

**DEFICITS OR ASSETS? PROBLEMS OR  
OPPORTUNITIES?  
AN ASSET-BASED APPROACH TO  
FACILITATING LOCALLY-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT  
INITIATIVES**

by

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## ABSTRACT

Critiques of past participatory development practices and attempts at trying to fix their many pitfalls have focused largely on methods. Yet practitioners have failed to engage in a more in-depth questioning of ideational standpoints or to consider development as an underlying process. Such an analysis would illustrate that these problems are largely systemic and lie in the ideological and institutional interests of the approaches and the organizations employing them. More in-depth and paradigmatic critiques would also show that current practices of participatory development are failing as a result of their focus on imminent development. Exploration of alternative and innovative approaches that may make up for the pitfalls of past approaches is necessary for a more in-depth notion of the necessary conditions and elements for more thoroughgoing participation and development that is authentically community-driven. An asset-based approach shifts from a conventional problems-focus to an asset-focus, mobilizes communities to recognize their own agency and capacities, and provides assistance in forming linkages to outside associations that may be utilized for a community's development efforts. These unique interests, ideology, and practices designate an asset-based approach as a plausible alternative that can compensate for the shortcomings of past approaches to participatory development.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| <b>ABCD</b>     | Asset-Based Community Development         |
| <b>AI</b>       | Appreciative Inquiry                      |
| <b>CBO</b>      | Community-Based Organization              |
| <b>CDD</b>      | Community-Driven Development              |
| <b>CED</b>      | Community Economic Development            |
| <b>DCBA</b>     | Deficit Community-Based Approach          |
| <b>HUNDEE</b>   | Oromo Grassroots Development Organization |
| <b>LG</b>       | Local Government                          |
| <b>PM&amp;E</b> | Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation   |
| <b>MDGs</b>     | Millennium Development Goals              |
| <b>NGO</b>      | Non-Government Organization               |
| <b>ODA</b>      | Overseas Development Assistance           |
| <b>PA</b>       | Participatory Approach                    |
| <b>PD</b>       | Participatory Development                 |
| <b>PLA</b>      | Participatory Learning and Action         |
| <b>PRA</b>      | Participatory Rural Appraisal             |
| <b>RRA</b>      | Rapid Research Appraisal                  |
| <b>SLA</b>      | Sustainable Livelihoods Approach          |

# 1: INTRODUCTION

## *1.1 Participation in Development*

Academia and the development industry abound with discussion and debate over the shortcomings of participation in development. Advocates of participatory development (PD) warn of the misuse and abuse of the concept within programmes, fearing an eventual hijacking of the term from its original form. The quest for a ‘best practice’, a way to bring about genuine, inclusive, locally driven development, is a seemingly constant one. Can development agents stimulate participatory development without driving the process and becoming extractive? Is there a theory and approach that can redress the shortcomings of conventional PD practices?

The critiques of past development practices have focused mainly on participatory rural appraisal (PRA) and other conventional, project- and problem-based approaches. These analyses have raised many important and key considerations for development practitioners whom seek to integrate participation within their practices. However, reflection of this nature focuses on the niceties of PD and attempts at trying to fix the many pitfalls have been largely methodological. Yet while methods may be part of the problem, practitioners have failed to consider their concerns with a more in-depth questioning of ideational standpoints and paying mind to underlying processes of development. Such an analysis would highlight the basis of the problems, which are largely systemic and lie in the ideological and institutional interests of the approaches and the organizations employing them. More in-depth and paradigmatic critiques would

illustrate that current practices of PD are failing as a result of their focus on imminent development.<sup>1</sup>

This common emphasis becomes evident in the following ways: participatory approaches (PAs) maintain a problem-focus which disempowers communities and prevents the realization of their agency and assets; there are more fundamental institutional problems, such as donor demands and hypocritical tendencies of organizations whom fail to match their practice with their participatory rhetoric; limited understandings of power or willingness to relocate power and thus; methodological individualism and a project focus rather than long-term goals that seek to link the micro issues to macro ones, thereby resulting in; directive, results-focused projects under the guise of participation.

Moreover, there has been inadequate consideration for alternative and innovative approaches that may make up for the pitfalls of past approaches.<sup>2</sup> The importance of this lies in developing a deeper understanding of the key components for a PA that successfully engages with locals and ensures their complete involvement within their own development, while remaining true to the ethos of PD. Indeed, in assessing and experimenting with new approaches, practitioners can gain a more in-depth notion of necessary conditions and elements for more thoroughgoing participation. A recent alternative approach, asset-based community development (ABCD), offers a new perspective. The ABCD paradigm focuses on assets, not deficiencies, and mobilizing

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<sup>1</sup> Hickey, S. and G. Mohan (2005). Relocating Participation within a Radical Politics of Development. *Development and Change* 36(2): 241.

<sup>2</sup> Hickey, S., and G. Mohan. (2004b). "Towards participation as transformation: critical themes and challenges." pp. 11-12 in S. Hickey and G. Mohan (Eds.) *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development*. ZED Books: New York/London.

communities to recognize their own agency and capacities. The approach places emphasis on helping communities to leverage support from outside institutions and associations, seeking to garner governmental interest in helping the community by creating an enabling policy environment, thereby enhancing the sustainability of development efforts. As such, we can define this approach not so much by its methods, as with other PAs, and instead by its lack of them; a key tenant of ABCD is stepping back from the outset to allow community members to propel their own development activities.

As current discussions are comprised of what and how questions that seek to come up with a new PA, development dialogue might better be served by questioning a more fundamental (read ideological) level of current participatory practices. It is this standpoint upon which the methods of a PA are based, and the initiatives' results might be explained. For development practitioners to mobilize communities and foster innovation and novelty, rather than introducing, implementing and driving initiatives, a paradigmatic and institutional shift is required at all levels of development thinking and practice.

## *1.2 Purpose and Objective*

This paper serves to understand the potential of an asset-based approach to make up for the shortcomings and deficiencies of traditional PD practices. Specifically, it will highlight and discuss the unique components of ABCD and their implications on the impacts of the approach in practice. These components – interests, ideology, and procedures – are what sets the approach apart from other designs, and indeed, underlie the ability of ABCD programs to generate community confidence, ownership, institutional support and thus authentic and sustainable locally-driven development.

Furthermore, in discussing the origins and approaches of ABCD and identifying its ideological and operational specificities, these can then be compared and contrasted with the general and commonly criticized aspects of conventional approaches to participatory development. As such, the concerns with both the theory and practice of populist, problem-focused participatory approaches (PAs) can be addressed while ABCD practice can be situated in the PD realm and its potential advantages as an approach identified. Together, this paper seeks to highlight new avenues for development practitioners, which can ensure participatory processes are authentically inclusive and contribute to individuals' ability to become active drivers of their own development.

### *1.3 Methods and Questions Guiding the Study*

Followed by a comprehensive review of the academic participatory development literature, a qualitative single-case case study will form the basis of this paper. Specifically, an ABCD program in Ilu Aga, Ethiopia, initiated by Oxfam Canada and the Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative (HUNDEE), will be analyzed. The analysis aims to identify the significant factors that influenced the outcomes and impacts of the program; namely, the components of the ABCD approach and their implications on the extent to which community members were involved in the process and the consequent program outcomes.

Through this analysis, the main research question can be answered - How is the ABCD theory and approach more suitable than past designs for bringing about genuine community-driven development (CDD)? The analysis will highlight the ideology, interests, and specific procedures of an ABCD approach as its unique factors that enable it to be a plausible alternative to compensate for the problems of past PD approaches.

Specifically, the approach shifts from a problem- and needs-based focus to one that emphasizes a community's inherent strengths and capacities, while resituating power and authority in the hands of locals. This ideology serves to empower communities to collectively mobilize their assets for mutual benefit. The approach's interests to engage with the underlying processes of development such as power and politics, to form linkages between a community and outside associations, and its conception of participation for empowerment and transformation illustrate its uniqueness from past project-based approaches. Finally, its rejection of a blanket approach and thus, its minimalist-natured procedures help to ensure context specificity and to avoid methodological hegemony. The integration of various theories and concepts that are at the forefront of PD discourse and practice highlights the comprehensiveness of the ABCD approach.

#### *1.4 Significance of the Research*

As research on development has indicated, there is high value in including communities within their own development programs; we have seen that in using participatory approaches to empower individuals to take control of their development, program efforts become more sustainable and thus, more effective and successful.<sup>3</sup> Yet the approaches and practices for achieving this transformative and empowering type of participation have failed to live up to their promises and consequently, attempts at bringing about a type of development that is fully community-led have not been successful. There is frequent reference within the academic literature on development to

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<sup>3</sup> See Abaza, H. and A. Baranzini. (2002); Absalom, E. et al. (1995); Altarelli, V. and G. Ashford. (2001); Chambers, R. (2004); Foster, M. and A. Mathie. (2001); Fowler, A. (2000); Mansuri, G. and V. Rao. (2004); White, S. C. (1996).

these problems and deficiencies of PD approaches, yet the criticisms most often end here; concerns and solutions predominantly focus on methodological revisions of current approaches instead of paying mind to alternative approaches that emphasize more fundamental and paradigmatic shifts.

While methods may be part of the problem of populist PD approaches, problems may also stem from the ideological foundations of PAs. This suggests the need for examination of conventional and alternative PAs along these lines. Through looking at the interests, conceptions, ideologies and practices of PD approaches and the way that this affects the type of program that is employed, we are better able not only to analyze problems, but also to identify the unique components that contribute to positive outcomes. Indeed, further discussion of approaches to participation in development will contribute to our learning and understanding of more sound ways of engaging with indigenous knowledge for stimulating authentic community-led development. Moreover, this case study analysis will enable a deeper understanding of practical approaches to CDD to increase the likelihood of sustainable CDD efforts. Surely too will the findings help to enrich our ideas of potential ways to bring about development initiatives that genuinely relate to community priorities and insights and that enhance their agency to propel their own development.

### *1.5 Thesis Elements and Organization*

This paper concentrates on both the theory and practice of participatory development. A comprehensive review of the academic literature on development in Chapter Two begins the discussion. Here, the evolution of participation in development is traced to show the motivating factors that influenced the valuing of participatory

practice. This will illustrate the fundamental philosophies of participation and the objectives of its advocates in integrating it within development, in an effort to understand why it was initially considered important. The influence of these ideas in practice is then outlined through consideration of the original PD approaches (referred to as project-based or populist PAs). The major theoretical and fundamental bases of these practices and their main shortcomings and pitfalls are identified. From here, an outline of the shift to new, alternative approaches and the impetuses to these is provided, illustrating the changing concerns with PD – a move from methodological criticisms to ones concerned more with the theoretical and ideational foundations of PD practices. Again, the underlying theories and philosophies of these PAs are distinguished to show their main points of divergence from populist PAs. Specifically, the ABCD theory and approach will be considered as a valuable way forward.

The methodological foundations of the paper are outlined in Chapter Three; research methods are explained, the chosen case of Ilu Aga, Ethiopia is justified, and limitations are discussed and confronted. The case study of the ABCD approach in Chapter Four will be the focal point of the paper, seeking to understand if the approach may be able to make up for the shortcomings and deficiencies of other needs-based methods, including bridging the gap between rhetoric and practice. After an outline of this program, Chapter Five will then assess the impacts of the approach in terms of ensuring inclusivity and absolute participation, as well as transformatory empowerment. These findings are then discussed and the value of the ABCD approach with regard to its ideology, interests and procedures, for generating sustainable development that is fully driven by communities themselves is highlighted. The case study will show that the

ABCD approach is in fact a plausible alternative for bridging the rhetoric-practice gap and can do so through its theory and methods, which recognize the unique and often unrealized assets of communities. As such, ABCD practices mobilize, revitalize, and develop community assets, thereby strengthening the capacities of community associations to lead their own development. The paper will conclude in Chapter Six by discussing unresolved issues and potential ways forward in PD discourse and practice.

## 2: PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPMENT – ITS EVOLUTION

In order to assess the value of new PAs, it is necessary to understand the need and desire for such alternatives. We must first understand what participation is; indeed, there are many differing conceptions of participation and what it means for development, as well as varied understandings of those to whom PD initiatives are directed. A development agency's, as well as individual practitioners' understandings of participation surely will affect its interests, objectives, and methods for employing a PA and thus, the degree to which its development efforts include the genuine participation of communities. Through identifying the major conceptions of PD, discussion of the various PAs is more viable; understanding the ideologies and methods of conventional, project-based practices that have been employed from the inception of participation in development is key for highlighting the foundations of critiques. Consequently, the impetuses for innovative revisions to PAs are evident, and shifts in thinking can be discussed.

This chapter begins with Section 2.1 by discussing the differing understandings of participation. Section 2.2 then traces the evolution of participation in development. It will show the motivating forces to include participatory elements within development practice and also highlights the influence of the participatory philosophies and objectives within the application of PAs. Finally, Section 2.3 will discuss their major shortcomings and deficiencies and thus, the impetuses to shifts in thinking and alternative approaches.

## 2.1 *What is participation?*

Upon entering the development world in the 1980s, the concept of participation quickly became practitioners' buzzword and as the practice spread, it was soon a required component for donors' funding of development efforts. Yet as each participatory programme unfolded differently, one question remained – what is participation? Indeed, while the development literature lacks an ultimate definition of participation, the term most often refers to the utilization of 'popular agency'.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, participatory development (PD) (herein referred interchangeably with community-driven development) continues to be interpreted in a variety of ways. These differing conceptions, ideals and values are thus present not just in the literature and consequently in practice. As organizations profess their commitment to participatory approaches to development, the differing conceptions and thus strategies of PD cause the practice to remain inconsistent. Moreover, understandings of development vary within organizations themselves, illustrating even deeper divisions in the theory and ideology of participation.<sup>5</sup>

What *is* clear, however, is that the meaning attached to the term is heavily influenced by the stakeholders whom employ it. While this varies widely, understandings of participation tend to be broad or narrow in scope. For some, the objectives and goals of participatory efforts are intangible, seeking to alter local power relations through empowering individuals to take control of their lives and choose the

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<sup>4</sup> Hickey, S., and G. Mohan. (2004b). "Towards participation as transformation: critical themes and challenges." In S. Hickey and G. Mohan (Eds.) *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development* (pp. 3) London: ZED Books.

<sup>5</sup> Nelson, N., and S. Wright (Eds.). (1995). *Power and Participation: Theory and Practice*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 7.

direction of their future.<sup>6</sup> More radically, this philosophical view “even redefin[es] the term ‘development’ itself.”<sup>7</sup> By contrast, others understand participation as a means to a predetermined end, for example, to obtain information for planning future efforts. From this instrumentalist view, participation is simply a responsive, cost-effective, and efficient tool to be utilized for meeting project goals.

In addition, there are varying conceptions of the communities and individuals whom PD programmes seek to include. As Nelson and Wright explain, locals are viewed either “as a presence, as objects of a theoretical process of economic and political transformation; as expected ‘beneficiaries’ of programmes with pre-set parameters; as contributors of casual labour to help a project achieve its ends; as politically co-opted legitimizers of a policy; or as people trying to determine their own choices and direction independent of the state.”<sup>8</sup> These conceptions thus reflect and are influenced by the initial understanding of participation.

It is the former understanding – a philosophical, political, and broad concept of participation – that will form the foundation of this paper. Participation goes beyond mere involvement. It has to do with decision-making, control, and leading of the process, while acknowledging the inherent capacities and agency of communities and their members. Locals should not be directed, nor should they be merely consulted. Rather, such stakeholders have a right to be directly involved in initiating, steering and managing

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<sup>6</sup> Moser, C. (1989) “Gender planning in the Third World: meeting practical and strategic gender needs.” *World Development* 17(11): 1815.

<sup>7</sup> Adato, M., J. Hoddinott, and L. J. Haddad. (2005). *Power, Politics, and Performance: Community Participation in South African Public Works Programs*. Research Report 143. Washington, D.C.: International Food Policy Research Institute, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Nelson, N., and S. Wright (Eds.). (1995): 6.

development initiatives that will undoubtedly affect their lives. Various scholars<sup>9</sup> encourage such distinction between participation and involvement, defining participatory approaches as inclusive processes that realize an individual's right to control the decisions that affect one's life and livelihood. This conception of PD is expanding past development literature and increasingly becoming more visible within practice.

## 2.2 *Origins of participatory ideologies*

Participation has become the new development orthodoxy, but where did it come from, what does it involve, and what does it promise? Since the mid-1990s, development agencies and their projects have included some element of participation, while simultaneously, demand for participatory development manuals and training have rapidly increased. As a result of this mainstreaming, participatory approaches moved past the community level to become a principle and theory that larger development projects were founded upon; scaled up, participation was emphasized in large-scale plans, practices and initiatives of agencies such as international NGOs (INGOs) and national governments, amongst other development giants.

It is this period that is most referred to when addressing the history of participation in relation to development, however, to adequately recognize the range and variety of participatory approaches, attention must be paid to its much earlier presence.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, elements of participation existed, albeit opportunistically, within colonialist development projects. While the theory and practice of participation has no doubt varied throughout its history in development, its historical presence within development

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<sup>9</sup> See Arnstein, S. R. (1969); Pretty, J. N., et al. (1995); Robinson, L. W. (2002); Stewart, J. M. P. and A. J. Sinclair (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Hickey, S., and G. Mohan. (2004b): 5

thinking is important for debates concerning alternative approaches. Moreover, tracing this presence will highlight the rationale(s) for participation as a feature of contemporary development practice.

Elements of participation within development efforts can be traced back to the 1940s and 1950s during which strong colonial efforts were made to control rural communities; many colonial African countries and their populations were viewed as having “inherent incapacities”,<sup>11</sup> and thus, unable to lead their own development. During this time, projects sought to generate stable rural populations to offset urbanization and radical political movements and changes.<sup>12</sup> Participation was considered essential to this process as a cost-sharing mechanism, and thus, was an obligation of citizenship.<sup>13</sup> As such, inclusion of individuals was coerced and tyrannical. Responses to this approach to development emerged in movements of the 1960s, particularly with Gandhi’s calls for decentralization, self-reliance, and the construction of cooperative communities. Gandhi emphasized that the state should simply play a facilitative role in development and drew attention to the value of indigenous populations’ capacities for village-centered development.<sup>14</sup> These ideas were paramount and such revolutionary ideas sparked a new thinking of participation in relation to development.

Yet development thinking and theory still included pessimistic assumptions of the possibilities of indigenous-led development and collective action, thereby reinforcing the practice of centralized state control and regulation. Many theorists warned of the naïveté

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<sup>11</sup> Mohan, G. (2007). “Participatory development: from epistemological reversals to active citizenship.” *Geography Compass* 1(4): 786.

<sup>12</sup> Hickey, S., and G. Mohan. (2004b): 6.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Gandhi, M. K. (1962). *Village Swaraj*. Ahmedabad: Navjivan Press.

in thinking that rational, self-interested individuals will act as such within a group. In *The Logic of Collective Action*, Olson refutes the idea that groups will work together in support of collective interests. According to Olson, large groups are unlikely to voluntarily work together toward a common good, for as group size increases, the benefits for each individual member decrease; the cost of collective action thus tends to outweigh the benefits.<sup>15</sup> With this tendency, collective action is unlikely “unless there is coercion to force them to do so, or unless some separate incentive, distinct from the achievement of the common or group interest, is offered”.<sup>16</sup> Equally as skeptical, property rights theorists such as Demsetz (1970) and North (1990) were concerned about the practicality of participation in development and ideas of decentralization. Both noted that private provision of public goods faced danger of the overexploitation of resources, a possibility that could best be controlled through state regulation.<sup>17</sup> Yet while the influence of the cooperative, Gandhi inspired movements faded with the re-emergence of pessimistic ideas and problems-focused concerns, they did not disappear and later resurrected.

The state-led economic and material development throughout the 1960s and 1970s quickly came under scrutiny after failing to perform as expected.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, small experiments with farmer systems research in the 1970s highlighted the benefits of farmers’ involvement in projects and provided additional empirical support of

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<sup>15</sup> Olson, M. Jr. (1971). *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and The Theory of Groups*. (New York: Schocken Books), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>17</sup> Mansuri, G., and V. Rao. (2004). “Community-Based and –Driven Development: A Critical Review.” *Policy Research Working Paper No. 3209*. Washington: The World Bank, 4.

<sup>18</sup> Some efforts, such as Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), even resulted in development ‘reversals’, raising concern amongst development practitioners and within their dialogue of this project-based and interventionist style of development.

the advocacies of participatory development proponents such as Robert Chambers.<sup>19</sup> By the early 1980s, Chambers' promotion of participatory development – in which he encouraged the inclusion of locals and others hitherto excluded from development projects, along with a more minimal, facilitative role for practitioners – was becoming widely recognized. It was around this time that Hirschman returned to his exit-voice dichotomy of *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1970) and applied it to participatory democracy. He explained that voice – the ability to express one's complaint, grievance, or proposal for change – is essential as it allows citizens to share their intimate knowledge of local conditions. In doing so, individuals verbalize their needs and optimal project targets to implementers (thereby avoiding the utilization of the exit – withdrawal from the relationship – option). Hirschman's ideas were considered by others as indicative of the potential of collective agency to improve one's well-being.<sup>20</sup>

Likewise, empowerment of the poor was strongly emphasized by Sen, who critiqued the use of an increase in wealth and material well-being as a proxy for development, as development projects did at that time. According to Sen, development also entailed building capabilities of the poor, a practice that would help such individuals to become empowered.<sup>21</sup> The failure of development practice of the 1960s and 1970s to encourage locals to learn how to develop their communities was a common critique, and Sen's arguments were supported and echoed by many others (Escobar, 1995; Scott, 1998).

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<sup>19</sup> Chambers, R. (1994c). Participatory rural appraisal: challenges, potentials and paradigm. *World Development* 22(9): 1437.

<sup>20</sup> Mansuri, G. & V. Rao. (2004): 5.

<sup>21</sup> Sen, A. K. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. New York: Knopf, 18.

It was these insights that contributed to the realization that the traditional normative practices of development were no longer plausible, and thus, reappraisal of development practices transpired. This led to the eventual adoption and incorporation of participatory ideologies within donor agencies, and the search for an alternative approach to development that offered a more sustainable method to development. Furthermore, the widespread criticism regarding the top-heavy nature of development provoked donor agencies to engage in a holistic effort to mobilize and empower program participants and to encourage their participation.<sup>22</sup>

The participatory development debates and dialogue quickly became paramount in changing not only ideologies, but practices too. Major shifts in development thinking occurred again, with realization that programs of the past were failing largely due to the fact that the beneficiaries were left out.<sup>23</sup> Emphasis was placed on decentralization and participation, and practices slowly started to incorporate a focus on the value of people. Ideas that emphasized the value of indigenous knowledge re-emerged, with suggestions that development practitioners lacked sufficient understanding of the realities on the ground and thus, a way to learn more about rural life was necessary. In addition to developing a better understanding of the conditions of communities, a method was sought to offset the problems of traditional development methods (i.e. non-inclusion of marginalized people, a focus on projects, and gender biases), deficiencies of quantitative research methods (i.e. tedious surveys and questionnaires that produce unreliable data),

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<sup>22</sup> Mansuri, G. & V. Rao. (2004): 5.

<sup>23</sup> Nelson, N., and S. Wright (Eds.) (1995): 3.

and a desire to find an efficient and economical research method.<sup>24</sup> To account for these issues, a new approach, Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA), was introduced. Proponents of the approach placed value on local knowledge for two reasons: participation in a project would provide more insightful and reliable information that may not otherwise be available through traditional research methods; and, including local perspectives was a more cost-effective and timely method of research.<sup>25</sup> When employed, RRA worked in combination with traditional methods such as surveys, aiding practitioners in satisfying the donor-imposed demand for quantitative data while gaining deeper insight into projects. Yet although RRA methods included local insights within research, it was criticized for doing so in an extractive manner, using the information gathered to teach outsiders rather than benefit the communities from which it was gathered.<sup>26</sup>

Despite this shortfall, the in-field experiences from RRA were instrumental in creating a lasting change in the perspectives of development agents; practitioners were challenged, working in multidisciplinary teams and seeing first hand what rural conditions were like.<sup>27</sup> While RRA was initially employed to efficiently obtain useful, hard to reach information, it had a lasting affect on agents' perceptions of the poor, and quickly led to the addition of a participatory element to the method in the mid-1980s. Proponents whom advocated for participatory RRA (PRRA) sought an approach that empowered the poor and provided them with avenues to contribute to development decision-making. Robert Chambers was a leader in this movement and suggested that

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<sup>24</sup> Chambers, R. (1994a). "The Origins and Practice of Participatory Rural Appraisal." *World Development* 22 (7): 956.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Chambers, R. (1994c). "Participatory rural appraisal: challenges, potentials and paradigm." *World Development* 22(9): 1437

<sup>27</sup> Chambers, R. (1997). Quoted in Cornwall, A. and I. Guijt. (2004): 161.

under such circumstances, donor organization personnel should remain as external agents, present within projects to simply facilitate projects and assist with funding. The benefits of this type of approach were confirmed through project evaluations and studies, which revealed the links between grassroots participation and project sustainability, and the increased likelihood of financial returns within the targeted communities.<sup>28</sup>

The theory of PRRA spread rapidly, and filled development literature and agencies' practice. Practitioners attended training sessions, manuals were created, and periodicals, namely the International Institute for Environment and Development's (IIED) *RRA Notes*, were established for agents to share their experiences and learn from others'.<sup>29</sup> A more precise definition of participatory development started to emerge, identified in a 1991 OECD report as "strategies which 'combine effective economic policies, equitable access to basic social and economic services and broad popular participation in programmes."<sup>30</sup> By the late-1980s, most bilateral development agencies had incorporated an element of participation into their programs and policies, and PRRA initiatives were soon launched in India and Kenya. With this shift, an alternative name for PRRA was introduced – participatory rural appraisal (PRA) – confirming a shift from "reductionism, linear thinking, and standard solutions to inclusive holism, open systems thinking and diverse options and actions."<sup>31</sup>

The experiences in India and Kenya illustrated the potential for community members to undertake their own development initiatives and as a result, sparked more

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<sup>28</sup> World Bank, The. (1994): 193.

<sup>29</sup> Chambers, R. (1994a): 957.

<sup>30</sup> OECD Development Assistance Committee Chairman's Report. (1991). Quoted in Nelson, N. and S. Wright. (1995): 4.

<sup>31</sup> Chambers, R. (1994c): 1450.

interest and demand for training in PRA for NGOs, bi- and multi-lateral development agencies, and governments alike.<sup>32</sup> The new method spread rapidly between development agents in the South and later to the North. Southern NGO facilitators travelled to other countries to conduct training workshops, and were sharing experiences and assisting with training to Northern NGOs by the mid-1990s.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, donor agencies in the developed nations, namely the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, were beginning to change their focus to include participatory approaches within their initiatives. The Bank confirmed its commitment to participatory development in the Learning Group on Participatory Development Report (1994), within which borrowers were encouraged to involve all stakeholders – the poor, marginalized, and all else hitherto excluded from development processes – in all stages of a project.<sup>34</sup>

New practices such as Sector Wide Approaches (SWAPs), Comprehensive Development Programs (CDPs) and Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) were introduced in reflection of the problems of past efforts and the new successes of PRA in the South. These initiatives incorporated key elements such as long-term horizons, donor-recipient partnerships, technical assistance, government ownership, and a participatory element. Additionally, alternative PD projects such as farmer agricultural research, and participatory local resource management included the end-users in a new and more comprehensive way – locals identified their own needs, designed and implemented programmes accordingly, and continued to manage and monitor them after

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<sup>32</sup> Chambers, R. (1994a): 957.

<sup>33</sup> Chambers, R. (1994c): 1439.

<sup>34</sup> Nelson, N., and S. Wright (Eds.). (1995): 5.

execution.<sup>35</sup> This type of involvement was considered valuable based on its contribution to building future development programmes; end-user feedback equips development organizations with direction for creating responsive projects.<sup>36</sup> Soon, participation was a condition upon which donors based funding.

### 2.3 *Changing motives and shifts in thinking*

As PD continued to spread, donor agencies, INGOs, NGOs, governments, and parastatal organizations sought to scale-up PRA, implementing it on nation-wide, large-scale levels. Yet this rush led to the use of PD approaches in very diverse ways, putting the quality of such initiatives in jeopardy and causing concern amongst those who advocated for participation in development throughout the previous decades. It became difficult to understand exactly what participation was and just as RRA had been criticized, questions of the authenticity of PRA practices were raised.

Donors were accused of being hypocritical as their incorporation of PD into programs was only insofar as it fit with their interests and concerns. Priority was placed on the methods rather than the philosophy of PRA, and the practice was increasingly becoming a trend. Moreover, while multi-lateral agencies had encouraged and often required their funded projects to have a participatory base, many of them continued to show signs of a centralized organizational culture that engaged in top-down practices. World Bank projects, for example, continued to include characteristics of SAPs, and 80%

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<sup>35</sup> Chambers, R. (1995): 36.

<sup>36</sup> Capeling-Alakija, S., C. Lopes, A. Benbouali, and D. Diallo. (Eds.). (1997). *Who are the question-makers? A participatory evaluation handbook*. OESP Handbook Series. New York: Office of Evaluation and Strategic Planning, United Nations Development Programme. <http://www.undp.org/eo/documents/who.htm>.

of the organization's staff remained based in Washington, missing out on the highly acclaimed field experiences that were considered critical to changing staff perspectives of the poor.<sup>37</sup>

PD proponents discussed their concerns of this scaling-up in the 1995 issue of PLA Notes (previously RRA Notes), explaining that development practices were at a turning point as some agencies encouraged the diversification of PRA practice at the risk of compromising quality.<sup>38</sup> In this reflection, Absalom et al. outlined ways in which these problems could be remedied, stressing the importance of “personal behaviour and attitudes, role reversals, facilitating participation through group processes and visualisation, critical self-awareness embracing error, and sharing without boundaries.”<sup>39</sup> While the group suggested that PRA still held potential to enable local people, other advocates such as Mosse were less confident in the approach, arguing that the dangers of poor practice were a symptom of the inadequacies of the method as whole.<sup>40</sup> It was argued that PRA was failing to empower beneficiaries in the way that was originally intended.

Cowen and Shenton, like Mosse, criticized PRA as an approach, as well as the common conception of development within the industry. At the time, they argued, there was a clear divide in how practitioners conceived development. The most common focus was on imminent development, “led by a belief in the ‘makeability’ of society,” discovering solutions that focus on problems of poverty and exclusion of marginalized

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<sup>37</sup> Nelson, N., and S. Wright (Eds.). (1995): 5.

<sup>38</sup> Absalom, E. et al. (1995). “Sharing our concerns and looking to the future.” *PLA Notes* 22: 1.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Mosse, D. (1994). “Authority, gender and knowledge: theoretical reflections on the practice of participatory rural appraisal.” *Development and Change* 25(3).

populations, and approaching development by way of specific interventions.<sup>41</sup> Authors such as Kapoor and Ferguson also recognized this split, deeming imminent conceptions to be “inductive and empiricist,”<sup>42</sup> turning development into a “technocratic process to be administered and planned for by agents of development rather than negotiated with and contested by its subjects.”<sup>43</sup> Instead, these critics encouraged practitioners to view development as a process of social change. Immanent development conceptions are “metaphysical and theoretical,”<sup>44</sup> and “[engage] with the underlying forces of socioeconomic and political change that shape people’s livelihoods.”<sup>45</sup>

The various debates regarding conceptions of, and thus approaches to, development encouraged widespread reassessment of theory. Today, methods have begun to experiment with other ways of engaging the poor and marginalized, using practices such as participatory theatre and video, participatory action research (PAR) and participatory monitoring and evaluation (PM&E). Still, these approaches face problems of sustainability – while these income-generating programs help to drive communities’ development, they do little in the way of enhancing local capabilities, a necessary aspect of a project to ensure its maintenance upon donor withdrawal. This issue illustrates the importance of an “out-of-the-box thinking” that is difficult to do within the limits of PRA. Cornwall and Guijt explain that this type of shift is “more than simply group-based

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<sup>41</sup> Cowen and Shenton, *Doctrines of Development*, Quoted in Hickey, S. and G. Mohan. (2004b), p.10.

<sup>42</sup> Kapoor, I. (2002). “The devil’s in the theory: a critical assessment of Robert Chambers’ work on participatory development.” *Third World Quarterly* 23(1).

<sup>43</sup> Ferguson, J. (1994). *The Anti-Politics Machine: ‘Development’, Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press. Quoted in Hickey, S. and G. Mohan. (2004b).

<sup>44</sup> Kapoor, I. (2002).

<sup>45</sup> Ferguson, J. (1994).

learning, but rather bringing together a range of unlikely comrades in multi-stakeholder processes of joint fact-finding, negotiation, planning, reassessing, and refocusing.”<sup>46</sup>

Some practitioners see the solution in an approach that focuses on assets (social, physical, natural, and human) and strengths, placing emphasis on building community assets and helping the people to recognize these capabilities in themselves. NGOs such as MYRADA in India, Khanya in South Africa, and Oxfam in Ethiopia have integrated an asset-focus into their CDD programs through the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) approach.<sup>47</sup> Through a similar method, the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), this new focus has also been integrated into the programs of large donor organizations such as the UK Department for International Development.<sup>48</sup> With emphasis on discovering individual and community strengths, and understanding local vulnerabilities and the institutions, organizations, policies and legislation that influence them, asset-based approaches are considered to have large potential to generate true community-led development. These methods seek to empower individuals, emphasize complete inclusiveness, and enhance local capacities and confidence to drive their own development. Advocates believe that it is through this manner that genuine participation can be realized and project sustainability ensured.

In what is arguably the most comprehensive compilation of PD critiques, contributors to Cooke and Kothari’s *Participation: The New Tyranny?* have suggested that these past PAs, namely PRA, have failed to uphold their commitments to community

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<sup>46</sup> Cornwall, A. and I. Guijt. (2004): 165.

<sup>47</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002). “From Clients to Citizens: Asset-Based Community Development As a Strategy for Community-Driven Development.” Occasional Paper Series, No. 4. Coady International Institute: Angionish, p. 477.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

empowerment and transformation. The authors argued that by ignoring power dynamics and political relationships and structures within communities, these approaches have “depoliticize[d] what should be an explicitly political process.”<sup>49</sup> The ideas of the political dimensions of participation raised within the *Tyranny* works were elaborated and emphasized in Hickey and Mohan’s *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation?*. This response became a critique of critiques and raised concern of the over-emphasis of the methodological problems of approaches such as PRA. Hickey and Mohan argued that this concentration has “reduce[d] ‘participation’ to one particularly visible and mainstreamed variant”<sup>50</sup>, and consequently ignores the possibility of alternative approaches that might make up for the evident problems of project-based approaches.

The *Transformation* edition encouraged PD practice to understand development not as a type of intervention, but instead as a process in which relationships between power, politics, and participation are inherent.<sup>51</sup> The ability for participation to become transformative is real, the authors contended, insofar as it pays regard to a community’s existing development processes, engages with its organizations, and acknowledges and builds from the community’s capacity to act.<sup>52</sup> In doing so, it is argued that participation has the ability to not only influence the locus and level of development practices, but also to transform political processes<sup>53</sup> within communities to create a more enabling environment for community-led development initiatives.

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<sup>49</sup> Hickey, S. and G. Mohan. (2004).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Hickey, S. and G. Mohan (Eds.) (2004); Kapoor, I. (2005); Masaki, K. (2004); Mitlin (2004); Mohan, G. (2007); Williams, G. (2004).

These works reminded development practitioners of the power and value of participation, and inspired further exploration for an alternative PA that would reengage with the original theoretical foundations of PD thought – participation for empowerment. In light of this, shifts in development theory continue to occur, most recently including recognition of the inherent agency of communities and their strengths. Moreover, recent examples of spontaneous local development initiatives<sup>54</sup> that did not involve donors or development organizations have given even greater weight to innovative PA assertions of indigenous capacity to lead their own development. The asset-based community development (ABCD) approach is exemplary of this paradigmatic shift. The approach aims to generate bona fide CDD through helping communities to recognize their strengths and assets and hence, ability to create and enact their own development initiatives. Key to ABCD is consciousness for the political nature of development,<sup>55</sup> the approach thus emphasizes community linking with government and other outside organizations a means to establishing an environment more conducive to CDD.

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<sup>54</sup> Hickey, S. and G. Mohan. (2004): 3.

<sup>55</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003). “Who Is Driving Development? Reflections on the Transformative Potential of Asset-Based Community Development.” Occasional Paper Series, No. 5. Coady International Institute: Antigonish, 8-9.

### 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the general structure and flow of this paper, specifically outlining the particular research methods that are employed to analyze participatory development. The sequence of these methods helps to shape my suggestion that ABCD is a more suitable approach than traditional practices of participative development for its ability to stimulate genuine community-driven development (CDD) without directing such a process. It is the unique interests, ideology, and consequent minimalist-natured mechanisms of the ABCD approach that underlie its success.

To begin, Section 3.1 frames the motive for this research; that is, to identify the potential of ABCD to make up for the pitfalls of more commonly used PAs. The methodology used within this paper is then discussed in Section 3.2. Specifically, the case study is briefly summarized and its selection is justified; data sources are discussed; and the sequence of the analysis is outlined. The limitations of this research are addressed and confronted to conclude in Section 3.3.

#### *3.1 The Problem*

Within the development literature there is common recognition of the shortcomings of participatory approaches in general. It is understood that the basis of this problem is related to the differing interests in, conceptions of, and thus methods utilized for participation. In response, various sub-types and new approaches have been designed. Yet there remains limited exploration of how and to what extent these new approaches can make up for the shortfalls of past ones as they reflect on and build from

common critiques. Questions remain of the possibilities for participatory approaches to be understood as legitimate and truly transformative efforts, while the likelihood of ensuring that initiatives are genuinely community-driven is also under great consideration.

Surely there is value in considering the potential of the new approaches, especially those that have come up with more than just methodological tweaks. One such design, asset-based community development (ABCD), was founded upon a philosophical and theoretical shift wherein PD as a *process* is emphasized. Underlying the approach is the belief in the power of collective action and community agency, and a desire to relocate power from development agencies and practitioners back to communities; in this way, participation is understood as an end. And while ABCD has its own unique philosophies, it can also be identified for its effective integration of several other innovative PD principles that are increasingly pervading development discourse (for example, the concepts of social capital, decentralization, civil society, sustainability, and local governance).<sup>56</sup> Based on these interests and foundations and the shift of emphasis away from mere methodological alterations, the ABCD approach serves as an attractive solution to filling the gaps of traditional participatory development practices.

## 3.2 *Overview*

### 3.2.1 *Ethiopia as a Case Study*

Recalling that the objective of this study is to determine if and how an asset-based community development (ABCD) approach can stimulate community-driven

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<sup>56</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 3.

development, in-depth identification and analysis of the components of the ABCD design is necessary. It was decided that the ideal approach to this research would be a case study method in order to illustrate how the theoretical foundations of the ABCD approach are applied in practice and the implications that this has on stimulating genuine and sustainable CDD. Such a research method is useful in that it gives opportunity for tracing, interpreting, and explaining<sup>57</sup>, and as such can be used “to explore, illuminate, probe, or test broader propositions about specified causes and effects...”<sup>58</sup> In analyzing the objectives, procedure, and outcomes of an Ethiopian community’s experience with ABCD, the potential benefits for development activities that would be associated with adopting the approach will be highlighted.

It is constructive now to explain the choice of case study as methodology and of a case from Ethiopia in particular. What constitutes a case study, however, is debated and reaching consensus on the definition of the term has proven difficult, and as Gerring suggests, somewhat semantic in nature.<sup>59</sup> Discussions tend to centre on whether a case study refers to the explanation of one or multiple cases. While Mahoney suggests that case studies primarily aim to “explain a particular outcome in a specific case” and are “often only secondarily interested in producing generalizations”<sup>60</sup>, others emphasize the

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<sup>57</sup> Hamel, J., S. Dufour, and D. Fortin. (1993). “Case study methods.” *Qualitative Research Methods Series*, 32. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, 39.

<sup>58</sup> Gerring, J. (2007a). *Case study research: principles and practices*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 20.

<sup>59</sup> Gerring, J. (2007b). “On the Road to Consensus? A Reply to Coppedge, Lieberman, Mahoney, and Smith.” Symposium: John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practice* (Cambridge, 2007). *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research*, 5(2): 11.

<sup>60</sup> Mahoney, J. (2007). “Particularizing Case Studies: A Critical Review of Gerring’s Case Study Research.” Symposium: John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practice* (Cambridge, 2007). *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research*, 5(2).

intent of case studies to illuminate aspects of a population of cases. Gerring contends that ‘case study’ refers to the “study of a single case where the purpose of that study is – at least in part – to shed light on a larger class of cases.”<sup>61</sup>

Generating a consensual definition of a case study is certainly important, yet Gerring encourages a shift in the discussion to focus on understanding what a case study is good for, that is, its offering of causal insight, depth, and opportunities for theory generation.<sup>62</sup> Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg similarly suggest that case study methodology is ideal for many types of investigations, lending itself most useful for a holistic and in-depth analysis of a given phenomenon,<sup>63</sup> thereby providing a deeper understanding of the concept(s).<sup>64</sup> As such, this method offers the opportunity to generate and explore theories, and to test hypotheses.<sup>65</sup> While this research is not intended to be “heuristic”<sup>66</sup> – to develop theory from the chosen case – it does aim to utilize its findings to highlight the relationship between a given PA and the impact and sustainability of a project more broadly. Thus, the research design within this paper is characteristic of that which Gerring defines as a ‘case study’.

More specifically, this case study design is both exploratory and explanatory in nature. The former type of study is one that is often used as a prelude to social research,

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<sup>61</sup> Gerring, J. (2007a): 20.

<sup>62</sup> Gerring, J. (May, 2004). “What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for?” *American Political Science Review*, 98(2): 346.

<sup>63</sup> Feagin, J., A. Orum, G. Sjoberg. (Eds.). (1991). *A case for case study*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

<sup>64</sup> Yin, R. (2003). *Case Study Research: Design and methods* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 13.

<sup>65</sup> Kaarbo, J. and R. K. Beasley. (1999). “A Practical Guide to the Comparative Case Study Method in Political Psychology.” *Political Psychology* 20(2): 387.

<sup>66</sup> Eckstein, H, (1975). “Case studies and theory in political science.” In F.I. Greenstein and N. W. Polsby (Eds.), *Handbook of political science*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

wherein the linking of data to hypothesis is not developed within the case study, but instead is represented in the analysis of the data.<sup>67</sup> This aspect of the case study will thus examine the tangible use of the methodological and philosophical standing of the facilitating organizations (Oxfam Canada and Hundee),<sup>68</sup> aiming to probe into the relationship between these aspects of the organizations and their approaches. The latter type of case study, explanatory, is typically used for doing causal analysis. This type is thus characteristic of this paper's case analysis, as it is used to determine the degree to which the philosophy and ideology of the organizations' approach affected the level of participation included within their program. Additionally and predominantly the cases serve to determine the extent to which these approaches affected the outcomes of the programs.

The justification for Ethiopia as a case study lies in its representativeness; Ethiopia has been a main receiver of foreign aid and is widely recognized amongst the international community to be dependent on such assistance. The piloting of such an organic, non-directive approach to community development in this environment was therefore spirited; the country's heavy dependence on aid would suggest that the likelihood of response to an approach that requires strong community initiative, agency, and commitment would be minimal. While many underdeveloped countries are similarly dependent on foreign assistance, Ethiopia is deemed to have one of the highest levels of dependence. As such, the signs of program success, that is, community mobilization and

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<sup>67</sup> Yin, R. (1989a). *Case study research: Design and methods* (Rev. ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.

<sup>68</sup> Tellis, W. (2007), Yin, R. (1989a), Sjoberg, G. N. et al. (1991), and Kaarbo, J. and R. K. Beasley (1999) each explain that explicitly defining the case, or unit of analysis, is a critical factor in case study methodology, and helps to ensure internal validity. A case can take the form of an individual, community, organization, or even nation-state. In this study, the unit(s) of analysis are the respective organizations whom initiated the PD programs in Sudan and Ethiopia.

initiating their own inclusive and sustainable development activities, highlight the potential of the ABCD approach to be applied and have similar success in many underdeveloped countries. Additionally, the Ethiopian case was chosen in part for the availability of quality data and evaluations (although this proved difficult to access). Due to the infancy of the ABCD approach, well-recorded examples are lacking. However, while still limited, Oxfam and the Coady Institute have done commendable documenting of the process in Ethiopia in collaboration with Hundee, the facilitating local NGO.

Through the case study design, the variables that influenced the extent and quality of participation can be recognized, helping to account for why the outcomes occurred in the way that they did. This type of analysis will enhance our understanding of ideal ways of engaging with local knowledge and capacities to help foster community-led development; links can be drawn between the unique characteristics of the ABCD approach and the outcomes of its practice, and ways for improving the quality of PD theory and practice suggested. This is illustrative of the association between case study design and positivist philosophies to the extent that the analysis centres on causal effects and observable implications. It thus becomes relevant for policy makers (in this case, development organizations, donors, governments, and NGOs) and can effectively be applied in future practice.

### *3.2.2 Sources of Data*

There are multiple sources of evidence that are common to case study research. Yin identifies six primary sources: documents, interviews, archival records, direct

observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts.<sup>69</sup> As each source has strengths and weaknesses there is significance in the use of a multitude of sources within one case study design. Indeed, compiling data from different contexts and sources helps to provide accounts for alternative explanations<sup>70</sup> and thus increases the reliability and accuracy of the data.<sup>71</sup> Accordingly, an effort to triangulate this paper's research strategy as much as feasible was made through utilizing multiple sources of data. Yet due to time and resource constraints and the consequent limited scope of this project, the data used within this paper comes from mainly secondary sources.

This research draws from the academic development literature, as well as documents and records from Oxfam, Hundee, and the Coady Institute on the ABCD process in Ethiopia. The participatory development literature is substantial and proved invaluable for forming a foundation of the paper. These works were utilized in two ways: first, to determine the common critiques of populist PD approaches in an effort to understand where gaps exist in both the practice and theory of PD. Second, the literature was consulted to assess alternative PAs that claim to respond to the concerns of PD critics. In particular, academic literature regarding recent asset-based approaches served to highlight their strengths and weaknesses, situating their potential for making up for the deficiencies of populist PAs.

Case specific data was then accessed through the organizations' and other relevant websites. As a small, local NGO, Hundee's website did not provide substantial

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<sup>69</sup> Yin, R. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.

<sup>70</sup> Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

<sup>71</sup> Yin, R. (1994); Tellis, W. (1997, July). "Introduction to Case Study." *The Qualitative Report* [On-line serial], 3(2), <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-2/tellis1.html>.

information on the organization or its specific community efforts. The Coady Institute, however, provided significant online access to program evaluations, reports and case studies on the ABCD process within Ethiopia. These sources provided thorough, comprehensive, and reliable data and as such, comprise the majority of the data for this case study research.

The data was primarily qualitative. This decision was based on the ability of qualitative data to generate a deeper and more detailed narrative. In measuring the strengths, weaknesses, and impacts of a case, quantitative data alone does not provide a definitive illustration for the reasons why the results are the way they are; such data is more conducive to measuring tangible impacts and outcomes. It is through the accounts of those involved in the project that more insightful findings might be reached. Ideally such stories could be gathered through more inclusive methods such as interviews and observation techniques, to be utilized as primary data and provide a story to the numbers. However such intensive research was not feasible with the scope of this project. Instead, formal studies and evaluations of Oxfam and Hundee's pilot ABCD process in Ilu Ağa<sup>72</sup> were consulted. These works included research gathered from primary methods such as interviews and participant observation, and although once removed from the original source, remained useful for incorporating local accounts of the ABCD program.

It should be noted that access to reliable and published primary documents was limited; although Oxfam and the Coady Institute completed program reports, reviews and evaluations, such documents were not accessible to researchers, while others remained unpublished, the results of which would not be released. While organization staffs that

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<sup>72</sup> See Cunningham, G. (2008); Peters, B. et al. (2009); Peters, B. et al. (2011).

were reached expressed interest and enthusiasm about the research, primary data (namely, project proposals) could not be shared or accessed. Certainly the use of primary documents for a case study is ideal, however there does exist inherent value in secondary resources, and as Yin contends, the validity of primary documents must be of equal concern – “Few people realize, for instance, that even the ‘verbatim’ transcripts...have been deliberately edited...before being printed in final form.”<sup>73</sup> This potential limitation will be addressed further in section 4.3.

### 3.2.3 *Approach*

Through a qualitative case study analysis, the potential for the ABCD approach to make up for the shortcomings and deficiencies of past approaches can be methodologically and conceptually addressed. To do so, a basis for the analysis will be formed through: investigation of the theory, philosophies, rationales and overall goals of the facilitating organizations (Oxfam and Hundee); and examination of the objective, theoretical foundations, and procedure of the ABCD program in Ilu Aga. Through identifying how the process occurred, what may have contributed to the successes and shortfalls, and how and to what extent the locals were engaged at each level of the program, the case study will highlight the commitment to participation in practice through an ABCD approach. The effects of the tenets and mechanisms of the ABCD approach on its ability to generate true CDD will also emerge, and can then be further explored and discussed separately.

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<sup>73</sup> Yin, R. (2009). *Case Study Research: Design and methods* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc, p. 103.

It becomes clear that the intended objectives of the ABCD approach in Ilu Aga aligned with its practice; the approach was true to its commitment to participation as empowerment to trigger collective action and community-led initiatives. Moreover, external agents acted as facilitators within the ABCD approach in Ilu Aga; through mobilizing the community and employing ABCD methods, locals were eventually able to identify their own assets and the ways in which these could be utilized to initiate a development program. In doing so, the members were *fully* involved in *all* levels of the initiative, and thus, drove their own program.

Exploration of the data will proceed as follows: Oxfam annual reports and the organization's website will be utilized to identify its rationale, original (intended) objectives, theory, and philosophy in its programs. This analysis will focus on the organization itself and will not be project specific. The aim here is to gain an understanding of the background of Oxfam that will help to create a base for assessing the case study and to draw implications of the organization's characteristics and foundations on its practice.

Secondly, project reports will be used to examine the methodological and ideological basis on which the program was founded. Purported program objectives and purpose highlight *why* and *how* participation will be used throughout the program, and the intended roles of each stakeholder (Oxfam and Hundee staff and fieldworkers, community members and grassroots organizations, and local institutions and governments). Through an outline of the procedure and mechanisms of the program, the extent to which this practice matched the organizations' professed commitments and

objectives can be highlighted. This will help to understand whether Oxfam and Hundee were true to their original intentions and objectives.

Finally, internal and external project evaluations will then be assessed in an effort to understand program results and outcomes. Other studies and evaluations of this ABCD process in Ilu Aga provide data for additional (local, primary) insights into the program procedure and results. These evaluations had a participatory element, giving primacy to locals' accounts of their experiences with and reflections on the program. This final aspect and source of data exploration is crucial to the research framework for the more contextual insight that it provides; local perceptions can provide firsthand accounts of how community and individual changes could be linked to the ABCD process.

#### *3.2.4 Analysis*

The objective of the analysis is to understand the potential of an ABCD approach to make up for the deficiencies of past PD approaches. This investigation will be conducted in a two-step process: First, the data outlined in steps one and two will be compared to underline the extent to which the ABCD program adhered to its original intentions, helping to identify whether Oxfam's professed objectives and commitments were matched by its practice in Ilu Aga. With consideration for these findings, the second step of the analysis will assess the outcomes and impacts of the ABCD process, making clear the way in which the organization and program philosophy and design affected the results.

It becomes clear that participation underscored Oxfam and Hundee's ABCD program, which aligned consistently with the organizations' professed ideology and intended objectives. Through the ABCD approach, Hundee focused on assets and building capacities of communities, groups, and individuals, helping to mobilize and excite communities to participate in all aspects, including designing, initiating, and maintaining their own activities. Moreover, Hundee fieldworkers took a minimalist and facilitative role from the outset, and this allowed community members to drive a development program at all levels, including design. As such, the process was fully locally-driven, with additional community-based groups forming spontaneously and independently. It is this local motivation and enthusiasm that is key to ensuring project sustainability, and thus, an indicator of project success.

Taken together, this research framework will illustrate that the strength of the ABCD approach is based upon three dimensions: its interests, ideology, and procedures; it is these unique characteristics that contribute to the approach's potential for filling many of the gaps of current PD practice. The ABCD design emphasizes recognition and revitalization of community assets, and discourages the ever-common concentration on needs and problems throughout development initiatives. Its interests in empowerment and collective action are reached for through this asset-focus. Within the ideology of ABCD, participation is understood as a right of citizenship and is thus transformative. To this end, practitioners assume the role of a facilitator, while indigenous communities become the leaders and teachers. Finally, the ABCD approach looks past particular interventions and seeks to engage with the underlying processes of development through helping communities to form linkages with other associations that might prove useful for

their development activities. An extension of this discussion will be held in Chapter Five.

### 3.3 *Limitations*

Concerns regarding case study limitations are centred on the validity, namely construct and external validity, and reliability of the research. Construct validity, that is, the degree of objectivity of the researcher, manifests as reporting bias. Often, this bias results in designs that overly rely on documents as a source of evidence. As this research was unable to draw on a significant number of primary data sources, it may be suggested that there is a dangerous reliance on secondary data. However, the design has attempted to control for this through triangulation; in utilizing multiple secondary sources such as project reports, internal and external evaluations, and the academic literature in tandem, data has been corroborated and thus, its reliability and accuracy increased.

It is recognized that the problem of limited external validity is seemingly inherent within the case study method. While case studies are significant providers of detail, context, and nuance, this also makes it difficult to generalize; critics question whether the results can be generalized beyond the immediate case(s), and how an argument can be deemed reliable when it may in fact apply only to the chosen case(s). Anthony Giddens, for example, suggests that the case study methodology is ‘microscopic’ because it lacks a sufficient number of cases, and is thus is not widely applicable.<sup>74</sup>

Indeed, *absolute* generalizability of this paper’s findings would require more extensive research than is currently feasible. However, as Yin suggests, this common

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<sup>74</sup> Giddens, A. (1984). Quoted in R. Yin (1993). *Applications of case study research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.

criticism is most often directed at statistical, not analytical generalization, in which “previously developed theory is used as a template against which to compare the empirical results of the case study.”<sup>75</sup> Furthermore, Yin (1984, 1989a, 1989b, 1993, 1994), Stake (1995), and Hamel et al. (1993) disagree with Giddens’ contention that sample size has such a significant impact on generalizability, suggesting instead that provided the objective of a study is established, made explicit, and is applied to the research, the case becomes generally applicable once the goal of the study is met.<sup>76</sup> Yin goes further, asserting that regardless of sample size, the generalizable potential of a case study is based upon “the set of methodological qualities of the case, and the rigor with which the case is constructed”.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Yin, R. (1984). *Case study research: Design and methods (1st ed.)*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing. Quoted in W. Tellis (1997 July).

<sup>76</sup> Tellis, W. (1997 July).

<sup>77</sup> Yin, R. (1989a), Quoted in W. Tellis (1997 July).

#### 4: ASSET-BASED COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (ABCD): AN ETHIOPIAN EXPERIENCE

*Assets (broadly defined) as a source of identity are therefore linked to 'agency' or capacity to act. Assets (what we have or perceive we have) and agency (our capacity to act with what we have) converge and mutually reinforce each other, whether at individual, household or community levels, and express themselves in the power of individual action and community organizing. (Mathie and Cunningham, 2008: 3)*

*Communities can no longer be thought of as complex masses of needs and problems, but rather as diverse and potent webs of gifts and assets. Each community has a unique set of skills and capacities to channel for community development. (Foster, M. and A. Mathie, 2001)*

Out of growing concern of the persistent shortcomings of PD practice and inspired by ABCD processes from Egypt, Oxfam Canada and the Oromo Grassroots Development Organization (Hundee) initiated a pilot ABCD program in Ilu Aga, Ethiopia. The organizations urged that through an ABCD approach, development practitioners can undertake a catalytic role in PD, refraining from directing a community's development and instead, stimulating their taking control of the process.<sup>78</sup> This chapter provides an account of this experience in an effort to highlight the extent that the approach was able to stimulate genuine and sustainable CDD and to identify the reasons for this influence.

In building from the discussion of Chapter Two regarding recent reassessments of PD theory, Section 4.1 will discuss ABCD as an approach, illustrating its impetuses and origins as it builds off of lessons from the pitfalls and critiques of past PAs. The basic

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<sup>78</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 264.

tenets and mechanisms of the approach will also be outlined and discussed. Next, Section 4.2 will centre on the ABCD process in Ilu Aga in an effort to identify how the theory of ABCD is applied and works in an organization's practice. The case study begins by giving consideration for Ethiopia's state of development prior to the pilot program (Section 4.2.1), highlighting where Oxfam Canada and Hundee's interests for initiating the program lay. The objectives, goals, and intended roles of each organization will also be discussed here, and used within Section 4.2.2 to highlight the extent of the organizations' respective involvements throughout the duration of the program. To conclude, the impact of the ABCD process will briefly be outlined in Section 4.2.3.

Through this framework, it will become evident that the theoretical foundations of the ABCD approach were reflected in the design and evolution of the program in Ilu Aga; the rhetoric of the approach, as well as that of Oxfam and Hundee, aligned with the practice of ABCD, thereby indicating a true commitment to participation and sustainable CDD. The ABCD program successfully mobilized community members in Ilu Aga to recognize their assets and capacities, triggering an increased confidence and a renewed willingness to act collectively towards a locally-led development initiative. The community's activities have proven to be sustainable, resulting in diversified and increased livelihoods, sources of income, and individual and community assets.

#### *4.1 Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)*

##### *Foundations and Tenets*

The value of indigenous knowledge as contribution to the design, execution and monitoring of development programs has been increasingly recognized in the last decade.

As outlined in Chapter Two, local insight has been (or attempted to be) included within development practice in many ways – community consultation prior to a project, via cash or in-kind contributions from individual community members or groups, or through participatory forms of evaluation. An invaluable resource that remains insufficiently tapped, however, is a community’s assets – capacities, talents, and skills of individuals; associations; local institutions; physical assets; and natural resources.<sup>79</sup> Indeed, voices of the marginalized must be included within development activities to ensure such efforts reflect their expressed needs and priorities, and are thus more efficient and effective. Yet, there also exists great potential for assets to act as key resources to helping communities drive their own development in a hands-on manner.

The ABCD approach to development is founded upon this philosophy; “communities can drive the development process themselves by identifying and mobilizing existing (but often unrecognized) assets, thereby responding to and creating local economic opportunity.”<sup>80</sup> Jody Kretzmann and John McKnight, the pioneers of the ABCD process, argue that the strength of a community to act as a development leader can be identified in its recognition, value, and use of local strengths and assets; strong communities are those in which capacities are identified, valued and utilized.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the approach came from Kretzmann and McKnight as a response to the critiques of populist participatory development designs, including PRA, regarding their ‘problem solving’ and ‘needs-based’ focus – what Mathie refers to as a Deficit Community-Based Approach

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<sup>79</sup> Foster, M. (2006). “Mobilizing Assets for Community-Driven Development: Learnings from action research.” SL-ESH Conference, University of Guelph.

<sup>80</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 2.

<sup>81</sup> Kretzmann, J. P. and J. L. McKnight. (1993). *Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing community’s assets*. Institute for Policy Research, Northwestern University: Evanston, IL, p. 13.

(DCBA). ABCD theory suggests that such an approach creates a “mendicancy mentality” in which communities identify with and internalize their perceived problems and needs.<sup>82</sup> This has a disempowering effect, causing a “fragmentation of efforts to provide solutions” and “den[ying] the breadth and depth of community wisdom”.<sup>83</sup>

Accordingly then, ABCD practice centres on capacities and aims to recognize, encourage, and revive a community’s strengths. Foster and Mathie explain that by placing value on the capacities of individuals and communities as a whole, there tends to be an increased sense of connectedness to collective efforts and fellow community members.<sup>84</sup> In this way, empowerment of a community becomes a more achievable goal, citizens are more open and willing to act collectively, community ownership over development activities is greater, and consequently, the common problem of poor sustainability is reduced.<sup>85</sup>

While the interests and ideology of the ABCD process are unique, they were influenced by other novel development theories such as Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Community Economic Development (CED), the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), and participatory approaches to development.<sup>86</sup> A key component to putting these philosophies into practice, however, is the relocation of power from the development practitioner to the community. This necessitates a scaling back of the role of the external agent (development worker), and similar to PRA, a ‘handing over the stick’ to

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<sup>82</sup> Mathie, A. (2008). “From DCBA to ABCD: the potential for strengthening citizen engagement with local government in Mindanao, the Philippines.” p. 325 in A. Mathie and G. Cunningham (Eds.) *From Clients to Citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development.* Intermediate Technology Publications Ltd.: Warwickshire.

<sup>83</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 2.

<sup>84</sup> Foster, M. and A. Mathie. (2001).

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Foster, M. (2006).

communities and their members. This helps to avoid practitioner direction of the development process and inducing community dependency on assistance. This power shift occurs through the development organization and fieldworker assuming a facilitative and catalytic role from the outset, and stepping back even further to act as an intermediary once community agency and willingness to lead their own development activities is expressed. As such, organization staff is present typically to act responsively, assisting in diversifying and expanding community relationships through forming linkages between communities and external organizations, associations, government, or resources that would be instrumental to the locally-led initiatives.<sup>87</sup>

More importantly, and necessary, practitioners must be willing, open, and able to develop this flexible relationship and to recognize the often hidden agency of indigenous peoples. Indeed, within some communities this agency and capacity may be significantly less and will thus require strengthening, yet ABCD advocates stress that these “unpolished diamonds” exist in some form within *all* communities<sup>88</sup> whom simply must be “remotivated” to utilize and invest in them.<sup>89</sup> As the level of community ownership of the development activities is understood by the ABCD process as dependent upon the level of external (development organization) involvement<sup>90</sup>, the valuing of locals’ capacity to act will serve to strengthen their attachment to a program.

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<sup>87</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008). “Stimulating Asset Based and Community Driven Development: lessons from five communities in Ethiopia.” p. 294 in A. Mathie and G. Cunningham (Eds.) *From Clients to Citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development*. Intermediate Technology Publications Ltd.: Warwickshire.

<sup>88</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 2.

<sup>89</sup> Alexander, A. (1997). *The Antigonish Movement: Moses Coady and Adult Education Today*. Thompson Educational Publishing: Toronto: 156.

<sup>90</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 292.

## *Mechanisms*

Following this philosophy and emphasis on assets and agency, the ABCD approach in practice is carried out in a context-specific manner, paying consideration to culture, power dynamics, existing relationships between the community, government and outside organizations, as well as the current capacities of the community.<sup>91</sup> The way that this happens is not the same in each case; in fact, this lack of blueprint or pre-determined sequence of methods is a defining characteristic of ABCD. What does remain consistent in each process of ABCD is that it is “internally driven, not dependent on external agency initiative or direction.”<sup>92</sup>

There are, however, four major elements that are common to ABCD practice, through which communities can be mobilized and their assets recognized. While the use of each is not required, the starting point – discovering strengths – of each ABCD case is common practice. This takes place through storytelling and group discussion about past community initiatives (of any kind) that were successful, in an effort to uncover assets. In contrast to the focus on problems and needs within PRA practice, the emphasis on previous accomplishments has an empowering effect on the community, promoting positive change and encouraging further action to initiate development activities.<sup>93</sup>

Just as the theory of ABCD has theoretical influences from other innovative development thought, its practice also integrates modern development practices such as social capital, decentralization, and governance and civil society.<sup>94</sup> Proponents suggest that by including and integrating these other innovative ideas together, the ABCD

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<sup>91</sup> Foster, M. (2006).

<sup>92</sup> Foster, M. and A. Mathie. (2001).

<sup>93</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002).

<sup>94</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 3.

approach becomes a “practical means of operationalizing [SLA] at the community level”.<sup>95</sup>

## 4.2 *An ABCD Approach in Ethiopia – Oxfam Canada and the Oromo Grassroots Development Organization (HUNDEE)*

### 4.2.1 *Ethiopia before ABCD*

The environment of extreme rural poverty and limited livelihood diversification has triggered a massive increase in food aid and Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Ethiopia since the 1980s.<sup>96</sup> Approximately 77.5 percent of Ethiopia’s population lives in poverty, living on less than \$2 per day,<sup>97</sup> while 41 percent of the population remains undernourished, and in 2000, 91 percent took part in vulnerable employment.<sup>98</sup> Most of the country’s poor live in rural areas and maintain livelihoods that are dependent on agriculture. These small-scale farmers are consistently vulnerable to unpredictable weather systems and frequent droughts, possess limited technical capacities, and practice underdeveloped production methods. When combined with food and fertilizer price increases, the rural poor lack access to secure food sources and often experience famines.<sup>99</sup>

Devereux, however, suggests that while Ethiopia certainly experiences fluctuating climatic conditions, other variables such as its poorly targeted agricultural policy and institutional weaknesses have intensified this vulnerability, while overseas aid has

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<sup>95</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 6.

<sup>96</sup> Peters, B., M. Gonsamo, S. Molla, and A. Mathie. (2009). “Applying an ABCD Approach in Ethiopia: Mid-Term Evaluation Report Summary.” The Coady International Institute: Nova Scotia, 5.

<sup>97</sup> Bertelsmann Stiftung. (2009). *BTI 2010 – Ethiopia Country Report*. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2.

<sup>98</sup> World Bank, The. “Data and Statistics: Millennium Development Goals - Ethiopia.” World Bank, <http://go.worldbank.org/VPRAGBADT0>

<sup>99</sup> IFAD. (n.d.). “Rural poverty in Ethiopia.” Retrieved online 25 May 2010 from <http://www.ruralpovertyportal.org/web/guest/country/home/tags/ethiopia>.

instilled a deeper sense of dependence.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, Ethiopia has come to increasingly rely on this foreign assistance and consequently lacks incentives to establish new and more secure production techniques. Moreover, Ethiopian communities are perceived as passive recipients of top-down donor assistance as a result of its strong dependency such support. Development agencies and NGOs have thus adopted the role of service providers, providing emergency relief and assistance to what are considered needy communities.

Cunningham explains that what once was referred to as ‘humanitarian assistance’ for the country’s food deprived has today been renamed by donors and the Ethiopian government as a ‘safety net system’.<sup>101</sup> This reframing of external assistance to Ethiopia is an attempt to make top-down support appear more attractive to the international community, within which the dangers of this type of development (that is, top-down assistance) are frequently highlighted.<sup>102</sup> ‘Participation’ in this new system is encouraged by agencies that provide incentives, such as per diems, for adopting the new techniques that they propose. Peters et al. explain that this instils the belief that external motivation for participation is required, creating the expectation within communities to receive reward for their participation.<sup>103</sup>

Furthermore, community groups in Ethiopia are rarely included in local government-led development processes, thereby deepening their disempowerment, stifling their potential to recognize and utilize their assets and agency, and compromising

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<sup>100</sup> Devereux, S. (2000). “Food Insecurity in Ethiopia: A discussion paper for DFID.” IDS: Sussex, 1-2.

<sup>101</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 264.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Peters, B., et al. (2009): 5.

the traditional self-help approach that once existed.<sup>104</sup> This current aid environment is in stark contrast to Ethiopia's historical development experiences in which initiatives were largely community-driven. Local government and grassroots organizations such as burial societies, clan associations, community-level credit associations, and in some regions, self-help associations initiated, implemented, and managed community development activities.<sup>105</sup> Evidently then, Ethiopian communities possess the agency and willingness to lead their own development, and are equipped with the assets to do so. The suggestion that communities require motivation to undertake development initiatives<sup>106</sup> might be reiterated here; as evidenced in Ethiopia's development history, the strength to undertake development initiatives is indeed inherent in some capacity within communities.

Among those weary of the donor-led approach to development, Oxfam Canada held concern for the tendency of the donor-driven, beneficiary–recipient dynamic to disempower communities and deepen their dependence on external assistance.<sup>107</sup> The organization was inspired by the innovative ABCD approach that was adopted by the Coady International Institute. This approach emphasized a shift of focus from deficits to assets; rather than understanding communities based on their problems and needs, ABCD encourages development agencies to revive the capacity and agency of communities and encourage their independence. Through adopting such a facilitative role, Oxfam staff saw strong potential for reversing community disempowerment and consequent dependency, and for stimulating community-driven development through ABCD. More specifically, it believed that an asset-based approach would help communities “to reflect

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<sup>104</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 266-267.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>106</sup> Alexander, A. (1997): 156.

<sup>107</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 264.

on previous endeavours and to identify community assets,” thereby motivating them to plan, design, implement and manage their own development initiatives and thus, become self-reliant.<sup>108</sup>

#### 4.2.2 *The Roles of the Facilitating Organizations throughout Ilu Aga’s ABCD Process*

The overall objective of the action-research was to test the potential of ABCD’s community-level approach that focuses on strengths, assets, and opportunities to stimulate community-driven development.<sup>109</sup> It sought to generate an inside-out process of development in which the community leads while the role of the NGO is reduced to that of a facilitator.<sup>110</sup> To do this, Oxfam approached three local Ethiopian NGOs to take part in ABCD action-research, one of which was the Oromo Grassroots Development Organization (Hundee). Hundee was selected based on the consistency of its methodology and philosophy with that of Oxfam; the organizations each hold the belief that poor rural communities are capable of, and responsible for their own development. Hundee therefore aims to assist and empower poor communities to attain food security, increased household income, and sustainable livelihoods.<sup>111</sup>

The organization acts as a facilitator within poor communities of the Oromia region, working within a community’s culture, practices and institutions in an effort to trigger community-led development. Hundee’s efforts focus on community organizing, civic education, economic support for women and the elderly, the establishment of cereal

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<sup>108</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 264.

<sup>109</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 4.

<sup>110</sup> Oxfam Canada. (2010). “Ethiopia: the road to self-reliance – ABCD.” Retrieved 22 May 2010 from <http://www.oxfam.ca/what-we-do/where-we-work/east-africa/ethiopia/abcd>.

<sup>111</sup> National AIDS Resource Centre. “Organizations Directory: Hundee-Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative.” Retrieved 14 September 2010 from <http://www.etharc.org/resources/organizations?sobi2Task=sobi2Details&catid=3&sobi2Id=103>.

banks and networks, and environmental rehabilitation.<sup>112</sup> Its programs in Ilu Aga place emphasis on the establishment of community associations for achieving food security. Specifically, Hundee promotes autonomous village level cereal banks for their tendency to act as forums for community dialogue about development priorities and experiences, providing individuals with the opportunity “to make a positive shift from their current realities to a future they imagine and construct.”<sup>113</sup> In taking part in the ABCD pilot with Oxfam, Hundee used these cereal banks as an entry point for the introduction of the new approach.

The implementation of ABCD began first with Oxfam and Hundee fieldworker training to help generate an understanding of the importance and nature of the necessary shift from a needs-based to asset-based focus.<sup>114</sup> For the majority of fieldworkers, their practices of participatory development had typically started with community dialogue to identify the problems and needs of a community. The ABCD workshop was important for helping to break this habit, and taught fieldworkers the four main elements of ABCD that they were encouraged to use: appreciative inquiry and story telling; asset-mapping; mobilization; and initiation. Within Ilu Aga, ABCD was introduced at a meeting between the community cereal bank association and a Hundee fieldworker who facilitated storytelling and discussion in an effort to help the association members to recognize their capacity for community-led development. This was the first step to the ABCD approach, known as appreciative inquiry (AI). The Hundee fieldworker asked the group to share their stories about successful community-led development activities from

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<sup>112</sup> National AIDS Resource Centre. “Organizations Directory: Hundee-Oromo Grassroots Development Initiative.”

<sup>113</sup> Peters, B., et al. (2009): 25.

<sup>114</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 267.

their past. The association told several stories, quickly uncovering their assets and reasons for success in the past.<sup>115</sup> Inspired by the discussion, a core group of fifty young and inspired individuals formed, marking another element of the ABCD approach – mobilization, the convening of a representative group. Within ABCD practice, the independent emergence of this type of group provides insight into those villagers whom will likely become the community social entrepreneurs; it is these individuals who will lead the group through the ABCD process, allowing the fieldworkers to take a step back.

The core group came together to discuss and identify the range of community assets that could be utilized for income generation; these included individual and group skills (i.e. farming, cultural, civic, and health skills) and talents, physical assets, natural resources, village associations, and even linkages with other institutions or organizations.<sup>116</sup> Formal and informal associations were also identified, such as the formal cereal bank association created in collaboration with Hundee, and other informal associations such as burial societies (*idirs*), traditional rotating savings and credit schemes (*iqubs*), and traditional religious and marriage festival groups (*senebets*, *mahabers*, etc.), and cooperation associations.<sup>117</sup> These associations were deemed key to the community's development initiatives; a respected and experienced leader headed the cereal bank, while the informal associations were vital for mobilizing people, resolving conflicts, and raising financial resources.<sup>118</sup>

Next, Hundee initiated a third ABCD method, a mapping activity to compose a list of those assets identified throughout the group's discussions. The 'leaky bucket' tool

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<sup>115</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 3

<sup>116</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 269.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

was introduced, helping community members to locate economic opportunities by visualizing financial inflows and outflows. Money being spent by the community, for example, transportation costs, chemical fertilizer, education expenses, or land use taxes, was charted, while the leaky bucket was also used to identify changes that could be made to the economy if money was reinvested into productive activities.<sup>119</sup> Through this activity, the group identified how to increase and diversify their incomes, and decrease unproductive expenditures. It became apparent that farmers' excessive use of chemical fertilizers was economically inefficient, requiring more money than was being generated by the crops themselves. Based on their successful use in the past, the group identified cost-effective and environmentally sound agricultural practices that could be adopted by the community. They also reached an agreement on a community savings scheme (in which savings would be used to invest in new livestock varieties), and decided to plant new commercial and indigenous species.

These ideas, along with the asset map and leaky bucket diagram were then presented to the rest of the community, helping to illustrate the potential future of the community if ABCD were to be implemented. Through discussion, the core group and other villagers came up with a four-part, ten-year community action plan (CAP) designed around their economic and environmental concerns. The CAP sought to reduce dependence on fertilizers through practices such as composting, manuring and crop rotation, terracing, tree planting, and irrigation, to address the loss of natural resources and soil erosion, and to construct small dams and river diversion schemes. Additionally, the plan aimed to diversify sources of household and community income and to increase

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<sup>119</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 270.

this income. All of these efforts would be undertaken by the community, which was equipped with the necessary labour, tools and skills, and natural resources that were necessary. External assistance was needed only in the form of legal advice for dividing land for tree planting, networking assistance from Hundee-supported community nursery to access tree seedlings, and technical assistance from the *woreda* for irrigation schemes.<sup>120</sup>

#### 4.2.3 *Program Impacts and Outcomes*

Through the ABCD process, Ilu Aga's physical, social and financial assets showed significant development. The community mobilized to make individual and group contributions that were used toward constructing a new school, worked together to develop a grain banking system, and invested in new agricultural activities to increase household incomes.<sup>121</sup> This camaraderie and sense of ownership and collective action within the communities was of utmost significance; members became motivated to initiate their own development activities, thereby taking control of the initiatives and even innovating their own.

With new enthusiasm and motivation, Ilu Aga's cereal bank association and other community members did not hesitate to initiate their action plan. The CAP specified the necessary inputs (through the community's own resources) and goal outputs, and outlined the responsibilities and roles of groups and individuals. In contrast to previous development initiatives, community members were now responsible for all aspects and stages of the planned activities, including prioritizing, design, implementation,

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<sup>120</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 271.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 290-291.

maintenance, and management. Furthermore, membership in the cereal bank increased and new associations were created, indicating a revival of traditional Oromo practices of discussing community issues as a group. This new form of associational life helped groups and associations become more coordinated and offered the opportunity for individuals to become involved in groups specific to their own strengths and interests.<sup>122</sup> With the establishment of a youth, dairy, and two irrigation associations, the community was better able to mobilize, organize, and utilize its resources, and thus take on the various CAP activities.<sup>123</sup> Where necessary, the community sought additional assistance, namely from Hundee.

The new activities and practices helped to revive the community's existing assets, to diversify and increase community and household income sources, reduce expenditures, and increase and reinvest savings.<sup>124</sup> Households no longer depended on one or two income sources, and thus reduced their economic vulnerability.<sup>125</sup> As a result, Ilu Aga's human, physical, social and financial assets increased. Tangible individual, household and community asset increases included: reforestation with improved seedlings; tree nurseries; a new road; communal shops to sell food; a new milk collection centre; and improved school facilities.<sup>126</sup> Hundee also helped to locate organizations with the necessary technical capacities for designing and implementing the dam and river diversion scheme, and assisted in approaching the *woreda* to gain permission and

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<sup>122</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 293.

<sup>123</sup> Peters, B., et al. (2009): 20.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>125</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 291.

<sup>126</sup> Peters, B., et al. (2009), p. 20.

additional support for the irrigation project.<sup>127</sup> Consequently, seven small dams were constructed, a river diversion scheme was implemented, and land was improved through irrigation and terracing, offering opportunity for vegetable production. By replacing the use of chemical fertilizers with measures such as composting, terracing, and reforestation to protect the soil, water and trees, natural asset degradation was also reduced and these assets even increased in some circumstances.

These efforts and asset increases had run off effects and spawned cyclical improvements in the community. For example, new dams were constructed to irrigate areas of common land that were previously used only for grazing, and also to provide additional access to water resources within Ilu Aga. With this newly irrigated land, households were able to diversify and increase their crop production; many began to sell vegetables at local markets, thereby utilizing a new source for additional income.<sup>128</sup> In this way, the efforts to protect and revive natural and physical resources of Ilu Aga also contributed to increases in financial and social assets. When combined with reduced expenditures on things like alcohol and coffee, these activities helped to accumulate savings at the household and community level. Some of these savings were then reinvested into new or enhanced assets and activities: assets that would contribute to productivity levels, such as improved school facilities; assets that could be sold in the future and thus would reduce community vulnerability, such as trees;<sup>129</sup> or to purchase inputs for other productive activities like vegetable production or animal fattening.<sup>130</sup> In

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<sup>127</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 294.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>129</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 10.

<sup>130</sup> Cunningham, B. (2008): 291.

doing so, households experienced additional increases of income, thereby maintaining the cycle.

Just as the ABCD discussions had done, these activities triggered enthusiasm and encouragement for community members to undertake their own development initiatives. Aside from the core group, new leaders and entrepreneurs emerged from the community and began their own efforts, such as increasing access to water. Ayaletch, an Ilu Aga native, sought to bring potable water to the community and did so by repairing a local spring, constructing new wells, and bringing women into the ABCD process to help with these efforts.<sup>131</sup> Another natural leader was Abera, who successfully headed an additional cereal bank association (and was so successful that he was eventually hired by Hundee to work as its agent in Ilu Aga).<sup>132</sup>

Cunningham refers to Ayaletch, Abera, and others' work as a form of informal leadership wherein an individual "lead[s] through action, rather than position," and suggests that it is the efforts of these individuals that has been central to the success of ABCD initiatives in Ilu Aga.<sup>133</sup> He explains that informal leaders in the community were typically those who had living and/or working experiences in larger cities where they learned additional skills, insights, and ideas for development, as well as the confidence to take control of their own activities. As such, these leaders became recognized within the community as motivating, inspiring, and objective innovators whom are open to asking for advice, considering the opinions of others, and confident to voice their own beliefs.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Cunningham, B. (2008): 292.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 274.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 293.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

The ABCD processes carried out by the cereal bank and informal community leaders inspired others to become involved in the process and to be confident in doing so with less external assistance and motivation than within past initiatives. Recognition of their assets and identification of ways that these could be put towards locally-driven initiatives was the beginning of Ilu Aga becoming more self-reliant and its leaders more capable to steer an action plan. As such, positive changes in the self-perception and confidence levels of individuals and the Ilu Aga community were evident, while trust between individuals and leadership also increased. Moreover, the ABCD process stimulated an increase in the value of cooperative action as perceived by community members, as well as more openness and eagerness to include those individuals who were once excluded from community associations.<sup>135</sup> It was this pooling together of individual assets that was recognized by both community members and Hundee staff as the key to the successful initiation and maintenance of the development activities in Ilu Aga; together, the community was able to take on efforts that were more risky and required more inputs than those that they could have attempted alone.<sup>136</sup>

With the tangible successes and increasing inclusiveness of Ilu Aga's activities, local government became more supportive of the ABCD process and Hundee's work. What once was an unstable relationship between Hundee fieldworkers, community leaders and local government had begun to positively transform as a result of the development initiatives. The local government came to see Ilu Aga as an example community within the *woreda*, and began to work alongside the ABCD process.<sup>137</sup> Local

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<sup>135</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 20.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>137</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 274.

government made efforts to provide a more enabling environment for community-led initiatives through ensuring increased access to government resources and services that would contribute to the quality and sustainability of each initiative. Neighbouring villages reacted to Ilu Aga's success in a similar way, dubbing it a model community of the *woreda* based on the increased household savings and visible outcomes of individual and group activities.<sup>138</sup> These positive reactions provided further encouragement for community members to maintain their current development activities, and inspired more individuals to undertake their own initiatives.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 273.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

## 5: IMPLICATIONS OF THE ABCD APPROACH: INTERESTS, IDEOLOGY AND MECHANISMS

Reflecting on the impacts of the pilot program in Ilu Aga, this chapter will draw links between such outcomes and the ABCD approach, seeking to identify the factors that affected the level of community participation. Specifically, the ideology (Section 5.1), interests (Section 5.2), and mechanisms (Section 5.3) of the ABCD approach will be highlighted. How these were reflected within Oxfam and Hundee's efforts will also be assessed. This will draw attention to the implications of such dimensions on bringing about a community-driven process of development. This discussion will work iteratively; the features of populist approaches to development (such as PRA) are referred to throughout the discussions so as to indicate the divergence of an ABCD approach and the value in this uniqueness as related to genuine CDD. Through this framework, this paper's general research question – how is the ABCD theory and approach more suitable than past designs for bringing about genuine CDD? – will be answered.

We will see that an ABCD approach was useful for mobilizing, recognizing, and reviving indigenous strengths, which are instrumental to individual and community capacity and willingness to act. In doing so, community collective action increased, utilizing the ABCD 'methods' for planning and designing their locally-led development activities. Moreover, as emphasized in the ABCD strategy, Hundee workers assisted in establishing links between the community and local government, creating a more enabling environment for CDD. The ability of the ABCD process to have such an effect

is based upon its understanding of participation as empowerment and social transformation and its focus on ‘immanent’ (broad) development (its interests); its concentration on capacities and assets, and profession for a relocation of power from development practitioner to the community or individual (its ideology); and consequently, its facilitative and minimalist-natured mechanisms that allow for a handing over of power.

### *5.1 Ideology: An approach to community-based development*

A key tenet of the ABCD approach is the recognition of the inherent agency, capacities and assets of a community. The approach thus shifts the way in which communities are conceived and engaged with. Rather than the populist PD approach of understanding communities based on their problems and deficits and directing them in meeting their needs, ABCD facilitates communities to recognize and emphasize their inherent assets. Proponents suggest that an emphasis on capacities incites positive thinking and action, and a “spirit of egalitarianism”<sup>140</sup> that can empower communities and mobilize their members to take control of their own development.<sup>141</sup> Moreover, assets provide more than improved livelihoods and agency (the capacity to act); they are also instrumental and become a defining characteristic or source of identity for individuals and communities. The resulting motivation and confidence serves as a precursor to community-led action and linkages with local governments, private enterprise, and other organizations.

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<sup>140</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002).

<sup>141</sup> Foster, M. and A. Mathie. (2001).

This emphasis on assets is in response to the critiques of populist PAs that are problem- and needs-focused, which subsequently disempower communities and induce their further dependence. Mathie and Cunningham deem ABCD as “more consistent [than problem-focused development approaches] with the dynamism, fluidity, and differentiation of the diverse communities with which they work.”<sup>142</sup> The approach works contextually, seeking to situate a community with regard to its history and thus, understand its development based on its particular experiences. Additionally, a long-term commitment is part of the approach, putting emphasis on learning, consistent reflection, and an appreciation and willingness to accept changing circumstances and surprises.<sup>143</sup>

#### *From DCBA to ABCD*

Through its focus, ABCD considers development initiatives in an optimistic light. While low incomes and poor productivity may be identified and focused on as a problem of the community, the ABCD approach acknowledges this, but emphasizes instead the assets that may be utilized to confront the problem, such as entrepreneurial or artistic skills.<sup>144</sup> Taking this approach does not necessitate a disregard of the problems of a community; rather, it moves this focus immediately to the possibilities within the community and its members<sup>145</sup> to utilize their assets and contribute to overcoming these problems, thus driving their development. These assets may include strong and well-developed leadership, collective action and organization, or the skills and talents of individuals (social assets), local institutions, physical assets, or natural resources.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002).

<sup>143</sup> Foster, M. (2006); Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 365.

<sup>144</sup> Foster, M. (2006).

<sup>145</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002).

<sup>146</sup> Foster, M. (2006).

However, ABCD does place more emphasis on social assets, as these are what underscore community associations and informal networks<sup>147</sup> and as such, are important community components that can be instrumental in furthering development activities.

In this way, individuals themselves begin to identify and recognize their capacity to act and thus, their ability to re-define themselves as true agents of their own development, thereby moving away from their former label as beneficiaries or recipients of aid and donor-directed projects.<sup>148</sup> Yet, this level of internal agency is dependent on how involved the facilitating organization is and it demands a shift in power from the development organization to the community. Indeed, the attitudes and understandings of fieldworkers, as well as the level of support provided by the organization or NGO is influential on the effectiveness of the initiative.<sup>149</sup> The ABCD approach not only requires an attitudinal and behavioural change within development organizations and their staff, but the approach also contributes to this change. As such, the aim is not to ‘do’ ABCD to the community, rather, to act as a catalyst for the community to act together, to mobilize their assets, and to propel their own development.<sup>150</sup>

#### *Role reversals and a relocation of power*

The development worker working with the ABCD process undertakes a facilitative, not directive, role recognizing the agency of a community and stepping back to allow them to control the process. This is a role reversal from past PD activities, with the

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<sup>147</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002).

<sup>148</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2008b). “Introduction,” pp. 8 in A. Mathie and G. Cunningham (Eds.), *From Clients to Citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development*. Warwickshire: Intermediate Technology Publications Ltd.

<sup>149</sup> Mathie, A. (2008a): 351.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

development agent becoming the student of the community member whom is now the teacher. As Mathie and Cunningham recount, the result is new and dispersed leadership which motivates others in the community to act and increases the level of participation in their development activities.<sup>151</sup>

Role reversals and a shifting of power might also be seen as a move from ‘power over’ to ‘power to’. As we have seen from Chapter Two, several critics of past PD approaches question how development practitioners and researchers can empower others and transform development as they so strive to, when they have failed to consider PD reflexively<sup>152</sup>; with poor attempts to understand the dynamics of power and how this affects the degree of true participation that is possible, an understanding of how to ‘empower’ communities is lacking.<sup>153</sup> Nelson and Wright urge practitioners to remember that to be a participant, individuals’ ‘power to’ must be accessible and utilized, equipping them with the ability to negotiate and lead their development activities; agencies “cannot ‘give’ empowerment to their ‘beneficiaries’, ‘targets of development’ or ‘clients’.”<sup>154</sup> As they suggest then, the professed empowerment and decentring of power from past PD approaches have failed largely due to a disregard for handing over power. While Chambers encouraged PRA practitioners to ‘hand over the stick’ and simply convene, catalyze, enquire, and encourage,<sup>155</sup> in practice, this rarely happened.

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<sup>151</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2008a). “Conclusion,” pp. 357 in A. Mathie and G. Cunningham (Eds.) *From Clients to Citizens: Communities changing the course of their own development*. Warwickshire: Intermediate Technology Publications Ltd.

<sup>152</sup> Nelson, N. and S. Wright. (1995). “Participation and power,” pp. 18 in Nelson, N. and S. Wright (Eds.). *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice*. London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

<sup>153</sup> Hickey, S. and G. Mohan. (2004b): 11.

<sup>154</sup> Nelson, N. and S. Wright. (1995): 18.

<sup>155</sup> Chambers, R. (1994b). Participatory rural appraisal: analysis of experience. *World Development* 22(9): 1255.

Surely there are concerns here; such deep and structural shifts are undoubtedly complex, difficult, and time consuming. Organizations must undergo a transformation and take a responsive, catalytic role while becoming flexible and open to working in uncertain circumstances that often require impromptu and improvised planning.<sup>156</sup> This organizational restructuring is crucial to reaching the objective – empowerment and transformation for genuine community-led development – of an ABCD process. The potential of an organization making these changes rests in the hands of its staff, whom must themselves achieve attitudinal and behavioural changes and be willing to shift their power to those they once considered beneficiaries.<sup>157</sup> Indeed, Mathie and Cunningham also attest that it is typically more difficult to get NGO staff to appreciate and acknowledge communities’ inherent strengths and agency than it is to encourage locals to realize such assets.<sup>158</sup>

Yet while fieldworker refusal to make such a change is possible, Hira and Parfitt give a sense of hope; they urge that in making explicit what type of enabling environment is required to ensure that practice is aligned with rhetoric, organization staff will be more able to make principled decisions.<sup>159</sup> Another recommendation specific to ABCD is from Peters, Gonsamo, Molla and Mathie, who explain that role transformation “requires a balanced combination of push and pull: push to catch people’s attention and get ABCD groups thinking and driving the process; and pull to motivate and leverage people’s knowledge and creativity to carry the change over.”<sup>160</sup> To account for this in Ilu Aga, the

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<sup>156</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 9.

<sup>157</sup> Hira, A. and T. Parfitt. (2004): 125.

<sup>158</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2008a): 365.

<sup>159</sup> Hira, A. and T. Parfitt. (2004): 125.

<sup>160</sup> Peters, et al. (2009): 18.

Coady Institute<sup>161</sup> led an ABCD workshop for Hundee and Oxfam staff prior to the ABCD program, which discussed and emphasized the importance of attitudinal changes and role reversals as key tenets of the ABCD approach. The Coady Institute's experience with ABCD has helped it to close in on and magnify ways that ABCD can be applied in different contexts, the type of role that donors, NGOs, local governments and other external agents must hold, and also, the most conducive regulatory environments to ensure best practice and application of CDD.<sup>162</sup> Additionally, practitioners were shown the various steps of ABCD that might be utilized in their program.

In accordance with the workshop, Hundee fieldworkers assumed a hands-off role of accompaniment once the community began undertaking its own development activities. Practitioners were initially present to sensitize the community on the ABCD program and process, to motivate, and provide inputs to help the community with their eventual action plan, and later stepped-back to assist in alliance-building and establishing linkages with local government and other organizations.<sup>163</sup> While practitioners noted a changed thinking about their roles in development initiatives, Cunningham also explains that both Hundee and Oxfam organizational structures internalized these transformations; since Ilu Aga, both organizations adopted and integrated the ABCD approach within their efforts in other communities.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> The Coady Institute is a partner of the ABCD Institute, which was established by the founders of the ABCD approach, Jody Kretzmann and John McKnight. Coady Institute has become a leader in ABCD research, evaluation, policy formulation, and application, and hosts many renowned ABCD forums.

<sup>162</sup> Coady International Institute. "Our Work: About ABCD," Coady Institute, <http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/writing/chicago-turabian>.

<sup>163</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 17.

<sup>164</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 293-5.

This role transformation is not just complex for facilitators, for getting communities to become involved in this manner is also a difficult feat. This type of participation, or ‘power to’ was taboo in Ilu Aga prior to the ABCD process, as persistent foreign aid had perpetuated a top-down assistance structure and further deepened the community’s reliance on such help. As a result, Hundee and Oxfam made attempts to reverse this disempowerment and dependence in order to stimulate community members’ ‘power to’. The ability of the ABCD approach to keep regard for this transformation lies in its capacity focus and the mechanisms that are utilized. The asset-focus of the approach helped to do this through stimulating discussion of past successes and thus, recognition and appreciation for community strengths. This established a sense of confidence and motivation within the community to utilize these assets.<sup>165</sup>

## *5.2 Interests: A strategy for sustainable community-driven development*

The ABCD approach rests on two main aims: to activate a type of development that is authentically community-driven through uncovering and reviving local assets and capacities; and to link community assets to larger structures which inevitably have significant influence over them. The former aim requires engagement at the local level to mobilize populations and spur collective action as a means to community-led development activities. The second challenge is influenced by the former aim, and also key to ensuring its sustainability; learning about and building on community agency helps to identify opportunities for structural changes, while support from outsider organizations diversifies and improves information and resource access. This creates an environment

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<sup>165</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 16.

that is more conducive not only to maintaining development efforts, but also for the establishment of new initiatives.

This second aim is illustrative of the ABCD strategy's broad focus on development and recognition of the underlying processes that work within that process; politics and power undoubtedly influence participation in, and the direction of development activities. In seeking to stimulate CDD and establish relationships between the community, local government, and private sector, the ABCD approach has a long-term vision; with a shift in attitudes and orientation that results in genuinely community-driven development initiatives, community organizations can become attractive investments,<sup>166</sup> thereby increasing their ability to diversify their initiatives and make riskier, perhaps more profitable investments.

### *The importance of the macro*

While participation is a fundamental component of ABCD, the approach acknowledges its inevitable limits; unequal power relations and socioeconomic inequalities can prevent participatory processes from becoming fully inclusive. A failure to contextualize efforts and account for such imbalances has resulted in a dangerous optimism within mainstream PAs about the potential of participation. Indeed, ABCD proponents raise concerns that much development discourse regards the concept from an instrumentalist view; participation is considered a panacea<sup>167</sup> and its potential to induce empowerment and transformation of communities is ignored.<sup>168</sup> In practice, this

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<sup>166</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 4.

<sup>167</sup> Agrawal, B. (2001). "Participatory exclusions, community forestry, and gender: an analysis for South Asia and a conceptual framework." *World Development* 29(10): 1625.

<sup>168</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002).

instrumentalist view leads PAs to ‘do’ participation as a technical method, failing to consider the fundamental systems of development and thus, depoliticizing the process.<sup>169</sup>

Hickey and Mohan suggest that it is this “imminent” focus on development that underscores the many problems of PAs, resulting in neglect for structural issues such as power imbalances and socioeconomic inequalities that have marginalized individuals from the outset.<sup>170</sup> The second aim of the ABCD approach – establishing linkages between communities and outside organizations and groups – confronts this problem. The approach recognizes the limits of participation and the importance of creating an enabling environment for true participation in development to take place. With this conception, the ABCD approach rejects the focus on ‘imminent’ development and instead, understands it as an ‘immanent’ process in which the micro (community assets and activities) must connect with the macro (government, the private sector, and other outside organizations).<sup>171</sup> In practice, this link enables a working relationship that includes support – or at the very least, a willingness to listen – and information sharing, thus promoting a more propitious policy environment for community-led activities.<sup>172</sup>

Concerns of the depoliticization of development that were directed at past PAs might also be applied to an ABCD approach. With a self-help ideology and stress on community-led development activities, a government may escape its responsibilities of providing services and resources to its communities. In this way, Berner and Philips warn that in relying on a community’s assumed inherent capacities, this ideology can be futile, and in some cases harmful. It assumes a homogeneity and equality within

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<sup>169</sup> Cleaver, F. (1999); Hickey, S. and G. Mohan (2004b); Masaki, K. (2004); Rahman, M.D.A. (1995).

<sup>170</sup> Hickey, S., and G. Mohan. (2004b): 11.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Mathie, A. (2008): 477.

communities that most often does not exist, and fails to regard macro power structures.<sup>173</sup>

Yet while ABCD encourages decentralization and communities to drive their own development, its emphasis on linking the micro to macro and creating an enabling environment wherein government supports community-led activities works to avoid depoliticizing development. Mathie and Cunningham do acknowledge that as this requires a change in attitude and behaviour of government officials, becoming open to working with and listening to communities, it is surely difficult.<sup>174</sup> However, the experiences of Ilu Aga show that this is indeed possible and can even happen naturally without any external assistance or prompting.

The program in Ilu Aga successfully influenced community-government relations. With visible improvements, innovations, and a demonstrated capacity to lead their own development efforts (see Section 4.2.3), the local government was much more supportive of community associations in Ilu Aga and even recognized it as a model community.<sup>175</sup> Government investment also increased through contributions to new developments for the school system, road construction, and establishing a tree nursery plot.<sup>176</sup> Furthermore, in the face of pressure from higher-level government to generate community involvement in activities such as well construction, local officials welcomed community-initiated activities that eased their responsibilities.<sup>177</sup> As a result, the community developed a positive and supportive relationship with local government.

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<sup>173</sup> Berner, E. and B. Phillips. (2005). "Left to their own devices? Community self-help between alternative development and neo-liberalism." *Community Development Journal* 40(1): 27.

<sup>174</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2008a): 366.

<sup>175</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 274.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

Hundee's relationship with the government also improved. The organization was considered to be radical and its work in Ethiopia was often stifled or prevented by the government, yet Hundee's involvement in Ilu Aga changed local government's attitude toward the organization.<sup>178</sup> With this improved reputation, the organization was better able to help in negotiating with government or other outside organizations when such assistance was requested. For example, when the community was working on its river diversion scheme, Hundee workers were approached to help request project permission from the government and to assist in finding technical support for the project.<sup>179</sup> As a result, the community's irrigation project was initiated and the community began potato production, a scheme that diversified the incomes of several households and reduced their economic vulnerability.

Such assistance was not routine, as several groups acknowledged that the institutional mapping exercises (see Section 5.3) helped to identify institutions and organizations whose resources and services could be utilized within their development activities.<sup>180</sup> Consequently, community associations became more cognizant of and acquainted with the government policies, programs, and resources. This expansion has resulted in some of these organizations registering with the government as formal associations.<sup>181</sup> Hence, empowerment of locals and the transformative effects of the ABCD approach are evident.

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<sup>178</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 273-4; Peters, B. et al. (2009): 25.

<sup>179</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 294.

<sup>180</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 11.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 20.

### *The transformative and empowering potential of participation*

The linkages and relationships formed between community groups and other organizations further influenced the ability of participation in the ABCD process to be transformational and empowering. Understood in this way, participatory development becomes a means *and* an end;<sup>182</sup> an end wherein people are involved in their own development activities, and as a means to allow the marginalized to express their voice. As previously discussed, there has been a visible shift, albeit small, in conceptions of participation, with many PAs citing empowerment and transformation as central to their ideology and objectives. However, while much of development practice is said to be dedicated to these ideals, many have failed to live up to such promises.

Undoubtedly, there are difficulties in engaging communities and encouraging attitudinal shifts. As Eyben and Ladbury contend, the motivation for community members to participate in a development program is largely dependent on what that program offers, and the type and amount of assistance offered to the community. There is an opportunity cost to participating – although an development organization may value the participation of locals in its programs, individuals may be reluctant to get involved as the benefits may not outweigh the costs.<sup>183</sup> The objective or purpose of a project may, for example, be deemed by community members to be the responsibility of government, and as such the benefits of participating are nil. Moreover, the authors note that when a project is likely to benefit individuals as individuals, not as community members, there is

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<sup>182</sup> Mohan, G. (2007): 781.

<sup>183</sup> Eyben, R. and S. Ladbury. (1995). “Popular participation in aid-assisted projects: why more in theory than practice?” pp. 200, in N. Nelson and S. Wright (Eds.), *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and practice*, London: Intermediate Technology Publications.

poor likelihood of collective participation.<sup>184</sup> Similarly, Olson refutes the idea that groups will work together when individual benefits are minimal. To overcome this, he suggests that the implementing organization must coerce individuals or provide them with incentives for participating.<sup>185</sup>

In Ilu Aga, participation in donor-led development activities in the past was uncommon given the high level of aid dependence within the country as a whole. As such, Peters et al. noted the difficulties in inciting a change in behaviour and attitude within the community; many were reluctant to participate since this had never been required, yet aid was still provided. Additionally, other programs had given per diems for attending meetings or participating in workshops, creating incentives to participate based on financial reward.<sup>186</sup> While such incentives may be useful for enforcing participation, as Olson suggested, this approach diverges from the ethos of participation and CDD and fails to stimulate motivation to continue to act collectively once outside agents have retreated from the project. A major challenge for the ABCD program then was to overcome these expectations and help individuals to see the benefits of collective action and participation.

In contrast to the instrumental view of participation within many populist PAs – participation by way of information sharing and consultation becomes a means for project efficiency and legitimacy –, a focus on empowerment and transformation includes mutual-learning for more relevant development, and then moves past this to consider underlying social transformations. Rather than assuming an eagerness to act together and

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<sup>184</sup> Eyben, R. and S. Ladbury. (1995): 197.

<sup>185</sup> Olson, M. Jr. (1971): 2.

<sup>186</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 17.

thus, seeking to initiate a project that requires participation, an ABCD approach's general objective is to generate recognition within a community of their assets to prompt them to act collectively. It seeks to engage with indigenous knowledge not only to ensure activities are more reflective of a community's priorities and to incite confidence and empowerment, but also to trigger confidence in collective action in pursuit of development.

As such, it is possible to distinguish meaningful participation from involvement, as encouraged by many critics of past PAs.<sup>187</sup> Rather than simply being involved in processes prescribed by a development organization, individuals are creating and controlling their development initiatives. White suggests that this process is never-ending, "a continuing dynamic which transforms people's reality and their sense of it."<sup>188</sup> As such, the likelihood of sustainability is improved significantly; through leading their own development initiatives, community ownership and responsibility over such activities increases, creating incentive to maintain and manage those undertakings.

Through this conception of participation and PD as a process, the ABCD approach has been influential in Ilu Aga in profound ways. Along with improved relationships between local government, the community and Hundee, the program served as an impetus for changed relations within the household and community.<sup>189</sup> An increase in collective action and a willingness listen to others, including those hitherto marginalized, as well as changed power dynamics and the inclusion of women in more

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<sup>187</sup> See Arnstein, S. R. (1969); Pretty, J. N., et al. (1995); Robinson, L. W. (2002); and Stewart, J. M. P. and A. J. Sinclair, (2007).

<sup>188</sup> White, S. C. (1996). "Depoliticising Development: The Uses and Abuses of Participation." *Development in Practice* 6(1): 8.

<sup>189</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 273.

household decisions, are just two cited examples of the transformative impact ABCD has had in Ilu Aga.

Evidently, the capacity-focus of ABCD is key to evoking the potential of becoming involved in one's own individual and/or community development initiatives, and thus, prompting more deep-seeded transformations. We will see in the following section the value of the mechanisms used to facilitate and mobilize communities. While it has been stressed that the search for alternative approaches should not rely on method revisions, that is not to say that these should not be minded and valued, for it is through the processes of an approach that its interests and ideologies can be tangibly expressed.

### *5.3 Procedure: Facilitative, minimalist-natured steps*

While past approaches to PD often begin with a strategic plan and framework for engaging with a community, analyzing its problems and needs, and prescribing solutions,<sup>190</sup> ABCD emphasizes discussion, inquiry, and decision-making. It is action-oriented, seeking to understand others' opinions and perspectives through discussion and working together. In contrast, the tools employed within PRA projects are useful insofar as their ability to generate information about indigenous knowledge and views, yet they fail to motivate and encourage action<sup>191</sup> or to reflect and analyze on practice.<sup>192</sup> Initial criticisms of PAs focused mainly on PRA and what had become its rigid and technical practice. A major shortcoming was the tendency to focus on specific methods to be applied in a specific sequence, regardless of the context. It was assumed that such

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<sup>190</sup> Waddington, M. and G. Mohan. (2004). "Failing forward: going beyond PRA and imposed forms of participation." p. 245 in S. Hickey and G. Mohan (Eds.) *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development*. London: ZED Books.

<sup>191</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2008a): 364.

<sup>192</sup> Hira, A. and T. Parfitt. (2004): 124.

methods were suitable for all circumstances and all PRA work. Consequently, these PAs were inflexible and unresponsive, and any focus on genuine community participation was lost.<sup>193</sup>

The ABCD approach differs in its attempt to encourage discussion, learning, information sharing and innovation, and for locals to learn to develop their own communities. In this way, we can see elements of the original prophecies of the potentials of participation and community-led development; as Sen suggested with his “capability approach,” development practices must place emphasis on building from the existing capabilities of the poor in an effort to empower them.<sup>194</sup> ABCD processes begin to do this through reviving the voices of communities, helping them to recognize and strengthen their assets and capabilities, thus encouraging them to lead their own development.

In response to the over-emphasis on methods and the mechanical application of PRA tools, Chambers later encouraged a “use your own best judgement” approach to PRA that rejected a blueprint altogether and suggested practitioners place “primacy [on] the personal.”<sup>195</sup> Yet, while this responded to the critiques of methodological hegemony, it then raised concerns of sloppy practice that often still resulted in mere information generation without any action or creating a plan for action after PRA was practiced.<sup>196</sup> While Kretzmann and McKnight do not provide a blueprint for ABCD, they are also weary of haphazard practice. To prevent both rigid and sloppy practice, they outline

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<sup>193</sup> Thompson, J., J. Abbot, and F. Hinchcliffe. (1996). “Participation, policy and institutionalization: An Overview.” *PLA Notes* 27: 26. London: IIED.

<sup>194</sup> Sen, (1999): 18

<sup>195</sup> Chambers, R. (1994c): 1450.

<sup>196</sup> Cornwall, A. and G. Pratt. (2003). “The trouble with PRA: reflections on dilemmas of quality.” *PLA Notes* 47. London: IIED, 40.

various steps and mechanisms that have proven useful in their experience and which ABCD practice subscribes to. It should be stressed that these steps are simply to “begin to point the way down a community building path which is, in fact, asset-based, internally focussed and relationship driven” and “would mobilize an entire community’s assets around a vision and a plan.”<sup>197</sup>

The steps include diagrams and mapping, which are considered to be practical methods for identifying and linking assets. Together, these steps provide a holistic approach that encourages communities to mobilize their assets and work together on development initiatives, while simultaneously acknowledging the links of their activities to other aspects of their community life.<sup>198</sup> Yet, unlike PRA methods, the ABCD approach puts much emphasis on discussion, problem solving, and building relationships. It does this by integrating various theoretical influences that occupy much of modern development discourse: appreciative inquiry (AI), theories of social capital, and community economic development (CED). While the fundamentals of these theories have been elaborated in Section 6.1, this section will outline their influence on the practice of ABCD and its procedures and thus, how this contributes to the potential of the approach to make up for conventional PA shortcomings.

#### *Discovering strengths with appreciative inquiry (AI)*

The initial step of ABCD is largely grounded in the theory of AI, which assumes that within all communities there exist strengths and skills that must be uncovered, acknowledged, and utilized. Efforts are refocused on mobilizing these assets for shared

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<sup>197</sup> Kretzmann, J. P. and J. L. McKnight. (1993): 345-346.

<sup>198</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 7.

problem solving and collaborative action. While problems surely exist in these communities, new development activities may indirectly solve these problems,<sup>199</sup> or the urgency of a particular problem may be reduced as activities help the community to outgrow the problem or establish alternative solutions.<sup>200</sup> Elliot explains that AI aims to shift a community's self-perception from negative expressions based on internalized views of their deficiencies and supposed incapacities, to positive terms where their capacities to improve livelihoods are realized and appreciated.<sup>201</sup>

An evaluation conducted by Peters, Gonsamo, Molla and Mathie revealed AI as a key step to overcoming resistance to participation and shared problem solving in Ilu Aga. Through storytelling of past development successes of their community, locals discovered their own strengths, realized the potential of collective action to generate similar success, and became confident and motivated to mobilize their assets to do so.<sup>202</sup> In fact, community members cited an increased willingness to engage in collective action as the 'Most Significant Change' indicator of their ABCD process.

Using the appreciative approach as an initial step helped to establish the unique nature of ABCD, presenting the facilitators as students who are there to listen, learn, and discover strengths, not to diagnose problems and direct solutions. This creates a positive and open environment rather than one that focuses on needs. Moreover, through identifying why past successes were possible, individuals gain confidence in their capacities. Through discussion, trust and openness to expressing opinions and needs

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<sup>199</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 6.

<sup>200</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002).

<sup>201</sup> Elliott, C. (1999). *Locating the Energy for Change: An Introduction to Appreciative Inquiry*. Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development, 12.

<sup>202</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 16.

increase, generating a further willingness for shared problem solving for mutual benefit.<sup>203</sup> As such, AI becomes a steppingstone to community action.<sup>204</sup>

### *Social capital*

Community assets and capacities are then mapped to create an asset inventory, identifying not only human and financial assets, but also geographical and institutional assets. In Ilu Aga, this also included association mapping wherein social assets were identified. An inventory of community associations was created to establish what kind of contributions could be offered and if there were any potential points for collaboration between associations.<sup>205</sup> This can be seen as the operationalizing of the theory of social capital through identifying and making use of the community's "bonding" and "bridging" social capital.

Social assets include community associations, both formal and informal, as well as networks and extended family. Such relationships can be supportive and assist individuals or communities to advance and become more productive. It is these social linkages that can be understood as social capital; while defining the concept is difficult, Putnam explains that it generally denotes "connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them."<sup>206</sup> As well, he differentiates between two types of social capital – bonding and bridging. The former refers to relationships between friends and families, bringing people together and

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<sup>203</sup> Cornwall, A. (2004). "Spaces for Transformation? Reflection on Issues of Power and Differences in Participation in Development." in S. Hickey and G. Mohan (Eds.) *Participation: From Tyranny to Transformation? Exploring New Approaches to Participation in Development*. London: ZED Books.

<sup>204</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002).

<sup>205</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 5.

<sup>206</sup> Putnam, R. (2000): *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 19.

creating a sense of solidarity. By contrast, bridging social capital includes broader relationships and is thus outward-looking and useful for information sharing, mobilizing assets and leveraging relationships.<sup>207</sup>

Kretzmann and McKnight consider this building of relationships as critical for encouraging collective action and reducing the “mendicancy mentality.” It is important for problem-solving and strengthening community ties; as individuals and associations are linked, “as the web of ties among assets inside the community is rebuilt, and as the demonstrations of local competence multiply, residents cease to look first toward the outside for help in addressing the most important local concerns.”<sup>208</sup> As such, the ABCD emphasis on social assets may constitute the formation of bridging social capital.

Through the ABCD mapping and mobilizing activities, a core representative group can form to lead the community through remainder of the ABCD process and developing a community action-plan. Acknowledging differences in power, the ABCD approach attempts to make the process open and participatory through encouraging the involvement of individuals whom are not normally thought of as community leaders, but may represent a particular asset.<sup>209</sup> In this way, it is not only the visible and traditional community leaders whom are participating, and the planning process becomes more representative. Furthermore, in acting together, burdens of leadership are spread and power concentrations can begin to be dismantled.<sup>210</sup> However, Mathie and Cunningham do caution that while ABCD has much to offer for strengthening and utilizing a community’s social capital, when hierarchical relationships are difficult to break down or

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<sup>207</sup> Putnam, R. (2000): 22-23.

<sup>208</sup> Kretzmann, J. P. and J. L. McKnight. (1993): 346.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 352.

<sup>210</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2008a): 359.

work around, there is limited willingness to work collectively rather than in the interest of one's own class or caste.<sup>211</sup> As bridging social capital acts as a latent asset, it can be increased or depleted depending on the level of trust and degree of reciprocity of support.<sup>212</sup>

The effects of the ABCD emphasis on social assets as capital were made evident in Ilu Aga. Once the asset inventory was created, the community's social capital could be identified and mobilized to increase community-wide access to opportunities for development. Moreover, as we saw in Section 5.2, community members cited attitudinal changes as being the most important change within Ilu Aga since the ABCD process.<sup>213</sup> It was suggested that through the ABCD process there was an increased value on collective action, and this had run-off effects such as improved organizational abilities for mobilizing resources, thereby increasing groups' potential for leading development activities.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, locals explained that as the process continued and the benefits of working together and helping one another became more visible, more people were willing and eager to becoming involved.<sup>215</sup> Together, these community associations have mobilized their bonding social capital and increased their bridging social capital.<sup>216</sup>

The outward orientation of bridging social capital also makes it relevant to and significant for moving forward and developing as a community. Accordingly, it is deemed highly influential on economic activity: de Souza Briggs explains that individuals' access to "information, vouching (recommendations and other social

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<sup>211</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002): 11.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>213</sup> Peters, B., et al. (2009): 10.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>215</sup> Cunningham, G. (2008): 273.

<sup>216</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002): 10.

endorsements), preparation, mentoring, and other keys to economic access and attainment,” improves with bridging relationships.<sup>217</sup> Similarly, Putnam remarks that bridging social ties among economic actors are seen to contribute to widespread economic growth.<sup>218</sup> Within the ABCD approach, Mathie and Cunningham comment that as bridging social capital contributes to improved and expanded aggregate economic activity, it also has a spin off effect as it allows for current social capital to increase and diversify.<sup>219</sup> The ABCD approach, through its focus and emphasis on social relationships as assets, can be understood as an application of the theory of social capital.<sup>220</sup>

#### *Community economic development (CED)*

Once placed in an inventory, the community’s assets can then be mobilized for information sharing and strengthening the local economy. An analysis of the local economy helps to develop the community’s capacities for economic development and make use of local economic opportunities. The leaky bucket diagram used in Ilu Aga helped community members to identify their specific expenditures and financial inflows. Through this, they were able to generate ideas of how to minimize expenditures, increase inflows, and facilitate exchanges and sharing within the community.<sup>221</sup> Based on this information, an action plan was formed by community members who then became responsible for all aspects and stages of the planned efforts including prioritizing, design, implementation, maintenance, and management. At this point – once the representative group begins to problem-solve together and create a vision and plan – the facilitators can

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<sup>217</sup> de Souza Briggs, X. (2003). “Bridging Networks, Social Capital, and Racial Segregation in America.” John F. Kennedy School of Government Faculty Research Working Paper Series Paper RWP02-011: 10.

<sup>218</sup> Putnam, R. (2000): 323.

<sup>219</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2002): 10.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>221</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2009): 5.

remove themselves and revert to an intermediary, ‘gap bridging’ role, helping to link the community to outside organizations to leverage resources.<sup>222</sup>

The ABCD process can thus be considered a strategy for CED and group capacity building. Through collective action, individuals are able to improve their wellbeing in ways that would not otherwise be possible if they were acting independently.

Community members form together, creating associations to work together; this occurred in Ilu Aga with the formation of new community associations such as irrigation associations, cereal-banks, youth associations and dairy associations. These associations are considered key to ABCD for identifying and connecting community assets, thereby maximizing their value and effectiveness.<sup>223</sup>

Success of an ABCD process is not determined by any tangible outcomes or impacts of the program. Rather, success refers to a program in which community members were active and fully engaged in all levels of the initiatives, which then stimulated an authentic community-led process.<sup>224</sup> More specifically, community-driven effort refers to community level activity that enables participation, and a sense of ownership and responsibility for the development of the community.<sup>225</sup> While ABCD may not directly confront and tackle issues of poverty and community inequalities, it surely creates a path for communities to realize and make use of their assets to eventually improve their livelihoods in accordance with their own priorities.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Kretzmann, J. P. and J. L. McKnight. (1993): 353; Cunningham, G. (2008): 296.

<sup>223</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham (2002): 5.

<sup>224</sup> Foster, M. (2006).

<sup>225</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2003): 10.

<sup>226</sup> Peters, B. et al. (2011): 2.

## 6: CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper has not been to refute critiques of participatory approaches, rather, to illustrate how we can build off of such criticisms through identifying the potential of alternative practices. In reflecting and critically analyzing the common problems of PAs, there is a strong essence of confidence and optimism that there *is* potential for participation to successfully bring about authentic community-driven development. This analysis also signifies an appeal for continued improvement in practice. Indeed, debate of the shortfalls and potential successes of PAs surely helps us to hone our practice, developing more effective ways of engaging with communities and ensuring participatory initiatives contribute to peoples' ability to uplift themselves.

Moreover, the Ethiopian case study, while not absolutely representative, offers a better understanding of the potential of the ABCD approach for genuine CDD and of the importance of behaviour and roles in development practitioners. The case also provides guidance for future studies or for the planning of PD in other communities. In this way, this paper has offered an exploration of the nature and potential of participation in development, of the form and function of the roles of development and external agents, and of the ability of ABCD to make up for the shortcomings of traditional PAs.

Development can be understood as a process of social transformation, including economic, political and technological changes, which seeks to improve one's quality of life. The importance of participation in development is paramount; development exists in the lived experiences of people, and we can identify 'success' when these individuals seize to become objects under someone (or something) else's control, thereby becoming

subjects of their own events. Accordingly, top-down development approaches must adopt a more participatory ideal. While PRA and other conventional, populist PAs have potential for stimulating CDD, systemic problems and inequalities have undermined the value of such approaches and thus, the effectiveness of PD. Consequently, their ability to have the transformative power they purport has consistently failed. This requires an aim to create a long-lasting and irreversible process, engagement with development as a process rather than a project or intervention, and thus going beyond the individual to encompass institutional and structural revisions. Surely, empowerment cannot be given to a less powerful group by a more powerful one.<sup>227</sup> To move away from a project-focus, practitioners must strive to understand local development processes, “in part through building on existing forms of popular agency.”<sup>228</sup> The ability of development approaches to accommodate indigenous participatory values, processes, structures and practices so as to enhance the effectiveness of PD is an area that requires additional exploration.

As an approach to PD, asset-based practices illustrate a new paradigm and an innovative ideological alternative. ABCD places emphasis on facilitation, decision-making, processes of power, and change within greater political structures. The shift from a needs- and problems-focus to an asset-based focus that emphasizes capabilities has been evidenced to have a ripple effect, creating confidence within communities of their own ability to lead their development. Consequently, this has generated enthusiasm to initiate development activities within one’s own community, and there exists a sense of ownership and responsibility over such efforts. Capacities are further developed and the increased willingness to act collectively enhances a community’s ability to take on more

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<sup>227</sup> Waddington, M. and G. Mohan. (2004): 221.

<sup>228</sup> Hickey, S. and G. Mohan. (2004b): 13.

diverse development projects. Projects tend to be more sustainable as a result of this strong ownership.

The potential of ABCD and other asset-based approaches to bring about authentic community-led development is evident, yet challenges certainly remain. The long-term commitment that such approaches require combined with their uncertainty and inability to offer quick, measurable and tangible results makes it difficult to frame such practices as attractive to donors. Moreover, the attitudinal and behavioural shifts of NGOs and development workers that are critical for an asset-based approach to function have, as discussed, proved challenging to reconstruct; practitioners must adopt the role of ‘gap bridgers’ whom build on local capacity in communities rather than ‘gap fillers’ that build capacity. This will require finding a balance between locally-led initiatives that are responsive while also maintaining a role of assisting in linkage development and ensuring community services and entitlements are met.

As development experience has illustrated, there are underlying strengths to most PAs. Perhaps then, a combination of methods and approaches will add value to the effectiveness of PD, allowing the best of each approach to be utilized and to complement one another. Russell and Smeaton suggest that an ideal mix of the SLA, rights-based, and PRA approaches can become even more powerful when complemented by an ABCD approach. This framework of approaches will help to relocate power and authority to local communities by ensuring that development agencies avoid the tendency of treating communities as clients instead of ‘active citizens’.<sup>229</sup> While PRA is useful for ensuring

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<sup>229</sup> Russell, C. and T. Smeaton. (2009). “From Needs to Assets: Charting a sustainable path towards development in sub-Saharan African countries.” *Global Sustainable Development Conference*. Evanston: Asset-Based Community Development Institute, 18.

that PD initiatives are relevant to and approved by the communities for whom the initiatives are directed, the approach does not allow for those communities to become leaders of their development. ABCD can make up for this; in focusing on community assets, the approach avoids and rejects an assumption that externally led solutions are the key to development, thus ensuring that locals are the development drivers and reducing their dependence on outside agencies.<sup>230</sup>

PRA methods are also integrated within SLA and are then expanded by inviting and encouraging individuals to map their assets and identify associations to be utilized for development initiatives; citizens move further beyond decision-making, helping also to produce their development rather than simply designing solutions.<sup>231</sup> ABCD offers a way of operationalizing SLA and when combined, the approaches can build both bonding and bridging social capital, connecting community members and including those once marginalized individuals.<sup>232</sup> Incorporating and applying the ideals of a rights-based approach, which emphasizes equality and equity, accountability, participation and empowerment, can further enhance this marriage of approaches.<sup>233</sup> Together, this combination ensures indigenous capacities can be realized, power can be relocated into the hands of communities, and an opportunity for increased levels of social inclusion is offered. The ‘unpolished diamonds’ can thus be recognized, for communities “have skills and capacities that they can mobilize for change” and “they are powerful in their recognition of their own strengths, and in their motivation to make use of them.”<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Russell, C. and T. Smeaton. (2009): 8-9.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>234</sup> Mathie, A. and G. Cunningham. (2008a): 368.

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