# Community Involvement: A Way of Repaying the 'Development Gift'?

*Master's Thesis in Anthropology of Education and Globalisation*

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Anthropology's empirical basis brings a focus to bear on what already exists – in a sense the future cannot be studied because it has not yet been created. And yet, the practice of development is partly lived in the future. Through visions, plans, proposals, policies and needs assessment exercises, the future is continually created and evoked. It is in the space between the future and the past, between a hope for happiness and despair at failure, that the most human aspects of development can be understood.

*Crewe and Axelby 2013, 214*

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## List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---|---|
| BoM | Board of Management |
| CDF | Constituency Development Fund |
| HFH | Harambee Foundation Holland |
| KES | Kenyan Shillings |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| NGO | Non-governmental Organisation |
| PPA | Participatory Poverty Assessment |
| PRSP | Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers |

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## Abstract

*Community involvement – or participation – is a method commonly used and discussed in the context of development. While acknowledging arguments from both proponents and critics, this thesis is meant to move beyond the simplistic for or against participation debate. Based on a three month long fieldwork with a small-scale Dutch NGO in rural Western Kenya, this thesis analyses the ideas and motivations behind community involvement in educational development projects, both from the NGO's and the so-called beneficiaries' perspectives. The findings suggest that community involvement can simultaneously bear different meanings for the stakeholders involved in one development project. While using the analytical lens of the gift exchange perspective, this thesis furthermore illustrates how community involvement establishes and fosters complex social relationships between and within the so-called community and the NGO. As a result, it calls for a more nuanced understanding of development aid than a simple transaction between 'givers' and 'receivers'.*


## Introduction

This thesis is based on an ethnographic fieldwork investigation of three months in rural Western Kenya, where I stayed with a small-scale Dutch non-governmental organisation (NGO) called Harambee Foundation Holland (HFH). HFH works with the overall aim to reduce poverty through improving the access to, and quality of, public school education. They therefore raise money in Europe to support projects which can range from building educational and sanitary infrastructures to creating capacity building workshops for teachers and heads of schools. Within fifteen years, the NGO has realised over 45 projects in primary, secondary and polytechnic schools in five Kenyan counties. These geographical units near the Ugandan border are mostly constituted of rural, agricultural areas, in which more than half of the population live under the poverty line (Okwany 2014). Many of the schools there are marked by insufficient infrastructure and a poor provision of educational materials, and issues such as low literacy skills, teacher shortages and absenteeism, uneven and unpredictable funding, and pupil absenteeism are day-to-day concerns (Okwany 2014; Uwezo Kenya 2012).

The NGO and its five Kenyan partners lay emphasis on the fact that aid should only be given if locals request it in their own initiative, and only if they are willing to be actively involved in a project. Concretely, this means that the locals concerned are asked to cover 10-

15 percent of the total costs in one project through providing building materials, actively taking part in the building process, or helping with the financing.

This central aspect of their work – the NGO calls it the 'involvement of the community' – became the focus of my fieldwork. In development practice and literature, it is commonly referred to as 'participation'. Over the last thirty years, *participation* has become a big buzzword in the development world. Despite (or because of) its popularity with many development aid organisations, it has been critiqued by several scholars (see for example Nelson and Wright 1995; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Kesby 2005; Gardner and Lewis 2015). While acknowledging arguments from both proponents and critics, this thesis is meant to step away from the dialectical discussion for or against participation. Instead, it calls for a more nuanced perception of this way of doing development. The following pages first of all serve as a reminder that participation does not designate one specific approach but can take different shapes, depending on how one defines 'development'. Secondly, they show that participation can come to mean different things to the various actors involved in a project and foster social relationships between the latter. The thesis will illustrate that development does not always come in a structured, linear, and foreseeable process. I hereby follow Crewe and Axelby (2013, 19) who urge "for proper recognition to be paid to the possibilities for complexity, contestation and creativity in development".

One recent way of seeing development is through the gift exchange perspective (Stirrat and Henkel 1997; Gardner and Lewis 2015). This approach is inspired by the writings of the anthropologist Marcel Mauss (1969), who studied gift systems and their inherent moral obligations of giving, receiving and repaying a gift. When using this prism to look at development, one focuses primarily on the moral aspects and social relations a 'development gift' can carry and reinforce. Indeed, at first glance, Harambee Foundation Holland's work seems to be primarily based on *giving*. Furthermore, the fact that the community needs to contribute a certain percentage of a project's total costs in order to benefit of the NGO's funding, made me realise that there actually is an *exchange* going on, as their 'development gift' seems to be bound to conditions and (moral) obligations. This awareness led to the following research questions:

*What are the ideas behind community involvement and how do these translate into the realities of the so-called community? What does community involvement come to mean for different stakeholders involved in a project? How can community involvement be understood in light of the gift exchange theory?*

To answer these questions, the thesis is structured into four major sections. The first part lays out the empirical and analytical field within which this study is carried out. The second presents the perspectives of the members of the NGO and its Kenyan partners on their general aim and community involvement. In the third section, I will analyse the viewpoints of the school and community members on the latter. The final section concludes by relating all these previous elements to my research question.

It is important to emphasise here that this thesis is neither meant to evaluate nor judge the work of HFH. With little proper practical experience in this field I am not in a position to do so in a just, fair, and reflective way. This thesis is also by no means an attempt to somehow "measure" the impact of the NGO. Instead, the following pages should be considered as a space where light is shed upon the complex world in which an NGO can operate and where multiple meanings of their central working method – the involvement of the community – are explored.

# Part I.

# The Empirical and Analytical Field

# 1. The Empirical Field

In 2015, I conducted fieldwork for three months within a small-scale nongovernmental organisation (NGO) called Harambee Foundation Holland (HFH) in and around the town Kimilili in Kenya. Before describing the content of my fieldwork and the methodological choices I made throughout this period of time, I will first of all give a short overview of the NGO and its work.

## 1.1. The NGO Harambee Foundation Holland

HFH's overall aim is to reduce poverty in Kenya through improving the quality of, and access to, public school education. They financially support projects which range from the construction of educational and sanitary infrastructures to capacity building workshops for teachers and heads of schools. As these projects are 'planned interventions' with economic, social and political objectives, the work of HFH can be inscribed in the field of "development" (Crewe and Axelby 2013, 3). At the time of writing (July 2016), HFH has supported over 45 projects in primary, secondary, and polytechnique schools.[1]

HFH was founded at the turn of the twenty-first century and evolved "in an organic matter" (Okwany 2013, 18). It all started with the two Dutch founder members Roel and Marianne Meijers who gave financial and physical assistance in the build-up of infrastructures in three schools with which they had personal ties. Throughout the following years, more and more schools in the area approached them for help and this led to the official setup of HFH in 2001. The establishment of an NGO gave their way of offering assistance a more formal structure (Okwany 2013). From the beginning, HFH closely collaborated with a few local people, their so-called partners. Today, they have five local partners with different backgrounds: two of them are retired principals, two are development consultants, and one is a Catholic Priest. HFH's headquarters are situated in Holland, where a voluntary committee has been formed to help in fundraising activities. The latter counts a total of seven members. Gradually throughout the years, the small-scale NGO established linkages with other Dutch

[1] Polytechnique schools are institutions providing vocational training in various subjects such as masonry, engineering, plumbing, motor vehicle mechanics, garment making, . The pupils studying at these schools must at least dispose of a primary school diploma.

organisations such Wilde Ganzen or EduKans who regularly assist in the co-financing of projects (Okwany 2013, 21).

In brief, HFH's work can be described by the following five connecting activities:

- To enhance the quality of education and learning environment through improving the infrastructure
- To support of initiatives of capacity building
- To strengthen the educational base or fundament of children
- To cooperate with the local government
- To involve parents and the local community (Harambee Foundation Holland 2016a)

During my fieldwork, I observed that all these aspects are part and parcel of the projects which the NGO undertakes. However, I chose, together with the NGO, to focus specifically on the last aspect: the involvement of the parents and the local community. The NGO and its local partners place emphasis on the fact that aid should only be given if locals request it in their own initiative, and only if they are willing to be actively involved in the project. Concretely, it means that 10-15 percent of the costs in one project are asked to be covered by the locals concerned. This can take various forms: parents, pupils, and other community members actively building infrastructures, providing building materials, or helping with the funding. Indeed, the perspective of collaborating with different people in the completion of a project is also reflected in the NGO's name: the word 'Harambee' is Swahili and means 'pulling or working together' (Oxford Dictionaries 2016). According to the Dutch director Marianne Meijers,

> the philosophy behind Harambee Foundation Holland [is about] the whole concept 'Harambee'. You know, to join hands together. That it isn't only us who bring something, but we want to realise a project together with the people on the spot. These can be the community, but also the government who contributes, the school, and all the other stakeholders who play a role in a project. It isn't only us, but a lot people.
>
> *Marianne Meijers, director of HFH, personal translation from Dutch to English*

I spent my fieldwork exploring seven different infrastructural projects in which educational and/or sanitary buildings have been, or were going to be put up. In such projects, it is generally speaking the head of a school who addresses HFH's partners to request such a

project. The partners then visit the school and assess the need together with the local board of management (BoM)[2] and the willingness of the school and community to contribute. If these criteria are approved by the partner, the project proposal needs to become concrete. The head master and board of management are tasked to hire a contractor, to create a plan of the new infrastructure and to get an official approval with the Ministry of Works. Furthermore, HFH asks them to create a so-called 'bill of quantity' where the exact costs are laid out.

Meanwhile, the partner sits together with the board of management to create a memorandum of understanding (MoU). This document, which all parties sign after agreeing, settles the amount which HFH and the parents and community each have to pay. Furthermore, the MoU defines the two or more physical building phases of the project. HFH's contribution is apportioned according to these phases, meaning that they give a specific amount for the first phase, and only when this phase is done and approved of by the partner, money is given for the second phase, and so on. The money will be transferred to a bank account, specifically opened for the purpose of this project. The MoU names the four mandatory signatories of this account: the head master, the chairman and the treasurer of the management committee, and the partner of HFH. Money can only be withdrawn with the signature of three of these people, the partner and head master being mandatory signatories.

In the MoU is also specified who owns and is responsible of the organisation and evaluation of the project. After the latter has been signed, an official hand-over of the cheque is organised, to which all stakeholders of the project are invited. The Dutch directors of HFH Roel and Marianne Meijers, who are in Kenya twice a year for a period of two months, present the cheque.

Hereafter, the actual building of the infrastructure can start. Together with a team of workers, the hired contractor aims to complete the different phases of the project within the planned timeframe. The contribution of the community, whether in cash, material or labour, is implemented in the building process. Until the completion of the building, the partner of HFH regularly checks up on the site and keeps the Dutch side of Harambee Foundation

[2] This is a committee which consists of parents, teachers, and the head of the school. Some call it Parent-Teacher-Association (PTA). A new policy also requires the presence of pupils. However, I have only seen this in one Kenyan school.

Holland updated on progresses. Once the infrastructure is built, an official hand-over is planned. Also here, the Dutch representatives of HFH must be present. The latter then send pictures of the finished building and an overview of the total costs to the original donor.

Once a school is involved with HFH, it becomes part of the so-called HFH 'families'. These families exist since 2010 and consist of an assembly of representatives of the schools that have been supported by HFH. As they have been working with three sets of public schools, there are three families: the family of polytechniques, the family of primary schools, and the family of secondary schools. Within the primary and secondary school families, a yearly exam is set up and carried out among the final year students. The schools compare their results and their progress over time.

Furthermore, the staffs of the different schools organise and attend, in collaboration with one of the partners, different workshops sponsored by HFH. As one of the NGO's main objectives is to improve the quality of public school education, they fund workshops and trainings for board of management committee members, head teachers, and teachers. However, as it was the involvement of the parents and community, or *participation*, I was exploring during my fieldwork, these workshop were out of my focus range.

## 1.2. Methodological Considerations

### 1.2.1. A Participatory Approach

To be in line with the NGO's way of working and as a way of gaining access, I adopted a 'participatory approach' during my fieldwork. As Kesby et al. (2013, 144) describe, a participatory approach is more "about working *with* rather than *on* people". It requires a shift from seeing research as an externally developed data-collection process, fully assessed and controlled by the researcher, to a more reciprocal relationship between researcher and the people within the research field. Ideally, respondents are involved in the design and process of knowledge production, as well as the analysis and presentation of data.

The authors recognise that such an approach is challenging, particularly for students who are bound to a timeframe and only have limited resources (Kesby et al. 2013). Being in such a position, I realised that a *fully* participatory approach would not be possible: I was able to include the organisation in the design of the fieldwork and knowledge production, but I

remained the sole data-collector throughout the fieldwork, and the only one to analyse the data. Despite it therefore only being *partially* participatory, the approach had many implications in terms of form, content, and locality: together with members of the NGO, we decided on the research focus, the groups and places of interest, and how to proceed in practice. We agreed that exploring their central, participatory way of working - *community involvement* – would be the focus of my fieldwork.

The approach I had towards my fieldwork gave the members of the organisation a right to speak their minds about my research and myself a responsibility towards hearing these inputs out. It made sense for me to take into account their opinions – it was a question of respecting their views and knowledge, but also of being conscious of time and getting started. Furthermore, by doing research that seemed important for both me and them, and by being transparent, my feeling of 'getting a degree on their backs' had become less dominant. However, despite the practical guidance about the shape and matter of my study at the beginning of the fieldwork, it also implied that I had to adapt to the views of others in order to appear 'valid' in their eyes. As a result, I had to find a balance between keeping to my own ideas on how to do the research and theirs. It became clear to me that although the design of my fieldwork was a mutual construction between me and the NGO, their representations on how and where to do research sometimes had more weight than mine. In the end, I agree with Julie Park (in Sluka and Robben 2007) that a participatory approach entails a *partnership,* and that the latter doesn't necessarily mean an equal relationship between two partners. It can be, as in business, a "relationship […] of joint engagement based on negotiation" (Sluka and Robben 2007, 22). As Park argues, an essential element of the approach is to be open to each other's views and opinions, and to respect the other's resources and skills in order for it not to become exploitative. The NGO made some fundamental decisions about for example which projects I would see, which in return influenced whom I would meet and eventually also the knowledge production within my fieldwork. Letting the NGO make these decisions was, in my eyes, part of this partnership and a necessity to gain access. In return, I was given freedom in my choice of whom to interview and which data gathering methods to use throughout my fieldwork.

### 1.2.2. Access and Positionality

As I arrived in Kenya together with the two Dutch directors Marianne and Roel Meijers, I got the opportunity to follow their work in context from the beginning. I stayed with them and they took me with them everywhere they went. They became my gatekeepers, which turned out to be very important to my whole fieldwork. I needed the link to the organisation to gain access to the projects. Either the Dutch members or the Kenyan partners had to 'present' me in the schools I was visiting to justify my presence there, so that I could afterwards be there on my own. The willingness of the members of the organisation to do so, and the powerful position they were in as they facilitated the funding of projects in the schools, made access to the different settings rather easy for me.

However, my (white) skin colour and the fact that I was often seen with members of the NGO made it difficult for outsiders not to think of me as part of the organisation and sponsoring. As a result, I noticed that my informants would consequently maybe only tell me things they thought the NGO would like to hear or even leave out information for they might see me as a control mechanism of the organisation. In order to avoid this, I always made clear that I was an independent student. Furthermore, I emphasised that their names would be anonymised and the information used for the purposes of this research only.

### 1.2.3. Locality

As I indicated before, the partially participatory approach I adopted had consequences on the locality of my fieldwork. Knowing that the organisation has supported over 40 projects in polytechnic, secondary, primary and nursery schools and operates in different regions related to the different partners, the choice of where I should physically be during my fieldwork was hard. The NGO wanted to show me as much as possible to get a more complete picture of the organisation's work. We agreed on a number of seven schools, four primary schools, one secondary school and two polytechniques. Which schools I would visit was decided by the members of the NGO. They based their decisions on the type of school, the possibility of me gaining access, on the region, and on the age of the project.

As such, my ethnographic field of study has been multiple. In short, I first followed the work of the Dutch directors to various events and meetings. Once I had been introduced by

either the partners or the European members of the organisation, I could individually visit all of the schools we had agreed upon. Each of them have benefitted from projects funded by the organisation or will do so in the near future. I usually spent two or three days in the schools themselves to see how the project is in use, and to talk to the head master, the teachers, the sponsors (usually members of the Church), the teacher-parent association (PTA), the board of management (BoM), and pupils. As I wanted to hear about the experiences and feelings of many people involved in a project, I decided to spend one day per school going around the area with a translator. We visited several households to interview parents and neighbours to the school. Parallel to my visits to the schools, I spent three weeks living with two of the partners. This was mainly for practical reasons: from their homes, which were outside Kimilili, I had easier access to a school in their area. However, staying with them was also a means by which I gained insight into their role and work in the organisation.

All these sites were related to my rather broad focus of study: to see the involvement of the community in context. I agree with those anthropologists who argue for a "deconstruction of 'a place-focused concept of culture' (Hastrup and Olwig 1997, 4 cited in Amit 2000) and the allowance instead for a more contingent relationship between collective identity, place, social relations and culture" (Amit 2000). After all, I was 'following' the work of an organisation, which operates at many locations, and consists of multiple persons.

The numerous sites reflect the complexity of the world in which the organisation operates. Some locations were *given* in the situation – by following people around, one automatically arrives to various settings. I also consider the schools as a *given*; they were a choice made by the NGO, related to what they wanted me to see and the (easy) access I would have. However, I also made personal choices for localities based on the circumstances and on what I found out throughout fieldwork. I decided for example to go to the homes of the parents and neighbours near the schools. This choice was related to the various definitions of 'community' I came across in my interviews and conversations. Whereas there was a common consent that parents and pupils were part of the community, some also emphasized its geographical component. The latter defined the 'community' as the people living within a certain distance to the school. I therefore decided to also take into consideration neighbours to, and the staff within schools.

Unfortunately, the multiple sites I engaged with influenced the kind of rapport it shaped with my informants. Whereas I had a good rapport to the members of the organisation which I saw on a more intense and regular basis, it was sometimes hard to build a similar relationship with other people I met in the short amount of time I spent with them.

### 1.2.4. Collecting Data

Participant observation and qualitative interviews are central to any anthropological fieldwork. Throughout the following paragraphs, I will shortly reflect upon these methodologies and the way they shaped the knowledge production during my stay in Kenya.

#### Participant Observation

Participant observation was one of the main sources of data collection during my fieldwork. However, the focus on *community involvement* raised several issues: what is *the community,* and where can I find it? And how can I observe *involvement*? I quickly realised that there are no fixed answers for both questions. As I will return to at a later stage in this thesis, the so-called community was often, but not always, defined as a geographical entity around a school by my informants. Furthermore, involvement had several meanings. It was sometimes seen as an action (for example the construction of a building), as a means (to sustain the building), and on other occasions it referred to an attitude (for example to be positive towards education) or an end in itself. It became clear to me that community involvement was really hard to do participant observation on. Aside from the multiple definitions of the notion, there was furthermore no project going on where I could really *see* involvement happening. I followed one project in a secondary school throughout my whole fieldwork, from the moment they received the cheque until the building was almost completed. In this project - the build-up of a new kitchen - the parents and neighbours to the schools contributed to the total costs with building materials. The latter were already on the ground when I first visited the school.

After being in the field for a while, I noticed that I rather did participant observation within the organisation than within the so-called community. In fact, I participated in many official and informal events, such as hand-over of cheques or finished projects, meetings, and the daily life of members of the organisation. However, without concretely being able to

*observe* community involvement in action, I still tried to gather the opinions and experiences on it from different stakeholders in a project: parents, neighbours, partners, teachers, head teachers, local leaders, and pupils.

**Interviews**

During fieldwork, I remarked that most people I met had fixed ideas of a researcher. One of them was that a researcher collects data – a big quantity of it - through having a questionnaire and by asking questions to a big number of people. It occurred to me that participant observation was not often known and acknowledged, and that, if I wanted to be 'valid' and 'credible' in doing my research, I would have to live up to some part of their image. This is one reason why I did many qualitative interviews. Most of them were semi-structured, and some were held in form of a timeline interview. The latter being a method to understand a person's account of a story or life (Adriansen 2012), I saw it as a useful tool to get a hold of the story of a project and its evolution over time.

Of the 74 interviews I did in total, I recorded only few. One reason for this was that some of the interviewees were very hesitant when I asked them whether I could record our conversation. I think it made the situation more formal and intimidating than me just writing down answers with pen and paper. Although I could see some benefits in using a recorder, such as me being able to concentrate more on the content of the conversation, it sometimes had a negative effect on the rapport with the interviewee. Because this effect was unpredictable and dependent on every person, I often decided not to record so that a rapport would not be 'spoilt'.

Whilst some interviews were one-on-one, in most cases more people were present. I often encountered a whole family in a household even though only one of them would be my interviewee, or I intentionally set up a group interview. Furthermore, I was on many occasions accompanied by a translator.

**The Language Issue**

Although Kenya has only two official languages - English and Swahili – it is a linguistically diverse country: All of the 42 ethnic groups have their own local language, and languages often even differ within an ethnic group. The ethnic group which the organisation

mostly works with is the Luhya. Within the Luhya are seventeen sub-tribes, most of which speak their own dialect.

As I did not speak any of the local languages, I needed to work through a language which is neither mine nor my informants' native one: English. Davies (2008) explains that this undesirable situation can turn into an advantage if both the interviewer and the interviewee(s) recognise the risk of misunderstandings when there are few "shared cultural memories" (Davies 2008, 27). In many situations, this was indeed the case: both the informants and I spent much effort to make ourselves as clear as possible and to discuss meanings. However, it was also common that people did not speak enough English for us to build a conversation. In those cases, an interpreter was needed. In the end, not only one interpreter, but six different ones were mandatory. Each school I visited was in a different region, and they spoke a different dialect almost every time. I needed someone who knew where to go – there were no street signs and addresses – and the local language of my interviewees. I left the choice of the interpreter to the head master of the school, as I did not know anybody and was in no position to find somebody in such short time. As a result, I was mostly accompanied by a teacher or, at one occasion, by a member of the church. Well aware that such an 'authoritative' presence might inhibit the interviewees from speaking their minds, I was in no position to refuse the person the head masters suggested. When I once raised the concern with a head teacher, he replied that the presence of a teacher or another known person was a very good thing, as the interviewees would then trust me and know that I come with good intentions. Either way, although impossible to tell to which extent, the presence of an interpreter had an influence on the interview situation.

Likewise, it also had an influence on the content of the interview. Instead of the interview being a construction of knowledge between me and the interviewee (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009), I sometimes thought it was rather one between me and the interpreter. I tried to avoid the latter by confronting and briefing the interpreter on how I wanted him or her to interact. While this may have reduced the effect on the content of the interview, it probably wasn't eradicated.

### 1.2.5. The Data

According to Judith Okely (1994), a central element of anthropology is to have an open-ended approach to the information and people you meet, as fieldwork is often unstructured and themes and priorities sometimes only gradually emerge. Having this in mind, most methodological choices described above had to be made on the spur of the moment as a way of adapting to my ethnographic field of research. In the end, they allowed me to gather an important amount of data (see table 1).

| | |
|---|---|
| 74 Interviews | Some 20 hours of recorded materials, the rest in notes.<br>Informants:<br>HFH directors<br>local partners<br>7 head teachers<br>15 teachers<br>Visit to 26 homes<br>11 members of the BoM of the different schools<br>12 pupils (sometimes in groups of 2) |
| 4 timeline interviews | Informants:<br>local partner<br>3 head teachers |
| Informal conversation | Informants:<br>HFH directors, local partners, friends of partners, head masters, teachers, staff at schools and at my place for stay, parents, contractor of project, etc. |
| Field notes | About 100 A4 pages of observations and reflections |
| Documents of the NGO | Letters to schools<br>Official working methods descriptions<br>Criteria for identifying projects<br>Former impact study within NGO<br>News letters<br>Website<br>Challenges, written down by directors<br>Meeting minutes |
| Documents from Schools | 2 action plans / strategic plans<br>Extracts of meeting minutes<br>Project proposal<br>Official correspondence with NGO<br>Lists of contributions from stakeholders in projects<br>Bill of quantity<br>Memorandum of understanding<br>Fees |
| Pictures | Official events<br>Schools in daily use<br>Unfinished buildings<br>Progress in the build of a kitchen |

*Table 1: The data gathered throughout fieldwork*

# 2. The Analytical Field

As mentioned earlier, my research focused on the involvement of the community and parents in infrastructural projects. The term 'involvement' is an emic concept used within my ethnographic field of study. It is the term commonly employed to designate the working method of the NGO as described earlier in this chapter: asking the locals to contribute 10-15 percent of the total costs of a project, either in building materials, cash or labour. In development practice and literature however, the NGO's mode of operating is generally known as *participation*. To make the distinction between the emic and etic concepts clearer, I will hereafter use 'involvement' whenever I denote the term as used by actors within the ethnographic field of study, and 'participation' when I refer to the etic concept used in literature.

Participation actually has a long history in development practice. It is strongly linked to the concept 'development'. To understand the different conceptualisations of participation, it is therefore important to understand what 'development' means and how its meaning shifted through time. Throughout the following paragraphs, I will create an historic overview of the role of participation in development.

## 2.1. Participation and Development from a Historical Perspective

'Participation' is often thought of as an approach which appeared in the 1980s and 90s after many development agencies and organizations realized that their mission – poverty reduction and 'developing' the 'underdeveloped' – so far had not succeeded (Gardner and Lewis 1996). By that time, development interventions were often carried out in an expert-led, externally designed top-down manner (Cooke and Kothari 2001). Throughout the 90s, more and more governmental and non-governmental actors used participatory methods in an attempt to make development processes more effective, more sustainable, and more relevant for the beneficiaries. The idea, mainly inspired by the work of the academic and development practitioner Robert Chambers (1983), was to include 'local' knowledge and views in decision-making processes and to "make 'people' central to development by encouraging

beneficiary involvement in interventions that affect them and over which they previously had limited control or influence" (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 5).

However, 'participation' isn't only limited to a tool for better outcomes on a practical level. Hickey and Mohan (2004) point out that 'participation' actually has a long and varied history in development thinking, depending on the political contexts and school of thoughts. Throughout the next paragraphs, I will elaborate on some of the various definitions that 'participation' can bear while simultaneously introducing influences and shifts in development theory. Well aware of the fact that the approaches I introduce are not exhaustive and often more interrelated than portrayed, they are meant to give an overview of the different understandings of the concepts 'participation' and 'development' through time.

Through linking it to notions of 'citizenship', Hickey and Mohan (2004) trace forms of 'participation' amongst others back to the 1940s and 50s when 'development' was part of the colonial agenda. During those years, 'development' often meant to "(re)produce stable communities" and to "counteract processes of urbanisation and socio-political change, including radical nationalist and leftist movements" (Hickey and Mohan 2004, 6). Here, 'participation', as a form of citizenship, was seen as a mandatory component in the endeavour for creating stable and homogeneous communities.

Throughout the 50s and 60s, what came to be known as 'modernisation theory' triggered a paradigm shift in development thinking. According to many scholars, this theory still shapes development thinking today (Crewe and Axelby 2013; Gardner and Lewis 2015). Influenced by President Truman's vision in 1949 of a global fight against poverty to secure affluence and freedom for all (Crewe and Axelby 2013), it sees development as "a progressive movement towards technologically more complex and integrated forms of 'modern' society" (Long and Long 1992, 18; cited in Gardner and Lewis 2015, 19). In this sense, modernisation is an evolutionary, linear process from a "traditional, particularistic and unmotivated" country towards an "industrialised, urban and ordered society" (Gardner and Lewis 2015, 19). Crewe and Axelby (2013) emphasise that development projects inscribed into the modernisation paradigm are usually target- and output-orientated, built on external help and expertise. In a caricatured way, those who the development projects are supposed to reach are seen as "a passive and uncritically accepting local population of grateful

beneficiaries" (2013, 7). In this light, 'participation' can therefore not be understood as locals partaking in decision-making and contestation of development plans. According to Hickey and Mohan (2004), 'participation' here is rather equivalent to 'political participation'. It is a means by which, through encouraging and educating local people on their rights and duties as citizens to vote, campaign and take on a political party membership, a country's stability would be secured and its political system strengthened. It is a right and obligation of citizens in the endeavour to reach 'modernity'.

In the 60s, further trains of thoughts entered the development arena. Latin American Catholic priests and the second Vatican Council influenced the introduction of 'Liberation theology' within development thinking. Another major influence was found within the work of radical researchers and educationalists from the Global South such as Paolo Freire. In his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968), he advocates "the need to stimulate and support people's abilities to understand, question and resist the structural reasons for their poverty through learning, organisation and action" (Gardner and Lewis 2015, 154). 'Development', for both approaches, is understood as empowerment of the marginalised and oppressed to analyse and confront existing structures. This can be done for example through participatory action research (PAR). PAR is a process through which poor and marginalised people research the cause for their economic, political or social situation which will then lead to collective action for (radical) change. Hence, 'participation' here can on the one hand be seen as an empowering awareness-making process and as such a means by which present circumstances will eventually be changed. On the other hand, it can also be a political right of citizens to challenge the status quo (Hickey and Mohan 2004), which is an end in itself as it brings political change.

From the 1970s onwards increased critique was raised against 'mainstream' development and 'modernisation theory'. A major new paradigm, 'dependency theory', emerged and explained development (and underdevelopment) with reference to economic and historical structures. In short, the new paradigm mainly draws on Marx's school of thought and defines 'development' as an "inherently unequalising process" (Gardner and Lewis 2015, 23), as "no more than an exercise of power" by powerful international actors and "a continuation of colonialism by other means" (Crewe and Axelby 2013, 9). It is pictured as a

process through which some countries (i.e. the Global North) become wealthier while others (i.e. the Global South) inevitably get poorer within a global capitalist system. Imperialism and post-imperialism made the economies of the Global South dependent from and conditioned by the markets of the Global North. 'Dependency theory', however, not only focuses on interdependent relations *between* countries, but also conceptualises intra-dependent interactions between local elites and the poorer population *within* a country as exploitative. Similar to the Freirian school of thought, the argument goes that unequalising processes can only be stopped through "radical, structural change" (Gardner and Lewis 2015, 25). 'Dependency theory' had several effects on the development arena, both on a national and international scale; development is for example no longer seen as neutral but as a politicised act. Furthermore, this development approach placed Southern societies at the centre of the development debate, and notions of self-empowerment, 'bottom-up', and positive 'change from within' came to be seen as key features in the process (Gardner and Lewis 2015). 'Participation' is understood here as a requirement for empowerment and structural change and as an end in itself.

Gardner and Lewis (2015, 27) elucidate that despite influences from both grand theories in development thinking, "[b]y the 1990s, neither modernisation nor dependency theory had survived intact as a viable paradigm for understanding change and transformation, or processes of poverty and inequality". This realisation led many scholars to think differently about development throughout the 1980s and 90s. Influenced by postmodern tendencies, an emphasis was laid on cultural relativity, diversity, a multiplicity of viewpoints, and the idea that there are no common problems and thus no common solutions. Besides increased reflexivity amongst development practitioners, development work now focused more on specific projects instead of offering all-encompassing solutions (Gardner and Lewis 2015). A more "populist" approach towards development practice rose, inspired by the ideas of Robert Chambers (1983, 1992) who called for bottom-up, participatory development (Hickey and Mohan 2004, 7; Crewe and Axelby 2013). Because of an increasing awareness of development failure brought about by the flawed top-down manner in which development was carried out, many organisations and development agencies changed their practice 'on the ground' and started looking for alternative methods such as participatory rural appraisal

(PRA). PRA focuses on the participation of the so-called beneficiaries in projects through taking into account their knowledge and viewpoints so that development initiatives become more sustainable and efficient (Hickey and Mohan 2004; Crewe and Axelby 2013). In 1999, Cleaver wrote that this form of 'participation' as a tool for better outcomes had become the current orthodoxy of development aid, and as indicated above, it is this conceptualisation of participation that has become the most dominating one in the development literature (Hickey and Mohan 2004). As such, it also has been an object of critique for several scholars (see for example Nelson and Wright 1995; Gardner and Lewis 1996; Cooke and Kothari 2001; Kesby 2005). Main points of critique referred to the lack of evidence that participatory approaches were actually living up to what they promised to do: empower marginalized people and trigger transformative development (Hickey and Mohan 2004). Furthermore, some scholars claim that there are paradoxes within the use of participatory methods: "[NGOs and other organizations in the global South] impose priorities and agendas while claiming to enhance communities' capacity to determine their own" (Kesby 2005, 2047). Looking at it from this angle, Cooke and Kothari (2001) even call participation a form of *tyranny*. In line with this, authors have criticized that participation, in fact, serves various political agendas; that NGOs and other organizations practicing participation have imagined communities and locals as homogeneous entities; that local knowledge has been romanticized; and that while concentrating too much on the local level, wider processes have been neglected (Kesby 2005).

Although the thought of development aid as a form of "oppressive hegemonic control" (Gardner and Lewis 2015; 111), as it is expressed by critics of modernisation theory and participatory development, still persists after the turn of the century, a new focus on its moral and spiritual dimensions appeared after some scholars revisited a major classic anthropological paradigm from 1954: Mauss's gift exchange theory. Throughout the following paragraphs, I will expand on this particular school of thought. As I will explain later in this chapter, this theory is essential to my whole thesis.

## 2.2. The 'Development Gift'

Before explaining the Development Gift theory, I will shortly introduce the idea that lies at its origin: Marcel Mauss's (1969) essay *The Gift*.

### 2.2.1. Gift Exchange Theory

In *The Gift,* Mauss (1969) compares and analyses forms of contract and exchange in what he calls 'primitive' and 'archaic' societies. He observes that gift-giving is common to all places of study and he sees the latter as a stage in social evolution from which "our own economic institutions have arisen" (Mauss 1969, 46). Gifts are not only goods of economic value, but can also take the shape of courtesies, rituals, people, assistance, etc. Although it often seems as if gifts are given on a voluntary basis and for free, Mauss observes that they actually emanate out of three obligations inherent to gift exchange processes: (1) to give, (2) to receive, and (3) to return the gift (Mauss 1969).

In the tribes that Mauss studied, the first of the three obligations - to give - is a way of demonstrating wealth and obtaining and keeping authority or status within and outside of society. As Mauss puts it, "[t]he only way to demonstrate [a chief's] fortune is by expending it to the humiliation of others, by putting them 'in the shadow of his name'". "Rank is lost" if one fails to give (Ibid., 37-8). Once it has reached the recipient, the gift must be received. However, by accepting and appreciating a gift, one also takes on a challenge, namely to receive it in a certain way that makes you keep your dignity and shows respect to the giver. "[By receiving] you mean to take up the challenge and prove that you are not unworthy" (Ibid., 40). The last obligation, to return or repay the gift, is 'the essence' of the gift exchange: "[t]he obligation of worthy return is imperative. Face is lost for ever if it is not made" (Ibid., 41). If one does not return a gift of the same worth or more, one will be in debt towards the giver. According to Mauss, the driving force behind returning a gift potentially lies in the fact that the gift carries part of the giver's personality. It is this spiritual dimension in the gift which, in order to return to the giver, drives the recipient to reciprocate (Graeber 2001).

As several authors have pointed out, gift-giving is first of all marked by a paradox (see Derrida 1992; Godbout and Caillé 2000; Kowalski 2011). Indeed, the definition of the word

'gift' in the Merriam-Webster dictionary is the following: "something voluntarily transferred by one person to another *without* compensation" (Merriam-Webster 2016a). However, Mauss argued that there is no such thing as a purely 'disinterested' gift in 'archaic' societies. Reciprocity is part of any gift system. Secondly, gift-giving has a moral dimension: a moral bond is created between giver and receiver through the three acts of giving, receiving and reciprocating a gift. Furthermore, gift-giving is a complex "total social phenomenon" (Mauss 1969, 76), which can be found in any aspect of society and which creates and changes social relations (Stirrat and Henkel 1997). "[Gift exchange processes] are at once legal, economic, religious, aesthetic, morphological and so on" (Mauss 1969, 76) and can concern a whole society as well as groups or individuals within. This makes Mauss's essay a theoretical basis for understanding social relations (AnthroBase 2016). In fact, even though Mauss sees the gift exchange as a stage in social evolution, Kowalski (2011) emphasises that one should not think of gift systems as only present in archaic societies. Some scholars have used this theoretical lens to analyse contemporary social and economic relations. The sociologist Bourdieu (1986) for example frequently comes back to *The Gift* to explain power relations in society. He speaks about the 'symbolic violence' of the gift: according to him, reciprocity in the gift exchange can be seen as a mechanism for generating asymmetries of power. If the recipient does not give anything of the same value (or more) back to the giver, he becomes 'servant', someone of lower rank (minister), while the giver becomes superior to the receiver (magister). As a result, to receive a gift forces the recipient into reciprocating the latter if he or she does not want to lose his or her 'rank' (Kowalski 2011). Moreover, as Stirrat and Henkel (1997, 69) point out, "while the gift is given in ways that attempt to deny difference and assert identity between the rich giver and the poor receiver, a gift in practice reinforces or even reinvents these differences".

### 2.2.2. Development Aid and *The Gift*

The following section will provide a brief overview of the way in which *The Gift* has been related to development aid. Influenced by scholars such as Mauss (1969), Bourdieu (1986), and Parry (1986), Stirrat and Henkel (1997) are some of the first authors to conceptualise development as a form of gift exchange. As indicated above, the gift exchange

theory can be used to explain social relations. With their article *The Development Gift: The Problem of Reciprocity in the NGO World*, Stirrat and Henkel (1997) focus on the moral underpinnings of development aid and explain recent evolutions towards more participatory, bottom-up approaches in the development world through looking at the relationship between donors, Northern and Southern NGOs and the ultimate recipients as embedded in a gift system.

According to Stirrat and Henkel (1997), development gifts are different from the so-called Maussian gifts in four ways. First of all, whereas in the societies which Mauss studied, the givers commonly know the receivers, the authors conceptualise development gifts as money, objects or equipment given from donors to a "generalised [unkown] impoverished other" (Ibid., 72). Secondly, as donors usually do not expect anything in return for their gifts, the latter become disinterested and free of obligation for the recipient. Third, Stirrat and Henkel (1997) claim that development gifts are not meant to create ongoing social relations. Lastly, unlike the Maussian gifts which are often specific objects with a history attached to it, the abstract form of development gifts (especially the case of money) "allows and indeed requires giving to be asocial" (Ibid., 72).

Stirrat and Henkel (1997) furthermore illustrate that there is a 'gift chain' in development aid. An initial donor gives a gift to an NGO, which then transmits it, sometimes via other organisational bodies or NGOs, to the ultimate recipient. Through this chain, the originally free or so-called disinterested development gift can become "hedged with conditionality at best, while at worst the gift may become a form of patronage and a means of control" (Ibid., 72) for the recipient. The authors highlight the problem with the disinterested gift: the lack of reciprocity. Without the obligation to repay the gift, the receiver is pushed into "a position of indebtedness and powerlessness" (Ibid., 73), becoming dependent on charity.

The knowledge that charity creates social inequalities and dependence has led many NGOs to replace material aid with advice or efforts for "helping the poor to help themselves" (Stirrat and Henkel 1997, 73). Furthermore, to avoid patronage, Northern NGOs have laid an increased emphasis on collaborating with local institutions and Southern NGOs. Nonetheless, despite the changing discourse and calling the chain of intermediaries 'partnerships', Stirrat

and Henkel (1997) argue that the asymmetrical power relation between giver and receiver persists, as the Northern NGOs are often the ones to choose their partners, to set the agenda, and to define what has to be done with the development gift. This is how "[t]he pure, or free, gift of the disinterested, anonymous donor in, for example, Europe or America is progressively transformed into an interested, accountable, and non-free transaction" (Stirrat and Henkel 1997, 76). Whereas the Northern NGOs demand from the Southern NGOs or partners a degree of transparency and accountability that the gift reaches its destination and that it has been applied or used in a certain way, the Southern NGOs demand "both aid and, increasing control over aid given" (1997, 77). At this stage, the gift is no longer free but bound to conditions and "an object of exchange and negotiation" (1997, 77). Its originally abstract manner has been transformed into something concrete when it reaches the recipient.

Stirrat and Henkel's (1997) analysis of the gift exchange raises questions about the ways in which this conceptualisation of development is different from former streams of thought. Indeed, their points of critique towards development aid are rather similar to the points that authors such as Nelson and Wright (1995) and Cooke and Kothari (2001) raise: all of them see development aid and participatory methods rather negatively and as forms of control and oppression. At first sight, the gift exchange theory highlights the oppression through a violent 'gift debt', which merely seems to give another explanation for the hegemonic control of NGOs (and other aid agencies) in the North over the beneficiaries in the South. However, seeing development aid as gift system has more to it: as Gardner and Lewis (2015) argue, thinking with *The Gift* is still highly relevant in anthropology of development in 2015. According to them, *The Gift* helps to rethink and deepen conventional ways of understanding development 'simply' as a will for improvement or a form of control. It allows us to look at "'the development gift' as invested with social and spiritual meaning as well as being embedded in power relations" (Gardner and Lewis 2015, 112). This is what the anthropologist China Scherz (2014) does; she claims that *The Gift* has in fact often been misread as "an antagonistic theory of exchange in which social actors are primarily interested in securing power and prestige through their generosity, which humiliates recipients who find themselves unable to make a return gift" (Scherz 2014, 4). Instead of assuming that gift-giving *necessarily* is a 'violent' act of gaining power, she uses this stream of thought to pay

"closer attention to the role that particular sociohistorical conjunctures play in shaping how givers and receivers understand these acts of charitable giving". While recognising that there is another inherent paradox in the gift system leading to the simultaneous production of inequality and solidarity, Scherz (2014) finds that "these opposing dynamics are brought together in a wide range of situations that influence the effects of any given exchange" (2014, 5). In her book *Having people, having heart: Charity, Sustainable Development, and Problems of Dependence in Central Uganda*, Scherz challenges the assumptions about "the unavoidable violence of the charitable gift" (2014, 135) by exploring the viewpoints of the recipients. Thus, her use of the gift exchange theory doesn't paint as negative a picture of development aid as Stirrat and Henkel (1997).

Another scholar who believes that *The Gift* has not been used appropriately to fully grasp development aid is Kowalski (2011). He recalls that gift-giving is primarily about fostering relationships and should thus be conceptualised as a social system. As a result, in its original sense, gift exchange precludes superiority (although, in certain situations, it is used to obtain hierarchical power). Kowalski states that "[t]he western cultural agenda underpinning IDA [International Development Aid] is strongly influenced by a market approach to exchanges (even of humanitarian assistance [HA]) that places great store on the formalisation of the exchange, on the importance of delivering value to the donor, and on the short-term nature of the commitment. As such it cannot foster those positive attributes of *The Gift*; in particular, the trust, the spontaneity and the mutuality that focuses upon the nature and characteristics of the other party in the exchange" (2011, 198). For development aid to fall under all rules of a gift system, Kowalski (2011, 202) explains that development aid should be "ameliorated by the overwhelming nature of the need at that instant, on the one hand, and a presumed ability to reciprocate such assistance once normality has been restored, on the other". Consequently, he calls for giving voice to the receivers in the gift system, and, most importantly, for creating opportunities to reciprocate the gift to balance the unequal donor–recipient relationship.

## 2.3. Research Question and Outline

In this chapter, we have seen that participation, as it is linked to the shifting meanings of development, has been conceptualised differently through time. A recent way of thinking about development is through seeing it as part of a gift exchange system. Following authors such as Scherz (2014) and Kowalski (2011), I would like to emphasise here again that using *The Gift* goes beyond simply looking at development aid as a means by which hierarchy and control are established. In fact, it allows us to see development aid in a different, maybe less oppressive and negative light than former development paradigms do. Conceptualising development aid as a gift primarily focuses on the social relations and aspects of morality that it brings along. The research questions guiding this thesis are: *What are the ideas behind community involvement and how do these translate into the realities of the so-called community? What does community involvement come to mean for different stakeholders involved in a project? How can community involvement be understood in light of the gift exchange theory?*

As the third and next chapter will illustrate, apart from the fact that the work of the Harambee Foundation Holland is based on giving, the data I generated led me to think of the assistance given by HFH through the gift exchange theory. In the next analytical section I will first of all focus on the NGO's perspective, meaning of the Dutch directors Roel and Marianne Meijers, and their Kenyan partners Father Peter, John, Tryphosa, Albert, and Tatwa. I will look at the aim of Harambee Foundation Holland, and then examine its working method in general, before moving on specifically to community involvement in the fourth chapter. This requires a thorough analysis of the use of the concept 'community' and the meanings behind 'community involvement'. The fifth and final chapter of this section provides an analysis of the NGO's ideological and political intake behind community involvement. According to Klees and Edwards (2015), participation is always ideological and political. The scholars differentiate between 'neo-liberal', 'liberal', and 'progressive' participation. After having provided an overview of these three categories, I will examine whether participation, in HFH's case, fits any of the latter, and what this entails in terms of the gift exchange paradigm.

As Scherz (2014) points out, it is essential to not only analyse the giver's viewpoints, but to also look at those of the so-called recipients to grasp what is actually happening in a gift exchange system. Therefore, the third big analytical section examines the perspectives of the school and community on 'community involvement'. As a matter of fact, as the Kenyan government also uses the method of community contributions in public schools, community involvement is no novelty introduced by the NGO. However, it appears that the government's interpretation of 'community involvement' is slightly different than the NGO's. In the sixth chapter of this thesis, I will analyse how members of the school and community, standing between both perspectives, perceive the meaning and objective behind community involvement. The seventh and last analytical chapter provides an in-depth analysis of the notion of togetherness, as for many of my informants, it seems to be at the heart of community involvement. I will analyse what generates and reinforces a sense of togetherness in a project, who it encompasses, and what this entails for the social relationship between the NGO and the so-called community.

The conclusion restates my research questions in order to determine how the aims and ideas behind community involvement as seen from the NGO's point of view actually translate into the realities of the school and community members, and to analyse what 'community involvement' comes to mean in light of the gift exchange theory.

# Part II.

# The NGO:

# Giver, Co-operator and/or Educator?

# 3. Harambee Foundation Holland's Aim

On the HFH website, the NGO describes its objective as the following:

> Harambee Foundation Holland aims at contributing to raise the living standard of the local people in Western Kenya by a substantial improvement of the quality of educational opportunities.
>
> *Harambee Foundation Holland 2016b*

In other words, the contribution which HFH makes in the field of education targets a positive transformation of the current situation that people find themselves in. But how are the living standards in the area in which HFH works? Before analysing the NGO's ideas behind its objective and working method, it seems relevant at this point to give a short description of the world in which the NGO operates.

## 3.1. Life in Western Kenya

Although Harambee Foundation Holland has its main headquarters in Bungoma County in Western Kenya, it also works in four other counties: Busia, Trans Nzoya, Kakamega, and Siaya. These geographical units near the Ugandan border mostly constitute of rural, agricultural areas. Despite the fact that they contribute to a big part of the country's most important agricultural goods such as sugarcane, tobacco, vegetables, and maize, between 50 and 57 percent of the population in these areas live under the poverty line. In Bungoma County, the ratio of dependent people, meaning people under the age of 15 and older than 64, to those in the working age (15-64) is 93,8:100. In Siaya, this ratio is 106:100. The population struggles with different issues such as "high unemployment rates, [...] high rates of child labour due to high school dropout rates, [...] high population growth and a high youth/adult ratio" (Okwany 2014, 13). Furthermore, there is a high malaria and HIV prevalence – in Siaya County, 24 percent of the 15 to 49 year-old are infected with AIDS, which is high compared to the national average of 6.7 percent. As for the field of education, many of the schools in these rural areas are marked by insufficient infrastructure and a poor provision of educational materials (Okwany 2014). In 2003, primary school education became compulsory and free under President Mwai Kibaki. The number of pupils enrolled in primary schools has increased by 46 percent in 2009. However, national findings have shown

that the concept 'education for all' isn't unproblematic: in 2012, there still are low literacy skills, teacher shortages and absenteeism, high rates in pupil absenteeism, uneven and unpredictable funding in schools, and infrastructural deficiencies (Uwezo Kenya 2012).

### 3.2. Education and Transformation

As illustrated by the opening statement of this chapter reflecting HFH's interventions in Western Kenya, the NGO has a clear interest in the transformation of the local's living-standards. Indeed, this concern with change is reflected by the Meijers in an interview at the beginning of my stay in Kenya:

> If we talk about our overall aim, then we want to fight poverty in this region by improving the quality of education.
>
> *Marianne Meijers, director of HFH, personal translation from Dutch to English*

As this quote shows, there is a clear idea of education being the key to fight poverty. The emphasis on the importance of education is not only found with the Meijers, but also reflected with the partners. In an interview with Kenyan partner Tatwa, he states:

> [W]hat we are saying is: without education, you aren't anybody, you don't make sense in society. […] You will be denied a lot of things. You will not be able to access things that people that have gone to school access. You will not be able to know your rights, unless somebody articulates them to you. […] For you to be able to access all that you long to access, if you want to live a good life, then you need education.
>
> *Tatwa, partner of HFH*

This statement visualises that Tatwa finds education to be elementary for a person to become a competent member of society. But not only for a functioning society is education mandatory, also for the individual, as it opens doors to a 'good life'. It is a means through which people get to know their rights, so by which they can no longer be 'fooled' by other people. Furthermore, it 'gives access', which could refer to both material objects, but also personal relationships and positive feelings. A similar intake comes from partner Father Peter as an answer to the question what the philosophy behind Harambee Foundation Holland's work is:

> [First, there] is the idea of community transformation. From point A – so bad, poor school, bad administrators – to point B: improved. So another idea is [the] improvement of quality education. Another idea is the improvement of quality of life.
>
> *Father Peter, partner of HFH*

In the interview, Father Peter explains these three ideas behind HFH's work in greater detail:

> Point A could be [a] poor school, [with] no classrooms, poor infrastructure, [and] teachers not [being] helped or workshopped. Then you come to point B: the board of management members, head teachers, and teachers have been workshopped. Now, there is better administration, better teaching, better management of the little ones, better handling of facilities. There are classrooms and even desks. [...Point B] cannot be fixed, it has a chance to grow. Point B is quite amorphous, fluid.
>
> *Father Peter, partner of HFH*

We can observe that Father Peter sees community transformation closely intertwined with the improvement of quality education. Community transformation happens on two levels: by improving the facilities and infrastructure, meaning the shell of the school, and through workshops for the core of the school, the staff. Father Peter's use of the passive voice on the contrived verb "to workshop" implies that these workshops are provided by an external actor and inflicted on those, who take part in the latter. The workshops influence the teaching and the personal relationships between staff and pupils. These two levels of community transformation, both infrastructural and interpersonal, have an effect on the quality of education, and consequently on the results of the students.

Next, he explains the third idea, the improvement of the quality of life:

> [W]hen people go to school, they have a better quality of life. [...] When I talk about quality of life, it means that because of education, their mind broadens. They think differently. And through that, when they get employed, they know that they can spend money on important things.
>
> *Father Peter, partner of HFH*

Just like Tatwa and Marianne Meijers, Father Peter also believes in education bringing transformation on a personal level. Not only does he refer here to the employability of a schooled person, but also to the effect which education or schooling has on a person's thoughts.

In all the quotes listed above, we can find three common underlying assumptions. First of all, education, or 'schooling', is seen as the key for positive transformation, both on an individual and societal scale. It makes people think in different ways, become capable members of society, and acquire skills and tools that can help a person to have a better life. This better life is not a 'fixed point B'. As Father Peter says, it is fluid and amorphous. It cannot be defined precisely: Marianne Meijers for example broadly refers to the better life as a life without poverty. All in all, the NGO's aim conveys an idea of an "educated", knowledgeable person. As the anthropologists Levinson and Holland (1996, 3) argue, the image of the 'educated person' is "culturally specific and relative", and in case of HFH, we can see that they produce an image of the 'educated person' as someone who has gone to school, who will find a job, and who can personally bring change to his or her proper life and society. The second underlying assumption is that the general living-standards of the local people and the educational sector are deficient and unsatisfactory, and that these factors need to be changed in a positive way. Third, the informants express that the NGO can bring about this change and transform the status quo – not only in a material way by providing buildings and classrooms, but also spiritually through influencing the education, and with this the mind-sets of the local people. Thus, the assumption here is that HFH's contribution can bring about positive change, and help turning people into 'educated persons'.

But how does the NGO bring transformation both in terms of infrastructure and on a personal level? This brings us to the next section of this chapter: Harambee Foundation Holland's projects.

### 3.3. Harambee Foundation Holland's Projects

As mentioned in the second chapter, I explored different projects during my fieldwork in which educational and sanitary buildings have been, or were in the process of being built. The following figure (Figure 1) illustrates the general, simplified process of such projects once more by showing the primary involved stakeholders and their roles.

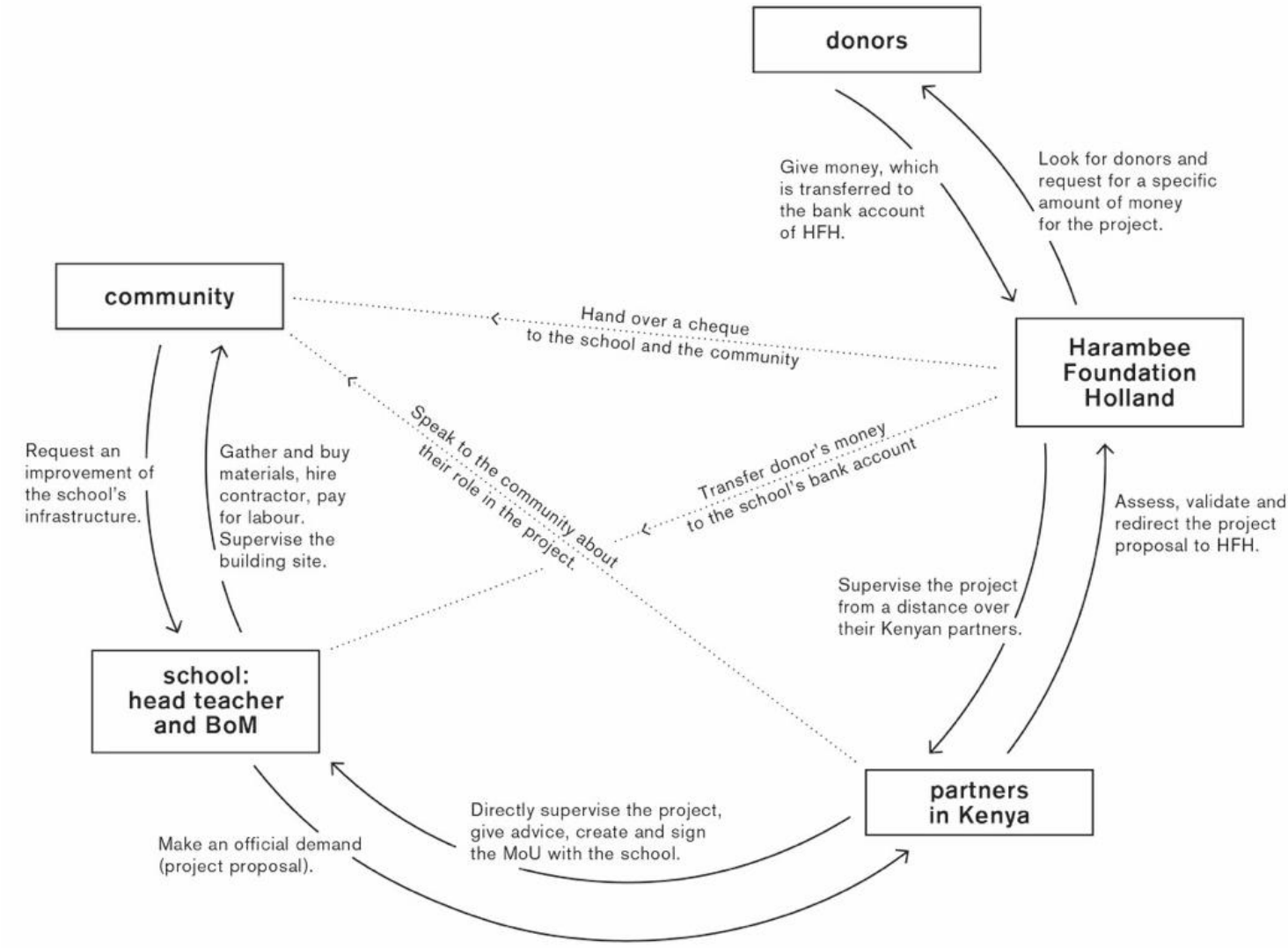



*Figure 1. The Process of a Project*

Figure 1 visualises various aspects of HFH's work. First of all, we can see that the process of completing a project is not done by a single person: a lot of people are involved: one or more donors, the NGO Harambee Foundation Holland and its Kenyan partners, the school, and the so-called community. 'School' and 'community' are broad terms. The word 'school' here refers to the people with whom HFH directly cooperates in this institution: the board of management committee (BoM), which includes the head teacher, a few teachers,

local church leaders (commonly referred to as 'sponsors') and parents (usually one parent per grade). In the next chapter, I will analyse who forms part of the so-called community. Altogether, these are the primary stakeholders which are elementary components of every project. There are other (secondary) stakeholders, not included in this graph, who depend on the location and project: people from the Ministry of Works, the contractors, the local Minister of Parliament (MP), administrators, District Educational Officers, and so on.

Secondly, this figure visualises the connection between the different actors involved in a project: it reminds of what Stirrat and Henkel (1997) call a 'gift chain'. If we start at the left end of the figure, we find the community who, in the eyes of the NGO, ideally requests for an improvement of the existing infrastructures with the board of management of the school. The head of the school, who is part of the BoM, contacts the partners of HFH. These are in touch with the Meijers, the Dutch directors of the NGO. The Dutch side of HFH then looks for a donor. Once they found one or more donors, the financial gift moves back over each element in the figure. In one perspective, one could argue that there is an initial 'giver', the donor, and a final 'recipient', the community. The financial contribution of the donors, or the initial gift, travels through this chain until it takes its ultimate shape: an infrastructure. On its way, various things happen to the gift. HFH is the main coordinator in this procedure: the NGO materialises it in form of a cheque and transfers it to a Kenyan bank account. From there, the money is used to pay the manpower of the contractor and other labourers, as well as to buy the different materials used to complete the building. Together with the contributions of the community, it can eventually take the shape of a building. In other words, the gift is not a stable entity, it is transformed throughout the chain. However, if we remind ourselves of the aim of the NGO, we can say that the initial gift – the donor's money – turns into more than a building in the end. From the NGO's point of view, this gift is expected to bring about transformation, not only to the educational circumstances in general (infrastructure and relationships within the infrastructure), but also indirectly to people's mind-sets. Hence, from this perspective, and I will come back to the latter at a later stage in this thesis, one could argue that the process of a project isn't 'simply' a 'gift chain'. In fact, *Figure 1* shows that the initial gift by the donors is given into the hands of HFH, who hand it over to the community, school, and partners. Thus, there are actually multiple givers and receivers involved.

Furthermore, the community has to contribute 10-15 percent to the project's total costs. One could thus argue that the gift is actually a co-construction between different actors.

Lastly, by drawing a parallel to Mauss's book *The Gift* (1969), the figure above illustrates the presence of the three inherent moral obligations *to give, to receive* and *to reciprocate*. The first two obligations, to give and to receive, go hand in hand with the givers (i.e. the donors and the NGO) and the recipients (i.e. the school and community). I will analyse these moral obligations in detail throughout the next two analytical sections. But what about the reciprocity in the gift chain? Looking at the potential 'ultimate recipient' – the community -, we have seen in the second chapter that HFH wants them to be involved in the project and to contribute to it. It is a condition for the NGO from the start of a project. The fact that it does not give money freely, but asks the beneficiaries to do something *in return,* namely to be involved in the project, shows that there is a conditionality and obligation inherent in the gift for the receivers. There is thus an exchange going on: the cheque or money is offered in return for community involvement.

## 3.4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the overall aim of the NGO and concluded that their target is a dual transformation of the living standards of local people. On the one hand, this transformation is meant to take place on an infrastructural or educational level related to the project itself: the NGO wants to influence and transform the quality of education through changing the outer 'shell' – infrastructures – and the inner core of schools – how people relate to each other inside the building. On the other hand, HFH strives at transforming the attitudes and mind-sets of people outside of projects, and to generate, through the means of education, what its members perceive as 'educated' people. To reach this aim of two-levelled transformation, the NGO works, apart from capacity building workshops and trainings, with so-called projects. Here, a multitude of stakeholders come together in the common goal to realise an educational infrastructure. Although one could perceive a project as a 'gift chain' (Stirrat and Henkel 1997), where a gift travels over intermediates to reach an ultimate recipient, a more nuanced perception proves more fruitful. There are, in fact, multiple givers and recipients involved in the work of HFH. Furthermore, the initial gift, the money from

donors, turns into more than a simple infrastructure and becomes bound with expectations for transformation on part of the NGO. In a project, we are dealing with the acts of giving, receiving, and maybe even reciprocating the gift. To analyse whether community involvement can indeed be seen as a way of reciprocating the gift, and thus a way how the so-called recipients can escape "a position of indebtedness and powerlessness" (Stirrat and Henkel 1997, 73), will be discussed later in this thesis, after having explored the perspectives of different stakeholders involved in a project. We will now first turn to the NGO. The next chapter will provide an analysis of the notions 'community' and 'community involvement' as conceptualised by the members of the NGO.

# 4. Community Involvement

The involvement of the community is a mandatory aspect in any HFH project, as the NGO only hands over a cheque if the community has made a contribution, usually in form of cash, building materials or labour. However, before I will analyse the ideas and objective(s) behind community involvement from the NGO's point of view, I will turn to the notion which lies at the heart of this practice: the 'community'.

## 4.1. The Community

Who is the so-called 'community'? The Dutch directors of the NGO once told me during an interview that although they often use the word 'community' interchangeably with 'parents of the pupils', it actually defines a broader group of people. Despite the fact that I came across various notions of 'community' in my interviews and conversations, there was a common consent that parents and pupils of a school are part of the community. Moreover, most of my interviewees emphasised a geographical component and defined the 'community' as the people living within a certain distance to the school. A head teacher of a primary school described the community as follows:

> All the people living in this region around the school. Parents, children, leaders [village elders], church leaders, some teachers. I myself am part of another community.
>
> *Esau*[3]*, head teacher, primary school*

What Esau is suggesting in this quote is that because his home is quite far away from the school, he does not count himself as part of this community. Yet, Tryphosa and Father Peter, two of the partners of HFH, include the staff of a school, meaning the head teachers, teachers, cooks, secretaries, and so on, to the definition of 'community'. Albert, another partner, defines the community even broader. He sees it as an 'amorphous' group of men, women, and children. According to him, one can find the following people in the community:

[3] The names of all informants from the schools and their surrounding communities have been changed in order to preserve their anonymity.

> the chiefs [from] the national government; the administrators from the county government [called] the ward administrators; the educational office, that is the DEO [District Education Office]; […] the sponsors [from a school] - normally it is the church here; the leaders of the various groups like [for example] the women groups that exist within the community; of course the CDF [Constituency Development Fund given by the member of parliament]; and the [Ministry of] Public Works - those are the ones who give the OK for the structures.
>
> *Albert, partner of HFH*

We can see here that according to Albert's definition, the words 'stakeholders' and 'community' can be used interchangeably.

All in all, we become aware of the fact that the definition of 'community' is not the same for all the people involved in a project nor for the different members of the NGO.

In the late 1990s, the scholars Guijt and Shah (1998) analysed the use of the term 'community' in participatory rural appraisal (PRA) methods. As explained earlier, this was one of the methods that arose in the 80s and 90s, inspired by the ideas of Robert Chambers (1983, 1992) who called for bottom-up, participatory development. Through PRA, development agents take into consideration the views and opinions of the so-called community. According to Cooke and Kothari (2001), Guijt and Shah (1998) criticised that in PRA discourse, communities were often considered "as homogenous, static and harmonious units within which people share common interests and needs. The articulation of the notion 'community' […] conceals power relations within 'communities' and further masks biases in interests and needs based on, for example, age, class, caste, ethnicity, religion and gender" (Cooke and Kothari 2001, 6).

Although HFH is not using this specific PRA method, the question could be raised whether this critique is viable here. To answer the latter, I would like to highlight two aspects within the former quotes by Albert and Marianne. First of all, by naming all the different people that can be part of a project, we can see that the members of the NGO are aware of the fact that the community is a very heterogeneous entity. Secondly, the quotes show that different power relations within the community are clear to them. The local partners live in the areas where the NGO operates, and they know the people and hierarchical orders they are facing. In fact, they sometimes even specifically make use of these power relations and hierarchies within a project. They speak for example about involving 'leaders' of groups

within the community. These leaders can then bring the rest of their groups on board of the project. Another example is the involvement of the Ministry of Works to give accord to the infrastructure and to control whether what is being built is up to standards. Having an official body discuss and sign off the plans is making specific use of their power. All these arguments suggest that although the word is contested within the NGO, it would be unreasonable to criticise HFH for treating the community as a homogeneous entity.

But what constitutes a community at what point in time? How can HFH ask for a contribution from a so-called community if there is no clear understanding within HFH on who this group of people consists of? The anthropologist Andrea Cornwall (2007) gives a possible solution. In her text *Buzzwords and Fuzzwords: Deconstructing Development Discourse*, she points out that the development world is full of words which gain and loose popularity in time, and which often have vague and various meanings. Whereas fuzzwords refer to formerly popular terms which have nowadays nearly been forgotten, buzzwords are those which are commonly used in the development jargon today. They can be "terms that combine general agreement on the abstract notion that they represent with endless disagreement about what they might mean in practice" (Cornwall 2007, 472). They furthermore often have "euphemistic qualities" and a "normative resonance" (Cornwall 2007, 472), meaning they have a pleasant touch to them and represent what is considered correct in society. 'Community' is such a buzzword: it has "warmly persuasive" qualities (Cornwall 2007, 472) and a positive undertone. As Raymond Williams (1976, 17) has analysed in his work *Keywords*, it is one of those words which "involve[s] ideas and values", whose meaning cannot be simply defined by looking into the dictionary, as dictionaries will list a range of meanings which are all current. It is a word which shifts its meaning through time and space as it is embedded in a given context. The quotes listed above indeed suggest that there is an absence of a clear definition within my empirical field of research. Nonetheless, this lack of denotation was not questioned by any of my informants. In fact, everybody using the term seemed to have a proper, clear, but quite different understanding of the word. This is reminiscent of what Ohnuki-Thiery (2002; cited in Wright 2008, 195) calls "'misrecognition': situations where people do not acknowledge that they all put diverse meanings into a same word. According to the anthropologist Sue Wright, misrecognition has

a potential danger, especially when it occurs in situations "related to a new rationality of governance, [where one set of meanings] is integrated implicitly into political technologies". In these circumstances, people might not realise that the meaning of a word has been subject to change and still relate it to a different rationality. This could "lead them into activities to which they, with more realisation, would be opposed" (Wright 2008, 195). However, I argue that the danger of misrecognition is not as immediate in case of HFH – after all, they are not working in the field of political governance and policy making. Furthermore, I argue that the term 'community' has no single set of meaning for the NGO, and as such, it offers "room for manoeuvre and space for contestation" (Cornwall 2007, 474). In fact, misrecognition is very convenient here: the use of this all-inclusive word leaves possibility for any person to join who would like to be involved in a project. In a way, the use of the abstract word *community* allows to maximise the number of contributions from local people, as it does not exclude anybody from being involved. Moreover, it leaves space for any project to be with a different set and number of people.

## 4.2. Why Community Involvement?

Let us now take a closer look at the different reasons the NGO has to involve the community. Throughout the next paragraphs, different views on how the members of the NGO define 'community involvement' will allow me to analyse the ideas behind community involvement from the NGO's perspective.

### 4.2.1. Cooperation and Equality

First of all, as noted above, the NGO's name 'Harambee' means 'to join hands together'. The Dutch director Marianne's explains in an interview:

> [I]t isn't us who bring something, but we want to do this together with the people on the spot. These can be the community, but also the government who contributes, and the school, and all the stakeholders who play a role in a project. It isn't only us, but a lot people. […] [I]t is not so much about the projects being ours, but they are the people's projects to improve the education of their children. We give them a helping hand.
>
> *Marianne Meijers, director of HFH*

The double emphasis on 'it isn't only us' indicates that it is essential for Marianne to bring forward the contributions of the other stakeholders. She highlights their involvement and hereby makes the NGO's contribution of around eighty-five percent of the total costs more insignificant. The importance is not on *how much* everyone did in terms of percentages but on the fact that everyone did *something*. By analysing this quote through the gift exchange perspective, it seems as if she here undermines or rejects her own role as *giver*. Instead, she speaks about being 'a helping hand'. Not only does this emphasise that the project is a result of cooperation between NGO and other stakeholders, it also makes it seem as if the other stakeholders do most of the work in this cooperation. Various authors such as Bourdieu (1986) and Stirrat and Henkel (1997, 69), who analysed the power relations which a gift creates between giver and receiver, might argue that a denial of the role of the giver could indicate that Marianne is not accepting the superior position ('magister') in the gift exchange system. Furthermore, it prevents the recipients from becoming 'minister', lower in rank, and as such it inhibits, from Marianne's point of view, the creation of asymmetrical power relations between giver and receiver. To conclude, we can say that one idea behind involving the community is cooperation and co-creation, which, from a giver's perspective, balances unequal power relations between giver and receiver. The social relationship between them thus becomes one defined by the equality of all stakeholders.

### 4.2.2. Value and Appreciation

Another incentive behind community involvement is the creation and recognition of the value of the project. As John, a Kenyan partner, stated during an interview:

> Many times, when people do things for you and just tell you 'take it, it is ready', you take a lot of things for granted. But when you do things yourself, you appreciate it, you value it, and you own it up.
>
> *John, partner of HFH*

Similarly, partner Tryphosa explains in a conversation:

> Giving things so freely makes people take things for granted. You avoid this by asking to bring in something, come in and be involved. And they are also happy when they can say 'we build it' and not 'it was built for us'.
>
> *Tryphosa, partner of HFH*

To take things for granted is an idiom which expresses "to fail to properly notice or appreciate (someone or something that is helpful or important to you)" (Merriam-Webster 2016b). So what underpins these two quotes is the thought that through active involvement, people will acknowledge and appreciate what is given to them. This is reminiscent of a Marxian understanding of 'value': as Graeber (2001, 26) explains in his book *An Anthropological Theory of Value*, Marx stated "that the value of commodities is derived from the human labour that went into producing them". However, an object's value can change: Graeber (2001, 26) adds that the idea of value as the invested human labour "tends to be forgotten when the object is bought and sold on the market, so that it seems that its value somehow arises naturally from the qualities of the object itself". When using this definition of value, we need to remember that while Marx speaks about objects which are destined to be sold and bought on the market, we are dealing here with an infrastructure which is neither meant to be bought nor sold. Despite of this, thinking in Marxian ways raises the question whether the beneficiaries see the value of this infrastructure in the same light, or whether they might define its value otherwise. In the next chapter, I will explore whether and how the recipients define the value of a project.

We can see here that another idea behind community involvement from the NGO's perspective is the creation and increase of the value of the project. If the beneficiaries look at the value of this project in the same light, a logical consequence would be that they appreciate it. Furthermore, the NGO speaks about a sense of ownership which is instilled amongst the recipients by actively participating in the project's construction.

### 4.2.3. Ownership and Action

This brings us to a third idea behind community involvement. The next few quotes show that through instilling a sense of *ownership*, community involvement creates a contract between the NGO and the community; it is a means by which the community takes on the responsibilities to cooperate in the creation of the project, to use the project, and to sustain the project after its completion. Tryphosa, one of the partners of the NGO, describes community involvement as follows:

> When the parents are involved, they feel this is theirs. The fact that they can say that this is 'our' school makes them responsible, once they feel they own it. You know, if something is not yours, you don't care about it. But if it is yours, you feel it belongs to you and therefore you should take responsibilities.
>
> *Tryphosa, partner of HFH*

Tryphosa indicates that community involvement brings about ownership, which in return makes people 'care about' what is given to them, and be responsible for what happens to it. The Kenyan partner Father Peter takes this thought a little further.

> For me, it [i.e. the involvement of the community] means that the people own what is happening for them. If they own, then that means that they are thinking in that way [of owning it], and their thinking is transformed into action. Like in the event of putting up a classroom, they can come in large numbers, each bringing a stone. Some […] can volunteer to bring trees. They can fetch water in their buckets when there is no water [on the site]. Community involvement is taking action. […] [Ownership] means they look at it as their property. They look after it. They will maintain it, they will use it, they will think of better ways to improve it.
>
> *Father Peter, partner of HFH*

Through the means of ownership, community involvement here translates into action: it means contributing to the project, using it, maintaining it, and improving it, *because* it is the community's property. An interview with partner Tatwa reflects a similar thought:

> The [members of the] community will not be part of the project if they have not personally confessed: 'yes, we own this project'. […]So in a school, […] it is not just enough for parents to say 'we are happy, this is our school' No. […]. 'I am a parent, and […] there was no tree here and shade [...] where the children sit when they are relaxing, so I planted this tree. So that the children have a place to sit. […] That is involvement!
>
> *Tatwa, partner of HFH*

What both Tatwa and Father Peter are getting at is that community involvement goes beyond the moment where the community needs to contribute in the project through labour, cash or materials. In fact, it means instilling a certain attitude and way of thinking about the project which leads to taking action even when the project is realised. This action is on the one hand meant to maintain the project, and on the other hand to improve it even further. Tatwa illustrates this through the example of planting a tree: he explains that involvement is

taking initiative to optimise the children's learning environment. However, as Tryphosa, Father Peter and Tatwa emphasise, before the community acts on the infrastructure, they need to accept the project as their own. It is ownership what makes people act, use and sustain the project. Thus, ownership, as an attitude, becomes a prerequisite for community involvement. While analysing this through the gift exchange prism, one could say that ownership goes hand in hand with receiving the gift: accepting it as their own is an attitude the recipients 'ought to' have, it is a moral obligation in this particular gift system.

As a result, another reason behind community involvement is that it makes people take action on the site of the project. Hence, community involvement is not only restricted to the moment when the project is put up. Rather, it expresses an ongoing relationship between the NGO, the project and the community. We can observe that this relationship is defined by the moral responsibilities which it entails for the community: they are supposed to act on the gift through contributing, using, sustaining, and eventually improving the gift. Consequently, community involvement is like a contract between the NGO and the community, it is a means by which the sustainability of a project is ensured.

However, it is important to note here that the community, in the eyes of the NGO, needs to be told what the contract entails, what their responsibilities are. As Tryphosa puts it in an interview:

> It is important that they know what is going on. The schools belong to them. It is not the head teacher's school. It belongs to the community. And if the community [members] accept that they have a role to play then that means the development is faster. […] But without sensitizing the community, without making them know that they have a role to play, that they are the owners of the school, then it becomes very difficult for them to respond when they are called upon to make contributions.
>
> *Tryphosa, partner of HFH*

Apart from a practical reason behind community involvement - the more people take action together and contribute the project, the faster the 'development', or the completion of the project - Tryphosa expresses the importance for the community to become aware of what the NGO expects from them. Somebody needs to 'sensitise' them, and educate them on this matter. Throughout my fieldwork, this 'somebody' was often one of the partners of the NGO.

When they assist the schools in a project, they often invite the local parents for a meeting to inform them about the project, to call upon them to contribute and remind them of other responsibilities. Interestingly, it seems here as if the meaning behind the word community is restricted to the parents of the school only. However, this is not completely true: partner Tryphosa expresses in the same interview that the parents are the ones that are easiest to reach within the framework of the project, but that HFH, in the future, would like to reach out to more people by mobilising more members of the so-called community.

#### 4.2.4. Education for Independent Behaviour

Whereas the quotes above illustrate how community involvement can be a means by which the members of the community take action and initiative on the site of the project, for some members of the NGO it also changes attitudes and behaviours *outside* the framework of the project. During an interview at his house, partner John stated,

> [Community involvement] is part of the education. Not just teaching the kids. But teaching them [the community] […] that they can do things themselves. They don't have to wait for somebody from out there to do it. I have that well [in my garden], because I dug it myself. I did not wait for the government for instance to come and bring water to me. […] If I wouldn't do it myself, I would have no water.
>
> *John, partner of HFH*

John, who has a general lack of confidence in the capabilities of the government to ensure that there is running water, approves of taking one's fate into one's own hands by showing initiative. He sees community involvement as an educational process in itself which catalyses such conduct. Community involvement would thus have the power to change the attitude and behaviour of people even outside the framework of a project. It creates an awareness that things might not happen if one does not initiate them themselves, independently of the government, NGO or other bodies.

During my fieldwork, I came across one specific example of where community involvement has led people to take independent, autonomous initiative. Almost all of the members of the NGO at some point told me the story of one of HFH's supported primary schools in which the parents were not satisfied with the results of the pupils. The parents held

the head teacher accountable for the poor results which were not improving over the course of some years. In a social movement, they decided to lock the head teacher out of his office and demanded a new head teacher at the local education office. Their voices were heard and the head master was replaced. However, when this principal did not improve things either, they held a protest march and asked for his replacement, too. The third and current head master works hard to improve the pupils' performance, which led to the school being "one of the designated model schools in the area" (Okwany 2014, 62) in terms of educational results and school management.

When the Dutch and Kenyan members of the NGO spoke about this incident, they did this with pride. This story reflects how they want the community, through community involvement, to independently improve their own situation and the quality of education. It is a behaviour they wish to see with the people who are involved in projects. Community involvement thus becomes something between a means an end in itself: it is an educational process by which people eventually change their attitudes and behaviours to commonly contest the current situation, they live in. It is important to stress here that this change, in the eyes of the NGO, can only happen if there is an underlying self-awareness. In John's example, this awareness entails to acknowledge that things might not change if they aren't initiated by one-self. In the second example, the awareness consists of seeing that educational results are not satisfactory, that they can be improved, that the head teacher can be held accountable for these results, and that common action is key for change.

### 4.2.5. Community Involvement as a Means or an End?

This chapter has revealed that the members of the NGO have different interpretations of the use of community involvement or participation in a project. In development literature, scholars distinguish between participation as a means - a tool for better outcomes - or as an end (Nelson and Wright 1995; Cleaver 1999). However, we could see throughout the previous paragraphs that in case of HFH, participation is both a tool for better outcomes, and an end in itself.

**A Means for Sustainable Development**

When conceptualised as a means, participation for HFH becomes a synonym for cooperation and working together, which not only has the practical reason of finishing the project in less time, but also balances the unequal power relations between the NGO and the beneficiaries. Furthermore, in the eyes of the NGO, participation serves to increase the value and appreciation of the finished product, which makes the people involved more responsible for the latter and instils a sense of ownership. Because of this ownership, people take action in and beyond the framework of the project. They participate in creating, using, maintaining and improving the project. In short, the NGO is concerned with the sustainability of the project and uses participation as a means to guarantee more sustainable development.

Focusing on sustainable development is, as a matter of fact, nothing unusual in the development world. As Scherz (2014) wrote, it has become increasingly common since the end of the 1990s. Although the idea of 'sustainability' is nothing new in itself, the connection between sustainability and development that emerged before the turn of the century differed from earlier conceptualisations of development. While 'sustainability' can denote the "environmental impact of development projects", it can also refer to the "financial sustainability of development projects", which is concerned with "whether a project can continue to produce benefits beyond the life of the intervention" (Scherz 2014, 34). As we have seen throughout the previous chapter, it is this latter definition which is applicable to HFH's work. Scherz describes how this conception of sustainability has characterised development thinking in a novel way. The author states that "participation and investment in local institutions" (Scherz 2014, 40) are henceforth seen as central aspects to reach sustainable development. The focus on participation made development agents pay increased attention to "the community" and the "social capital" found within the latter (Ibid.). But what is 'social capital', and how can development agents make use of this concept?

The term 'social capital' is usually traced back to the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1986), who defines it as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to the possession of a durable network of […] relations" (Bourdieu 1986, 241). In their book *Social Capital in Development Planning,* Nanetti and Holguin (2016, 19) specify that "social capital [as an asset] is not produced by single individuals and in this sense it does not belong

to single individuals. Rather, it is the product of particular types of social interactions among individuals and their groupings". As such, social capital is characterised by three elements guiding the social interactions: (1) trust, (2) solidarity norms and (3) actions. The first element, trust, facilitates and accentuates interaction within a group. The second element denotes a sense of shared "solidarity values and norms" amongst members of a group, which create an idea "that there exists a common good beyond the individual interest but also the belief that the interest of the individual benefits from and is enhanced by the pursuit of the common vision for the community" (Nanetti and Holguin 2016, 20). The last element, action, is based on these solidarity norms, and refers to the ability of the members of a group to engage in common action to pursue shared goals and policies. One important point the authors make in their book is that social capital can be *constructed* and encouraged. They claim that it could be of great interest to the state and other policy actors to construct and strengthen the social capital of a group for better development outcomes. In fact, by analysing the impact of social capital in the policy implementation in an Italian community, they conclude that "social capital becomes a forceful element in the assessment of effective territorial community policies" (Ibid., 26). Although Harambee Foundation Holland is neither working in the field of policy planning and implementation nor comparable to the institution of a state, it is still interesting to analyse whether and how they construct and encourage social capital in order to receive better outcomes in terms of sustainable development.

As a result, the question that can be raised here is *how* development agents act on social capital. According to Scherz, this is linked to the

> ascendancy of what Nikolas Rose (1999) has termed 'government through community' in Europe and the United States. Government through community does not act on an existing physical or social space but rather defines, maps, and empowers new networks of individual actors who are conceived of as imperfect and in need of management, yet capable of bringing about social and economic change. […G]overnment through community places a greater emphasis on how emotion is used to tie individuals together and spur them to construct microcultural identities.
>
> *Scherz 2014, 40*

There are elements in this quote which shine through in the work of HFH: first and foremost, the NGO without a doubt ties different people together in a project. As we have seen before, this group of people is labelled 'community' and is not clearly defined. In a sense, we could say that the NGO creates an inclusive, common identity through calling the group 'community'. Secondly, the members of the NGO undeniably believe in the capability of the community, as a group, to bring about change. The members of the NGO emphasise cooperation and common action, not only between the NGO and the so-called community, but also inside of the community. They conjure and engage a community in the collaborate activity of constructing, using, maintaining and even improving a project. However, as partner Tatwa has emphasised, the community needs to be told about their responsibilities and roles, they need to be clear about what Nanetti and Holguin (2016) call 'solidarity norms' - that is that *together*, sustainable development can be reached. This indicates that although the partners believe in the common force of the community, they are persuaded that this group is in need of guidance or management.

All in all, by comparing the above quotes of the members of the NGO to the definition of social capital, it appears that HFH's interpretation of community involvement is in line with what Scherz (2014, 40) has entitled "the key to sustainable development". In the next section, *Part III* of this thesis, I will analyse whether the members of the community and school acknowledge the NGO's emphasis on their social capital. If we make reference to the gift exchange theory, one can gain two main insights from the previous paragraphs. First of all, the givers create a common identity of receivers by tying them together in a project and labelling them 'community' so that the sustainability of the 'gift' is assured. Furthermore, the givers also clearly want the recipients to act together on this gift. As a result, it becomes a co-construction between givers and receivers. But can we still speak about a 'gift' if the so-called 'recipients' have to participate in its realisation? At this point, we reach the limits of the gift exchange theory. The members of the NGO see indeed more than a pure gift in what they offer. In fact, they deny their role as givers and focus instead on cooperating with the recipients by emphasising their involvement.

**An End in itself: Conscientisation**

Participation, however, is not only a means for attaining sustainable development. In HFH's case, it is also a desired end in and of itself: John, who is one of the HFH partners, refers to it as an educational process leading to autonomous, common action based on the community members' initiative to change the status quo. However, as mentioned earlier, a necessary condition for this to occur is that people are aware of their current situation. This is similar to Paulo Freire's concept of 'conscientisation'. In the development world, many NGOs have used Freire's concept "to stimulate and support people's abilities to understand, question and resist the structural reasons for their poverty through learning, organisation and action" (Gardner and Lewis 2015, 154). Through participation, the NGOs want to empower marginalised and oppressed people to analyse and take action against existing structures. The next section will provide a deeper analysis of both the concept of conscientisation and the way HFH uses this method to achieve transformation, on a personal level and beyond.

## 4.3. Conscientisation

In his article *Understanding Paulo Freire: reflections on the origins, concepts, and possible pitfalls of his educational approach,* James Blackburn (2000) provides an overview of the works of the Brazilian professor Paulo Freire, whose revolutionary pedagogical inputs from the sixties and seventies have had a great influence on the methodological tools of NGOs active in the development world. Freire believed that the capitalist society he lived in was marked by injustice, oppression and exploitation. He was opposed to formal education as it was practiced in schools and universities, he saw it as "an instrument of oppression rather than an instrument of liberation" (Blackburn 2000, 6). His critique was directed at the fact that "education becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher […] 'makes deposits' which the students patiently receive, memorize, repeat" (Freire 1972; cited in Blackburn 2000, 6). Since this kind of education prevents pupils from having a critical consciousness, they are not able to see and transform existing oppressive societal patterns. Freire's key concept of *conscientisation* paves the way to alternative forms of education, namely education for critical thinking: "[c]onscientisation can be understood as the process by which humans

become more aware of the sources of oppression. […It] is the process by which the capacity for critical thinking by the oppressed – of themselves and the community and, ultimately, the society they live in – can be expanded" (Blackburn 2000, 7). An equally important component of conscientisation is *action*, which eventually leads to changing the oppressive structures. However, it is important to note here that Freire's focus lies with the *process* of liberation rather than liberation itself. He provided the tools for people to realise, and finally act against the sources of oppression and exploitation themselves. He therefore emphasises the role of the 'educator' in the process of conscientisation. The educator no longer simply 'deposits' knowledge into the heads of the students; instead he engages "in a 'genuine dialogue' or 'creative exchange', with the 'participants'" (Ibid., 8), where they become subjects "rather than passive objects" of the educational process. Furthermore, the educator is supposed to engage into their reality and to value the participant's knowledge as his or her own (Ibid.).

In the development world, many NGOs have used Freire's concept of conscientisation "to stimulate and support people's abilities to understand, question and resist the structural reasons for their poverty through learning, organisation and action" (Gardner and Lewis 2015, 154). By using methods of participation, development actors want to empower marginalised and oppressed people to analyse and confront existing structures. 'Participation' is here an end in itself, as it embodies political change triggered by the awareness and initiative of the oppressed. I noticed throughout my fieldwork that the NGO Harambee Foundation Holland attempts to create such awareness on different occasions. The following sub-section provides an example.

### 4.3.1. HFH's Public Speeches

When I followed the work of the organisation Harambee Foundation Holland in Kenya, I went to various events that the Dutch couple Roel and Marianne, as well as their local partners, were invited to. One of these events was an official opening of a new school building at a primary school. This new, shiny building shines out in the whole area; with bright blue and yellow colours, one can easily spot it from the big main road leading to Uganda. As the local partner Father Peter pointed out, the whole area around this school is

particularly poor. Being only a few kilometres away from the Ugandan border, an endless, ear-deafening row of lorries pass by the badly maintained street on a daily basis. Child prostitution, drug abuse, and poverty are very common issues in this warm and dry border region.

*Figure 2. A new building of five classrooms*

As usually at these kinds of events, many people were present on the ground. When we drove onto the school compound, pupils in their school uniforms were already waiting for us on both sides of the entrance road. Roel had his window down to high-five children on his side of the car, while Marianne did the same on the other side. The children were shouting and laughing in excitement. When we got out of the car, we shook many hands. After a while, we were led to our seats on plastic chairs underneath a big tent. Opposite of us, under some trees, there were pupils sitting on school benches and parents sitting on chairs. There was a big open space in between us and them. Sitting to our left were teachers, the BoM and the head teacher. The event started with entertainment: some groups of people used the open space to sing or dance. After this, the different people were introduced and speeches were held. The first person to address the crowd was a man who wants to become the local Member of Parliament (MP) in the following year (i.e. 2016). He promised to donate 80.000 Kenyan Shillings (approximately 800 €) for the next stage in the project. The members of the NGO immediately started talking to each other in astonishment: this is large amount of money. Marianne wrote down the man's name and promised sum on a piece of paper. The

whole audience clapped after the man's speech. During the next hour, various people including officials from the educational office, the headmaster, county government officials, and national government officials gave a speech. They were mostly turned with their backs to the pupils and parents, in the direction of our tent under which the "guests of honour" were sitting. I repeatedly heard in the speeches that they were happy about the building, and grateful to the donors. All of the speakers repeatedly thanked the Dutch couple Marianne and Roel. Their partners were also named on some occasions. Roel and Marianne commented in Dutch to me that many of these officials who were present this day had not contributed at all to this project, but most of them would probably like to be associated with it. The current MP arrived late during the event. When his car entered the school compound, it was preceded and followed by about ten motorbikes. The MP sat down underneath the tent, amidst the members of the organisation and the other guests of honour. During the event, he looked at his phone. I noticed that he was watching a video.

Then it was the NGO's turn to give speeches. Starting with John, every partner and the Meijers individually stood up to say something into the microphone. They talked while turned towards the parents and pupils, and they thanked the latter for their efforts and contributions. John first thanked the board of management for their help and contribution, and then asked them how much had been contributed by the parents. They replied '15 percent'. He turned to the parents to thank them, and started applauding. Everybody joined in. Then he turned back to the board of management to ask how much was contributed by the Constituency Development Fund (CDF). This is a sum of money which the government allocates to the MP specifically for 'developing' their constituency in an area of choice – education, health, etc. The MP decides where this money goes to. After his question, there was a silence lasting a few seconds: John received no answer from the BoM. In fact, the head teacher later explained to me that the school did not get any support from the government for this project. Although the MP had already promised four times to help out the community by carrying ten percent of the total costs, he had not kept his promise until then. As a result, the parents and local community members had to contribute more in order to complete the project. John knew about this and purposely asked the question. He turned to the politicians and spoke directly about the lack of contribution of the CDF to them, explaining that he

hoped the ten percent would still be given to the school. The Meijers used similar topics in their speeches. They thanked the community, acknowledging how much the parents, teachers and pupils contributed, and expressed that they hoped that the politicians would still keep their word. Furthermore, all of the members of HFH got back to the man who claimed to donate 80.000 KES in the beginning of the event, reminding him of his promise and saying that they hoped they weren't empty words. Marianne made the public suggestion to put the promised money into new desks for the new classrooms.

The current MP was the last one to speak and to respond to all the preceding speeches. He emphasised that he had donated the library to this school, and that the promised ten percent will still be given. He said that he would like to invest into the library. Just like after any other speech, the audience applauded. A few days later, the head teacher told me that the MP did not personally choose to give this library to the school. He was bound to do so, because it was an official reward for a competition between different schools in the area which this school had won. The head teacher added that without the reward, the school would not have received this library from the MP.

After the ceremony, all the politicians disappeared very quickly. None of them stayed to assist in cutting the ribbons of the newly inaugurated building.

The above narrative reflects the social relations between the NGO and the other people on the site. As this chapter is about the giver's perspective, the following paragraphs will focus on the different NGO-members' actions to explore the way in which the NGO relates to other stakeholders.

First, it is helpful to recall the different groups involved in the opening ceremony: the members of the organisation (the Meijers and their partners), the officials and politicians, the pupils, parents, the board of management, different school employees such as the head teacher and the teachers, and other visitors. Thinking about the different definitions of 'community' which the members of the NGO brought forward, we can say that an extensive community is momentarily represented here, embodied by the different stakeholders mentioned. However, we can observe that when the members of the NGO speak to the community, they turn towards the parents and pupils, and not to the politicians and other

officials. It seems as if in this particular context, the boundary of who makes up part of the community and who doesn't, is dependent on their contribution to the project.

Second, the considerate, amicable attitude which the members of the NGO adopt throughout the whole sequence stood out to me. When the different NGO members drove onto the school compound, they high-fived the pupils, acknowledging their presence. Similarly, they turned towards the parents and pupils during their speeches, thanked them, and applauded for the contributions made by the parents. This compassionate behaviour, the accent on the contributions of the community, and the fact that they want to share the credit for building up the school can be interpreted as a way of parenthesising that the NGO is a 'giver'. Instead, it emphasises (again) the cooperation in the creation of the infrastructure. From a gift exchange perspective, one could argue that this action is a way of balancing an unequal power relation between the givers and the receivers by blurring the lines between givers and receivers, and by highlighting the equality of all stakeholders involved.

Moreover, we observe that throughout their speeches, the members of the NGO publically share their mistrust and scepticism towards the promises of the politicians. This goes both for the man who would like to run for Parliament the following year, and the incumbent. Let us first turn to the man who wants to run for MP. When he promised the money, the members of the NGO were clearly excited. All of them came back to this man during their speeches to remind him of his promise, and to express that they hope that he will keep it. Marianne even suggested what to do with the money. This makes the man's promise less abstract than a simple number: now that there is a clear image of what this money could be used for, it embodies a real solution to a real need. We can see here that even though this man has never worked as an MP before, the fact that he runs for this position makes it necessary for the NGO to doubt his words and to publically pressure him into keeping his promise. As for the current MP, the members of HFH publically exposed the fact that he did not keep his word by asking the BoM how much the MP has contributed so far. They directly confronted the board with this matter by asking them a thought-provoking question and waiting for their answer. They might have hoped for the audience to realise themselves that the MP's behaviour was not just: as he did not give the promised sum of money, the community had to contribute even more. All in all, we can see that the members of the

organisation openly questioned and mistrusted both men, and that they wanted to create awareness amongst the other people present at the event about this.[4] Indeed, one could say that they employed Freire's method of conscientisation (Blackburn 2000). In the event described above, they adopted a specific role in the process of community involvement: they became what Freire would call 'the educators'. Indeed, they entered into the reality of the so-called participants and confronted the latter with what they find unequal and unjust. Their open critique towards the politicians might made the community "perceive afresh, analyse, and transform" (Blackburn 2000, 3-4) their realities. This reminds us also of partner Tryphosa's statement cited above, in which she emphasises that the community must be sensitised about their roles and responsibilities in the projects, and that it is mostly the partners of HFH who take on the role to do so.

Furthermore, let us remind ourselves of the fact that John, partner of HFH, called community involvement 'part of the education', where people learn that they can do things by themselves without having to rely on other people. The members of the NGO emphasise participation as an "educational process": they want people to be *aware* of their situation, and to acknowledge that they might be let down by authorities who promise to step in for the community but fail to keep their promise. This is very similar to the definition which Blackburn (2000, 7) gives to 'conscientisation': "the process by which humans become aware of the sources of their oppression".

However, as mentioned above, conscientisation also means taking action to *transform* these oppressive realities. In another example from above, we can observe that the NGO encourages the community to take action: they are proud of those parents replacing a head teacher who does not bring about satisfactory results.

In conclusion, when analysing the above-mentioned examples through the theoretical lenses of the gift-exchange theory, we see that, on some occasions, the NGO strives to replace the image of 'giver' with an image of 'educator'. Community involvement is an

[4] It is interesting to note that at the event, scepticism towards the politicians was not publicly expressed by any other speaker but the organisation's members. It was only later, during an informal conversation with the head teacher that he pronounced the same mistrust: he said that the current MP would have never paid for the library if it weren't for the award.

educational process where the recipients are seen as hierarchically equal to those who bring the gift. In fact, as the gift becomes a mutual construction between giver and recipient, we reach the limits of the gift exchange theory. The institution the NGO puts in place in collaboration with the so-called community is much more than a gift for the 'givers'. It is an object bound with hope for change – in and beyond the schools. Community involvement creates an ongoing social bond between the NGO and the community and, when seen as an end, it becomes a tool for awareness-creation and action for structural change.

# 5. Political and Ideological Motivations behind Participation

In their article *Unpacking 'participation' in development and education governance: a framework of perspectives and practices,* Klees and Edwards (2015) illustrate that 'participation' today can take different forms in practice, depending on the political and ideological perspective behind it. Specifically, they claim that participation is always political and ideological. The authors criticise that although participation has become an increasingly popular and central concept in development, it often lacks a clear definition. Looking at the field of educational governance, they create a framework which differentiates between three perspectives on participation and label these 'neo-liberal', 'liberal', and 'progressive'. Although they emphasize that their three perspectives on participation are not all-inclusive, nor always applicable, this framework can indeed help to determine the political and ideological thoughts behind participation from the NGO HFH's perspective, especially because HFH is engaged in this exact field.

## 5.1. 'Neo-liberal' Participation

The 'neo-liberal' perspective is based on values inspired by the neoclassical school of economics. As such, this perspective promotes "educational privatization, public-private partnerships, market-based solutions predicated on parental choice and user fees, and accountability-based policies of school management decentralization to the community level" (Klees and Edwards 2015, 484). The neo-liberal perspective is defined by three main characteristics. First of all, it encourages the idea that people are consumers of education and should be able to choose between competing schools. Second, it reduces state responsibility in the provision and funding of education by advocating public-private partnerships or by encouraging the privatisation of education services. Lastly, the neo-liberal school of thought approves of an increased responsibility for the individual and/or communities in educational outcomes by imposing fees or by installing school management committees. The latter decentralises educational governance towards members of the community.

From a neo-liberal perspective, schools are made accountable for their educational outcomes through the pressure coming from the so-called consumers of educational services: by being

able to choose the best schools and by being part of a management committee, schools will ideally react to their desires and pressures and use resources more efficiently and effectively. Furthermore, as opposed to the definition of neo-liberalism as propagated by the neoclassical school of economics, the state is a strong, central institution which provides, designs and implements policies and curricula and holds schools also accountable for their outcome.

### 5.2. 'Liberal' Participation

The second perspective on participation in educational governance is called 'liberal'. Here, participation is equal to bringing individual and/or groups *into* the state or other institutions by for example adopting a "representative democracy, with its emphasis on the rights and responsibilities of citizen participation in regular elections" (Klees and Edwards 2015, 488) in development processes. Seen from a liberal perspective, participation is part and parcel of development because it is a means to achieve certain goals. This is reflected in the belief that inviting community representatives to engage and contribute in space, resources, decision-making, planning and/or implementing phases will lead to positive outcomes. Known examples of this intake on participation are "participatory poverty assessments (PPAs), poverty reduction strategy papers (PRSPs), and the formation of organisational or governmental policies" (Klees and Edwards 2015, 488). This instrumentalism to community-led participation has been widely criticised in the literature, partly because participation has often been a top-down, "front-end" process where the final decisions were taken from the most relevant stakeholders instead of the beneficiaries. Furthermore, liberal participation has been accused of reproducing rather than changing the status quo (Cooke and Kothari 2001; Klees and Edwards 2015).

### 5.3. 'Progressive' Participation

The last perspective on participation, labelled 'progressive' participation, is directly concerned with challenging the status quo. It is based on a critique of existing dominant structures within state and market, and relies on the empowerment of the individual to bring about alternative forms of development and educational governance. 'Progressive' participation has three main characteristics, which, however, do not necessarily all have to be present to make the process of participation progressive. First of all, it is concerned with

"personal transformation through the development of an awareness of oppression and a critical consciousness". This is related to Paulo Freire's concept of "conscientisation" as explained in the previous chapter, which is based on the idea of using education as a means to develop critical awareness about oppressive political structures, so that targeted measures can be taken against the latter. A second characteristic of progressive participation is the "purposeful individual and group action against oppressive political, economic and social systems". Here, participation becomes an act of mobilising a group of people in order to change existing structures. In line with this, the third aspect of progressive participation consists of "work[ing] toward actual transformation of those systems". The focus is on the way in which groups can work together to reach a certain goal, thus on being part of a group to modify the status quo.

## 5.4. Conclusion: Community involvement - Neo-liberal, Liberal or Progressive?

What are the ideological and political motivations behind community involvement from Harambee Foundation Holland's perspective? Can they be conceptualised in the tripartite framework which Klees and Edwards (2015) offer? In an attempt to answering these questions, we now return to analyse the NGO's overall aim and meanings they give to the concepts 'community' and 'community involvement'.

In the third chapter, I argued that the NGO targets a dual transformation of the living standards of local people. On the one hand, HFH seeks to influence the quality of education by financing buildings and workshops: the NGO wants to transform the outer 'shell' – infrastructures – and the inner 'core' of schools – how people relate to each other inside the building. On the other hand, HFH strives to transform the attitudes and mind-sets of people by creating awareness, which influences how people think and eventually might lead to action for changing existing patterns. To reach this dual aim, the NGO uses the method of participation. When explicitly targeting the first level of transformation, participation is a means for the members of the NGO to reach sustainable development. In this sense, participation is like a contract for an enduring relationship between the NGO and the community, defined by the community's responsibilities of owning, using, maintaining and

improving the infrastructure. However, participation can also be useful to aim at the second, more personal and spiritual level of transformation: by involving the community, its members learn how to take initiative, become aware of their situations, and eventually change the status quo for instance by holding people, such as a head master of a school, accountable. Participation, in this sense, is an end in and of itself, an educational process similar to Freire's concept of 'conscientisation', leading to initiative-taking and, eventually, communal action against injustice and for quality education.

If we compare HFH's intake on participation with the three political and ideological perspectives by Klees and Edwards (2015), it becomes clear that by conceptualising participation both as a means and an end, the NGO is concerned with an even more complex and interrelated perspective on participation than the ones suggested by the authors. In fact, HFH's concept of 'community involvement' embodies elements of all three categories listed above (i.e. neo-liberal, liberal and progressive participation).

First of all, community involvement is a must in each project. It is the NGO that decides whether and how community involvement takes place. Underlying this is a conviction that community involvement leads to better outcomes in the project (and beyond). Community involvement, in this light, receives an instrumental value just like in Edwards and Klees' (2015) liberal perspective on participation. However, we saw that participation isn't purely instrumental, indeed it serves a wider purpose, which is to create awareness, leading to personal transformation and common, targeted action against injustice. Here, we can definitely perceive elements of so-called 'progressive' participation. Nonetheless, as illustrated by one of the examples mentioned above, one possible targeted action to improve the quality of education can be to hold a head teacher accountable for the pupil's outcomes. The NGO supports the idea that the members of the community care about the results of the students, and therefore encourage them to take responsibility in ensuring good educational outcomes. Just like in Klees and Edwards's explanation of neo-liberal participation, the NGO in fact decentralises educational governance towards members of the community and advocates a similar accountability system.

All in all, it appears that there are political and ideological motivations behind HFH's work. However, we cannot easily place these motivations into a single theoretical category as

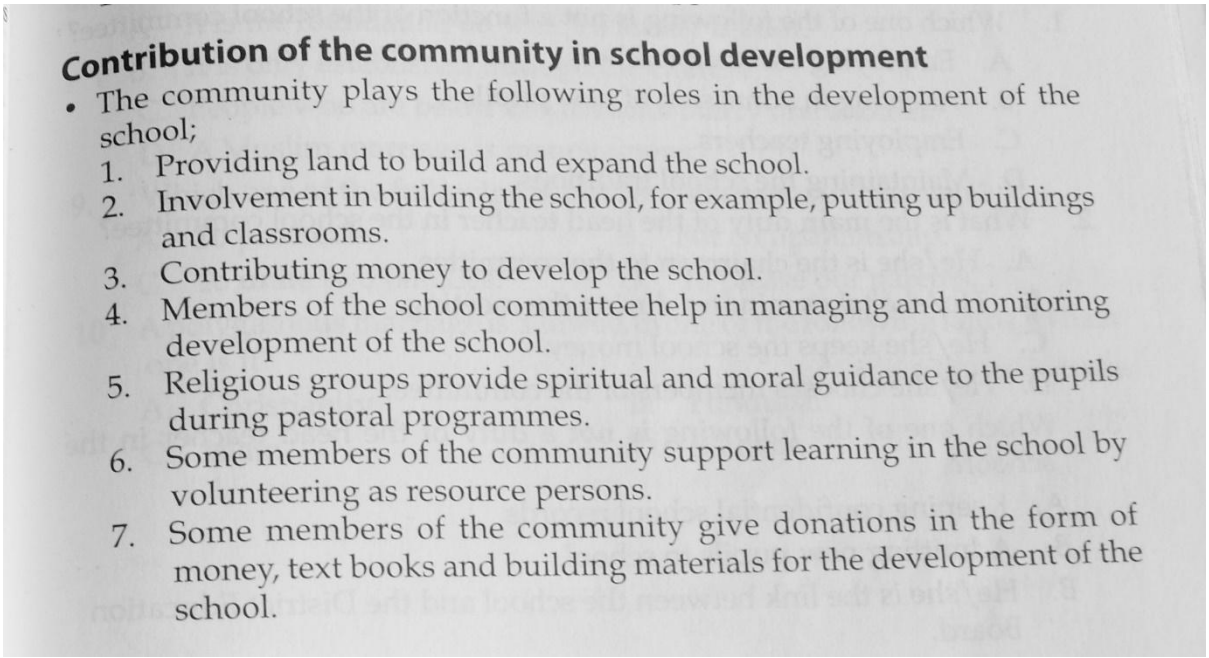
outlined by Klees and Edwards. In practice, we face a more complex definition of participation, which may be both a means and an end at the same time. This raises the question as to how these multiple perspectives on involvement translate into the realities of the members of the so-called community: how might they perceive the concept of community involvement? The next analytical section – *Part III* – explores this aspect in greater detail by considering the views of those who are 'involved' in HFH projects: the school staff and community members.

# Part III.

# The School and Community:

# Contributors, Beneficiaries and/or Co-Owners?

# 6. Community Involvement: A Well-known Method?



**Contribution of the community in school development**

- The community plays the following roles in the development of the school;
  1. Providing land to build and expand the school.
  2. Involvement in building the school, for example, putting up buildings and classrooms.
  3. Contributing money to develop the school.
  4. Members of the school committee help in managing and monitoring development of the school.
  5. Religious groups provide spiritual and moral guidance to the pupils during pastoral programmes.
  6. Some members of the community support learning in the school by volunteering as resource persons.
  7. Some members of the community give donations in the form of money, text books and building materials for the development of the school.

*Figure 3. Excerpt from Standard 8 Social Studies Syllabus, Chapter 3: Social relations and Cultural Activities, The School, p. 60*

During my fieldwork, I rapidly came to realise that the idea of a community making contributions to a school was no novelty for my informants and definitely not introduced by the NGO Harambee Foundation Holland within the frameworks of their projects. In fact, towards the end of my fieldwork, I learned that the idea of 'community involvement' is taught in public primary schools, where the pupils are told that the community has a set of fixed roles in "school development". This is shown by the above excerpt I found in the Kenyan national social sciences' textbook used in standard 8.[5] Since this textbook forms part of the official syllabus, it can, to some extent, be understood to representing the Kenyan government's opinion on the community's role in the school.

Even though a clear definition of 'community' is missing, we can see that it includes religious groups as well as some members of the school's management committee, which, apart from the head teacher and teachers, usually consists of parents and church leaders.

[5] In Europe, Standard 8 is commonly referred to as grade 6, where the pupils are generally around 12 years old.

The excerpt visualises how some contributions are an obligation for the community as a *whole*: the determined language in the first three sentences describes how the community is to contribute land and money and expand the infrastructures by physically putting up educational buildings. Some smaller groups within the community have more specific roles: the school's management committee (BoM) should supervise the process of school development and the religious groups are to give pupils moral and spiritual guidance. The above excerpt also shows that some *individuals* within the community can do more than the obliged roles described above; the presence of the words 'some members', paired with 'volunteering' and 'donations' in sentences 6 and 7 show how some can *voluntarily* provide learning support for the students, donate text books, give money or building materials to make the school grow in terms of buildings and finances.

Despite the absence of a clear definition, the excerpt provides valuable insight into the way in which the Kenyan government conceptualises 'school development'. Words such as 'build', 'expand', 'land', 'building materials', and 'money' equates 'school development' with the physical and economic growth of the institution. This echoes the conceptualisation of 'development' in the modernisation paradigm in the 1960s. In this case, however, one can additionally observe that the development of the school also lies within the spiritual and educational capacities of the pupils: the community can develop the school through providing educational, religious and moral guidance to the students. Overall, one can say that for the government, the contributions from communities as a *whole* are mandatory and limited to one-time, single-moment contributions in terms of cash, labour, and resources.

Let us recall the three contributions – cash, labour and building resources - which the NGO HFH asks from the community in a project. These contributions are basically identical to what the Kenyan state would like the community to contribute. Nonetheless, there are some striking differences in the way in which HFH and the Kenyan state perceive the role of the community in 'school development'. Firstly, as shown in the previous section, HFH involves the community in order to achieve sustainable development. This is why the involvement is not limited to the three contributions mentioned above. The NGO would like the community to also use, maintain and improve the infrastructure. Secondly, HFH sees the role of the community as learners in an educational process of conscientisation, eventually

leading to autonomous, collective action against injustice. Thus, in contrast to the excerpt above, for HFH, the community as a whole plays a role which goes beyond the single act of contributing cash, labour, and building materials. For them, community contributions are interpreted as a long-time commitment to the project and an educational process. As a result, despite the fact that the community members are, according to both the Kenyan government and the NGO, supposed to contribute to the school, they receive mixed messages on the purpose and nature of their role.

This begs the question as to how the staffs of the schools and the community members actually interpret and understand the contribution asked by HFH in a project. W*hy* do they think HFH works with the method of community involvement, and *why* do they participate in the projects? Do they see community involvement as a common *obligation* for the community as a *whole*, as a *voluntary* act as *individuals*, or something entirely different? Moreover, do they perceive it as a one-time contribution like in the above excerpt, or, following the NGO's ideas, as an ongoing commitment between them and the school and/or an educational process leading to independent behaviour within and outside the frameworks of a project? To answer these questions, the next two chapters of this analytical part explore different events and interviews with the primary stakeholders (i.e. those who work closely together with HFH in a project). These are head teachers, members of the BoM, teachers, pupils and other so-called community members, in this case parents and non-parents to pupils, who live within walking distance of their local school. In both chapters, I use quotes from informants around the seven different schools I visited.

In this chapter, I will explore the broad variety of motivations behind 'community involvement' as well as the meanings my informants read into its purpose. I categorised them in themes ranging from a (1) *responsibility for sustainable development*, (2) a *prescribed duty*, (3) a *moral obligation*, to (4) an *act of appreciation and common interest*. Chapter seven then offers an in-depth analysis of one of the commonly named perceptions on community involvement in a project, namely the *sense of togetherness* and *trust* it instils amongst participants.

### 6.1. A Responsibility for Sustainability

Let us first turn to the head teachers. According to Marianne and Roel Meijers, a head teacher is 'key' in a project. Not only is he or she the manager of the project, meaning the one who budgets, organises and monitors the different phases of a project, the principal is also in contact with all the stakeholders involved in a project. As one primary school head teacher explained during an interview:

> They identified me as the manager of the project. But above that, as the head of this institution, it is my role to ensure that the project succeeds by involving all the stakeholders, [by] ensuring that they are all brought on board: the national administration; the political wing: the education office; the public works office, which deals with the plan to make sure that the project is built to standards; and the public health people, who are concerned about the safety of the children.
>
> *Mark, head teacher, primary school*

As illustrated by the quote above, this head teacher sees it as his duty to make a project succeed. To do so, he needs to 'bring on board' all the stakeholders from various governmental bodies, which means convincing them of the project's benefits so that all of them contribute their shares and duties. Furthermore, the head teacher is, together with the members of the board of management, the link between the NGO, the school and the community. It is his job to ensure that the school and community members participate in a project. Consequently, the head teacher is (figuratively speaking) situated between the NGO, various government bodies, the school and the community.

In the same interview, the head teacher stressed how important and valuable community involvement is in a project,

> You know, when you just […] bring a project and put it there, the community says: 'We do not know how that project was brought, we were not involved, we don't know the intentions'. But when they were involved, they say: 'Yes, this is ours, we carried sand and water'. So they feel they participated in ensuring that the project was put into place. […]
> I think it is a very good initiative […] to ensure that the community is involved. Because after the project has been realised, and they [the members of the NGO] move away, the community does not move away! The community remains. And they have to sustain it. Harambee Foundation Holland […] will not come back to

> repair [for example] broken window panes. It is now the community to ensure that a broken window pane is fixed.
>
> *Mark, head teacher, primary school*

This head teacher's message was basically unanimously conveyed by all the principals of primary, secondary and polytechnic schools I interviewed; they all attached importance to community involvement because the community hereby understands the intentions of the project and, by participating in its realisation, they *own* it. As another principal said,

> [Through community involvement,] they [i.e. the community] make it [i.e. the school] their own, their personal thing. […] When the community owns it, they see its benefit and therefore value, take care of it, and respect it. They now say 'our' school.
>
> *Francis, head teacher, primary school*

Interestingly, all the head teachers spoke about the fact that community involvement instils a sense of *ownership*. The previous quotes, are underpinned by the belief that participation and ownership will lead the community to value, respect and sustain the project in the future. In the words of the principles, ownership gives people the 'responsibility of stopping damage if one sees it happening' and 'protecting the school'.

In her article *Opening Up Ownership: Community Belonging, Belongings, and the Productive Life of Property*, Davina Cooper (2007) explores what school property *means* and *does* at Summerhill School, a private boarding school in England, well-known for its anti-authoritarian and democratic pedagogy with its accent on a child's autonomy and freedom of choice. Cooper argues in her article that ownership is a complex notion which at the same time denotes a *subject-object* and *part-whole* relationship. In the subject-object relationship, the author "identifies a relationship whereby an object, space, or rights and freedoms over it, are held by the property-holder. This subject-object relationship provides the standard legal definition of ownership or property, centred on fungibility, mastery, and commodification" (2007, 629). She emphasises that ownership here can be seen as "an instrumental, hierarchical relationship between the agent and a severable thing or space" (Ibid., 629). The part-whole relationship, on the other hand, sees ownership "as a relationship of connection, of part to whole. […] As such, it draws on a quite different understanding of property as the

attributes, qualities, or characteristics of a thing" (Ibid., 629-30). This understanding of ownership stresses the social relations, norms, notions of proper conduct, and communal identity which constitute property (Nielsen 2015). Cooper (2007) argues that these two conceptualisations of ownership are often not as clear cut as it might seem at first glance. In the case of Summerhill School, for example, she shows how "they overlap, combine, and reform, and how as a result they provide the context, limits, and conditions of each other's existence" (Cooper 2007, 661).

The complexity of ownership shines through when analysing the above quotes. As mentioned earlier, all the principals I interviewed considered community involvement as an essential component in a project because it is the *responsibility* of the community to sustain the project in the future. Words such as 'they *have to*' imply an understanding of community involvement as an obligation the members of the community bear vis-à-vis the school. The fact that they are to 'protect' the school and stop potential damage suggests that the project is perceived as some kind of commodity. Sustainability here becomes a duty the community carries as co-owner of this commodity. Consequently, the quotes point at what Cooper understands as ownership as a subject-object relationship. In the quote by head teacher Francis, however, he speaks about ownership making people *value* and *respect* the project. These two words transmit a different understanding of sustainability than physically acting on a project to protect it. It is about seeing the attributes and qualities of the project. Thus, there is also a sense of ownership as a part-whole relationship (Cooper 2007).

The previous paragraphs suggest that the head teacher's perspective on community involvement may be situated somewhere between the government's and the NGO's. On the one hand, the principles see it as the community's *duty*, or even *obligation*, to be involved in expanding and improving the school property. This bears resemblance with the government's intake on community contributions. On the other hand, however, their focus on ownership, value and responsibility to sustain the school property remind the reader of the NGO's perception of community involvement as a means to reach sustainable development.

### 6.2. A Prescribed Duty

For many other school staff and community members, contributing to the school in terms of labour, cash or resources falls under the *duties* of a community as prescribed by stakeholders such as the government. This is visualised through the following two quotes:

> The community, according to the government, is supposed to build schools. But now, HFH comes in as a friend, aside from the government. […] HFH assists, but does not replace the work of the community. HFH wishes to help the community in what they are supposed to do. The community has to contribute a certain percentage [in a project] because the school is theirs, so they have to participate.
>
> *Frank, teacher, primary school*

> We appreciate it [that HFH asked us to contribute to the project]. Because of the burden that was there. You can imagine, that was our responsibility: [to] put up a school for our children. […] Somebody has come, from very far, and is willing to join hands with you and even plan to carry the lion's share, to contribute a bigger percentage. We were happy. […] You know, it is technical. If you do something for the community, and they have not felt any pinch in supporting the project, at the end of the day, they don't value it much. I believe the involvement of the community, in doing some work, and in contributing some materials - definitely through that - you will find that they [the community] also own it, they are part and parcel [of the project]. And they may take care of it even after it is completed. [… We take care of it] through the board of management. But if there is a problem here and there, we shall be called upon. And if we also see there is a problem, we have a right, we walk into the school and demand to speak to the head teacher.
>
> *George, non-parent, primary school*

In both quotes, HFH is seen as a 'friend' who gives the community assistance in 'what they are supposed to do' according to the government. They both emphasise that the NGO does not replace the work of the community but *helps* them with it. Whereas teacher Frank states that the community has the duty to build schools *because* they own the school, for George, community involvement *instils* a sense of ownership: he explains that without contributing, the community might see it as a foreigner's project. Ownership thus becomes both a prerequisite and a consequence of community involvement. Both men emphasise ownership as a subject-object relationship by referring to the costs, labour or resources which the community has to contribute. Furthermore, George even speaks about the right he and the rest of the community, as co-owners of the project, have to 'walk into the school and demand to

speak to the head teacher' once they see something is wrong. Hence, community involvement is, in this case is not bound to a single instance of participation. It is through ownership that the community takes further actions on the project in the future.

Sarah, a member of the BoM of a secondary school, has a similar understanding of community involvement and ownership:

> [Harambee Foundation Holland asks the community to participate in the project] so that they see it as their own. The community then supplies because they understand [it is for them]. Secondly, so that the community protects the school property. Not necessarily [only the new project of] the kitchen, but the school property in general - because the resources are theirs, so they will protect them.
>
> *Sarah, parent and BoM member, secondary school*

Sarah expresses the same previously mentioned duality. She perceives ownership at the same time as a prerequisite for community involvement - a source of understanding - and a consequence of it - the community give *their* resources, and these resources remain *theirs*, even after they have contributed them to the project. In both George's and Sarah's examples, the community still holds some kind of property rights over the resources, even though they gave them into the school's hands. Once again, ownership is here conceptualised as a subject-object relationship (Cooper 2007); in other words, these property rights make the community members responsible for their property and bound to protect and sustain it. In another school, I actually came across an example of such behaviour. A teacher here noticed:

> [The community participates] so that they can feel they are part of the project. This has worked, I saw this lately: there was something wrong about a window, and the community reported it. I feel [that] they feel it is their own. They are sensible about anything small!
>
> *Irene, teacher, primary school*

Although we do not know who she is specifically referring to when Irene speaks of 'the community', the example shows how the latter is protective about the new project. They report problems to the school staff who can then take action against the latter. Their behaviour is based on a feeling of being part of the project and the school. Ownership, for this teacher, thus denotes a relationship between the owner and its property which goes beyond a mere subject-object relationship. It becomes a matter of sense of belonging and

inclusion of those, who contribute to the project, and, as such, it can be understood as a part-whole relationship (Copper 2007). The focus on belonging and inclusion reflects the notion *Harambee* – to join hands together – which the NGO likes to emphasise in their projects. For HFH, one of the central attributes of a project is togetherness and cooperation.

Whereas for the informants in this sub-chapter, community involvement is perceived as a prescribed duty, the next section will show that for others, there is something else which motivates the community to contribute.

### 6.3. A Moral Obligation

> The project benefits the community, so the community should give something back.
>
> *Nora, teacher, secondary school*

> If you want help, you should give help first of all. We really educated the community that we should be ready to give our part. So that we feel that we own the project.
>
> *Philip, parent and BoM-member, primary school*

As these two quotes illustrate, some informants think the community *should* contribute because the project is beneficial and helpful to them. Teacher Nora and BoM-member Philip consider community involvement as a way of 'giving something back' to the NGO. Similarly, a parent named Patrick told me how happy the community was to be asked to contribute to the recently finished project in the nearby primary school. He said that he participated because it is directly beneficial to the community, and if it weren't for the community contributions, he would feel like "abusing" the help of the NGO. In his eyes, community involvement thus is a morally good behaviour. For these three informants, contributing to a project is a matter of proper conduct resulting out of an internal motivation to even out the efforts the NGO invested in the project, and to be able to use it without feeling like exploiting HFH. There is a parallel here to be drawn to Mauss's gift exchange theory (see Mauss 1969). The informants consider a project as something which is given to them to help them and position themselves as 'recipients' of HFH's help. Community involvement, for them, results out of a moral obligation to receive and to repay the gift. Indeed, as Mauss

(1969, 40) wrote himself, "[by receiving] you mean to take up the challenge and prove that you are not unworthy", you keep your dignity and show respect to the giver. Mauss (1969, 41) furthermore states that to return the gift is 'the essence' of the gift exchange: "[t]he obligation of worthy return is imperative. Face is lost for ever [sic] if it is not made". For Rachel, Philip and Patrick, the only way to receive the gift with dignity is to do something in return so as to neither be indebted to nor take advantage of the givers. Therefore, the community *has to* contribute to the project.

In a similar vein, a teacher affiliated to the same school as Patrick said the following:

> [HFH asks the community to participate in the project] so that they are committed and able to own it. (…) If it is done for them, they will maybe only see it as the wazungu's [white men's] project, not theirs. I remember, some time back, there was an NGO, and most of the community members were negative towards them. This NGO was giving everything freely. People thought: 'That must be the devil's worship, a way of trapping us!' HFH are much more friendly."
>
> *Linneth, teacher, primary school*

In this quote, teacher Linneth emphasises that without community involvement, people wouldn't see the project as 'their own'. To support her argument, she brings up an interesting example of another NGO, which did not ask anything in return for their development projects. In her eyes, their free gift was synonymous to a trap and 'devil's worship'. That Linneth mentions supernatural forces to explain the free gift is quite curious. It is reminiscent of central anthropological concepts such as *sorcery* and *witchcraft*. According to Bailey and Peoples (2011), people have different reasons to believe in these often seemingly harmful and unjust forces. First of all, sorcery and witchcraft deliver an (often more satisfying) explanation for unfortunate happenings. Furthermore, they can serve as "scapegoats" for bad events and, as such, witchcraft and sorcery give people "a means to do something about the situation: identify, accuse, and punish the witch responsible" (Bailey and Peoples 2011, 224). Lastly, and most importantly in relation to the above quote, "witchcraft reinforces the cultural norms and values that help people live harmoniously with one another. Every culture has notions of how individuals ought to act toward others. Witches typically are the antithesis of these cultural ideas" (Bailey and Peoples 2011, 225). For Linneth, it is a norm for people to return or repay what is given to them. It is how people 'ought to act', a moral obligation. By

giving something for free, the other NGO acts in opposition to this norm. Linneth therefore doubts the goodwill of this NGO, she feels as if they are 'trapping' the community. This once again reminds of the gift exchange theory. Indeed, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, both Mauss (1969) and Stirrat and Henkel (1997) say that those, who receive, are indebted to those, who give. Similarly, Kowalski (2011) explains that donors can sometimes use this situation to bend the recipients to their will, to make them do things because of their debts. He suggests that there should be opportunities for the receivers to repay the gift, so that the hierarchical power relations between giver and receiver can be balanced. Linneth might feel the same way. By asking the community to contribute to the project, Harambee Foundation Holland is, in Linneth's eyes, 'more friendly' than the other NGO. HFH hereby shows that it does not want to trap the community, but it leaves them the option of remaining in control of the project and to kill their debts towards the NGO.

As one can observe throughout the previous paragraphs, reciprocity in a project has proven to be of importance to many of my informants. The next sub-chapter will provide a more nuanced and in-depth description of this notion.

### 6.4. An Act of Appreciation and Common Interest

As explained earlier, it isn't always the externally ascribed *role* of the community which motivates some informants to contribute to a project. Rather, it can be, similar to the previously mentioned moral obligation, a voluntary, intrinsic motivation which pushes them to become involved. As the following quote from a board of management member shows, community involvement can signify a means to thank the NGO HFH for helping them,

> The involvement is that we are happy about it. [It is] the way of receiving it [the project]. I think that is why the community came up. It is a way of thanking them [HFH] for coming.
>
> *Claire, BoM- member, primary school*

This message was, as a matter of fact, reflected in other interviews around various schools. For one teacher, community involvement was, apart from an act of gratitude towards the NGO, a way for the community to express their positive attitude towards the school and education in general. Yet for others, it is also a means to show the need for the project:

> It [community involvement] means to show interest to those who assist you. To show that you are in need of the project.
>
> *Rose, teacher, primary school*

For the above-mentioned informants, community involvement seems to be a polite act of courtesy and appreciation towards the NGO, a way of accepting and acknowledging their presence and help. According to Rose, the community members prove that they are really in need of the project by being involved. Furthermore, what both quotes underline is the voluntary choice people have to be involved in a project or not.

Two other community members living in different areas also expressed their own choice in community involvement:

> We participated for Harambee Foundation Holland. So that they know that the community was eagerly waiting for it. So that they can do it better, do more projects, because we participated.
>
> *Rosemary, parent, primary school*

> They [the members of HFH] need help to show the people in Holland that we are happy for the promoting. They helped us in a big way. We welcomed the visitors through gathering and through actions.
>
> *Felice, grand-parent, primary school*

These two quotes show that some members of the community participated in the project(s) *for* the NGO HFH, to help *them*. In the first quote, Rosemary might be referring to the fact that community involvement sometimes is a requirement from donors in Holland. If HFH fulfils this requirement and the community participates in a project, the NGO is more likely to receive more funding and, hence, to do more projects. In a similar vein, Felice mentions in the second quote that the NGO needs to prove to people in Holland that they are doing something good in Kenya. She explains that she got involved in the project so that donors and other people back in Holland know the NGO 'promoted', or helped the community. She sees the NGO as 'visitors', and community involvement as a way of 'welcoming' them and appreciating their visit and contribution to the school.

Instead of participating for HFH, other informants contributed because of the benefit the project brings them as individuals. When asked why they had participated in the project, two pupils from a primary school gave me the following explanation:

> Because we were told by the head teacher and Father Peter: *Harambee* means together. And because we are the ones in the classes. So we were ready to help.
>
> *Purity and Philip, pupils, standard 8, primary school*

Purity and Philip specifically make reference to the name of the NGO *Harambee*. Although they employ the phrase 'we were told', which could sound like an order, I recall the pupils using it as a synonym of 'they told us that', or 'they explained to us'. The quote shows a two-fold, external and internal motivation for these students to participate. On the one hand, they do it because community involvement is, for the NGO and the head teacher, a matter of being and working together. On the other hand, they contribute because it is directly beneficial to them, as they are the ones who are using the classes on a daily basis.
Yet others contributed because of the benefit for the community as a *whole*:

> [The community participates] because it is directly beneficial to them. It is not strange to help. They took it positively and came in because they saw it was going to benefit the community.
>
> *Christine, teacher, primary school*

> I felt OK [participating in the project]. Because this project was going to assist us, and not Holland.
>
> *Sheldon, parent, primary school*

Similarly to these two statements, a grand-mother named Mary living in the same area as Sheldon expressed in an interview that the members of the community were willing to provide a percentage of the total project costs because they realised how "low" the "status of the school" was. The community knew that by contributing, the school would be changed in a positive way. Indeed, during the interview, she compared the current shape of the school proudly to Nairobi University. Sheldon also emphasised how happy and proud he is to live close to an "attractive, beautiful school". He said the HFH projects were very important for the "development" of the area. As his quote suggests, the community members contributed to

the project because they recognised it was beneficial for them, local Kenyan people, and not for people in the Netherlands.

The informants in this sub-chapter all accentuate the willingness and voluntariness of the community to contribute to the project, either as an act of appreciation *for* HFH, or because they saw it as beneficial to the group of people they affiliate themselves to.

## 6.5. Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I want to return to the questions I raised in the very beginning: *why* do the school staff and community members think HFH works with the method of community involvement, and what motivates them to participate in a project? Do they see community involvement as a common obligation for the community as a *whole*, as a voluntary act as *individuals*, or something different? Moreover, how do they perceive the temporality of their contribution – as a one-time thing, an educational process and/or an ongoing commitment?

First of all, as I have shown throughout the chapter, there are no clear-cut answers to most of these questions. Despite the fact that according to the Kenyan government, it is one of the set roles of the community to contribute in cash, labour or resources to a school, and although it is a well-known method for all of my informants, community involvement can mean many different things to the people involved in a project. Whereas the head teachers and some informants see it as a duty to sustain the school property in the future, other people emphasise the community's obligation of a one-time contribution. One might argue that the latter informants do not envision HFH as a pure 'giver' in a gift exchange system. Instead, they see the NGO as a 'friend' and a 'helping hand' in a duty prescribed by the government. The project thus becomes a co-creation of both the community and the NGO. Other informants, however, see themselves as 'recipients' in a gift exchange system, and the project as a 'development gift'. For them, community involvement is a moral obligation, namely to receive the development gift in a 'worthy' way, and to repay it accordingly so that the hierarchical relationship between giver and recipients is balanced. Yet other people have emphasised their participation was a purely voluntary act, motivated by an internal conviction to do good to the NGO or for the pupils' and community's general benefit. Consequently,

there is no common understanding of why the school and community members think HFH uses the method of community involvement, and why they actually contribute to a project. Neither is there common consent on the temporality of community involvement. Furthermore, it has become clear that instead of using (and opposing) the terms *obligation* and *voluntary act*, one could rather differentiate between an external and internal sources of motivation to do something: although some informants might think of community involvement as a prescribed or moral obligation, they contributed out of their own will.

Secondly, this chapter has illustrated that to many of the people I interviewed, ownership seemed to play a major role in community involvement. Interestingly, it is at the same time a justifying, driving force for participating in a project, as well as a consequence of it. It is this circular argument which makes the community act on and react to the project. This can be subscribed to what Cooper calls a *subject-object* relationship between the owner and the property. As mentioned above, it is the community's prescribed duty to contribute to the school. Although the government does not mention anything about ownership in the school book excerpt pictured above (see Figure 3 on page 64), the head teachers, some teachers, BoM-, and community members explain this obligation through *ownership*. It becomes a matter of proper conduct; as co-owners of the school and project, they are to contribute to it. Furthermore, by contributing, they symbolically hold property rights over the latter. These make them maintain and protect the new buildings in the future.

The fact that community members act on and react to their property can also emerge from ownership conceptualised as a *part-whole* relationship (Cooper 2007). In Cooper's (2007, 629-30) words, this "draws on a quite different understanding of property as the attributes, qualities, or characteristics of a thing". As indicated earlier, an HFH-project represents, for some informants, a 'gift'. As such, it holds the attributes of a gift exchange system, which make people, who receive and own it, feel attached to and react to it. Because of community involvement, ownership can, in these cases, become what Cooper (2007, 629) calls "a relationship of connection" between the NGO and the community, thus defining their social relationship in a certain way. Ownership was furthermore perceived as a part-whole relationship for those who understand community involvement as a way of bringing people

together. For some, community involvement represents matter of sense of belonging and inclusion.

This brings me to the final conclusive point of this chapter. As a matter of fact, the people I interviewed rarely spoke about them as individuals when talking about community involvement. Instead, it was, in my informants' words, a 'WE' who contributed to a project, who acted on it *together* as a community. In the next and last analytical chapter, I will further analyse this 'WE'. As I will show, many teachers, parents and non-parents see the involvement of the community as a way of bringing people together, fostering social relations, and realising something in cooperation as a community. But who is part of this *community* and when? And what constitutes this sense of *togetherness*?

# 7. Establishing (a Comm-)Unity

> Whenever a project arises, we must come together and cooperate. To make the project succeed. One person cannot do so. Once we come together I think we shall move ahead.
>
> *Doris, non-parent, primary school*

For Doris, a neighbour to a primary school where a project of five classrooms was recently completed, community involvement equals togetherness and cooperation. Even though it is not clear who constitutes the 'WE' in her quote constitutes of, it is a crucial component of a successful project - an individual alone cannot do enough to make a project succeed. Joining hands together is thus a must for her in a project. She is not the only one to think this way. In this chapter, I would like to further analyse this sense of togetherness within the so-called community: when and how do people feel they are *together*, and who is part of their form of association?

## 7.1. Joint Commitment and Belonging

One word that has often been mentioned during the various conversations I had with school staff and community members was *Harambee*. When asked whether and why he would contribute to an HFH-project, one man for example responded as follows:

> That is an obvious case, I am member of the community! Harambee! Here, they are used to working together. They even started the school as a community. It is important, everybody has to contribute and be involved, so that they can get going with the construction.
>
> *George, non-parent, secondary school*

Just like in the first quote in this chapter, joining hands together is, for George, the essence of community involvement. He explains that it is nothing new for the community as they had initiated the build-up of the secondary school themselves a few years back. It is usual and common to join hands together, a necessity to start and finish a project quickly. For both Doris and George, togetherness and cooperation is what defines a community: if one calls oneself a member of a community, one *has* to contribute and engage in this project *together*. Community involvement, for them, is a matter of proper conduct. However, it is not a matter

of proper conduct because the NGO tells them to do so, but because of a *commitment* towards the community. Here too, there is some sense of circularity; whereas for Doris, it is rather the physicality of the contributions which ties the community together on an emotional level, it is, from George's perspective, the sense of belonging that motivates people to contribute.

One scholar who has analysed the concept *community* in great detail is the anthropologist Vered Amit (2012). She states in her chapter *Community as 'Good to Think With': The Productiveness of Strategic Ambiguities* that community is a vague, ambiguous concept which has often been criticised for its lack of a proper definition. She suggests that "[i]f people continue to insist on using community to refer to many different forms of association, perhaps we need to prove how they might do so rather than bemoan the lack of precision in its terminology" (Amit 2012, 3). Instead of focusing on the vagueness of the concept 'community', she advocates one should analyse its use to designate what makes a community. In her own words, "[a] more effective working model of community must […] focus on the uncertainties arising in the intersection between the idea and actualisation of sociation" (Amit 2012, 6). She develops a framework of three 'strategic points', or principles, which are at the heart of (the ambiguity of) the notion community: "(1) joint commitment; (2) affect or belonging and (3) forms of association" (Amit 2012, 6). Even though these three elements are central to the idea of the community, Amit argues they are at the same time often contested. Joint commitment, for example, is generally used to emphasise a basis of a community. The term highlights, simply put, interdependence between people: "if we are jointly committed, each one's 'individual commitment' stands or falls with the 'individual commitment' of the other" (Gilbert 1994; cited in Amit 2012, 7). This interdependence becomes obvious when reading Doris' quote; she emphasises that a project is doomed to fail if not done in cooperation, and that it is the joint commitment which ties the individuals together in a form of association. However, Amit (2012) argues that although interdependence is often used to describe how unity is built and reinforced, joint commitment does not always "generate consensus or even collegiality. Nor, for that very reason, can they always be successfully mobilized or sustained." She says that joint commitment does thus not necessarily have to be a basis for a form of association between people. Similarly, understanding the notions affect or belonging are "not a question simply of exclusion or

inclusion but of how belonging may or may not be recognised, interpreted, responded to and felt" (Amit 2012, 12). Furthermore, she states that joint commitment and affect or belonging are not necessarily linked or associated with any forms of association.

This raises questions about how people, who contribute to a project, consider those who *do not*, especially with regards to the notion of belonging to the community. Even though none of my informants ever expressed that they did not contribute[6], a major challenge in the eyes of the NGO, school staff, and community members was that some didn't support a project or made fake promises about contributing, either because they did not have anything to contribute or because they did not trust the school management and NGO not to "eat the money". The different answers I received to the question as to how this challenge had been overcome in past HFH projects can broadly be divided into two categories: persuasion and abandonment. Indeed, some informants stated they would try to convince the ones reluctant to contribute by encouraging them, explaining to them the benefits of the project, and finding other solutions such as contributing in labour instead of cash or materials. Other informants, however, said they would "just leave them" as it was a voluntary contribution. The ones who do not contribute would "kill the moral" for others, meaning they would destroy the latter's motivations to contribute to a project. However, in all situations, non-participants were still considered to be 'members of the community'. The persuasion-abandonment dichotomy exemplifies one of Amit's (2012) points: for some people, joint commitment is at the heart of association; for others it doesn't necessarily have to be - at least not in the framework of an HFH project. Moreover, this paragraph reminds us of the fact that the notion 'community' exists outside of an HFH project. Community involvement can be considered as a medium to establish new forms of associations, 'sub-communities' within a wider community.

While some seem to believe that the parents form part of this 'sub-community', others include non-parents, pupils and school staff members. Some clearly extend this notion to the NGO HFH and the donors in the Netherlands:

> I think we are maybe also able to learn, that if we join up together, we realise something positive can happen. The little we give plus what the friends from

[6] This was probably related to the fact that I left the choice of whom to interview to the translators and principals of the schools.

> Holland gave. We are able to learn that through population [i.e. a lot of people], we can do something.
>
> *Francis, parent, primary school*

Francis considers community involvement as a learning process through which the participants realise that positive things can be achieved when done in cooperation. The NGO and the donors in the Netherlands are seen as friends and collaborators in the joint commitment of a project. Francis is not the only informant emphasising *togetherness* with the NGO. Another couple for example highlighted that it was the collaboration which made them "also feel part of the project". If it weren't for their contributions, they would not consider it as *their* project, but solely as the NGO's. The joint commitment once again established a sense of belonging to a form of association *including* the NGO.

For another informant, community involvement is kind of a 'test' for the NGO to see whether they and the project-participants could become part of the same form of association in the future:

> They [i.e. the members of the NGO] expected cooperation. When somebody brings you something, he wants to know whether you like it or not. To me, they wanted to know if we can really help them to bring this up, and in future, to be partners. So that we don't just leave it there. We continue.
>
> *Patrick, parent, primary school*

Patrick thinks the NGO wants to measure whether the community liked what they gave them through the means of community involvement. He considers the NGO here as 'givers', and positions himself and other community members as 'recipients', who are, however, supposed to collaborate with the NGO on their gift. Community involvement becomes a basis for new future forms of associations between Kenyans and HFH, depending on how well the community cooperated during this project.

For yet another informant, it was not so much a matter of establishing a new form of association, but to incorporate the NGO in the existing one: as shown in the next quote, one teacher states that, for her, involving the community is a means by which the NGO seeks to demonstrate that it also belongs to the community.

> To involve the community in the building… I think it is one way that Harambee Foundation Holland show their love. They wanted to work with this community, they show that they belong to this community and so the community feels their love.
>
> *Irene, teacher, primary school*

Despite the fact that this teacher had only been in this school for a few months, which means that she arrived when the last building phases of this project were in motion, she has an opinion on why Harambee Foundation Holland uses the method of community involvement, namely to express their 'love'. Community involvement could be a way of caring about the community and becoming part of the latter. By asking the community to be involved, and, consequently to cooperate with its members, the NGO becomes, for this informant, one with the whole community.

For some of the above informants such as George, Doris and Irene, the joint commitment is of a rather temporary, physical nature. In an HFH project, it is a matter of cooperation and contribution through labour, money and resources. One teacher, however, emphasised another, more emotional and durable aspect of joint commitment:

> They [i.e. the members of the community] have to participate. It is their school. There must be a network. And this network brings about harmony and unity in the community. It makes them responsible. You know, some parents just throw the children to school, and the teachers become foster parents. The parents need to see where the pupils study and sit.
>
> *Alice, teacher, primary school*

For Alice, community involvement not only builds unity among community members, but also encourages parents to become more *responsible* towards the education of their children. Community involvement, for her, goes beyond a momentary contribution in a project. By fostering ongoing interest in and value for education, it becomes a matter of generally being involved in a child's schooling.

During my fieldwork, I came across other examples where community involvement did not remain limited to a joint commitment within the temporary framework of an HFH-project. Father Peter mentioned how he had observed a change of the social life within his Parish after some community members had participated in an HFH-project at one of the

primary schools. Being a Catholic priest, he witnessed how some people seemed to develop a genuine friendship after being involved in a project; they started visiting each other's homes and attending funerals of family members other than their own. Furthermore, shortly after the completion of the project, some members of the community jointly put up a house for a sick old man whose home had broken down. Father Peter said that this remarkable initiative came from some twenty local people who gathered around the man's broken home for prayers. He had told the crowd: "Saint James says that faith without action is dead. So what can we do for this man?". One of the ideas which came up was to build him a new house. Within a single day, the people gathered materials and did as planned. Father Peter emphasised that he saw this as a consequence of the recently completed HFH-project. These examples show that for Father Peter, community involvement extended beyond the framework of an HFH-project and in a sense initiated new, smaller forms of associations and joint commitments (Amit 2012).

What unites the various quotes and statements in this chapter is a shared emphasis on *togetherness* among members of a community who participate in a project, and sometimes even between HFH and the latter. The above quotes are only a few examples of the power that teachers, pupils and members of the community attribute to working and being together. One can see that for some of my informants, a joint commitment is a central attribute of a form of association. It can at the same time be a basis for and a consequence of a sense of belonging. It can furthermore be of physical and emotional nature, temporary for the time of a project and extend beyond the latter. By asking the community to make a joint commitment, the NGO creates and reinforces what Amit (2012) calls affect/belonging, and, as a result, establishes and strengthens a new form of association, a so-called sub-community.

At this point it makes sense to recall China Scherz (2014, 40), who claimed that "the key [to sustainable development] is the social capital found in 'the community' and, especially, in 'community organisations'". After having examined the notion of 'social capital' in its three aspects (1) trust, (2) solidarity norms and (3) actions (Nanetti and Holguin 2016), I came to realise that the NGO Harambee Foundation Holland acts on the social capital of a community by strengthening the common identity of 'community' and engaging its members in the collaborate activity of constructing, using, maintaining and even

improving a project. The focus on belonging and joint commitment in this chapter has illustrated that the school staff and community members indeed feel the NGO's emphasis on *solidarity norms* and *action*. But what about *trust?* As I will show throughout the next section, *trust* is also a crucial component in a project for those, who contribute. As a matter of fact, this is what differentiates HFH from the government and other organisations.

### 7.2. Trust and Audit

During my numerous visits to schools, I took note of the fact that on many school compounds, there were vacant and abandoned-looking, unfinished buildings. They stood out next to the projects which were conducted by HFH, usually completed, with windows and an eye-catching colourful façade. The unfinished buildings were sometimes only consisting of the outer walls and roofs, missing the inner floors, furniture, black boards, and windows (see Figure 4).

*Figure 4: Two unfinished buildings in different Primary Schools*

I became curious about these numerous unfinished buildings. I was particularly interested in the stark contrast between the finished HFH buildings and these incomplete structures and started to ask my informants questions about this difference. As analysed earlier, HFH not only aims at a transformation of the school's educational facilities, it also wants school and community members to learn that they can bring change themselves. Consequently, community involvement is, for the NGO, an educational process which could lead the community members to take initiative to improve other, existing buildings on the

compound. Why doesn't this happen here? And what is the reason that most HFH-buildings, in contrast to other buildings, are complete?

During a group discussion, teachers named some crucial differences in the way HFH operates compared to the other (usually governmental) bodies that sponsored the unfinished buildings. First of all, the teachers mentioned *monitoring* and *supervision*. They said that through the partners, the NGO monitors the process at all times. Every small bit has to be discussed with, and approved by the partner.

Secondly, the teachers debated *transparency* and *corruption*. As a matter of fact, they said that for the unfinished buildings, the funds simply 'ran out'. In those projects, different amounts of money were irregularly transferred to the school, whereas HFH determines the complete sum of money beforehand and transfers it to the school in small amounts. These amounts have been discussed and agreed upon by the partners, the head of the school, and the chairman of the BoM in a jointly signed document called Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The amounts are only transferred according to the building phases of the project, and only if the previous phase has been completed and checked by the partner. As for the buildings funded by the government or the local MP, donor-designated 'middle men', such as contractors, engineers, and others, would, in my informants' words, "eat the money". By contrast, HFH encourages the school to interview different contractors and take the cheapest and most accountable one. Furthermore, the NGO HFH supervises that every expense is written down on paper and approved by the partner, chairman of the BoM, and head teacher before payment. HFH's rigid, bureaucratic practices are, as a matter of fact, nowadays very common in the development world. In her ethnographic account on an Ugandan NGO, Scherz (2014, 99) explains that "[t]he move toward participation, sustainability, and community ownership at the turn of the twenty-first century was directed at least in part by a desire to increase aid effectiveness". As a result, many donors or NGOs necessitate a use of bureaucratic practices to see where their money is spent. One can observe here that the members of HFH indeed have the same concern: they want to ensure that their money reaches its intended goal. By supervising a projects in detail through a partner's announced and unannounced visits to schools, and by controlling the use of the money through the opening of a specific bank account to which a partner is co-signatory, through the MoU and

through the partner's signature for every expense, the NGO uses so-called "methods of audit". The latter are, amongst others, what makes the teachers *trust* the NGO.

As a third reason, the teachers named *community involvement*. The other sponsors and donors don't involve the community, or at least not in the same way. As mentioned earlier, community involvement, for almost all my informants, fosters a sense of ownership. The importance of ownership became particularly obvious when the head teacher of the same school explained that the buildings have not yet been completed by the community because they think they are someone else's business, not theirs. I often received similar explanations from community members when visiting their homes; they did not perceive it as their responsibility to complete the buildings, instead they were wither waiting for the government (or whoever initiated it) to do so, or waiting for the head of the school to raise funds.

Some of the reasons mentioned above were also reflected in interviews I conducted with other informants living near the schools. Joseph, a neighbour to a primary school, gave me the following answer to the question why he thinks HFH asked the community to contribute to the projects:

> Because these people [i.e. the members of the NGO] are wise. […] Sometimes, managers misuse money. By contributing, the community will do better! Harambee! HFH coined that term!
>
> *Joseph, non-parent, primary school*

For Joseph, community involvement is a means to fight corruption. He proudly expresses that *because* the community joined hands together in the spirit of Harambee, money will not be misused. Togetherness presupposes mutual trust and social control in a project.
A father living around another primary school said the following:

> You can see some [buildings in our school] are incomplete. Now, Harambee Foundation Holland came and the buildings are complete. [… When] the CDF [i.e. Community Development Fund] came in, they didn't really involve the community as HFH did. HFH brought all the stakeholders, so they worked together. But now, the government, the CDF, they don't involve the community. Theirs [i.e. what they do] is just to come there, bring the contractor there, whether it is not completed, they don't mind.
> But HFH – that is why I am saying the community is very happy with the HFH people – they came, they first talked to the community, they talked to the

> stakeholders, and after that, they said: Ok, let's move ahead. They joined hands together. […] So that is why we are really welcoming the HFH people, because they know how to work.
>
> *Patrick, parent, primary school*

In contrast to the government or the CDF – by which the informant actually means the local MP, as it is him who distributes out the Community Development Fund - HFH first spoke to the community and other stakeholders, and only then decided to bring them all together so that they cooperate on a project. By emphasising that HFH *talked* to the community before speaking to the other stakeholders, Patrick first of all shows the physical nearness of the NGO to the community in contrast to other funding bodies. Secondly, he recognises the importance the NGO devotes to the community and their contributions. Furthermore, the quote shows how, for Patrick, community involvement is, just like for many other informants quoted in the first part of this chapter, a matter of joint commitment and belonging, common action and solidarity norms. He emphasises that HFH, contrary to the MP, *cares* whether the project is finished. All these points suggest that Patrick sees the social relationship between the community participating in a project and the NGO as a relationship based on mutual trust. He acknowledges that HFH is a loyal collaborator that not only keeps its word and finishes whatever it starts, but is also transparent and caring. It is partly thanks to these qualities of HFH that the projects they sponsor are also finished.

## 7.3. Conclusion

I began this chapter by asking who belongs to the 'WE' that school staff and community members employ to designate who contributed to an HFH project. I wondered what constitutes the sense of togetherness that these people describe. By focusing on what Amit (2012, 6) calls "the uncertainties arising from the intersection between the idea and actuation of sociation", I showed with the above quotes and events that *togetherness* means different things to different people involved. Whereas for some informants, the 'WE' refers to the community as a whole, others think of it as a new form of association, a sub-community of which HFH and even donors in Holland can form part.

Community involvement implies at least three elements which can, but don't necessarily all have to contribute to the formation of a 'WE' in a project: joint commitment, a

sense of belonging and trust. For some, the joint commitment is a rather physical experience, and for others, it also manifests itself on an emotional level. The sense of belonging can be felt for the duration of the project. At times, it is seen as a medium for encouraging parents' responsibility for their children's education or a learning process for increased cooperation. As such, this joint commitment can last beyond the frameworks of an HFH project. Trust is a precondition for the start of the project, but can also be seen as a consequence of it. As shown in this chapter, some people do not contribute because they think that the NGO or the school management might be corrupt and misuse the money. Not only practices of audit, but also community involvement can help to foster a social relationship based on trust between those, who contribute, the school and the NGO.

In chapter 5 of this thesis, I asked whether the different members of the community and school acknowledge the NGO's emphasis on social capital. Inspired by Nanetti and Holguin (2016), I explored how HFH acts on a community's social capital by conjuring and engaging them in the collaborate activity of community involvement and by educating them about their roles and responsibilities. This chapter has shown that indeed, for many people, togetherness is *crucial* to a project. There has rarely been talk about individuals in a project. Instead, my informants highlighted the importance of collaboration as a group, as one individual is not sufficient to make a project succeed. It is important to note that this sense of togetherness does not appear as something that is solely *imposed* on this sub-community by HFH. Instead, it seems to be the basis and the consequence of the joint commitment, affect, and trust, which are experienced through community involvement. Thus, many informants acknowledge the presence and importance of social capital. Interestingly, some expand the notion to the NGO itself and include them (and donors in the Netherlands) to the form of association established in the frameworks of a project. Returning to Stirrat and Henkel's (1997) *The Development Gift*, one can conclude that for many of the school staff and community members, HFH's help is, once again, actually not a *gift*. Rather, through community involvement, HFH comes in to assist the community and to co-create something with them. They engage in a social relationship simultaneously marked by trust, collaboration, and care, but also by difference, control, and supervision. These seeming paradoxes represent, however, no major problems in the common realisation of a project – instead, I argue that it is this complex relationship

which sees to the *completion* of HFH projects in opposition to those sponsored by other governmental or non-governmental organisations in the same area.

# Part IV.
# Conclusion

# 8. Community Involvement: A Way of Repaying the Development Gift?

In this thesis, I have first of all studied the general aim of the NGO Harambee Foundation Holland and its political and ideological motivations behind involving the community in development projects. I then explored the viewpoints of members of the schools and so-called communities on this particular way of working. This conclusion aims at underlining two of the main insights gained from the analyses in order to answer the three research questions that underpin this thesis: *What are the ideas behind community involvement and how do these translate into the realities of the so-called community? What does community involvement come to mean for different stakeholders involved in a project? How can community involvement be understood in light of the gift exchange theory?*

First and foremost, this thesis has illustrated that there are internal differentiations within the NGO, but also within their field of practice, about the purpose, use, scope, and temporality of community involvement. The findings in this thesis suggest that community involvement can simultaneously bear many meanings for all the stakeholders involved in a development project. The multiple ideological and political motivations behind community involvement - both conceptualised as a means and as an end - do not simply *translate into* the realities of the so-called community. Whereas the choice of the verb – to translate into their realities – could suggest that the community is passively receiving active inputs from the NGO, this thesis suggests that the members of the community make their own meanings of, and have their own motivations behind community involvement. It has become visible that some ideas – like instilling ownership and reinforcing cooperation – are reflected in the voices of the members of the school staff and community. Also the idea of community involvement as an educational process to stimulate independent action for change seems to resonate with some of the so-called beneficiaries, for example through situations where some community members demanded a new head teacher for their primary school or built a house for a sick man. Nevertheless, the before-mentioned ideas, even though linked to HFH projects, might not directly be caused by the NGO. As the third analytical section has shown, community involvement does not only exist within the frameworks of an HFH project. This

practice is also used by other development actors such as the Kenyan government, who have their own views about its nature and purpose.

Secondly, this thesis has visualised how community involvement shapes and establishes social relationships between and amongst the NGO and other stakeholders involved in a project. What seems to be, at first glance, a relationship based on giving and receiving, has turned out to be far more complex. This leads me to the third and final research question: *How can community involvement be understood in light of the gift exchange theory?* The gift exchange paradigm, which has guided my analysis throughout the entire thesis, has allowed me to realise that development is more than a means by which hierarchy and control are established. Specifically, the gift exchange theory has allowed me to focus on the moral obligations within development and the social relationships and communities it fosters. Nevertheless, this theoretical approach reached its limits; indeed, reality has proved far more complex. According to my analyses, development aid cannot always be pictured as a 'simple' gift chain, and a project is more than a 'gift'. As a result, the answer to the third research question is twofold.

To some informants, who positioned the NGO as a 'giver' and the members of the so-called community as 'recipients', community involvement can be understood as a way of *repaying* the 'development gift'. It is a moral obligation for the recipients to give something back to the givers, to prove themselves as 'worthy' of the gift, and to maintain their dignity. By receiving and owning the project, the latter also morally obliges people to act and react, to protect and sustain the building. Furthermore, like Kowalski (2011) has suggested, community involvement, as a way of repaying the development gift, balances prevailing hierarchical power relations – both for the NGO and for members of schools and communities.

Yet, at the same time, community involvement can also be understood as an act of *collaboration*. Many interviewees – including the members of the NGO – understand a project as a co-construction between HFH, the school and so-called community, and hereby distance themselves from notions such as 'gift', 'giver', and 'receivers'. For the NGO, a project is not something they simply 'give' to the community. Instead, they remain present before, during, and after the construction of the building through managing and supervising

its building process, but also by financing workshops. As for many members of schools and their surrounding communities, they do not simply 'receive' the project - they commit themselves to the buildings by owning them, and they make a commitment to protect and sustain them in the future. Neither do they envision HFH as pure 'givers': for many interviewees, the NGO is portrayed as 'a helping hand' in the community's prescribed duty to contribute to the school in their area. The collaboration, which all stakeholders in a project engage in, is seen as an act of solidarity for the greater good of the whole community. From this point of view, community involvement can be seen as a way of balancing the previously mentioned hierarchical power relations between the NGO and the so-called beneficiaries: they engage in a 'partnership' with each other. However, as this thesis has illustrated, this 'partnership' has proven itself to be a relationship based on paradoxes: it is simultaneously marked by trust, collaboration, and care, but also by practices of audit, by education, and by difference. This begs the question as to whether or not community involvement thus truly balances the hierarchical power relations between HFH and the community, or whether it rather efficiently disguises them. In any case, community involvement provides room for agency and seems to present an escape to what Stirrat and Henkel (1997, 73) have named the "position of indebtedness and powerlessness" of the 'receivers' in a development gift exchange system.

To sum up, this thesis suggests that development aid is complex and cannot simply be captured in dichotomies such as 'givers' and 'receivers'. I agree with the anthropologists Crewe and Axelby (2013, 18), who state that "[i]n order to understand the working and impacts of international development, it is necessary to go beyond a view of the world as being made up of donors and beneficiaries, perpetrators and victims". As this thesis has illustrated, a more nuanced perception of development is needed – a perception which studies the relationships between these seemingly opposing notions.

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