



Discussion Paper BRIEFS

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Discussion Paper 177

Community Empowerment and Scaling-Up in Urban Areas: The Evolution of PUSH/PROSPECT in Zambia

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CARE began the Program of Support for Poverty Elimination and Community Transformation (PROSPECT) in 1998 in peri-urban areas of Lusaka. PROSPECT has attempted to carry out its activities largely through support of area-based organizations (ABOs) that now form part of city government. The Zone Development Committees (ZDCs) and Residents' Development Committees (RDCs) are the basic components of the ABO structure. These community-level representations of municipal government are the community's mechanisms for expressing voice and driving development.

PROSPECT is itself an extension of an earlier project, PUSH II (Peri-Urban Self-Help Project). PUSH II and PROSPECT are fundamentally about developing community-based and community-driven development (CDD) mechanisms and strengthening community capacities to identify and respond to community needs. The paper examines the scaling-up experience of PUSH II and PROSPECT, looking especially at the mechanisms of CDD, the ABOs.

Evolution of PUSH and PROSPECT

PUSH I (1991–94) was a food-for-work (FFW) program sponsored by the Government of Zambia, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The objective of PUSH was to alleviate the negative effects of structural adjustment and stabilization and of the 1991–92 drought on well-being and food security.

In the second phase of PUSH, PUSH II (1994–97), CARE sought to move from *direct implementation* to *facilitation of implementation* and to building the capacity of the community to identify and act upon development needs. A new donor, the United Kingdom's ODA (Overseas Development Administration) and CARE's senior staff encouraged this more community-driven approach. PUSH II initiated work in three compounds in Lusaka in a learning and "process" project. Communities determined project interventions only *after* initial participatory assessments.

PROSPECT scaled up from the three compounds of PUSH II to 11. After the initial process orientation of PUSH, while maintaining a community-based focus, PROSPECT began to revert to a more traditional project arrangement. PROSPECT's proposal, for instance, specifically identified water provision and microfinance as interventions, without working with communities to identify their own priorities.

Facilitating Factors and Challenges

Although, supposedly, water supply was to be simply an entry point for more in-depth work to build up the ABOs and encourage CDD, CARE's efforts to follow up on this have been less than optimal. The two principal factors that militated against this were (1) political conflict between the ABOs and the traditional hierarchical power structures and (2) the difficulty of structuring organizational incentives to encourage consistent long-term actions to support CDD.

As CDD scales up, political tension is likely. The spreading of the RDCs threatened the authority of the city councilors, who traditionally were in charge of development in the compounds (although not necessarily effectively). With PROSPECT, residents saw the RDCs managing substantial resources and promoting investment beneficial to the community. The RDCs were an emerging threat to the councilors' status. In 1999, the council suspended further RDC elections. To resolve the crisis, PROSPECT worked with the city council and ABOs so that everyone understood their roles. Under the auspices of CARE, stakeholders worked to develop a new legal framework for RDC and council relations. Elections only resumed in mid-2002, so for almost three years, the ABO structure was not fully operational. (Some project activities continued, as the suspension only affected new elections, but the conflict cast a pall over ABO, CARE, and council relations.) The result of the suspension has been a more robust legal framework for the ABOs, a significant step forward for scaling up CDD, integration of the ABOs into the municipal government structure, and its spread to all peri-urban compounds in Lusaka (whether CARE works in them or not).

"...The nature of support to community-driven development will change over time. The promoting organization, therefore, must be a learning and empowering organization."

Still, the crisis showed how politics can be a significant obstacle to CDD and scaling up if ignored. The experience suggests politics cannot and should not be avoided. Politicians, bureaucrats, and local leaders may perceive new structures and new resources as threatening to their traditional positions or governing mechanisms. However, they may also

see them as opportunities, and they may want—and deserve—some say about how resources are allocated or institutions set up. If CDD avoids or antagonizes these stakeholders, they may undermine the program. If the program engages them, they may support it, leverage funds, influence or recruit others, or advise of future plans or pitfalls. Good program design that stresses communication and engagement of key players from the beginning is crucial.

CARE's position as an important international NGO with resources to fund the dialogue and meet some community needs possibly allowed them to play that mediating role in a way that a less prestigious or less well-funded organization could not. Scaling up CDD may thus require the prestige and resources of an outside catalytic change agent, and it almost certainly requires that stakeholder and participant roles and responsibilities are clarified from the beginning and quite possibly "officialized" in some way.

The history of PUSH II and PROSPECT also illustrates the organizational difficulty of supporting CDD. Despite PUSH II's initial emphasis on CDD and empowerment, PROSPECT over time came to focus more on promoting specific interventions (water provision, microfinance) than on energizing CDD in a sustainable way. This is not entirely surprising, given the genuine community need for water, external evaluations that encouraged water schemes, and donors that stressed outputs over process. As a result, the focus shifted from process to specific activities of previously determined project components. PROSPECT's own monitoring and evaluation system also focused more on outputs or their impacts, rather than on indicators of effectiveness and sustainability of ABOs. Efforts to support CDD thus will require changes in project design and performance indicators, and in donor perspectives and expectations.

Other factors were also important in shaping CDD. Democratization and a national policy of decentralization, along with encouragement from key CARE staff, encouraged a community-based approach to development. Project management was careful to train staff in participatory methods. This was important for them to understand how to promote CDD. Project and mission management's own insistence on decentralizing authority and empowering staff further enhanced this thrust. All this created a national and institutional environment important to promoting CDD.

Funding continues to be a severe challenge to sustainability. Neither the municipal council nor ABOs have adequate resources to build capacity or implement projects to meet identified needs. Without resources to meet community demands, CDD becomes a hollow exercise.

The evolution of PROSPECT suggests that the nature of support to CDD will change over time. The promoting organization, therefore, must be a learning and empowering organization. Initial promotion of CDD may involve establishing local structures and creating an enabling environment, but supporting organizations must build capacity on a number of fronts, including needs identification, project design, fund-raising, and project management. As community, municipal, and national structures become stronger, the promoting organization must move from the center to the side. It may still be involved in strengthening organizations and shaping the enabling environment, but the skills and activities required to do this are very different from those required at the beginning, when the institutional landscape is more barren. The promoting organization itself must be ready to transform its support (activities, funding focus, and staff numbers and skills) rather than simply "shutting down" or "exiting."

The study also finds that scaling up occurs rather naturally along a number of different dimensions over time. In PROSPECT's case, not only were the ABOs ultimately integrated into the social and institutional fabric of urban government in Lusaka, PROSPECT's approach had impact beyond the project itself. CARE has now instituted a number of new projects that support CDD approaches to development. The PROSPECT model has also been replicated in other cities in Zambia and in Madagascar.

Keywords: community development, urban, Zambia

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