

Assessing Social Change Through Participatory Action Research: The Case of Kasighau Small- Scale Miners, Kenya

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Foreword

Between May 2005 and November 2006, a small group of development professionals discussed the opportunities and challenges for assessing and learning about social change in ways that, in turn, provide valuable insights and strengthen the change process. This group was composed of individuals whose position in relation to the topic represented important voices to be heard: activists, researchers, evaluators, facilitators, and international and local NGO staff. This group called itself the ‘assessing social change’ or ASC group.

Central to the group’s discussions was a common concern with the chasm between the need for reflective social change practice and the existing understanding and repertoire of approaches for assessment and learning. The group debated and shared through a series of facilitated e-discussions, case studies and two workshops.

The ASC group was coordinated by Irene Guijt of Learning by Design, and was part of an initiative by the Power, Participation and Social Change Team at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS), UK. This initiative had emerged from earlier discussions in Canada between US-based activists and evaluators and Southern development professionals around the same topic, seeking to construct exchanges that could help strengthen social change work. Both phases of the work were supported by the Ford Foundation. The North American discussions have continued in parallel as the ‘Learning Group on Organizational Learning and Organizational Development’ under the guidance of Vicki Creed, with Andy Mott and Francois Pierre-Louis.

The ASC project has led to several outputs: four case studies written by Mwasaru (2007), Patel (2007), Reilly (2007) and Samba (2007), with overall editing by Irene Guijt; a literature review (Guijt 2007); and a synthesis paper that draws on the literature, the case studies and the group discussions (Guijt 2007). All outputs and details of the ASC initiative and participants can be found at: <http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/Part/proj/socialchange.html>

1. Introduction

As a development worker and researcher operating within a conventional development framework, I have used participatory action research (PAR) as a tool to collect information for use by development planners and/or academic institutions. In this respect, I have also used PAR to validate information collected through conventional research tools. I have combined the use of PAR as a research tool with conventional research methods to generate information that can assist project implementers and communities to analyse development needs in a particular situation, strategise for relevant intervention and produce plans for immediate action. In general, I have found the use of participatory methods from mainstream traditions of participatory methodology, such as the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) or participatory learning and action (PLA), extremely exciting. People are actively involved and they identify with the information produced. In some cases, especially in situations of project-related rather than academic-focused research, they use some of the information generated through that process in subsequent action plans.

However, despite these exciting moments and experiences, the focus of research is not the people but *project objectives* of respective academic or development actors external to the community. This means external actors control both the agenda and the process. They also control and own the final product – the information generated from the research project. This is how things are in a *conventional development paradigm*.

This case study describes my experience with the use of PAR in the context of an alternative paradigm that, for the purposes of this case study, I call *the resistance paradigm*. The case study aims to demonstrate the critical difference in using participatory methods, in this case PAR, not only with creativity and innovativeness in new circumstances but particularly in applying these methods in an alternative development paradigm outside the mainstream or conventional development paradigm.

What is the conventional development paradigm and what is this alternative ‘resistance’ paradigm? The case study will illustrate this difference by describing the ownership and management of the PAR project and the context in which PAR was used to assess social change. Most critically, it will demonstrate the application of participatory methods and processes to primarily serve the interests of the small-scale miners, including their subsequent use of the information generated to enhance their struggles within the context of this alternative paradigm – *the resistance paradigm*.

This case study begins by introducing the players and providing an overview of the issues that the social change work was seeking to address. I then follow with a description of the Participatory Action Research process. After this, I discuss how PAR worked from the perspective of the ‘resistance paradigm’ and present the diverse outcomes it had on the small-scale miners struggle. This then brings me to observations about dilemmas, challenges and lessons learned.

2. About the Players

Kasighau Location is an area in Taita-Taveta district within the Coast Province of Kenya that is endowed with vast mineral wealth, especially precious stones including rubies and green garnets. While the local and national elite, along with international investors, have amassed immense wealth by exploiting these mineral resources and the labour of the local people since

independence in 1963, the inhabitants of the small village of Kasighau¹ continue to live in deplorable conditions of poverty. Over the years, a small section of the people have actively protested the exploitation of resources in their ancestral lands by ‘outsiders’. Part of this protest and resistance involved refusing to work in the mines owned by big investors and opting to turn into small-scale mining. In the mid 1990s, they formed an *association of small-scale miners* to mitigate their weakness in relation to mining technology, access to capital and competition in the market. The market is controlled by a cartel of national and international business tycoons specializing in precious stones.

In their efforts to eke out a living through mining activities, the small-scale miners found an ally during 2000 in *Ngua Mlambo Development Trust* (NMDT),² a community-based organisation working in Taita-Taveta district that seeks to enhance food security and eradicate poverty. A key programme of the NMDT, the natural resources management programme (NRMP), was launched in 2000 to assist groups and communities in matters of access, control, appropriate management and use of available natural resources. The relationship between the small-scale miners and the NMDT (then known as ‘The World Neighbors Taita Program’) goes back to the mid 1990s when the small-scale miners’ association was formed.

Another ally who came onto the scene in August 2002 was the *Coast Rights Forum* (CRF), an umbrella human rights organisation operating in the Coast Province of Kenya with a particular focus on advocacy concerning historical/current injustices and human rights violations with special reference to natural resources. NMDT became a member of the CRF in order to seek assistance and solidarity, and to advocate around the said violations and injustices. Coming from a background of conventional development traditions, NMDT benefited from CRF membership by learning advocacy skills and tools, an aspect that was never explicit in their work despite their inevitable involvement in advocacy in various ways.

In April 2003 the *Institute of Development Studies* (IDS, United Kingdom) became interested in the support of NMDT and CRF to the small-scale miners’ association in Kasighau village. IDS came onto the scene through my participation³ in a study project on Rights and Participation. This sabbatical programme aimed at exploring approaches and synergies between mainstream development traditions and the emerging human rights discourse that I perceived (at least in Kenya) to be elitist and dominantly led by the urban-based middle class professionals, especially, lawyers. This was a perfect opportunity for this programme to link in and my close association⁴ with NMDT and CRF made it possible to connect all four groups in a local study on rights and participation. This was the basis of the PAR initiative discussed here.

3. Context of Social Change Work

When we initiated the PAR process in the village of Kasighau between April 2003 and July 2004, the small-scale miners and the village community perceived the project in the overall context of a

¹ The community of Kasighau is composed of six sub-villages around the Kasighau Hill with an estimated population of about 8,000. The population of Taita-Taveta district is currently estimated to be over 250,000. The 1999 Census figures (Central Bureau of Statistics) indicate a figure of 246,671.

² The formation of Ngua Mlambo Development Trust was facilitated by The World Neighbors East Africa Program as part of an exit strategy by World Neighbors International. NMDT was registered in 2000.

³ I linked up with IDS in 2003 when I took a one year sabbatical leave.

⁴ While I was Program Director of the Kwale Rural Support Program, a project of the Aga Khan Foundation, between 1997 and 2002, I developed a close working relationship with the NMDT and facilitated various community exchange events for staff and community peer learning purposes. My relationship with CRF is historical. I was one of the key actors in forming CRF in 1998 in an effort to bring together community-based organisations to oppose irresponsible mining of titanium in Kwale district of the Coast Province of Kenya by an international company, Tiomin Resources Inc. of Canada. With the support of national and international actors, CRF has continued to be a point of reference and a nerve centre of resistance against human rights violations in relation to irresponsible natural resource exploitation in the Coast Province. In 2003, I was on the CRF Board of Directors.

‘new political era’ promising far-reaching socio-economic and political changes (see Box 1). Assessing the past in order to plan interventions for the future was a topic whose time had come. The expanded political space gave people a sense of ‘being in charge’ of their situation and the country as a whole.⁵

The euphoria and hope for meaningful change can be appreciated given the legacy of the post independence dictatorship and the colonial era. During the PAR process, participants narrated how the people of Kasighau were removed en masse from their village in 1916 by the British and banished to Malindi, another part of the Coast Province hundreds of miles from Kasighau. This was a punishment for alleged collaboration with the Germans against the British during the First World War. In the late 1920s and 1930s, the people of Kasighau trickled back unaided to their ancestral land.

Today the people of Kasighau continue to suffer the effects of colonialism and betrayal by post independence regimes in a very profound way. Their economic activities have been confined to a radius of about 10 kilometres around the Kasighau Hill. They have lost access to their grazing and hunting lands through creation of the vast Tsavo National Park, private ranches and sisal estates.⁶ The impact of this skewed land use pattern to small-scale miners is immense. They are accused of trespassing or are subjected to a long and expensive process when they extend their mining activities outside the confines of their village.⁷ Other economic activities, such as livestock keeping and crop agriculture are similarly restricted. As one participant exclaimed during the PAR workshop in April 2003 that involved mapping local people’s control and access over natural resources, “*We are an*

endangered species! How can we sustain our livelihoods and ensure the future of our children under these circumstances?”

Box 1. In an Era of Political Promise

The General Elections of December 2002 caused the mighty fall of the Kenya African National Union (KANU), the party that ruled Kenya with an iron hand since independence in 1963. The National Rainbow Coalition (NARC) ascended to power through a landslide victory followed by massive expectations and euphoria for radical socio-economic and political changes. The promise for ‘real’ change was underlined by the fact that a constitution review process that had formed the core of the reform movement since 1995 was in its final stage. The incoming government had promised to complete it and make the new constitution a basis for continued socio-economic and political reforms.

4. Purpose and Process of the Participatory Action Research

The implementation of the PAR event had the following key features: the main actors, the composition of the facilitation team, the overall approach to the PAR event, organisation and management of the entire event, the methodological framework, the social change work undertaken, types of activities, and specific methods used. The following is a brief description of each feature.

⁵ Following the euphoria of radical changes supported by a government perceived to be pro-people, there were several cases reported in the media concerning instances of passengers arresting corrupt police officers and dragging them to police stations after they had been caught demanding bribes from drivers and conductors.

⁶ This is a reflection of the situation in the entire district of Taita-Taveta. Land distribution statistics (Farm Management Handbook of Kenya Vol. II 1985) paint a grim picture as follows: land under the Tsavo National Park - 62% of the surface land area of the district; land under ranches (mostly private) - 24%; land under agriculture (mainly sisal plantations) - 11%; land under water, marches and rocks - 3%.

⁷ Mining in the private ranches and the National Park by ordinary people is next to impossible. Over and above the process of acquiring legal permits for prospecting/mining, the miners are required to pay colossal amounts of money by the Kenya Wildlife Services (the State organ that manages the national parks in the whole republic) and the management of respective ranches surrounding their traditional lands – a strip of land around the Kasighau Hill.

4.1 *The primary actors and their purpose*

The primary actors in the PAR process were the *small-scale miners association* whose struggles were inseparably embedded with the development efforts of the *Kasighau community*. The association and the community as a whole had a keen interest in the PAR process because they saw it as an opportunity to get support from external actors in their struggles for justice and meaningful development.

The core team in the facilitation of the PAR process was composed of four people: Patrick Mtsami, research assistant, Mwikamba Maghenda from CRF, Delphina Mwasi and Haji Mohammed from NMDT. From the grassroots, the core team had co-opted Mwalimu Mshiri, the Chair of NMDT Kasighau Zone. Together with the small-scale miners' association and community leaders, Mwalimu Mshiri ensured mobilization of participants in the PAR events and coordinated all aspects of logistics necessary for successful its implementation. While I was the overall coordinator of the core team, Sammy Musyoki and Celestine Nyamu-Musembi from IDS provided back up to the core team through occasional visits.

In various interactions between community members and the facilitation team in the course of the PAR process, indigenous or experiential knowledge, on the one hand, actively engaged with technical information or professional knowledge on the other. The interaction between these two kinds of 'knowledge' enabled greater clarity for the local people and facilitators about the issues at stake and created an opportunity for developing better strategies and action plans.

4.2 *Approach and overall methodological framework*

The PAR project was perceived to be a small but critical input into the ongoing struggles by the small-scale miners concerning their rights in a protracted struggle for control of and access to minerals in their own ancestral lands. The PAR process focused on assessing the struggles of small-scale miners with a view to identifying ways and means to enhance those struggles in a 'new political era'. This was a people's struggle that PAR was not supposed to appropriate but to strengthen by facilitating a deeper understanding of the issues at stake and the socio-political environment in which the various actors were engaging. The essence of the approach was summarised by Samuel Musyoki (of IDS) during a preparatory meeting in February, 2003: "The PAR process is like someone who jumps into a train from Mombasa to Nairobi at Mariakani, engages with a group of passengers in the train around their own agenda, and alights at Voi or Mtito Andei leaving the passengers to continue their journey to Nairobi".

With this understanding about the approach, the facilitation team outlined the core methodological principles as follows. First, the team members agreed to facilitate by listening attentively to local people's narratives about their struggles, asking strategic questions, providing relevant technical information or analytical inputs and posing challenges for reflection or action by the local people themselves. Second, the team also sought to make every effort to ensure that the PAR process was entrenched in the history of the local people. Third, the team underlined its commitment not only to respect local people's ownership of the process but also to strive in practice to promote that ownership in line with the approach and design of the PAR project. The team members had an advantage in that they were all seasoned practitioners with participatory methodology with many years of experience behind them.

With these broad methodological parameters and commitments in place, the facilitation team endorsed the processes previously undertaken in the preparatory phase of PAR and went on to plan and implement subsequent activities (see section 4.4 below) on the understanding that these would be implemented flexibly depending on prevailing needs and circumstances. During the PAR process, the IDS team members visited several times but only participated in field activities

when an activity was on-going. No activities were scheduled to suit them. Indeed, the IDS team, just like the rest of us, participated on invitation by the local people.⁸

4.3 Organisation and governance of the PAR process

The methodological parameters meant that the PAR process was conducted strictly along the lines of a participatory methodology, not only in terms of actual learning methods, but also in relation to the overall organisation and governance.

The PAR process was hosted by the local leadership of Kasighau and the NMDT. In the community, IDS and CRF team members (the two researchers were identified with CRF) were introduced as guests of the NMDT. NMDT had already discussed the visitors, their relation with NMDT and their role in the process. All logistics were handled by the leadership in Kasighau with NMDT. The hosts also took care of administrative issues, such as calling meetings to order and dealing with housekeeping matters. The facilitation team focused only on the learning processes.

The PAR process was only a booster to the ongoing struggles by the local people on issues of development and rights. The formal end of the process in July 2004 was not perceived as an 'end' by members of the small-scale miners association and the local community. As leaders and the driving force of their protracted struggles, they have continued to call upon CRF and NMDT whenever they need advice or other inputs. They perceive the IDS team members as comrades-at-arms who made useful contributions at a particular point in time in the process of interactions, and may still do so in future. As for NMDT and CRF members of the facilitation team, they perceived them as trusted friends in the struggle with whom they maintain contact and strong linkages of solidarity, and on whom they can call upon in a case of need. On the other hand, whenever there was a need to meet or share relevant information, NMDT and CRF leadership was always welcome to contact them. The relationship between the community and the facilitation team was mutual.

Indeed, the PAR project created an occasion for these key actors to make useful contacts and build long-term relationships based upon solidarity.

4.4 Concrete activities during the PAR process

From April 2003 to July 2004, the PAR activities consisted of a sequence of planning and/or evaluation sessions by the facilitation team and field events consisting of reflection meetings and workshops. The field events based around reflection led to action plans that were implemented by community members themselves without the presence or oversight of the facilitation team (see Table 1).

Table 1. Timeline of the PAR process

<i>When</i>	<i>Activity/Field event</i>	<i>Participants</i>	<i>Methods used</i>	<i>Core Questions & Outcome</i>
November 2002 (one day)	Boardroom consultations looking at relations between the rights discourse and mainstream development tradition in Kenya (part of	NMDT leadership (4) and author with research assistant, P. Mtsami	Focus group discussion	Reflection on impact of traditional development programs on poverty alleviation at grassroots

⁸ During the last IDS visit in July 2004, participants asked them not to participate in an ongoing activity that involved matters 'restricted' to local people. The IDS team members respected this, greeting people before leaving.

	author's sabbatical)			
December 2002 - one day with leaders & members of small scale miners' group, and second day for workshop	Field visit to Kasighau small scale miners group	NMDT office team (3), NMDT Kasighau Zone leaders (3), local councillor, CRF representative, two researchers, small scale miners group (25) and key community leaders invited by the Zone Leadership	Timelines indicating major events in the history of the Kasighau people's struggle for development using resources around them. Mapping minerals in Kasighau amongst other natural resources <i>Note:</i> Demand by participants for another workshop with a broader scope on land and land related resources – not just minerals.	Why are the Kasighau people living in poverty when they are so rich in natural resources?
February 2003	Boardroom review and planning of initial awareness workshop in response to people's demand after field visit consultations	NMDT team, Kasighau Zone leader, the CRF representative, Sammy Musyoki from IDS and the research assistant	Meeting to review the field visit event, especially 1 day workshop event	To draw lessons and insights from the field visit and plan the way forward in response to the demand for another, more comprehensive workshop
April 2003	Planning meeting for the comprehensive workshop	NMDT team, CRF representative, IDS team, research assistant	Meeting to design the field learning events. <i>Day 1:</i> meetings with community leaders and small-scale miners' group members. <i>Days 2 & 3:</i> workshop involving members of small – scale miners' group and other community members	Natural resources (land and land related resources) as development resources <i>versus</i> rights of access and control within the history of Kasighau people, and the wider Kenyan history, legal regimes, policies and on-going reforms
April 15 – 17 2003	Field meetings and the main awareness workshop	Community leaders from six villages of Kasighau, members of small-scale miners' group, NMDT team, IDS team, CRF rep, and researcher	<i>Preparations:</i> Meetings with formal and informal leaders, checking of venue and logistics. <i>Workshop:</i> Social and resource mapping, mapping institutions and influential actors, time lines and changing historical trends in relation to access and control of existing natural resources, pair-wise and triangulation. <i>Other methods:</i> Narrating significant events to illustrate an important fact, personal witness or experience in critical events. <i>Also:</i> group discussions, plenary sessions, technical inputs from local participants and facilitation team.	Forces, systems and power structures behind inequality in distribution of development resources <i>versus</i> challenges and opportunities in the ongoing social and political reforms to address the given inequalities <i>Note:</i> Detailed action plan for the way forward involving acquisition of mining law and policy, visit to the Commissioner of Mines and Geology over mining licenses and cases of fraud by large scale miners
August 2003 - one day	Review and Reflection meeting	Members of the Small-Scale Miners' Association, leaders from 6 Kasighau	Review of Action Plan from main awareness workshop; reports from different actors assigned specific tasks;	What helped us to succeed? What prevented us doing better? What are the key lessons and insights that will

		villages, core facilitation team	reflection on successes, difficulties and challenges: Key lessons and/or insights	inform our next round of planning? <i>Note:</i> Emerging lesson or insight: The magnitude of land issue and related resources cannot be resolved by the Kasighau people alone.
March 2004	Review of the Kasighau experience and planning for district-wide consultations	The core facilitation core, members of the Executive Committee of NMDT Board of Trustees, leaders from Kasighau NMDT Zone	Review of NMDT Program on natural resources in the light of the Kasighau experience; brainstorm on the way forward in the fight against poverty	Can we ever eradicate poverty when the majority do not have control over or access to basic development resources? What must the people Taita-Taveta district do about this inequality and denial of rights? <i>Note:</i> Management and Board of NMDT endorsed a district-wide consultation on poverty, its causes, and plans to fight it.
June 2004 - 2 days	District-wide consultation workshop	Leaders of civil society organizations from different parts of the district; Leaders of religious institutions (Christian pastors, Muslim sheiks and elders of traditional religions – Njama in Taveta and Figi in Taita); influential councillors, leaders of urban based welfare organizations of Wataita and Wataveta	Sharing of live experiences from different parts of the district on skewed distribution of development resources and the impact on ordinary people in the district; thematic analysis in small group discussions (e.g. on land settlements, forest/water resources, road infrastructure, education/health infrastructure, District Development Committee and allocation of national resources for the development of the Taita-Taveta district; report back and plenary discussions.	Is the Kasighau experience replicated in the entire district? If so, what went wrong and what can the people of Taita-Taveta do to correct the situation? <i>Note:</i> At the end of the 2-day meeting the Taita-Taveta Rights Forum was formed to be the advocacy vehicle for these and related issues. An interim committee was elected from among workshop participants. Also, formation of Taita-Taveta Small-Scale Miners Cooperative Society to protect/promote interests of small-scale miners in the district. Members of the Kasighau Small-Scale Miners Association were among the founding members of the cooperative society.
July and August 2004 – 2 days in each case	Subsequent meetings of the Taita-Taveta Rights Forum	Same categories of participants with NMDT acting as the secretariat of the Taita-Taveta Rights Forum Interim Committee	Prioritization of key issues and formation of sub committees to spearhead advocacy activities around those issues; delegations or task forces for special assignments (e.g. district boundaries, district tender committee, devolved funds such as Local Transfer Fund, Constituency Development Fund)	How do we influence the key organs or systems of decision making in regard to development resources and major decisions made around those resources? How will the Forum support struggles of people at the grassroots in different parts of the district? What is the capacity of the Forum to influence and shape the 'politics of development' in the district?

The PAR officially ended in July 2004. However, activities that were triggered by the PAR process have continued regardless of the end of the PAR project.

The following features of the process characterized all the PAR events. Formal and informal consultations took place continually, not only among the facilitators and among the miners and/or community members, but also between these various actors, on either a one-to-one or group basis. Similarly, formal and informal evaluation or feedback sessions were held to take stock of developments during and after each event, drawing out lessons and insights that would feed into the following stages in an unfolding process of reflection-action-reflection. Through that process, the participants had the opportunity to deepen their understanding of the past and the present with a view to identifying strategies and plans to remove not only the immediate injustices affecting them but also to participate in the overarching process of structural change. The ongoing government reforms within the movement for socio-economic and political transformation offered an appropriate opportunity to the participants of the PAR process.

Each step in the PAR process enabled reflection among participants and the facilitation team. A workshop event, for example, was designed to allow space for critical issues to emerge, without losing sight of the commonly agreed objectives for a given day's program. Informal discussions and consultations among participants were consciously accommodated as part of the learning event. Tea and lunch breaks were deliberately planned to be flexible. If participants went into deep discussions over these breaks, discreet consultations were held among the key leaders and facilitators so that time was allowed for discussions to continue instead of breaking such moments simply to pursue the formal programme. Similarly, a tea or lunch break could be shortened through consultations and consensus in order to create more time for a session considered to be critical. This degree of flexibility was made possible, to a big extent, by the fact that the venue and related facilities were not located in a formal setting like a hotel. Village organizers and service providers were in charge of these facilities.

In the same way, planning and evaluation sessions by the facilitation team took place as part of an overall reflection process. Planning and evaluation were not limited to the level of activities. Attempts were made to understand the dynamics at play in the complex situation in which the small-scale miners found themselves. The various and competing interests at the village, district, national and even global level were factors that directly affected the struggles of the small-scale miners to get what they considered to be a fair share of mineral wealth existing in their ancestral lands.

With better clarity and appreciation of the key competing interests at various levels and the related political dynamics within and between major actors, the facilitators were able to pose fundamental and/or strategic questions that deepened reflection and analysis of the issues at stake. Similarly, clarity on the issues, forces and factors underlying the situation helped the facilitation team members to prepare critical and relevant inputs for specific events and sessions.

5. Using PAR with an Alternative Paradigm⁹

5.1 Patronage or Local Power as the Methodological Basis?

The anchoring of the PAR framework in the resistance paradigm transformed the use of ordinary participatory methods and tools into powerful 'revolutionary' processes. Not only was the history of struggle assessed from the perspectives of the primary actors, the planning and implementation of subsequent action was led and driven by the same actors. At no point in the process did the small-scale miners perceive or feel that 'benevolent' outsiders had heard their cry and, in sympathy, decided to take over their struggle on their behalf. Patron-client relations had no place. The grassroots led PAR process confined the facilitation team in its right place –

⁹ For more on an Alternative Paradigm, see Mwambi Mwasaru, *Beyond Approaches and Models: Reflections on Rights and Social Movements in Kenya, Haiti and the Philippines*, *IDS Bulletin*, Volume 36, Number 1, January 2005.

colleagues or comrades in solidarity with the struggles of the small-scale miners and the Kasighau community as a whole.

This is in sharp contrast with conventional development practice, in which the dominant paradigm inevitably dictates the kind of relations that must exist between external actors and targeted ‘beneficiaries’. Therefore, even in cases where patron-client relations are consciously avoided and participatory methods applied rigorously, the process is still basically driven and controlled (however subtly) by external actors in the name of development programmes or projects, human rights and civic education. The driving force behind such development endeavours are open or disguised agendas of donors, government, human rights or development organisations and, sometimes, vested personal or class interests of powerful government officials, politicians, development workers and human rights crusaders. In this scenario, relations between external actors and intended ‘beneficiaries’ are initiated and developed within a patronage or charity model, irrespective of how subtle the process may be. Thus, using rigorous participatory methods in implementing such forms of development is little more than manipulation of the targeted ‘beneficiaries’. The apparent ownership of the process and resulting action plans by the ‘beneficiaries’ are superficial and, once the external masterminds have left on achieving or failing to achieve their intended objectives, the process and related activities collapse leaving the majority of ‘beneficiaries’ disappointed and more dependant in their mentality than ever before.

It cannot be stressed enough that the critical difference and effectiveness in the use of participatory methods in social change work is not so much the skills and innovativeness of using such methods but the paradigm context in which they are applied. The methods described below are ordinary participatory methods but used in the context of an alternative – *resistance* – paradigm. The absence of such a paradigm explains why development organisations have used participatory methods over many years but with no significant improvement in the lives of ‘beneficiary’ groups and communities especially in terms of capacity to drive their own agenda, defend their rights and take leadership in pursuit of their interests. The situation has been equally hopeless in cases of scaling up the practice of participatory methods or mainstreaming participatory methodology. In this respect, projects sponsored by big actors like the World Bank have been outright disasters.¹⁰

5.2 Methods and techniques that proved useful

The facilitation team chose and picked from a rich arsenal of participatory tools.¹¹

Mapping tools, especially resource mapping, transect walks and time lines, were the most powerful in collecting information, analyzing it within the historical local context, and creating strategic opportunities for facilitators to raise crucial questions (see Box 2) on the emerging scenarios with a view to encouraging motivation, critical thinking and home grown plans of action.

Use of *small group discussion techniques* with appropriate group composition (depending on the nature of the topic and prevailing dynamics) based on gender, age, locality, professional or trade affiliation, etc. was a much-used tool that enabled community members to analyze and digest emerging issues. Group reports were often shared in plenary sessions but, in some cases, the sharing of group reports was left to informal spaces for sharing with various actors as deemed suitable.

¹⁰ The experience of Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) sponsored by the World Bank and implemented in Kenya in 2001 is a case in point. The project was implemented through a coercive process driven by the notorious Provincial Administration structure. The mechanical use of participatory methods during the implementation of this project was a mockery and gross abuse of participatory methodology.

¹¹ See PLA Notes http://www.iied.org/NR/agbioliv/pla_notes/index.html

In subsequent meetings, *reviewing the content covered in previous meetings and sharing reports on action* undertaken in line with previous action plans proved to be a very useful technique to ensure that new participants stayed informed, highlighting key issues from previous sessions, creating practical entry points into the discussion around relevant issues, and providing a bridge to the following sessions.

Ad hoc and planned case studies similarly proved very powerful. Ad hoc case studies were spontaneous personal experiences that befitted the moment and helped to hammer home a key point concerning the topic at hand. For example, in one of the sessions a member of the small-scale miners association lamented on how the large-scale miners, the provincial administration and the police had instilled fear in the small-scale miners in order to keep them ignorant of the law that regulates mining. Rumours had been in constant circulation to the effect that if

anyone was caught with a copy of the Mining Act without lawful permission that person would face imprisonment without the option of a fine. However, after receiving information to the contrary from the NMDT and some members of the small-scale miners association around 1998, he gathered courage and decided to buy a copy of the Mining Act. Although he was still fearful, he went to Nairobi and purchased a copy of the Mining Act from the Government Printers. He was relieved that he was not asked any questions at the Government Bookshop. Nevertheless, he hid the book carefully in his bag and travelled home immediately. After reading the book without anybody in sight, he realized that even an ordinary person like himself could go to the office of the Commissioner of Mines and purchase a mining licence! That is how he obtained his prospecting licence and he has since educated many other people who were victims of such cheats.

In some cases, a formal case study was required (see Box 3). These formal and informal case studies by the members of the community encouraged and motivated others into action. They demystified oppressive power and released liberating action by the oppressed.

Box 2. Making mapping political

Work in village groups to:

1. list the resources existing in your village
2. map out these resources onto a sketch map of the village
3. indicate which ones are being used and how
4. who controls the resources, and
5. who is responsible for their management
6. indicate which resources are not being used and why
7. indicate who controls the un-used resources and who is responsible for their management.

Box 3. A planned case study to reveal injustice

A case in point related to the many ranches surrounding the Kasighau Hill. Participants wanted to know who was listed as official owners in the land registry. Consequently, a retired officer who had worked in the district lands office for a long time was tasked to look up the facts and prepare a short presentation for the following reflection session. He did a good job. When the time came for his presentation, he gave a precise history of the group ranches in Kasighau and showed that out of the eight ranches only one that was legally registered. The rest were only 'proposed' owners and, therefore, technically part of communal grazing lands as they had been since time immemorial. The case study revealed that the board of directors for those proposed ranches had made everyone believe that those ranches were legally registered. Therefore, local people were denied access to their own traditional grazing lands through false pretences. Those directors enriched themselves by hiring out those ranches to cattle traders to fatten their animals before sending them to the slaughterhouses. When the people heard this scandal, they called for the immediate withdrawal of herds grazing in those ranches at the expense of their own herds and degradation of the environment. They threatened to evict the animals and the herders forcefully if the district administration did not heed their call. The District Commissioner (DC) responded by holding a public meeting in Kasighau. He brought along the District Livestock Officer with a view to starve off 'rumours' threatening security in the area. When the DC was confronted with facts by a village spokesperson about PROPOSED ranches that are non-legal entities, he thought that was a big joke and turned around to get the District Livestock Officer to trash those 'fairy' stories. To his surprise, the DC saw his Livestock Officer lost for words and admitted in public that the case as presented was, indeed, true.

Overall, the PAR process was an ongoing ‘reflection component’ in the dialectic of praxis. Although focused, each event was open-ended in terms of process and the use of tools was as per the demands at specific moments. Participants often came forward to illustrate their points with use of a story, proverb or wise saying, diagrams or drawings, etc. It was active, emotive, intensive and, at times, open-ended after bursting the limits of stated objectives. It inevitably evolved into interplay between formal and informal sessions involving group and one-to-one interactions.

6. Outcomes of the Assessment Process

The PAR not only resulted in a critical assessment of the past but also triggered a deep-rooted process of transformation challenging individuals, the small-scale miners’ group and the facilitators to act now within their respective capacities and roles to strengthen the struggle.

Below are six examples of transformation and initiatives for change associated with the PAR project (directly or indirectly). The context of these examples is the protracted and ongoing struggles of the small-scale miners within a climate of national political transition charged with expectations for radical change.

6.1 *Improved confidence and capacity to engage government authority*

The PAR process officially closed in July 2004 but in August 2004 the NMDT Annual Agricultural Show was held in Voi Town. The small-scale miners and petty gemstone dealers decided to take up stalls at the show in order to display precious stones existing in Kasighau, Mwatate and other parts of Taita-Taveta district. They were determined to uncover this lucrative industry, shrouded in mystery and secrecy, for open discussions on related issues. On learning about these plans, the police claimed that the Department of Geology and Mines was vigorously opposed to the display of precious stones in the proposed stalls as it would encourage illegal trade in precious stones. With support from the provincial administration, the police urged the NMDT, as the organiser of the show, to disallow the display of precious stones by members of the small-scale miners or community members from mining areas. NMDT argued that the purpose of the show, among other reasons, was to display locally available resources and open opportunities to the local people for improving their livelihoods through such resources.

On being told about the constraints and even the threats by the said government officials, small-scale miners and petty dealers in precious stones challenged and dared any government official who claimed they were breaking the law to come to their stalls and arrest them. A three-day agricultural show took place and nobody was arrested. In so doing, the small-scale miners destroyed the myth that only large-scale miners and wealthy, powerful people could handle precious stones.

As this story was narrated to me, one man exclaimed, “*Haki ya Mungu, tumefanywa wajinga! Nilikuwa natokwa na majasho nikiwa na mali mfukoni mwangu...Hata ninaiiza kwa bei ya kutupa ili iniondokee!*” that is, “*Truly, we have been fooled! I used to perspire profusely with fear when I had precious stones in my pocket...I sold them off for a song in the earliest opportunity just to get rid of them!*”

The emerging boldness and bravery by the small-scale miners could be directly linked to the PAR process. However, this phenomenon is also a reflection of the continued opening up of political space in Kenyan society. Equally, it is also a reflection of growing consciousness about rights among the Kenyan public given the pro-democracy movement since the mid 1990s and the protracted Constitution Review process that is continually de-mystifying dictatorship and encouraging a culture of questioning among ordinary citizens.

6.2 Small-scale Miners' Cooperative Society - unity is strength!

In August and September 2004, the Kasighau small-miners joined a district wide Small-Scale Miners Cooperative Society of which they were founder members. *"We formed this cooperative because we realized that it is very difficult to deal with corrupt government officials, big miners or their agents and other swindlers when we are acting as individuals and isolated groups,"* explained a woman who is one of the committee members in the cooperative. Asked what tangible benefits have been realized through the cooperative, one of the members explained, *"The saving scheme of the cooperative is giving members an opportunity to save. Previously some of us never saved even a cent! Furthermore, the cooperative is negotiating with the government (Commissioner of Mines and Geology) to purchase mining equipment for us which we can pay back on agreed terms."*

The small-scale miners in Kasighau did not join the district wide cooperative society out of the blue. It was significant that the cooperative was formed at a time when district-wide consultations were taking place as a way to deal with problems rooted in legal and policy regimes that had serious consequences for the entire district.

The PAR process in Kasighau brought home very clearly the need to link up with others in similar situations in order to fight against the consequences facing not only the small-scale miners but also the Kasighau community. Indeed, even NMDT itself was leading district-wide consultations on land and land related resources with a view to creating a stronger vehicle for advocacy. These consultations gave birth to the Taita-Taveta Rights Forum in March 2004. This was the time for district linkages in the face of a common threat. It is, therefore, not surprising that the Kasighau Small-Scale Miners Association saw the need to unite with others in similar situations.

6.3 Participation in the formulation of a mining act

In April 2006, the Small-Scale Miners Cooperative Society was one of the grassroots stakeholders invited by the office of the Commissioner of Geology and Mines to participate in a national conference to discuss a new mining act that would take into consideration the interests of small-scale miners and local communities. Prior to this conference, members of this cooperative society had been assigned to various working committees whose input would contribute towards a draft law for overall national discussions.

This invitation was also extended to any known group of miners in the whole country. This is part of prevailing trends in government where it has become normal practice to be seen to consult stakeholders in matters of policy making. Consequently, the participation of the Taita-Taveta Small-Scale Miners Cooperative Society in the said conference on mining may not be linked directly with the PAR process.

However, the quality of participation in the conference related to the PAR process and events, as increased confidence was clearly displayed by participants from the Small-scale Miners Cooperative Society that attended the conference. They actively and confidently contributed to the debate, especially on issues relating to the benefits accruing to local communities and small-scale miners in mineral-rich areas.¹²

By the second half of 2004, the PAR process had critically changed the thinking of the small-scale miners and the Kasighau community as a whole about the law. Through the various sessions of reflection and inputs on the history and development of the law, as well as the current jurisprudence in Kenya, participants in the PAR process were clear that the law was not

¹² I was a resource person in the conference and I remember representatives vigorously challenging the constitutional provision that any minerals found to exist in private or traditional lands belong to the Government. They supported arguments that the new mining act should recognize the rights of local communities in mineral rich areas and provide clear provisions on how local people in those areas would benefit from such resources.

equal to justice. In fact, the existing legal regime in Kenya today is a legacy of colonial repression and it is in dire need for reforms, this includes the constitution – the mother of all laws – and one of the most backward of these laws is the Mining Act.¹³

PAR was taking place at the time of great political promise. It was, therefore, perceived as part and parcel of the ongoing social and political reforms. Some of the participants from the Taita-Taveta Small-Scale Miners Cooperative Society may have seen the conference as a continuation of PAR since they do not even know that PAR ceased officially in July 2004.

6.4 Shifting thinking by NMDT leadership

Social change work by NMDT in Taita-Taveta district was significantly influenced by the PAR project that took place between April 2004 and July 2004. The reflections of Delphina Mwasi, the Manager of NMDT, provide a glimpse on the apparent impact that the PAR project made to NMDT and possibly its future work on social change.

As I talked to her in July 2005, one year after the PAR process ended, she expressed excitement about the insights she gained from the PAR process and recounted how that subsequently influenced the direction of NMDT concerning social change work, particularly in relation to poverty eradication.

“The PAR event has opened our eyes to the reality of things that matter!” Delphina exclaims and then she goes on, *“The people of Taita Taveta district cannot eradicate or even reduce poverty as long as they do not have control over their own resources, especially their natural resources.”*

Delphina narrated how the PAR project initially focused on small-scale miners in Kasighau and how the focus shifted from minerals to land. *“As we were about to close with a prayer during one of the initial workshops on the problems of small-scale miners and the reasons why the local community was not benefiting from the huge minerals deposits in Kasighau, one woman sprang up and requested to ask a question before we ended that workshop session,”* she explained.

On getting permission, the woman asked, *“Who owns the land on which these mineral deposits lie? How much of this land is owned by the Wa-Kasighau?”* Before anybody could respond to that question, the meeting hall burst into murmurs and some people were quite audible, *“She is right! We own nothing! Can we mine on land we don’t own?”*

Unanimously, the meeting agreed that the fundamental problem and threat in Kasighau was the fact that the local people did not have the land they needed to do meaningful development, mining aside. It was consequently agreed that the next reflection session in about three or four weeks time would focus on land and land related resources over and above minerals and precious stones.

Delphina went on to explain how the following workshop on land was shocking to the participants. *“The analysis of patterns of land use in the district, the history of how that came to be, and the laws that maintain that unjust pattern of land use convinced me that we can never remove poverty given this situation. No amount of developmental interventions will fight this poverty if we do not take control of or have a say over our resources!”*¹⁴

Delphina went on to explain that the Kasighau reflections left her so disturbed that she really began to think what must be done to deal with poverty in Taita Taveta district. She began to ask herself why the lives of people in this district do not improve despite so many resources that had been pumped into the district every year through government departments, bilateral programmes

¹³ The existing Mining Act was legislated in 1940 and is part of the colonial legacy that is basically hostile to the interests of local people.

¹⁴ Op.cit. Farm Management Handbook of Kenya Vol. II 1985.

(like Danida which had operated in the district for the last twenty years), NGOs and even UN programmes. She also began to wonder why education, health and physical infrastructure like roads had virtually collapsed.

“Something is seriously wrong somewhere.” She concluded. And then she went on, *“But where did the rain begin beating us?”*

An important outcome of assessing social change strategies is shifting consciousness about causal factors and possibly a shift in priorities. Delphina’s account of social change is a good illustration of this statement. The PAR process has no doubt shifted consciousness of the NMDT programme people and can then shift programme priorities. Indeed, as indicated in 6.6 below, the PAR process significantly influenced the NMDT strategic plan of 2006 – 2010.

6.5 Formation of the Taita-Taveta Rights Forum

Delphina confided that those were the kind of questions that led her to conclude that the intervention at a very micro level, like Kasighau, was not enough to deal with the magnitude of the issue of poverty, huge inequalities in the land and resource distribution, and the decay of social and physical infrastructure witnessed in the district. At the same time she was very conscious of the fact that NMDT alone cannot address these issues either. Wondering freely in her thoughts Delphina questioned, *“Are other local actors in the district experiencing similar frustrations and asking similar questions?”*

These questions led Delphina to challenge the leadership of NMDT in a meeting held in March 2004 to call a district-wide meeting of civil society actors. This meeting would be a place to share experiences on these issues and start a process of exploring solutions to the chronic problems of poverty and diminishing standards of living in the district. The district-wide consultations were held between June and August under the leadership of NMDT in three separate events. The intensity of discussion, bitterness and anger over the perceived injustices, causes and possible solutions culminated in the formation of the Taita-Taveta Rights Forum (TTRF) in June 2004, with NMDT as its interim secretariat.

The political heat released by these consultations attracted the attention of the district intelligence officer and the district commissioner who reports directly to the Office of the President, Republic of Kenya. These officers sought to intimidate the process, with telephone calls to NMDT leaders and physical presence at the meetings, but did not resort to force. Participants continued their deliberations, simply ignoring the intrusion. One participant, while closing the day’s meeting, prayed referring directly to the intruders (who were seated within hearing distance) as loudly as possible: *“Oh God, our Father! We also pray for these agents of darkness attempting to disrupt this meeting. Father, send your Holy Spirit to change their hearts! Convert them so that, like Saul, they can become Paul! Help them to change and reject the Kingdom of Darkness and, instead, dedicate their lives to serve you, Oh, God of Justice!”* There was a thunderous chorus of *“Amen!!!”* followed by vigorous and extended clapping and singing.

6.6 NMDT strategic plan (2006-2010)

The PAR process, apart from its unexpected off-shoots like the Taita-Taveta Rights Forum, had significant impact on the NMDT strategic planning process that took place in October 2005. Having understood the critical importance of addressing issues of power and control over resources as part and parcel of development, the NMDT introduced advocacy in its new five year strategic plan. In this strategic plan of 2006 - 2010, NMDT sees TTRF as a critical ally along with other institutions such as the traditional councils of elders, notably ‘Waghosi wa Kireti’ in Taita and ‘Njama’ in Taveta. The elders’ councils had hitherto not been perceived as development actors or partners within the history of NMDT.

7. Key Challenges and Dilemmas

The PAR process and the challenges faced raise critical questions about community participation. What is the value of community participation and in whose spaces? What capacities are required for meaningful participation in invited spaces? And how can grassroots groups and communities be organised within the resistance paradigm for radical social transformation?

7.1 Participation in whose space?

Coming from a dictatorial tradition where government does not consult with citizens on key issues seriously affecting citizen's lives, members of the Small-scale Miners' Cooperative Society were genuinely excited when they were invited to participate in the national conference to review the existing mining law. What they did not realize at the onset was that the conference was a 'space' controlled by the government and that their participation was expected to take place within the constraints defined by the government and its agents or global partners.

The capacity of participants from the Society and other grassroots stakeholders to safeguard their interests in an 'invited space' (see Gaventa 2007¹⁵ and Box 4) – a space controlled by government – came into sharp focus during the conference. When the issue of control by central government over all 'wealth underneath the earth' was raised, government officials defended their position using the existing constitution. Grassroots stakeholders, however, challenged this position by arguing that the constitution was faulty in its perception of justice which went against communities living in mineral-rich areas.¹⁶

During the conference, the existence of draft legislation submitted by the Commonwealth Secretariat was revealed. The conference was supposed to simply polish this draft and 'customize' it for Kenya. The government showered praises on the Commonwealth model, quoting the Tanzanian Mining Act as excellent legislation crafted on the basis of the draft model. However, a Tanzanian team of human rights lawyers invited to the conference by the Kenya Human Rights Commission produced research findings that gave a completely different message. They illustrated how the Tanzanian Mining Act had totally failed to protect the interests of small-scale miners and of the national economy. The real beneficiaries of that Act were the foreign investors whose interests were well protected and serviced.

These serious contradictions raised fundamental questions about the intentions of the government to invite grassroots stakeholders to this conference. What is the value and usefulness of participation by grassroots groups in such arenas? Are they simply the public relations exercises of the government? Are such occasions meant to be serious opportunities for government to listen to grassroots voices and make provisions to cater for local interests and needs?

Box 4. Spaces of engagement

According to Gaventa (2005), 'spaces' are understood to be spaces of engagement filled by power of varying kinds, visible and invisible, including knowledge and discourse. Thus, a 'space' is an arena, process or mechanism within which people communicate about issues, share information, make decisions and take actions, or in which civil society (people and organisations) seek to have influence on decisions which affect their lives. Gaventa distinguishes three kinds of spaces: *closed* spaces – official or unofficial spaces to which only certain people or interest groups are invited, and others are excluded; *invited* spaces – formal or informal spaces in which powerful officials invite people or organisations to be consulted or to make their views known; *claimed/created* spaces – formal or informal spaces created by those who seek to have greater power and influence.

¹⁵ Gaventa, J. 2006. Finding the Spaces for Change: A power analysis. *IDS Bulletin* 37 (6):23-33.

¹⁶ The constitution review process has been at the very core of the struggle for socio-economic and political reforms since 1995. This may explain why the grassroots stakeholders in this conference were so confident in challenging the constitutional provisions in relation to ownership of minerals.

In this context, other questions about community capacities to operate under such conditions emerge. What does it take for communities operating within the resistance paradigm to be heard and taken seriously by government and others within the dominant mainstream paradigm? What opportunities could exist in 'invited spaces' within the dominant paradigm for grassroots actors informed by the resistance paradigm? How can resistance paradigm operators avoid manipulation and total cooption into the mainstream agenda by bureaucrats and elite serving powerful interests in the dominant development paradigm?

Can actors in the resistance paradigm create their own 'spaces' and invite players and representatives from the dominant mainstream paradigm into that space – reversing the invitation? What does it take to make possible such invitations and participation? Can there be 'shared spaces' between actors from the dominant paradigm and those from the resistance paradigm? If so, what does it take to create such shared spaces?

Despite these rhetorical or even sceptical questions, one must appreciate the fact that a culture of engaging government by citizens is growing. This is an important step in the process of social change. Therefore, despite the apparent lack of seriousness or good will on the part of the government concerning instances of opening up and inviting citizens' participation in formally closed spaces, this is an important step gained through people's struggles for participation in public affairs as a matter of right. Such gains gradually erode the culture of dictatorship as the culture of participatory democracy takes roots in Kenya. This is no doubt an uphill process that calls for patience and courage on the part of those working for social change. In such slow macro-scale transitions, focused assessment and learning processes such as the one described here which encourage disenfranchised citizens to pause, reflect and re-strategise can have significant impact on their lives.

7.2 Organising grassroots groups and communities for radical social transformation

Analysis of the experience of the small-scale miners' association revealed inherent competition between the dominant/mainstream and resistance paradigms in the history of their struggles.

The organisation of groups and communities in Kasighau by NMDT and other mainstream development actors in the area was premised on projects and programmes conceived and implemented within the framework of the mainstream development paradigm. For example, the small-scale miners' association, although historically and practically operating within the resistance paradigm, was organised along the lines of an interest group with little or no clarity about power relations and linkages between this group and the rest of the village, district, national and global realities, some of which existed in the village itself.¹⁷ Organizing around interest based groups for 'welfarist' and 'developmentalist' projects basically depoliticized the development process or, rather, politicized it in favour of the status quo locally and globally.

Yet, this depoliticized development process is the dominant tradition in Kasighau as it is elsewhere in the country. Therefore, although the small-scale miners knew very well that whatever gains they had made in the fight for their interests against those of the big miners and government bureaucrats were fruits of their own efforts, they still entertained thoughts that the final solution to their problems would come from an external benefactors or liberators – an incorruptible and powerful MP, a 'good' chief or councillor, a powerful pro-people government committed to shielding and protecting its people from exploiters and ruthless business people, a

¹⁷ The village of Rukanga had a hostel that exclusively accommodated foreign research students interested in the flora and fauna found in the Kasighau Hill. It also accommodated other foreigners with unknown missions in the area. It was operated by a foreign organization but the propaganda circulating when the PAR process began was that it was co-owned by the local community as a community managed enterprise. The PAR process exposed the lies and the liars behind this propaganda.

generous NGO, a powerful human rights organisation with fearless crusaders invading to rescue the downtrodden, and so forth.

Despite this tendency, the reflection and analysis sessions during the PAR revealed considerable radical thinking among the people that was inconsistent with the mainstream development paradigm within which their organisations were premised and built. It seemed as if the powerful spirit of change displayed by these people was imprisoned in the status quo. This spirit called for grassroots organising based on justice-inspired perspectives as opposed to 'developmentalist' or 'welfarist' perspectives. Some of the people inspired by the resistance paradigm saw the need to organize differently to protect and advance their interests. That may have happened in small ways but not in any significant proportions given the level of dominance by the mainstream development paradigm.

However, the PAR process indicated very clearly that the seeds and spirit of resistance are very much alive among the people in Kasighau. The participatory approach and style of work by the NMDT had to a certain extent nurtured the spirit and seeds of resistance. Support, such as the PAR project, by progressive professional allies (individuals and organizations) to NMDT to develop and sharpen tools for grassroots based advocacy is a sure way of helping to nurture and realize the potential forces in the resistance paradigm. This is a process of continually challenging the status quo and developing scenarios of new arrangements of power relations that better protect or promote the interests of the majority. It can be a painstaking process, but it can be done and must be done.

8. Concluding Observations

Observations about perceptions of social change by different actors

Different actors in the PAR process perceived social change and their participation in the process of assessing social change from the viewpoint of their primary concerns and specific situations. The perception of social change by NMDT and CRF were heavily influenced by their programme objectives and organisational vision or mission. Their participation in the process of assessing social change remained purely professional.

However, the small-scale miners and Kasighau community perceived social change in terms of their immediate daily lives: improved livelihoods and physical and socio-cultural survival of current and future generations. The issues raised and the process was a matter of life and death – personal and collective survival. Although local people's perceptions on values of justice were shared by NMDT and CRF, the organisations were involved via the personal commitment of their key program people or formal organisational focus.

Participation in processes of social change is informed by different and various types of interests and motivation. Yet, it is the dynamic convergence of these interests that inform the alliance and solidarity for social change between primary actors (grassroots groups and communities) and secondary actors – development workers, human rights activists, donors, academic institutions and all the other 'external' stakeholders in a given situation. The other side of the coin is the existence of competing interests and inherent contradictions within and between the primary and secondary actors continually undermine and threaten to undo the alliance for social change within and between these categories of actors. The delicate balancing act involving convergence of interests, on the one hand, and conflicting interests on the other, constitutes the 'politics' of social change.

The politics of social change includes understanding actual and potential interests and inherent contradictions with which the various actors are operating. This helps us to appreciate the

different perceptions of social change by different actors and motivations of different actors willing to participate in the process of social change.

PAR process and paradigms

When applied in a critical reflection context, PAR becomes a useful assessment tool. The PAR experience in Kasighau with the small-scale miners' struggles powerfully illustrates this point. The degree to which participatory methods can contribute meaningfully to social change work depends on the paradigm in which they are applied. In an enabling paradigm such as the resistance paradigm, participatory methods can be powerful tools of social change and transformation. On the other hand, such methods can be reduced to manipulative tools of the status quo in an oppressive paradigm that protects the interests of powerful elite. It cannot be stressed enough that the critical difference and effectiveness in the use of participatory methods in social change work is not so much the skills and innovativeness of using such methods but the paradigm context in which they are applied.

Facilitation for transformation

It is often middle class actors who facilitate assessment or learning processes such as those described here. When facilitating a process led by primary stakeholders (grassroots groups or communities) facilitation techniques or methods are best used in a flexible and appropriate way. Give your inputs only when requested or when you as facilitator/resource person feels time is ripe for it. Let the people control the agenda, simply guide the process and clearly understand your role. Support them at strategic points in the process with critical technical inputs such as new information, analysis and overall direction of the learning event in accordance to agreed goals and objectives. Let them own the agenda and the process to a point where they take responsibility of any success, as well as failures, so that they can subsequently draw lessons from their experience.

Grassroots focus on common agenda with external actors

From the viewpoint of grassroots actors, external actors include donors, professional middle class workers or activists, government officials and so forth. These external actors have their agenda (implicit or explicit) as they engage with grassroots actors. The agenda of external actors and those of grassroots actors may overlap to a given extent but these sets of agenda are bound to differ to the extent of shared interests, values and perspectives. Grassroots actors should, therefore, strive to identify the common denominators between the two agendas as a basis for vertical interactions and collaboration between themselves and middle class professionals, government officials and donors.

This scenario also holds true when grassroots actors relate with others around issues and concerns of common interest, motives and objectives (whether stated or otherwise) for engagement may differ considerably. Therefore, whether it concerns vertical or horizontal relations, grassroots actors should continually assess common denominators and shared overall direction, goals and objectives in order to design strategic and tactical relations with the different actors. If in doubt about common denominator or shared areas of respective agenda, disengage, reflect and re-engage if appropriate. Defend your space, direction and objectives while respecting other people's spaces and choices.