People's experiences of living in poverty

Early findings for High Level Panel deliberations

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Participate

People's experiences of living in poverty: Early findings for High Level Panel deliberations

This document presents the early findings of *Participate's* major synthesis of recent participatory research and sets out eight key messages from those who are living in poverty and who are most marginalised.

These early findings are designed to accompany *Participate's* Monrovia workshop of 30 January 2013 in which panellists and their advisors will explore the implications for the HLP framework setting document. The full report will be complete by mid March 2013 and will be published in time for when the HLP meets in Indonesia.

Study selection criteria

Studies were chosen for synthesis based on selection criteria focused on standards of quality participatory research identified by the *Participate* initiative – principally that participants were involved in setting the agenda, in analysing the data, and in making sense of it. We assessed 20 major studies that had participatory elements, of which only seven met all of the criteria. These formed the basis for this first phase synthesis. This drew together research from 57 countries, ranging across issues from climate change (Children in a Changing Climate Coalition) to conflict and peace building (People's Peace-making Perspectives), sanitation (Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS)), humanitarian aid (The Listening Project), adult literacy (Reflect), HIV (Stepping Stones), and extreme poverty (ATD Fourth World).

The original research was carried out by the organisations above. The synthesis was carried out by the Participate Team comprising Danny Burns, Erika Lopez Franco, Joanna Howard, Jennifer Leavy, Francesca Salvi, Thea Shahrokh, Chris Shaw and Joanna Wheeler.

'They will tell us not to be silly.
They will ask 'Who will water them?' as we are in school.
They will ask 'How will it help us?'
They say 'Do not create a forest here, it will bring the elephants.'
Kenyan children (Polack 2010: 24)

1 Introduction

This interim report draws on the experiences and views of people living in extreme poverty and marginalisation from 57 countries. It highlights **a contradiction between the way many people working within the 'development system' think change happens, and how people actually experience change**. Moreover, it shows that people living in poverty have different concerns from many of the priorities in development interventions: they tend to value an increased sense of dignity and hope, and improved community relations, as highly as they value improvements in their economic realities (MOWCD and UNDP 2007: 42). International development interventions are often experienced as devaluing local capabilities, knowledges and institutions, and as creating tension in recipient communities. Participants in the studies included in this synthesis call for respect and recognition, and a transformation in the way that the aid system engages with people:

> *'without genuine engagement of both recipients and providers in changing the aid system as it now works, international assistance will continue to save some lives (greatly appreciated!); provide some useful infrastructure and much that is not useful or sustainable; benefit some people and marginalize others (often reinforcing pre-existing social and economic inequalities); weaken local structures and undermine local creativity; and simply waste a great deal of money and time contributed by both external and internal actors.'* (Time to Listen 2012: 26)

How international development interventions are implemented (rather than *what* is implemented) was articulated as a critical factor in whether interventions are relevant and sustainable or not. Sustainable change happens when people living in poverty acquire the tools and knowledge to participate actively and effectively in development processes. This may mean contributing their specific local knowledge, their understanding of the opportunities and challenges that local customs and beliefs present for social change, or it may mean challenging social and institutional injustice and demanding greater state accountability and access to public services. Once people have gained the confidence and skills to participate in these ways, they shift how power is distributed between individuals, communities and institutions, and they will continue to participate.

In this document we illustrate: (i), the complex realities of people living in poverty; (ii), people's experiences of aid; and (iii), some of the solutions proposed by people who are living in extreme poverty and marginalisation, in order for sustainable development to occur. Eight key messages emerge from the analysis:

■ Extreme poverty is characterised by difficult trade-offs and impossible choices.

■ Development interventions that reach the poor, often don't reach the very poor and the most excluded.

■ Top down development programmes frequently fail to respond to the everyday realities of those in poverty, and increase their sense of powerlessness.

■ Many poverty alleviation programmes provide short term answers to issues, but create long-term dependencies.

■ Development programmes are often based on simple cause-effect assumptions. The poorest people have to deal with unintended consequences and perverse effects that could be avoided with greater local participation.

■ Sustainable development requires time and investment in relationship building.

■ Effective development processes need to engage much more with power, social norms, customs, attitudes and behaviours.

■ Empowerment, dignity and hope are valued as much as livelihoods, education and health.

An international framework that seriously engages with extreme poverty and marginalisation will need to have understood the implications of all of these.

Box 1 **Extreme poverty is characterised by difficult trade-offs and impossible choices.**

Violence and insecurity constrain how people make decisions
Maria Teresa González is an activist in Guatemala and her family faces a choice between feeling safe but in poverty and living in constant fear but building a livelihood for themselves. She explains: *'My son is sixteen years old and could be working but I'm afraid to let him go out. The stress is constant for fear that something will happen to our children, fear that they will be recruited into gangs, because once they are in a gang, it's too late. They can't leave even if they want to. As a mother, you're caught between duty and poverty, because we need our children to help in some way, but sometimes it is better to live with constraints than to wonder if they're coming back or not. Stress is constant because of the constant danger we live with'* (ATD Fourth World 2012: 36).

Climatic changes create trade-offs in opportunities for 'development'
Fourteen year old Samuel from Machakos, Kenya, sees his involvement in the development of climate adaptation strategies as critical for reducing trade-offs: *'Climate change is affecting us and in the future if we are not involved, we will live in a desert, so we have to do something now so that we prevent our land from becoming a desert. The rivers have dried up and sand mining has increased, this has caused many children to drop out of school to work in mines in the rivers loading the vehicles.'* (Polack 2010: 23)

2 Experiences of life (People's realities)

Poverty is often characterised by impossible choices and trade-offs which are frequently unseen, and rarely taken into account by development agencies when planning interventions.

The **violence** associated with living in extreme poverty acts as a barrier to taking up solutions or ways out of poverty. In Ecuador eligibility for assistance directly targeting gang members can further entrench involvement in gangs, even when those involved wish to change their situation:

> *'No matter how much of a gang member a youth may be, he is a person who wants to move forward in his life. This is why I don't understand why the people that help continue to call us gang members. A gang member is helped in order that he stops being a gang member, but then he receives no help if he's not a gang member.'* Young former male gang member, Ecuador (Time to Listen 2012: 62)

Eligibility defined along negative or 'undesirable' categorisation – precisely those categories that the benefit aims to enable people to overcome – can therefore act as a perverse incentive for people to remain in their category and unable to make transitions. Measures are effectively undermined by their own, inappropriate targeting procedures.

Changes in climate mean that households have to balance the immediate demands of what may be their main or sole livelihood activity against long term considerations.

> *'Since the climate has changed, our studies have been badly affected. We have to spend more time helping our family in farming and non-farming activities. We don't have much time to study. Hot weather and drought means our family needs to pump water for our rice fields from sources further away than before which our parents cannot manage by themselves. When the situation is urgent we have to miss school to help them out.'* (Polack 2010: 19)

For the poorest people there is often no choice and the immediate need must be met at the expense of investing in their children's future and a key route out of poverty.

Sustainable solutions to these bitter choices need to be grounded in an understanding of the dynamics that hold people in powerlessness. This calls for interventions to adequately reflect people's daily lives, and support for interventions that reflect individual lived experience. But as indicated above, **interventions alone will not result in sustainable change unless they engage critically with power**:

■ at the family level, changing gender relations
■ at the local level, in the way the state operates

Interventions that have engaged women and girls in literacy circles and income generation activities have been most frequently highlighted by people as bringing positive change. Processes of women's empowerment have brought about enhanced appreciation of women's capabilities previously undervalued as a resource, both within the family and in the community (Collaborative Learning Projects 2007; Macpherson 2007; MOWCD and UNDP 2007; Upton and Gandi 2012). **These successes reveal how interventions must reflect local realities.**

The appropriate approach and process to address exclusion will depend on the setting, and may need to happen at a very different pace in different settings. For example, Reflect Literacy Circles in Sierra Leone and Johannesburg and KwaZulu Natal in South Africa triggered quite different outcomes. In the Johannesburg Township, women participants were ready to analyse power inequalities at the institutional as well as

'You can't have peace until you can tell your own truth and the person you are talking to can be in a position to understand and not generalize.' Mahamadou Kone, full-time volunteer, Burkina Faso (ATD Fourth World 2012: 62)

family level, and to take action to challenge their exclusion from local services. By contrast, in the traditional rural setting of KwaZulu Natal, and in post-conflict Sierra Leone, the power analysis took place at the personal and family levels. Here, there was sustainable change in gender relations, but participants did not wish to challenge institutional power. In Sierra Leone, greater family and community unity was the most valued outcome of the Literacy Circle, even more than literacy itself, which is seen as the route to improved livelihood opportunities (Upton and Gandi 2012:19). **Development processes and expectations must therefore be adjusted to local realities.**

Sustainable solutions also need to address the way the non-poor or more powerful judge poor people. This erodes people's dignity and creates stigma or *labelling* related to extreme poverty. **To be effective, development policy needs to engage with discriminatory social norms around poverty held by the non-poor.**

> *'people disrespect us by calling us names like "social case", "bad mother", "incapable", "good-for-nothing" demonstrates how they are judging us and do not know about the reality we face. We experience the violence of being discriminated against, of not existing, not being part of the same world, not being treated like other human beings. This everyday violence is abuse…'* (ATD Fourth World 2012: 39)

This labelling is also strongly embedded in international development practise:

> *'[…] just before the International Day of the African Child, the coalition made the children walk through the streets wearing t-shirts with the words "Street Children" on the back. During the coalition's Board of Directors meeting, we decided to talk about it because we were all in disagreement about it. We told them, 'Our protest was meant to proclaim "No" to the stigmatization of children living in the streets but today we're making them parade around wearing "Street Children" written on their backs!' A person in charge said to us, "if the funding sponsors don't see the children in the streets, the event won't be a success. You can't make an omelet without cracking some eggs." It's an act of violence to benefit from the poverty of others in order to fill your pockets. Today the question for us is, 'How do we change our partners' vision?'* Mahamadou Kone, full-time volunteer Burkina Faso (ATD Fourth World 2012: 54)

Challenging these prejudices requires the participation of people in poverty, in planning, implementing and assessing the public policies that affect them (ATD Fourth World 2012: 78).

Dignity relates strongly to people's well being and this comes through very clearly in the voices in the studies analysed here, in wide-ranging contexts – from the experiences of people who have been enabled to address open defecation and sanitation issues via Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) work (Plan 2010–2011), to people's experiences and interactions with international assistance (Time to Listen 2012).

The next section reviews people's experiences of aid, and analyses how aid interacts with the complex realities of poverty and marginalisation.

Box 2 Sustainable development requires time and investment in relationship building.

According to a spiritual leader in Thailand: *'People come from the outside and do not spend time to get to know the community and the area. They see what is on the surface and they only see problems.'* (Time to Listen 2012: 31)

A local resident in Kabul believes that: *'NGOs look at immediate needs, but may not be aware of why there's a problem. Why is the child sick? They need to stay longer to get an idea of the real problem.'* (Time to Listen 2012: 31)

Relationships also matter at the local level
Vukuzenzele Reflect Community Organisation (VRCO) in Orange Farm Township, Gauteng (near Johannesburg) gives this example: *'…the Youth Circle, wanted to go and march on the municipal offices because they felt that they were not getting satisfactory service delivery…they wanted to march and fight, but they ended up, thankfully, sitting in the circle and inviting the council member to join them and to discuss why there are these problems of service delivery. They did not come but the circle are now analysing, it becomes more strategic and thought-through, I mean imagine marching to a councillor who doesn't know your problems, doesn't know you, he becomes automatically defensive and closes himself down, whereas if you meet him and say with him 'how can we solve this' then they become part of the solution.'* (SA Macpherson 2007: 30)

More time is needed to address the most complex problems
A child in Cambodia explains: *'We started a campaign to inform the children about the danger of continuous rainfall due to climate change and the continuing mining operation… We formed groups to help our parents in filling mining pits. We also started our own tree planting program. But these are temporary solutions… For the sake of our future, we want chromate mining to be stopped.'* (Polack 2010: 32)

Box 3 Development programmes are often based on simple assumptions of cause and effect. The poorest people have to deal with unintended consequences and perverse effects that could be avoided with greater local participation.

The leader of a women's association in Mali describes how external funding causes problems: *'Donors require that we establish associations in order to be eligible for support but these associations have in some cases become the source of our misfortune. It can happen this way. For example, I create an association and I am the President. My sister becomes the Secretary and another sister becomes the Treasurer so it becomes a family affair. I can easily mobilize 100 other women to become members of my association but they won't have the right to question things or have their say. When the funding arrives, you are marginalized if you keep asking questions. All the association's income goes to the President. When the donors return, the association's leaders convene some of the members and pay them to attend a donor's meeting. The donor is happy and concludes that all is going well. But, in fact, nothing is going well! The funding comes to those who know how to work the system.'* (Time to Listen 2012: 35)

A group of shop owners in Kosovo observed: *'We got all this aid because the village was 'multi-ethnic'. The NGOs were fulfilling their own conditions. To get aid, not only does your community have to have many ethnic groups, they have to have problems with each other too!'* (Time to Listen 2012: 45)

A primary school teacher in Kenya observed what can happen when local people are not consulted: *'[A donor] dug boreholes and used a lot of money, but most have collapsed due to lack of maintenance. [An international aid agency] supplied schools with mabati (tin) water tanks, but they rusted and are now useless. Why not build stone ones and involve the community themselves so that they can anticipate future challenges? Those who bring projects have good intentions, but because of the poverty here, people cannot maintain the projects. Instead of relief food, why not have more irrigation? There are too many 'white elephants.'* (Collaborative Learning Projects 2007: 26)

3 Experiences of Aid

In what ways does aid assist the poorest and most marginalised people to move out of poverty? While there are countless short term benefits and some sustainable changes, this research finds that there is a unified call by poor people throughout the aid-recipient countries for a rethinking of how aid is distributed, how fast, to whom, and for what. There is a sense in which **people want aid that is slower and more thoughtful**:

> *'People in Mali regretted the fact that visits were very brief and that donors always seemed to be in a hurry. In their view, donors seem to be responding more to the needs of their own organizations and were more preoccupied with feeding their own systems (with reports, data collection, meetings, etc.) than observing, addressing and learning from issues in the field. Donor representatives themselves lamented the fact that they have little time to go to the field to see activities first-hand and to meet with partners and beneficiaries. Time constraints and the additional costs that more frequent monitoring visits would entail were cited as reasons for the limited follow up on the ground'* (Listening Exercise Report, Mali: Time to Listen 2012: 59)

The processes and systems within the aid industry tend to create distortions and perverse incentives. The Listening Project found that people across all regions and social strata described similar experiences of processes of assistance that undermined the very goals of the assistance. Aid often tends to increase dependency and powerlessness: too much aid is given to address crises but not to address the longer term challenges that cause them (Time to Listen 2012: 18). People feel exploited as aid agencies compete with each other to position themselves (Time to Listen 2012: 18; ATD Fourth World 2012: 54).

Short term solutions are likely to address the symptom and not the cause, and may perpetuate and even deepen the problem. This is very clear when we talk about issues such as climate change, Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS), and conflict:

> *'Many countries where aid is given have experienced wide scale violence, sometimes over extended periods of time… in all but one country [where the Listening Project had visited] people said that international aid over time had introduced or reinforced tensions among groups and that cumulatively it had increased the potential for violence and/or fundamental divisions within their societies.'* (Time to Listen 2012: 20)

> *'Interventions need to be grounded in a thorough understanding of the local context, and of the capacities and challenges of local institutions. How is marginalisation taking place? Through what processes? In the Mano River Union, people felt that 'poor governance was one of the critical drivers of conflict' and that the disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process had done little to change the fact that 'the vast majority of people in rural areas across the MRU still feel excluded from decision-making in their own countries.'* (Conciliation Resources 2012: 11)

The relationship between inequalities of power and poverty is a narrative that runs through all of the participatory research studies:

> *'Every organization is under the influence of local community elders and tribal leaders. Aid often ends up in their hands and is not distributed based on need.' Villager, Afghanistan.* (Time to Listen 2012: 81)

> *'If you are not a member of a political party or you do not have any friends or family in the municipal administration, then you struggle to get any assistance. You have to be a political party member to get any assistance.' Local man, Kosovo.* (Time to Listen 2012: 81)

Box 4 Development Interventions that reach the poor, often don't reach the very poor and the most excluded.

For Jean Diène, a volunteer with ATD Fourth World in Senegal, poverty is not understood by decision-makers; they target those who are easiest to reach. *'We often see institutions and organizations come to tell us that they are there to help us – but their strategy is just to distribute money or food to anyone. They don't try to really understand what poverty is. The money and food that they distribute often becomes a source of conflict between neighbors. They give the money or food to people who actually shouldn't get it. At the same time, they forget about the ones who truly need it.'* (ATD Fourth World 2012: 53)

A community member, Rupa sub-county, Moroto district says, *'We hear a lot on radios about goats, pigs and other good things being given out, but we do not see any of these in our villages. When we are in town people show us big goats, sometimes referred to as NAADS goats, but these belong to the leaders. Ordinary people in our villages don't have them.'* (Saferworld and Conciliation Resources, Uganda 2012: 5)

The Chairman of a social welfare group in Western Kenya noted how assistance from the outside doesn't always get to everyone in need. *'Most often, what is provided is so little compared to the population deserving it. Since it is not possible to provide assistance or aid enough for the people who need it, agencies should focus more on strategies or initiatives that enable people to do more for themselves so that as the agencies exit the locals can still go on without having to look to another agency from outside again.'* Collaborative Learning Projects 2007: 16)

Box 5 Top down development programmes often don't respond to the everyday realities of those in poverty, and increase their sense of powerlessness.

Community members in Myanmar, Burma criticise how some NGOs work: *'There are times that NGOs do not provide what people really need. For some NGOs, the projects come from above, top-down. They should listen to the people from the communities.'* (Time to Listen 2012: 31)

A woman from a Sri Lankan village tells about her experience of the aid industry: *'A local CBO funded through foreign donor funds has been surveying the surrounding communities in preparation for upcoming 'peace committees.' We have no idea what these are, and what they will do. We are not sure if this is something we need, we are just waiting to see what will come out of these surveys. I am baffled about how projects like this are decided on.'* (Time to Listen 2012: 31)

Katharine, a village health team member in Katipe, Uganda explains how a participatory approach to sanitation (Community-Led Total Sanitation) starting at the community level enables children to find their own solutions to sanitation issues. *'The children were bored with the messages about good hygiene and sanitation, but when I started using the CLTS Approach, I noticed a positive change… Instead of telling them how to solve this problem, I asked the children to come up with solutions by themselves and make an action plan how to improve the situation. Within a short time the toilets at the school were cleaned up and the children stopped defecating in the open when they were at school.'* (PLAN 2012: 30)

Box 6 Many poverty alleviation programmes provide short-term answers to issues, but can create long term dependencies.

A villager in Sri Lanka explains how food rations do not support economic transformation in their community: *'This food assistance ought to stop. This money should be given to infrastructure development. 75 per cent of families in this village receive rations for food each month but are unable to pull themselves out of poverty. Changes will be there definitely if families take their economic development into their hands.'* (Time to Listen 2012: 18)

Participatory approaches such as CLTS can reverse traditional assumptions that *'the poor need external help'. Mahmud, a farmer from Tilorma, Sierra Leone explains: 'We found it very difficult in the beginning to accept that we ourselves should build our own toilets with our own local materials.'* (UNICEF 2008: 2)

'I applied three times for a cow but I did not get it because I belong to a different religious community than the minister. If you have a leader from your religious sect in the government, he will bring you aid.' Villager, Lebanon (Time to Listen 2012: 82)

Powerful interests restrict access to resources and support from reaching those living in extreme poverty – they who don't have the necessary access to networks and power. Without understanding how power plays out in local communities it is impossible to understand the context within which development interventions are located. This understanding is critical to their success or failure. These experiences echo a wider message that while development aid may be beneficial to many people, frequently does not reach those in extreme poverty.

Top-down approaches to development assistance can remove people's sense of agency – of being in control of their own lives. This sense of powerlessness erodes self-esteem and over time reduces the effectiveness of measures designed to enable people to exploit opportunities that lead to positive outcomes, further entrenching people's identities as 'the poor'.

Without understanding the drivers of marginalisation, interventions may often further perpetuate inequalities instead of transforming them, and undermine the local institutions that need to be strengthened as partners in development (see section 4). Aid can also undermine existing coping mechanisms of the poor. Examples point to societal distortions such as a loss of community sharing and volunteer spirit they had before aid arrived. Somehow, people say, the incentives of the delivery system business model evoke these perverse responses so that recipients, themselves, perpetuate their own dependency (Time to Listen 2012: 35).

When the systems and processes of aid bypass national and local government institutions, they undermine state institutions which have the potential to deliver sustainable change. Local institutions are likely to have capacity issues, but are cited by many as key to long term development, through greater decentralisation and, in the African context, better coordination between local councils and traditional chiefdom authorities (Drew and Ramsbotham, *Accord 23* 2012: 33).

Communities are not being sufficiently engaged in aid programming and decision-making, by either government or NGO's, 'There are common complaints that NGOs take a blanket approach and arrive with pre-planned programs, without doing appropriate needs assessment or consulting with the communities about their priorities.' Listening Project Report, Zimbabwe (Time to Listen 2012: 59)

The next section highlights some solutions proposed by people living in poverty and marginalisation, to address the complex issues and the inconsistencies of the aid industry and to make progress towards a more sustainable development paradigm.

Box 7 Effective development processes need to engage much more with social norms, customs, attitudes and behaviours.

Lack of understanding of social norms will undermine development interventions
In Karamoja, Uganda, scarce resources have shifted traditional pastoralist livelihoods and fuelled conflict. This has created tensions in perceptions of gender identity, where men in Nadunget who are working in gardens rather than herding cattle say: *'We have now become women'* (Saferworld 2012: 31).

Addressing social norms can lead to improvements in development
A resident of Baluch Khel, Afghanistan describes her experience with a participatory approach to sanitation (CLTS): *'Before CLTS, it was really difficult for us (women), as there were no latrines in the homes, and we were forced to ease ourselves only early in the morning and late in the evening – it was extremely inconvenient. The men in our village used to walk far away for defecation, while the children used to defecate wherever they wanted in the village – there was shit everywhere! From the village mapping exercise, we realised that we had been defecating even in the middle of our village. As a result of the CLTS campaign, we had a chance to understand the sanitation situation in our village and to analyse the outcome of open defecation and its effects on our entire life. We found it very shameful, disgusting and unhealthy for us, and realised that shit was everywhere in the village. Since the CLTS campaign, much effort has been made to improve the situation in our village. But now latrine construction is flourishing, and a lot more residents are committing to build latrines. We women have been able to find a lot of privacy, which was not the case before. Now I will work on improving the condition of the latrine to avoid flies and smell. Our village looks clean, with fewer flies, and less sickness too. So far we have shared our CLTS knowledge with our relatives living in another village, so that they too may benefit from this campaign.'* (Greaves 2010: 9)

4 Solutions Proposed by People Living in Poverty to Achieve Sustainable Development

In order to facilitate sustainable outcomes, development interventions need to work through partnerships that prioritise inclusion of people living in poverty at the very local level, but also ensure that relationships are being built with those operating within institutions of power.

This could mean bringing together local government and customary institutions in the African context:

> *'Decentralisation to local councils in Sierra Leone is discussed as a way of promoting sustainable change and development, but a blockage is the lack of coordination between local councils and traditional chiefdom authorities: Development is implemented mainly at the chiefdom level. However, when contracts are awarded by local councils, no reference is made to chiefdom authorities, who are excluded from the process'* (Drew and Ramsbotham 2012: 33)

Weak institutions can act as a barrier to people moving out of extreme poverty and marginalisation, and can block otherwise successful development initiatives: In Malawi, the Reflect programme aimed to set up cooperatives around the country to promote the income generation activities, but this could not happen because of 'limited capacity… at district level forcing the district level staff to rely on the ministry responsible which in turn has limited capacity in terms of personnel to suffice the demands from the district level' (MOWCD and UNDP 2007: 42). Effective development interventions need to build state as well as community and individual capacity.
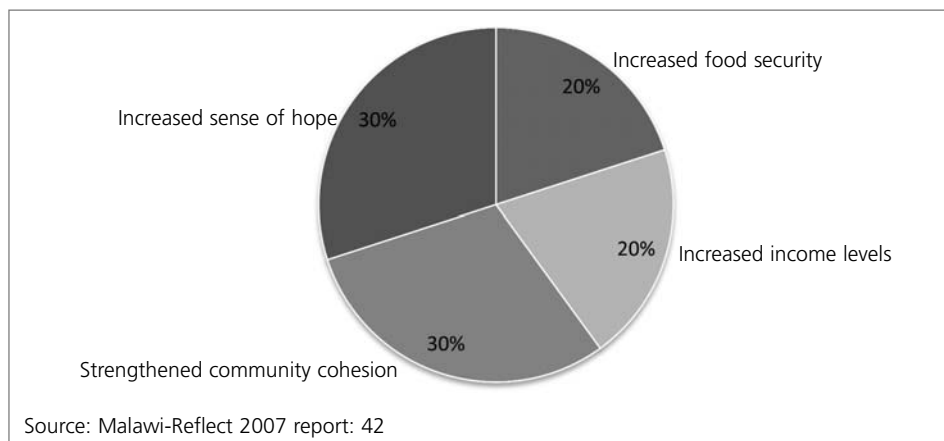
Similarly, building partnerships between state and civil society actors is essential for development to be sustainable. Increased confidence and capacity of the poor and their organisations needs to be matched by increased capacity and accountability of institutions of the state. Without this, people begin to take their security into their own hands (Saferworld 2012). Building linkages across state-civil society boundaries does of course bring with it the risk of exploitation of people by the state, and co-optation of their organisations (and this is a very common experience).

The majority of examples of sustainable change are underpinned by shifts in attitude and behaviour. Changes in attitudes can in turn trigger other developmental changes, often indirectly or in a 'non-linear' way. Development interventions tend to have a linear logic – inputs ABC will produce outcomes XYZ. Attitudinal change is incremental and operates in a non-linear way, triggering changes at multiple levels, as behaviours and expectations change. For example, a Reflect literacy circle brings about improvements in literacy and numeracy (linear change), and also, over time, changes in attitudes towards women in the community. As women's views begin to be heard and respected, men's attitudes also change. Discussions within circles identify local issues and priorities which can be fed into district planning frameworks (MOWCD and UNDP 2007: 46). Thus, change is occurring at multiple levels simultaneously, and is fed back and forth between people and institutions.

Often, change which is only partial, or which has negative, exclusionary or damaging effects, is the outcome of an intervention that has not engaged properly with underlying social norms. Successful sustainable interventions such as Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) demonstrate **the importance of interventions that work with norms and attitudes and not just needs**. Defecation is often culturally linked to shame and dignity, and not always to health and sanitation. In Malawi, childrens' death from diarrhoea 'has been associated with witchcraft due to tobacco farming which is taboo (Charity Kholola – mother, Malawi (Plan 2012: 45). This association needs to be understood before change can be brought about. The participatory

Box 8 Empowerment and hope are valued as much as livelihoods, education and health.

This pie chart is based on participatory research, and shows that citizens in Malawi highly value an increased sense of hope and strengthened community cohesion that result from livelihood activities.

Increased food security 20%

Increased sense of hope 30%

Increased income levels 20%

Strengthened community cohesion 30%

Source: Malawi-Reflect 2007 report: 42

Empowerment has different meanings in different contexts
Jailosi, a 42 year-old woman from Malawi, describes economic empowerment: 'Besides the reading and writing skills I have gained, I am involved in rearing guinea fowls soon to be shared using the pass-on method. I have not just waited to receive money from the project; I raised my own money to buy my own guinea fowls because I know how to raise them now. I have sold guinea fowls in order to have money to buy household necessities.' (MOWCD and UNDP 2007: 39)

Ethel, a primary school teacher from Salima, Malawi describes gender-based empowerment experienced through the Stepping Stones approach: 'It is wonderful to learn things I have not heard before. The project enabled me to understand myself and my relationship with my husband better. This understanding enabled me to become more open to discuss subjects including sex which I wouldn't have dared mention before. My husband became more open too and now we don't keep secrets from each other. Our children have benefited as we now discuss our incomes and can provide more for them. The closeness of my family is a source of pride for me.' (DFID 2007: 1)

processes of CLTS engage community members in activities and discussions through which, common beliefs are put under scrutiny and eventually changed.

Sustainable change is systemic: it works on multiple levels and iteratively, with individual and cultural norms and beliefs, institutions and processes. Attempts to deal with conflict around cattle raiding in Karamoja have, in addition to addressing capacity issues of state institutions, to address cultural attitudes around gender and how these undermine intended conflict resolution interventions. In Sierra Leone, community-based reconciliation processes (Fambul Tok bonfire ceremonies) draw on local culture and traditions to promote grassroots reconciliation (Drew and Ramsbotham, *Accord 23* 2012).

The participatory research analysed here suggests that **development interventions need to provide sources of hope, not just poverty reduction**. This includes less 'tangible' dimensions such as dignity that are essential for wellbeing. Reflect programme evaluators in Malawi found that hope and community cohesion were benefits of the income generation activities, alongside increased food security and income (Reflect Malawi, 2007: 42). Dignity and self-respect came across as core dimensions of well-being in the CLTS programme. Individual empowerment builds within the groups (e.g. Reflect, CLTS, ATD) and extends to others beyond the group in a way that can affirm the dignity and rights of marginalised groups, especially women, children and people living with HIV-AIDS:

> 'Our confidence increases in a group … once one gets an idea others can also think more about the same idea and it can be used to educate the community. Once we are educated we can add other ideas and then people can understand that children are important partners in the community' (Child in Kisarawe, Tanzania, Shutt, 2010: 104).

Through participation in such groups, people recognise it is important for them to talk about their poverty in order to generate awareness and recognition of everyday exclusion: 'For me, peace is being able to tell your own truth and to be heard.' (ATD Fourth World 2012: 62)

'If you ask me what my priority needs are and I tell you, but then you bring me other things instead, I will take them, but you did not help me.' Farmer near Timbuktu, Mali (Time to Listen 2012: 46)

Conclusion

This report has drawn on research conducted with people living in poverty and marginalisation, to identify how they experience and understand change, how they experience aid interventions, and the interaction between the two. It has found that aid interventions often help in the short-term, but can also result in damaging change when social ties are broken down and competition between groups is exacerbated. We have identified sustainable change as possible when the development intervention works with social norms and beliefs, and takes a systemic approach by working across issues and groups and working at different levels.

This is not easy. It requires a shift in how development interventions tend to take place. Processes of community-led development will take longer, but a key message from this research is that donors are not taking enough time and as a result, people living in poverty feel used, exploited and further marginalised. Effective partnership working means taking risks in order to build trust. For example working with traditional leaders and institutions does not,

> *'provide easy or risk-free solutions: many played their part in both conflicts; they can contradict national or international norms and standards; and they can be socially partisan or politically exploitable. But local communities are often more likely to perceive them as legitimate, effective and – above all – available. They can tap into local expertise and understanding, help to build community capacity, and inform and complement state structures that are in the process of being developed'.* (Drew and Ramsbotham, *Accord* 23 2012: 61)

Not working with them however is a greater risk, as without understanding the local context, systems and practices, development interventions cannot bring about sustainable solutions to conflict, marginalisation and poverty.

ATD Fourth World argues that one of the principal causes of the failure of development policies is that they overlook the knowledge of those that live in poverty. It advocates creating spaces and processes for 'knowledge creation' jointly between those who live in poverty and those who work to understand and to combat poverty (ATD Fourth World 2012: 22). There are many different ways in which this 'merging of knowledges' can happen.

In a development landscape which is littered with projects and programmes that people either don't want to, or are unable to engage with; where conflicts continue to spring up; and where inequalities are widening, it is critical that any new global framework gets this process right.

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This document was built drawing on a total of 56 documents across the seven analysed projects, ranging from policy-briefs to evaluation pieces. The following list only presents those documents that were referenced in Participate's early findings. The final research output for the synthesis of past participatory studies will present the complete lists of studies read, discussed and synthesised for the whole document.

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