

Does Deference Enable Elite Capture? Evidence from a World Bank Community-Based Project in Ghana

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Abstract

The contribution of ‘development brokers’ to the creation of elite capture is not well represented in the community development literature. We attempt to fill this gap by presenting findings from a doctoral research in Ghana on the World Bank’s Community-Based Rural Development Projects (CBRDP), implemented between 2005 and 2011. We present the findings of research from the Eastern Region of Ghana and document how a Traditional Chief inadvertently ‘captured’ a local school project that was to be maintained by an entire ‘community’. We found residents of the locality to be apathetic to the upkeep of the project, emanating mainly from their Traditional Chief’s ‘benevolent’ capture of the initiative. Through an attitude of deference to the Traditional Chief, relevant CBRDP officers were also found to have been biased in monitoring the project, resulting in its failure. The paper suggests that community participation and engagement is more important than co-opting elites to manage community-based programs.

Keywords: *community-driven development, development, elite capture, traditional chiefs, Ghana*

1. Introduction

The subject of ‘elite capture’ is emerging, albeit slowly, in community development literature, particularly those focused on sub-Saharan Africa and Asia Pacific regions. According to the World Bank ‘elites are actors who have disproportionate influence in the development process as a result of their superior social, political or economic status’ (World Bank, 2008: p.1). Other scholars have described them as the ‘educated’ in poor communities, who dedicate more time to local initiatives and with better connections with outsider and development agencies (Rao & Ibanez, 2003; Platteau & Gaspard, 2004). Some commentators also present ‘elites’ as being the ones who seem to take the most critical decisions on local projects and have the tendency to favour projects that may represent their own preferences rather than community preferences or by misusing the funds provided to the community (Bardhan, 2002; Labonne & Chase, 2007; Araujo et al., 2008). Portrayed variously as a ‘phenomenon’, a ‘concept’ or a ‘situation’, ‘elite capture’ is believed to happen when ‘elites’ shape development processes according to their own priorities and/or appropriate development resources for their private gain (Platteau, 2004; World Bank, 2008; Dutta, 2009).

Although some scholars consider elite capture to be useful for facilitating local development in some contexts, a greater part of the literature appear to condemn it for having tendencies to breed corruption and undermine participatory development values (Stokes et al., 2013). While we validate the notion that the phenomenon is detrimental to community development and decentralisation, and should be guarded against, our point of departure is; 1) The seeming exoneration of ‘development brokers’ from the factors and conditions that contribute to the creation and perpetuation elite capture; and 2) The apparent blaming of ‘only’ elites as perpetrators of the phenomenon. We draw on the ideas of Lewis and Mosse (2006) to define ‘development brokers’ as government bureaucracies, development practitioners and organisations involved in policies and activities that affect people-mainly the poor. As applied in this paper, the ‘elite’ refers to the Traditional Chief of Dabidabi from the Eastern Region, whom we encountered, during a doctoral research fieldwork in Ghana between August 2010 and March 2011.

2. Objectives

This research explores the following points:

1. To show that development brokers do patronize elites, particularly, in contexts where deference to socio-cultural institutions, like Chieftaincy, is prevalent.
2. To show that local people do not feel they have a responsibility to contribute to developing their communities as long as elites are in-control.
3. Provide new and empirical literature for community-development practitioners on the factors and conditions that create elite capture
4. To show that 'co-opting' elites by development brokers further perpetuates elite capture.

3. Method

The data presented in the paper was extracted from a PhD dissertation (Adusei-Asante, 2013). The doctoral study drew on a seven months ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana between August 2010 and March 2011 to examine the issues that influenced the implementation and outcomes of Ghana's Community-Based Rural Development Projects (CBRDP). The thesis critically examined international development aid, specifically the manner in which decentralisation theories and concepts such as 'empowerment' and 'community' influence its community-based program outcomes.

The research that informed the PhD thesis and this paper was conducted in nine localities from the Eastern, Greater Accra and Eastern Regions of Ghana. The current paper is based on a case study of Dabidabi¹ in the Eastern Region, which received a three-classroom block school under the CBRDP to boost education in the locality. The case study formed one of five case studies in the thesis proper. The data was generated from a review of relevant literature, participant-observation (ethnography), interviews and focus group discussion with Traditional Chiefs, residents of CBRDP beneficiary localities and local government officials. Respondents were purposively sampled and had to reside in localities in which the projects were delivered and possess intimate knowledge of its implementation. The semi-structured interview questions sought information, for example as to how and why Dabidabi's school project was selected, implemented and the issues affecting the maintenance of the classrooms. Edith Cowan University's Ethics Committee granted ethics approval in 2010. The entire data was analysed manually, and the themes that emerged on elite capture are presented in this paper.

4. Literature review

'Elite capture' is an accepted concept applied mainly in political economy (Putnam, 1976 & 1977; Bottomore, 1993; Stokes et al., 2013). However, its use in community studies and practise is a recent development. Elite capture emerged as a major shortcoming and threat to the effectiveness of Community-Driven Development (CDD) programs², an approach believed to give control over planning decisions and investment resources for development projects to community groups (Dongier et al., 2003; Mansuri & Rao, 2004; World Bank, 2012).

CDD programs became popular from 2000, endorsed by the World Bank as a credible alternative to top-down development policies, which were prevalent in the 1980s (see Chambers, 1983; Escobar, 1995). According to Binswanger-Mkhize et al. (2010), between 2001 and 2008, CDD funding was almost USD 2 billion annually and reached USD 7.8 billion in 2010 alone (Mansuri & Rao, 2012). An Independent Evaluation Group review of sixty-two country assistance strategies found that CDD operations formed an integral part of the World Bank's strategy in more than seventy-four per cent of relevant countries (Binswanger-Mkhize et al., 2010). In 2008, the International Development Association's (IDA) lending for CDD- related programs averaged seventeen percent of its total lending (World Bank 2010), while the number of CDD programs active at the IDA for the 2007– 2009 period averaged over seventy-two. A recent report shows that the World Bank is implementing nearly four hundred CDD projects, worth USD 30 billion, in ninety-four countries (Wong 2012).

¹ For ethical reasons the region and names of the town where the fieldwork happened and Traditional Chief have been de-identified.

² While CDD programs can be implemented in different forms (such as Ghana's CBRDP and Sierra Leone's 2003 National Rural Infrastructure Program) they draw on the fundamental principle of giving control to communities.

Notwithstanding its popularity, CDD has been impacted by many shortcomings, one being elite capture (Baird et al., 2009; Platteau, 2009; Labonne & Chase, 2007). As earlier indicated, elite capture is believed to transpire when elites, in most cases, few politically and/or economically powerful people, manipulate local decision-making and agenda to their personal benefits (Dutta 2009; Wong 2010; Platteau 2009). As Duchoslav (2013: p.7) observed:

‘The idea that CDD projects are prone to elite capture may seem somewhat counterintuitive. By allowing the intended beneficiaries to play an active role in the management of the projects, the very design of participatory development is supposed to limit the corruption often associated with top-down approaches to development.’

Unequal power relation at the local level underpins most cases of elite domination. According to Platteau (2004) elites can capture initiatives meant to benefit an entire community because of their: (1) privileged access to economic resources, (2) asymmetrical social positions, (3) varying levels of knowledge of political protocols, and (4) different education attainment. Elites also perpetuate their ‘power’ and domination through land holding, family networks, employment status, wealth, political and religious affiliation, personal history and personality (Wong, 2010; Dasgupta & Beard, 2007; Stokes et al., 2013).

Although scholars disagree on whether the elite capture of community-based projects is an exception or a generality, the literature seems to favour the latter. This is particularly evident in developing countries, where non-government organisations, lineage-based social systems, politico-cultural institutions (such as Chieftaincy) and corruption appear to be prevalent. Despite this, most scholars agree that elite capture is not easy to investigate (Hartman & Crawford, 2008; Olken, 2007; Ahmad & Brosio, 2009; Platteau, 2009).

Two major attempts to reduce and/or eliminate elite capture have been identified in the literature: ‘counter-elite’ and ‘co-opt’ elites approaches. Counter elite approach excludes elites from community-based projects, while the latter includes them (Rao & Ibanez, 2005; Labonne & Chase, 2009; Wong, 2010; Duchoslav, 2013). The notion of co-opting elites in community-based projects is rooted in Platteau’s (2004) suggestion, and confirmed by other scholars (Mansuri and Rao 2004; Wong 2010) that there are ‘benevolent elites’ who, despite their wealth and influence, want to serve their communities out of a sense of duty.

Sam Wong (2010) discusses the results of two case studies in which elites were included and excluded from community-based projects respectively. The author avers that elites can be absorbed and challenged in the same project at the same time, as suppressing their authority in managing community-based projects does not necessarily undermine their influence. Wong argues further that co-opting elites reinforces power inequalities and exacerbates powerlessness of the poor. Using data from randomised controlled trial in rural Sierra Leone, Duchoslav (2013) also concluded that excluding elites from managing community-based projects does not have any effect on their eventual success.

Given the paradox above, a growing body of literature has been encouraging development brokers to champion and adopt measures to eliminate and/or at least reduce elite capture of community projects (Platteau & Gaspard, 2003; D’Exelle & Riedl, 2008; Dutta, 2009; World Bank, 2012). Such suggestions are exemplified by Wong’s (2010, p.14) argument that:

‘NGOs and other development agencies should maintain their high power sensitivity at the post-implementation stage of the projects. They should continuously provide support to local people in order to monitor the influence of the elites over the development processes.’

Alatas et al. (2013, p.30) also commented that:

‘[Development brokers] ...should take seriously the possibility that improving the skills of local leaders through training them and challenging them to perform by giving them important responsibilities may contribute more to welfare than cutting them out of the whole process to avoid capture...’

While their role in suppressing elite capture is significant the seeming exoneration of development brokers from factors that create elite capture is inconsistent with our findings from Dabidabi in the Eastern Region of Ghana. As discussed below, we present a case study that shows the complicity and impact of development brokers' patronage of a Traditional Chief who essentially captured the World Bank's CBRDP in his town.

5. The World Bank's community-based rural development projects in Ghana

The World Bank's Community-based rural development projects (CBRDP) was designed as a type of Community-Driven Development (CDD) program. CDD programs are designed to do what the term implies, to be driven by the community, implying community ownership and management of projects. The project was principally aimed at contributing to the empowerment of rural population while strengthening the country's decentralisation system (CBRDP Implementation Manual 2006). Funded with loan facilities from the World Bank's International Development Association and the Agence Francaise Development, the CBRDP served as one of the vehicles for the implementation of Ghana's Poverty Reduction Strategy (Yaron, 2008; Binswanger-Mkhize et al., 2010).

To facilitate implementation, the CBRDP officials divided the country into four Zones; the Eastern Region (the focus of this paper), Eastern and Greater Accra regions fell into Zone IV. Each Zone had a Zonal Head and other staff to provide administrative and coordinating support to the project. The CBRDP had five stages of implementation: (1) Training of Area Councillors, (2) Preparation of Community Action Plans, (3) Approval of Action Plans, (4) Implementation, and (5) Monitoring and Evaluation. Ghana's Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development and Municipal/District Assemblies facilitated the project's implementation processes, together with the CBRDP Headquarters. It is important to mention here that, officially, these two bodies selected the beneficiary districts and municipalities, whereas localities within the districts had to apply for aid. However, there is some evidence to suggest that some localities were handpicked because of their political affiliations with the government of the day or as a so-called emergency response to pressing local needs (Adusei-Asante, 2013).

Localities that wished to benefit from the CBRDP took part in several rounds of training, where they were tutored to prepare community action plans, sometimes as a mere formality. A CBRDP action plan had to capture the respective locality's district/municipal development blueprint and justify the importance of the project. It also needed to be explicit about the prospective project implementation and procurement plans, while ensuring that the project selected formed part of the CBRDP options³.

The CBRDP secretariat received, reviewed and approved the action plans, the beneficiary locality received seed money of GHC15,000⁴ in three equal instalments. The expectations were that District Assemblies would contribute ten per cent of the project sum while the beneficiary localities contributed labour and/or offered hired services at a reduced market rate. In some of the localities researched, the District Assembly funds never came, while others also suffered the 'usual' financial bureaucratic delays. In such circumstances, 'influential' local people pre-financed the projects.

Aside from this development being a recipe for elite capture, the CBRDP Headquarters' seeming lack of attention to the CBRDP processes at the grassroots level, together with the nepotistic political climate of the day, appeared to have offered other loopholes for elites to capture the resources around the CBRDP. For example, we discovered through interviews that the CBRDP Headquarters seemed to have paid little attention to the processes of developing action plans at the grassroots level as prescribed. Adusei-A (2013) argues that the Secretariat, in some instances, cowered to political pressures from the government of the day by allocating projects to unqualified localities. As a result, he contends further that some of the CBRDPs were in a deplorable condition because some residents of beneficiary localities did not approve of them as being the most vital need in their respective localities at the time. It is within this context that one has to appreciate how some Traditional Chiefs benefitted from the CBRDPs.

³ 1) Institutional Strengthening and Capacity Building, 2) Infrastructure for Agricultural Development, 3) Rural Enterprise Development, 4) Infrastructure for Social and Human Development, and 5) Community-Based Natural Resource Management.

⁴ Approximately USD 10,000 at the time.

6. Traditional Chiefs in Ghana

Traditional Chiefs are a class of elites in most West African nations. Regarded as the custodians of the land, Traditional Chiefs are respected and influential in Ghana. Chiefs are recognised by Article 246 of Ghana's Constitution, which restricts the State from interfering in their affairs. Traditional Chiefs also hold thirty percent of the seats of District Assemblies, while they receive nearly twenty-five percent of the revenue from Stool Lands (Donkor, 2005; Ahwoi, 2010). In a 2005 survey conducted in Greater Accra, over fifty per cent of the over a thousand respondents considered Traditional Chiefs to be more powerful than Members of Parliament (Knierzinger, 2011).

Traditional Chiefs are not just custodians of culture, but also of spaces with well-delineated boundaries. As a result, they wield political influence at the local and national levels—aside from the cultural legitimacy they enjoy. As a matter of fact, many Traditional Chiefs, unlike the past, are now acquiring formal education, with some setting up foundations for improving education, healthcare and environmental sensitisation in their respective traditional areas (Knierzinger, 2011; Sackey, 2012). Culturally, the more developments a Chief champions in his locality, the greater respect he commands (Abotchie, 2006; Manboah–Rockson, 2007). Consequently, Traditional Chiefs in Ghana do regard initiating developments in their localities as both an obligation and a means to maintain their acceptability.

Most Ghanaian Chiefs also consider it as a right to be consulted and involved in local development projects, and would resist any attempt to sideline them. We provide evidence to this effect elsewhere (see Adusei-A & Hancock, 2012). Likewise, using examples from Sierra Leone, Arcand & Bassole 2007, confirm this assertion when they discuss the role played by Traditional Chiefs in determining which villages were eligible for the World Bank's National Rural Infrastructure Program in the country in 2003.

Against this background, we proceed with a discussion of the case study below from the Eastern Region of Ghana, which shows the role a Traditional Chief played in attempting to ensure that his locality benefitted from the CBRDP. The implications of the tacit and/or open patronage of the CBRDP Headquarters' (as 'development brokers') of this 'benevolent elite' on the project are also presented. The case study presents as a cautionary tale for other development projects that are community-driven.

7. Case study: Dabidabi, Eastern Region, Ghana

Dabidabi is an old, but relatively small town in Eastern Region of Ghana. The Ewe ethnic group inhabit Dabidabi, many of whom are farmers, and a small herdsman population, who hail from the northern parts of the country. At the time of data collection, the population was almost a thousand. As of the time of fieldwork, the inhabitants of Dabidabi had neither a pharmaceutical shop nor a health facility. Until recently, the entire population relied on surface water and hand-dug wells for their water needs (Dabidabi Area Council Action Plan 2006-2009).

Dabidabi received a three-classroom school block under the CBRDP. Before this time, pupils in the town had to walk four kilometres to school at Gorbah, which inhibited attendance and exacerbated attrition levels. Attempts had been made by the leaders of the town to establish a school in tents and under trees, but parents would usually avoid the school and still send their children to Gorbah, as the local 'tent' school lacked teachers and could not function anytime it rained. According to the Assembly Member of Dabidabi, the fact that the children travelled long distances to school became a disincentive for school attendance. It was under these circumstances that the Traditional Chief of the town, Nana Tagboto (Nana) lobbied for a primary school, eventually under the CBRDP.

Having served as Chief for over fifteen years, Nana typifies the influence of many contemporary educated Traditional Chiefs in Ghana. In view of the paucity of educational facilities in Dabidabi, Nana wrote several letters to the District Assembly and many development agencies for a primary school to be brought to his locality. Being an influential personality, Nana heard of the introduction of the CBRDP and personally approached the CBRDP headquarters through his contacts on getting a primary school for his locality. Nana's persistence paid-off, his town received funding to build a three-classroom school block.

In an interview, Nana revealed that he wrote the majority of the school project's action plan, which was a prerequisite to benefit from the CBRDP. Asked if he followed the participatory processes required by the CBRDP principles in developing the action plan, he mentioned that his people trusted his

judgement and that he only told them in a meeting of his decisions to apply for a school instead of other development projects in the town. Nana explained further that the CBRDP National Managers admired his persistence and commitment to advocating for development for his people and rewarded him with the primary school, which he considered as one of his greatest achievements as the Chief of Dabidabi. In fact, some officials in the CBRDP National Headquarters office often referred to Nana as one of CBRDP Zone IV success stories.

Meanwhile, before the CBRDP was implemented, Nana had initiated and facilitated the construction of public toilet facilities, pipe-borne water and the presence of electricity in Dabidabi under different funding schemes. Even so, because the Dabidabi primary school project was supposed to be 'driven' by the community, we were curious to understand the contribution of the local people to the project. The findings were intriguing.

When Dabidabi was selected, Nana Tagboto requested that the project is implemented under the Rapid Response Initiative under the CBRDP. As a result, the school project had to be completed within a hundred days before the seed money of GHC15,000 would be disbursed. The project's seed money, which was expunged in just over three months, could only fund a three-classroom block and one veranda. As a result, Nana pre-financed the entire project and also offered to sponsor the construction of an additional veranda, which the school critically needed.

When the project was completed, Nana bought books, furniture and other educational materials for the school and paid the salaries of the teachers for over two years until the Ghana Education Service adopted the school. Moreover, because the three classrooms were limited in size and quality, Nana went ahead to construct two more pavilion structures to cater for the upper primary classes. Asked why he invested in the school so much, he would always say: "I believe in education". The Assembly Member of the town confirmed the influence of the Nana, when he admitted that: 'I have not done much for them because Nana is influential and is able to lobby the powerful people in government to solve the problems in the locality.'

Notwithstanding the benevolence and influence of Nana at the time of fieldwork, the school had many challenges, which were beyond the resources of Nana and revealed the consequences of community-based projects that do not have the support of the majority of the people for whom they were intended. A normal primary school in Ghana has ten classrooms (kindergarten to primary six). However, the Dabidabi School had only five classrooms, three of which were constructed under the CBRDP and the two pavilion structures constructed under the auspices of Nana. Under the circumstances, at the time of collecting the data, the teachers merged some of the classes as follows: (1) Kindergarten & KG One, (2) KG Two & Nursery, (3) Class One, (4) Classes Two & Three, and (5) Classes Four & Five. The situation meant that the pupils followed syllabi not appropriate for their levels of education. Additionally, the furniture available to the pupils was so limited that some of the pupils were required to sit on the floor during class sessions. While Nana was doing his best to get the school running, it lacked many crucial resources a mainstream school should have: textbooks, toys, writing materials, and other educational aids.

Our interviews with some of the teachers revealed a sense frustration. Their concern was that the paucity of facilities was retarding the progress of the children. A female teacher remarked:

'Some of the children in Primary Four should be writing their names by now, but they can't. Even the Primary Five pupils have problems with reading and solving simple arithmetic problems ... it is so sad. Some of the children come to school virtually empty-handed, without even a pencil. There have been instances that we have tried to help with our own monies, but we can't do that always. I have only one textbook for the Classes Three and Four and had to photocopy the text for the entire class out of my own pocket.'

Another female teacher explained that:

'When I want to teach them about computers, I have to walk all the pupils to Nana Tagboto's office because he is the only one who has the machine in this locality. It's hard to explain to these children the difference between a computer mouse and the animal mouse. We lack so many basic learning materials. For instance, if I want to teach them about geography, I use an orange because we don't have a globe. We love our jobs as teachers, but working in these conditions is too frustrating.'

Also, owing to the limited number of classrooms, pupils who completed Primary Five at Dabidabi Primary School had to travel on foot to Gorbah to continue their Primary Six and Junior High School (JHS) education respectively, the very reason Nana had requested for a school to be brought to his town in the first place.

Aside from the lack of educational resources, the school had no urinal and toilet facilities. The teachers had the option of either using the public facility in the town, Nana's private facility or the bush – to which most of the pupils had resorted. The female teachers and pupils found the situation very inconvenient. While the teachers commended Nana for his efforts, they were not enough to sustain a community-based project, and wondered why the local people were not offering the needed support that was a design pre-requisite for the project to succeed.

The data pointed to a two-fold problem with the Dabidabi CBRDP. First, the facilitators and implementers of the CBRDP appeared to have focused on Nana, instead of the entire residential population. As pointed out earlier, the project was given to Dabidabi, partly because of the influence of Nana. As a result, the CBRDP Secretariat appears to have relied on the Chief during the implementation stages, rather than working in collaboration with the Dabidabi 'community', which would have garnered far more resources, labour and goodwill.

Officials at the CBRDP Headquarters we interviewed mentioned that Nana was capable of managing the project, as custodian of the landed properties of Dabidabi traditional area. Given this notion, relevant officials seemed satisfied with the Dabidabi project, as one mentioned that, 'We have a lot of respect for Nana, and trust him to involve his people in developing and maintaining the project...He is doing well and has become of our great success stories'.

They officially never visited Dabidabi, and many appeared to have paid little attention to the Dabidabi school project, despite the fact that it needed to be monitored for the sake of the community it was supposed to serve. They considered Nana 'elite' enough to be in-charge.

Because Traditional Chiefs are culturally expected to initiate and provide leadership for the maintenance of local development projects in Ghana, many of the Dabidabi residents we interviewed appeared not to care about the school's welfare. Although, many of them indicated that they took part in the communal labour during the building of the school, they considered it as a normal routine in the locality and tended to regard Nana as the one who had the responsibility of maintaining the school. Interestingly, some of the residents thought that the project was Nana's initiative, as they claimed that the CBRDP officials never came to the town to explain the process to them. Others maintained that Nana was not categorical about the project being externally funded, and suspected he had benefitted financially from the project.

As a result of the erroneous impression created of the project as being one of the 'usual' initiatives of Nana, many of the residents saw nothing wrong with not contributing any money to buy books or educational materials for the school, as well as time and labour to maintain and expand and improve the school when required and the critical issue of hygiene remained. The general impression gathered through the interviews and questionnaires was that Nana kept all the funds of the town (from the sale of traditional lands) which they expected him to use to develop the school. While some conceded that it was the duty of the entire locality to seek welfare for the school, the residents' perceived the maintenance of the school as the duty of the Chief, and by implication they expected him to manage the project. Thus, many respondents argued that Nana had no right to request funds from the residents to run the school. A woman, who had lived in the locality for over twenty years, remarked:

'The school is for all of us. However, as a traditional town, we also have proceeds from the sale of stool lands and the... stone quarry ... Nana Tagboto cannot levy anyone to pay anything towards the school...there is money to take care of the school.'

Asked why the local people have left the entire school's burden on him, Nana said out of frustration:

'[Some] of my people don't have foresight nor appreciate the value of education ... they feel it's my responsibility to meet every need of the town and school. Although I'm culturally the head of the town, I shoulder all its needs.'

In the midst of the challenges, Nana appeared to be uncomfortable with seeking support from the CBRDP Headquarters. He seemed to regard such a move as a failure on his part and preferred to portray to the officials, who rarely visited the project, that it was being well-maintained. Incessant calls on relevant officials to visit the school to ascertain challenges facing the project were ignored.

The other findings related to poverty. Many of Dabidabi appeared to be economically poor and therefore, lacked the financial resources to support the project. As of the time of fieldwork, Dabidabi did not offer any jobs to its citizens. Many of them were not engaged in profitable economic activities, aside from subsistence farming. Thus, in reality, most of the local people appeared to lack the means to contribute any meaningful sums of money towards the project's upkeep. For example, 70% of the respondents surveyed in Dabidabi indicated being unemployed. Tellingly, the researchers found during numerous visits to Dabidabi that some of the local people depended on Nana for income. Being poor, the people of Dabidabi relinquished the maintenance of the school to Nana, although many of them claimed to be a part of the 'community'. This finding is consistent with Botchway (2001) observation during the implementation of a Canadian water project in the northern parts of Ghana, where the locality lacked the resources to maintain it.

8. Conclusion

The notion that development aid should be driven from the communities it is designed to serve is a commonly accepted 'wisdom' in much literature on the topic. In theory, it would seem a simple process to deliver aid to the poor in Ghana, for example, and at the same time include communities who would be positively affected by it. We found that, based on one case study alone, that this notion is flawed and too easily ignored, simply by the process of elite capture. We studied the World Bank's Community-Based Rural Development Projects (CBRDP), implemented in Ghana between 2005 and 2011. By focusing on only one region in which the project was deployed we found clear evidence of the ways in which elite capture negatively impacts on community-based project outcomes. One Traditional Chief, in this case, was the focus of the displacement of the project's aims and objectives. While he was acting in good faith, we found that this undermined the sustainability of the project, because the community and relevant CBRDP national officials assumed that the project would be managed and maintained by this elite and as a result successfully serve the community. In fact the opposite resulted, as in elite capture, the community distanced themselves from the machinations of the project and in turn failed to provide what was intended, which was adequate classrooms and associated facilities. Elite capture in our paper was a simple process to observe and in turn very easy to explain. The focus of this paper, a Traditional Chief, who all stakeholders, officials and the community relied upon, and 'traditionally endowed' with such reliance, was unable to motivate community-based support for the community-based project and this in turn led to apathy and a lack of sustainable input at the grassroots level. As a result, although a school was built, it was not of adequate quality, had few amenities, no toilets, lacked appropriate books, furniture and was dysfunctional.

The policy implications from our research are clear. Community-based programs should not be implemented based on assumptions that traditional leaders or chiefs should be the focal point for aid and associated project development and in some cases funding. Policy-makers need to make concerted efforts to avoid elite capture by monitoring projects more rigorously to ensure that the community that is the target of development aid actually feels like they are part of the solution and not simply assume that a local leader will take care of everything. Simple policy solutions should focus on the community apathy we observed as well as the assumptive indifference of CBRDP officials and the embedded and legal position of a Traditional Chief in Ghana, a position and process that warrants further attention.

Our study has also underscored the need to apply research methods (such as ethnography) to compliment relevant quantitative instruments to explore how aid-funded projects work on the ground. The use of ethnography enabled the researchers to uncover subtle cultural issues that plague international development programs, which in our view, are unlikely to be unearthed by program evaluation models that rely solely on quantitative methods.

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