

Indigenous Institutions, Community Organizational Development and Mobilizing Africa for Global Competitiveness.

By

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Abstract

In most of Africa, in spite of a modern national political organizational system, the majority of the people (in the rural areas) are still organized around their indigenous institutions for carrying out the activities that are important for their development and well being. In fact, civil society in rural Africa is embedded within their indigenous institutions and systems. These institutions are key to the organization of people at the rural level for their political and socio-economic development. These institutions have however been largely ignored by both colonial and post colonial governments in the development equation in Africa in favour of western-styled institutions.. In spite of all the good attributes that can be accorded western-styled institutions, they do not capture the worldviews and wellbeing aspirations of rural communities. This paper argues that western-styled institutions are exclusionary and leave out the bulk of Africa's human resources (indigenous institutions) in the development process. This situation is an important contributing factor to the demise of Africa's development. The paper seeks to demonstrate the existence and efficacy of indigenous institutions in Africa that could form the basis for organizing rural communities to lead Africa's development process. It places the value of indigenous institutions within the context of endogenous development and describes indigenous institutions in Ghana and their contributions to community development in Ghana. It concludes

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by giving some policy directions on an endogenous approach to development in Africa that is premised on mobilizing, revitalizing and re-valoring Africa's indigenous Institutions as the boon for engagement with the global village.

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Indigenous Institutions and Development in Africa

In targeting the rural poor the strategy in the past till present day of most development agents has been to organize rural communities into community based organisations, co-operatives and similar organisational structures based on western democracy criteria e.g. constitutions and elections. The formation of such organizations is usually facilitated by external development agents for the purpose of mobilizing people specifically for accessing resources for income generating activities, natural resources management and other group initiatives. The experience of cikod and other organizations is that such externally facilitated organization have been exclusionary of the real poor and marginalized in society (Isoba et al, 2005). This exclusion may occur through entry requirements into such formal organisations such as membership dues, dress code, educational standards etc. Moreover such organisations can be easily influenced and politicised (Guri, B, 2007). Such externally structured organisations are most likely to survive only as long as the external support is available and then disappear when this diminishes. From the field experience of cikod, there is sufficient empirical data that establish the efficacy of building on indigenous knowledge systems, existing indigenous institutions and social networks to organize the rural sector as an alternative organizational strategy for mainstreaming the participation of the poor and marginalized in development. Traditional structures and institutions remain the respected local authority and primary means through which rural people organise their livelihoods, however inequitable this may be. Engaging these institutions and structures therefore has the potential for community wide impact (Kendie and Guri, 2007).

This paper argues that in Africa, the success of development interventions such as the Millennium Development Goals rests to a large extent on the ability to organize civil society, particularly those in rural poor communities to be able to articulate and co-ordinate their voices so as to influence power holders so that decisions concerning resource allocation would reflect their interests. However, so far, efforts to organize civil society has not been successful in reaching down to the real poor and vulnerable because of poor understanding of how the poor organize themselves. From the work of CIKOD, we have come to the realization that Civil Society in rural Ghana may be categorized into two layers - the visible and the invisible layers.

The visible layer is that part where one finds the formal groups such as local NGOs, community based organizations CBOs, Farmer based organizations FBOs, credit unions, faith groups, different types of co-operatives, etc. An important characteristic of the organizations in the visible layer is that they are run by a small group of volunteers/employees, often well-educated and respected members of the community. Such formal organizations are often created in response to an externally initiated development intervention (eg European Union projects, Community Based Rural Development projects, Social Investment Fund Projects, Projects funded by various INGOs, etc) and are based on the neo-liberal assumptions of profit orientation as well as western democratic organizational models and planning processes. These may be classified as the visible CSOs and are the focus of development interventions by both government and NGOs.

The invisible layer is where one finds indigenous organizations and institutions that are embedded within the traditional or local structures. In the real rural Ghanaian context, organization for community development has been going on independently of external facilitation. This has been achieved through traditional leaders – *nannom*, *namine*, *magazia*, *tindanba*, *okomfo*, etc. and age old indigenous institutions - such as the *Asafo* companies, *nnoboa* farmers groups, *susu* groups traditional festivals, clan networks, indigenous development associations, etc., based on their own criteria and local knowledge and accepted practices. These serve as the rallying points for community organization and provide all-inclusive platforms through which the rural poor are able to initiate self-help activities and make demands for resources for development at the local level. Organization within this layer is guided by the

traditions, norms and values of the community such as *the belief in consensus, dialogue, inclusion, reciprocity, fairness and trust*. These facilitate cooperation for local self-help initiatives, which do not depend on external prompting and support. These institutions and practices are located within the worldviews of the local populations and go beyond human and material, to the spiritual dimensions of rural people. In the worldview of Ghanaians, spirituality and social status are considered equally as important for well being as economic or material gain (Hagan G: 2002). The bulk of the rural civil society is organized within this layer. The indigenous organizations within this layer are however not recognized by development agents because they do not conform to western democratic organizational criteria. This means that the bulk of the rural population who fall within this layer are not recognized as part of organized civil society and are therefore not sufficiently integrated into development initiatives. This layer we categorize as the invisible civil society.

Implications for global competitiveness of Africa

The strategy of working exclusively with the organizations in the visible layer means that the voices of rural Africa which are found in the invisible institutions are not heard. Advocacy on global issues are articulated only by the African elite or those that are captured by the western lenses, leaving out the majority from the invisible layer. Take the case of global issues like climate change, food security, agro-fuels, etc. Where do you find the voices fighting against them in Africa? Are they from the institutions of the rural poor? How representative are the so called modern Civil Society Organizations of the rural poor (usually with no western education)? Do their articulations reflect the development worldviews of rural Africa which is composed of the majority of the population?. Given this scenario, it should not be difficult to realise that under the current conventional development strategies, Africa can never attain the competitiveness that is required to be able to make its rightful contribution to its own development as well as global development. Mobilization of its human resource is still limited to the small educated population that is organized in the formal civil society organizations while the majority of the population found in the indigenous institutions (indigenous civil society?) is left out. Meanwhile being the majority, it is the people in these institutions that form the legitimate constituency of Africa. It is the people in these institutions that have the innovations that can address some of these global

development issues merely by their sustainable lifestyles, production methods and general positive attitudes to nature. This paper argues that for Africa to become competitive and contribute to global development, it will need to mobilize all its human resources found in both the visible and invisible layers of Africa's civil society. This means recognizing, revitalizing and working with people through their indigenous institutions from the perspective of their worldviews as well as from the more educated and visible population captured in the formal western-styled civil society organizations.

Endogenous Development as interface between development paradymms

Endogenous development (ED) is defined as development from within, based mainly though not exclusively on locally available resources, values, institutions and knowledge. ED involves revitalising ancestral and local ways of knowing and learning, and addressing their current relevance. ED as a development concept was developed by the COMPAS network, established 13 years ago to explore how endogenous development approaches, based on people's culture and worldviews, and intercultural dialogue and how this contribute to equitable and sustainable development. Endogenous development aims to empower local communities to take control of their own development process. External resources that best fit the local conditions are selected by the communities. It is a participatory approach which takes the material, social and spiritual wellbeing of peoples and their interactions into account. It allows for an intercultural dialogue (an interface) between different paradigms, between indigenous and rural people and their worldviews on the one hand, and the worldviews related to (western-styled) development proposals on the other hand. In addressing the organizational crisis in Africa as a result of the neglect of Africa's indigenous institutions and ways of organization, the concept of endogenous development become relevant. The argument for engaging the rural "un(western)educated" population is not that the western forms and criteria for organizing people should be dropped in favour of only the indigenous forms of organization of Africa. The argument is for creating an interface between people representing different paradigms. Hence for Africa to attain global competitiveness, the gaze should be to mobilize Africa's total human capital using both African and western lenses. This requires that development institutions develop the capacity for working with people from the perspectives of their indigenous institutions, ways of organizing and

worldviews as well as from the formal organizations using the western democratic criteria. This way, we will be mobilizing the total African human capital for global competitiveness. Interfacing the western and African modes of organization would not only mobilize Africa's total human capital but also the total knowledge base and innovations from Africa. Engel (2009) confirms the relevance of ED in current development challenges in the following statements:

- Development policies are at a crossroads between full neo-liberal 'Washington Consensus'² and a more balanced/adapted 'Post-Washington Consensus';
- The world has turned multi-polar; a diversity of approaches is carried by the diversity of global powers;
- The development agenda has widened; it needs to address many issues besides the MDGs;
- In view of 2015, the search for and awareness of new ways to make development more effective, particularly in Africa, has never been so great.

Operationalising the endogenous development approach for mobilizing Africa for global competitiveness

In Ghana, the core of CIKOD's work centers around facilitating the reclamation or revitalization and utilization of Africa's indigenous institutions, knowledge base and internal resources for the development of Africa and contributing to global development in general. The work of CIKOD is guided by the Ghanaian development philosophy of "Sankofa" which refers to the need to **go back to the past to retrieve all that was good and bring it into today's development process**. Since 2003, CIKOD has been researching and learning from elders to have an understanding of the existing indigenous institutions in Ghana and their relevance for

² The Washington Consensus is a term used to describe a set of specific economic policy prescriptions that he considered should constitute the "standard" reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries by Washington DC-based institutions such as World Bank and IMF.

development. From these studies, we categorize indigenous institutions in Ghana into the following categories:

Leadership institutions	Social security institutions	Social control institutions	Functional Indigenous Organizations	Indigenous platforms
Chief	Family/household	rituals and rites	Hunters	Festivals
Women leaders	Clan system	norms, values, beliefs, taboos -	Traditional medicine practitioners	taboo days,
Youth leaders	Mutual support systems	the dowry system	Mutual support groups	community durbars,
The earth priest	Praise singers , dancers	Shrines, sacred groves		funerals
Community guards				Local markets
Clan heads, heads of households				

Source: Author's own construct.

Based on our understanding of these institutions, CIKOD, through field experimentation with its associates and the communities they work in, developed the concept of Community Organizational Development (COD) as an approach for operationalizing the concept of ED for community mobilization for their self initiatives. Endogenous development here means 'development from within' and is at the core of the COD approach. Endogenous development seeks to enhance the community's own development process by working with community

members to integrate their own knowledge and local resources with appropriate outside know-how and resources (Milar and Hiemstra,). COD build's on the assumption that the community already has institutions, resources and a knowledge base on which it has survived for centuries. The COD approach therefore involves motivating communities to reclaim, revitalise and use their existing indigenous institutions, organizational structures and resources to initiate and lead their own development process. In the COD process, the culture, norms, values and worldviews of the community form an integral part of the process. In COD, instead of constructing new decision-making structures, the COD approach looks at existing cultural and power-sharing systems in the community and integrates the decision making process of the development intervention into them. COD has been conceptualized as a framework comprising five different methodologies that can either be implemented individually or complement each other as an overall development intervention. The methodologies aim at targeting the development of the community at different stages in the developmental process.

The ground principle of the COD process is that you as the facilitator should help the community do the analysis, reflection and diagnosis of their situation themselves – instead of you doing it for them. The five COD methodologies are described briefly below.

Community Institutional and Resource Mapping (CIRM)

CIRM is a process by which communities themselves map out their history and social structures as well as the different institutions, formal and indigenous that exist in the community and the inter relationships between them. The mapping includes the natural resources and cultural assets as well as social amenities in the community. CIRM is useful for both community entry and awareness creation on the asset base of the community.

Community Visioning and Programming (CVAP)

CVAP is a process that helps the community to define where it wants to go in terms of their development as a community and how to get there based on the assets available in the community. It's a process of visioning – what visions and developmental goals do we have for our community? And programming – how do we use our resources to reach our goal and make the vision come alive?

Community Organisational Self-Assessment (COSA)

COSA is a process by which communities self reflect and assess their own capacities to design and implement programmes to achieve the vision. Through this, communities are able to point out their capacity strengths and gaps and decide on what external support they might need to fill these gaps and where to find such support.

Community Institutional Strengthening (CIS)

Based on the outcome of the COSA, special interventions are designed with support from external collaborators to strengthen the capacities of the community groups and institutions so they can take charge of the community's development themselves. These may include training, coaching, exposure visits, material or funding support.

Learning, Sharing and Assessing (LeSA)

LeSA is a community peer review mechanism that enables communities with similar development agendas to learn from each others, share their own experiences and critically assess each others community programmes. This is done through mutual cross visits by two communities. During such visits, the visiting community representative are hosted by the community they are visiting. It includes documentation using appropriate methods – usually tape recording - and played back to the community through community radio where it is available.

The various COD methodologies should be seen as individual means of intervention, that is, they can be used individually for specific developmental purposes and at different stages in the community's development process. They can also be applied collectively as a systematic community intervention framework. It is important to note that the sequence is not fixed and alternative combinations of the various methodologies might prove beneficial.

The added value of COD

The COD framework has been developed based on CIKOD's work with rural communities in Ghana. This, however, does not mean that the use of the methodologies is restricted to work in Ghana. The COD framework will be useful on other continents, in urban settings and as well as in rural communities.

The purpose of COD is to build sustainable community organisations based on their existing indigenous institutions and organizational practices. COD seeks to give voice to rural communities through their existing institutions which are inclusive of the marginalized and thus empower them to participate in their own development and make local governmental agencies and NGO's responsive to their development needs. In other words COD sets the community members in the driving seat. It aims at building on the social cohesion, social capital and organisational structures that already exist in the community. Instead of setting up new institutions that are most likely to disappear after the development agency has left, using the COD framework will help the community strengthen the capacity of the indigenous organizations that already exist such as clans systems, households, *asafo* groups, local village development initiatives, women and youth peer or age groups, and others.

Practical Application of COD

In general, the of mission of CIKOD is to facilitate **the reclamation and revitalization of indigenous institutions in Africa for local and global development.**

In operationalizing this mission, CIKOD is engaged in the design and implementation of COD programmes at different levels. The main strategy is to work in partnership with local and international development organizations to mainstream indigenous institutions and their resources into their development interventions. For example, since 2005, CIKOD has been working in partnership with the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and the Houses of Chiefs to deepen Ghana's democratization process by advocating an active role for traditional authorities to

facilitate the mobilization of citizens in the invisible layer of civil society to participate in Ghana's decentralization process. CIKOD is also working in partnership with CARE International to engage indigenous institutions and their indigenous mechanisms in the management of care, stigma and prevention of HIV/AIDS in 36 communities in southern Ghana. Similarly, CIKOD is working with CARE to engage traditional authorities and formal forest sector institutions in the governance of Ghana's forest resources in southern Ghana. CIKOD is also partnering with Global Witness, an international transparency organization in the UK to engage communities in identifying information gaps in forest governance and to strengthen the capacities of Traditional institutions to lead their communities in engaging formal forest sector institutions in the governance of forest resources.

At the global level, CIKOD is a member of COMPAS International, a global network of NGOs and Universities that is promoting endogenous development. Indigenous knowledge, cultural sensitivity and respect for African spirituality are an important part of the criteria for the work of compass members. CIKOD, through compass and other like-minded African CSOs like the African Biodiversity Network, PELUM Association, etc, are actively facilitating the emergence of a Pan-African movement that will work with formal civil society organizations as well as African indigenous organizations that enable the mobilization of the total African voice to address global challenges such as climate change, food sovereignty and HIV/AIDS.

Conclusion

The central argument in this paper is that, for Africa to contribute effectively to its development as well as to the global development process, there is need to mobilize the total human resource base of Africa. This requires re-examining the vehicles through which people are organized for action. Currently this takes the form of formal organizational structures and institutions that fall

within western democratic principles such as constitutions, formal government recognition, democratically elected leadership, etc. this approach however leads to the exclusion of the majority of Africans who are still organized in indigenous structures that do not conform to these criteria and are therefore not recognized and mainstreamed into formal development initiatives. The paper proposes the adoption of the Endogenous Development approach which promotes an interface between indigenous and western organizational systems that lead to the mobilization of the total African constituency (with respect to western and indigenous worldviews) for both African and global development. CIKOD has developed Community Organizational Development as a set of methodologies that help development interveners to operationalize the ED approach for Africa's human resource mobilization.

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