history of colonialism, the cold war, slave trade, inefficient domestic policies, and the unwillingness of the rich western countries to invest in the long-term development of Africa (Sachs, 2005a; 2008). Since they are so poor, these communities cannot make the desired progress towards achieving the MDGs on their own unless they receive external support. This is the notion that led to the Millennium Villages approach (Sachs, 2005a). The Millennium Villages Promise (MVP) is a community-based development strategy designed to facilitate the attainment of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MVP investments are directed to the local communities in rural African villages with an emphasis on the key sectors of education, agriculture, health, and infrastructure. This is both a bottom-up and top down approach to community development

that seeks to empower rural communities to manage their local development needs sustainably, while harmonizing the activities of all actors involved in the MVP partnership from local, national, non-governmental, and donor agencies (Cabral, Farrington, and Ludi, 2006; Carr, 2008; Konecky and Palm, 2008).

Millennium Village Promise interventions are found in poor villages in Kenya, Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. These villages were selected based on criterion that reflects Africa's major twelve agro-ecological zones (Baseline Report, 2007; Kanter, Negin, Olayo, Bukachi, Johnson, and Sachs, 2009). The Sauri project began in 2004 and has expanded to include 10 additional neighboring villages representing a population of about 55,000 in Western Kenya (Annual Report, 2006; Baseline Report, 2007). A number of strategies have been implemented by the MVP in Sauri, Kenya to ensure community development efforts are successful and sustainable. Some of these strategies include institutionalized participation, strengthening the capacity for collective action, developing a community-based information system, gender equity, and a policy environment that supports a multi-level community development process (Annual Report, 2006; Konecky and Palm, 2008). To strengthen the community's capacity for collective action and localize the programs, the MVP uses resource utilization strategies, inclusiveness, conflict management, and the building of networks with local governments and NGOs. Participatory action is a major element for making the MVP development initiatives sustainable, which are tied to strengthening the capacities of local institutions for long-term participation (Konecky and Palm, 2008).

Community institutions are considered strategic institutional entry points to the communities because the local institutional landscape includes a variety of community-based organizations and traditional institutions that influence participatory development in the community. Local institutions (from the community, private sector, government, NGO) play a vital role in the identification of appropriate structures and mechanisms for service delivery within the villages. These institutions are vital to the life of development during and after the MVP investments expire in 2015. The MVP acts as the link between support agencies and local community structures/institutions that facilitate the development beyond the MVP investment (Konecky and Palm, 2008). Each sector utilizes specific institutional strategies from the individual, organizational, and system levels. Eight departmental or sector committees and village committees have been formed to facilitate the effective operations of the community. The sector sub-committees include finance, welfare, recruitment, gender, advisory, disciplinary, transport, and security (Annual Report, 2006; Konecky and Palm, 2008).

#### *The MVP - A New Approach or "Old Wine in New Bottle"?*

There have been contested explanations about what works or does not work with regards to the development interventions of the MDGs. These disputes focus on reducing poverty by half, the millennium development goals, and the MVP approach to development. They specifically challenge how the

MDGs differ from past failed rural development initiatives and effectiveness of increased foreign assistance. There are two prime schools of thought that have guided the discussions surrounding foreign aid in developing countries. Sachs (2005b), an economist, leads the mindset in favor of increased foreign assistance to developing countries while Easterly (2006), also an economist is against foreign assistance being used to fund development in the developing countries. In the *End of Poverty*, Sachs (2005b) argued that millions of people around the world were stuck in poverty traps especially in the developing countries. The poverty traps are as a result of persistent diseases (malaria/AIDS), extreme poverty, physical isolation, climate stress, environmental degradation, and lack of the financial capital to make crucial investments that could enable them to escape the manacles of extreme poverty. Ending poverty traps (Sachs 2005b; 2008) required a global network of cooperation and increased funding from the international community. Sachs (2005b; 2008) contended that past global cooperation had been used to bring about change around the world. Examples included the Green Revolution that was donor funded and provided high yields in Mexico and Asia. The World Health Organizations (WHO) is also cited as having relied on global cooperation to initiate successful campaigns that led to the eradication of smallpox in the 1950s, campaigned for child survival in the 1980s, eradication of polio in the 1980s, and other immunizations in the 1990s. These campaigns began at local levels and were scaled up to global levels with success. This is the kind of approach that Sachs envisions the international community can adapt to help poor countries meet the specific MDGs using the Millennium Villages approach (Sachs, 2005b; 2008).

On the other hand, Easterly (2006) argued that approaches taken by the international community are laced with utopianism and grand big-push plans that have failed to bring about change over the years. Whereas Sachs (2005b; 2008) sees the failed promises by the rich countries as being a result of an insufficient amount of foreign aid, Easterly (2006) argues that the prevailing economic conundrum in poor countries is a result of the foreign aid system itself. Addressing modern poverty issues should be guided by lessons from past failed efforts. Examples include UN Summits that were held in 1990 to ensure free primary education. When the international community failed to achieve this goal they held another summit and extended the goal to 2015 as part of the MDGs. There is no accountability for missed goals on the part of the international community. Similar big-push plans that triggered foreign aid in the 1950s and 1960s continue even now. Aid agencies can make progress by directing assistance to specific tasks instead of focusing on utopian plans where no one is accountable when they fail (Easterly, 2006). Whereas Sachs (2005b) views poor countries as being stuck in poverty traps, Easterly disagrees for lack of evidence supporting the existence of poverty traps. According to Easterly, poor countries became poor due to declining economic growth, not as a result of being stuck in poverty traps. Many countries that were recipients of foreign aid experienced decreased growth for the period they were under the aid programs such as Ivory Coast and Liberia. Easterly (2006) also believes that homegrown solutions should be promoted to help countries develop. He gives examples of locations like Chile, East Asia Tigers, and Botswana in Africa, which progressed with

minimal aid. Other scholars have also weighed in on the prevailing debate about what constitutes an effective policy because as Besley and Burgess contend, there is no “magic bullet” (2003, p. 20) as far as the MDGs are concerned. Carr (2008) is concerned about what a true bottom-up approach is given that the MVP uses preconceived problem definitions and solutions for use in the rural communities. Clemens, Kenny, and Moss (2004) are also apprehensive about the cost of the MDGs and the 2015 deadline arguing that foreign aid contributes only a limited proportion to development and so some of the targets of the MVP that are unrealistic facilitate perceptions of failure. In addition, programs are estimated to cost \$1.5M annually per village, which brings into question aspects of cost effectiveness (Clemens and Demobyne, 2010).

Cabral, Farrington, and Ludi, (2006) perceive the MVP to be similar to other development initiatives that have been used in the past and have not been able to sustain their rural development initiatives. Sauri had involvement with donor-funded programs for over 15 years before the MVP interventions began. Measuring the impact of the MVP initiative requires more indicators than are currently provided (Clemens and Demobyne, 2010). Scaling up community-based development interventions presents a challenge because the diverse socio-cultural inequalities of rural communities make it hard to mirror successful programs. Therefore, scaling has to be a slow gradual process that adapts to local conditions because best practices derived from other socio-cultural communities required sufficient time (Mansuri and Rao, 2004).

### **Kenya's History with Rural Development Programs**

Kenya's History with rural development programs reveals similar observations about viable strategies and potential conflicts with international agenda. Various national and international policy attempts have been made towards promoting equitable regional development within the broader realm of Kenya's national development. Each of these national strategies was designed to alleviate poverty and included some engagement of grassroots people and organizations at the community level. The Harambee Philosophy became a rural development strategy upon Kenya's independence in 1963 and was premised on indigenous forms of self-help (Thomas, 1987; Holmquist, 1984; Ngau, 1987). The District Focus for Rural Development (DFRD) policy was established in the 1980s to help facilitate rural development by decentralizing and shifting the development process from the central government (top-down) to the district level. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) was used in conjunction with national development plans to prioritize development in the 1990s (Ashley and Maxwell, 2001). A PSRP is a conditional document that the World Bank and International Monetary Fund initiated to provide debt relief to developing countries with a large debt burden, including those from Sub-Saharan Africa (Swallow, 2005). The Constituency Development Fund (CDF) was established in 2003 to oversee regional development efforts in poverty eradication by providing 2.5% of the total national revenue equally to each of the local parliamentary constituencies (Kimenyi, 2005). These examples illustrate that participatory, bottom-up or grassroots strategies development is not a new phenomenon in Kenya. They have had some success in addressing specific issues in

rural Kenya but have not had the kind national impact on reducing poverty that is desired.

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the MVP program on community networks in Sauri and consider how networks in the communities affect the sustainability of development efforts in the 11 communities in Sauri where the program is being implemented.

### Focus of the Research

The overall aim of this research project was to look at the relationships between exogenous and internal organizations in Sauri communities and explore how these relationships are impacting community networks. Therefore, the research aimed at exploring the extent to which the community networks contribute to accessing agricultural services

*Central Research Question.* What is the impact of the MVP on community networks and do these networks affect the implementation of the development efforts in the Sauri MVP communities? The following sub-questions were used to collect data from existing personal networks in the Sauri Millennium Village Program (MVP) communities:

- a. What are the existing personal networks in Sauri MVP communities?
- b. What are the connections between these personal networks and the (MVP)
- c. How have they changed since the inception of the MVP?

At the personal or individual level the aim was to determine the existing personal networks in Sauri MVP communities, the connections between personal networks and the MVP, and how have personal networks changed since the inception of the MVP. At the community level, the study focused on the connections among local and between local and extra local institutions, connections between local institutions and the MVP and whether these institutional connections changed since the inception of the MVP.

### Study Design

The primary methodology was qualitative and included 15 interviews with key informants in the agricultural sector. The study utilized a case study approach, which has been recommended for understanding society and culture based on the in-depth immersion that case studies involve (Creswell, 2007; Marshall and Rossman, 2011). The case study approach incorporates data collection methods such as interviews, observation, document analysis, and even surveys (Marshall and Rossman, 2011; Patton, 2002). According to Patton (2002), a case can be a person, group, program, or a community. The characteristics of this study that qualify it as a case study include the selection of Sauri as the MVP site, the 2015 deadline of achieving the MVP goals, and how the 11 communities interact with outsiders working on the MVP. The qualitative methods were therefore intended to contribute to

understanding the feelings, thoughts, values, assumptions, actions, and experiences of actors associated with the MVP interventions in agriculture.

### Data Collection Procedures

Data collection for this study was guided by the actor-oriented approach, which focuses on the interaction among the actors involved in a project or program (Long, 2001). Based on the concepts of the actor oriented approach, as well as the literature review elements, the two broad actor categories for this study are the local Sauri Millennium Village communities and the external actors drawn from the Government of Kenya, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and other agencies working at the MVP site. Qualitative interviews helped to examine the characteristics of participants such as attitudes, interests, feelings, concerns, values, and detailed accounts of living in communities that are part of the Millennium Village Promise programs the agriculture sector. The length of interviews ranged from 1-2 hours as recommended (Gay and Airasian, 2003). A translator worked with the researcher to conduct the interviews and help interpret in cases where language was a barrier. Key informants for this study were selected purposively. Purposeful sampling is the intentional selection of sites, actors, or individuals who can provide an in-depth picture about the problem and phenomenon being investigated. A purposeful sample is also recommended when the potential sample is too large as was the case with Sauri (Creswell, 2007; Marshall and Rossman, 2011).

Key informants were selected intentionally or purposively from the community because of the belief that they hold information that is of use to this study. These key informants were men, women, young people, or opinion leaders who live in the Sauri MVP communities. The intention for selecting them is because key informants are considered to be knowledgeable about the community and the MVP program being implemented in agriculture. Specifically, these were people who had been targets of the MVP program and have participated in some of the MVP sectors in agriculture as farmers or members of agricultural groups.

The key informants comprised six (6) female participants and nine (9) male participants ranging in age from 52 years to 86 years of age. Each was actively involved in agricultural production including involvement with MVP programs. Some participants held MVP committee or group leadership responsibilities. To delineate the networks in the agricultural sector within the MVP cluster, the researcher interviewed agricultural sector leaders, and farmers who were members of farmer cooperatives. Gatekeepers such as the local assistant chief, village elders, and sector leaders were used to identify key informants the Sauri community. Interview questions focused on membership in formal or informal groups, understanding the functions of the groups, exploring why they joined groups and detailing how groups were mobilized. In addition, the groups people used to solve conflicts and the number of times an individual attended group meetings were identified. An interview protocol consisting of 29 items was used in conjunction with structured questions that were closed and open ended.

## Data Analysis Procedures

According to Gay and Airasian (2003), qualitative data analysis begins with the initial interactions with the participants. Interviews were recorded, translated and transcribed for analysis. Gay and Airasian (2003) recommend the use of rich, thick, thorough descriptions to present the perspectives of participants in personal networks, the MVP setting, settings, and phenomenon being studied. This study relied on descriptions drawn from field notes, observations, and the interview transcriptions mentioned above. Data from interviews was classified into smaller units based on their importance. This procedure is called coding, and involves classifying data into categories of ideas or concepts formed when concepts are examined, compared, and connections made. Meanings were characterized according to the meanings/understandings that emerged from the data. Classifications were in response to the sub-questions on personal networks, connections with the Millennium Villages Program, and the impact of participating in the MVP programs on their lives. The common codes were combined into themes, which were organized around the research questions. By examining participation in community groups and related activities, it is possible to determine whether MVP activities are instrumental in building or preventing ties within the networks in the community or linking community groups with external resources. Personal attributes and community network characteristics were used to determine the extent to which they impacted the success of implementing community programs.

## FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of the Millennium Villages Promise program on community networks in Sauri and how networks in the communities affect the sustainability of development efforts in the 11 communities in Sauri where the program was being implemented in Western Kenya. The agriculture sector was selected because it is a sector that relied on personal networks to implement the MVP interventions in the communities. Most of the interventions in agriculture cut across sectors like education (school feeding program), water, health (protein-rich diets for AIDS care), and environment (promoting soil fertility management practices). Seven themes organized around the three research questions emerged from analysis of the interviews conducted with key informants from the agriculture sector. Two themes “perceived personal networks” and “collective action” helped us understand the existing personal networks in Sauri. Three themes, “group activity”, “leadership issues”, and “benefits/importance of the MVP” illustrate the relationships between personal networks and the Millennium Village Project. Two additional themes, “MVP weaknesses” and “transformations due to MVP” explore the changes that have resulted in personal networks since the beginning of the MVP.

### Existing personal networks in Sauri

This section identifies the aspects that relate to personal networking in the communities where the agriculture interventions are taking place. It is explained through the sub-themes of perceived personal networks and collective action in

the communities. According to the participants the main sources of personal networking were through community *barazas*, participation in development projects, and attendance at religious functions. Community *barazas* were the preferred avenues of networking in the community because the participants felt that these forums accorded members freedom of expression. *Barazas* are community meetings held in rural areas under the auspices of local chiefs, their assistants, and village elders. Apart from serving as forums for disseminating government of Kenya policies at the local level, they are popular with the local people as open forums for solving disputes in the communities. They were popular partly due to the mobilization ability and appeal of the village elders whom they had a role in their appointment and served as effective link between the government agencies and even the MVP. The participants also expressed satisfaction at the ability of village elders to influence their opinions on development matters in the community. Eleven participants preferred networking through agricultural development projects which had attracted many interest groups, agricultural trainings and sector meetings, which brought people together frequently. Every village had a village agricultural committee and sector facilitator who coordinated the programs. As one participant said:

*Yes they have helped [The community development committees and related initiatives] a great deal. Every village has a development committee per the eight MDGs which also facilitate dissemination of information. They host trainings in water, health, education, agriculture etc. Which bring people together quite often. [Agriculture] Sector facilitators organize their own meetings. Then there is a sub-location committee [for agriculture] has representatives from every village. (WOGU, a 52 year-old female farmer from Madiri).*

Five participants perceived religious organizations as other avenues for networking in the communities because most people had a religious affiliation of some kind. They viewed church organizations as being organized, transparent, and helpful to most needs in the communities. Church activities unified people through congregational activities. Twelve participants gave a description of the progression of collective action in the Sauri MVP. Initially most people were attracted into full participation based on promises made to improve agricultural production and the unique mobilization of the MVP team. Fish ponds, community interest groups, farmer cooperatives, and a cereal bank were some of the agricultural projects that attracted people into participation. However, all the participants expressed concern at the declining trend in collaboration on community programs which was attributed to the growing mistrust in the MVP over many programs that had not been implemented as promised. An example is the cereal bank project that the MVP sought to introduce to the community through the agricultural sector but failed to implement. Consequently, most residents appeared to have lost interest in collaborating as was manifested in low attendance at MVP meetings. Another participant explained:

*[There is] Not so much [participation in meetings] because there is a lot of mistrust among people. Currently, unity has waned because of failed promises. They took us to the cereals boards and showed us fertilizers that they said ‘belonged to*

us'. But not long after they were telling us to buy. This is how people started losing faith and trust in working together on MVP projects because it cast aspersions amongst community members about the trust and transparency issues. People thought they were not transparent in their dealings. (JOGO, a 68-year old male and also the agriculture sector leader, from Sauri A).

According to thirteen participants, additional constraints stemmed from the lack of trust in the outcomes, failed promises, lack of transparency with MVP resources among the leaders, and inaccessibility of the MVP team. Most of the people in the community expected to receive direct individual benefits in exchange for their participation while others cited their inability to raise the financial resources needed to access the needed agricultural projects. Here is what a participant said:

*It's average [not what you would expect] because the people are very sensitive, in case of any small mistake or mismanagement, people lose interest and willingness. When you start another [development project] one and get people, they will not come. For example the failed cereal bank project by the MVP is still fresh in people's minds. We contributed our shares of grain and money for membership and then in the end we didn't see anything, yet this was done through MVP. In future, if you come up with a similar thing, people will just look at you in consternation. (SOUJ, an 86 year-old male farmer from Kosoro)*

Four participants pointed out what they perceived to be selective administration by the MVP for participation in the programs. They described how the MVP local team had become inaccessible to the residents and how senior MVP staff like Jeffrey Sachs would visit their communities with armed policemen raising fear among the residents.

*Whenever Sanchez or Jeffrey Sachs comes, they are highly guarded [by local police] with limited access unlike in the first years when the MVP was being started. These days when Sachs comes he has a very high security team from the provincial administration so it is not easy to approach him as an ordinary citizen. So how do you do community development with policemen or the provincial administration? It is only the project managers who are given the opportunity to speak at such functions and in most cases they misrepresent the information. The more you make noise, the more you are regarded as a wayward. (ARAN, a 52-year old male farmer from Yala).*

#### *Relationships between personal networks and the Sauri Millennium Village Project*

This segment explains how these personal networks enhanced relationships to the MVP interventions in agriculture. The theme on group activity explored how agricultural groups have facilitated connections between the personal networks in the communities with agricultural interventions. Twelve participants discussed how group activity had increased in the communities since the MVP introduced agricultural interventions. The MVP preceded the implementation of agricultural interventions by asking the communities to

establish new groups, referred to as common interest groups (CIGS). Farmers had subsequently formed and joined CIGS such as tomato growers, beekeepers, fish farmers, or poultry keepers to pool their interests and access resources, information, and training needed for the new programs. These groups enhanced collective action in the community through networking with development agencies and community interest groups [CIGS] assisted in marketing agricultural produce.

There was a general consensus amongst all the participants about the possible differences between community groups that existed before the MVP and the new groups initiated by the MVP. The new agricultural groups were considered more popular, active, skilled, knowledgeable, diversified, and were connected to NGOs such as the MVP which facilitated access, capacity building sessions and development in the community. On the other hand, the old groups were considered to be more informal self-help or welfare-oriented and less organized for development purposes such as agriculture. The theme on leadership issues explores leadership aspects in the community, agricultural groups, and MVP and how they affected networking in the agricultural communities based on the mobilization role of the leaders. Leaders in the community played a major role in mobilizing the residents to participate in development programs. Nine participants felt that the local leaders were effective because they were popularly chosen, had a better comprehension of the community's needs, and provided better linkage with the village chiefs and development agencies. The local MVP team leaders and agriculture sector leaders were perceived as instrumental leaders because of their role in implementing the MVP interventions. This new aspect of community development leadership seemed to be favorable to the residents because it gave them the option of selecting their own leaders.

The theme on benefits and importance of the MVP interventions highlights how perceived MVP benefits affected personal network relationships with the MVP. The benefits are related to agricultural production, improved agricultural knowledge, and agricultural trainings in farming which the participants contended to have empowered them as a community. Ten participants acknowledged improved agricultural production through agricultural development committees, trainings, capacity building sessions, and the common interest groups in the agricultural sector. The agricultural trainings were instrumental in improving agricultural production in the community. The participants identified crop production, accessing agricultural resources, and the introduction of community interest groups as having been consistent with the trainings from the MVP. Another recurring observation among the participants was the acknowledgement that prior to the MVP agricultural interventions most people who engaged in agricultural production had very little specialized knowledge on how to approach the same. According to eleven participants, the MVP had enabled them to acquire specialized skills and knowledge in agricultural production and also enabled them to pursue other areas of interest including tissue cultured bananas, dairy farming, the use of farm inputs, and how to form common groups. Empowerment refers to aspects of the MVP interventions that were perceived to have empowered the

community through participation in the programs. Fourteen participants felt that participating in the MVP's interventions had empowered them to hold their leaders and institutions accountable for their actions and attributed this to the MVP training sessions which had supposedly sensitized them on their rights as farmers. This was also a unique observation among women participants who felt empowered to participate in the community's development activities, assume leadership positions, and contribute to economic development in Sauri. Even though women were active prior, their level or activity or recognition did not match that accorded to them by the MVP programs.

### Changes that have resulted in personal networks

There were also changes in personal networks that were attributed to the MVP and these are explained by two themes namely "MVP weaknesses" and "transformations due to MVP". The theme on perceived weaknesses of the MVP unfulfilled promises, wrong presentation of the social economic status, lack of transparency, duplicating programs, and monopolizing development in the community. All participants described that agricultural interventions were premised on the promise of a five-year supply of farm inputs to the farmers, which raised expectations of the MVP significantly. However, the promise only lasted a year and a microloan program was introduced in the second year. The withdrawal of inputs was considered too sudden and premature while the participants felt unprepared to adopt the new micro-loan program. A participant stated that:

*We were promised farm inputs for five years, but only given for two years. The rest of the years we were told to get loans. That is how people started losing trust in the MVP and working together on community projects. There are some people who took loans but did not have enough knowledge on repaying the loans and subsequently it is as if they 'ran away'; they no longer wish to come close to where people are gathered (for fear of retribution). This is one of the main issues that are discrediting the work of the MVP. (AYIE, a 61-year-old female farmer from Nyamninia A).*

The participants pointed out to the decreasing attendance at MVP meetings as an indicator and manifestation of declining collaboration in the community. According to the participants, the withdrawal of farm inputs left many participants unprepared to bear the financial cost of fertilizers and other inputs. Consequently, most farmers were reverting back to the old farming practices thereby raising the concern about the risk of food insecurity in the community that was there before the MVP interventions. Similar concerns were expressed about numerous training sessions provided to initiate cooperatives, cereals banks, dairy projects, and poultry projects, which never took off. The failure of cereal bank and cooperative projects had a major impact on participation in agricultural interventions as it affected the marketing of produce. Six participants expressed concern that the MVP had initiated too many projects, some of which were duplicates without the requisite resources needed to sustain them. The community lacked the time needed to attend the training sessions or implement the programs with limited space on their farms. Dairy farming and tissue cultures were examples of programs

that required time and large farm size to implement, inputs which most participants lacked. Transformations due to the MVP theme is a collection of general issues that emerged from the interviews and contributed to what was perceived to be changes due the MVP. The MVP was perceived to have caused transformations in the community's approach to development through information sources developed in the communities and the structure or leadership of meetings in the communities. The MVP initiated village development committees in every village to mobilize people and resources for the interventions. Villagers were required to attend committee meetings in order to access the resources needed for the projects although the frequency of meetings had become a burden to the residents. Participants noted that divergent opinions at these meetings often translated into long-standing feuds amongst the residents who also shared membership across the MVP sectors including health, education, water or infrastructure. Rather than unifying the residents, the participants felt that frequent meetings also served as division points in the community. Additionally, all the participants reported that the primary source of information had shifted to sector committees. Previously village elders were the principal mobilizers for *barazas* in the community, but currently village committee leaders seemed to have taken over. The introduction of sector leaders and meetings replaced community meetings as information sources. Another major observation was that the structure and frequency of community *barazas* had been diminished by MVP structures. The community *barazas* had become dysfunctional and the participants decried the loss of the *barazas* as open forums for interacting in the community. They attributed the loss of the *barazas* to the local chief and assistants for failing to perform their duties effectively and letting sector leaders and MVP groups replace community *barazas*.

*The public barazas have become dormant or a thing of the past [since the MVP meetings became more frequent]. You can take as long as six months without attending a baraza. The sector meetings have replaced them, and sector heads seem to have taken over. At the onset of the MVP in 2005, all these sector meetings and others used to be conducted during Chief's barazas every Thursday. That is where all matters for the MVP were discussed, every Thursday. But the sector meetings are held on a bi-weekly basis. They don't stay long without a sector meeting. (JOGO, a 68-year old male and the agriculture sector leader, from Sauri A).*

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study was guided by the actor-oriented approach (AOA) in data collection and analysis. Used in the context of the MVP programs, the AOA was intended to facilitate understanding of the processes by which particular social forms emerge, are consolidated, and reworked in the daily lives of people. The MVP program is replete with multiple heterogeneous practices whose interpretation results makes and remakes the lives of the actors involved. Similarly, the associated processes of the development projects lead to insights that are crucial to the processes that lead to construction and reconstruction of livelihoods that can be understood by looking at the relationships between the actors

involved. Therefore, the findings of this study yielded three essential lessons about the impact of the MVP interventions on networks in the community. These were a shift in the locus of control, the emergence of linking social capital, and network empowerment issues. In this study, changes in the locus of control are explained by changes that were found to have occurred among the personal networks in the communities where the interventions were being implemented. All the changes in community meeting structure, sources of information, and leadership issues that were identified by the research participants pointed to a shift in locus of control within personal and community networks. The development committees together with the respective sector leaders thus become part of the new locus of control in the communities. "Network empowerment is another crucial aspect that has impacted networking in the communities. The idea of working with community groups and village development committees seems to have empowered the community to take charge of development issues. Prior to the MVP's intervention, most groups were informal and focused on welfare matters. However, the MVP helped popularize groups by introducing community interest groups. The agricultural groups were found to have revitalized how the communities perceived groups and community development. Participation in community development groups could be further attributed to the improved level of collective action in the community. For long-term sustainability of the MVP programs, embracing such local institutions is paramount because they influence mobilization and membership to personal and community networks. As the study found out, local residents trust such institutions more than any other because they perceive them to be their own whereas other development agencies only serve the objectives of their programs. This is the case with the MVP. A look at the way the community was able to adopt the new approach to development further sustains the view that the programs were empowering to the community.

Linking social capital is an additional form of social capital along with bonding and bridging forms of social capital. Trust and cooperation between members with similar characteristics is known as bonding social capital while the relations that occur between groups with different characteristics is known as bridging social capital. A major facet of linking social capital is the enormous knowledge base that the community has acquired over the years. Using the networks, the community has been able to leverage resources, information, and ideas needed to improve standards of living in the community. Through increased group membership and participation in development functions, it can be argued that such involvement has improved social relations in the community. In the agriculture sector, improved relations contributed to increased participation, which led to improved agricultural production. The networks have enhanced relationship with other local government agencies in the community especially connections with the local leaders. Overall, while the findings of this study extend our knowledge on the millennium development goals and millennium villages phenomena and community networks, it is still clear that more detailed studies are still needed. The MVP programs in Sauri have been in existent for about ten years and so more rigorous studies are yet to be undertaken to determine meaningful trends and relationships within the communities.

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