

From 1999 to 2004, RELMA – the Regional Land Management Unit of Sida – worked closely with the Luo community on the Lake Victoria coast in Nyando District. The community, known as Kusa, was among the hardest hit by the blockage of Nyakach bay fishing beaches by water hyacinth.

**The Kusa Experience** tells the story of how the project began. It records the unconventional learning approach taken to discover solutions to the most pressing problems. You will read how community groups organized themselves and initiated schemes that have improved the living conditions of thousands of households, while addressing environmental and health issues (inadequate water supply, gully erosion, flooding, HIV/AIDS and others).

The book looks closely at the dynamics of community-based development; how a new local institution was created to manage the process; who were the major stakeholders involved; what were the most effective methods for implementing activities on the ground.

The intent is to capture the story in such a way that the more successful aspects of the project can be adapted and applied in other community-based programmes around Lake Victoria. A separate chapter describes the major lessons learned during more than five-years of joint work.

Written in a non-academic style, with plenty of illustrations throughout the text, *The Kusa Experience* should appeal to project planners, advisors and community development workers. It should also be relevant to students of development practice in east Africa and beyond.

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The Kusa Experience, Community development in western Kenya

TECHNICAL HANDBOOK No. 37

# The Kusa Experience

## Community development in western Kenya



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## Chapter 1

# Introduction



**B**eginning with a brief description of the cultural origins and economic history of the Luo people, we move to the factors that led to the decision to begin work in Kusa. A major reason was the sudden appearance of an exotic weed - the water hyacinth - that made news headlines throughout the region in the mid-1990s. Other crises linked to the hyacinth invasion are described. As only one facet of the Swedish International Development Agency's long-term commitment to supporting communities and organizations across the Lake Victoria region, the six-year project activity in Kusa was in many ways very unique. The chapter brings us to the 'entry point' that was chosen by the Regional Land Management Unit (RELMA) that proved to be the most successful and mobilizing aspect of the Kusa experience.



## 1.1 Historical backdrop: Luo culture

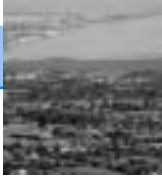
The Luo are a community of 3.2 million people – the third largest in Kenya according to the 1991 census. Their historical background and the term “Luo” identifies them as members of the larger River-Lake Nilote family, and in particular the ‘Lwoo’ speaking peoples (the name Lwoo distinguishes the language group from the Kenyan ethnic group) who inhabit areas from central Uganda to their original homeland in southern Sudan.

The Luo are historically related to the Shiluk, Dinka and Nuer who inhabit the large floodplain and swampy margins in southern Sudan. This is a region characterized by too much water during part of the year, and a scarcity of water and pasture during the long dry season.

Lwoo traditional culture is famous for its strong emphasis on cattle, but fishing and farming were important economic activities complementing livestock husbandry. The ancestral Lwoo necessarily practiced a mixed economy founded on the practice of combining permanent residence in one location with seasonal migration to exploit distant resources. Changing conditions dating back 1,500 years, including an extended dry climatic cycle and growing population, launched a series of migrations to the south. Rather than a mass movement, this was a gradual process involving clans and small bands of people who probably moved small distances at one time.

The Luo arrived on the western shores of Lake Victoria via several successive migrations, the first settlers entering the area of Samia and Yimbo, the lakeside plain of present day northern Nyanza Province, several centuries ago. The distribution of the southern Luo reflects their need to settle in areas with sufficient rainfall for growing indigenous grains like bulrush and finger millet. But of the several regions occupied by Luo speakers, Nyanza was the poorest in agricultural potential.

The agriculturally-oriented clans (like the Jokowiny) established themselves in what is now Siaya by the 1700’s. This population provided a staging area for the other more pastoral clans to eventually move into the Uyoma peninsula and occupy the sparsely occupied lakeside plains bordering the Winam Gulf. During the 1800s the Luo speakers colonized the area known as Kano Plains further to the south. Millet was the most important crop for these agro-pastoralists of the lakeside plain, and they compensated for the area’s poor rainfall by settling around the rivers flowing into the lake. Kusa is part of this same plain falling between rivers Nyando and Sondu Miriu. For generations the people of Kusa depended on livestock and fishing,



the former continuing to be the more important activity until several decades ago.

Like the situation in southern Sudan's large floodplain, the people of Kusa and other communities on the plain bordering the lake have to cope with an excess of water during the rainy season and shortage of water during the rest of the year.

A large portion of the Luo community had switched to a primarily agricultural economy by the early part of the colonial period (1930-40). The poor quality of the lakeside soils and variable rainfall are, however, major reasons why this shift did not occur in Kusa. Here, cultivation was part of the annual production cycle but was of minor importance as the people's comparative advantage lay in livestock and fishing.

In areas like Kusa, where population growth was increasing the pressure on the limited and fragile land, migration to urban areas became an accepted element of household economy. For those who remained at home, cotton became a new source of household income.

People in Kusa began growing cotton during the 1950's. Local production flourished, attracting Asian buyers from Kisumu to Kusa beach. The weekly market put Kusa on the map, and senior members of the community date the beginnings of a "JaKusa" identity transcending clan and other factors.

The cotton market collapsed due to institutional mismanagement during the 1970's. The urban job market started to dry up during the 1980's. But the artisanal fishery kept the local economy in Kusa above water, so to speak. Then a major environmental disaster in the form of a massive invasion of water hyacinth cut off access to the lake, and the main source of income with it.

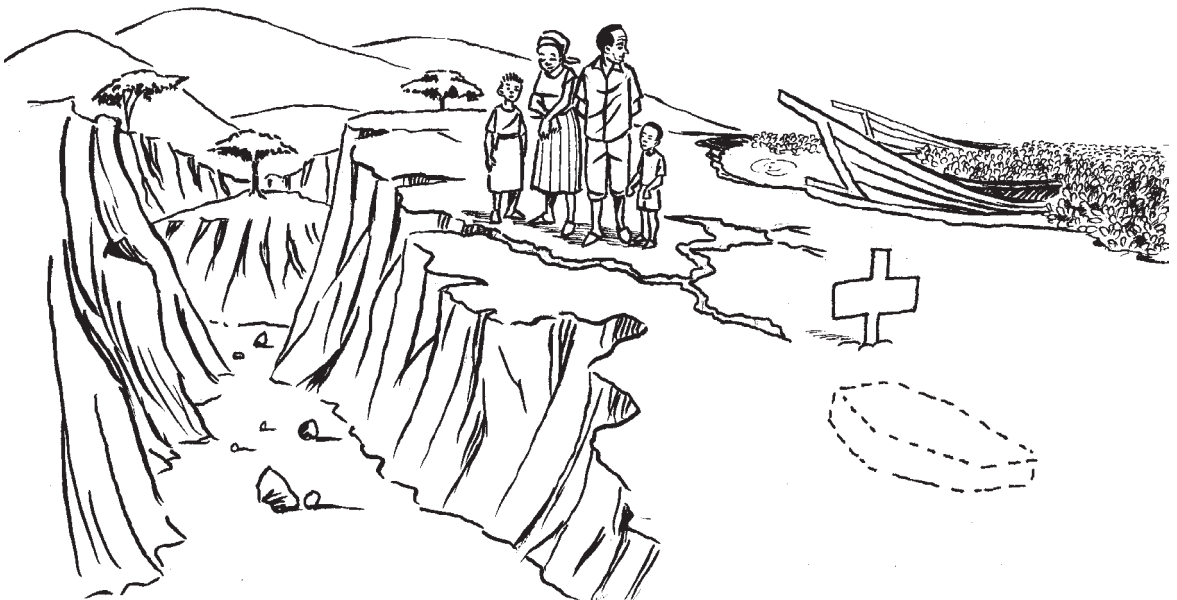
The crisis of the hyacinth invasion set the stage for a community initiative that began on the Kusa beachfront and evolved into the project addressing the many problems facing the community.

The Kusa Community Development Project (KCDP) emerged out of a combination of external forces, internal developments and local ecological conditions. The impressive successes registered over a short period of time highlight the combined contributions of community groups, NGO sector, government ministries and donor assistance. RELMA, a small yet focused agency supported by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) played a critical role in catalyzing the energies of the project's diverse participants.

The KCDP's achievements also highlight the absence of a project blueprint made by development experts; rather, the Kusa community itself featured in their place. It represents a noteworthy example of the participatory approach to problem solving that replaced the top-down and externally directed project orthodoxy that for decades defined "development" in Africa. As such, it offers valuable lessons and insights into the use of participatory methods. The project is perhaps best understood as the defining stage in an ongoing process of change: yet there are clear and difficult problems ahead. We can nevertheless observe that the process is moving in a positive direction.

## 1.2 The hyacinth invasion

Lake Victoria is the world's second largest freshwater body. A lake of such size is a dynamic environment that changes over time, and apace with developments on its long shoreline. Local fishermen claim that the area covered by papyrus has been increasing since the onset of the colonial era. The lake level rose following heavy rains ten times the average between 1961 and 1964. This expanded the area covered by wetlands, and aggravated the gullies beginning to appear on the slopes between the Nyakach escarpment and plain. Introduction of the Nile perch increased the lake's overall fish yield, but reinforced the decline of local fishermen's catch over recent decades. Nile perch, overfishing and pollution have contributed to the serious reduction of the lake's indigenous species.



Obstacles to development in Kusa: severe erosion caused by flooding; collapse in artisanal fishing, caused by water hyacinth; rapid spread of HIV/AIDS.



These negative trends in the aquatic environment reflect the scale of urban development, population growth and land degradation occurring along the shores of Winam Gulf. Untreated sewage, industrial pollution and soil erosion feeding into the lake for years culminated in the water hyacinth invasion. The nutrient-laden waters around Kisumu served as an ideal incubator for the growth of the hyacinth, while the sheltered waters of Nyakach Bay provided a friendly home for the wind-blown plants.

The first floating rafts of the weed appeared in 1991. Large and dense islands seemingly appearing out of nowhere trapped fishing boats in a spongy carpet of vegetation. Boats and nets were lost to the aquatic morass. Stranded fishermen and would-be rescuers on the shore discovered that the weeds made a devilishly impregnable blockade.

Fishing was the primary source of income in Kusa at the time of the invasion. Many of the fishermen sailed off to the south west when the accumulating weeds formed a permanent barrier, accessing the lake from other beaches not yet effected by the hyacinths.

The same barrier, however, prevented local livestock from watering. Most households in Kusa keep livestock, and their dilemma provoked the first community response to combat the invasion. Volunteers came forward and cleared a path through the weeds. Twice they successfully



Huge gullies such as this force Kusa residents to walk long distances just to visit a family member.

cut a lane to the open water, only to see the shifting mass choke off their passage. Under favorable conditions, 10 plants can multiply to cover an acre of water in eight months.

The hyacinths became a permanent presence and a major regional issue by the mid-1990's. While Kusa's brigade of volunteers were hacking away at the enemy, international donors active in the region were considering their own response. Scientists were consulted, new research studies commissioned and options debated in conferences and the press. By this time, the hyacinths had formed a solid block stretching from Kusa to Kendu Bay.

The scale of the problem probably explains why an alternative plan based on using local labor to harvest the weeds was shelved in favor of a frontal attack financed by the World Bank, using powerful engines mounted on pontoons that chopped up the weeds. The machines began in Kisumu, and moved toward Kusa. But the harvesters claimed the shallow water in Kusa prevented them from operating, complaining that the wind-propelled massive islands of hyacinth frustrated them in the open waters near Kendu Bay. The contractor cited such unfavorable conditions and went home, reporting that 37 square kilometers of the hyacinths had been crushed. Before long the weeds were back.

### **From hyacinths to water tanks**

Another NGO from Kisumu, Osienala ("friends of the lake") was the leading local organization doing advocacy and promoting environmental awareness since 1992. Osienala became involved in the process leading to the formation of KCDP. Osienala built upon the community's own efforts to mobilize itself by promoting community discussion on the hyacinth problem, and a local team for monitoring the problem.

The Government of Sweden, via the Swedish International Development Agency – Sida – was among the leading donors involved in the Lake Victoria region. Sida supported RELMA, which was to become a central partner of the Kusa community further up the road. Sida policy for the Lake Victoria basin was based on support for the East African Community's regional activities. Sida subsequently commissioned RELMA to follow up, and in early 1999 the RELMA director, Matts Denninger, held a public meeting in Kusa.

*"The water hyacinth is a global problem; Sweden is but a single nation. But we are ready to assist communities like yours that are affected by the problem."* Denninger said. The meeting marked the very beginning of a pilot project in name, that was in fact not a project at all, rather an offer



of practical assistance for the lakeside community. Osienala conducted the participatory rural assessment that revealed the counter-intuitive fact that for local households, sanitation and access to clean water was a much higher priority than the hyacinth problem.

One solution: build ferrocement tanks to harvest rainwater. RELMA began by training twelve young artisans to build several demonstration tanks. A booklet in Dholuo was also published on the tank-construction technique, to help spread the technology. The initial concept was for individual homeowners to hire these artisans to build more tanks. As a test, each one built a tank (with material subsidy from RELMA) on their own. Six years later, most of these artisans are still building tanks.

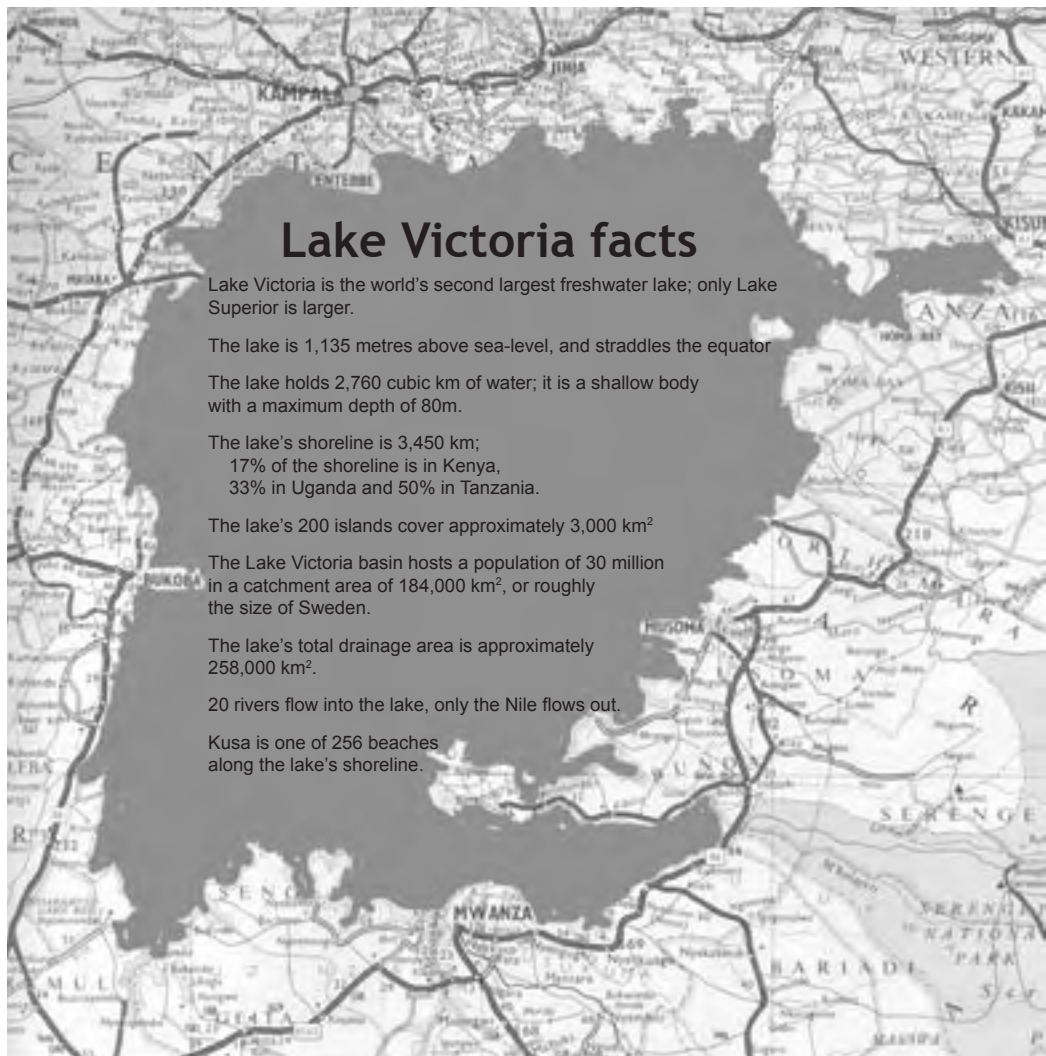


Figure 1. Lake Victoria statistics

There was no pre-set budget, only RELMA's commitment to support activities targeting the community's needs, hence no long-term strategy or rollout plan. There was no contract or Memorandum of Understanding because there was no legal entity available to act on behalf of the community. There was no government involvement except for official acceptance of RELMA's offer of assistance, recorded in the minutes of the Nyando District Development Committee.

There were no 4-wheel drive vehicles, no office, no computers and no fancy letterheads. There was a two year learning and planning phase (1999-2001) for sorting out what the community's real needs were, incorporating diverse stakeholders, assessing the contribution of government ministries, identifying local leaders, calculating costs and constraints, and for instigating formation of local structures and institutions on the ground.

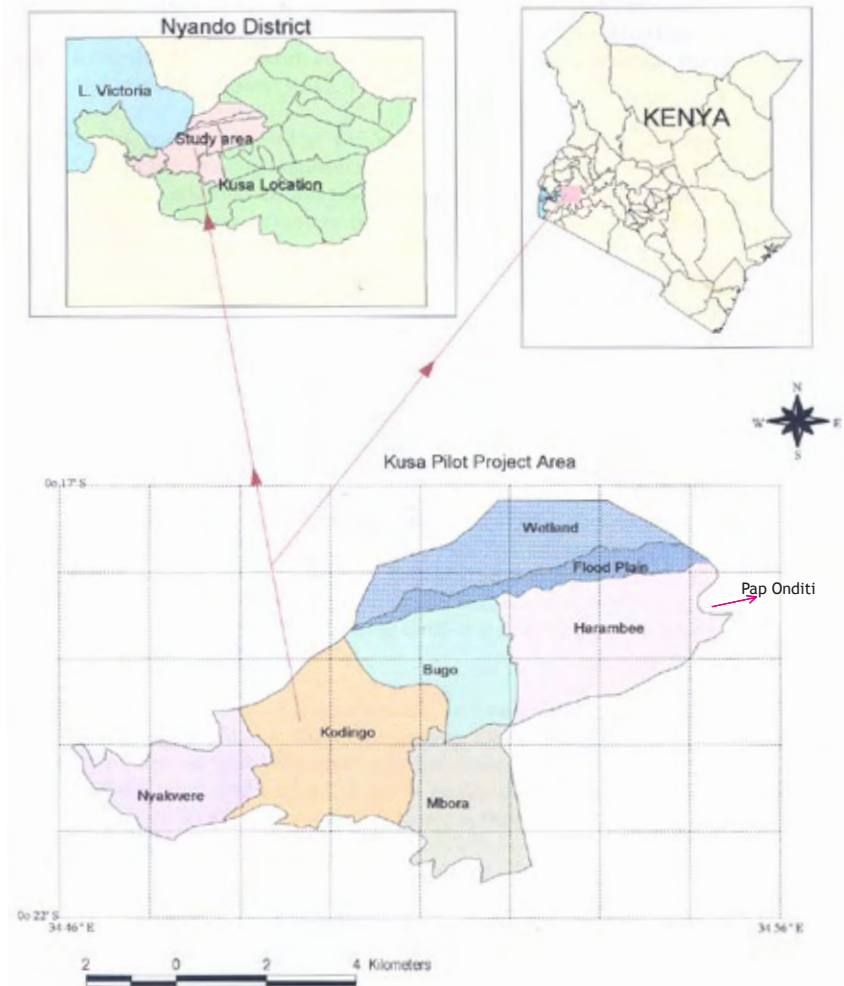


Figure 2. Location of Kusa in Nyando District, and the five project zones.

## Chapter 2

# Dramatic changes on the lake shore



Chapter 2 outlines the recent economic history of the Kusa area, highlighting issues that contributed to the multiple problems faced by the community. It also identifies factors that contributed to the project's success up to this point. The initial focus on constructing water catchment tanks expanded to include many other on-farm activities. The project identified several natural zones of project activity. Common interest groups (CIGs) emerged as focal points for innovation and community resource management. A description follows of how CIGs and zone committees provided a stable platform for good project governance and management of project activities.

*The Luo tell the story of a poor fisherman named Nyamgondho Wuod Ombare who lived by the lakeside. One day, while out fishing, a woman appeared out of the early morning mists. As the story goes, he married her, and after this he prospered. Nyamgondho became wealthy, and owned many animals. He became arrogant, and began to mistreat his wife even though in his heart he knew she was the source of his wealth. The wife eventually grew tired of his behavior; she packed up their belongings and disappeared into the lake with all their animals. Nyamgondho begged her to return, but to no avail; he then walked into the lake and died. The Luo say that his footsteps can be seen at the cultural site bearing his name in Gwassii, Suba District.*

## 2.1 Nothing like a crisis

The economic progression of lakeside communities like Kusa follows the broad outlines of this story. The lake rescued pastoral-oriented producers from poverty; they turned to fishing, and converted their earnings from the lake into animals and wives. But they took the source of their prosperity for granted; after a period of abuse, the lake took back its wealth and the local population sank back into poverty.

The problem of the lake, of course, links up with most of the other issues supporting the downward trend in a range of social and economic areas. Nyanza Province has suffered from a high rate of HIV infection since the late 1980s. The social impact of the pandemic is increased by the inroads it has made within the economically most active segment of the population. The hyacinth-induced migration of fishermen and the practice of wife inheritance contributed to a local infection rate that reached 17 per cent in Kusa several years ago. The poor management of land resources both accelerates the decline of the lake, and together with labor shortages, limits increasing agricultural production.

The problem of the lake emerging during the 1990s was compounded by outside factors. The economy was stagnant, the El Niño rains of 1997-98 destroyed physical infrastructure and Kenya's institutional corruption aggravated an already dire situation. Several decades of high population growth were exerting severe stress on the environmental resources supporting most of the rural population's livelihoods.

The lake basin registered a four per cent population growth in the last census (1999). This was in contrast to the national average growth of three per cent. The social-economic equation is a primary force behind the fundamental changes overtaking the Nyanza countryside; the condition of the lake itself dramatized how, for the most part, things were heading in the wrong direction.





But there is nothing like a crisis, whether long and creeping like the case of Lake Victoria, or sudden and devastating like the Asian tsunami (at the end of 2004), to set the forces of international development in motion. For decades, Nyanza was known for its fish, footballers, and as a breeding ground for scientists, scholars, and opposition politics. Then an exotic aquatic plant multiplied out of control. An armada of international agencies, experts, and doctors of development appeared on the shores. We learned that close to half of the inhabitants reportedly live in absolute poverty, in an area assumed to be one of Africa's more resource-rich regions. Journalists described the magnitude of soil and land degradation in the lake basin as destruction unparalleled in Africa.

Poor understanding of the environmental, socioeconomic, and cultural dynamics of a region is consistently cited as the reason why developmental inputs invested may not produce positive results. After the great Sahel famine of 1974-76, for example, the donor world rushed into Turkana. The tide of agencies, NGOs, and contractors subsided after a decade, leaving abandoned works rising like ancient ruins along the shores around Kalokol. One of the lasting impacts being large numbers of disenchanting youth, many of whom turned to banditry.

Much progress had been made in the business of rural development when, twenty years later, a different crisis emerged on a different but less distant lakeshore.

At the time most of Africa's nations gained independence, for example, development was initially assumed to be a matter of transferring skills, capital, and technology. The continent's under-producing rural areas harbored armies of cheap labor; policy makers presumed that the continent's Westernized state elites would faithfully execute their designs, even though they worked in a fundamentally different environment. Planners went about the task of engineering economic growth.

The script had undergone radical revision by the time Matts Denninger was announcing Sweden's offer of assistance to the community at Kusa in early 1999. Markets had replaced five-year plans, peasants had displaced Cabinet Ministers, indigenous knowledge now reigned where capital and technology once ruled. However, adapting development policies to local conditions that vary significantly even within an administrative division, and fine-tuning projects to act as vehicles of progress in the presence of entrenched interests is still a tricky business.

Participatory methods were a widely endorsed strategy at the moment SIDA requested RELMA to offer assistance in Kusa, but participation

is still no magic bullet. Participatory approaches to local problem-solving often end up being hijacked by leaders, or adopted to satisfy donor requirements while the decisions are still made from above. In other situations, participation can generate more clamor and argument than decisive action - a problem frequently resurfacing in Kenya's civil society.

Reversing the negative momentum building up over the long period of ineffective policies, maladaptive practices, and social inertia leading to the lake's crisis invites comparison with the task of reversing the direction of a large ocean-going ship. It also highlights the importance of the RELMA-supported project's two-year planning phase, and the critical elements of the approach. The key concept here is learning.

There was considerable knowledge available and a growing understanding of many of the regional issues before the project began. But if anything, this knowledge and the publicity engendered by the water hyacinth invasion combined to overshadow the other multiple challenges facing localities across the lake region like Kusa. This was demonstrated when the community prioritized the provision of clean water and sanitation over the problem of the hyacinth.

Kusa is situated on the sloping shelf between the Nyabondo plateau and the lake, spanning the plain between Nyando river and Pap Onditi town on the east side and Sondu Miriu river to the west. The area experiences flooding during the rainy season, with several deep gullies becoming torrents of runoff flowing from the plateau to the lake. The importance accorded to access to potable water in such a water-rich environment had to be learned from the local community.

The knowledge generated by the twin strategies of participation and learning was critical to meeting the objective of "actually implementing a bottom-up approach." (Winberg report).

## 2.2 Project design: concept to practice

A follow-up PRA confirmed the water problem, while establishing the other community priorities ranked below (Kusa PRA: Majorstep 2000):

- access to clean water
- health and sanitation
- environmental and land management



- vocational and informal education
- strengthening existing socio-economic activities and introducing new ones
- equitable access to resources and markets

The quality of water is naturally a critical variable influencing the second priority, health and sanitation. Again, most outsiders may have assumed that the inroads made by HIV would place it near the top of the ranking. Even so, malaria still ranks as the leading cause of mortality for the general population, as the parasite becomes increasingly resistant to medications available to the lakeside population. Dysentery and other health-sapping water borne infections are endemic, and periodic outbreaks of cholera are a consequence of the location's watery extremes.

Before addressing these concerns raised by the second PRA, however, RELMA used the planning phase to develop the project's governance structures and knowledge base.

### **Planning and learning**

To bring the project closer to the community, the area was divided into five zones that also recognized the influence of often small but important local variations on household strategies. PRAs were done for each zone. The residents elected zonal implementation committees, and RELMA trained the committee members in planning and democratic decision-making.

The planning process included baseline studies on wells, water quality, education, health, and the human resources available in Kusa. The technical information complemented the information generated by the PRAs, and informed the formulation of community action plans. The planning process also extended to testing the evolving 'design' through implementation of some activities.

The construction of water tanks for roof water harvesting was determined to be the most cost-effective and technically viable technology for targeting the two overlapping problems of water and health. The activity also provided the opportunity for introducing technical training endowing the community with the capacity to continue building tanks after the project ended.

RELMA had introduced thirty portable eco-toilets designed to improve soils and yields of fruit trees by recycling human waste. But cultural biases proved to be more powerful than the long-term advantages on



all but a few farms. The building of water tanks has indeed continued without RELMA support, and these two empirical examples of success and failure illustrate how knowledge qualified by learning guided the way the project unfolded.

RELMA utilized the time committed to the learning process to develop local structures for managing the project, while also cultivating a local culture of democracy. Technical training is a standard component of community development projects, but the emphases RELMA placed on forming a basic structure of committees and training the members in governance and decision-making is less common.

The bureaucrats who determine the content of development interventions and design the packages they come in are expected to produce measurable results. They do not have the budget line items or the formal mechanisms for nurturing a culture of democracy. Yet the importance of this for effective participation cannot be over-exaggerated in Kenya.

Privatization and the downsizing of the state reduced the influence of top-down patronage and political liberalization increased competition for political offices on the ground. Opening up the political space offered greater leeway for projects like the KCDP to operate independent of politicians, but it also increased the power of deep-rooted local interests within their communities, and their influence on politicians and administrators.

Many such actors and their agents have become experts at cloaking themselves in the politically correct ideas and language of the day. This enables them to insinuate themselves into leadership positions or influence the allocation of resources to their personal benefit. This has a deadening effect on true participation. Project evaluations place more stock on the numbers of tanks built and measurable indicators; in most cases, the evaluators rarely have the time to verify the quality of the process underpinning the results.

The planning process generated a comprehensive framework document profiling the local settings and specifying the pilot project's goals, methods, procedures etc. The results achieved, however, are arguably considerably more a function of the quality of the process than the knowledge and plans outlined in documents. The positive elections and handing over to new leadership in 2003 marked an important threshold in the process, and appears to have strengthened the project's management.





The Kusa Pilot Project Document features a diagram mapping the organizational structures and stakeholders involved in the project (Project Document, p. 29). The box for the “Kusa Community” appears at the top of the chart, inverting the usual relationship between facilitators and beneficiaries. The acronym CIGs - indicating ‘common interest groups’ also lies inside this box, and represents the project’s single most important organizational component.

Women’s and other self-help groups are a ubiquitous presence across Kenya’s landscape. The CIGs present an elegant variation on the rural self-help group, with certain distinguishing characteristics:

- They are comprised of individuals who engage in a specific economic activity, meeting regularly to share experiences and solve problems (see table on page 39).
- Individual members of a CIG initiate the activity and receive all the benefits that come from participating.
- CIG members gain significant economic advantages – e.g. training, input purchasing, marketing – over their neighboring farmers.

The CIG set-up also offers an organized channel for other development actors – from Government to regional NGOs – to channel services to the household level. Members of different CIGs questioned on the subject all stated that the groups would continue to operate even if the structure of committees were to collapse.

These first two chapters have set the historical, cultural and economic setting for the Kusa story. It is clear that the overall situation in this part of the Lake Victoria basin offered multiple challenges to project implementation, and also many opportunities for learning. We now turn to a detailed description of how the community organized itself to meet these challenges.



## Farm and soil facts from Kusa *(based on Mati and Mutunga 2003)*

The combination of topography, rainfall characteristics, and land management are not conservation-friendly in Kusa.

### Overall soil characteristics:

- Poorly drained loamy sands, sands, sandy clay loams, and cracking clays
- Very hard surfaces when dry, and hard pans at 20cm in subsoils
- Fertility low and poor in nutrients e.g. nitrogen, phosphorous, and magnesium
- Most soils have < 1 % organic carbon, and < 2 % even after manuring
- PH high, >7.5
- Sodicity medium to high, increasing with soil depth
- Poor infiltration and high run-off
- Low organic carbon (<1 %) and low Nitrogen and Phosphorus
- Average rainfall: 1176mm per annum
- Bimodal: Long rains: 380-550mm / Short rains: 200-400mm -- 60 % reliability
- Water availability during the early stage of growth critical due to soil characteristics
- Water in many wells sodic and saline, and should not be used for irrigation; attempts to irrigate nearby rendered the soil infertile after three years

### People and livestock:

- Typical household size: 5 - 10 people
- Average land holding: 1 - 2 hectares
- Effectively cultivated land: 0.1 - 0.4 ha
- Average livestock holdings: 2-10 cows; 5-10 goats; some chickens
- Low labor availability due to migration a constraint
- Expected crop yield: 1.5 t maize per ha without fertilizer
- Typical yields: <1t maize per hectare, beans < 0.5 t/ha

### Other issues affecting soil productivity

Use of fertilizer indirectly benefits soil through larger volume of growth leading to greater intake of carbon and root exudation; optimum strategy is to use fertilizer with manure.

Most farmers see rain as the chief determinant of yields, and think crops are more likely to dry out if fertilizer is used.

The management of farmyard manure very important, with the manure from healthy animals kept in covered sheds offering higher mineral nutrients.

Burning manure to repel mosquitoes and deposit on unused land common practice.

Water hyacinth and aquatic weeds have good potential for green manuring but labor for transport is a constraint.

## Chapter 3

# Building a new Society



**I**n 1999 there were few local institutions in Kusa. None were capable of managing a community-wide development project. Four years later, in 2003, the legally registered Kusa Community Development Society [an NGO] hosts elections for officers and operates on behalf of more than 1,100 supporting members. This chapter traces the path and events that built a strong community-based institution. Emphasis is placed on internal dynamics / practical issues. An illustration of the structure and growth of this new institution is provided.

## 3.1 The Kusa Interim Community Development Committee

It is important to remember that Kusa is in a newly formed district, created in 1998. Government departments had not yet established full operations. Resources were minimal and what services existed were inadequate. A few NGOs had small projects in the area. These included Osienala (doing studies on Nyando wetlands and water pollution), CARE Kenya (providing community health training to women's groups and a short-lived revolving credit scheme) and Africa Now which funded water tank construction projects at several local schools.

The Netherlands-funded Lake Basin Development Authority had recently drilled several new boreholes, fitted with hand pumps. None of these projects gave specific attention to institutional development in Kusa. All of the activities worked through individual CBOs, church groups or schools.

The first meetings between local leaders and Sida/RELMA, to explore ideas for working with the community, raised the need for a broader management structure. They agreed to appoint an interim management committee consisting of those community members who had been active during the first meetings. This was formed in February 1999, with assistance from the Nyalunda Location area chief at the time.

Forming the interim management team was a shortcut to create the needed organizational structure, therefore a proper election of committee office holders was set for March, 2001. This allowed time to engage in a series of pilot initiatives. The Kusa Interim Community Development Committee [KIDC] was composed of working groups for three main action areas: water supply, health and agriculture. These had come out as the top priorities during the Osienala-run PRA.

### From helpless to hopeful

One important challenge facing both RELMA and the new-born KIDC was a cynical attitude toward outside agencies. Some NGOs, based in distant capitals, had 'talked big' and raised unrealistic expectations among area residents – especially about solving the water hyacinth problem. These empty promises created disappointment. People had to be convinced that RELMA was not just another passing NGO coming to take pictures and do 'development tourism.'

It would take much dialogue and demonstrated commitment to overturn the prevailing attitude of hopelessness and helplessness, to





a more positive 'we can do something' outlook. The strategy was to identify several activities that would bring speedy results, and also mobilize community groups for long-term efforts. This was more easily said than done without an established community-level organization to work through. How would RELMA promote a community-level project with no office, no central meeting place, and no easy means to coordinate pilot activities?

### PRAs and action plans

To begin, more in-depth local information was required together with awareness on the issues, capacity and aspirations of the community members. A full-scale PRA (lasting several days, and involving many more individuals than the first one) was planned for February 2000.

This time the PRA exercise was done within well defined zones. This activity subdivided the project area into more manageable portions (refer to map on page 8). Community action plans for each zone were a key outcome of these PRAs. These action plans also featured in the RELMA project document that would be prepared during the same year. To a certain extent, they also helped clarify the role of zonal committees, at least on paper, and recorded the aspirations of community members.

### First stakeholder meeting

RELMA felt it would be crucial to bring as many stakeholders as practical into the planning process. Towards this end RELMA called a first stakeholder meeting (March 2000). Representatives with an interest in Kusa attended from the Ministry of Agriculture and Livestock, Osienala, local universities, regional NGOs, and several of RELMA's subject matter specialists.

At the meeting, emphasis was laid on the absolute need to create local ownership of the project, and avoid raising new expectations and any sense of dependency. Significantly, rather than having a one-time gathering of potential supporters, RELMA institutionalized this stakeholder input, by formalizing the group as the Kusa Support Network.



Network representatives continued to meet quarterly for the duration of the 5-year project. A more detailed discussion of the role of this body, and of networking in general, appears at the end of Chapter 4.

## 3.2 First election

Before the first election took place the following measures were taken:

- The project boundary was defined – West Kabodho Sub-location in Nyalunya Location and West Koguta Sub-location in Thuridibuoro Location (all within in the newly formed Nyando District).
- Zones were defined for effective supervision of the project. The area was split into five zones: Bugo and Harambee Zones in West Kabodho. Kodingo, Mbora and Nyakwere Zones in West Koguta.

The community registered the Project as Kusa Community Development Programme with the Ministry of Sports, Gender and Social Services as a CBO. The group was targeting all members of Kusa community irrespective of membership.

After the new millennium arrived the organizational structure of Kusa began to take shape. In March 2001 the election was carried out in all five zones simultaneously to elect the following office bearers: Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Assistant Secretary, Treasurer, Women's Representative, Youth Representative and Artisan Representative.

The new concept of Common Interest Groups was gradually introduced to provide a stronger motive for implementing specific activities. Only a few were formally registered by early 2001 (Winberg p. 44). For each zone, a Zonal Committee was selected comprised of a minimum of six office-bearers (Project Document p.15) with responsibility for mobilizing new groups in each zone and promoting wider participation in the Kusa Pilot Project.

For coordination amongst these committees and to represent their plans and aspirations to RELMA and other outside stakeholders, a central structure – the Interim Community Development Committee, was also created. RELMA provided support for training – from MajorStep and other independent consultants - for these new committees on leadership skills, conflict management, participatory planning and other needed skills.



### 3.3 Mobilizing the zones

The first two years were an important learning phase for the new institutions and for RELMA. It was a time of testing possible solutions to core problems identified by the PRA. It was also a period of trust building between Kusa and RELMA, each watching to see how committed the other was as the scope of activities expanded. Nevertheless, information and awareness about the project, its goals and objectives, and about RELMA's role, was not 'trickling down' to the more marginal villages and clan groups. There were many reasons for this – not all of them straightforward. One obvious reason was that no explicit effort had been made to communicate directly with the poorer households in Kusa.

Understandably, only a small fraction of the community had, by early 2001, been involved directly with the project. *"It is estimated that only 20% or about 700 households (3,000 people out of the estimated 18,700 Kusa population) has so far been involved in or exposed to the preparatory activities"* (T. Mutinda, GS Consult, June 2001)

As start-up activities moved ahead, the participation and 'ownership' within the community became stratified. Community members with more resources, and less pre-occupation with the daily struggle of subsistence were the most active in projects.

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*"Little wonder that it would need a lot of persuasion to get people to participate in Kusa Project for whole days at the expense of their subsistence activities."* Mbora Zone Outreach

Workshop report, June 2001

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This was especially true with the first phase of water tank construction, where individuals would contract directly with trained artisan-entrepreneurs to build 'demonstration' tanks. The tanks cost about 7,000 Ksh [US \$90]. Choice of tank size and method of construction left out those without money to invest – the majority. A general feeling prevailed that the project was catering to the more wealthy members of the community. This was unacceptable to RELMA.

In 2001, two other aspects of the 'learning process' approach adopted by RELMA took place. The first was a series of five two-day workshops – one in each zone, the second a set of baseline surveys. In general terms, these 'learning events' generated valuable information about community needs and perceptions, as well as wider understanding and enthusiasm about what the project hoped to achieve. Both also pointed out the weakness (low activity level) of, and need to strengthen organizational structures at all levels.

### Outreach workshops

To broaden the participation, RELMA funded five outreach workshops. These workshops, each run by a different consulting group, and following a common terms of reference, were specifically aimed at raising awareness about the pilot project, and gathering the perceptions of people not yet directly involved with KCDP. More than 250 people joined in these workshops. They proved to be a successful mobilizing event, generating greater understanding that 'something good was happening in Kusa' and clarifying the role of RELMA as a facilitator of self-help, of acquiring new knowledge, but not a source of free handouts.

A further purpose of these workshops was to revisit the community action plans that were developed during the June 2000 PRAs in every zone. An attempt was made to assess the capacity for implementing the plans, and pinpoint new skills needed.

### Baseline surveys

RELMA commissioned several studies in 2001. These surveys raised the knowledge level on local human and natural resources, and drew attention to specific target areas of work.

Learning value of baseline studies

- All studies were done with the assistance of zonal committees, also increasing the zone committees understanding of the prevailing situation.
- Terms of reference provided by RELMA included popularizing RELMA/Kusa project approach to the wider community. Awareness created during the course of gathering information thus facilitated mobilization.
- Teams gathering the information were able to physically confirm the situation on the ground during homestead visits.

Other surveys were done as the project got underway, covering soils and livestock. These surveys highlighted household-level circumstances, providing valuable information that would be useful during the implementation period and beyond.

The preparation of a formal Project Document, in consultation with Kusa community members, was a third important activity during the first half of 2001. Although this was done to meet the requirements for funding from Sida for the following three year period, it introduced a more structured [logical framework] way of assessing achievements – something which was lacking in the initial planning process.





## Summaries of community surveys

### Well survey and water quality analysis

Kodingo zone had highest number of wells (more than 100) while Mbora had very few (9). Water quality analysis revealed which wells were contaminated. Had the study not been done, the project would have gone ahead to improve all wells irrespective of their quality.

### School situation study

The study showed that the number of girls attending upper classes was very low, due to a high drop-out rate in Harambee zone compared to other zones. The most alarming statistic to emerge was the number of orphans in Kusa: 635 at the time of the survey.

### Human resources study

The survey discovered that few retirees return to Kusa to live at home. The majority of retirees who do return are teachers. Among these were several professionals who supported implementation of the project. One example was those former teachers who took leading part in community training on the new KCDS constitution.

### Youth situation

The study revealed that many youth, especially those with good basic education, were unemployed, saying that they were above doing manual work. The study raised the need to provide activities for youth. Growing numbers participated in productive activities e.g. horticulture, fruit tree growing, gabion making. Many youth also expressed the view that the project belonged to their parents generation so they did not attend development meetings. Once their interests were identified, a football club was formed, providing a forum to discuss problems with the youths.

### Health situation study

This survey raised many important issues: e.g. poor latrine facilities (especially at schools), the ten most prevalent diseases, the extent of the HIV/AIDS situation (the latter did not emerge during the early PRA).

This structure, which divided the work into nine distinct activity areas [see footnote on page 26] was applied by the Kusa Central Management Committee as a basis for evaluating project performance two years later, after rejecting the report prepared by an evaluation team as partly inaccurate and incomplete.

### 3.4 Making a new constitution

Every formal management structure – from the smallest self-help/CIG to the biggest multinational corporation, requires clear guidelines to regulate its operations. As the level of activity and outside support grew, so did the need for an accountable legal entity to bear responsibility for the local management work.

Leaders of the Kusa Central Committee, during the planning stages in 2001, expressed the desire to initiate formal registration process. They realized the need to raise the status of the organization to negotiate with outside institutions and gain greater recognition in a competitive world. To expedite this request, RELMA hired the services of a lawyer well versed in institutional setup and governance. The lawyer presented various registration options (NGO, limited company, development society) during initial discussions. Kusa leadership chose the option of a Cooperative Society, resulting in the need to prepare a detailed constitution. Kusa Community Development Society is a limited liability institution registered by the Registrar of Societies (under the Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs). It is a development Society drawing its members from all individuals who work and live within the Kusa community.

Kusa had an advantage in doing this: they had already been operating several pilot activities and could base the content of the constitution on practical experiences. The document was not viewed as an abstract exercise needed to meet the requirements for registration as a Development Society. It was a living set of rules which fosters greater accountability and transparency. Such issues were high on the minds of all Kenyans in a period when runaway government corruption was affecting all levels of Kenyan society.

After preparing a first draft (based on existing project reports and meetings with Kusa leaders) the lawyer presented it to the Central Committee for debate. Other project partners provided their input. A revised draft was produced, in English as well as Dholuo. Aware that this was a vital document needing wide understanding and endorsement the lawyer was instructed to train a group of ‘elaborators’ on the meaning and purpose of the new constitution. These were selected from each zone and given a detailed briefing.

Based on community feedback, the lawyer made a last round of changes to the draft constitution. The Central committee reviewed these, then sent the final version to the Registrar of Societies for approval.



In February, 2003, the Kusa Community Development Society received its certificate of registration – making it a legally liable entity.

The constitution requires elections of office bearers to be held every three years. This was also the moment to explain how the leadership of the new Society would be elected, three months later. For several days in March-April 2003 a group of trained informants, many of whom were local retirees, went to all homes in each zone, explaining what the constitution was about and how the elections would work. During the house-to-house campaign, virtually all Kusa residents were included in discussing the content of the Kusa constitution. The process was much more inclusive than any other project activity up to that time, resulting in widespread awareness about the purpose and formal structure of Kusa Community Development Society. This was an ideal time to put the groundwork experience and new ideas into practice with firm backing from RELMA and a motivated cadre of local leaders.

## **The Kusa constitution**

### **Section 6.4 [only] Functions of the Organs of the Society**

(a) The Central Management Committee (CMC) shall perform the following functions:

1. Coordinate the activities of the zonal committees
2. Monitor the performance of zonal committees
3. Approve zonal action plans
4. Solicit funds for the Society
5. Oversee the management of project funds in accordance with the agreement without directly taking charge of project funds intended for use by Common Interest Groups.
6. Represent the Society in all external dealings and relations
7. Admit members to the Society
8. Expel or suspend members from the Society
9. Resolve disputes between the zones

(b) Zonal Committees shall perform the following functions:

1. Supervise and coordinate the activities of common interest groups in the zone
2. Develop a work plan for the zone
3. Facilitate the implementation by CIGs of the approved work plans in the zone
4. Recommend to the CMC new members for admission into the Society
5. Recommend to the CMC members for suspension or expulsion from the Society

*continued...*

6. Perform any other functions conducive to the achievement of the Society's objectives on the direction of the CMC.

(c) Common Interest Groups shall implement their work plans, carry out project implementation and receive and manage project funds.

(d) All membership fees and other local contributions received by the Society (but not project funds which shall be used exclusively for the project) shall be shared between the Central office and the Zones on a proportion of 20% to the Central office for administrative expenses and 80% to the Zone which received the contribution or membership fees. Membership fees for a common interest group shall go directly in full to the common interest group in question.

Amendment to Section 6.4 Article (d), passed during Annual General Meeting, May 2004: membership fees and local contributions shall be shared on a proportion of 40% to the Central office and 60% to the Zone receiving the fees and contributions.

## 3.5 The second elections

Three years after the first community-wide election of leaders to manage Kusa Pilot Project, a substantially larger membership cast their votes again. RELMA again hired MajorStep consulting group (who had assisted with the first elections), based in Kisumu, to facilitate the election. Their role included supervising the election process to ensure that it was fair and according to the rules of the Societies Act. They also printed ballot papers and boxes.

During elections, only registered members of Common Interest Groups are eligible to vote. The Society had 1,133 members as of May, 2003. This same requirement holds true for anyone standing/running for election to the zonal committees. Seats for the three executive officers, three vice-officers and three additional representatives for each of the five Zones (45 positions in total) were placed on ballots – using the normal secret ballot system. Results are given in the box on page 27.

Elections for CIG office-holders were not centrally organized, but left to each CIG to manage, according to each group's internal rules.

Note: Objectives from the project document logical framework: 1. Improved health status of Kusa community 2. Improved standard of education 3. Improved access to clean and safe water in Kusa 4. Sound environmental management practices applied 5. Active/effective participation by community members in development activities 6. Improved cash economy and access to resources 7. Reduced disintegration of social order 8. Improved agriculture and livestock production 9. Improved infrastructure.



However (following Cooperative Society convention) the method for choosing the Central Committee executive officers used a delegate system. Thirty delegates were chosen – six from each zone – and traveled to Kisumu to elect the three senior posts of Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer.

Meanwhile, a separate election was held in Kusa to fill the positions of Women representative, Youth representative and CIG representative on the Central committee. The five elected Chairpersons from the zones also sit on the Central Committee, for a total of 11 members.

### Balanced leadership

- Among the **49 Common Interest Groups**, with 3 elected seats each (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer) 76 seats went to women and 59 to men [12 were not included in the count]. Women received 24 CIG chairperson seats.
- Among the **5 Zonal committees** (with 9 seats per committee), 22 seats were taken by women, 23 by men. Among chairpersons, two out of five were women.
- On the **Central committee**, four seats went to women, seven to men, including 1 youth.

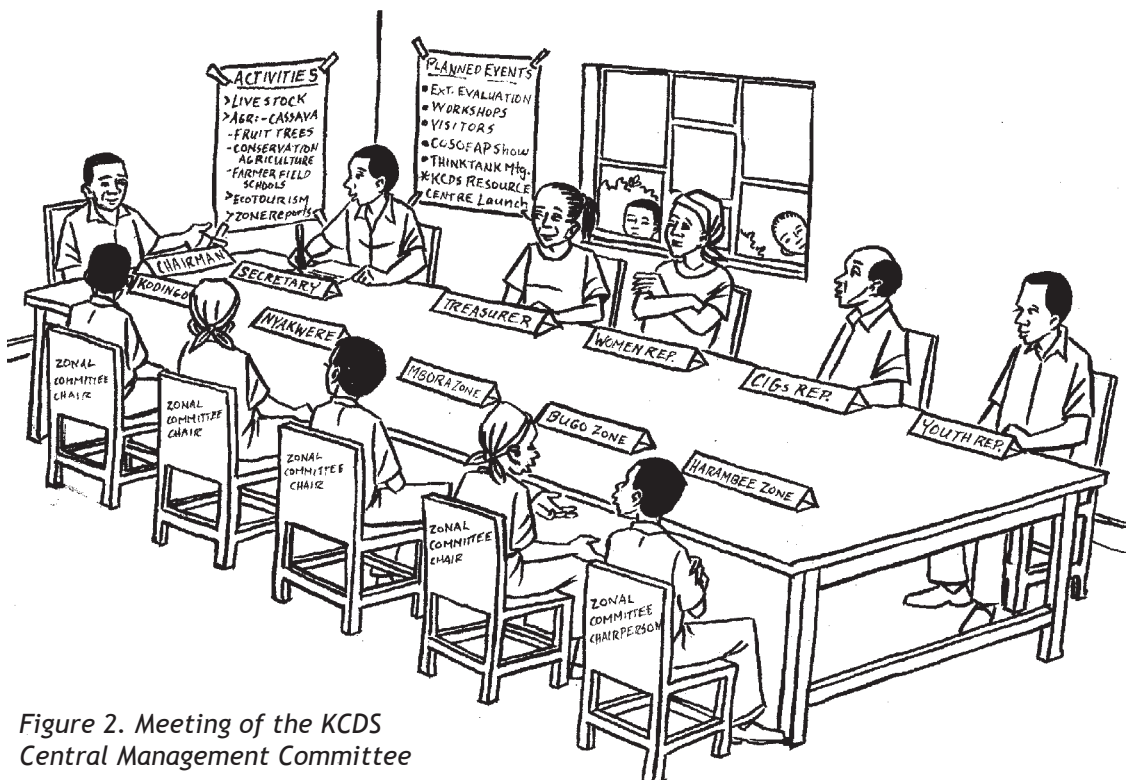


Figure 2. Meeting of the KCDS Central Management Committee



This election stands out in the Kusa experience as an indicator of women's empowerment and changing attitudes on gender. The wide promotion and open nature of the process encouraged large numbers of women and youth (as well as men) to get involved. Women outnumbered men as voters, and in gaining seats on the CIG committees.

Clearly, KCDS had a tremendous amount of work to achieve with its new formal status and management system. Sustainability of the Society soon became an issue. In the same year that all of this institution building was going on, RELMA itself (the chief architect) began the difficult process of moving from an autonomous operation (reporting to the Swedish Embassy/Sida) to a division within the World Agroforestry Centre. Support for most activities in Kusa officially came to an end in June 2004, a little more than one year following the second elections. A carry-over of unspent funding allowed certain activities – especially the materials and labour subsidy for building water tanks – to continue into early 2005.

Nevertheless, many significant goals were achieved with large numbers of people involved and working together towards the greater goal of community development.

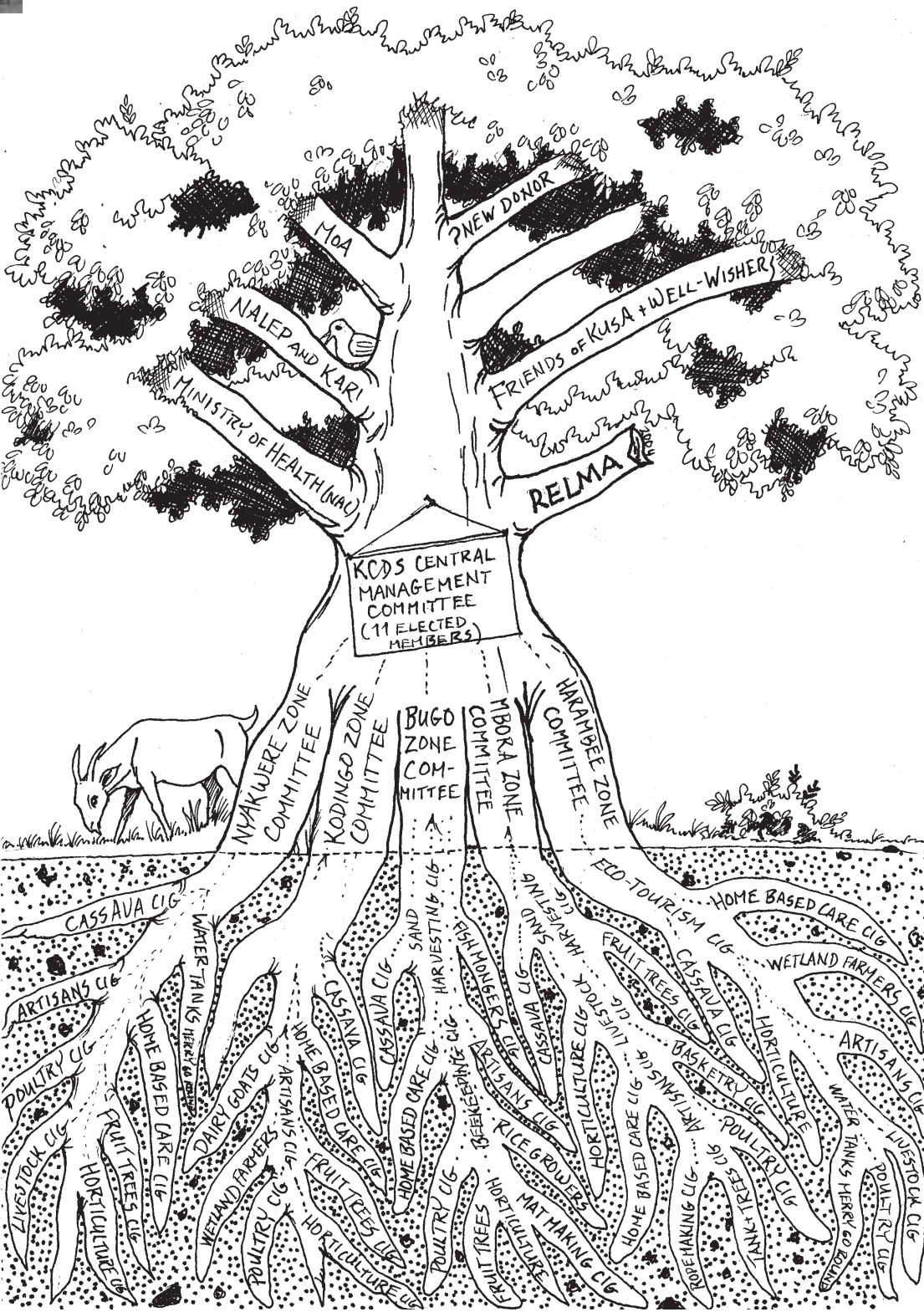


### Indicators of a ‘strong’ local institution

From the perspective of institutional strength, it helps to consider several indicators in light of what KCDS achieved in a short time. The list provided comes from a 2002 report on Institutional Strengthening for a Netherlands funded project.

- ✓ Institution is legitimate – i.e. is registered and has a constitution approved by a solid majority of stakeholders and has a legal status that permits enforcement of democratically agreed rules and regulations. Elected by majority community representation.
- ✓ Leadership is democratically elected by the community and holds elections regularly.
- ✓ Institution is autonomous and not unduly influenced by local politics or politicians.
- ✓ It practices equity in gender and socio-economic representation.
- ✓ It has the ability to mobilize and manage resources for the benefit of the community, including capacity to negotiate with outside stakeholders and service providers.
- ✓ It is effective in setting strategies and actions based on participatory principles.
- It has the ability to articulate development issues within the community including planning, implementation and monitoring & evaluation.
- It makes or takes decisions by consensus.
- It is transparent and accountable to the community - reporting on a regular basis to the assembly of representatives or the community.

The checklist above indicates the stage KCDS reached by the time this text was prepared. Within a very short time the Society demonstrated a commitment to many of the factors that distinguish a well-managed institution from a weak one. An important pointer to strong institutional development is how KCDS is perceived by its peers – or partners. An attempt is made in the following chapter to capture some of these perceptions, as we recount the roles and influence of the many other organizations who have joined hands with KCDS over the years.



*Figure 3. Common Interest Groups form the root system of the Kusa Community Development Society*

## Chapter 4

# Partners in construction



No community-led development initiative happens in a vacuum. This chapter examines the major sources of external assistance. It describes the stakeholders who contributed to project efforts along the way - and how. Emphasis is given to the unconventional approach taken by RELMA, and how the various relationships evolved. You will read about the partnerships that are ongoing and why.

## 4.1 Government Ministries role

In the 2004 internal evaluation report, Kenyan government departments received high scores from Kusa community members in the stakeholder analysis. These included the Ministries of Agriculture; of Health; of Livestock and Fisheries, among others. All were given a rating of 5, for “Critical player” when the team considered their role in the success of the project. Let’s examine what this meant on the ground.

### The Ministry of Agriculture

During the life of the Kusa Pilot Project, the Ministry of Agriculture provided increasing levels of extension support, for example on crop management with direct contributions of planting material such as cassava cuttings or seed. Kusa farmers were encouraged to request specific support through their CIGs and were more likely to get help from the Sida-funded National Agriculture/Livestock Extension Program (NALEP).

The project area straddles two administrative divisions: Upper and Lower Nyakach, which would normally complicate the role of government. But the Nyando District administrative infrastructure is rudimentary, the government facilities are basic, and lack of funds limit the ability of the staff to reach the field even under ideal conditions. The ‘turf’ factor was not a serious issue, but there were other problems.

Ministry staff have a lot of technical knowledge to offer and initially felt that the project by-passed them to bring in outsiders. Operations of NALEP, however, were constrained by the rigid planning and budgetary delays within the ministries. The pilot project was flexible and open-ended in comparison.

The Kusa project provided an entry point for ministry staff at the divisional level to participate and contribute to specific focal areas after CIG activities started in earnest (KCDS quarterly report, Oct-Dec 2003, p. 10). The project management included an officer from the Ministry of Agriculture and a livestock officer in a farmer exchange visit to Uganda, as well as other study tours. Community-wide events, like the exhibition organized for World Food Day, also furnished opportunities for staff to collaborate and offer input into the local project.

Despite the inequalities, the relationship generated healthy debate on how to improve extension services. The District Livestock Officer cited the example of the privatization of artificial insemination. Most farmers are too poor to afford the service, and the ministry lobbied for





the provision of a community bull that could serve many households involved in the livestock CIG at the same time -- despite Sida objections based on the 'hand-out' principle.

The ministry officers noted how RELMA sourced technologies from a much wider knowledge base, while adding that they are well-placed to test off-the-shelf technologies on the ground, such as conservation tillage. The extension services have also directly benefited from participating in the project. Staff incorporate the experience from CIG activities into their services; e.g. officers who participated in training on cassava processing are introducing the methods to other areas.

### **The Ministry of Health**

Through its Department of Public Health, the Ministry provides strong support and financial assistance to the Home Based Care CIGs. Training seminars on basic disease prevention and related health topics were provided for more than 100 members of these CIGs (see annex 2). This was followed up by provision of free bed nets and basic drugs. Even if overall coverage of this assistance was not complete, it still reached a major portion of Kusa households, and was bolstered by the voluntary work of the CIGs. Without the Ministry's input, the fight against HIV/AIDS would be an even greater struggle than it has been.

At the Divisional level, Public Health officers, in liaison with Chiefs, also monitored the community efforts to improve on waste management (location and use of garbage pits) and household sanitation (building dish racks, relocating pit latrines). The health officers also joined in training and promoting use of improved Eco-sanitation latrines at schools and homes in Kusa.

### **The Ministry of Education**

Through support to the 16 primary and 4 secondary schools in Kusa, the Ministry plays a critical role in the overall socioeconomic development of the community in two ways. First, as one of the major employers in the area, teachers salaries are a steady source of household income for investing in CIG activities and other project initiatives. Second, by introducing free primary education in 2003. This important policy change had a significant impact on the number of orphans that remained in school, and on the finances of poor households in general. Whereas the 2002 survey on orphans showed a very high percentage dropping out of school – girls especially – this situation improved with the advent of free primary schooling in 2003. Teachers at most Kusa schools took an active role in training on 'eco-sanitation', with improved latrines now operating at 14 of the 16 primary schools.



### **Field days and exhibitions**

In 2002 and 2003 KCDS participated in Kisumu regional shows. Society members exhibited farm produce and products, skills and knowledge, for example water tank construction, conservation farming, and approaches to fighting HIV/AIDS. The Kusa stands offered curious visitors information on many activities of the project, while farmers from Kusa who attended the shows gained new ideas and information from the other stands.

Representatives of many Nyando District offices took part with enthusiasm in the first Kusa Community field day held in June 2004. This was an event organized by KCDS specifically to share its work, especially that of the CIGs. The field day gave a much larger number of Society members the chance to display their produce and share experience, showcasing the multiple initiatives of the CIGs. Farmer field school members could share experience with a larger audience, as could other Kusa artisans. Several other stakeholders (most of those mentioned below) also took an active part in the field day.

The Provincial Commissioner of Nyanza, Nyando District Commissioner and many other public officials attended. Prizes were awarded to the most dynamic Common Interest Groups, as well as outstanding farmers and zones.

## **4.2 Lake Victoria region NGOs**

Several regional NGOs helped strengthen the capacity and raise the profile of Kusa beyond the immediate district boundaries. They continue to bring visitors to learn from the Kusa experience.

### **VI Agroforestry/LIFE**

VI-Agroforestry is a large, regional extension-oriented programme funded from Sweden, with headquarters in Kitale, Kenya. The project recently began to scale up activities in Nyanza, with 16 field-level extension workers covering Upper Nyakach Division of Nyando District. Kusa farmers benefit from the training activities, study visits and on-farm demonstration plots. VI officers are also based within the community to improve access to their skills.

### **Osienala ‘Friends of the Lake’**

In the early years, the Kisumu-based NGO Osienala gave strong support to the project planning stages. Osienala continues to promote awareness (via local FM radio broadcasting) and mobilize external



support for many issues in the lake region. With a new emphasis on savings and credit facilities for fisherfolk, they may renew the former relations with Kusa.

### **ECOVIC-Kenya**

ECOVIC, in Homa Bay, is the Kenya chapter of a regional body promoting environmental policy issues in the Lake Victoria basin. ECOVIC supports information gathering and sharing to several hundred member community groups, as well as active involvement in advocacy on their behalf. As a member of ECOVIC-Kenya, KCDS participates in annual seminars dealing with issues of natural resource management around the lake.

### **CARE-Kenya**

CARE ran a series of training workshops for members of women groups on primary health care. Although project support was ending when RELMA started working with Kusa, the vigor and capacity of several women groups carried over to the establishment of Home Based Care CIGs and other health-related initiatives of the Kusa project.

## **4.3 Consulting groups**

The project made extensive use of consultants to provide specialized services and to undertake research. RELMA contracted more than 40 consultancies employing 85 individuals over a five-year period. This policy was consistent with the bottom-up orientation of the pilot project. The work of three are mentioned, while noting that there were many other groups and individuals involved over the years.

### **ASAL consultants**

This group was contracted to provide training on erosion control/water harvesting, sand dam construction, and to build a cold storage facility at Kusa fish landing (presently not operating). Most importantly, the construction of four sand dams, soon followed by several more (one resident of Mbora zone took the initiative to build three sand dams where the gully was eroding his land) has raised the water table within a giant gully. Two CIGs earn significant cash income from harvesting the sand collected by these dams. ASAL consultants successfully transferred the knowledge and skills to design and build effective sand dams to Kusa. These dams have already made a dramatic difference in reducing erosion downstream, and supporting vegetation re-growth above the dam sites.



### **MajorStep consultants**

This local group was involved in many aspects of the Kusa project. The following helped build local organizational capacity in Kusa:

- Facilitating of year 2000 PRAs to develop action plans for each zone in Kusa.
- Facilitating an outreach training workshop for Mbora zone.
- Community oriented planning workshop, for all Kusa stakeholders.
- Formulating the project logical framework and elaboration of community action plans (jointly with Guiding Systems consultants).
- Briefing and guidance of the 2001 zonal committee elections.

MajorStep's training experience with other community groups, NGOs and international development organizations gave the team the leverage to have a positive influence on the new-born Kusa Community Development Society.

### **Farmer Field Schools for Kusa**

The work of an individual trainer has been instrumental in establishing a dynamic farmer field school in Kusa. In 2004 the first 'class' of 54 farmers completed the field school training course and received their certificates. They are now qualified to carry on running the field school programme on their own. Testimonies of several model farmers confirm a growing interest and application of the field school method, adapted to the unique conditions and constraints in Kusa.

## **4.4 Kusa Support Network**

Most of the institutions mentioned above also took part in the Kusa Support Network. The Kusa Support Network is a non-formal group of institutions and organizations that were stakeholders in the Kusa Project who met regularly to discuss activities, lessons learned and ways to strengthen the project. Their first purpose was to follow closely the progress of the project – making use of the quarterly reports, and offer advisory support to the Central Committee. A second function was to report to the different stakeholders on interesting aspects of activities in Kusa. Another important service was to bring in new ideas and identify resources to strengthen the implementation efforts.

Chapter four has expounded on the different supporting organizations that came to work in Kusa. We now turn to the 'root system' that has, from the beginning, anchored Kusa in very practical terms.

## Chapter 5

# CIGs - Engines to create wealth



**T**his chapter explores the heart of Kusa Community Development Society: more than 50 active Common Interest Groups (CIGs). A series of close-ups of several CIGs examines who participates, what they contribute, what they gain from being members. All CIGs work at the grassroots level, involving a majority of the households of the two Sub-locations. Read on to discover why CIGs are the driving force of local development in Kusa.



## 5.1 What is a Common Interest Group?

In Kusa, Common Interest Groups have become the back-bone of new development initiatives. They are “the main vehicle in the implementation process” (Winberg, p. 57).

To understand the dynamics of community development in Kusa – and of community-driven development in particular, we need a clear picture of how the Common Interest Groups operate. Before the Kusa Community Development Society was established, many social welfare and self-help groups already existed. For example, in Harambee Zone, there were 20 known groups in 2001. Fewer than half of these were formally registered with the Ministry of Gender, Culture and Sports – Department of Social Services. Most groups were dormant, while others were very active. Several provided the foundation for establishing strong CIGs, as in the case of the Harambee Home Based Care CIG (also known as Ritri Kendi women group).

The existing self help groups were mostly women’s groups with a general focus but no specialized activity. Members of these groups have varied interests and typically perform communal activities like house building, helping at funerals or collecting funds for individual household purchases like kitchen ware.

### CIG defined

A CIG is a group of individuals who are engaged in a common economic activity and who come together regularly to share experiences and solve common problems. Individual members of a CIG initiate the activity and receive all the benefits that come from participating. Consequently, individuals are highly motivated by a strong sense of ownership and responsibility.

The KCDS encourages formation of CIGs, because through them development reaches the household level. The CIGs are the actual implementers of Community Action Plans developed during the Zonal PRAs (in February 2000). They also take responsibility for monitoring and revising their plans.

Each CIG must register with the Department of Social Services - Ministry of Gender, Culture and Sports, as a Community Based Organization. Registration requires electing a committee to run its affairs according to agreed by-laws and regulations. In early 2005, there were 56 registered CIGs within the Society (see next page). CIGs run their affairs by themselves and report to the zonal committees as need arises. In turn, zonal committees report more-or-less on a monthly basis or whenever the central management committee meets.



**Table 1. Membership of Common Interest Groups in Kusa, March 2005**  
(updated from R. Winberg, p. 58)

Interest	Zone--> Bugo	Harambee	Kodingo	Mbora	Nyakwere	Groups	Members
Home Based Care	16	25	35	18	16	5	100
Artisans	13	10	11	21	7	4	62
<b>Agriculture</b>							
Cassava	65	29	41	30	21	6	182
Conservation tillage						1 (16)*	16
Drip irrigation				[10]		1 (18)*	18
Fruit trees	22		40	27	27?	4	116
Horticulture	33	19	28	60	65	5	205
Rice growers	40					1	40
Wetland farmers		32	26			2	58
<b>Livestock</b>							
Poultry	32	36	99	29	33	5	229
Dairy goats			28			1	28
Grade cattle		10	10	8	15	5 (20)*	71
Paravets						1 (10)*	10
Beekeeping	[40]		27			2 (10)*	37
Basketry				13		1	13
Mat making	38		14			2	52
Rope making				30		1	30
Tank construction		79			39	2	118
Tank & Trees				43		1	43
Building materials			27			1	27
Sand harvesting	33			12		2	45
Fishermen						1 (20)*	20
Fish mongers	28					1	28
Fish farming						1 (21)*	21
Eco-tourism						1 (35)	35
<b>CIGs per zone</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Total as of Feb. 2005</b>	<b>364</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>291</b>	<b>261</b>	<b>(122)</b>	<b>1664</b>

\*Groups with members in all 5 zones.

Numbers in [brackets] are groups not yet registered with KCDS, but active in the zone.

No direct financial support is given to the CIGs by the Society, apart from coordination of training and capacity building activities like those offered through RELMA or other partners.



The formation of CIGs has increased the idea of project ownership and greatly reduced a tendency for groups to wait for outside assistance before taking action. Many groups formed with the intention of boosting their bargaining power when marketing their produce and services. This is the case with fruit tree growers, poultry keepers, tank artisans and sand harvesting CIGs.

In Kusa, CIGs were unknown before year 2000. The concept of CIGs was an innovation in project management introduced from outside. By June 2001, there were only seven registered CIGs, dealing with early pilot activities such as water harvesting, sand harvesting, and fish marketing (R. Winberg, p. 44)

As the number of registered CIGs approaches 60, with a well-established forum of meetings and reporting continuing to function, the future management of household-level development efforts in Kusa is in capable hands.

## **5.2 Leading the fight against HIV-AIDS: Harambee Home Based Care**

Certain factors caused a rapid spread of the disease in Nyando/ Nyanza – this part of Kenya. The sudden collapse of the traditional fishing industry when the water hyacinth ‘plague’ arrived in mid-1990’s certainly played a part. Hundreds of fishermen were forced to move to more distant beaches, or migrate to urban centers in search of other work. Living outside their homes led to multiple sex partners. Those who did not protect themselves by practicing safe sex or using condoms (which were more often not available in the early years of the pandemic) contracted the disease, and brought it back to their wives.

The slow reaction by the government, which did not declare AIDS a national crisis until 1999 – nearly a decade after it was known to be spreading – may have also encouraged the attitude that the problem was not that serious.

A cultural feature in the spread of AIDS is the Luo tradition of wife-inheritance. When a married man dies, his brothers are heir not only to his property, but his surviving wife or wives as well (MajorStep PRA study report, 2000, p 9). In this way, men may end up also inheriting the very disease that caused the death of their brother.



Yet another factor was the influx of outsiders attributed to the construction of the Sondu-Miriu hydropower project, with its main offices and headquarters situated at the center of Kusa. The presence of so many single male workers, with income to spend probably added to the rate of HIV/AIDS infection in the community.

With so many factors interacting to help the virus spread, a coordinated community-wide response was called for, one that uses many methods. Awareness and behavior change are two of the top control factors in preventing HIV infection.

The Ritri Kendi Women Group was officially registered in 2001, but had already been operating as a self-help group for several years. In 2000, assisted by CARE-Kenya, all the group members were trained as community health workers. At the same time, a DfID/Futures Group funded NGO called HIV-AIDS Prevention and Care project (HAPAC) provided funds for the group to establish their own community pharmacy at Harambee market. The pharmacy is well-stocked, has a full time clerk, and serves as an information center for the community, while providing a small source of income for the HIV/AIDS awareness activities.

From the beginning, raising awareness was a high priority for Ritri Kendi group, which is also widely referred to as Harambee Home Based Care CIG. Members organized meetings and video-shows at schools, in churches and during public holidays. An important tool for spreading the message on the need for changing behaviour is theatre. Harambee and Bugo Home Based Care CIGs both use drama at public venues for bringing out the issues. Nearly every public event in Kusa is taken as an opportunity for keeping the fire burning on the AIDS crisis.

### Frightening facts

**In 2002, the Chiefs offices in Thurdibuoro and Nyalunya Locations recorded nearly 1,200 AIDS-related deaths\*, an average of 100 per month. The year before, a RELMA-supported survey of orphans in all five project zones found almost 2,000 children living with a widowed parent, and 635 children living without any parents (only grandparents, guardians, or alone).**

\*this number only accounted for people who died at home, it did not include hospital deaths.

### Caring for the most needy

Each one of the 25 group members takes responsibility for an orphan, as well as someone living with AIDS. Services include delivering food packages twice a month, providing counseling, making school uniforms, and making home visits twice monthly to people in need of home care. It is impossible to quantify the real value – in materials and time – that Ritri Kendi as well as the other home based care CIGs are providing, all given on a voluntary basis. Yet they are showing what is possible by working together and caring for the most affected households in Harambee Zone.

Two years ago, in 2003, when the HAPAC project ended, they appealed to the newly-formed National Aids Council to give financial support for their efforts. The Council provided 350,000 Kshs (including the other Home Based Care groups that were then starting) to strengthen the awareness and home care work.

Home Based Care CIGs are now working in each zone in Kusa, providing a greatly valued service, with very restricted resources. They serve as a link to outside (national and international) support networks for reaching as many AIDS-affected households in the community as possible.

### New hope from Uganda

In 2003, thirty Ugandans – all HIV-positive – came for a three-day visit to Kusa. The Aids Support Organization, or TASO, has been one of Uganda's most successful organizations in raising awareness on HIV/AIDS. A vital message from the group was the need to be tested and be aware of one's own status. Another message was that it is possible to live positively with the disease.

By sharing their personal stories of living with HIV, through school presentations and using drama, they showed how important it is to be open about AIDS. This event was an awakening to the reality of the situation for many residents of Kusa, and was even covered by national television.

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*“Since the TASO people came from Uganda, we youth are more aware of HIV. Before that only some of us knew about it. Now, Home Based Care makes announcements at football matches, and we go to their pharmacy or to KCDS office for prevention [condoms].”* Charles Odhiambo, Youth Representative, KCDS

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## Supporting orphans

When the 2001 health baseline identified a serious increase in orphaned children, RELMA commissioned a study to look into the situation. The survey found that Kusa has more than 630 orphans. In response, the Harambee Home Based Care CIG looked at ways to provide basic support. For the last three years, each member of the group has taken responsibility to care for one orphaned child. Contributions of time and scarce funds provide the 30 children (10 in secondary and 20 in primary school) with school uniforms, lesson books, a daily meal and other help with household needs. Some of these orphans are strong performers in school.

Kusa Community Development Society works to promote the efforts of Harambee Home Based Care and the other new CIGs. The groups are invited to all community meetings to perform dramas and promote openness about AIDS. KCDS helps link them with the Ministry of Health to obtain drugs, free bed nets and support for training. KCDS plans to open a VCT (Voluntary Counseling and Testing) center at their new resource center. In a community that has faced many other major challenges, it is remarkable that so much local charity is being channeled to cope with the problem.



Millicent Auma Ong'ole, Secretary of Harambee HBC, holds the trophy awarded to the group in 2004 for outstanding service to the community.

## 5.3 Harvesting water: 140 tanks in Mbora Zone alone

*This case looks at the work of the Mbora zone artisans CIG. It highlights how the major problem of water scarcity and poor quality has been tackled for a large number of households. Keep in mind that similar CIGs are working in all other zones.*

### The water problem

The situation of household water supply in Kusa, and especially in Mbora zone was serious before 1999. The baseline survey on wells commissioned by RELMA in 1999 showed that neighboring Kodingo zone has 130 wells, while Mbora has only nine. These wells and other water points are far apart, and not reliable. The survey also analyzed the water quality and found high levels of salinity in most shallow wells, in addition to contamination.

For Mrs. Perez Onyango, fetching water from the spring a kilometer down the steep hill below the house was once a daily chore that she happily no longer does. During the 2-month dry period of January and February this year, she has not been to the spring once. This is because she and her husband – both members of KCDS - now own two tanks with a combined capacity of 20,000 m<sup>3</sup> of rainwater. Having a reliable supply of safe water at home was once a dream. Now it is a reality for nearly one hundred households in Mbora zone and over 700 families throughout Kusa.

How were so many water tanks – which are relatively expensive – built in such a short time? Three important factors contributed: first, the need for safe water close to the household was severe. Second, local capacity to construct tanks of a high standard was created. Third, a method for raising adequate funds (to meet RELMA requirements for receiving a subsidy on materials) was applied that used a traditional revolving 'credit' approach – the merry go round. Once these three enabling conditions came together, many more water tanks were built than originally expected. To date, KCDS groups and artisans have built tanks for more than 20 percent of all households in Kusa.

When the Kusa Pilot Project began working in Mbora, Mrs. Onyango and many of her neighbors took part in the PRA and outreach exercises. They made it clear to the facilitators that water supply was the top priority. This was also the case for other villages in West Koguta sub-location.



To address the water problem at the community level, the idea of building a large capacity earth dam was raised during the early meetings. RELMA contracted an experienced water engineer to investigate. A site was selected by the community, and the land owners agreed to having a dam built on their property. For several months in late 1999, hundreds of Mbora residents gave many days to working on excavations, moving large stones, and building the spillway.

Excitement mounted over this big project and it brought the community together like no previous project activity. Surprisingly, the site was not well chosen, because the rocky subsoil is too stony and porous. Although the dam fills up during the rains, water seeps under and around the embankment and within a short time is gone. This failure, however, convinced the Onyango family and others in Mbora how important rainwater harvesting at the household level was.

At about the same time, a rainwater tank construction exercise was carried out in which several demonstration tanks were built, during which twelve local artisans received hands-on training. Some tanks were large, built at local schools, others were small, for household use. The cost was rather high for a majority of Kusa residents. The question was: how could everyone afford to build their own tank?

### **Laikipia study tour**

In 2002, RELMA supported a study tour for ten people to travel to Laikipia to see a successful community rainwater harvesting project. There, local self-help groups with assistance from the Semi-Arid Rural Development Project (SARDEP), were building not dozens, but hundreds of household water tanks. They were using a group approach to collecting local materials for building several tanks at once, by submitting detailed proposals to SARDEP who contracted out the work to trained artisans. The Kusa visitors saw how the community in Laikipia had organized themselves to tackle such a big job: 700 tanks were built in 2001 alone in certain parts of Laikipia. RELMA realized the existing approach in Kusa was too slow and agreed to provide a 49% cost subsidy (see table below). This was an important shift in policy which enabled many more poorer households to also benefit from tank-building.

### **Forming the CIG**

The Mbora Artisans CIG organized themselves in 2002. Preparing by-laws for the group and getting registered with the Ministry of Social Services were the first steps. Soon after, the new CIG applied for support from RELMA to begin building their first tanks.



In 2002, an intensive practical training workshop (provided by Land Use Consultants) provided the necessary skills to 10 CIG members – 6 of whom were women. At first some men scoffed at the idea of women doing such difficult work. But the women soon proved they could build tanks just as well as men.

That first year, the group built about 15 tanks. Members of the group even traveled to other districts – even to Tanzania – to build rainwater tanks and train artisans at other RELMA-funded projects. These outside contracts gave the Kusa artisans confidence and reinforced their skills. Now a highly skilled builder, Mrs. Onyango has supervised construction of 25 to 30 water tanks around Mbora.

### After RELMA

Because of their strong commitment to helping the community, the Mbora CIG plans to continue building tanks – even without the 49% material subsidy RELMA was giving. Clean, safe water is just too important to improving living standards.

In March of this year (2005) the rains were starting, promising to refill the 140 tanks in Mbora and begin again the cycle of storing precious water. Water for new-born grade calves, for hundreds of newly hatched chicks, for fruit tree seedlings, and of course for the drinking and cooking needs of entire families. Water enough for more productive farming systems. Now that the days are over when hours would be spent carrying a few jerry cans of water from the distant spring, Mbora women can concentrate on more challenging enterprises, such as keeping poultry or marketing their baskets and other handicrafts.

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*“... in one strike the water tanks have managed to satisfy not only the goals of poverty reduction and environmental improvement, but also related Kusa Project priority objectives, such as gender equity and improved health. It has also provided the creation of a new professional cadre: tank artisans. The tanks have provided clean water as well as expanded livelihood activities, thereby reducing infection rate of waterborne diseases. ”* Sandström, External Evaluation, p. 34

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**Table 2. Cost of a standard 6m<sup>3</sup> water tank (prices as of 2003)**

Left column shows materials purchased/supplied by tank owner, right column provided by RELMA

Item	Ksh	Item	Ksh
5 bgs cement @ 560/ ea.	2,800	5 bgs cement @ 560/ ea.	2,800
One lorry-load sand	1,800	7 pieces weld mesh @ 300/=	2,100
¼ lorry ballast	600	7 metres chicken wire	530
½ lorry hard core	800	3 plain sheetmetal @ 340/=	1,020
Poles – 20 pieces @ 60/=	1,200	½ bag building lime @ 220/=	110
Curing materials – polythene sheet	400	½ kg bondex @ 150/=	75
11 gunny bags @ 40/=	440	Coffee tray @ 180 x 0.25	45
2 kg sisal twine @ 110/= ea.	220	1 manhole cover	430
½ kg roofing nails	65	Tapping unit @ 750/=	750
Normal nails	70	3mm G.I. wire @ 115/=	70
35 drums water x 60/= ea	2,100	4 m polythene sheet @ 60/=	240
Material handling	300	1mm G.I wire @ 115/=	115
Administration by Zonal officials	100	2 kg binding wire @ 90/=	180
<b>Total</b>	<b>11,095</b>	Skilled labor	2,000
		<b>Total</b>	<b>10,695</b>
<b>Total cost: 11,095</b>	<b>51%</b>		<b>49%</b>



With plenty of clean rainwater stored in her tanks, Perez Onyango and her neighbors have more time for income generating activities, like basket weaving.

## 5.4 CIGs improve poultry production

In Kusa, uncontrolled poultry diseases and poor management of chicks are major obstacles to increasing poultry production. These were the most important findings of a baseline survey on traditional poultry keeping, done in May 2002. This was the first time any study on poultry production was done in the area, and it yielded some interesting information. Virtually all households in Kusa kept chicken, the average size of a flock was 24 birds, but productivity was very low due to disease and poor management.

The RELMA livestock advisor realized there was great untapped potential in local chicken. They contracted a specialist to devise a training program for farmers who wanted to improve their poultry keeping practices. This simple idea struck a common chord of strong interest, especially among women farmers. Why?

### Chicken traditions

In the Luo household, women are typically the poultry owners. They always keep a small flock of birds for eggs and the occasional special dinner guest. Poultry serve as a bank account too. When a small amount of money is needed for household expenses, a rooster or older hen is sold. But the idea that more substantial income – approaching several thousand shillings per month – could be earned from local poultry was something new. The 2002 survey also found that most farmers had little knowledge about exotic poultry breeds, and lacked investment capital. But everyone could at least begin with what they had, and improve on it.

In the Luo tradition, a grandparent will give a young chicken to the grandchild. This is the starting point for learning how to care for livestock. Keeping poultry is the first step to building up domestic stock. When the chick grows into a healthy brood hen, some birds are sold to buy a lamb or goat kid. The lamb in turn will grow, reproduce and the eventual offspring sold or traded for a calf. Thus that first baby chick might ultimately be the source of wealth and status.

### New skills and structures

Poultry CIGs were soon established in all zones. Each one elected a management committee and made its own rules or bylaws. For example, one requirement of Bugo and other poultry CIGs was that each member should build a proper hen house, with nesting boxes, good ventilation and adequate protection for chicks.





After completing his survey, the consultant hosted a Kusa-wide one-day poultry seminar in each zone to popularize the idea of upgrading local poultry. The 120 community members who attended worked out simple 'action plans' for each Project zone. These plans listed and prioritized key activities including vaccination, building chicken houses, training and marketing.

The five new CIGs kicked off a revolution in poultry management in the community. At the beginning, fewer than one in 15 people kept poultry in a specially-built house (T. Kaudia, p. 8). They let them roost in the kitchen or the main house. By the end of 2004, among the 32 members of Bugo Poultry CIG, one third have built improved houses such as the one seen below.

### Vaccination campaign

Each member must ensure that their flocks are vaccinated against Newcastle disease. To facilitate this, the trained paravets working in each zone were enlisted to obtain bulk vaccines from Kisumu Agrovet and give all older birds, and newly hatched chicks among group members their initial dose. Protection against Newcastle requires a series of several vaccinations, which calls for good record keeping and vigilant follow-up. All Poultry CIGs have members trained to give vaccinations. This has been the most important benefit of Poultry CIG membership, since high disease mortality was the main deterrent to making a profit from poultry.

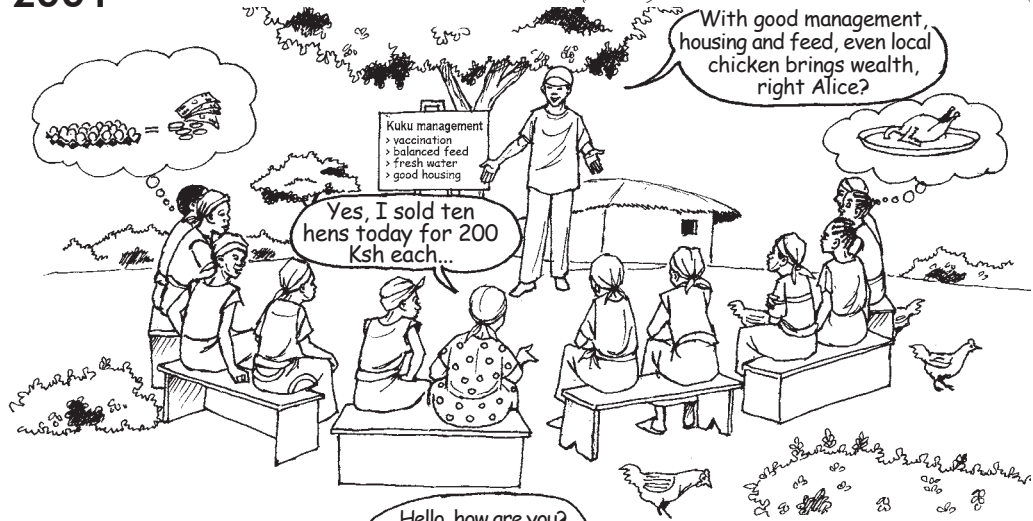


John Odingo, chariman of Bugo Poultry CIG, promotes keeping grade hens.

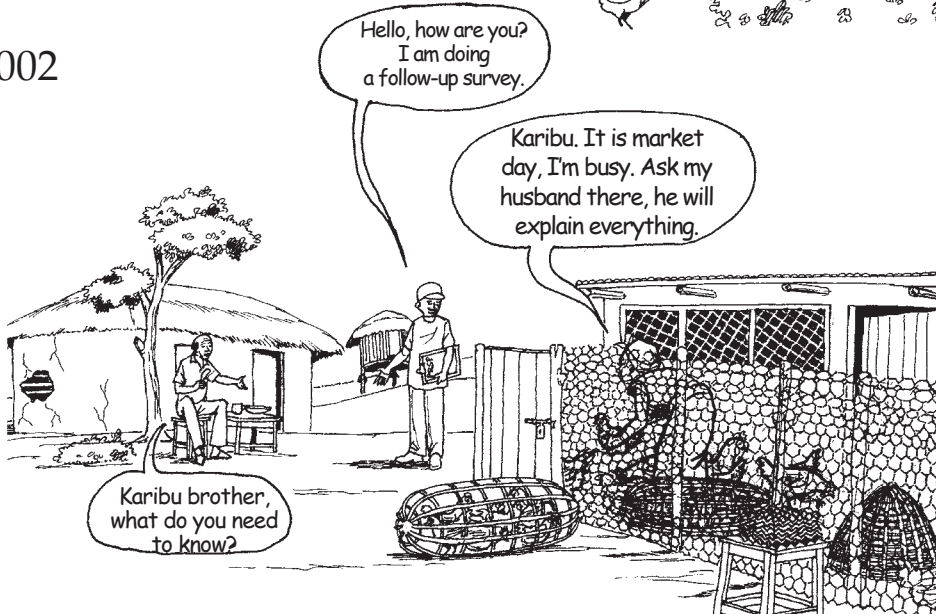
2000



2001



2002





The poultry CIGs also offer low-cost vaccination service (1 Ksh per bird) to anyone requesting it. The aim is to establish a disease-free area across the zones. The service is well used with serious outbreaks of Newcastle and other diseases rarely occurring.

In Kodingo Zone, the poultry CIG has more than 90 members, all of them keeping between 15 and 100 chickens. The cost of building an improved poultry house may still be a deterrent to getting optimum returns, but it has become a priority for the majority of poultry keepers. Every zone has 'model' poultry farmers who are willing offer advice and encouragement.



Improved poultry house in Nyakwere, owned by Pascalia Nyabindo and managed by her grandchildren.

### Marketing advantage

For members of Bugo Poultry CIG, another important advantage comes via collective marketing. The group sends a chosen member to Kisumu who collects orders from the major hotels. When the birds are delivered, transport and out-of-pocket costs for the person taking them to Kisumu are the only expenses, thus keeping marketing cost to a minimum. Members are free to market extra birds locally. Sales of eggs, day-old chicks, hens and improved cocks are a steady source of income to offset other farm and household expenses.

### More eggs than fish in Kusa

The greatest potential for reducing poverty comes from within – but is often overlooked. CIGs promoting improved poultry management are working in all five zones in Kusa. They are upgrading a livestock resource that was already available to virtually every household. With combined membership of 229 people (15 per cent of total KCDS membership in 2004), Poultry CIGs are the most popular, and most profitable activity, especially for women. Of all the farming technologies yet introduced, it offers the greatest return – in high value food and cash income – from sales of live birds within zones and outside Kusa. Poultry keeping might ultimately exceed fishing as the main source of protein, and income, for hundreds of households in Upper and Lower Nyakach Divisions.



## 5.5 Five thousand fruit trees and growing

The lakeshore climate is ideal for growing many different fruit trees in Kusa. Yet before the project began, very few farmers planted improved varieties of fruit trees on their land. In 2000, no one in the location possessed the skill of grafting, and no one had the new varieties of mango. Five years later, more than 5000 fruit trees are growing, most of them grafted (Winberg p. 120). More than 50 farmers now possess the skill of grafting.

Many yrees are yielding fruit already. You can buy high-quality ‘Kent’ and ‘Ngoe’ mangoes when they are in season at local markets. Prices are high: 20 Ksh or more for a single fruit, while a small indigenous mango sells for just one Ksh each or even less.

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*“With our encouragement and the technical skills of our CIGs, so many farmers are planting the grafted mangos. After 5 to 7 years, most households will have fruit-producing trees of their own.” says the KCDS Chairman, John Odingo.*

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### Good business

Three local tree nurseries now also sell grafted fruit seedlings. One is in Nyakwere beside the Sondu Miriu river, owned and managed by Charles Otieno. Charles is among the 20 people who were trained by a specialist with the Ministry of Agriculture on grafting and nursery management. Surrounding neat blocks of many different tree seedlings, you see ten large compost piles in different stages of becoming high-quality potting soil. Charles carries all the water (two dozen trips to the river every day!) by hand for irrigating his 7,000 tree seedlings. Luckily, the river is nearby!

In the beginning, he notes it was difficult to obtain enough scions (cuttings for grafting) but now his own fruit trees at home are the main source. Demand for the seedlings is very high, even at a price of 100 Ksh per grafted tree. Many farmers prefer to plant the local rootstock right on their farm, and pay Charles or another tree specialist to come do the grafting on site. This method of propagation is more reliable, faster and less costly than raising young trees from seed in a nursery. As soon as the rains begin, however, Charles knows all 200 of the grafted seedlings in his nursery will have buyers.

### All the way from Embu

Margaret Ondiegi is chairperson of the Kodingo Fruit Growers CIG. She grows more than a dozen kinds of fruit trees, and also many other





useful species. Her 5-acre farm is home to hundreds of fruit trees. Perhaps most unusual, six of these fruit trees have been planted on top of portable latrine pits – known as ‘Ecosan’ latrines. On pointing to one large, healthy orange tree, Margaret said *“this was the first one, planted five years ago. You can see it is already giving me fruit. I add one every year, after digging a new pit to move the latrine over to.”* Although the idea did not catch on the way RELMA had hoped, it still may, once others see the results of Margaret’s example.

In 1998, Mrs. Ondiegi went on a study tour to Embu to learn about improved mango varieties. Six people from each Sub-division (of Lower and Upper Nyakach) were selected to visit successful fruit tree farmers in Embu. When the twelve farmers returned, they decided to organize themselves and begin producing seedlings to plant their own orchards, and to sell to neighbors.

She is most proud of her selected mango varieties. One 15-foot high mango tree that is only five years old (grafted in 2000) is already yielding three *different* varieties of fruit: Tommy Atkins, Vandyke and Kent. The tree is her main source of scions for grafting. Her skills are in demand all around the neighborhood now. She charges 30 Ksh for providing the scion and making the graft. More than 50 of her neighbors and other farmers own grafted mangoes thanks to her work.



Margaret Ondiegi presents a sample of her fruit orchard production. She is holding one of her prize ‘Ngoe’ mangoes which sell for 20 Ksh each.

### From seedling to eating, to cash income

About 10 members of the Kodingo Fruit Growers CIG have been trained how to do grafting. From the trees that are growing in their own fruit orchards, they can select good quality scions and graft them onto local rootstock. Now that the word is out that Kusa is a source for high quality fruit tree varieties, farmers come from long distances to buy seedlings. Margaret Ondiegi keeps a tally of seedlings and fruit sold. In the December 2004 –January 2005 season, Margaret earned more than 7,000 Ksh from selling seedlings and fresh fruit.

Members of the CIG meet about once a month to discuss their plans for expanding fruit production. This planting season (that begins with the rains in March) is always the most busy for Margaret.

### Emphasis on quality

Using a combination of exposure to other successful fruit farmers, on-site training, and bringing the best quality grafting material to Kusa, the project gave a strong boost to the idea of improving on-farm fruit production. The skills were not complex, and could be transferred from one individual to another. The tools needed are not expensive, and can readily be obtained in Kisumu. Establishing a small nursery at home does not need a big investment in capital, and can bring quick returns in cash. Members with a nearby water point, or a water tank at the household, or – as in Charles Otieno's case - a river close by, can keep their seedlings well watered through the hot dry season.



Two skilled grafters, Mzee Bowa Marita and Joseph Onyango, beginning to harvest the fruits of their labour.





On the other hand, some CIG members may over extend their capacity to keep newly-planted trees from drying out during the dry season. Planting too many fruit trees at once can lead to losses, especially if the rains are poor.

### Expanding the market

With many people doing their own grafting, one idea is for the KCDS to use the new resource center as a central sales point. CIG members will bring extra seedlings there, where a qualified manager can then sell the trees to visitors. A sales commission (10%) will go to the Society for the service. Several grafted fruit trees have already been planted around the Kusa Community Resource Centre compound.

Where the water table is high – as it is close to the lake shore and along the rivers, mango trees grow very well. This is clear from seeing many large old mango trees in Nyakwere zone. People once thought it took too long for mangos to bear fruit.

The Kodingo Fruit Growers CIG, and those in three other zones, have changed everyone's way of looking at mangoes. New varieties brought from KARI-Embu, Yatta - Kitui and other locations around Kenya are producing fruit within four years. People like Margaret sell grafted seedlings for 30 to 50 shillings, and demand outpaces supply. Each rainy season, several hundred more mango trees are being planted.

## 5.6 The diversity factor

In Kusa, at the farm/household level, there is a very important change being spearheaded by a small, but growing group of 'model farmers'. The change is complex, but fairly easy to see – if one only looks closely.

What is this change? There has been an increase of diversity – of tillage methods, crop varieties, of trees, of livestock, and diversity of skills – on hundreds of farms in Kusa. Over the life of the Kusa pilot project, as we have seen from previous descriptions, strong emphasis was given to sending small groups on study tours and exposure visits. These visits were often to other farmers using production methods and technologies not known in Kusa. Sometimes the visits were just within Kusa to observe a particularly good cassava crop – other times a group of up to 20 farmers traveled by bus to see a new method like conservation tillage and cover crop management in Rachuonyo District, for example. The visitors brought back more than ideas. In many cases, Kusa farmers



brought back new plant material – seeds, trees, cassava cuttings, and other potentially valuable additions to the crop mixture (see box below).

### Stability improved

Together with this increased diversity, there is an increase in soil stability. Farmers are digging infiltration ditches, ‘tumbukiza’ pits and ‘fanya juu’ terraces. They are making changes in tillage, using soil-conserving ‘Magoye ripper’ plows, sowing cover crops, planting thousands of trees. All these efforts prevent or reduce erosion, while protecting and enriching soils.

With erosion one of the major causes of environmental decline, this improved stability is indeed already showing big gains in crop yields, rain water infiltration, tree growth and other aspects of environmental recovery in Kusa. No, the erosion problem in Kusa has not yet been solved. But the community knows how to solve it, and is working on securing the resources to continue the vital work.

Hand-in-hand with the increasing on-farm diversity there is an increase in tree-crop-livestock interactions. While researchers try to study and measure these interactions, farmers are the ones who make them happen, and reap the benefits. Kusa is a ‘real-world research centre’ on this interesting subject, with Kusa farmers running it themselves. Since 2003, with support from KARI /Kisii [and the Rockefeller Foundation], there is a functioning Farmer Field School. The focus of field studies has been on learning to evaluate and select crop varieties grown under local conditions. More than 50 new crop varieties are being evaluated by participating farmers in every zone.

### Increased agricultural diversity in Kusa since 2000

Banana:	24 varieties being evaluated on farm [most notably Washington Owala’s banana trials]
Cassava:	6 high-yielding and disease resistant varieties.
Mango:	6 new varieties introduced (Kent, Ngowe, Tommy Atkins, Vandyke, etc.)
Soya bean:	3 varieties
Sweet potato:	6 varieties
Fodder:	6 - 8 species of fodder plants, e.g. Napier, boma Rhodes, sesbania, calliandra, leucaena and others
Multi-purpose legumes: (fodder, soil-protecting, food):	Dolichos lablab, mucuna (velvet bean), Silverleaf desmodium

*Note: this summary is not comprehensive - it does not include new varieties obtained by farmers on their own visits to other farmers and research centers.*



## CASE STUDY: Weaving an integrated farming system

Joshua and Perez Onyango's farm in Mbora zone is a good example of the gradual increase in productivity and income from a sequence of investments (see table). Mr. Onyango is one of several 'model farmers' in the community.

Just a few years ago, before he retired from his teaching work, the 8-acre farm had several problems, soil erosion being the most serious, and water shortage another. The presence of stray livestock, and even troops of marauding monkeys from the hills above the farm were - and remain - a threat to crops and fruit trees.

*"Up to now, erosion has been controlled"* Onyango says this is the most important change you can see on the farm.

By first investing in permanent soil conserving and water harvesting structures - the 8 *fanya juu* terraces - he has nearly stopped all erosion within the cultivated area. That was only the beginning. On one terrace plot, there is a long line of 30 4 x 4m shallow pits, known as 'tumbukiza' with napier grass growing in them. They also capture run-off from heavy rains, and provide a steady source of cut-and-carry fodder for his dairy cows. Just beside these, Joshua grows leucaena and calliandra trees. Calliandra is a popular nitrogen-fixing tree that grows fast and serves many purposes: fodder for livestock, fuel wood, bee-forage, soil-enrichment, windbreak.

The rows of napier grass and calliandra are placed close to the cattle pen, to keep time spent cutting fodder and feeding animals to a minimum. Even so, this is a time-consuming job needing about three hours every day. *"With two of us - my young son and I cut and feed our cows thrice each day"* Mr. Onyango explains.

This is the second crucial change in managing the land: the switch from free-range livestock grazing to controlled, or 'zero grazing'. *"By November 2001 once we had enough Napier grass growing on the farm, I stopped using the free range grazing."* But he still has trouble with goats and cattle getting in from the neighbors, to browse his good cover crop of dolichos lablab. Uncontrolled livestock grazing was referred to during the first PRA as a major cause of erosion in Kusa. It is still becoming a more heated issue, as more people take up improved management and on-farm fodder production, but have difficulty convincing their immediate neighbors to stop leaving animals to roam freely.

Mr. Onyango is one of ten trained paravets working in Kusa - two for each Zone - and spends much of his time providing animal health advice and services around the village.

Keeping poultry and dairy cattle under intensive management means a large amount of rich farmyard manure is now available that was mostly lost under the free range system. This manure now gets spread before each rainy

*continues...*



season with priority given to those plots with the poorest fertility and structure. Some of the manure is also applied to the 50 grafted mango trees Joshua began planting in 2001. As a founding member of the Mbora Fruit Growers CIG, he has been trained how to do grafting. Although just four years old, several of his mango trees began yielding fruit in 2005.

Creating an integrated farming system however requires a huge amount of hard work. The cost of hired labour is a major challenge during all of these efforts. Hiring casual labour is relatively expensive. However on certain jobs like digging terraces and tumbukiza pits, the one-time cost of labour is soon compensated by the increasing productivity from the treated land.

### Main investments since 1999

Year	Item	Cost
1998:	1st water tank (15m <sup>3</sup> ) at the house - built with KRA subsidy.	70,000 Ksh
1999:	Sisal live fence around the farm and boma.	3,000 Ksh
2000:	Digging 8 <i>fanya juu</i> terraces	4,000 Ksh
2001:	Fodder: Digging 30 ' <i>tumbukiza</i> ' pits, planting Napier grass	3,000 Ksh
2002:	2 <sup>nd</sup> water tank (6m <sup>3</sup> ) at the dairy (49% subsidy from RELMA)	11,000 Ksh
2002:	Dairy cattle - a cow and a heifer	22,000 Ksh
2003:	Poultry house costing about 15,000	15,000 Ksh
2003-4:	Shallow well - 45 feet deep (not functional)	15,000 Ksh
2004:	Two Langstroth beehives x 4,200	8,400 Ksh
2005:	Fencing boundary of farm to keep out neighbors goats	20,000 Ksh
		<b>Total: 171,400 Ksh*</b>

\*US \$2,250 at 2005 exchange rates

Following a well-planned progression of investments and improved management practices, Mr. Onyango, his wife and family are developing a farm with higher diversity of crops and animals, and good integration between the various productive activities.

*Note: some readers may wonder why the Onyango family received such emphasis. Field time did not allow extensive interviews (to get similar stories) from other families, even though many other Kusa farmers are developing integrated farming practices. The intent is to give a detailed picture for readers to better understand how Kusa farmers are improving production. The authors have no intention to detract from efforts of others, nor give the impression that the Onyango case is exceptional. Hundreds of other farm families in Kusa have made similar improvements.*

## Chapter 6

# Lessons from Kusa



Previous chapters have covered the background, process of implementing, and selected achievements of the Kusa Project. From the early stages it was conceived as one aimed at learning. Learning for those who are planning other projects within Lake Victoria region. Learning for those who wish to support other communities to take over the challenge of reducing poverty while rehabilitating the environment. The difficulty is that so much has been learned by so many people, it needs another volume to capture it all. This chapter looks at the main lessons learned along the way to securing the future for the Kusa community.

For everyone who has been directly involved in the Kusa Community Development Society, learning has been a big part of the experience. For future programmes that support community-based development and institution building to gain from the Kusa experience, the major lessons must be shared in ways that directly influence project planning.

One of the best ways to do this is to use the same approach that brought so much valuable knowledge to Kusa during recent years: study tours and exchange visits. KCDS warmly welcomes other groups and individuals to come and see for themselves how the Society operates, and how the many CIGs continue to apply knowledge and skills gained during the 'RELMA period'. Hopefully readers will use this book and especially this chapter to decide which aspects of Kusa experience may be relevant to learn more about during a scheduled visit (see Annex 3 for contacts).

## Lesson 1. Seeing is believing

This is a lesson for everyone implementing *any* project. As a learning strategy, study tours and exposure visits to other regions were a major component of the Kusa project. What made them so effective in motivating individuals? Here are several important points common to many of them.

### Select participants with care

When selecting who will go for a particular study tour, the relevant committee or facilitator considers how the experience will be applied. In most cases, people were chosen based on their membership in CIGs that were planning to implement a related activity.

### Choose from each zone, replicate through CIGs

After the project area was formally partitioned into five zones, people were chosen for some study tours or training courses according to zone. E.g. when planning for a 2002 study tour to visit a water harvesting project in Nakuru, two people from each zone were identified. The same was true when paravet training was organized in 2001. The experience and new ideas gained during the study tours were spread evenly across the area, and were therefore less likely to be lost if one or two individuals left Kusa.





### Visit similar agro-climatic regions

Study tours to other regions also avoided the high potential regions, going to medium or even lower potential areas such as Machakos/Kitui or the dry parts of Nakuru (700mm rainfall/year). Seeing others succeeding with new production methods under more difficult conditions was a strong motivating factor.

### Gain a vision from communities facing similar challenges

Few things are as inspiring as meeting and hearing other farmers explain how they are using new methods successfully (fruit tree grafting & pruning, pond construction/management, HIV/AIDS awareness, etc.). Such visits set off a chain reaction within Kusa, giving groups a common vision to work toward. If you go to Kusa today, you can find this vision being re-created on many homesteads and farms across the area.

## Lesson 2. HIV/AIDS debacle

Much has been done at many levels to raise awareness and encourage open dialog about the reality of HIV/AIDS in Kusa. The Home Based Care CIGs have been the leaders in the ongoing campaign. Resources provided by various stakeholders for training on counseling, for exposure visits and exchanges, for community pharmacies, have been well used and much appreciated, but are not yet adequate to meet the challenge of controlling the spread of HIV.

Plans are in place to establish a VCT (Voluntary Counseling and Testing) center at the new community resource center, if support is forthcoming from the Ministry of Health. This will certainly help many individuals.

However, in the long run, a great deal of the donor resources invested in training and providing new skills to people will be lost unless the sexually active members of the community *change their behavior*. Awareness, as important as it is, is not enough.

More emphasis must be given to convince the youth to abstain from unprotected sex. Their future is still in jeopardy – and it is the future of the entire community. Scarce resources diverted to caring for the sick and burying the dead might otherwise be allocated to productive activities. Could these resources even exceed those that Sida/RELMA invested in Kusa from 1999 to 2004? The reality is that nobody knows.

Future Lake Victoria Basin projects must assess the HIV/AIDS situation from a socio-economic viewpoint to determine an adequate response. “According to data collected from the survey on schools within the project area, there are 653 orphans (of a total school population of 4,865) in the 22 schools.” (Okado, 2001 Baseline Survey on Schools). A coordinated program to raise capacity for providing educational and home-based support for all orphans could be in-built for future long-term community support projects.

### **Lesson 3. Merging environmental management with reducing poverty**

The two broadly stated KCDS goals are poverty reduction and environmental improvement. When people are forced to exploit the environment by the daily struggle of survival (especially in times of drought), these two broad objectives often oppose each other, at least where the latter calls for participating in group activities that are time and labour intensive. Normally, people who have very limited time and money can not afford to work (voluntarily) for large environmental rehabilitation initiatives when they have little to gain. To expect them to do so is unrealistic. Even so, in Mbora zone, a large community earth dam was built with tremendous community contribution of labour – and viewed as very successful in terms of mass mobilization. Yet the structure never performed according to the engineered plans: all impounded water rapidly seeps beneath the dam wall. In this sense, it is also viewed by the community as a failure. However, people living near the dam valley have gained significant benefits from the raised water table by digging fish ponds and shallow wells.

The last section of chapter 5 showed that heavy investment is also needed – both in training and on-farm assets – to break away from levels of household productivity that are below the ‘poverty line’. Even the most popular and successful aspect of the Kusa project – household water harvesting – could not take off without the 49% material subsidy from RELMA. This policy provided a strong incentive for many residents to raise the funds and resources to build tanks.

Environmental degradation from over-use of natural resources always extends beyond the boundaries of the household or even the sub-location. This is very clear in Kusa, where the lake fishery, Nyando wetlands and Nyakach hillside pasture and woodlands continue to be heavily exploited, even as the community has made admirable progress on erosion control and farmland protection.



Reversing decades of environmental decline (forest cover and topsoil loss, surface and ground water pollution) requires massive investment over large areas. It calls for coordinated work by government agencies, NGOs and community groups alike. Economic returns are slow to materialize from such investments, and resource-poor households simply do not have the time or money to contribute. Or do they? Patience also pays. People who took time and established permanent planting basins for fruits and Napier grass are now earning more money.

In Kusa, ways were found to mobilize human resources that were dormant (dozens of self-help groups and the youth). Methods were introduced – tanks, sand dams, gabions, terraces, and infiltration pits – that quickly converted the erosive force of runoff into productive opportunities: water for drinking, cooking, poultry keeping, fodder production for zero-grazing livestock, fruit tree-growing, fish ponds and many other uses.

RELMA killed two birds with one stone by using water harvesting as the entry point for improving lives and the environment. Building the human and physical capacity to manage and harvest water showed that the local environment can be rehabilitated at the same time as improving health and raising household income. Everything else would follow. The Kusa community understood this, and became the owner and custodian of this vital concept. A close look at the activities of virtually all CIGs in Kusa reveals a clear link to water management. From sand harvesting to poultry keeping, from cassava and fruit tree growing to eco-tourism, water is the focal point.

*What is the lesson?* If you want to address environmental conservation and alleviate poverty, focus on water harvesting. It is interesting to note that the latest study to be done in Kusa, in early 2005, looked carefully at all water harvesting activities undertaken by the project, documenting the efficiency and effectiveness of them. The lessons are very important, and will be shared via a water harvesting technical manual currently in preparation.

## Lesson 4. Institution building

Potentially the most valuable lesson – or series of lessons – for other communities and supporting donors around Lake Victoria is how the Kusa Community Development Society became established. This is the subject of Chapter 3. One lesson is that it takes a minimum of *five years* to accomplish (1999 – 2004). The first two years were for “introduction, learning about aspirations and capacities, prioritizing problems,

possible solutions and the stakeholders to know each other” (Winberg, p 125). In brief: relationship building and planning. This was followed by three more years of combined training and practical application of the new organizational structure and constitutional framework.

The illustration of the Kusa ‘Societree’ is somewhat exaggerated, but captures the key elements. A deep ‘root system’ in the form of revitalized Common Interest Groups – linked to each other by individuals who participate in several CIGs simultaneously. These groups feed directly into the middle-management of Zonal Committees, which form a key part of and inform the senior management (the CMC) about what is going on in each zone. The CMC, meanwhile, serves the vital function of coordinating outreach and carrying the ‘branches’ of external stakeholder assistance.

Building the KCDS over a three-year period attests to the high level of effort of all the people involved – community groups, training consultants, and donors. A vital element is strong leadership on both the community side and the ‘support’ side to coach the embryo of the institution. The process was accelerated to reach a state of autonomy before the RELMA support ‘branch’ was removed.

A valuable lesson related to gender – or women’s empowerment – that falls within the institution building aspect – is how women gained both leadership roles and a greater voice through the election process in Kusa (details on page 26). Because the CIGs formed the foundation of the new Society, and women’s participation in these groups was strong to begin with, they were able to overcome exclusion from traditional male dominated decision-making and resource allocation practices. The CIGs, for the most part, also increase women’s earning power thus improving their economic ‘equity’. Application of the traditional merry-go-round capital accumulation system played a major role in this, and will no doubt feature strongly in the future growth of Kusa.

## Lesson 5. Coexisting with the wetlands

People living near the lakeshore have utilized the wetlands for a long time. The wetlands provide a range of resources that are exploited throughout the year. During long rains farmers sow and harvest rice, arrowroot, bananas; they also catch fish for consumption and sale. During periods of drought, the wetlands serve as a granary for Kusa residents, who grow all manner of horticultural crops, grains, bananas and sugar cane. Perhaps the most important wetland resource is the papyrus; the reeds are harvested to make mats of both traditional and improved design, and provide steady income year round.



The wetlands host a great diversity of wildlife, from a large resident herd of hippos, to countless birds and reptiles, including the famous python called Omieri. A new ecotourism CIG is now beginning to exploit wetland attractions by taking tourists on short trips up the Nyando River. The Nyando wetland is also one of the largest fish breeding areas for Lake Victoria.

The wetlands in Kusa fall mainly within Harambee zone, but now attract farmers from the other zones as well. The farmers of Kusa realize the value and larger role of wetlands in the lakeshore economy, but the pressure to make a living and provide for household subsistence—especially during years of poor rainfall—are increasing people's dependence on this sensitive environment.

The downside of expanding wetland cultivation includes reduced and more distant supplies of papyrus reeds for mats, diminished habitat for the wildlife vital for the ecotourism initiative, and the long-term impact on the spawning grounds critical to the regional fishery. Although wetland soils are considerably more productive than those on established farms, their natural fertility declines rapidly under continuous cultivation.

While the Kusa community is generally aware of the trade-off between short term benefits and long-term costs, at this juncture the area is generating an important boost to the local economy in the form of food, raw materials, and income for unemployed youth—working the wetlands is definitely a young man's job.

Unfortunately, many farmers who use the wetlands cannot afford to hire labour to clear the papyrus and prepare new fields for cultivation. Instead, they light fires but strong winds off the lake frequently fan these fires out of control, burning vast expanses of wetland habitat. As the area burned and converted to crops increases each year, the wetlands' capacity to regenerate and to act as a pollution filter will diminish.

Most farmers presently avoid using pesticides or fertilizer, as much for economic reasons as out of concern for polluting the wetland. Characteristics of the wetland soils and ecology would likely limit the response to inputs even if they were applied (B. Mati, K. Mutunga, p 43). All of this points to a gradual but steady decrease in the areas' returns to land and labour, and the papyrus used for making mats. While these factors may begin to act as a brake on the current trend sooner than later, the damage incurred in the meantime includes the unknown but undoubtedly negative consequences for the regional fishery and wildlife habitat.

Considered in isolation, developments in the Nyando wetlands invoke cause for alarm. But it is important to view the issue within the wider context of the hyacinth invasion, completion of the Sondu Miriu hydroelectric project, the role of CIGs promoting change and innovation in other sectors, and the general pattern of socioeconomic and cultural adaptation sustained by the KCDP.

## Lesson 6. Project monitoring

Activities that produce visible and tangible (especially *drinkable* and *edible*) results are always the most exciting to monitor. Organized artisan groups can and do record and report the number of water tanks they build. Poultry groups track the number of chicks hatched or hens and crates of eggs sold. To mention but one individual among many: Margaret Ondiegi, a master grafter of fruit trees, keeps careful records of seedlings and fruit sold. In the recent December 2004 –January 2005 season, Margaret earned more than 7,000 Ksh (US \$93) from sales of tree seedlings and fresh fruit. Next season promises to be even better. Never-the-less, the capacity within Kusa for systematic data collection on most CIG activities remains weak.

Despite more than six baseline surveys, little was done to develop creative monitoring methods that built on what the surveys revealed. The opportunity was missed to attribute improvements in livelihoods to the direct investments in training, study tours and infrastructure which followed, especially water harvesting and livestock.

Having said this, the opportunity *is still there*. It exists mainly in the organizational structure of KCDS, and the latent capacity especially within the CIGs to keep better track of group and individual achievements from season to season. As the information gathered - e.g. for KCDS quarterly reports - is shown to be relevant and useful to the groups themselves and the Kusa Central Management Committee, the motivation to keep the files up to date should overcome the absence of an external incentive (RELMA) to continue the monitoring and reporting work.

## Lesson 7. RELMA's exit

The RELMA-funded Kusa Project officially ended in June, 2004. This was sixteen months after the achievement of full legal status of the institution. Two evaluations were done in 2004, an 'internal evaluation' with a small team of three consultants assisting, and an external evaluation commissioned by SIDA. When the written report





was submitted by the consultants, the internal evaluation was formally rejected by the Kusa Community Development Society.

They felt the report was an insufficient reflection of the achievements of the project. Significantly, the CMC prepared a new report analyzing its own achievements. Their analysis was based on the logical framework of the original project document. It reviewed the planned activities, achievements, major challenges, lessons and ways forward under each of the nine intervention areas. It is a succinct overview of all major activities done within the period of RELMA support, and current challenges faced by the Society.

Although no jointly agreed exit strategy was drawn up, certain measures were put into place to allow smooth handing over of financial management. The RELMA accountant provided basic training on book keeping to the Kusa office assistant, although the instruction was incomplete when funding ran out.

Institutional relationships can take sudden turns that are difficult to anticipate. RELMA did not know it would cease to exist as an independent operator in 2002. By the time RELMA was informed in 2003 that it would soon become a division within the World Agroforestry Centre, it had to focus much energy on adapting to the changing situation. This shift resulted in a more abrupt withdrawal of support to Kusa than was planned. The change affected the smooth completion of some project activities.

Shifts in the 'wind' of donor policy come from unexpected directions. In this case, the cause was an internal review of RELMA's own legal status and the discovery of anomalies in its set-up (RELMA 2003 Annual Report). The irony is that this happened just as Kusa was achieving its own formal legal status as a registered development society.

What are the lessons for the Kusa community? (and perhaps Sida as well). The KCDS leaders were well aware that RELMA would provide financial support only for a limited time. Indeed, funding to continue the subsidy for water tank construction was extended for several months beyond the official project end date of June 2004. At the same time, RELMA made efforts to provide wider access to other supporters through the Kusa Support Network, described earlier. But the very demanding nature of the community-driven project left little time or energy on either side for actively seeking new donor support. This - a vital project 'activity' in its own right - could have been part of the work plan from some time in 2003. Fundraising is obviously one of the more urgent 'future challenges' facing KCDS. We will end the Kusa story by reflecting briefly of a few others in the last chapter.



## Chapter 7

# Future challenges



**T**he final chapter is a forward look at how the next phase of community-managed development could happen in Kusa. Much is already happening, as CIGs gain experience, as the Society matures. A new community resource centre has been built. It will be a focal point for management and promotion of Kusa's long-term plans. With renewed Japanese support, the massive Sondu-Miriu hydropower project will be completed in the next few years, and will alter the face of Kusa. Many changes, large and small, are likely to continue to influence life in Kusa. These changes will hopefully be for the better, with KCDS in a strong position to invite future supporters will not need to start from scratch as RELMA/Sida did.

## 7.1 Building a business approach

The immediate challenge for KCDS is to keep up momentum of the last few years. It might help to realize that the amount of outside assistance was *less* than the internal level of financial investment. But the need to find even better ways to promote local investment, through savings, merry-go-rounds, micro-finance, remains. The local markets, and those in Homa Bay, Kisii and Kisumu, will play a vital role.

Kusa now generates a number of high-value commodities: e.g. the improved 'Harambee mats', hybrid milch goats, processed cassava products, and grafted mango trees. The Society must actively market these and the skills of CIG members as well: experienced water tank contractors, master fruit grafters, and conservation farmers. Already there are requests for training and services; expanding income opportunities for the Society is a matter of creative advertising and promotion through a well-established network of Kusa friends and well-wishers.

Key to all this will be having a competent, professional, paid staff to run KCDS as a business – not just another NGO running on donor money. Making the transition might take as much work as it did to build the Society in the first place. Yet again there may be no other option that is as sustainable.

## 7.2 Opportunities for stakeholders

With greater assistance from Ministry of Health, Kusa could become a model not only for Nyando District but the entire Lake Victoria region through innovation in HIV/AIDS programmes. A new strategy of behavior change with a focus on youth leaders and school-based theatre could dramatically reduce the infection rate – from close to 15% (maybe higher, it is not even known) to less than 5% among the sexually active age set. KCDS might use their VCT Centre to confidentially track infection rates (in a sample population from each zone). Such monitoring would show the value of any stepped-up behavior change campaigns, ultimately how to reduce HIV to a manageable health problem, rather than the major threat it now poses to the future well being of hundreds of Kusa families. The success of the project in improving sanitation and decreasing the incidence of infectious diseases indicates that reducing HIV to a manageable health problem is a realistic goal.



Appropriate support from VI-Agroforestry, government ministries, and other partners can build upon existing initiatives within Nyando to address the challenge of reclaiming gullies as productive community woodlots. The goal here is the transformation of the large eroded areas into income-yielding fodder and fuel wood plots managed by new social agroforestry CIGs focusing on land reclamation. The erosion problem presents a viable opportunity for the youth of Kusa, who as shareholders in the CIGs, would bank on the long-term demand for tree-products to generate future income while rehabilitating local wastelands.

The sight of a forest growing where now one sees degraded land is an entirely realistic objective that would prove the project's doubters and skeptics wrong.

Technologies for the conservation of soils, a critical component of any production enhancing strategy, have contributed to indigenous cultural tradition. Cattle continue to be an important element of the Luo social order, and are still the currency for bride price; while the sweet potatoes, dolichos (*Lablab niger*), and other legumes used as soil enriching ground cover directly benefit household livestock management. The switch from dependence on communal land to zero-grazing is in turn establishing a basis for the local dairy industry that provides a lucrative source of income in many other small-holder areas of Kenya.

The Kusa Farmer Field Schools, with the continuing support of KARI and the Rockefeller Foundation for ongoing initiatives, are capable of pioneering more integrated approaches to on-farm management optimizing the use of crop and tree and livestock diversity. Farmers could organize their own annual field days, similar in concept to the national soil conservation competitions, awarding prizes to farmers demonstrating the highest overall crop diversity and yields on standard sized plots.

The skills developed and institutional structures built during the last five years of hard work provide a platform for transforming Kusa community. The achievements registered over the relatively short time span of the pilot project provide evidence of a dramatic transition from crisis to progress, and merit the attention of like-minded supporters.

## 7.3 Capacity building never ends

Our documentation of the KCDS placed the challenges facing the Kusa community within a historical context in order to develop a perspective on the shifts in local livelihood strategies--and to encourage the idea that capacity building is an open-ended process.

This capacity-building process parallels the far-reaching changes occurring within the larger society. The achievements of the KCDS coincide with the comparatively unique prospects for the larger community in the wake of the giant KenGen electrical generation plant being constructed at Sondu. Since beginning several years ago, the KenGen project has attracted outsiders in search of employment, boosting the area's population growth. This will fuel demand for the produce generated by the CIGs. The company's commitment to provide electricity for the local community will create new opportunities for small-scale rural industries and services.

The Kusa area is, in short, poised for major change in the foreseeable future. Whereas a large influx of capital and technical expertise is responsible for constructing the dam and electrical plant, local communities do not have these kind of resources to draw on. And although Sida/RELMA launched the process of raising the institutional capacity within Kusa – they only helped build the foundation and design the structure for future progress.

Many donors and their NGO partner's concept of capacity building corresponds to the task of building a new school. Once the classrooms and structures are finished, the job is considered done. But imparting education also requires teachers, books and laboratory equipment, water tanks and facilities supporting the physical well-being of the students. The curriculum should prepare graduates to be productive, and to solve problems in a dynamic and changing world. In the real world of Kusa, this translates into the need for continuing exposure to new ideas, approaches, and technologies.

In the case of the KCDS, the community is the school and its leaders are teachers who recognize the need to update their experience in professional fields. With refresher training, they can use their leadership skills to seek the 'right' kind of external assistance to help them carry on the internal capacity-building process, and enable the Society's members to tap new sources of information and expertise to improve their lives.



## Annex 1. Kusa reference documents

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## Annex 2. Skills building (training and study tours) by topic at Kusa

Topic	Year	Who	Notes (reference)
<b>Health</b>			
Home-Based Care (began in Harambee zone, spread to all other zones)	2001	Women groups	Training in counseling, HBC CIGs established in each Zone. Harambee HBC voted best CIG in 2004 (Sandström p. 27) Exchange visit from TASO Uganda in 2002.
<b>Agriculture</b>			
Farmer Field Schools	2003	54 farmers graduated in 2004.	Sub-topics incl. farm management, soil fertility, crop selection, new crops. (Winberg p. 123) Emphasis on improved varieties - cassava, sweet potato, ground nuts, soya bean.
Cassava processing	2001	10 famers	Study tour to Uganda - processing methods, new varieties obtained (Winberg p. 68)
Conservation agriculture	2002	4 farmers	Study tour to Rachuonyo to learn tillage methods. Farmers began practicing 2003
Trees: fruit tree grafting	2001	20 farmers	Study tour to Embu for 10 farmers - then a follow up training
Drip irrigation	2002	2 farmers	A five-day course in Kitui organized by KARI - NARL (V. Sijali)
<b>Livestock</b>			
Improved breed dairy cows	2001	16 farmers/35 cows	"many more farmers plan to reduce number of free-grazing livestock for zero grazing" (Winberg p.120)
Dairy goats	2003	10 goat owners	43 dairy goats in Kusa by 2004 - breeding bucks and does in high demand
Poultry keeping	2002	Five CIGs = 232 farmers	Farmers have received training in poultry management, paravets do vaccinations (Winberg p. 120)
Paravets	2001	10 farmers	
<b>Water supply</b>			
Water tank artisans	1999	10 youth	Some subsidy from RELMA - slow uptake: 50 tanks (Winberg p. 60)
Water tank 'merry-go-rounds'	2000-01	40 more technicians	Over <b>600 tanks</b> , 49% subsidy (on 23,000 total cost) from RELMA (Winberg p. 123)
Sand dam construction and Gully reclamation	1999-2000	12 technicians, plus 8 women	4 sand dams built in Mbora - then five more. Winburg mentions 11 in total as of 2003. Sand harvesting to sell to Sondu-Miriu earns revenue for KCDS. (Sandström p. 21)
Well-upgrading	2001	10 (2 per zone)	10 demonstration wells (training by SANA)
<b>Fishing</b>			
Fishermen's Cooperative	2001	4 fishermen	Study tour to Uganda
Fish farming - in ponds	2001	8 farmers near lake	Study tour to Nakuru 29 fish farms established (p.120)
Education / Schools	?		Hygiene training in conjunction with building <u>ecosan</u> latrines.
Eco-tourism	2002	4 guides trained	Study tour and visit to Maasai Mara - Talek Base Camp

*Note: this list is not comprehensive. Many more training events and follow-ups are not shown.*

### Annex 3. Useful contacts for learning more about Kusa

Kusa Community Development Society

**John Odingo**, Chairman

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Pap-Onditi, Kenya

Phone: 0733 341496

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**Aichi Kitalyi** (Kusa Project Coordinator – 2003 to 2004)

RELMA in ICRAF

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**Rolf Winberg** (Kusa Project Coordinator – 1998 to 2003)

Skavkulla

37024 Nattraby, Sweden

E-mail: r.winberg@home.se

**Mary Okado** [former Field Coordinator/ advisor to Kusa Pilot Project]

Freelance training/community development consultant

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Kisumu, Kenya

Phone: 0721 848818

E-mail: mbokado@yahoo.com

**Ambrose Nzabi**

KARI-Kisii [Farmer Field School programme]

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Phone: 30748 Mobile: 0733 877 182

**Philip Oyoo**, Managing consultant

MajorStep Consultants [training for community members]

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**Erastus Orwa**

ECOVIC – Kenya

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Homa Bay, Kenya

E-mail: ecovickenya@yahoo.com

Phone: 0733 500043 / 0721 325542

**Dr. Thomas Aroka** (Kusa Think Tank advisor)

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Ahero, Kenya

Phone: 0722 884110

**Erik Nissen-Petersen**

ASAL Consultants – water harvesting specialists

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**Malesu Maimbo or Alex Oduor**

SearNet / RELMA [for water harvesting information]

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**Wilfred Murunga**

VI Agroforestry [for information on agroforestry extension activities]

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**Obiero Ong'ang'a**

Executive Director, Osienala

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**Stanley Mbagathi**

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