Impact of international donors' new policy agenda on project collaboration between community-based women organizations and NGOs in the Kibera slums of Nairobi, Kenya

Sophie De Feyter

Conflict Research Group, Center for Third World Studies, Ghent University

This article first describes the New Policy Agenda (NPA), a market-based ideology influencing donor agencies' strategies for international development. The article then continues to discuss how community-based women organizations (CBWOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) evaluate their collaborations or 'partnerships' in practice in the Kibera slums of Nairobi, Kenya. We tested the research hypothesis that the NPA reduces the likelihood of achieving equitable partnerships because of its insistence on 'contracting' partners, i.e. creating a patron-client relationship. This was carried out through qualitative research consisting mainly of semi-structured interviews and participatory observation with NGOs and CBWO representatives working in Kibera. Research results show that the contract conditions for CBWOs to enter into a partnership may reduce the chances of the most vulnerable groups in society of obtaining assistance. This 'contracting' relationship may also cause a loss of CBWO members' motivation. The NPA and its emphasis on saving time and money also has a negative impact not only on the external development actors' knowledge about the development context, but also on the multiple accountabilities in a CBWO-NGO partnership, on the quick-fix nature of the solutions applied to remedy the lack of accountability and on the practical implementation of 'participatory development' in Kibera.

Key words: development, donor relations, contract, participatory development

Research context

Women and CBWOs in Kibera

Kibera is one of the largest slums in Africa and houses a population of almost 1 million people in an area of approximately 2,5 km² (Thomas, 2007). A large portion of the dwellers work in the capital's industrial sector and earn around 1 dollar a day. The Kenyan government – just like the British colonial administration before – refuses to provide the inhabitants of Kibera with property rights to the land they live on, on account of its 'slum clearance' policy (Joireman, 2008: 8). This considerably complicates the housing situa-

tion in Kibera in a number of ways (see Joireman (2008) and Lonsdale (2008) for more information about the housing situation and property rights in the slums of Nairobi).

As city authorities do not consider Nairobi's informal settlements to be legal, they refuse to see basic service provision in these areas as their responsibility (Wegelin-Schuringa & Kodo, 1997). The street scene is illustrative of the authorities' attitude: the sewage system is open, garbage and dirty water flow in the middle of the alleyways, and electricity and water facilities are lacking to a large extent. There is also a lack of government-funded formal schools in Kibera, which motivates local community groups to set up their own non-formal schools with the limited means they can mobilize.

Disadvantaged Kenyan women are often more in need of 'empowerment' – a loaded term, as shall be discussed below – than disadvantaged Kenyan men, since Kenyan ethnic groups are characterized by strong male primacy and female dependence, stemming from a tradition of patrilinearity (Kimuna, 2008). Because of the collective actions they organize, women organizations (among which community-based women organizations or CBWOs) are able to pool resources and in this way gain ownership of something they could not have accessed or owned as individual women, for instance land or houses (Mitullah & Lewa, 2001). As a consequence, women and young people in Nairobi's informal settlements are "*relatively more dependent on group activities for their living, while adult males often have an alternative source of income*" (La Ferrara, 2002: 2).

As it is difficult for Kenyan women to achieve a position of power in their community or community organizations, it is more common for women to form their own community-based organizations (Riley, 2005). These organizations are then called community-based women organizations. Women are also drawn to join CBWOs because of the tradition of women having to leave their home after getting married, and going to live in their husband's home where they have no social network except for that of their husband's family (Gugerty & Kremer, 2008). Women groups are therefore important institutions for women in Kenya, and numerous NGOs and other aid agencies often prefer to work with CBWOs.

The NPA and its key concepts

According to Edwards and Hulme (1995: 188), donor agencies' doctrine on development and provision of aid has been largely influenced by the 'New Policy Agenda' paradigm (term coined by Robinson (1993), mentioned in Edwards & Hulme, 1995: 188) since the 1980s, and even more since the end of the Cold War in 1989. After the Cold War, ideological rivalry between West and East could no longer be used as an argument to persuade taxpayers in the North of the need for development aid (Fowler, 1998). Instead, an "*enlightened self-interest*" rather than a "*moral obligation*" became the justification for aid (UNDP, 1993 mentioned in Fowler, 1998: 138). As a consequence, taxpayers had to be convinced that their money would be well-spent and that aid was effective and efficient. This alteration is linked to the NPA's approach and philosophy which is based on the neo-liberal economics' belief that "*markets and private initiative are … the most efficient mechanisms for achieving economic growth and providing most services to most people*" (Edwards & Hulme 1995: 188). In this

context, NGOs – in collaboration with CBOs – are viewed as having a higher *"efficiency and profitability"* in service provision than the state, because they give *"better value-for-money"*, in particular with regard to addressing the needs of the poorest (Edwards & Hulme, 1996: 961). Based on the Agenda's premises, bilateral and multilateral donor agencies have only been too eager to fund NGOs and CBOs.

Beginning in the late 1970s, the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and the NPA as a model of 'bottom-up development' gained a lot of influence (Parnwell, 2002: 115). SAPs are concerned with increasing state income through increased exports but also by cutting back on government expenditure, especially on social welfare, which in effect often increases the pressure on poor people who lose the little support they used to get from government (Mayo & Craig, 1995). The bottom-up model of development is described as being *"localized and contextually rooted, small in scale, flexible, culturally sensitive, democratic and participatory,..."* and as a model *"which centres on the empowerment of the poor"* (Parnwell, 2002: 115). The theory behind this model of development is obviously packed with buzzwords such as 'participation', 'ownership', 'empowerment' and 'partnership' and has boosted the growth of both NGOs and CBOs. However, in the context of rising neoliberalism, free market promotion and a serious reduction of the role of the state, this model of 'bottom-up development' can also be interpreted as a way to *"shift costs from public sector budgets by persuading communities to make increased contributions [to the general public's social welfare] through voluntary effort and/or self-help/voluntary unpaid labour"* (Mayo & Craig, 1995: 4).

SAPs have driven international donor institutions to CBOs and so-called intermediary or 'operational' NGOs (Kamat, 2003). These intermediary NGOs *"engage primarily in design, facilitation and implementation of development sub-projects"* (Kamat, 2003: 66). An intermediary NGO can for instance act as a go-between between international donors and local community-based organizations. In the case of Nairobi, intermediary NGOs have become the interface that provides donor agencies and NGOs with the opportunity to *"invest"* in these slums without having to deal with the ineffective Nairobi City Council (Riley & Wakely, 2005: 84). Fowler (1998: 137) explains that the NPA is based on the principle of *"contract-based relationships"* between donors, NGOs and CBOs, which are in effect patron-client models. However, he claims, this *"contracting"* complicates the achievement of real or *"authentic"* partnerships, which are based on *"mutually enabling, inter-dependent interaction with shared intentions"* (ibid.: 144). The result is that the partnership is often only lucrative for donors and NGOs, which often increase their *"credibility, legitimacy, autonomy, economic viability, effectiveness, influence and leverage within their respective societies"* due to their collaboration with CBOs (Fowler, 1998: 141).

The partnership and empowerment concepts are closely related to the NPA and often used in development discourse in Kibera. However, they are interpreted in various ways by different actors. Firstly, the notion of partnership *"has been used and abused as a blanket covering all sorts of relationships between all sorts of development agencies"* (Sachs (1992), mentioned in Fowler, 1998: 140). Initially, in the 1970s and 1980s, a 'partnership' was proclaimed to be a symbol of international solidarity between North and South (Postma,

1994; Fowler, 1998). Today, there is no clarity about what a 'partnership' should cover and different kinds of aid agencies have different definitions of the concept. Secondly, 'empowerment' has also been interpreted differently over time. According to Kabeer (1994), mentioned in Parpart, 2002: 339), empowering women is about acquiring *"power over resources, institutions and decision-making"*, but the importance of *"the power within"* cannot be underestimated either. This 'power within' is a form of *"self-understanding"* that inspires people to challenge inequalities (*ibid.*). In the 1980s, empowerment was championed as an indispensable tool *"for challenging and transforming unequal political, economic and social structures"* (Parpart, 2002: 338). However, in the 1990s the term started to be utilized by some mainstream development agencies that firmly believed in liberal economics, and the term lost its initial meaning.

Research methodology

The main research question that will be addressed in this article is: 'What is the effect of NPA-inspired partnerships on NGO-CB(W)O dynamics in Kibera?' Our hypothesis is that the NPA reduces the likelihood of achieving equitable partnerships because of its insistence on *"contracting"* partners, i.e. creating a patron-client relationship instead of a *"mutually enabling, inter-dependent"* partnership (Fowler, 1998: 140). The data to explore and answer the research question were collected during a 6-month field research trip during the period of August 2008 to January 2009 in the Kibera slums in Nairobi (Kenya). In this research, the focus was on the relationship dynamics between CBWOs and (inter)national intermediary non-governmental (development) organizations (NGOs). It concentrated on the obstacles that are experienced by CBWOs 'in their search of' or during a collaboration with intermediary NGOs. Through the process of ethnographic content analysis (Altheide, 1987), the data collected on the different case studies were inductively organized into different categories, i.e. common trends with regard to CBWO-NGO relationships in Kibera. On the basis of 31 semi-structured interviews with selected members of CBWOs, network CBOs and NGO staff, and regular participatory observation of the functioning of 1 CBWO (CBWO1) and 1 NGO (NGO1), common obstacles to equitable CBWO-NGO collaboration were identified. A number of documents (such as training manuals and websites) were also analyzed. These diverse methods were used for triangulation purposes whereby participatory observation and documents were used to verify statements made during the interviews. Moreover, different informants were asked about the same cases and issues in order to double-check from different perspectives the information obtained.

All in all, 14 CBOs in Kibera were visited and their representatives interviewed. During most of our research in Kibera, we were assisted by a female key informant, who accompanied us through Kibera for reasons of security, facilitated contact with a number of local organizations, and translated from Kiswahili (or occasionally from indigenous languages, such as Kikuyu) to English wherever necessary during the interviews. During the data collection process, the focus of the research narrowed to 10 CBWOs (mainly consisting of women), because of the importance of these organizations for women in the

specific slum context and Kenyan society as a whole. These CBWOs were either 'in search of' (3) or already had a collaboration with an NGO (5) or a CBO network that connected them to other aid agencies/NGOs (2). Thematically, these CBWOs were all working on social service provision.

Interviews were conducted with representatives of 14 NGOs (6 local and 8 international NGOs). Of these, 5 local and 4 international NGOs were selected for further research because they were in a long-standing collaboration with CBWOs in Kibera in the field of social service provision. Interviews took place mostly when several CBWO members were present to answer questions. For the interviews with NGO representatives, one (occasionally two) NGO staff member(s) was present to answer questions. In general, one interview – occasionally 2 – was/were conducted per organization.

During the Kibera slums research the role of the researcher occasionally became an obstacle. The researcher conducting the interviews presented herself as an international student doing research. The researcher was viewed as a 'white, rich stranger', however, especially during interviews with CBWO representatives. During participatory observation, the researcher took part in discussions between NGO1 and CBWO1 fronting as a volunteer for CBWO1 (doing research at the same time) delivered to CBWO1 by NGO1. Group members were aware of the volunteer's research. The researcher regularly observed the women group's weekly meetings and occasionally discussed the situation of the group with the NGO staff as part of her voluntary work in NGO1's women empowerment programme.

Even though the researcher had explained beforehand to CBWO members that they would not financially benefit from the interview, some CBWO members afterwards displayed disappointment and, from time to time, even anger towards the researcher for not receiving any financial support. Others, however, inquired about the researcher's findings and said they found it interesting to hear an outsider's opinion on the issues concerning the matter of entering into partnership with an NGO. The researcher's own experience when contacting NGO representatives showed that NGOs, and international NGOs in particular, prefer not to talk to external researchers. This aloofness was also frequently mentioned by CBWO interviewees, who wanted to inquire about an NGO's activities. Some NGO representatives referred to researchers who had negatively portrayed their organization, as the reason for their refusal. Our key informant was a development worker from Kibera. Because of her connections, we managed to interview some NGO workers. However, not all of them were talkative, possibly out of fear of losing their job.

Data derived from the interviews with the selected 9 NGOs and 10 CBWOs, were analyzed using open, axial and selective coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The process of ethnographic content analysis showed that CBWOs regularly encounter similar issues complicating their collaboration with NGOs. Based on their suitability to provide a deeper understanding of these issues complicating the partnership practice, five CBWOs (CBWO 1 – 5), 3 (local) NGOs (NGO 1 – 3) and 2 network CBOs (Network 1 and 2) were selected as case studies. For reasons of privacy, the analyzed CBWOs, network CBOs and NGOs are only referred to by their category and number. Moreover, it is not the intention in this research to point a finger at the interviewed organizations, but rather to focus on the generic issues arising in CBWO-NGO partnerships.

Results
Presentation of results

Based on the analysis of the field work data, the research provides an insight into the way NPA-inspired notions of partnership are implemented in the case of CBWOs and NGOs in Kibera. This article therefore discusses the results of the field research and links them to existing theory on the subject. The first part discusses how donors' NPA-inspired confidence in NGOs and CBOs (among which we have the CBWOs) as "*magic bullets*" that will magically make 'development' happen (Fisher, 1994: 3), distracts donors' attention from the context of development interventions. It will be shown that this lack of contextual knowledge can lead to demotivation and even conflict in CBWOs. The second part analyzes how the issue of multiple accountabilities is complicated by the NPA. Both CBOs and NGOs have to deal with these "*multiple accountabilities*" (Edwards & Hulme, 1996, p 967). On the one hand, there is the downward accountability "*to their partners, beneficiaries, staff and supporters*", while on the other hand they have an upward accountability "*to their trustees, donors and host governments*" (*ibid.*). In this research, particular focus is given to the issue of upward accountability of both the CBWO to the intermediary NGO as well as of the intermediary NGO to the donor, and on the (lack of) downward accountability of NGOs and donors toward CBWOs. All of these accountabilities are faced with serious challenges. The third section addresses quick-fix solutions to accountability problems, which worsen the situation in CBWOs. The fourth and last section explains how emphasizing upward accountability in CBWO-NGO partnerships can create a restrictive version of participation that fits within the plans of the donor, without taking into account the needs and wishes of CBWO members.

Donors' haste causes lack of contextual knowledge

Because of the NPA, a large amount of donor funding in Kenya has been channelled through CBWOs and NGOs since the 1980s (Edwards & Hulme, 1996: 965). However, CBWO-NGO collaborations can lose (a part of) their empowering effects due to heavy donor dependence. These donors often lack the capacity or willingness to "*support long time horizons, slow careful work, and gradual (often non-quantifiable) results which characterize successful local institutional development*" (*ibid.*). Even though in successful CBWO-NGO partnerships tempo and coordination of development processes are supposed to be decided upon by the community organizations, such a dynamic is rarely achieved (Mitlin & Satterthwaite, 1992: 178).

The CBWO1 case study shows how the haste of donors can lead to the erosion of CBWO members' motivation. CBWO1 consists of around 30 women, mainly young mothers and grandmothers with orphans. Some of these women used to be in another CBWO, i.e. CBWO4, which they left because of corruption issues. They then started another group with a number of new women members in the beginning of 2008. CBWO1's initial activities were income generation through craftwork, and merry-go-round. Merry-go-round refers to the habit of collecting food and other necessities such as soap from all group members, which are then distributed among those members who need it most

at that time. The approach is similar to that of revolving funds, but is based on the pooling of commodities instead of money. The group also collaborates with a relatively small local NGO, NGO1, for a microfinance initiative. Some of the members of CBWO1 are well-trained on issues of accountability and microfinance, even though the majority is not. After a large amount of donor money for a CBWO-managed microfinance scheme was (all too quickly) transferred from the NGO to the CBWO under donor pressure, fierce discussions arose among CBWO members about how loans would be distributed, who would participate in the first round of borrowing and how much money these women would each receive. To avoid further conflict, the NGO agreed to a short-term and compromising decision that was taken jointly by the CBWO members themselves: all members would be given the same small interest-free loan at the same time, because setting up a rotating system of bigger loans would require patience of most members. The latter would, however, be more profitable in the long run, because it would allow them to invest a larger sum into the expansion of their small businesses. The provision of small loans to all members created new problems in the long term. One year after the research, informants claimed that the group had lost much of its initial energy and enthusiasm. Many members became frustrated and left the group, as the promised profits from the microfinance scheme were not realised and their businesses did not grow as expected. If donor and NGO had more patience and a deeper understanding of the CBWO members' context and way of thinking, they might have seen that it was too early to disburse the money. The members had not yet grasped that the investment of a larger sum of money could significantly increase their businesses' leverage, whereas the investment of a small amount would not significantly increase their income. If the aim is to create a sustainable microfinance scheme that continues to deliver in the long run, that understanding of the mechanisms of investment should be shared by all members. Aid agencies, among which NGOs, are often *"in a hurry"*, because *"they feel the need to spend in order to justify their existence to their constituencies and to their donors"* (Eade, 2007: 636). In CBWO1's case, the haste of both donor and NGO led to demotivation and a decline in the membership and activities of the CBWO.

This haste – along with the lack of contextual knowledge it induced – can also bring about corruption, as illustrated in the Network1 and CBWO2 case studies. Network1, a network CBO composed of 100 CBWOs from Kibera, was accused by several interviewees of using its CBWO member organizations to attract donor funding which did not trickle down to its members. Even though Network1 board members were unwilling to be interviewed, we talked to several CBO members in Kibera who confirmed the lack of accountability of the network. At least 5 respondents from 5 different CBOs called it a briefcase organization with numerous international donors. Network1's board is claimed to be entirely constituted of the chairlady's family members. The chairlady had collected information, project proposals and registration certificates of around 100 CBWOs in Kibera, in order to write a joint project proposal. Following this, the network received a substantial amount of donor money, but all the network did for its members was to finance a one-day event during which the CBWOs collected garbage from Kibera's streets and for

which all CBWO members were mobilized. An incident occurred at a meeting when representatives of an international trust came to Kibera to see the project. Some CBO members took it as an opportunity to directly express to the international visitors their issues and frustration with the network, but this was to no avail. It is claimed that the network still continues to receive funds from the same donor even though it continues to use them in an illegitimate way. A CBWO6 member said that Network1 *"gets a lot of money, but it gets eaten by the network's leadership"* (CBWO6, personal interview, 23 September, 2008). An interview with an expatriate NGO worker of a highly respected NGO (that was not selected as one of the case studies) showed that her NGO wanted to finance Network1, because it *"brings almost all women groups in Kibera together in one network"* (NGO7, 18 September, 2008). The presence of a network combining many CBWOs is, after all, convenient for an NGO that concentrates on women's issues. It allows the NGO to achieve its targets in a more cost-effective manner (which is in line with the NPA), as it does not need to set up a collaborative effort with every single Kibera CBWO separately. However, the Network1 case shows that what might initially seem to be cost-effective, can foster corruption and promote a lack of transparency in the long run. This case shows that the lack of donors/NGOs' willingness – in the wake of the NPA – to invest sufficient time and resources in trying to understand CBWOs' functioning and 'reality', contributes to the absence of long-term development impact. Or, in the words of one CBWO member: *"Donors should come to the ground and see for themselves what their money is being used for"* (CBWO5, personal interview, October 15, 2008).

The necessity of contextual knowledge is also illustrated by the CBWO2 case. CBWO2 manages a large, informal primary school for orphans and neglected children. This CBWO collaborates with many different international and local NGOs, which provide the CBWO with food for the children feeding programme together with medicine and teachers' allowances. However, it was claimed that the chairlady of CBWO2 used half of the donor-funded teachers' wages for personal gain without the donor's knowledge and bought two matatus with that money (CBWO5, personal interview, October 15, 2008). *A matatu* is a small bus that is the most common means of public transport in Nairobi and therefore a very lucrative source of income. In at least 7 out of 10 organizations visited, CBWO interviewees mentioned corruption or "money-eating" by CBOs (and their leaders) or NGOs that are working in their area, as one of the problems they are facing. Not taking a project's context into account is therefore harmful to the most vulnerable people in society. However, it is important to keep in mind that allegations of corruption are sometimes used by dishonest people as a means to discredit the success of a CBO or NGO in Kibera, as one NGO official recounted (NGO1, personal interview, January 23, 2009).

Struggling with accountabilities

As donors often fail to consult with CBWO beneficiaries of a development project before deciding whether or not to (continue to) fund an intermediary organization (such as an NGO or a network), the latter intermediaries are not obliged to consider the con-

cerns of individual CBWOs and their members (Pearce, 1993). As our results confirm, accountability in NGO-CBWO partnerships therefore becomes problematic. Account-ability refers to "*the means by which individuals and organizations report to a recognized authority (or authorities) and are held responsible for their actions*" (Edwards & Hulme, 1996: 967). Theoretical work points to two major issues that complicate 'accountability': accountancy and an overemphasis on upward accountability.

Firstly, accountability – especially with regard to NPA-inspired contracting – is often translated as "*accountancy*" (Edwards & Hulme, 1996: 968). This means that the focus is mostly on the financial aspect of accountability because of its measurability (Tandon, 1995). Because long-term empowering effects of a development intervention are often difficult to quantify, they become of minor importance. Our interviews with NGO and CBWO representatives suggest that NGOs dread losing donors' money more than they fear setting up a project that the community does not want, need or own. Unwittingly, they create conflict or corruption by focusing on financial accounts instead of how the money invested will impact on people's lives. Real mutual accountability should be about more than financial accountability and should hold NGOs and CBWO boards responsible for the project's empowering benefits for CBWO members. This move towards real mutual accountability would then help donors and NGOs to anticipate any possible failure in project implementation and success, even when the financial aspects of accountability are seemingly in order (as in the above-mentioned CBWO2 and Network1 cases). These development actors should relinquish their dependency on accounts and financial systems that only keep track of quantifiable facts. Rather, if CBWO and NGO were to be held qualitatively accountable by donors for actually assisting (or for failing to assist) CBWO members in the field, the NGO and CBWO board would be compelled to immerse themselves in the group's context and dynamics. Engaging in and becoming familiarized with the context of an intervention is vital for all stakeholders involved. This is also illustrated by the CBWO4 case study, in which the donor's ignorance of the complex ethnic situation causes problems in the project's management.

CBWO4 has around 30 women members. The management of a small primary school is currently their main activity. After CBWO4 was given a quite expensive school building by a donor, some members wanted to seize the power in the group in order to obtain personal financial gain (CBWO4, personal interview, October 17, 2008). By attracting more and more new Luhya members, who constitute one of Kenya's largest ethnic groups, a Luhya majority was built among group members. Subsequently, elections were called without informing the other members. These elections were won by the Luhya representatives and other non-Luhya, critical members were kept out of the board. In this way, the best-represented ethnic group managed to vote members of other ethnic groups out of the board. After that

> the elected board was not transparent and nobody knew what was going on in the office. The three elected signatories were hiding the money. The chairlady and the secretary all belong to the same tribe … so they communicated in their own way, so that the others could not understand it (CBWO4, personal interview, October 17, 2008).

The new leaders were not accountable towards any of their members and they refused to call statutory elections, despite the group's constitution stating that this had to be done every year. Since financial accounting of the CBWO did not show any discrepancies, the donors were unaware of the abuse of power and continued to fund CBWO4. Eventually, a number of members left the CBWO. The aid agencies, which never communicated with any CBWO4 members outside of the board, were not aware of the (ethnic) divisions within the group or the lack of downward accountability of the group's leaders. In line with Patterson's findings (Patterson, 1998; see also Kelsall & Mercer, 2003), this case shows the danger of viewing CBWOs as homogeneous entities. One CBWO4 member said:

> Sometimes a chairman or other board member can use his power to keep the women disempowered and uncritical. This makes it much easier to eat the money that has been donated to the whole group. True empowerment is sometimes avoided on purpose.

If careless NGO monitoring (partly caused by NPA's focus on accountancy) pays no heed to internal CBWO heterogeneity and does not look into the group in order to assess and discuss issues with all the actors involved, power struggles and conflicts may increasingly arise within a CBWO (Mitlin, 2001; see also Degnbol, 2005).

The second major issue with accountability is the overemphasis of upward accountability. In general, upward accountability from CBWO to NGO and from NGO to donor is much more valued by donors than downward accountability from donor to NGO and CBWO, from NGO to CBWO and/or from CBWO leaders to their members (Eade, 2007). Nevertheless, our interviews with CBWO representatives showed that an intermediary NGO's downward accountability and transparency were considered to be important issues by all interviewed CBWO members. This is, however, often disregarded by NGOs. The CBWO5 case illustrates this. CBWO5 consists of 100 members. It has been working with many big (inter)national NGOs and development agencies. One of them is the large local NGO, NGO2, which focuses on issues of water and sanitation. NGO2 was funded by international donors to build a water tank for CBWO5. A construction material supplier wrongly delivered low-quality material that was not suitable for the durable construction of the water tank. Because of the time pressure from the donor, who wanted to see the construction finished on time, the NGO did not take the time to exchange the low-quality material for quality supplies. This resulted in a quick deterioration of the water tank. The CBWO members notified NGO2 about this problem and the NGO found new funds from another donor to repair the tank. However, according to NGO2's director, the donors could not agree whose logo would be put on the water tank (NGO2, personal interview, September 23, 2008). The donor who financed the initial investment, wanted its name to remain visible on the repaired tank, while the second donor wanted its name to be the only one on the signboard. This turf war between donors still leaves the CBWO waiting for a solid water tank. In short, the CBWO was not able to hold either donor or NGO responsible for not implementing the initial project. From this case, we

can deduct that the donors seem to underestimate their duty of downward accountability in a CBWO-NGO partnership. The NGO obeys the donors and in this way also ignores its downward accountability.

In contrast to downward accountability, upward (financial) accountability of CB-WOs and NGOs receives a lot of emphasis in partnerships (Eade, 2007). In this respect, Edwards and Hulme (1996: 968; see also Eade, 2007; Platteau & Gaspart, 2003) stress that massive flows of donor funding, in the wake of the NPA, may "*reorient accountability [within such a partnership] upward, away from the grassroots, supporters and staff*". This is illustrated by international-NGO4's request for official accounting documents from CBWOs in Kibera, such as authentic receipts with seller's ID numbers. According to NGO4-Kenya's program manager, it is a major challenge to accord the requirements of international-NGO4 (the international mother NGO to which the local branch of NGO4-Kenya is affiliated) with the accounts CBOs in Kibera can offer. The danger is that "*if you push the CBOs to get accounting documents, they will go get [just any] receipts, [so] not [necessarily genuine] receipts*" (NGO4, personal interview, October 17, 2008). Local Kibera vendors sell their merchandise (food, clothing, equipment, etc.) at much lower prices than supermarkets do. These vendors therefore are the preferred sellers for CBWO members, but they are not able to provide receipts. Nor do they want to be asked for their ID number for official documents, because they fear prosecution (as they are informal traders). By demanding official receipts, donors and NGOs unintentionally encourage 'financial creativity'. This is a habit that might spiral out of control and render CBWO boards completely unaccountable except on paper, i.e. in their financial accounting towards NGO/donor. This insistence on official receipts might cause CBWO members to lose a lot of valuable time and/or money that could have been used for assisting CBWO and community members. In this instance, a CBWO board's downward accountability, i.e. realizing the project for its members, is undervalued in favour of a mainly financial upward accountability towards NGO and donor.

This emphasis on upward accountability instead of on mutual accountability creates a patron-client relationship between NGO and CBWO (Fowler, 1998), which requires specific financial systems to allow a CBWO/client to account for the funds it has received. In this regard, it is unsurprising that in 5 out of 9 interviews with NGO representatives working with Kibera CBWOs, financial accountability systems of CBWOs were emphasized as being a prerequisite for entering into partnership. The reasoning behind this seems to be that, if financial accountability systems are already in place, the chances of project failure are smaller. However, using such a criterion when choosing partners also reduces the chances of the most marginalized organizations entering into a potentially empowering CBWO-NGO collaboration. While requiring the presence of formal governance mechanisms and management skills from a CBWO prior to establishing a formal collaboration, NGOs can forget that the poorest of the poor in Kibera may not have been educated on these issues, but could become proficient in them through training. The assertion "*Nobody wants to explain anything to us, we are treated worse than children!*" (CBWO7, Personal interview, October 15, 2008) is a rather extreme illustration of CBWO members' frustration with these requirements.

Many CBWOs in Kibera are looking for an NGO partner, but have difficulties in attracting the attention of NGOs' in their direction. In 8 out of 10 interviews, CBWO representatives explained that their group, though small and possessing only limited financial means, had written project proposals to NGOs (and even invested heavily in them) in order to set up a partnership. In spite of these efforts few replies were received. CBWO7 is a CBWO consisting of 400 members. This CBWO has activities in the field of entrepreneurship and microfinance for women, and organizes peace forums. As the chairlady of CBWO7 put it:

> *Maybe we have no paper proof of education, but we do have a lot of practical knowledge. Are international organizations going to leave us like this because we don't have those financial systems that are called with very difficult words? Let them give us the chance to own our own projects* (CBWO7, personal interview, October 15, 2008).

However, setting up such systems of financial accountability in small and un(der) skilled CBWOs requires patient, long-term and expensive guidance and capacity building efforts. This does not coincide with the NPA's cost-cutting strategies and desire for quick results.

Quick fixes to a lack of accountability: suitable solutions?

Once donors, NGOs and CBWOs have formed a partnership, donors often opt for speedy solutions to accountability issues, such as training a small number of members (i.e. the CBWO board) or setting up an external intermediary organization for (upward) accountability purposes. The cases of Network2, a network CBO consisting of CBWOs in Kibera, and CBWO3, one of Network2's CBWO member organizations, illustrate how donors are not very patient with the gradual progression of CBOs' towards accountability. One donor provided Network2 with financial support for training on communication skills. However, in Network2, *"only the chairman, secretary and treasurer [of Network2's own board] were trained on how to write [project] proposals"* (CBWO3, personal interview, August 26, 2008). Network members such as CBWO3 never had the opportunity to attend such training sessions. Network2 board members took advantage of their newly acquired knowledge for personal gain and started ignoring their duty of accountability to CBWO3. After a while, these board members could no longer be reached by untrained group members. A CBWO3 member testified that *"the leadership of Network2 writes proposals for its own personal CBOs now, and is not putting much effort into Network2 and its member organizations".* This shows the danger of empowering only a small part of any CBO's members, while the rest of the members remain untrained. This reluctance to invest more time and resources creates new or – more likely – deepens existing inequalities between the un(der)skilled and the better-off.

As has been discussed earlier, many partnerships emphasize the upward accountability of CBWOs towards NGOs. Therefore, CBO leaders receive most of their legitimacy from their relationship with the donating aid agency instead from their relationship with their CBWO members (Platteau & Gaspart, 2003). Consequently, the skills of communicating and collaborating with these donors, which are often concentrated in the hands of

only a few people in a poor community, become of the utmost importance. Donors and NGOs often focus their investments on a limited number of people. Considerable power is then concentrated in their hands and, as the case of CBWO3 and Network2 shows, this complicates accountability to the beneficiaries.

Many donors focus on improving the efficiency of the southern organization, but lose sight of actually assisting the most vulnerable in society (Hyden, 1997). The Network2 case shows that some donors and NGOs in Kibera assume that training only a few CBO members will spill over to the whole organization. In at least 3 of the NGOs visited in Kibera, however, representatives mentioned the detrimental effects of creating a small 'trained elite' in a Kibera CBWO and of "*the danger that [the training sessions] become a one-man-show, [whereby] only one person's capacity is being built*" (NGO5, personal interview, January 14, 2009). As a consequence, these NGOs had decided to try and start training the whole group or set up mechanisms by which the trained minority would share its knowledge with the untrained rest of the group. However, at the time of the research all these plans had been shelved because of the lack of financial donor support for this new strategy.

Besides offering training and capacity building, aid agencies also use another strategy to make sure that development funding is spent efficiently: they establish an intermediary organization which performs the upward accountability tasks that are considered too difficult for CB(W)Os themselves (Pearce, 1993). Donors' fear that local CBWOs themselves are not able to account for their finances, has turned these intermediary NGOs into the "*preferred recipients of [donors'] funding*" in the wake of the NPA (Kamat, 2003: 66). NGO3, for instance, is an intermediary local NGO that was established by a big international NGO as an umbrella organisation that would supervise four already existing CBOs in Kibera. Each of these CBOs – one of them being CBWO5 – managed a local primary school, which the international NGO wanted to support. As the international NGO did not believe that the CBOs could directly deal with the funding issues themselves, it decided to set up NGO3. The latter thus became the intermediary that had to account for the funds transferred from the international NGO to the CBOs and their schools. The international NGO equipped NGO3 with adequate staff to monitor the CBOs and financed an external programme co-ordinator and accountant for NGO3 (NGO3, personal interview, August 25, 2008). However, this external professional co-ordinator was not accountable towards the CBOs or the community, and he soon misappropriated a large amount of money for personal benefit. This eventually made the international NGO decide to completely cease funding both intermediary and CBOs (CBWO5, personal interview, September 23, 2008).

This case shows that creating intermediary organizations is not necessarily an effective solution. Even though it is time-consuming, building the capacity of as many CBWO members as possible remains the best solution to allow these members to hold their CBWO board and intermediary NGO accountable in the long run. Igoe (2003: 877) analyzed a case, similar to that of NGO3, in rural Tanzania and warns about so-called

"*institutional fixing*", which sets up formal, externally-driven intermediaries and disregards the complexity of creating accountable organizations in poor contexts. Moreover, a reluctance of NGO staff to "*delegate power and responsibility to local residents*" can result in a failure to create and truly empower independent CBOs in the long run (Mitlin, 2001: 164).

How participatory is participation?

The concept of participation has been interpreted in diverse ways. Cornwall (2003: 1327) distinguishes between the type of participation that at one extreme "*genuinely opens up the possibilities for participants to realize their rights and exercise voice*", while at the other there is the type that "*takes the shape of enlisting people in pre-determined ventures and securing their compliance with pre-shaped development agendas*". In the dictionary of some aid agencies, the term 'participation' is used to legitimate cutting back on project funding (Arrossi, 1994). In this case, the community's participation is realized through the cheap labour it provides to the project. The patron-client relationship between CBWO and NGO, in the wake of the NPA, tends towards the second version of participation. This is what happened in the CBWO5 case.

CBWO5 members interviewed, did not paint a positive picture of the way local NGO2 constructed a sanitation block for their CBWO:

> *NGO2 writes proposals on behalf of the group and sends them to the donor. To the CBO they just say: 'we are bringing you the toilet'. ... All the CBO can do is [provide the space] and perform the voluntary work [of carrying stones and materials] for 200 shillings per day* (CBWO5, personal interview, October 15, 2008).

CBWO5's collaboration with another international NGO through the intermediary local NGO NGO3 (that was later found out to be unaccountable, as mentioned before) is viewed by CBWO5 members in a similar way: as it is, the latter CBWO members could – voluntarily or for a low wage – perform menial jobs (such as cleaning and cooking) in the schools, but were hardly, if ever, involved in the decision-making processes dealing with the school's management. The main decision-making power lay with the international NGO (in collaboration with the intermediary NGO). In line with Kelsall and Mercer's findings (2003) of an international NGO's project in Tanzania, community participation in NGO projects in Kibera was perceived by CBWO5 members as "*contributions [to the project] in ... labour*". In short, the CBWO5 case is an obvious illustration of the NPA-inspired 'contracting' that goes on in NGO-CBWO partnerships.

The following paragraph intends to add some nuance to our aforementioned proposition which might seem to attribute the low degree of actual participation by CBWO members solely to NPA-inspired donor/NGO strategies. Low participation is also caused by the lack of opportunities for, or a lack of willingness of CBWO members themselves to participate. NGO representatives from at least 4 (out of 9) NGOs visited, voiced their disappointment at the lack of motivation of CBWO members to partake in training and

group meetings. According to the interviewee from local NGO6, the problem with providing training to resource-poor people is that "*money is often the priority of the participants*" (NGO6, personal interview, September 15, 2008). The CBWO1 case illustrates some of these complexities. Participatory observation of CBWO1 meetings showed a majority of members remained inactive during most of the meetings, except when it came to making decisions about dividing the resources that the group had obtained. That is why local NGO1 wanted to avoid a situation in which CBWO1 members participated in their three-day training session for the wrong reasons and refused to give a financial allowance for their attendance. Instead, the NGO decided to provide participants with a good lunch every training day. Even though CBWO1 members attended the training in numbers, they were dismayed about this approach. One of them said:

> *We don't want to eat rice with meat and afterwards go home empty-handed to our children. We do not want to close our business for a few days and then go home without anything. That is why we should get a financial allowance for every day of training* (CBWO1, personal interview, January 12, 2008).

This shows that NPA-inspired contracting should not be seen as the sole reason for the low degree of actual participation by the most vulnerable in NGO-CBWO collaborations in Kibera.

Competition for participants

In at least 3 out of 9 NGOs visited, NGO representatives said that many other NGOs in Kibera interpret community participation in terms of the number of people who attend their capacity building programs (also known as 'trainings'), without taking into consideration whether they really benefit (in terms of 'empowerment') from attending. As donors require quantifiable results from the NGOs they have contracted, "NGOs are fighting among each other to give training to [as many] people in Kibera [as possible]" (NGO5, personal interview, January 14, 2009). The program officer of international NGO6 explains that

> *organizations like [local NGO] NGO2 are competing against each other to [organize] … workshops. There is no coordination, there is a lot of overlap and every organization competes [for] the same thing. Workshops are big business, [but] they are not [necessarily] benefiting the community.* (NGO6, personal interview, September 15, 2008).

In a situation in which NGOs – in the true spirit of the neoliberal NPA – compete for the same contracts, hard figures are easily measured and are therefore a cost-effective way of comparing competitors' results. In this way, the actual empowering effects for the community are considered to be of minor importance. In order to attract participants, some organizations even "*give food and [financial] allowances to their trainees, but do no follow-up*" on the training (*ibid.*). The CBWO7 chairlady adds that these organizations "*prefer*

people who are submissive and [participate] in the training just for the allowance" (CBWO7, personal interview, October 15, 2008). This shows that the line between 'participation' and 'mobilization' can be very unclear in practice (see also Kelsall & Mercer, 2003). Moreover, such a disorganized way of providing training – based on the amount of people trained, regardless of who they are and what they do with that knowledge – impedes the possible empowering effects of training and causes problems for NGOs that intend to provide effective follow-up to the training they organize, because *"in this way you can't follow up whether your training has given a good result or not"* (NGO5, personal interview, January 14, 2009).

Conclusion

In this article, the results of a qualitative field research on CBWO-NGO collaborations in Kibera were linked to existing theoretical analyses of NPA-inspired partnerships. Theory has shown that the NPA has enthused international donors to focus on contractual, and often inequitable, patron-client relations instead of on development-as-real-empowerment. In a neoliberal context quick, quantifiable and cost-effective ways of performing development interventions (such as setting up an external intermediary organization) are highly valued and advocated by donor agencies.

Our field research gives evidence of the impact of the NPA at microlevel: NGOs and CBWOs, which have increasingly become dependent upon NPA-inspired donors' financial flows, are forced to focus on upward accountability towards the hands that feed them, instead of on empowering the most vulnerable CBWO and community members, which ought to be their core business. Even though it would be short-sighted to see NPA-inspired relationships of contracting as the only reason for failing to achieve authentic CBWO-NGO partnerships, our results suggest a number of ways in which such partnerships are counterproductive in terms of assisting the most vulnerable.

This article has covered the partnership aspects of time management, multiple accountabilities, contextual knowledge and participation. All of these elements are complicated by donors' NPA-inspired strategies. First of all, the haste of donors reduces the opportunity to acquire contextual knowledge which in turn can lead to a loss of motivation and even conflict within CBWOs. Secondly, the NPA's emphasis on accountancy and upward accountability reinforces this lack of contextual knowledge, because it disregards downward accountability and CBWO heterogeneity. This affects the most vulnerable group members first and foremost. Thirdly, training a very limited number of group members or setting up external intermediary organizations are commonly used as time saving donor strategies for solving accountability issues. However, they do not necessarily lead to long-term accountability. And lastly, NPA-inspired participation can be translated as cheap labour performed by CBWO members or as passive, disorganized attendance of NGO training.

It can therefore be concluded that the preoccupation of the NPA with *"efficiency and profitability of service provision"* (Edwards & Hulme, 1995: 188) has negative effects on empowerment through CBWO-NGO partnerships.

Acknowledgements

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