Conceptions of Poverty and Development in a Malawian Village Setting

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CBO	Community Based Organization
DEC	District Executive Committee
DO	District Officer
DPD	Director of Planning and Development
ELCM	Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi
ELDP	Evangelical Lutheran Development Programme
ELDS	Evangelical Lutheran Development Service
GVH	Group Village Headman
ICA	Icelandic Church Aid
ICEIDA	Icelandic International Development Agency
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MASAF	Malawi Social Action Fund
MEET	Malawi Environmental Endowment Trust
MHRCC	Malawi Human Rights Consultative Committee
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PRA	Participatory Rural Appraisal
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SSHRC	Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
TA	Traditional Authority
VDC	Village Development Committee

Abstract

This thesis is the result of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Phalombe District in Malawi, Southern Africa, where I studied agricultural development projects in the village of Kachala. The focus of this investigation is on people's perceptions and ideas of development co-operation and the meanings of development and poverty in general. Perceptions of development and poverty among villagers in Kachala are compared to those of development agents working for development organizations in the area. These perceptions are also compared to the definitions of development and poverty found throughout development literature. This research demonstrates - through examples from Phalombe District and elsewhere - how notions of development are relative, diverse and context-specific, and therefore not static and universally applicable. Finally, participatory development ideals and the structurally unequal donor-recipient relationships, at the core of the current development system, are discussed. This thesis illustrates how the common portrayal of development as an oppressive, disempowering industry, characterized by top-down interventions, does not always apply.

Sommaire

Ce mémoire est le résultat d'une recherche de terrain menée dans le District de Phalombe au Malawi, au sud de l'Afrique, où j'ai examiné les projets de développement agricole dans le village de Kachala. Cette étude porte sur les perceptions et les idées existantes en lien avec le développement coopératif, et sur les différentes significations du développement et de la pauvreté en général. Les perceptions du développement et de la pauvreté chez les villageois de Kachala sont comparées à celles des agents de développement travaillant au sein d'organismes de développement qui sont présents dans la région. Ces perceptions sont aussi comparées aux définitions du développement et de la pauvreté que l'on trouve dans la littérature sur le développement. La recherche démontre, à partir d'exemples tirés du District de Phalombe et d'autres régions, comment les notions de développement sont relatives, diverses, et propres à chaque contexte et sont, par conséquent, impossibles à appliquer de façon universelle. Enfin, ce mémoire aborde les idéaux du développement participatif ainsi que les relations inégalitaires structurées selon un mode donateur-donataire. Ce mémoire illustre comment la vision du développement, décrit comme une industrie opprimante, caractérisée par des interventions du haut vers le bas, ne correspond pas toujours à la réalité.

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Foreword

My interests in international development originated in my childhood experiences in southwestern Africa's Angola, where I lived for six and a half years during the 1980s. At the time, my parents were working in Angola for international development agencies and I was brought up within an international environment of expatriate development workers and Angolan friends. During this time I studied at a Swedish school, played with friends in Portuguese and spoke Icelandic at home. This upbringing, in an environment of international development in Africa, sparked my interest in this topic, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, and has lead to the production of this MA thesis.

This thesis is based on fieldwork in Malawi, Southern Africa from July through September, 2005. My plan was to conduct my research in a village where development projects had been implemented and to record peoples' perceptions of these projects and of poverty and development in general. In 2005 I went to Kachala village in the district of Phalombe where a non-governmental organization (NGO), the Evangelical Lutheran Development Service (ELDS), was implementing development interventions. The reason for choosing Kachala was based on my previous experience in the village in 2004, when I spent four months in Malawi visiting the Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA) and traveling around the region. During my 2004 stay I witnessed various development projects being implemented by ICEIDA and other development organizations, one of these being the ELDS. I heard of and contacted the ELDS through ICEIDA as several of ELDS' development projects had been funded by an Icelandic donor, the Icelandic Church Aid (ICA). The ELDS invited me to join a fieldtrip to Phalombe District to observe their development activities. In Phalombe, I was taken to the villages of Kachala and Chaima where I was guided through various development projects funded by the ICA – such as irrigation farming projects and animal rearing projects – which focused mainly on encouraging more environmentally sustainable farming, water management and income generation.

In Chaima, irrigation farming had just begun; while in Kachala some animal rearing projects had been started, along with an irrigation project. In Kachala I met many

of the villagers, including the village headman and headmen from several neighboring villages also participating in identical ELDS projects sponsored by the ICA. During my stay in Kachala in June 2004, we conducted a meeting with the villagers and were entertained by a band playing music and people dancing. Additionally, a local drama group performed a play on the subject of HIV/AIDS[1] and the social problems of orphans who have lost their parents to the pandemic. This fieldtrip only lasted one day and neither I nor the villagers expected to be meeting again only one year later.

When I came back to Malawi in 2005 to conduct my research after a year studying at McGill University, the nice day I had spent in Kachala in June 2004 was still in my mind. I planned to return to Kachala since I had been there and was already acquainted with the ELDS staff and the villagers. With the development projects on site in mind, Kachala seemed like the ideal fieldsite for my research. I was also interested in observing the progress one year after my first visit. I wanted to hear peoples' opinions of the projects; whether they had changed or were still perceived as "a dream come true" like some villagers described them in 2004. Phalombe District was also an interesting place to examine people's perceptions of poverty and development as it is ranked the second poorest district of Malawi's 27 districts (Malawi: Millennium Development Goals Report 2003) and has been labeled disaster-prone because of frequent droughts, floods and crop infestations. This thesis gives an account of my research in Malawi in 2005. Not only does it read as an attempt to shed light on certain development-related issues, but also as an example of how "development" is being performed in a certain location and within a certain organization.

[1] Malawi's National AIDS Commission estimated HIV/AIDS prevalence in Malawian adults (15 – 49 years) to be 14.4% in 2003. This estimated prevalence indicates that "HIV infection among adults in urban areas is almost twice as high as in rural areas." HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in some other Southern African countries are higher and go up to 20-30% of the adult population (Malawi National AIDS Commission, http://www.aidsmalawi.org.mw/resources/Summary%20of%20national%20estimate%202003.pdf, accessed June 7, 2006).

1. Introduction

The objective of my research in Malawi was to study development co-operation in a rural Malawian village. Within this objective I planned to investigate people's perceptions and ideas of development co-operation, meanings of poverty, and development in general. I was interested in how these views differed from the conceptions and ideas of development workers in the same area. Also, I was interested in how perceptions of development and poverty in Malawi's Phalombe District differed or were the same as notions of development and poverty found within the global literature on development. During my field research I studied a non-governmental organization (NGO), the Evangelical Lutheran Development Service (ELDS), and its development implementations in Kachala village in Phalombe District of Malawi's Southern Region; as well as villagers' expectations and reactions to particular development projects.

Integral to critiques of development are peoples' perceptions of their own problems relating to development and poverty, in comparison to aid workers' perceptions of these same issues. Many critiques claim that development projects commonly fail because of misunderstandings between development workers and development beneficiaries, and misconceptions concerning the problems that need to be tackled and how they should be prioritized and handled. I chose the village of Kachala and the ELDS development projects conducted there as an example of how development can be carried out (successfully or not), how perceptions of problems such as poverty and development can differ (or be the same) and how this could relate to perceived development successes or failures.

I begin this introduction by discussing the theoretical dialogue that has influenced this study, it then goes on to provide some background information on Malawi, the district of Phalombe, my fieldsite, and my research methodology; finally it concludes with a short outline of the chapters in this thesis.

Criticisms of Development

My research has been influenced by the severe critique development has faced in the last decade or so, where it has been characterized as "a destructive and self serving discourse propagated by bureaucrats and aid professionals that permanently entraps the poor in a vicious circle of passivity and misery" (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 2). It has been claimed that "[t]he idea of development stands like a ruin in the intellectual landscape" (Sachs 2003b: 1); and development efforts and organizations are commonly perceived as failures by a growing group of anthropological scholars (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 2). The aim of development interventions has been to reduce poverty, environmental degradation, and inequality; but as Crewe and Harrison (1998: 14) point out, there is both statistical and visible evidence of the actual increase of these factors in many parts of the world. Increasingly development failures are documented and published and it is now common to perceive aid processes as being "riddled with corruption and plagued by inefficiency" (Crewe and Harrison 1998:14) and designed to benefit the donors rather than the recipients.[2]

Arturo Escobar (1995: 4) goes further and argues that the dream of development has turned into a nightmare; the real results being underdevelopment, exploitation, poverty and oppression instead of prosperity and well-being. According to him the debt crisis, increasing poverty, malnutrition, violence and famines are only the most pathetic signs of failure after 40 years (now 50 years) of "development." He asserts that development has succeeded in colonizing reality and "achieved certainty in the social imaginary" as the common sense solution to global problems. Development has therefore become a hegemonic discourse; the dominant point of view that shapes the way reality is imagined, represented and acted upon (Escobar, 1995: 5). According to Escobar (1995: 9) development has replaced the colonial discourse as an instrument for producing knowledge and exercising power over others. It is "an invention and strategy produced by the 'First World' about the 'underdevelopment' of the 'Third World'" (Escobar, 2005: 342). He argues that instead of solving the problems of poverty and underdevelopment, development has succeeded in creating an underdevelopment which is "for the most part

[2] See Escobar 1995 and 2005, Ferguson 1994, Crewe and Harrison 1998, Mitchell 2002, Sachs 2003a, and Edelman and Haugerud 2005 for some of the many examples of development critiques and documented development failures.

politically and technically manageable" (1995: 46-47). Thus, according to Escobar, development is more an instrument of control over the Third World rather than a humanitarian act.

These critiques or post-development theories, influenced by Michel Foucault's understandings of power (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 2), have been influential since the early 1990s. They highlight development as a hegemonic discourse that has turned Third World populations into so-called underdeveloped entities struggling to "catch up" to the "developed" world (Esteva 2003: 6-8 and Porter and Sheppard 1998: 111). These theories are almost inseparable from post-colonial theories as they divide the world into dichotomies such as North-South, the West and the rest, First World-Third World, and "developed"-"underdeveloped," where one domain has the "knowledge" and power and the other, because of its lack of "knowledge" and power, has to play by the rules of more powerful and "developed" nations. Consequently, some theorists view development as a form of "social engineering" which the First World uses to manipulate and disempower the Third World (Esteva 2003; Escobar 1995 and Ferguson 1994). Thus, the hegemonic discourse of development, according to post-development theories, is an instrument of domination which engages people in struggles for ideals "the powerful" want to impose on them (Esteva 2003: 7-8 and Porter and Sheppard 1998: 111); development is therefore not a desirable option.

These are valid critiques, applicable to many "development" processes; obviously relevant in cases where supra-national institutions "offer" conditioned "development aid" to governments in need of financial assistance. For example, "development aid" with political and economical conditions which seem to be aimed more towards political, economical and ideological transformations within countries rather than helping those in dire need. However, these theories downplay the role of local development dynamics through the oversimplification of a complex reality by bi-polarizing the world into dichotomies of "developed" and "underdeveloped" (powerful and powerless), while simultaneously criticizing others for doing the same. As illustrated in chapter four, these categories are not absolute but based on relative terms. By rejecting development without suggesting alternatives they also limit the options available to those seeking to improve their situation in one way or another. Without an alternative there is either development

or nothing. This calls for an absolute definition of development which, as will be pointed out later, does not seem to exist. This research does not look at development in these general terms; instead it concurs with Grillo and Stirrat's (1997: viii) argument that "'development' is not always the oppressive, 'top-down,' monolithic 'industry'" as commonly depicted, "but rather a multifaceted, multi-vocal process, and a complex site of contestation." In this thesis I study development and its ground practices on a smaller scale by focusing on how development is perceived, defined and performed at a certain location and within a particular development NGO.

Distinctively, I conducted my research with a different critique of development in mind. This critique points towards development failures as a result of the inability of development planners and workers to cooperate with and understand "the locals" on the receiving end of the development process. This failure to cooperate is often linked to misunderstandings related to different perceptions of the problems that are to be tackled; for example, the problems of "poverty" and "underdevelopment," and how they should be prioritized and handled.[3] In light of this critique of development and the role of development organizations' in what are commonly called development failures in the Third World, I traveled to a rural community in Malawi to see for myself how a development NGO operates and if and how "the locals" take part in NGO operations. I also was interested in hearing "the locals'" opinions and perceptions of development and poverty in general.

William F. Fisher suggests that the "imagined role of NGOs in development depends on the critical stance one takes toward the development industry" (1997: 441-443). He claims that interdisciplinary literature on NGOs and local and global forms of collective action is replete with sweeping generalizations and on the whole, is based on faith rather than fact. Anthropologists who research development have often focused on development failures. Edelman and Haugerud assert that "nearly all analysts agree that most development projects fail," but also point out (as a footnote) that development failures may be overrepresented in scholarly literature and that development projects that are considered "modest successes" do not receive as much publicity (2005: 2 and 53 n.

[3] A closely related critique, if not the same, is that development organizations ignore local knowledge and take Western knowledge for granted as the only solution to people's problems which can be seen as related to the critique of development as a hegemonic discourse and a form of political and ideological domination.

5). When considering this critique of development, the following questions come to mind: Is it fair to generalize about a diverse field such as development? Can all development be lumped under one umbrella – either good or bad, failures or successes – as has commonly been done in development literature? Generalizations of this kind seem simplistic when looking at the vast variation in development organizations and development projects and their implementations throughout the world.[4] It is of the essence that we avoid placing ourselves in political camps (e.g. pro-development vs. anti-development) or perceiving development through simple dichotomies consisting of relative terms such as "good" and "bad" or "failure" and "success;" as this limits our understanding of a vast, diverse and complex field.

Fisher asks the question can NGOs do good without doing wrong (1997: 456)? This question is difficult to answer since notions of what is good and what is wrong are relative. He quotes Milton Friedman to emphasize this relativity: "The power of doing good is also the power of doing harm... what one man regards as good, another may regard as harm" (1962). As mentioned above, assessing and interpreting whether development implementations are good or bad, successes or failures is problematic. How can these measurements be carried out? Are subjective or objective assessments used when deciding whether development projects are successes or failures? When evaluated in terms of allegedly "objective" and "scientific" formulas, what may at first seem to be a development failure because the intended results were not reached, might also be seen as a success to the people who live in the area where the "development" occurred. The same thing can be seen where development projects are believed to be successes by the implementers but failures by the people on the "receiving" end. These scenarios – where benefactors and recipients disagree about the outcome of development projects – are more likely to occur within development "co-operations" where perceptions of problems, priorities, development and poverty are vastly dissimilar and not open for discussion between those providing the development aid and those receiving it.

James Ferguson writes: "In a situation where failure is the norm... it may be that what is most important about a 'development' project is not so much what it fails to do but what it does do; it may be that its real importance in the end lies in the 'side effects'"

[4] See also Fisher 1997 on generalizations of NGO literature and the diversity of the NGO sector.

(1994: 254). The development project Ferguson studied in rural Lesotho failed to reach its goals – to decentralize the region, empower the people and alleviate poverty – but also had unintended consequences, which unfortunately were the opposite of its goals. Instead of reaching its goals, it expanded the bureaucratic power of the state over the people, as well as depoliticizing both poverty and the state (Ferguson 1994: 256).

Unintended consequences of development projects do not necessarily need to be negative as in the Lesotho case; they can be seen as positive as well. Whether the effects are viewed as negative or positive is of course also related to problems of assessment, objectivity and subjectivity; it can depend on who you ask, for example the benefactors or the beneficiaries. One person's failure can be another person's success (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 1). The Tanganyikan Groundnut Scheme in rural Tanganyika (now Tanzania), funded by the British government in the late 1940s can be seen as an example of a "development failure" with positive side effects. This project generally has been considered a colossal failure, costing British taxpayers £ 49 million, with very little being gained from it. A combination of reasons are believed to have negatively affected the outcome of the groundnut project. Among them a lack of infrastructure and roads to transport machinery, lack of proper equipment for the project, miles of barely penetrable brush that slowed down the project, and inappropriate soil conditions for groundnut cultivation (Watkins, http://www.sjsu.edu/faculty/watkins/groundnt.htm, accessed July 14, 2006).

In a dialogue with John Galaty (personal communication on July 13, 2006) – who has worked extensively in Eastern Africa – he related to me that although the project had been a known failure, an informant he talked to about the project, who had served as a DO (District Officer) in the area when the scheme was initiated, said that in hindsight the project had positive secondary effects on the area. Although the ground nut scheme failed, its mere existence created jobs, brought in salaries, caused large areas of brush which were breeding grounds for tsetse flies carrying sleeping sickness (*trypanosomiasis*) to be cleared, and roads to be constructed making transportation easier; only to mention a few of the positive side effects. Both cases of "development side effects" (in Lesotho and Tanganyika) exemplify the complexity involved in assessing failures and successes in development and the relativity of success and failure within development. It also

demonstrates the problematic of generalizing about such a vast and diverse field as development.

According to Fisher, anthropological contributions to the NGO literature have been relatively limited, with few "studies of what is happening in particular places or within specific organizations" (1997: 441).[5] It is important to go beyond the politics of good and bad and to focus on what is happening on the ground. We have to avoid the trap of "absolute" binary oppositions consisting of relative concepts. What one person regards as good can be considered bad by another person. Fisher claims that the "aim of 'doing good' is undermined by an inadequate understanding of what NGOs do in specific circumstances" (1997: 449); this of course, also applies to the preconceived view of NGOs as "doing harm." What is important is not merely whether NGOs or other development organizations are "doing good" or not. We also have to try to understand and illuminate how "development" is being implemented, whether it is on a certain "development" location or within a certain organization. As Fisher notes:

> [W]ork by anthropologists will not only contribute to knowledge of what NGOs are doing but will also provide insights into anthropological conceptions of communities, local and translocal networks, technologies of control, and the political role of intellectuals (1997: 459).

Without placing myself in a pro- or anti-development camp, I decided to research a development program in Malawi and the peoples' reactions and involvement within it, emphasizing their own perceptions of development and poverty. By selecting the village of Kachala as a research site, I was in a position to observe the ELDS' development projects and to investigate whether there were misconceptions about the problems, goals and expectations of the projects between aid workers and aid receivers; and if so, could these misconceptions have affected the outcome of the project?

My position on development is not one of glorification; yet at the same time I am not condemning it. While I do not believe my perspective fits in with a pro- or anti-development camp and their political agendas, that may be for others to decide. My only

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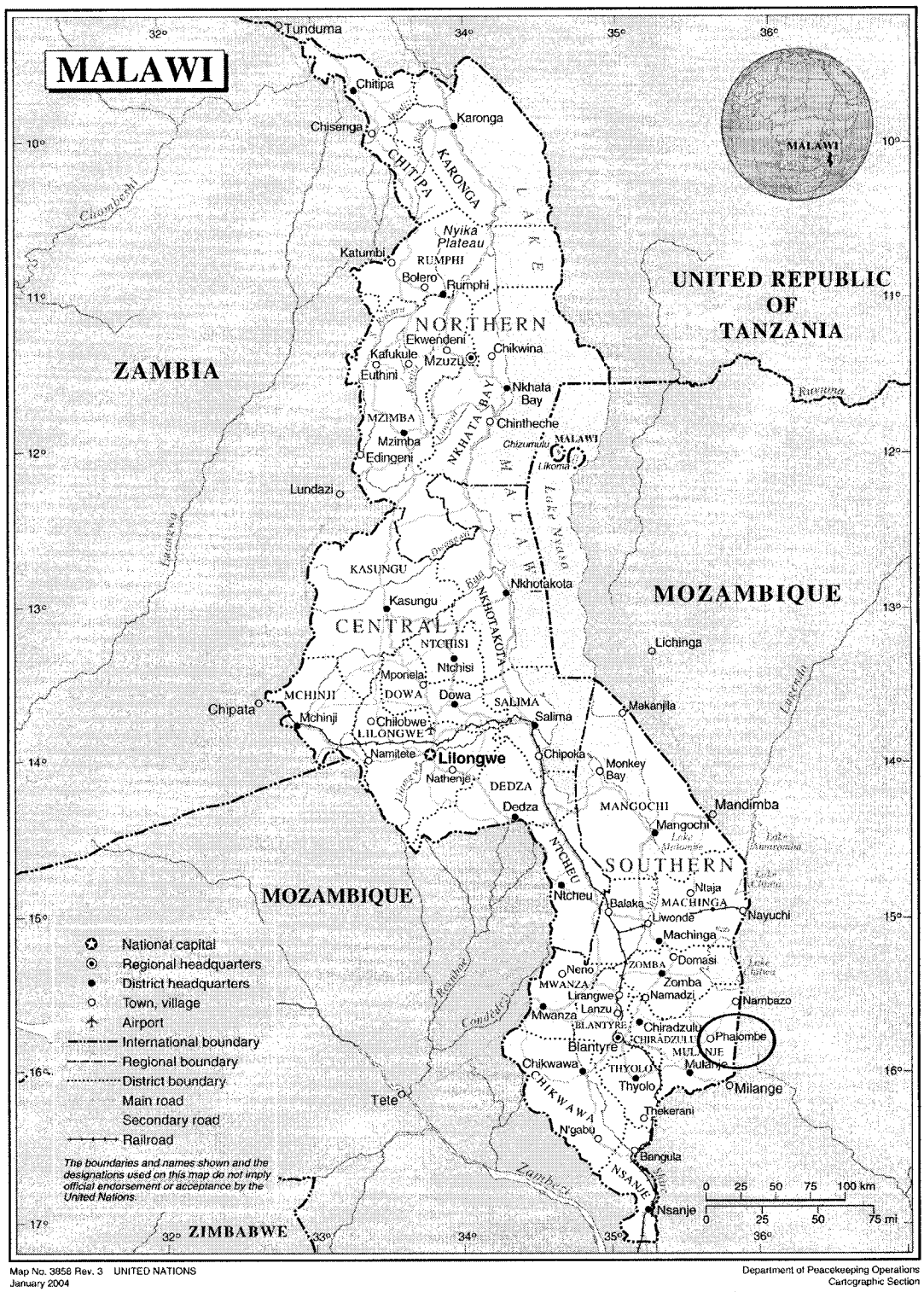
[5] Since Fisher's article literature on particular development examples within specific organizations and in particular places has been emerging. Examples of such literature would be Hilhorst's *The Real World of NGOs* (2003) where she studies everyday politics in a Philippine NGO and Walley's *Rough Waters* (2004) where she explores political struggles (or social drama as she calls it) surrounding a conservation and development project, the Mafia Island Marine Park in Tanzania.

assurance is that this case study has not been an attempt at making a generalized assessment of *all* development projects, or even those in Malawi. My objective was to go to rural Malawi and study a development project and its participants' views and perceptions of it.

Map of Malawi[6]



[6] Original map found at http://www.un.org/Depts/Cartographic/map/profile/malawi.pdf, accessed August 25, 2006. Phalombe District in south eastern Malawi is indicated by an added circle on the map.

General Overview of Malawi and Phalombe District

Malawi is a small landlocked country in Southern Africa; surrounded by Mozambique to the east, south and south-west, Tanzania to the north-east and Zambia to the west. It has a population of approximately 12 million inhabitants and its economy is based on agriculture, with 80% of the population living off smallholder agriculture (Ott 2000: 150 and the Lutheran World Federation 2003: 10). Approximately one fifth of the country is covered by Lake Malawi,[7] Africa's third largest lake (Ott 2000: 150). Most of the fish caught in the lake are used for consumption within Malawi, providing 2/3 of the nation's animal protein (Bass 1997: 94), but a few of Lake Malawi's colorful fish species are exported to aquariums around the world. Maize is a common crop for self-subsistence and consumption within Malawi, as *nsima* (the country's staple food) is made from maize meal. Other common crops grown for domestic consumption are cassava, rice, and potatoes among others; while tea, coffee, rubber, and tobacco are common export cash crops, with tobacco being Malawi's primary export product.

The country gained independence from its former colonial power Britain in 1964 and became the Republic of Malawi, changing its name from Nyasaland. In 1994, after 30 years of dictatorship under "President for Life" Dr. Hastings Kamuzu Banda, Malawi held its first democratic presidential and parliamentary multiparty elections and became a democracy (Ott 2000: 151). Banda's one-party autocratic regime was known for oppression of its citizens, strict censorship laws, dress codes, and the disappearance of its political enemies[8] (Lwanda 2002: 155). Banda had led the country to independence in 1964 but, as Russell puts it:

> That was just about that for Malawi's dreams of freedom... [h]e rapidly began to believe his own propaganda. He was soon hailed as the country's Messiah and Moses. At the first whiff of serious criticism, political

[7] Lake Malawi is the World's ninth largest and fourth deepest lake. It is famous for its fish diversity (especially among evolutionary biologists), being the most species-rich lake in the world, with more fish species than the Atlantic ocean (all the way from Greenland in the north to Brazil in the south) (Bass 1997: 90 - 93).

[8] Banda's time in office has been referred to as the era of silence. A friend from Malawi's Northern Region told me that when he was a child even the children were afraid of Kamuzu Banda. They knew that they were not supposed to talk about him and were afraid of his spies. They feared that there were spies everywhere and even thought the black ants were spies that would report them. He told me that they would say: "don't mention Banda, there are black ants here." They were even more afraid to mention Banda's young pioneers as these brutes beat up everyone that said anything against the president.

> opponents were drummed out of sight. To get anywhere in life, Malawians had to carry party cards (2000: 49).[9]

All estimations of Malawi's poverty situation have recognized it as an acute problem, with statistics indicating that Malawi is one of the poorest and least-developed countries in the world (Chinchinga 2002: 28). In the *Human Development Report 2003* Malawi was ranked the 14th least-developed country in the world out of 175 countries (2003: 308 and 311). Malawi's National Statistical Office (2006) estimated that 52.4% of the Malawian population was living below the poverty line[10] in 2005, with 25.4% of the urban population and 55.9% of the rural population living on less than a dollar a day. In a 1998 survey measuring poverty at the district level, Phalombe District was ranked the second poorest district in Malawi with 83.9% of its inhabitants living below the poverty line (Malawi: Millennium Development Goals Report 2003). Malawi has been heavily dependent on foreign aid and receives significant amounts of assistance from foreign donors; seventy percent of Malawi's annual state budget comes from international donors according to Action Against Hunger (2005). Malawi's relations with foreign donors have been damaged in recent years due to allegations of corruption, which have resulted in the suspension of some financial aid. In October 2003 the IMF (International Monetary Fund) resumed its funding to Malawi and consequently other key donors resumed their funding as well (ICEIDA Annual Report 2003: 26).

My primary research site, the village of Kachala is situated on the banks of the Phalombe River; west of Phalombe village at the foot of Mount Michesi. Kachala is a village of average size in the area, comprised of approximately 250 people.[11] The houses

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[9] See also Gibson 1999: 169-171 on human rights violations during Banda's rule.

[10] The poverty line for poorer parts of the world has been defined as one US dollar of income per day, compared to its purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates in 1985. People living on less than that are said to be living below the poverty line (See Thomas 2000: 10-14). The purchasing power parity (PPP) is "a rate of exchange that accounts for price differences across countries, allowing international comparisons of real output and incomes" (ICEIDA Annual Report 2003: 26). The Poverty line is supposed to be "the level of income below which one cannot afford to purchase all the resources one requires to live. People who have an income below the poverty line have no discretionary disposable income, by definition" (Reference.com, http://www.reference.com/browse/wiki/Poverty_line, accessed March 14, 2006). While using dollars to categorize people as rich or poor may be helpful in some contexts, this can be inadequate and ethnocentric in others since not all societies in the world are heavily dependent on monetary exchange (see also revision-notes.co.uk, http://www.revision-notes.co.uk/revision/623.html, accessed March 14, 2006). However, these are the measurements most widely used to measure individual poverty in the world, so I include them here.

[11] This number does not include children under five, as they are counted as one with their mothers.

are mostly constructed of mud-bricks with thatched roofs and are scattered around an area of approximately two square kilometers, laid out with a few houses clustered together and surrounded by farmland.

The Kachala villagers belong to an ethnic community called *aLomwe*, one of several matrilineal tribes found in Malawi. They are Bantu speaking, with most of the inhabitants speaking Chichewa (the language of the Chewa people, a lingua franca that is widely spoken in Malawi and is Malawi's official language along with English), and some Chilomwe (the language of the Lomwe people). The Lomwes originated in Mozambique, from the Namuli Hill area in the northwest (Phiri 2004: 102). Today the Lomwe are comprised of sub-tribes who fled the fierce control of the Portuguese in Mozambique during the beginning of the 20th Century. Some arrived even earlier as a consequence of tribal wars in their homelands. The Lomwe settled among the Nyanja and Yao (other Malawian ethnic communities) in the district of Mulanje[12] and soon outnumbered them. Integration among the tribes was relatively peaceful and today it is common for people to assume that all people from Mulanje and Phalombe Districts are Lomwe (Phiri 2004: 100 - 107).

Drought and Floods

I arrived in Phalombe District accompanied by my research assistant, Charles Mphande, during the dry season when the roads were dry and dusty. With the help of the ELDS staff we found a place to stay at a guesthouse in the village of Phalombe. The main research site, Kachala village, was approximately 21.5 km from Phalombe village; hence I drove almost every morning down the bumpy road to Kachala where I conducted interviews and then returned to Phalombe before dark.

There appears to be a fine balance between too much rain and too little in the district. Too much rain results in floods that wash away crops and sometimes causes human casualties, while too little results in drought and crop failures. A staff member of the ELDS in Phalombe described why the district is categorized as disaster prone:

[12] Phalombe used to be part of the district of Mulanje but in 1998 the district of Mulanje was divided into two independent districts, Mulanje and Phalombe (for more information on Malawi districts see Statoids, http://www.statoids.com/umw.html, accessed July 18, 2006).

> For example here in Phalombe, Phalombe is one of the districts which is a disaster prone area or district. So what normally happens is, I was mentioning of persistent drought last season... and there are at times when you also experience heavy flooding, and if drought does not occur on that particular season and the flooding does not occur on that particular season we also expect pests attacking the crops, for example, we have army worms,[13] crop infestation... So those factors may lead to lack of what, enough food, for the communities.

In a nostalgic discussion comparing the present rains and rainy season to the rains in the past, my research assistant Charles and James (a member of the ELDS office in Phalombe) described how previously the rains would start as early as September, while now they are not expected to start until November or December. The 2004-2005 rainy season started in December but ended in the beginning of January, resulting in the drought and crop failures I observed during my stay in September. As a result, the crops in the district of Phalombe started to wither before they were mature, and were in many cases, harvested prematurely in an effort to prevent them from drying up and being destroyed completely. This resulted in a food scarcity which worsened as time passed and lead to hiking food prices at the markets. International development organizations forecast predictions of famine that would affect 1/3 of the country (approximately 4 million people); this famine was in its early stages, according to international organizations, and would later become more serious. On October 14th 2005, the president of Malawi, Bingu Wa Mutharika responded to the situation by declaring a state of emergency, prompting international development agencies to react to what was to become the worst drought Malawi had seen in over a decade.

Due to the meager harvest, there was a shortage of maize to make *nsima*, the staple food. This was a problem for the people in Kachala and they frequently talked about times of hunger. When I came to Kachala people had started to eat *mgaiwa*, which is *nsima* made with the skin of the maize bean (rather than only the flesh). In addition they were eating *deya*, made only from maize bean skins; both of which are of a lesser

[13] The African armyworm is a great economic pest of pastures and cereal crops (maize, wheat, sorghum, millet, teff and rice) and is widespread in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa and parts of Arabia and Australasia. Outbreaks generally follow the onset of the wet season, "when dry grasslands produce new growth and cereal crops are planted. Major outbreaks of armyworm are commonly preceded by extended drought" (Information Core for Southern African Migrant Pests (ISOCAMP), http://icosamp.ecoport.org/armyw.html, accessed August 17, 2006).

quality than the traditionally prepared *nsima,* made from *mphale* (the flesh of the maize bean). Some families had started collecting unripe green mangoes, which they cooked and ate. According to the DPD (Director of Planning and Development) at the District Commissioner's Office in Phalombe, this was a sign of a truly pathetic situation, "when people have started to eat green mangoes as early as September."

The experience of famine, hunger and disaster is well recognized in myths recounted in the district of Phalombe. People told me myths about Mount Michesi, the beautiful peak of which stands watch over the village of Phalombe, at the foot of the mountain, and the plains below where villages are scattered, Kachala being among them. The following is an example of one such myth:

> If you are of good heart and pure soul you do not need to carry any food or water provisions when you climb Mt. Michesi or Mt. Mulanje,[14] for at the slightest sign of hunger or thirst on your part, food and drink are served to you right there in the wilderness by invisible hosts on a well-laid out table, those serving you being the spirits of the ancestors, who reside in the higher reaches of these mountains.
> (Official Website of the Government of Malawi, http://www.malawi.gov.mw/information1/CabinetProfiles/lipenga.htm, accessed February 26 2006).

There are many more myths associated with Mount Michesi. Morris (2000: 208) cites Soka's work *Mbiri Ya Alomwe* (History of the Lomwe) in which he describes Mount Michesi as the *phiri la mizimu* or "Mountain of the Spirits" (1953: 28-29). Although spirits are found in many places, Soka asserts that spirits are associated with Michesi in particular. These spirits are feared by people and it is said that people who wander into the forests on Mount Michesi "might be beaten, or see lighted torches but not the people carrying them."

The myth of Napolo is related to that of Mount Michesi and is directly linked to the flash floods that occur in Phalombe after heavy rainfall. Phalombe residents frequently use the word Napolo when they talk about the floods. Large and small boulders remaining from avalanches caused by Mount Michesi's flash floods can be seen scattered in the vicinity of the river basins around Phalombe village. When passing a

[14] The Mulanje Massif is Malawi's biggest mountain range and contains Central Africa's highest peak, Saphita. It is situated south of Mount Michesi in Phalombe's neighboring Mulanje district.

river just outside the village of Phalombe, a friend of mine told me that the rocks we saw lying around the river were caused by Napolo. When asked for the meaning of Napolo, people would only say that it meant the force of water (floods). Later I was told that people talked about Napolo as the force of water only in general terms and that, in fact, Napolo was a mythical being; a big snake, who lived under Michesi Mountain. Napolo is said to live in tunnels under the mountain and generally stays underground; but when torrential rainfalls occur and the underground water level rises, Napolo cannot stay underground anymore and crawls out of its underground tunnels causing water to gush out of the mountain and down its slopes, resulting in floods and disasters.

Brian Morris, who has written about the relations between people and animals in Malawi,[15] has studied these myths. Morris describes Napolo[16] as a mythical being, a giant serpentine spirit associated with rain, particularly floods and thunderstorms. Napolo is invisible though has the form of an enormous subterranean snake (2000: 207-210). It behaves like a wild beast, "destroying people and property," as it makes its way between Lake Chilwa[17] and Mount Michesi. In front of the guesthouse where I stayed in the village of Phalombe there was a memorial pillar erected in remembrance of people who had died in the floods of March 1991. As a consequence of these immense floods, which occurred after torrential rains in the area, 470 people were reported dead or missing and property damage was vast. This disaster has been blamed on Napolo. Describing these floods, Morris says:

> On the morning of Sunday 10 March it seemed to the people of Phalombe and neighboring villages that the whole mountain was coming down up on them. An immense flash flood occurred, bringing with it huge rock boulders, floating tree trunks and a deluge of mud, that completely swept all the bridges on the Phalombe-Mulanje road, and completely obliterated Phalombe. The flood affected an area of around 500 square km, with a population of around 21 thousand people, and constituted one of the worst natural disasters ever to occur in Malawi (2000: 209-210).

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[15] See Morris 1998 for more on the relations between people and animals in Malawi.

[16] For more on Napolo see Chimombo (1987).

[17] "Lake Chilwa (sometimes called Shilwa) is a shallow lake (maximum depth 2.7 m) on the border between Malawi and Mozambique," lying north of Mount Michesi. The Lake is Malawi's second largest lake, and one of Africa's most productive lakes: providing over 20% of all fish caught in Malawi (World Lakes Database, http://www.ilec.or.jp/database/afr/afr-01.html, and Hastings Maloya, http://www.ramsar.org/features/features_malawi_chilwa.htm, accessed August 17, 2006).

Belief in the existence of Napolo is common in Phalombe. People I talked to who believed the myth and saw Napolo as the cause of the floods, told me that although they had never seen Napolo (the snake) he existed all the same; as they had learned about it from their parents and elders. Napolo is also thought to be the cause of earthquakes in Malawi. When the earth shakes, it is said that Napolo is on the move underneath the earth's surface. Myths such as the one of Napolo are one way of rationalizing the natural disasters which occur in the district, such as flash floods, extended droughts and crop infestations. As mentioned above these disasters occur frequently and in some years the district is even hit by both drought, and when it finally starts raining, flash floods, that sweep crops away. These myths illustrate how diverse perceptions of problems (in this case natural disasters) can be found in different communities; which relates to the focal point of this thesis and later chapters that focus on perceptions of poverty and development.

Methodology

In 2005 I stayed in the district of Phalombe for a month, though spent 3 months in Malawi altogether; setting up my affiliation with the Centre for Social Research at Chancellor College at the University of Malawi in Zomba, obtaining a research permit, and conducting interviews in Lilongwe. While conducting fieldwork in Phalombe District, I studied development activities implemented by the ELDS and peoples' reactions, participation, and ideas about them. The research methods I used for this task were qualitative and included in-depth individual interviews, a few group interviews and participant-observation. As I do not speak Chichewa or Chilomwe, I recruited a research assistant – Charles Mphande – to interpret and translate Chichewa to English. Charles contributed a great deal to this research and helped me with more than just translations and interpretations; he taught me much about Malawi and its culture, and today remains a good friend.

The district of Phalombe was the main fieldsite, Kachala and Phalombe village in particular; along with the village of Khamula, on the slopes of Mount Michesi, and a few other villages in the vicinity of Kachala where some interviews were conducted. Interviews were also conducted at the ELDS headquarters in Lilongwe. Additionally, I

was able to access the Centre for Social Research at the University of Malawi in Zomba, and its library, where I conducted archival research.

Interviews were semi-structured and efforts were made to keep them informal in order to make interviewees feel comfortable. The questions mainly revolved around themes of development projects, poverty and development in general. Interviews were audiotaped in addition to my taking notes. All names of interviewees (ELDS staff members and residents of Phalombe District) occurring in this text are pseudonyms in order to protect the identity of my informants. Each day informants were selected according to questions I had in mind. Often I would choose my next informant based on information I had gathered in previous interviews. In this manner I was able to verify or follow up on certain topics and to get comments from informants from different backgrounds or statuses within the "development process" and the village. To contact people for my interviews I was often helped by someone I already knew from the village, or whom I had previously interviewed. They would introduce me to or contact my next informant, although occasionally I would also introduce myself to prospective informants and notify them of my intentions. I interviewed a wide range of people: village headmen, male and female development project participants, villagers not participating in the projects, development field workers, development managerial staff, and health care center staff. Most of the interviews took place privately, outdoors, in the shade of the interviewees' houses or the village mango trees; with the exception of a few group interviews, which were conducted indoors. A typical day of fieldwork would commence around 8 a.m. when we (Charles and I) drove out to Kachala or another village, depending on with whom I wanted to talk on that particular day. These days generally drew to a close in Phalombe village, where I would transcribe the day's interviews in my room.

As a measure to prevent the information I gathered from being biased due to an imaginary link with the ELDS, I emphasized to my informants that I was an independent researcher and was in no way connected with the ELDS. The first time I met with informants other than ELDS staff members, I held a meeting with the Executive Committee of the ICA sponsored ELDS development projects (consisting of one villager from every village that received the ELDS/ICA aid), yet without the presence of the

ELDS. When I first visited Kachala during my fieldwork in 2005, I arrived accompanied only by Charles in an effort to emphasize the fact that I was not connected to their development benefactors, the ELDS. Throughout the research I tried to ensure that people knew my intentions, why I was there and what I was doing. After a thorough explanation of what was involved in participating in the research – ensuring subjects that their anonymity was protected and that participation was entirely voluntary – all interviewees signed a consent form granting me permission to use the information provided in the interviews.

James Clifford (Clifford, 1986: 6-7) claims that all ethnographic texts are systems or economies of truth and that all truths are constructed. I want to emphasize that this thesis is based on *my own* perceptions of certain circumstances and should be read with that in mind. Clifford (1986: 6-7) again says, that ethnographic texts are true fictions and that all "ethnographic truths" are "inherently partial, committed and incomplete." This thesis has been based on a certain "reality" and my interpretations of that "reality" and it should not be taken as an objective truth ("truth" is always subjective), as another researcher may have interpreted the data differently based on a diverse variety of factors such as their scientific background, their personal beliefs or their perceptions.

While I acknowledge that this work is based on my own interpretations, I also recognize that if someone else were to conduct this research using the same methodology, he or she would not be able to produce an "objective truth" either. As long as ethnographers do not have an effective methodology that accounts for their subjectivity, there will be no completely objective studies of this sort. However, with or without complete objectivity there are still things to be studied and learned. We can always refuse to study things we cannot represent in complete objectivity; but should we acknowledge that complete objectivity will not be achieved in social studies of this kind, we can continue to do our work, and our work will be nonetheless important in doing so.

Organization of the Thesis

The first two chapters of this thesis elaborate on the Evangelical Lutheran Development Service (ELDS) and their development projects in the village of Kachala. Chapter 2 introduces the ELDS and discusses the origins of ELDS development projects in

Kachala. It also illustrates how development resources go through various stages before reaching their intended recipients and depict the organizational structure of the development project and process. In addition, Chapter 2 discusses the ELDS' and the participants' roles in the development projects. The development projects in Kachala are described one by one in Chapter 3, where I elaborate on their progress and perceived successes and failures, and then discuss questions of the projects' sustainability. Chapter 4 addresses the relativity of development notions and how multiple meanings of development exist in different social settings and contexts. Local perceptions of poverty and development in Kachala are examined and then compared to definitions of poverty and development among the ELDS development staff. These perceptions are also compared to conceptions of poverty and development within the global development literature. In Chapter 5, the swift proliferation of the NGO sector is elucidated and portrayed as the vast and diverse field it is. Also discussed are the complex and structurally unequal power-relations within development partnerships. The conclusion is a brief summary highlighting the content and arguments found within this thesis.

2. Strategies of Development, the Case of the Evangelical Lutheran Development Service in Phalombe District

ELDS Vision Statement:

People of Malawi empowered to live a quality life in which they enjoy and exercise their rights and responsibilities in dignity and in peace.

(Lutheran World Federation 2003: 17)

ELDS Mission Statement:

Compelled by the love of Christ, ELDP/ELDS works to empower Malawian communities to reduce poverty and human suffering.

(Lutheran World Federation 2003: 17)

In this chapter I introduce the Evangelical Lutheran Development Service (ELDS) and the origins of their development projects in Kachala village. I also illustrate how development aid and resources move through various stages before reaching its recipients, with reference to specific cases of ELDS development projects in the district of Phalombe. Finally, I relate what development participants (recipients) have to say about their role in this development dynamic, juxtaposing it to the ELDS' stance on co-operation and the role of recipients and benefactors in the "process of development."

The ELDS in Malawi recently changed its name from the Evangelical Lutheran Development Programme (ELDP) to its current name, the Evangelical Lutheran Development Service (ELDS). The ELDP was established by the Lutheran World Federation in Geneva in 1989 at a request of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi (ELCM) and the Government of Malawi. Its principal objective was to provide assistance to Mozambican refugees, at the time residing in Malawi as a consequence of the Mozambican civil war (1976 to 1992). During the time of their refugee work the ELDP realized that the local Malawian communities hosting the refugees were also in need of assistance. The ELDP therefore launched a program alongside their refugee program, targeting these rural Malawian communities. Concentration within this program was

placed mainly upon food security initiatives, adult literacy, reforestation, and provision of safe and clean water besides assisting refugees. After the repatriation of the refugees the focus of the program has shifted to assist Malawian communities to rehabilitate refugee impacted (and often devastated) environments through "sustainable rehabilitation initiatives, such as community based rehabilitation, including reforestation, agro-forestry, environmental education, and food security" (Lutheran World Federation 2003: 11).

The Lutheran World Federation has now been phased out of the ELDS in Malawi; turning the ELDS into a local NGO rather than a country program run by the Lutheran World Federation as it was before.[18] The ELDS in Malawi, in its present form, works with rural poor communities on issues of food security, action-oriented education, water and sanitation matters, emergency interventions, environmental protection, HIV/AIDS prevention and control, and human rights issues. In Phalombe District they carry out interventions in all of these fields within different areas of the district.

The ELDS in Malawi is not a religious-extremist organization (at least not at the time I was there). It is a faith based organization established by the Lutheran World Federation, and operates on behalf of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi. During my research, I found no evidence that the development projects were connected to missionary work; no preaching or converting participants to the Evangelical Lutheran faith was ever observed. Religion was not a factor for project participants, nor were the ELDS staff in the field necessarily Lutheran, Christian or even very religious. Questions I was most frequently asked upon my return from the field related to whether this faith-based NGO was preaching the gospel or on a mission to convert people to the Evangelical Lutheran Church, and whether beneficiaries of their development projects were chosen according to their religion or religious stance. Stories of such "aid" projects are not uncommon and I have to admit that I had some doubts in the beginning. However, I have come to the conclusion that this is not the case with the ELDS as I found no evidence of anything indicating this. Granted, the roots of the organization are based on certain Christian values, such as helping those in need (values pertinent not only to the

[18] It is common that Western-based NGOs have branches in the Third World countries they are working in. Often these branches oversee their own projects, and additionally, fund and monitor local NGOs (Thomas and Allen 2000: 211). In the case of the ELDS, the Lutheran World Federation established the ELDP, their own development branch in Malawi; though the Lutheran World Federation has now been phased out, transforming the ELDS into an independent local NGO.

Christian faith); and, as can be seen in the preamble to this chapter, Jesus Christ is mentioned in the ELDS mission statement; but at the field level where the "development" was taking place, there was no evidence of faith interfering with the projects in any way.

The staff in the field were all Malawians coming from other districts and as mentioned above, not necessarily Lutheran. None of the ELDS staff that I talked to in Phalombe belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Malawi; although, as is almost a rule in Malawi, all belonged to a religious group of some sort.[19] The staff at the ELDS office in Phalombe, working in the field, were educated and had earned certificates in disciplines such as agricultural studies, animal science, disease control, and development; applying their expertise when dealing with problems related to their education. One staff member pointed out that his education and expertise in agriculture and animal sciences was integral, as communities that he was working with had implemented many of his ideas.

The ELDS has collaborated with various donors that have sponsored a variety of projects in Malawi. In the district of Phalombe alone the ELDS has administered several development projects sponsored by a range of different donors such as:

- **ICA** (Icelandic Church Aid)
- **MEET** (Malawi Environmental Endowment Trust)
- **MHRCC** (Malawi Human Rights Consultative Committee)
- **NCA** (Norwegian Church Aid)
- **Bóthar** (A charity specializing in helping poor farmers in Africa and Third World countries through livestock donations)
- **Oxfam Malawi**

These donors have each emphasized different agendas and have been involved with various projects and interventions. For example, the ICA-sponsored projects I observed were mainly involved with what the ELDS staff called "recovery activities." That is, they

[19] The vast majority of Malawians belong to an official religious group of some sort. Common religious groups in Malawi range from a variety of Christian faiths (Catholicism, Presbyterianism, Pentecostalism and Seventh day Adventist churches to name a few) to Islamic faith groups.

were involved with providing communities with agricultural inputs and capacity building[20] efforts designed to promote self-sustainability (sustainable development). Donors such as Oxfam, on the other hand, distributed food directly to communities in need, without venturing into recovery activities or capacity building.

One of my informants at the ELDS office in Phalombe explained that the ELDS sought assistance from outside donor organizations due to limitations in their own resources and for accountability. There was a need to make it easier to monitor how the donor resources were spent, therefore resources from different organizations never ended up in the same community. ELDS development projects I observed in Phalombe District exemplify the operation of these donor relationships. After being approached by the Malawian Ministry of Agriculture to assist with agricultural efforts in ten villages in the district of Phalombe, the ELDS sought funding from the Icelandic Church Aid (ICA) for this undertaking. The ICA agreed to become involved and offered to fund several projects specifically related to water resource use and water management. The projects supported by the ICA involved a number of different interventions, such as crop diversification, livestock diversification, environmental protection, fish farming, gender equality awareness, and HIV/AIDS prevention and control. Currently, these projects are in operation in almost all of the ten villages in Phalombe, due to assistance from the ELDS (in collaboration with the ICA). The ELDS' involvement in these projects lasts for three years, with a project being introduced to a few communities at a time; therefore, not all of the communities commence their projects at the same time. After three years, the ELDS' goal is to have introduced the projects into the communities and empowered the people to be in a position to manage the projects themselves. At this time, the ELDS' direct involvement is phased out, leaving the management of the projects entirely in the hands of the communities – financially and operationally – although the ELDS still continues to monitor the projects for some time.

Below is a linear structure diagram, which illustrates the structure of the funding dynamic and the "linear" interaction network between the various operational components of the "development process."

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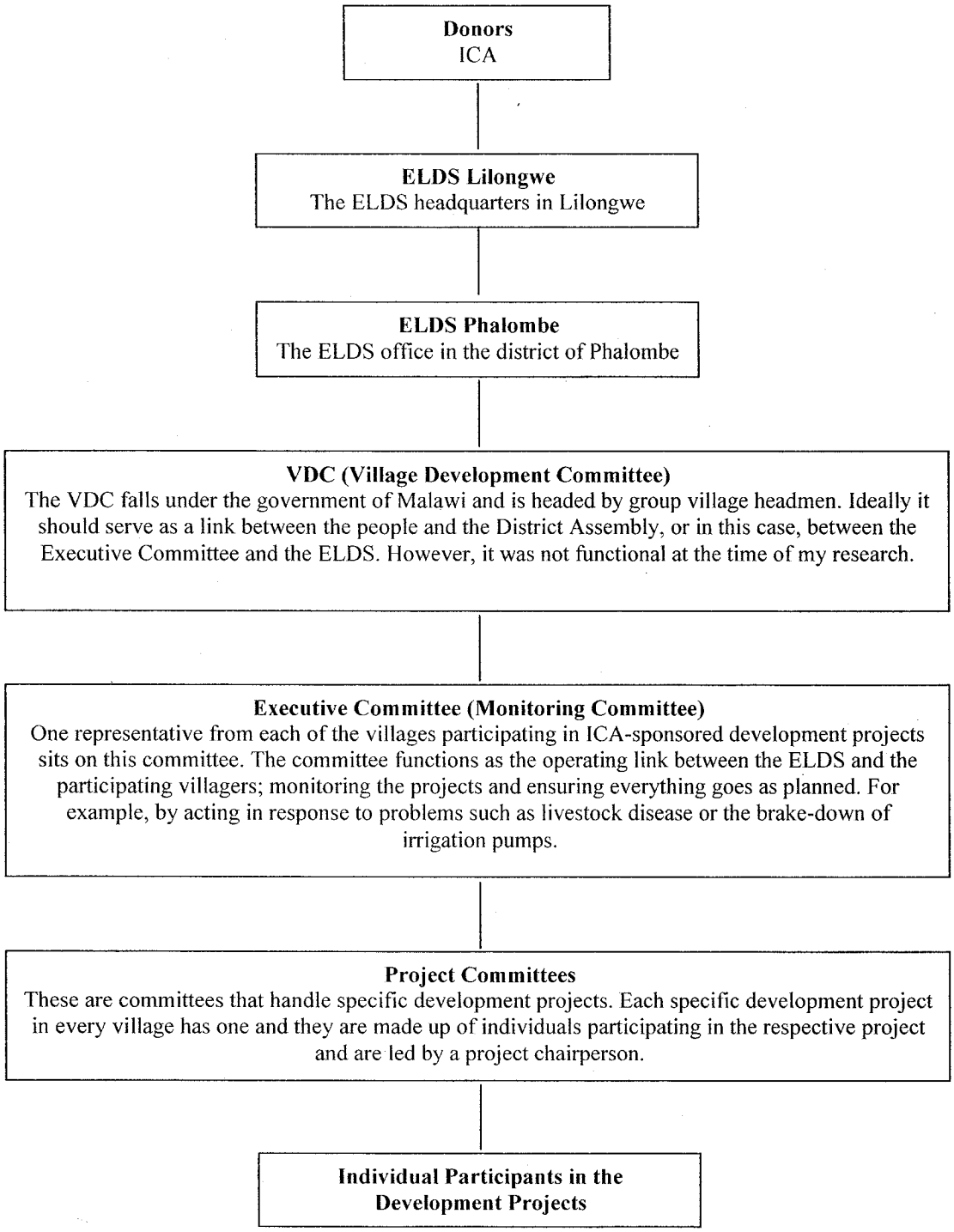
[20] Capacity building is a common term in the "development lingua" and refers to building capacity within communities or among individuals for self-support in the form of personal skills or social infrastructure, for example.

ELDS Organizational Chart



As can be seen in this structural organizational diagram, development resources go through various stages before reaching the intended recipients. The chart does not only portray how development resources are distributed from foreign donors to individual beneficiaries, but also depicts the different operational units of the development project. Each unit in the chart communicates with the units above and below it (although they sometimes overlap), forming the body of the development project itself. Examples of how these units co-operate and structure the development projects are found in Chapter 3.

In this diagram I have included the Village Development Committee (VDC), although they were not involved in the ICA-funded projects in Phalombe, as the ELDS would normally engage the VDC in their "development process." According to my informants at the ELDS, the exclusion of the VDC in their projects reflected the current weakness and limited efficacy of the VDC. The VDC's role, which is government-backed and headed by group village headmen,[21] is to serve as a link between the people and the District Assembly,[22] or as in this case, between the Executive Committee and the ELDS. As John at the ELDS office in Phalombe described it, since the VCD was almost nonexistent, the ELDS in Phalombe and the Executive Committee bypassed it and dealt directly with each other.

This exclusion of the local VDCs does not seem to be an anomaly. At a meeting with an Action Aid[23] official in Phalombe, I discovered that they did not go through the

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[21] "The Traditional Authority is a body organized since Independence in 1964 to coordinate with the Malawi government, particularly the local District Commissioner's Office" (Aguilar and Aguilar, http://www.odii.com/Papers/Malawi1.htm, accessed March 2, 2006). "Within the traditional leadership structure each village has a village headman, with a group village headman (GVH) selected by the village headmen, being responsible for five or more villages." The traditional authority (TA) voted from the group village headmen oversees between five and 15 group village headmen. "At the most senior level, a sub-chief has responsibility for a number of traditional authorities, with the senior chief having authority over all sub-chiefs in the district" (Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), http://www.clgf.org.uk/2005updates/Malawi.pdf, accessed August 17, 2006).

[22] At the district level, development matters also have a certain *modus operandi*. The District Assembly makes final decisions within the District Commissioner's Office, regarding development in the district. Members of the District Assembly include councilors, members of parliament, and traditional authorities (TAs) to name a few. The District Commissioner heads the District Executive Committee (DEC), which is the technical arm of the District Assembly and is in charge of designing a District Development Plan. Under the DEC, there are five Area Development Committees headed by a traditional authority which supervise development activities in their own traditional authority area. Under the Area Development Committees are the VDCs, which are headed by group village headmen who report to the Area Development Committees on the communities' interests and needs (Phalombe District Socio-Economic Profile 2002: 10-11). As previously mentioned, this arm of the District Commissioner's and the traditional authorities' structure in the district of Phalombe was not working efficiently in 2005.

[23] Action Aid is another NGO working in Phalombe District.

VDCs either, nor the village headmen. According to him, the reason for this was that it had previously yielded bad results. The ownership of the development projects, he explained, would not be with the people themselves, but rather with the chiefs or the VDCs. As a consequence, Action Aid adopted a new policy, "for the people by the people," which stresses the importance of the ownership staying with the people. As will be seen in the following sections, this policy did not conflict with that of the ELDS.

The Initiation of ICA-funded ELDS Projects in the District of Phalombe

Here the initiation of the ICA sponsored ELDS projects in Phalombe District is described, first by the Executive Committee, then by the ELDS, and finally by one of the four women who initially went to the District Agricultural Development Officer seeking assistance in response to the agricultural failures caused by the drought of 2001-2002.

At a meeting with the Executive Committee, or the Monitoring Committee as the ELDS calls it (see above diagram), it was related to me how the ELDS projects began in Kachala and spread to other villages in the area. The projects started in March 2004 after some of the Kachala villagers had made arrangements with the District Agricultural Development Officer, who oversees agricultural development in the district for the Ministry of Agriculture. They asked for a meeting with him after seeing the extent of food shortages and hunger in Kachala village due to the persisting drought in the 2001-2002 farming season. The villagers came to the District Agricultural Development Officer in search of help in finding an organization which could assist them with agricultural tools and other agricultural equipment. They originally wanted to buy these implements with micro-credit loans but when the ELDS came forward and offered to assist them that became unnecessary. The Executive Committee told me that the villagers already had an idea of what kind of development projects they wanted in their village. The projects they wanted were irrigation farming, rearing of animals, fish farming, the drilling of water boreholes and latrines. Finally they wanted to raise HIV/AIDS awareness among their fellow villagers. They added: "Luckily the ELDP [now ELDS] agreed to assist us with what we had planned to do," emphasizing that they initiated the projects themselves and the ELDS came in to assist them with their original plan.

When ELDS members in Phalombe recounted their initial involvement in the

development projects, they explained that the Ministry of Agriculture came to them after a request for assistance by the villagers. Upon realizing that they did not have enough resources to help these villages, the Ministry approached the ELDS, which they knew at times had resources to help rural poor communities. The ELDS told the Ministry they wanted to accompany them on a visit to these communities and after meeting with the communities and realizing that they indeed had problems, they started intervening.

The problems the communities faced led them to seek assistance in the aftermath of the drought during the 2001-2002 farming season. The harvest was bad, as was explained in a group interview with the Executive Committee:

> When we saw how severe the drought was in 2001-2002 and saw that water was still flowing in the river, we thought of irrigation farming. The problem in Kachala also spread to other villages of N'Dugunya Group Village Headman. Nine other villages in N'Dugunya's area were affected. Of the ten villages, three villages failed to proceed with the arrangements. They were given the chance to participate but failed to cope with the terms.

According to the Executive Committee, failing to cope with the terms meant that the three villages failed to carry out the work requested of them to implement the projects being introduced by the ELDS. "They thought they would receive food immediately for the work," explained the Executive Committee, "but when they found out that that was not the case, they withdrew from the projects." The Executive Committee, which was appointed two weeks after the date of inception in March 2004, continued to explain how the projects started with three villages, Kachala, Manase and Chaima and in mid 2004 two other villages were incorporated. The rest of the villages joined in October-November in 2004 when they saw the effects in other villages where it had started. The Executive Committee informed me at the time I was there that the projects were progressing well and according to plan.

An elderly woman participating in the Kachala projects explained how she was one of four women who went to the District Agricultural Development Officer in search of assistance when they realized their problems stemming from the drought in 2001-2002. The District Agricultural Development Officer told them to get organized and form a group of people who wanted to participate in an irrigation project. They were told to

inform the chief and appoint a project committee in Kachala. The initial group of participants in this treadle pump irrigation project was composed of twenty people but only sixteen of them remained in the ELDS projects at the time of the interview. I asked her what led her and her three friends to go to the District Agricultural Development Officer in search of assistance:

> What made us do that was the problem of hunger, seeing that due to lack of rain we could not harvest anything from our normal farming, and we were also admiring our friends. As we go to Phalombe [village] there is a certain place people have been using irrigation for some time now. We envied them, that they would have maize from July, even up to October [when they never had any themselves because of the dry season]. That's when we decided to ask the District Agricultural Development Officer. They gave us two treadle pumps on credit. After two years, that's when ELDP [now ELDS] came in.

She told me that after the ELDS had asked the villagers what they were going to use for the irrigation farming they supplied the engine for the irrigation. She added: "We thought they were lying but they indeed bought us the engine." They also contributed bags of cement for the irrigation channels, maize seeds and fertilizer. The project participants subsequently made boxed ridges for the irrigation farming and planted the seeds. Talking of the agricultural situation at the time I was there, she said: "It is just the problem of the river drying up; otherwise we would be having good crops by now."

As can be seen from this, the projects were initiated by Kachala community members themselves and not by the NGO. The projects would not have become a reality if it were not for the four women taking the first step in seeking assistance at the District Agricultural Development Officer's office. The fact that members of their own community initiated the projects and played an active role in the planning and execution of them, had given the project's participants and committees a feeling of ownership over them. This sense of ownership was evident when talking to the Executive Committee about the projects. As can be seen from these conversations with the Executive Committee and the elderly woman, the projects were not only initiated upon the demand of the community's own members, but also on their own terms and according to their own priorities.

Thus the ELDS projects in Kachala are not a result of an outside organization

coming into the community with predetermined and standardized development goals and packages; such development packages have been critiqued for being exclusively executed on the terms of the development organization and for not responding to the needs and priorities of the local communities. In such circumstances, ownership of these projects often seems to be with the organization bringing "development," rather than with the receiving community. When such organizations phase out and leave the projects in the hands of the community, these projects are unlikely to be sustainable if there is no sense of ownership within the recipient community. People are unlikely to dedicate themselves to something that is foreign to them and not responding to their needs.

James Ferguson (1994) describes standardized development packages as seeing people as an undifferentiated mass, as in not taking social and cultural differences at different "development sites" into account, and depoliticizing the "target population." It renders them as pawns in a game they have little or no control over. Although talking of development at a different level (at a macro-institutional level) this could also apply to small scale development projects. As these interviews have illustrated, this does not seem to apply to the ELDS development projects in Kachala.

Conditions and Co-operation within the ELDS Projects

When the ELDS came in with its tools and advice, the village headman called a meeting in the village and announced that projects were on their way. He explained the projects and publicized that those willing to participate should sign-up. Everyone was free to participate in the projects regardless of their social status or their religion. Only old people and those who were unable to work could not join, but they benefited from younger relatives who had joined the projects. A staff member of the ELDS office in Phalombe explained that in theory the projects were for the poor or those in need of assistance; while those who felt they had all the resources they needed, should not join the projects. Both ELDS staff members in Phalombe and the Executive Committee explained to me (on separate occasions) that the projects were in the hands of the villagers because the initiative was theirs and they determined the procedures. The ELDS only provided money, tools, and advice. According to the Executive Committee, the only conditions the ELDS put on their assistance was that the projects would be collective and

not benefit specific individuals. Everything else, such as the formulation and preparation of the projects, was in the hands of the participants; although the advice from the ELDS was always appreciated.

When asked about the conditions attached to the assistance, Richard at the ELDS office in Phalombe told me that they were set after the participants have been trained for the projects. One such condition was that the villagers had to ensure that whatever they received was used in a proper and sustainable manner so that it continued to assist them and thereby alleviate poverty. He explained by giving an example from the pig rearing project. The pigs were bought and handed over to the participants who were supposed to take care of them. After being bred they should be exploited in the form of either income or food. However, if this fails and they do not take care of their new property, the project will not succeed. Another condition mentioned was to ensure that the communities were in a position to make their own constitution and that those who had undergone training and capacity building, should be able to educate and train others. Richard emphasized that it was the villagers who came to them and asked for irrigation projects and animal rearing projects and that the ELDS did not come into communities dictating what to do. He clarified this by explaining:

> They should realize their own problems and find solutions. If we impose development activities on them, that system doesn't work. It doesn't work in the sense that you are a stranger to that community and you don't know what their problems really are. And it's not good for you to say "I have this," because according to their priority that cannot be a problem to them. So it's right and proper for them firstly to ask you for assistance, because they know their problems, they know what they need.

This, again, depicts how the ELDS has emphasized the importance of keeping the ownership of the projects within the communities rather than with the organization, and how important it is for the communities to prioritize their own problems and to try to find solutions to these problems on their own. This is in opposition to the critique that influenced my research question, as the critique suggests that most development projects do not pay attention to local communities' priorities and needs, resulting in miscommunication and misunderstandings and consequently the failure of most development projects.

In the next chapter, I describe the ELDS development projects in the village of Kachala and discuss their progress, sustainability and the unintended consequences of one of Malawi's past development schemes.

3. ELDS Development Projects in the Village of Kachala

In this chapter I describe each of the projects conducted in Kachala village during 2005. This is followed by a discussion of their progress, perceived success and failure, and I conclude with a section on their sustainability. Also incorporated into this section is a discussion of Malawi's past development initiatives' "unintended consequences." The chapter opens with general information on Kachala's development projects and a discussion about the skewed male/female ratio among development project participants.

Upon my arrival in Kachala, September 4th, 2005, I parked my car under the shade of a tree and was greeted by women dancing and chanting welcoming songs. Following this, I had a short conversation with the village headman and the people of the village and then was guided by them through the village, being shown every ELDS development project found within. This was my first day of fieldwork at the Kachala fieldsite and over the next few weeks, stories of the success and failures of the ELDS projects were imparted to me by the villagers, reflecting their perceptions of development and poverty.

In all, there were eight main ELDS projects operating in Kachala during my visit in 2005, of which all but the fish farming project (started in 2005) were initiated in 2004. These included a guinea fowl project, a pig project, a goat project, a chicken project, a well project, a latrine project, an irrigation project, and a fish farming project.[24] These projects are all part of what ELDS calls "integrated farming." With the ELDS' vision of integrated farming, projects rely on and support each other. For example, the manure from the animal husbandry projects can be used as fertilizer on the farm plots. In the fish farming project, manure can be used as fodder along with some of the vegetables grown in the irrigation farming project. Richard at the ELDS office in Phalombe explained that when the fish farming project is in operation, there will also be the possibility of planting rice patties in the fishpond. The goal of the animal husbandry projects, other than providing organic fertilizer, is to breed animals and distribute the offspring among project participants. When the breeding and distribution of offspring gets underway, more

[24] The names I use for the projects in Kachala are all the same names that were used for the projects in the village during my fieldwork.

participants will be able to join the projects because of the increased numbers of animals. The objective here is for as many households in Kachala as possible to own animals in the future.

The villagers contribute all the labor and land used in the projects, while the ELDS contributes money for things the villagers cannot provide. These include the animals for the projects, irrigation pumps (be they motorized or treadle pumps), and cement, which has been used to build the pigsty, irrigation chutes, latrines, and interior walls of the well. The ELDS also provides advice and training of the project participants.

During my time in Malawi, I observed that the majority of project participants were women, with only a few men participating. When asked, I was given various reasons why the majority of project participants were women. While one woman told me that "many men are not eager to participate because they are busy going out drinking," another woman added: "Another reason is that it is us women who remain at home. Men are very mobile in search for something to help their families in this time of hunger. Sometimes they go to Mozambique to work on farms." A man agreed with the latter comment and said that there were more women project participants "because men go out looking for other ways to find money to assist their families, and women remain at home tending the garden and the children." A man present during this conversation commented by saying that this could not be the reason, as from the beginning, interest in the projects had always been more among the women than the men.

In an unrelated adult literacy project in the district of Mangochi (in Malawi's Central Region), a common explanation I heard for the skewed male/female ratio of participants was quite different from the ones provided in Kachala. In Mangochi, the explanation given was that men were too proud to accept assistance and take instructions, especially in front of women. The absence and high drop out rate of male participants was therefore explained in terms of the humiliation of having to sit on a school bench with women and having to stand in front of the class and read. This example is provided not to imply that this is the explanation for the low male participation rate in the ELDS projects in Phalombe, but merely to point out that this is not a phenomenon unique to Kachala; rather, it is one found elsewhere, though it may be explained in different ways.

Richard at the ELDS office in Phalombe had a somewhat different explanation for

why so few men participated in the projects. First, he mentioned that women outnumbered men in the village. Richard went on to state that households targeted for development projects were usually those that were most vulnerable, these frequently being headed by single mothers with the responsibility of caring for their children and sometimes other orphans, on their own. He elaborated:

> As you can see that, we men, even if we are alone we can manage to stand on our own, by doing piecework; as compared to a woman, who, her husband died sometime back and yet she is fostering children. So that is why we try as much as possible to target those women so that their status should at least be improved.

I found the most common explanation for the skewed male/female ratio of participants in development projects to be that the men did not stay in the village as much as the women and therefore it was up to the women to participate. The reason for this is that the men would leave the village to seek work, or what is called piecework (*ganyu* in Chichewa),[25] often in far away places, in hope of earning money. While the women stayed behind with the children and kept up with the household chores and gardening. When I arrived in Kachala, many of the village's men were in Mozambique working or looking for small-scale labor contracts (piecework). When I met them on their return, they told me that there was almost no piecework to be found in Mozambique since they were experiencing hard times there as well. This resulted in fewer farmers looking for workers to work in their fields, and because of the drought in Phalombe, there were also more men looking for piecework than usual; resulting in men coming back home empty-handed.

The work they carried out in Mozambique was farm work for Chilomwe-speaking farmers who owned more land than the farmers of Phalombe District. This work entailed making ridges for seed planting and sometimes clearing the land for new fields. While in Mozambique, the workers reside in the homes of their employers' families, going out to the fields to work in the morning and returning after a day of work to a meal provided by their employers. The pay was 40 kilograms of maize for every two acres of land they break, which I was told was not much compared to the amount of physical labor it takes to do the job. The distance traveled to these piecework job opportunities in Mozambique

[25] "Piecework" are small-scale labor contracts invariably paid in cash or kind. See Englund 1999 on piecework in Dedza District in Malawi.

was considered great and according to the pieceworkers, the pay (maize) was often not enough for their families.

The Kachala Development Projects

I had been introduced to Kachala and the ELDS development projects in the summer of 2004, when the projects were just beginning; and I was excited to return in September 2005 to see how they were progressing. When I arrived in Kachala in 2004 with ELDS staff members (then still called the ELDP), the villagers enthusiastically guided me through the village, showing me several newly implemented animal husbandry projects – including a guinea fowl, chicken, goat, and a pig project – and describing them as "a dream come true." In addition, they showed me a motor-driven irrigation system designed to allow for two to three harvests a year, rather than just the one as is the norm when relying only on natural rainfall. In 2004, the villagers were so enthusiastic about these projects that when I returned one year later in 2005, I was excited to see how the projects had progressed and what people had to say about them. In the following sections, each of the ELDS development projects operating in Kachala during 2005 will be described.

The Guinea Fowl Project

The guinea fowl project took place in a 53 meter mud-brick hut with a thatched roof, located beside the house of the project chairman.[26] There were ten guinea fowls in the hut in September 2005. Upon the villagers' request, the project was originally started to provide manure as fertilizer for the irrigation farming project. As well as providing manure, the guinea fowls laid eggs; these eggs would be taken and put under hens from the chicken project, as the chickens were considerably better parents than the guinea fowls but also were more susceptible to disease (this is an example of integrated farming). Guinea fowls have more meat than chickens and lay more eggs over a longer period of time than do hens, therefore being considered better for breeding by some

[26] Each project had a committee made up of project participants and was led by a project chairperson who handled problems that arose within the projects (see the ELDS organizational chart in Chapter 2).

people.

At the time of my research, there were ten participants in the guinea fowl project. The aim of the project, other than providing manure, was to distribute the offspring of the original guinea fowls to other project participants, who could then sell them, eat them or breed them themselves. The ten original guinea fowls remained in the hut beside the project chairman's house. The distribution of their offspring had begun and several of the participants had already received two birds. The goal was to breed the guinea fowls so that other people could join the project and profit from it. I was told that eventually, when the guinea fowls have multiplied enough, all the people in Kachala would be able to benefit from owning guinea fowls.

The guinea fowls in their hut

The Chicken Project

The chicken project, like the guinea fowl project, was situated in a henhouse on the lot of the project chairwoman. There were ten hens in the henhouse. This project's goal was similar to that of the guinea fowl project (and the other animal rearing projects), in that as the chickens bred and multiplied, they were distributed to project participants, who then had the opportunity to either sell them, eat them, or continue breeding them. The project definitely had its ups and downs, as the ten hens present during my stay in Kachala were

only one-third of the original hens donated by the ELDS. Twenty of the original 30 hens had died from Newcastle disease.[27]

Before the outbreak of the disease, the project was doing well and offspring were already being distributed among the participants. According to the chairwoman of the project the ten that remained after the outbreak only "survived because the Executive Committee responded to the problem and bought medicine." After the rains stopped, early in 2005, the hens had started getting sick. The Executive Committee responded to the problem by collecting financial contributions from project participants, which were used to buy a vaccine against the disease. This vaccine was used only on the parent group (the original hens donated by the ELDS), not on the offspring that had already been distributed among project participants. The offspring were the responsibility of their new owners, who were supposed to care for their own chickens; while the parent group was seen to be the responsibility of the project committee and the Executive Committee. When asked why only the original birds were vaccinated, I was told that Kachala was not the only village affected by Newcastle disease and that other villages also represented by the Executive Committee needed the vaccine as well. The contributions that were collected were therefore only enough for the parent groups in each village. If an individual wanted to vaccinate his own chickens, he would have to put forth money in addition to that collected by the Project Committee. According to the participants, they were satisfied since the chickens were no longer dying, although they admitted that they were experiencing problems feeding the birds because of the agricultural difficulties the district was going through due to the drought.

[27] Newcastle disease is a highly contagious viral disease of domestic and wild birds (including poultry). "There are several different strains and, in its acute form, Newcastle disease has a very high mortality rate." (Department of Primary Industries and Water, Tasmania, http://www.dpiwe.tas.gov.au/inter.nsf/WebPages/CART-6FQ8PA?open, accessed February 25, 2006).

Inside the henhouse

The Pig Project

The pig project consisted of a cement stand-alone pigpen with a thatched roof, centrally located within the village. In front of the gate that led to the pen was a sanitation pit; a small quadrangular pit made of cement and filled with liquid. The sanitation pit was filled with water and a disinfectant agent (chlorine, or "medicine" as they called it) and everyone who intended to enter the sty had to dip their feet in it, in an effort to prevent the contagion of disease. The pigpen was divided into 6 different sties, each with its own door; and a small corridor led through the middle of the building, with three sties on either side. This was the first pigpen in the village, though more are to come when the pigs have bred and their offspring are distributed.

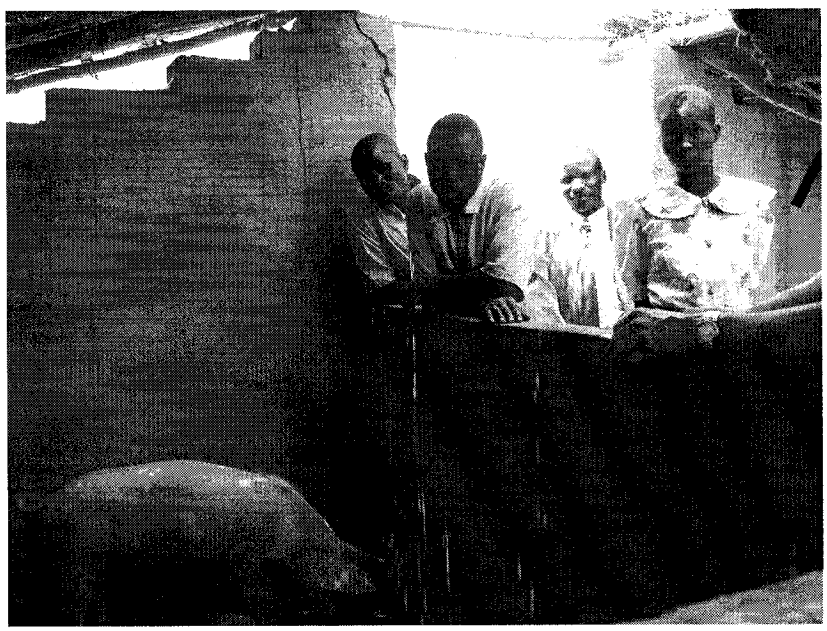
Upon my first visit to Kachala in June 2004, the pigsty had been built, though the pigs had not yet been purchased. In July 2004, the ELDS bought three piglets, though one of the three died prior to my return in 2005. Due to their young age at purchase, the pigs had not yet started to breed in the fall of 2005 and project participants were still waiting for them to mature before attempting to breed them.

The pigs were fed *deya* (the skin of the maize beans), also used for human consumption during hard times. The fodder was bought by project participants and all contributed what they could afford to buy it. When I asked the project's chairwoman how

they obtained the *deya* to feed the pigs, her answer was:

> It is difficult to feed the pigs this year, much more difficult than last year because of the drought. We have to struggle with other people at the maize mill because of people who want to buy for their own personal use.

She added that they, the project participants, had to eat some of the fodder intended for the pigs due to their own lack of food. The problem of providing fodder for the animals was for the project participants themselves to solve. This applied to all the animal husbandry projects. It lies outside the domain of the Executive Committee to help with these difficulties; their responsibility was to help with the so-called "big problems," when the solutions were out of reach for the project participants themselves; for example, when vaccines were needed for the animals.



The pigsty

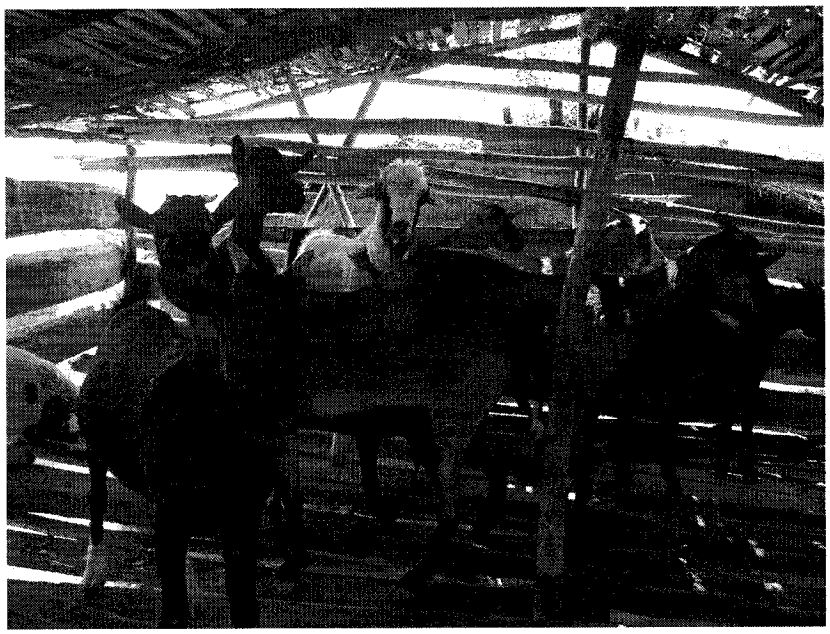
The Goat Project

The goats were kept in an elevated tree hut that stood on stilts, approximately 1.5 meters (about 5 feet) above the ground. A wooden staircase made from tree stems, with many small steps, led up to the hut's wooden door. The floor of the hut (under the thatched roof) was not very tightly constructed so that the goat droppings would fall through the floor's cracks and down under the hut. The ELDS suggested this design for the goat

house for two reasons; sanitation reasons, to prevent diseases, and to make it easier for the participants to collect the manure, which were then used as fertilizer in the fields.

In 2004 The goat project originally received ten does and one buck. By 2005 they had seven offspring, so the goats were eighteen in total. Distribution of the offspring had not yet started as the offspring were still young and dependent on their mothers; though this was scheduled to start in October 2005. Participants were advised to build their own goat houses before receiving the animals. Since there were not enough offspring to be given to the ten initial participants, the chairwoman had told all those not receiving goats in the first distribution "not to lose their head," as they would be next in line to receive a goat. The chairwoman explained to me that she had a dream that as the goats bred and multiplied and were distributed among participants, all households in Kachala would eventually have goats.

The participants of the goat project hired a herdsman to tend to the goats and take them out to pasture, but when the herdsman was busy with other things, the project's chairwoman did this work. The goats were taken out to feed in the pastures in the morning and returned to the goat house around two p.m. When they returned, the goats would drink water and would be fed shrubs and grass by the women. The ten participants would come and collect the manure for use in their fields together so that everyone received their fair share. According to the chairwoman, the people who had goats in the village prior to the project were now learning from them and copying what she called "more modern methods" in goat tending.



The goats in their elevated hut

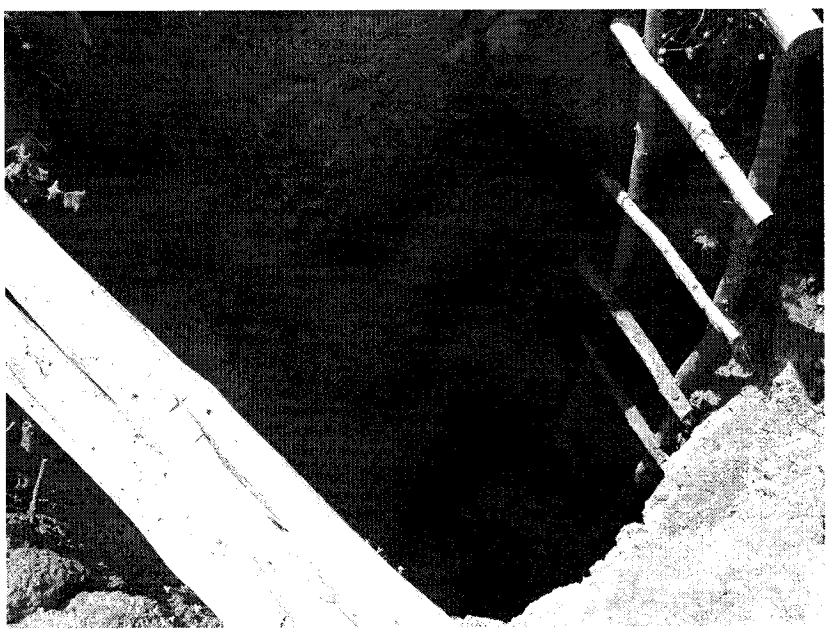
The Well Project

The well was part of what was called the "village hygiene project," which also included the latrine project. The well project was somewhat of a failure and the chairman was not particularly happy with how the events of this project unfolded. The ELDS had pointed to the place where the well was supposed to be dug, with the instructions that when the workers reached water, cement rings were to be installed that would serve as the well's interior walls. They started to dig the well in the summer of 2004 and had reached moisture in the ground when it started to rain and before they could dig past the groundwater level, the well filled with rainwater. In September 2005, the well had been dry for 6 months and the diggers had reached a large rock that was impossible to move without heavy machinery, so the project was halted. The Executive Committee informed the ELDS of this problem and they responded by offering to bring a machine as soon as a similar issue had been resolved at another ELDS development site in Dedza District.

The well project was a collective project with a chairman, though all villagers participated. When asked if all villagers were allowed to use the water, a participant told me: "Yes, because water is life, we can't stop people from using it." The chairman of the project had a bell he rang when he wanted people to come and work on the well. Only men dig the well. He explained that when he rings the bell, young men and even older

ones come to dig. When someone cannot come because of personal reasons he informs the chairman beforehand about his absence. I was told that when the well was completed, the village headman would take charge of the project. He would become responsible for informing people of how to maintain the well, and should any maintenance be required, he would be the one to tell them how they could contribute.

At the time of my fieldwork, there was only one operating water borehole in the village, provided by MASAF (Malawi Social Action Fund). According to my informants, this was not enough for the whole village, although the water was good and clean. As pointed out by an ELDS official, having only one operational borehole in the village posed a big problem should it break down since it was the only source of drinking water the village possessed.



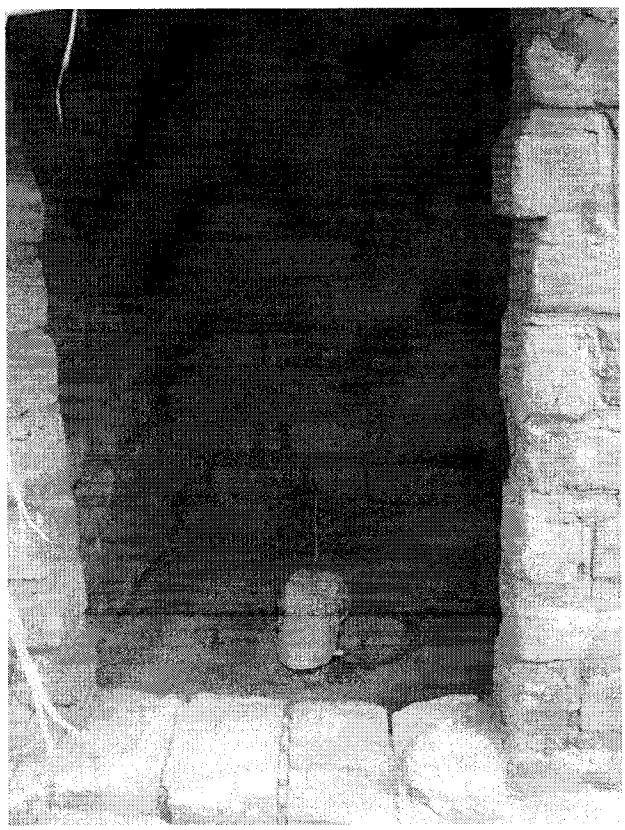
The dry well in September 2005

The Pit Latrine Project

Like the well project, the latrine project was also part of the village hygiene project. There were twenty households participating in this project while I was in Kachala, though the aim was for all the families in the village to eventually have pit latrines. The twenty first households to build pit latrines were then supposed to teach the village's remaining households the construction process when they got their own latrines.

In 2005, the latrine project was located outside the house of the only latrine owner in the village. It was a brick shelter with a thatched roof and a hole in a cement floor. On each side of the hole were little footprints where people were supposed to place their feet as they squatted over the hole while answering nature's call. There was a portable stone with a handle covering the hole, which one lifted off in order to use the latrine.

The owner of the latrine had started to use it the year before and therefore it was not yet full. When the hole filled up, the latrine would be transferred to another location. To lessen the smell, the owner said that they threw in ashes from their cooking stove and poured the water they used to clean and mop the latrine into the hole. I must say that the latrine did not smell bad at all. The stone covering the hole served to prevent the stench from coming out, prevent flies from coming in and out of the pit, and keep children from falling into the pit. Outside the latrine a tap had been built; a pole with a gourd full of water attached to it. On the side of the gourd was a hole with a plug and when the plug was removed, water poured out just as it would from a faucet. Using this gourd, people could wash their hands after using the pit latrine.



A pit latrine

The Irrigation Project

In 2004 the villagers showed me the irrigation system with pride. They demonstrated how it worked; how water was pumped from the river into cement chutes and how they directed the flow with bags of sand, forcing it to follow the chutes into the plots they wanted to water. This irrigation system was powered by a Honda WB30XT water pump; though in other villages, the ELDS donated treadle pumps instead of motorized engines. Both types of irrigation systems had their pros and cons. For example, the motor powered system was more expensive to manage, while the treadle pumps required much more physical work. For the treadle pumps to pump water into the fields, two people had to work the pump; while with the alternative, the motor did all the physical labor for you but it ran on fuel, which was expensive as would be repairs should the pump break down.

In 2004 the fields were empty, with seeds just having been planted for the next harvest; but in 2005, most of the fields were filled with dry and bare maize stalks, though some did bare young green maize plants. Alongside the concrete chutes that were used to distribute water into the field, lush green grass was growing, surrounded by drying vegetation. The pipe that connected to the motor pump had been disconnected as down by the river, there was no pump to be found. Even worse, there was no water in the river to be pumped. The river dries up every year, but in 2005 it dried up earlier than usual due to the drought, because of the very short rainy season that ended in early January 2005.

The chairman of the irrigation project was happy to inform me about how often they had harvested in the irrigated fields since my last visit. He described how they had harvested three times since I was there the year before and that without the irrigation system they would only have harvested once like those who did not participate in the project. He was not as optimistic when he told me about the next harvest: "The fields that are now green with maize will not be able to survive because they can't wait until the rainy season." He told me how they had tried to dig further down into the riverbed in hopes of finding water, but the water just kept drying up.

To the side of the fields were piles of composite manure, used to fertilize the fields. The composite manure was introduced by the ELDS according to their vision of integrated farming and was a mix of guinea fowl droppings, goat droppings and maize stalks. In the middle of the irrigated fields, the participants had planted *Brachestagia*

trees to increase the fields' fertility; another idea from the ELDS. The *Brachestagia* trees shed their leaves, which decompose on the ground and add to the fields' fertility. These trees are cut and trimmed to keep them at a manageable size (as they normally grow quite large); if they get too big, they are cut down, and new shoots grow from the stem.

In 2005, there were 20 participants in the irrigation project. However, because the irrigable land reserved for the project was limited, each plot per participant was rather small.[28]

Irrigating the fields in June 2004 when water was adequate in the river

[28] The average smallholder farmer's landholding size in Malawi is less than half a hectare (ELDS 2004: 9).

Dry irrigation chutes in September 2005

The Fish Farming Project

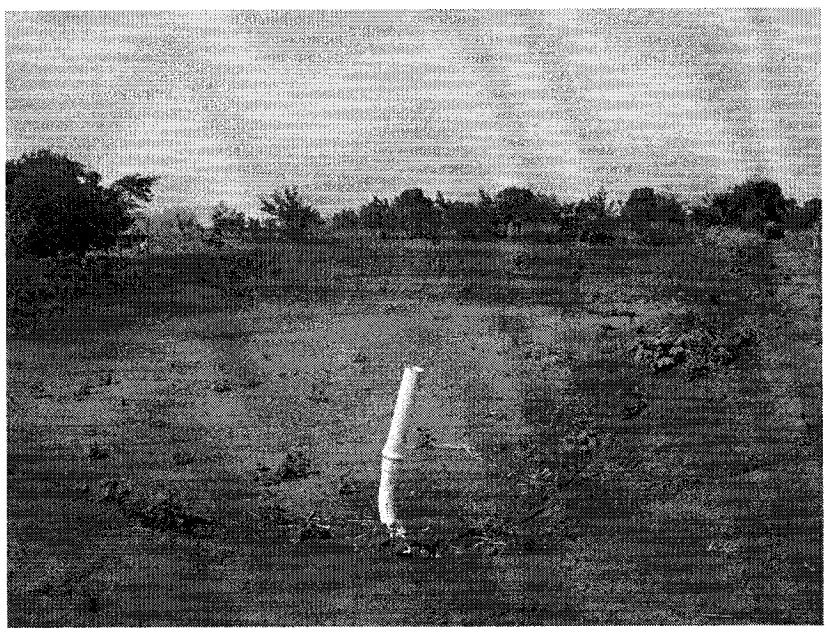
Above the irrigated fields an empty pond was dug. In 2005 it was new, dug only two months prior to my arrival; it had never been used. There were 20 participants in this project, but the project's chairman was away, working in Mozambique during my time in Kachala. Because there was no water in the river, there was no water or fish in the pond either. Since the river dries up every year, the fish farming project would not be perennial, but an annual project. This project would therefore commence at the beginning of the rainy season, with the fish being harvested when the rainy season came to an end and the river started to dry up.

When asked what they would do with the fish, I was told that part of the fish would be sold and part of it would be used as relish with the staple food *nsima*. After each harvest, the project committee would decide how much fish each member could take for their own consumption. The rest would be sold by the committee and the money would be kept for future use; to buy fingerlings or anything else connected to the maintenance of this project.

When talking about the fishpond project in Kachala with ELDS development workers in Phalombe, some of them revealed their doubts that the project would be

successful considering how dry the Kachala region is. Fish farming projects seemed to be more suitable for villages up in the mountains where water was plentiful, such as the villages up in the Mphata area, on the slopes of Mount Michesi.

Now that all the individual development projects in Kachala have been introduced, peoples' experiences with the projects are discussed.



The empty fishpond in September 2005

Accounts of Successes and Failures, Sustainability and Integrated Farming

Participants' experiences with the projects were generally positive. Negative comments pertaining to the projects were aimed at outside circumstances (which are none the less important); such as unfavorable weather conditions, lack of land for the irrigation scheme or, as could be heard in the comments made by the chairman of the well project, disappointment with the unsuccessful well. However, positive comments about the projects where much more common.

A woman on the Executive Committee told me about the positive effects of the ELDS' irrigation projects:

> The project, it has helped us. It has not entirely eradicated hunger, but things are still better because we have irrigation farming now when we did not have it before. I have benefited from irrigation farming. Because of the

> money I earned from the project I have managed to buy two bags of maize and two bags of dried cassava. I have also bought clothes for the children I have, one of whom is an orphan.

When asked about how the irrigation projects have impacted peoples' conditions, the Executive Committee told me that it had helped to some extent. Those who participated had managed to get food, but more people want to participate than the project could support because of a lack of land. The Executive Committee explained that the project is collective and based on co-operation. If someone who owns land wants to participate he would have to share his land with the others who do not have land and want to participate. However, if someone decides to pull out and farm independently, that would mean that the individual would have to provide implements like farming tools, fertilizer, and water for his field by himself.

I asked the Executive Committee about the impacts of the projects on poverty. If poverty at the household and village levels were the same after the projects commenced, compared to how it was before. They explained that things are better for the participants at the household level:

> In the past we couldn't even find vegetables during this season [the dry season]. Now we have a lot of vegetables like green maize and pumpkin leaves that we can eat and sell. On the village level we have hope and vision that as our animals [from the animal rearing projects] multiply, in the future, every household is going to have animals.

On the other hand, the Executive Committee also commented that non-beneficiaries of the projects were hurt when they saw their fellow villagers benefiting from the projects, for example roasting green maize in the dry season, when they themselves did not have any green maize. However, the committee rejected the notion that the projects had caused envy within the villages. They explained that everyone was free to join, that there was no limit on the number of participants, and that the non-participants were thinking of joining. It was common to hear that the projects were admired by fellow villagers and that they wanted to join. However, if there was a problem with limited land for irrigation farming, more participants joining would mean that the land had to come from

somewhere; either from the participants or customary land[29] controlled by the chief.[30]

When asked about the future of the project, the Executive Committee told me that if they continued at the same rate, the projects would assist the village much, and that in ten years there would be a possibility that all of the households in the villages would be raising animals (pigs, goats, chickens or guinea fowls). To further the financial sustainability of the projects, the Executive Committee established an association involving all the participating villages, and through this association they had opened a bank account. This bank account was to be used in the future, should problems arise, so that the projects would be able to carry on. Future problems, although hard to predict, could be related to animal disease and maintenance, such as when vaccines are needed for the animals; or the repairing or purchasing of equipment such as irrigation pumps. The chairman, secretary and treasurer from each village had been assigned to collect contributions from participating villagers; collecting available money and then bringing it to the Executive Committee for the bank. These contributions were made annually and the amount was agreed upon by the participants themselves and the Executive Committee. In addition to the annual contribution, individual contributions were collected when problems arose. If the problem required more money than could be collected, the Executive Committee informed the ELDS in hope of their assistance, which could not be guaranteed once the ELDS had been phased out of the projects.

According to the ELDS, the projects were not only financially sustainable, but environmentally sustainable as well. The ELDS introduced methods that enhanced the sustainability of water as a resource, within the drought-prone environment. Richard at the ELDS office in Phalombe elaborated on this: "We have trained them how to manage the water so that it shouldn't run away from them through planting of trees along the river bank." The planting of trees prevents soil erosion, the river gully from growing bigger and excessive water evaporation so that the river does not dry up prematurely. They also promoted another way of managing water through the construction of shallow wells and the planting of trees around them to conserve the water. Richard also explained how their

[29] Customary land is the property of the community but the chiefs are "empowered to authorize the use and occupation of any customary land within their areas in accordance with customary law" (Kishindo 2004: 214-217).

[30] Land for agricultural production is not in abundance and land suitable for the collective irrigation scheme needs to be located close to the water source which is the river.

projects encouraged integrated farming. In integrated farming people raise crops and animals within their own fields that rely on each other. Instead of harvesting only maize each year, crop diversification was also emphasized; encouraging the growing of crops and rearing of animals that rely on each other. By doing this they were better prepared should there be unfavorable conditions for the maize crop; for example, people could rely on their livestock or fish to obtain the resources to buy maize for *nsima*.

In the village of Khamula, on the slopes of Michesi Mountain, above the village of Phalombe; water could be found in adequate amounts. Here I was able to observe an effective example of integrated farming. In their fishponds, fish were fed with manure and the fields around them were irrigated with the water from the fishponds. The manure was not only used for fish fodder, but also as fertilizer in the fields. The ELDS had introduced composite manure, which is made of manure and inedible crop residues. The advantages of composite manure were that it was organic, the components were found locally, and it was not at all expensive. At the ELDS office in Phalombe, a staff member with an education in agriculture explained that the ELDS introduced this organic fertilizer in an attempt to regain the fertility of the fields, providing a cheaper and environmentally friendly alternative to chemical fertilizers. He explained to me how the low fertility of the fields was caused by the over-usage of and reliance on chemical fertilizers. When elaborating on how imported chemical fertilizers had unfortunate consequences in the past he explained:

> Malawi is a country which normally receives things from the outside and because of the status of the country itself, it just receives without standardizing. Or even assessing the effect of what we have received on our soils.

He took the example of a certain type of fertilizer which was called sulfate of ammonia. When it was applied to the fields people realized the high yields that followed. However, when it came to land preparation in the following farming season it was observed that the soil became harder, even too hard to cultivate. He described how the cultivation of the land without reapplying the fertilizer led to reduced yields and in some cases the soil would become barren. He continued to explain how, in the past, he had observed other development and agricultural policies and implementations coming from abroad that had

failed and negatively affected the soil fertility of farmers' fields. An example of this was the technical advice of agricultural advisors who emphasized wind breaking by planting trees at the edges of agricultural fields, which has resulted in reduced soil fertility. This agricultural policy, which originated abroad, was misunderstood and wrong kind of trees (Gmelia trees) were planted to break the wind. The species planted in this instance used up important minerals from the soil necessary for the crops. During my fieldwork the government had condemned the use of Gmelia trees as windbreakers and they had been cut down.

When asked about the proposed solutions to problems of soil infertility, he replied that their solution was to encourage communities to rear animals and apply the manure from the animals to the fields as fertilizer. The ELDS also encouraged communities to plant agro-forestry trees in their fields: "These trees assist in the biomass itself, it assists in adding the fertility of the soil." He added: "These solutions are locally found within the communities, they can't be bought."

This anecdote, demonstrating a past development policy based on a misunderstanding, is a good example of what Ferguson (1994) calls development's unintended consequences and could be viewed as supporting the critique that development in general is "riddled with corruption and plagued by inefficiency" and not necessarily designed to benefit the recipients (Crewe and Harrison 1998:14). However, it also supports the critique influencing my argument; that development projects usually fail because of misunderstandings between development workers and development beneficiaries, especially regarding misconceptions of the problems that need to be tackled and the prioritization and handling of these.

By examining the unintended consequences of the wind breaking plan, we see that the negative outcome of this development scheme, implemented to improve Malawian agriculture and instead decreasing soil fertility, was a result of misunderstanding. This does not mean that all unintended consequences of development schemes necessarily result from misunderstanding; many reasons could lead to unintended consequences, misunderstanding being one of them. However, this exemplifies how important it is for development partnerships to be based on mutual understanding. Co-operations or partnerships, whether development co-operations or not,

experiencing misunderstanding or miscommunication is very likely to be unsuccessful in reaching their goals. To reiterate I argue that if development projects are to work, it is important that all parties in the co-operation understand each others' ideas and can communicate or interact in a way that whenever misconceptions and misunderstandings arise, a compromise can be reached.[31] This does not, however, guarantee a success or benefit to all parties involved, as the ideas and interventions being implemented must be fruitful as well. No matter how well a group of alchemists understand each other, and agree with each other, copper can never be turned into gold.

In drawing on this chapter, I now turn to the different meanings of development, and the local definitions of poverty and development in Kachala village.

[31] This suggestion is against Hobart's (1993) claim that local and Western knowledge/discourses can never reach common ground because the rationalities behind them are not shareable (see Grillo 1997: 14).

4. Perceptions of Poverty and Development

In her study of everyday politics in a Philippines NGO, Dorothea Hilhorst argues that "[m]eanings of development notions are renegotiated in the local context" (2003: 10).[32] "So even when a certain vocabulary is adopted it may acquire different and often multiple meanings in localities." By acknowledging this, Hilhorst continues, one gives a more dynamic interpretation of discourse where "people's agency in bending the discourse to their own needs and realities" is acknowledged, along with the multiple realities of development (2003: 10). In a similar vein, Walley argues that the acknowledgment of multiple, coexisting meanings and diverse symbolic understandings of development notions leads to recognition that the social worlds we live in "are comprised of a patchwork of dynamics with varying social and historical origins, not all of which follow or are being subsumed by an overarching logic of capitalism and modernity" (2004:17). In this chapter issues relating to the multiple meanings of development notions and local and "global" definitions of poverty and development are discussed.

Hilhorst proposes an investigation of the duality of discourse, as she does not consider it helpful to view discourse as a hegemonic structure (2003: 81). Although one discourse may appear to be dominant, "there are always parallel, residual or emerging discourses" and between these dominant and counter-discourses, there is a dynamic relationship that "leads to renegotiations at the interfaces of discourse encounters." If we are to understand the duality of discourse, we have to take the notion of agency into account. Hilhorst explains: "Agency endows actors with the knowledge and capability to process social experience. This means that even though actors are affected by (dominant) discourses, at the same time they reshuffle, circumvent and accommodate these" (2003: 81).[33]

Studying the duality of discourse and analyzing how discourses become realities through actors' practices is a complicated process, as discourses are not always obvious in everyday social relationships. To accomplish the task of identifying discourses one needs to map the different meanings people have attached to notions of development in

[32] See also Pigg 1992 and Walley 2004: 8.
[33] See also Grillo 1997 on multiple discourses of development.

speech and practice (Hilhorst 2003: 82-83). In Kachala, I mapped how local concepts of development were being used in my interviews with the villagers, both participants and non-participants of the ELDS development projects.

Perceptions of Poverty

In the introduction to this thesis, I referred to figures used by international development organizations that situated Malawi on development and poverty scales. These figures are supposed to tell us whether people and nations are rich or poor, developed or underdeveloped, using the percentage of people living below the poverty line in the context of income per capita, and employing a definition of poverty defined by development "specialists." It can be confusing to use US dollars to define whether a person is poor or not, especially in places where people live off of self-subsistence agriculture or are not very reliant on money. In this section, perceptions of poverty and development in Kachala (and within the ELDS), as well as the problematic of defining and employing relative terms such as poverty, and how their use could possibly pose problems within development co-operations is discussed.

The global dialogue on world poverty and the idea of measuring poverty within and in between countries – classifying some as poor and others as well-off based on their gross domestic product (GDP)[34] per capita (and other indexes) – is a rather recent phenomenon in human history (Waldorff and Einarsdóttir: in press; n.d.). The main methodology used to assess global and individual poverty has been, and still is, mostly focused on economic factors.[35] It is difficult to agree on a universal definition of poverty. Even if "development experts" knew the exact GDP of every country on earth, that information could only be used to a certain extent. For example, this methodology of measuring GDP does not account for certain niches in economies, such as informal or underground economies that often make up a substantial part of Third World economies; it also does not account for the distribution of wealth within the nation itself. GDP per

[34] Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is "the total value of goods and services produced in a country over a period of time" (Encarta, http://encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761588125/Gross_Domestic_Product.html, accessed July 19, 2006).

[35] For a critical discussion of the history and invention of poverty as a global problem requiring economic solutions, see Rahnema 2003b.

capita on its own does not portray human well-being or ill-being, as there are many other factors to be taken into account. In some cases GDP can be completely irrelevant. GDP per capita does not necessarily indicate how people are being deprived of their well-being or the converse, but rather, where the most and least monetary wealth can be found in the world (Waldorff and Einarsdóttir: in press; n.d.; see also Chambers 2003: 45-46 on *poverty-line thinking*).

With these economically centered methodologies of measuring poverty in mind, the question arises, what is poverty? In urban "affluent" environments, the poor are often borderline groups, commonly without a voice; though according to development and poverty indexes, they generally have access to public healthcare and school systems and live above the poverty line. In contrast to this, an African farmer living on less than a dollar a day often lives a socially and economically similar life to the people in his proximate surroundings (Waldorff and Einarsdóttir: in press; n.d.). This example of "poverty" in two different social contexts shows its complexity and relativity and how poverty is not only related to income.

Because of the problematic essence of poverty as a term and phenomena (its relativity) and criticisms of international development organizations' methodology, "development specialists" have broadened their definitions of poverty from being exclusively economic-based to include a complexity of different causalities (Waldorff and Einarsdóttir: in press; n.d.). For example, the World Bank defines poverty today as a "pronounced deprivation in well-being... to be hungry, to lack shelter and clothing, to be sick and not cared for, to be illiterate and not schooled," adding that to live in poverty also means to live in vulnerability "to adverse events outside their control" (2001: 15).

Poverty is relative and can be found in all societies in one form or another. It is not unusual to compare one's situational impoverishment to other members of one's own community, therefore it is possible to find poverty in societies many people would deem affluent. Peter Townsend, a sociologist who studied poverty in Britain in the late 1970s, asserts that an individual's impoverishment is not only based on how much he owns, but also on how much he owns in comparison to others in the same community. He explains this by saying that people are considered poor when they, because of a lack of resources, cannot enjoy things that are thought to be "normal" or "ordinary" in their own

community and are thus excluded from certain "ordinary" parts of society (Thomas 2000: 12-13; see also Townsend 1979: 31). An example of Townsend's idea of relative poverty could be a child living in a community where TV ownership is the norm, but who does not have access to a TV at home. Even though the child has easy access to food and is healthy, it can be considered poor because it cannot partake in certain conversations among its peers pertaining to TV and its programs. This exemplifies how an item (the TV), which in many societies would be considered a luxury, can turn into a necessity in others (Waldorff and Einarsdóttir: in press; n.d.). Taking a relativist view of poverty as suggested by Amartya Sen, means that poverty cannot be eliminated as it will always be found in societies, and therefore anti-poverty programs can never be fully successful (1984: 329). Sen takes Townsend's argument further; presenting the idea of poverty as "failure to be able to take full part in human society" (Thomas 2000: 14). But rather than portraying poverty as simply derived from a lack of living standards; he depicts it as caused by a lack of choice, or what he calls, capabilities within society (Sen 1984: 325-345).

The notion of "lack" or "deficiency" are common denominators for most perceptions of poverty. According to Rahnema (2003b: 159) this reflects the relativity of the concept and evokes the question: "What is necessary and for whom? And who is qualified to define all that?" An anecdote I was told in Malawi in 2004 exemplifies the relativity of poverty and illustrates how definitions of poverty differ in various social contexts, demonstrating how people's definitions of poverty may change through time. A friend's wife, living in Malawi at the time, traveled to Cape Town in South Africa to meet up with family members from Europe. On the itinerary of this family reunion was a guided tour of one of Cape Town's infamous shanty towns. Her family, coming from an affluent society in Iceland, was shocked by the "poverty" and living conditions in the shanty town; but what to them seemed to be poverty and chaos appeared to the woman living in Malawi to be something quite different. After having lived for some time in Malawi and experiencing the small rural Malawian villages and urban squatter settlements in Lilongwe, she did not see the same chaotic mess as did her family. She noticed that the houses had electricity and that running water was available, which,

compared to some Malawian rural villages and shanty towns, could be considered a sign of luxury (Guðni Eiríksson personal communication 2004).

The preceding paragraphs illustrate how problematic the term poverty can be, not only to this thesis but also within "development" itself; what seems like poverty to one person can be seen as luxury to another. As Rahnema (2003b: 158) points out: "There may be as many poor and as many perceptions of poverty as there are human beings." It also suggests that people coming together (especially if they are from different societies around the World) to form a development partnership will have different ideas about poverty and therefore different objectives. Since alleviating poverty is usually one of the main goals of development projects, these differing ideas may pose problems if there is little or no communication between the parties involved in a development partnership; possibly leading to the "failure" of the project. As can be seen from the above anecdote, different social backgrounds may influence one's views but views can also change according to new experiences. In the same manner, these views are variable and negotiated; with meanings of development also being variable, as they are negotiated and renegotiated in different social contexts (for example during development projects). In development co-operation, it appears vital that all partners contribute to the project and talk about their perceptions and priorities, influencing each other; it should be an interactive process. As Richard at the ELDS in Phalombe pointed out, the locals are the ones who are experts in the problems they are facing and therefore should be the ones prioritizing the issues for development; implying that the project recipients themselves should also do the planning related to development aid. Of course, the development benefactors should also have a say, as they can bring certain ideas to the table; yet it seems more likely that the locals would have a better understanding of their own problems and priorities than an outsider, underscoring the importance of the recipients having a voice in development projects.

When talking of the importance of benefactors and beneficiaries understanding each other, I do not mean to imply that everybody must agree 100 percent. In all human relations there are some disagreements and misunderstandings in one way or another. What I am referring to is the importance of having an open forum within the project where everybody can participate in negotiations, listening and expressing their views and

feelings. All parties should have a voice in the development process, not only because it seems like the right thing to do, but also because it weighs-in considerably when it comes to perceived results. As I have mentioned earlier, no co-operation based on misunderstanding, one-way communication and miscommunication is likely to yield "success" (of course the fact that what one person considers a success another might see as a failure still applies). This may seem like a simplistic or commonsense argument, but the history of development failures highlights the urgency of the matter. Before continuing with a discussion of development co-operation, Kachala villagers' perceptions of development *vis-à-vis* development workers' perceptions, and definitions of development in scholarly literature; I elucidate local definitions of well-being, ill-being and poverty.

As noted above, poverty is for various reasons a problematic term; it is relative and can mean different things in different social settings and contexts. It is therefore difficult to settle on one universal definition and index of poverty. During my 2005 research in Malawi, there was a certain terminology related to poverty. It was common in Malawi to talk of well-being (*kupeza bwino* in Chichewa) and ill-being (*Kusauka* in Chichewa), rather than solely using the term poverty (*upmhawi* in Chichewa); with, poverty and ill-being often being used interchangeably. To be faithful to Malawian terminology, I will explain how the terms well-being and ill-being were used (terms that, like poverty, can also be seen as relative and subjective) by Malawians themselves, many of whom living in conditions classified as poverty by international development and poverty index standards.

In a study called *Malawi: Consultations with the Poor*, designed to inform the World Bank's *World Development Report 2000-2001* on poverty and development in Malawi, well-being and ill-being was defined based on interviews with "the poor." This research, which is rich in data on definitions of well- and ill-being in Malawian poor communities, states that well-being was defined by "the poor" on the basis of "having access to the most depended upon livelihood resource in the particular area and access to basic life" (Khaila et al. 1999: 1). These resources were for example, fishing equipment in fishing communities, the implements needed to grow valuable crops such as tobacco in

rural agricultural areas, and employment in urban areas. Khaila et al. (1999: 1-2) further defined well-being:

> [P]articipants to the discussions said that well-being households have adequate food for the entire year, have access to decent medical care, have good sleeping houses and bedding, have a constant and regular source of income such that they are able to withstand crisis situations like famine, price hikes and diseases and that since they have what is required for life, they live peacefully (have peace of mind).

They added that most women discussion groups mentioned household utensils, kitchen ware, pit latrines, bathrooms and plate drying racks as a sign of well-being (Khaila et al. 1999: 2). The state of ill-being was on the other hand described as:

> [T]he constant deprivation of basic life necessities like food, medical care and shelter. In general ill-being was said to be characterized by poor health and stunted growth, having inadequate food for the rest of the year, dilapidated houses, irregular income sources like fishing equipment and agricultural material.

Certain behavioral patterns were also depicted as aspects of ill-being, such as "rudeness, delinquent behavior, witchcraft, jealousy, excessive beer drinking, quarrels, in-house fighting and unstable families." Old age, physical disability, loneliness and being orphaned were also associated with ill-being. Khaila et al. explain how the relationship between poverty and ill being was defined:

> The state of ill-being was likened to poverty such that the definition of a poor household contained the characteristics associated with ill-being. However, some participants differentiated between poverty and lacking in that lacking is temporal while being poor has some longitudinal definition. (Khaila et al.1999: 2).

These definitions of well-being and ill-being are in many ways similar to definitions I gathered in Kachala and neighboring villages. I was interested in peoples' definitions and perceptions of poverty (and ill-being) and whether they considered themselves poor – and if so, why – and what they considered their status to be compared to others in the village. This seemed to me to be questions of importance for participants in a development partnership trying to alleviate "poverty" and therefore central to my research. With the

notion in mind that poverty is relative and that meanings of development are negotiated in local contexts, if NGOs come in with pre-packaged poverty alleviation schemes, they will not necessarily alleviate the "poverty" the "locals" see themselves as suffering from or even see it as a priority. This connects to the criticism stating that misconceptions within development partnerships lead to development failures and also to the argument that if a development project is to be successful and sustainable, it is of importance that both benefactors and beneficiaries understand each other, what is to be accomplished, and how people perceive their problems.

When we talked of perceptions of the problems that the community faced, and of poverty, ill-being, and well-being in Kachala and neighboring villages, villager's responses were fundamentally very similar to the perceptions of the ELDS development workers. This suggests that communication between the ELDS and the recipient communities was efficient and that both parties had a voice in the partnership and consulted each other. However, the fact that the ELDS workers were all Malawians themselves (although from other districts), coming from similar social settings with similar "local" knowledge and experiences could also play a substantial role in the two groups' similar perceptions of poverty, ill-being, and well-being.

It is not unusual to get a reply similar to the one provided below by Christine when asked for a definition of poverty or ill-being in Kachala:

> The poverty in the village, is that, because the villagers rely on farming and farming failed, the children are malnourished and the clothes are not enough.

When I asked Christine if she considered herself as poor, she said: "Yes I am poor." I then asked her "What is well-being or not being poor." Her response was "Someone who is not poor, is one that has enough food, a good house and is able to clothe his children well." I asked if there are villagers who have all this – that is, well-being – and she replied: "There is no one." Elsie, an older woman, expressed similar sentiments about poverty:

> Poverty is lack of needs [necessities], for example lack of food, clothes, especially lack of food because even if you have good clothes but you don't have food, that is great poverty.

She continued to explain how she imbibed this definition of poverty:

> That is the way I know poverty. My father died when I was a little girl. I have known poverty ever since, because the way I used to eat with my father was not the way I ate after his death, I lacked food, clothes and I failed to continue with my education because I couldn't find money. In those days we used to pay school fees, that is how I have known poverty.

The staff members at the ELDS office in Phalombe had very similar definitions of poverty and ill-being. Richard described poverty in this way:

> When we say poverty, that means, it's when one lacks resources which could have assisted him in improving his or her status or living conditions.

When I asked Richard about the causes of poverty, he explained that he believed the main causes of poverty to be bad weather conditions – such as droughts, floods, and crop infestations – for farmers, which led to food shortages in the communities. He added that illiteracy, a lack in education and high unemployment rates were also factors that caused poverty.

All the villagers I interviewed considered themselves and their neighbors poor and generally described poverty and ill-being as a lack of nutrition, clothing and education. They linked this directly to the fact that they were farmers. Because they were so dependent on forces of nature for good harvests, their poverty situation depended on the rain. When the rains were insufficient and they could not harvest enough, they were poor since they did not have enough food for their families or generate enough income to buy food and other necessities such as clothes and soap. The ELDS development partnership in Kachala was trying to react to these problems as could be seen with the projects in operation. The irrigation farming was to help when the rains were bad or in the dry season when it did not rain but water still flowed in the river. The crop diversification and animal husbandry projects were to diversify cultivation so that people were not solely dependent on one crop and could generate more diverse ways of producing income, whether in the form of food or money. With these projects in Kachala, the development partnership tried to respond to local needs and local perceptions of

problems. Local perceptions of development in Kachala are the subject of the next section.

Perceptions of Development

Development may be a term just as problematic as poverty, but since all the projects discussed have been development projects and "development" was the goal of these projects, I was interested to hear local conceptions of development. I found out that despite how frequently development is debated in academic dialogues, development was not a static term and has different meanings in different contexts, just as poverty. Wolfgang Sachs (2003b: 1) asserts that "development is much more than just a socio-economic endeavor;" he claims that it is "a perception which models reality, a myth which comforts societies, and a fantasy which unleashes passion." In this thesis I argue that development is not invariable from one locale to another. As will be seen through the case of Kachala, the terms "comforting myth" and "fantasy" do not necessarily apply to the definitions and perceptions of development found in the village.

When asked about development in Kachala, villagers' commonly responded that they perceived development (*Chitukuko*[36] in Chichewa) as collective tasks serving the village and commanded by the chief, such as building schools and roads within the village. It was common to hear descriptions of development as labor or work rather than a process or transition, as is commonplace in scholarly literature where development is defined as an ideal, "an objective towards which institutions and individuals claim to strive" (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 14-15). This ideal or objective suggests a positive change, improvements in well being, living standards, and opportunities (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 1 and Esteva 2003: 10). The term development has been used in different ways within scholarly literature; not only as an ideal or objective, but also to refer to the activities of organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, bilateral donors, and NGOs; with both of these definitions being used interchangeably. Within development literature, the discussion of development in terms of the above-mentioned organizations has given it somewhat of a corporate nature, with development

[36] Chitukuko or development in Chichewa can also mean "advanced life."

sometimes being described as an industry (the development industry) (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 14-15). The aim of development, which is believed to be "inherently good," also implies that certain countries and regions are more or less developed than others (Crewe and Harrison: 15).

James Ferguson describes how development has been defined as two "quite separate things:" First, as a quality of life and a standard of living, referring to the reduction of poverty and material want; and secondly, as a process of "transition or transformation towards a modern, capitalist, industrial economy" (1994: 15). He asserts that these two definitions often overlap, which he explains can best be seen when development "experts" equate modernization with the alleviation or eradication of poverty. He therefore claims (1994: 15) that development is no longer a historical process "but an activity, a social program, a war on poverty on a global scale." Ferguson has criticized this view of development and modernization and emphasizes the importance of going beyond the limitations of linear and teleological approaches by giving what he calls, "full weight to the wealth of coexisting variations at any given moment in the historical process" (1999: 80). He believes that there is no one trajectory towards development or modernization. There is no linear succession of basic social forms, leading to an endpoint called development or modernization (Ferguson, 1999: 80). To illustrate this, Ferguson provides examples from Zambia's Copperbelt where labor migration to the cities (urbanization) during the 60s and 70s was thought to be a stage in a linear teleological development process (1999: 82). However, after the collapse of Zambia's copper industry this pattern of migration was reversed, and in recent years Zambians have been more likely to leave the cities, reverting to rural livelihoods, than to be moving into them.[37]

The concept of development, like all concepts, is open to ambiguities, conflicting meanings and reinterpretation (Walley 2004: 15). Hilhorst mentions that villagers' perceptions of development are informed by their own history and experience with development (2003: 82). As noted by Crewe and Harrison:

[37] For a recent discussion of development and modernity in contemporary Africa see Ferguson 2006: 176-193.

> When people appear to be co-operating, adapting to, or resisting externally driven development projects, they are not merely reacting to outsiders. They may be reinterpreting development concepts - such as "tradition," "progress" and "modernity" – but their actions are meaningfully understood only within the context of their own social, economic, and political positions, and the ideologies that arise from these (1998: 166).

As noted above, the informants whom I spoke to about definitions of development in Kachala did not see development the same way scholarly literature has commonly described it; they saw it through another lens. While connecting it to their work in the development projects for the village, most of them did not see it as a process or an ideal, but as labor or work. To understand how villagers perceive and give meaning to development, it is necessary to take into account "the amalgam of external social relations and development interventions" (Hilhorst 2003: 82) or rather to follow Ferguson's advice, to go beyond the limitations of linear and teleological approaches and give "full weight to the wealth of coexisting variations" of development (1999: 80).

In Kachala, the common definition of development as work is likely to have its roots in the policies surrounding the Poverty Alleviation Programme of the Government of Malawi. Community participation and community development has been emphasized as the main poverty alleviation policy in Malawi since 1994. Through MASAF (the Malawi Social Action Fund) school blocks, bridges, roads, clinics, and boreholes have been constructed across the country; and Malawians have been important participants in these development activities, mainly through their provision of labor (Khaila et al. 1999: 125).

As we sat in the shade outside his house, I asked the Kachala village headman about development; and as can be seen from his response, his view of development as labor was clearly connected to the development policies within the village and the district:

> Development is what can help your village when you do this or that, for example, constructing roads, and this is done sometimes not for pay but it's there for the betterment of your village.

I went on to ask him if there was another definition of development, which he denied. When asked if there was any development in Kachala, he pointed towards the river and

said: "The development we have is what we are doing down the water there, the animal projects, the irrigation [the ELDS projects]." I asked if development was a term describing advancement and got a reply referring to development, once again, as work; as something people are told to do for the village, although a notion of advancement or improvement was incorporated into the work itself. He responded: "Yes, development is doing the work, it's explained to you, do the work like this, like that, as you advance." "Who is it that explains, do this, do that?" I asked him. Advisors, he told me. When asked where the advisors came from, he replied that some came from agriculture (the Ministry of Agriculture) and others from NGOs. [38]

Similar notions of development as labor or work were commonly expressed, as can be seen in the following definitions provided by three women from Kachala and neighboring villages. One woman told me: "I can say development is village work that can help improve our lives." The second explained: "Development is the way you co-operate and you do things together in a village." The third woman said: "To me development is when you can put your efforts into doing something in order to assist yourself, so you put all your heart into it."

The ELDS staff members in Phalombe and Lilongwe had slightly different definitions of development, describing it in a fashion more in line with scholarly development literature; as a process or improvement. For example, Richard's definition was that "development means when one experiences an improvement in his living status, that is development." For a small minority of the Kachala villagers, development was not particularly seen as work or labor but more as an ideal in connection with well-being and prosperity. John, a man with a higher than average education in Kachala, described poverty in these terms: "It will be the same as I have already said, development is when a person has good nutrition, a good house and other necessities in life." I then asked him if he saw development and well-being as closely related, and he replied: "Yes they are almost the same because someone who is developed is well to do."

The ELDS and the people of Kachala did not have an identical definition of development, but when asked about it, the ELDS staff in Phalombe were familiar with

[38] This response by the village headman could be interpreted as hinting at unequal power structures within development partnerships, as discussed in Chapter 5, along with the discussion of donor-advice as mandates.

these differences in definition. The collective ELDS projects used the principles of local definitions of development as labor to their advantage. For example, the well[39] was dug by villagers who saw it as their duty to do this "development work" for the betterment of their village.

The notion of development as work obviously is not the same as development as a process or an ideal. Some development can, in cases, leave communities worse off than they were before and still be called development; as can be seen in the rich literature of development failures (see Escobar 1995, Ferguson 1994, Crewe and Harrison 1998, Mitchell 2002). If development were to be defined as a process through time leading to improvement, rather than labor or work; development work that has not lead to improvement, should not be considered "development" (again, assessing whether improvement or a development success has taken place can be problematic). But should development be defined as work or labor, then the outcome is secondary; the development itself would be doing the work, providing the labor. What is important here is not necessarily where different perceptions of development come from – that is, the reasons for these different perceptions or how development and other notions of development are perceived – but the fact that there *are* different perceptions of development and that development notions take on different meanings in different social contexts.

As can be seen in the examples from Kachala, development was not an invariable or constant term. In scholarly literature, development usually stands for a certain positive goal or ideal and embodies the notion that certain countries and regions are more developed than others. According to Crewe and Harrison, this ideal has not necessarily been challenged by critics of the development process (1998: 15). When reading development literature, one often gets the impression that development is something negative, originating in the First World and imposed on its "victims" in the Third World. I believe we should try to avoid the simple "West and the rest" polarization, as Third World inhabitants are often the ones wanting "development" just as much as (or even more than) NGOs and other organizations are willing to provide development aid. However, interpretations of what development is, problems development can entail, and

[39] See the well project in Chapter 3.

the prioritization of issues to be addressed are not necessarily the same among those wanting "development" and those who are willing to provide the "development." It is not uncommon for people to want development programs in their communities; and in the case of Kachala, the villagers initiated the "development process" and asked for specific development interventions themselves. Wherever I went in Malawi, "development" was something desired, regardless of it being defined as an ideal, labor, or a development project.

Despite their sometimes generalized nature, the importance of critiques of and within development should not be ignored. Without criticism, there can be no golden mean; a course or position that avoids extremes in either direction. In the words of Hilhorst, "Even where one discourse appears dominant, there are always parallel, residual or emerging alternatives... [T]he relation between dominant and counter-discourses is dynamic and leads to renegotiations at the interfaces of discourse encounters" (2003: 81). If there should be no criticism or resistance, there will be little or no "development" of ideas and methods surrounding issues and subjects. As can be seen through the course of history, changes do not just happen; they originate in resistance to the status quo, in the form of ideas that sometimes lead to action. An example of change or "development" in history with very direct (and bloody) resistance – not only through ideas, but through action as well – is how democracy was shaped through the French revolution.[40]

The intellectual resistance and critique taking place surrounding the issues of development should be embraced, as they are immensely important. Not because we are hoping for a second French revolution, but because it influences and enriches the discourse. If it were not for criticism of development, my research and many others, studying various themes surrounding and connecting to development in one way or another, would not exist. Social change and other forms of action begin with an idea and ideas fuel and breed other ideas.

Development as a term, while central in relevance to development literature (regardless of its definition), did not appear to be of importance when "development"

[40] See also Hegel's theory of development and dialectics (thesis, antithesis and synthesis) and his view that ideas are always the focal point of historical processes or change. Additionally, see Marx's and Engel's ideas of how the process of change is derived from an interconnection between historical, political, and social realities (Morrison 2000: 110-119; see also Hegel 1929[1812], *The Science of Logic*).

matters were discussed in Kachala. There, development was seen in a majority of cases as labor provided for collective work for the mutual betterment of the village, and was usually commanded by the village headman. It did not matter what the projects were called; whether they were called development, their outcomes were called development, or the labor put into the projects was referred to as development. What seemed to be of greatest importance to the "success" of these projects was co-operation, partnership, communication, villager's feelings of ownership towards the projects, the sustainability of the projects and whether the projects were prioritized according to the local's perceptions of importance. All these things are interrelated. For example, it is not likely that Kachala's villagers will feel ownership over the projects once the ELDS is phased out if the projects were to be aimed at solving problems that the people did not view as important. This feeling of ownership also connects directly to the sustainability of the projects. Without ownership, it appears doubtful that the projects will be sustainable after the ELDS is phased out; and without communication and co-operation between the ELDS and the people of Kachala, it is not likely that the problems the Kachala villagers see as important will be prioritized; which in turn directly links to the ownership and sustainability of the projects.

In practice, development is a term that takes on different and multiple meanings in different social settings and contexts and is a concept used in many ways. Neither its provided definition within scholarly literature, nor its local definitions in Malawi is correct in absolute form; as is the case with viewing development as a teleological process, as labor for collective tasks within the village, or something else all together. It is important for students of development, development policy makers, and development implementers to acknowledge this – that development notions are not static and unchanging from one social context to another – that they are complex social constructions, negotiated and defined on the ground, in different ways in different localities. What is important is what is being done on the ground – how development operates in communities, within projects, and the co-operation entailed – be it called development or something else. What appears to be important on the ground (in Kachala) is not whether development is good or bad (a common theme in development literature), but the increase of well-being and decrease of ill-being in the village.

The following chapter focuses on the swift expansion of the NGO sector and the unequal power structures that exist within development partnerships.

5. NGOs and Development Partnerships

The NGO Sector

There has been a swift increase in the number of NGOs – both international and local – over the last few decades, which has had a profound impact on development theory, development practice, and grassroots movements in the world (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 27). In this chapter, reasons behind this increase of NGOs are elucidated – presenting a picture of diversity within the NGO sector – and the issue of partnerships within development is also discussed.

Prior to 1980, development was considered to be virtually synonymous with the development activities of the state; but in the 1980s, NGOs increasingly started to emerge. By the 1990s, many bilateral and multilateral aid programs had started channeling aid resources through NGOs rather than carrying out development programs themselves (Thomas and Allen 2000: 189-210 and Streeten 1997: 195). There are several coinciding causes thought to have influenced the worldwide increase of NGOs. This growth in the NGO sector is believed to be a response to the decline of the state as an institution. A phenomenon due in part to an increase in neoliberal state policies, in addition to the emergence of a variety of agencies, which seem to have taken over some of the state's former roles (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 27). Many bilateral and multilateral organizations became less willing to transfer funds directly to Third World governments, as they often saw them as inefficient and oppressive and also because of the rise of the neoliberal vision that the state's involvement in social programs should be trimmed down as much as possible (Thomas and Allen 2000: 213).

Intertwined with these movements has been the sharp criticism of previous top-down development interventions and the widespread evidence that development strategies of the past have failed. The rising support for sustainable development efforts, which included the participation of the beneficiaries, has also motivated existing development agencies to search for alternative ways to "integrate individuals into markets, to deliver welfare services, and to involve local populations in development projects;" which they found in the NGOs (Fisher 1997: 442-443; see also Tvedt 1998: 4).

In the mid-1990s, Official Development Assistance (ODA) from the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) began being distributed to NGOs through bilateral and multilateral organizations. This resulted in a sudden proliferation of NGOs, many of them being set-up specifically to compete for ODA money (Thomas and Allen 2000: 212-213). The emergence of NGOs, according to Ferguson (2006: 102-103), made it possible for Western "development agencies" to "go around" uncooperative national governments and today NGOs (and other transnational organizations) have become part of a new "transnational apparatus of governmentality" that coexists with the older nation-state system.

As noted above, there has been a huge expansion of the NGO sector. It is difficult to estimate exactly how many NGOs there are today, though Thomas and Allen assert that the numbers of international NGOs increased from just above one thousand in 1950 to 29 000 in the early 1990s (2000: 212). Because of problems of definition and lack of documentation, it is hard to estimate the number of local and grassroots NGOs there are in the World; yet it has been suggested that there are more than 200 000 grassroots NGOs worldwide. While this is only a guess, it is indisputable that the NGO sector has expanded enormously (Thomas and Allen 2000: 213).

Development NGOs are said to have certain advantages over bilateral and multilateral development organizations. In an article entitled *Nongovernmental Organizations and Development*, dating back almost ten years, Paul Streeten talks about the claimed advantages of NGOs over large foreign donor organizations, public sector organizations, and state interventions (1997). In this article, Streeten is skeptical of the claimed advantages of NGOs over bi-lateral and multi-lateral organizations, but also suggests that they may have beneficial qualities. He concludes: "With all their faults, NGOs may be doing less harm than governments in this field [development] and may even be doing some good" (Streeten 1997: 210). Although he acknowledges that not all NGO development projects are failures, he argues that the claimed advantages of NGOs are not a fact in reality.

Within Streeten's critique of NGOs' development operations, there are five such claimed advantages that he refutes, which I discuss below. Firstly, Streeten challenges the claim that NGOs reach out to poor and remote communities by stating that this is

something they rarely ever do and even when attempted, the communities targeted are "hardly ever the poorest" (1997: 196). Secondly, in response to the claim that NGOs' project implementations involve grassroots processes, bottom-up approaches, and recipients' participation which empowers people and strengthens local institutions; Streeten argues that this is more of an anomaly than a rule, as it is far more common for NGOs to implement top-down control as many do not employ democratic or participatory practices and are "autocratic and elitist" (1997: 196). Thirdly, the claim that NGOs are more experimental and innovative than governments is also false according to Streeten, as NGOs frequently implement approaches that are extensions of already well-known approaches and projects (1997: 196). The fourth claim refuted by Streeten is that NGO projects are carried out "at lower costs and more efficiently" and do not carry the negative connotation associated with governments (1997: 196). Streeten argues that this does not always apply, as many NGOs (though not all) are dependent on financial support from governments and often replicate government projects and their bureaucracies (1997: 196). Finally, the claim that NGOs promote sustainable development is contested by Streeten, as he argues that this is not the norm and that NGO projects are too dependent on charismatic leaders and dedicated volunteers to be sustainable; should such participants desert the project, the project is likely to collapse (1997: 196).

While Streeten's criticisms may apply to many NGOs, this should not be interpreted as an all-encompassing description of NGOs and their projects in general. The ELDS projects I observed were proof that this was certainly not the case in Kachala. Through my fieldwork, I was able to observe how the projects reached the poor by using a participatory, bottom-up approach that empowered the people to take part in new ways of integrated farming and animal rearing. The government was not involved in these projects; in fact, it was the Government of Malawi who approached the ELDS and asked for their assistance. Finally, all projects I observed in Kachala promoted sustainable development, both financially and environmentally. With this in mind, there are three possible explanations for Streeten's arguments. The NGO sector could be more diverse than Streeten claims it to be, the ELDS as an NGO may be an anomaly to other NGOs, or the NGO "industry" has changed for the better in the decade since Streeten published his

article. My personal belief is that the NGO sector is in reality more diverse than articles such as Streeten's portray them to be.

Streeten's conclusion that development organizations are causing harm and that NGOs "with all their faults" may be doing "even some good" (1997: 210), provides an example of what I refer to in the introduction as a generalization over a vast and diverse field and does not go beyond subjective assessments of good and bad, success and failure. As Fisher notes, "generalizations about the NGO sector obscure the tremendous diversity found within it" (1997: 447). There are different and multiple motives behind the practices of NGOs and individuals, as "not all NGOs operate in similar cultural, economic, and social contexts, nor do they have the same political significance" (Fisher 1997: 449-451). It is evident that "the potential for variety amongst NGOs is enormous" and, needless to say, similarly so within development methodologies, policies and priorities; therefore, "NGOs of different types act as development agents in very different ways" (Thomas and Allen 2000: 212). As Fisher points out, NGOs have undertaken an enormously varied range of activities, "including implementing grass-roots or sustainable development, promoting human rights and social justice, protesting environmental degradation, and pursuing many other objectives formerly ignored or left to government agencies" (1997: 440). He continues by emphasizing that not only have NGOs multiplied and taken on new functions, they have also "forged innovative and increasingly complex and wide-ranging formal and informal linkages with one another, with government agencies, with social movements, with international development agencies, with individual INGOs (international NGOs) and with transnational issue networks" (Fisher 1997: 441). All this makes clear that sweeping generalizations about NGOs, the NGO sector, and development in general, found in scholarly literature are overly simplistic and based on peoples' critical stances towards the development industry; that is, they are based on people's political views rather than facts, and ignore the diversity found within this field (Fisher 1997: 443-449).

Generalizations over a diverse field such as the NGO sector also ignore the micro-politics of NGOs and NGO work. As mentioned in the introduction, it is important to go beyond the politics of good and bad, success and failure, when researching development and the NGO sector. The outcome of development projects, however important, should

not exclusively be the subject of research on NGOs and development, as what leads to the outcome or the aftermath is also important; that is, what is happening on the ground in specific places and within specific organizations and communities. Dorothea Hilhorst argues for a more dynamic understanding of NGOs, one where they are not treated as things but as open-ended processes (2003: 3-5). She asserts that there is no exact single definition of what an NGO is, not only because of their vast diversity as Fisher (1997) argues, but because NGOs "constitute multiple realities, they are many things at the same time." She explains:

> An NGO may adopt a certain structure, but in practice where are the boundaries? NGOs present different faces to different stakeholders, for instance in relating to donor representatives, clients or colleagues. Which is the real face, or, in case they are all real, what does that mean for our understanding of NGOs? There are always different ideas of what the NGO should be, among and within staff, management and stakeholders. (Hilhorst 2003: 3-4)

According to Hilhorst, NGOs are not things, but processes and therefore students of NGOs should not be asking what an NGO is, but *how* "NGO-ing" is conducted (2003: 5). Hilhorst also criticizes the popular view found within development literature – that NGOs are the outcome of, or counterpart to, a hegemonic development discourse – as this would imply that all NGOs work within a single discursive framework (2003: 9). This, she says, leaves no room for the alternative motivations of NGOs, such as alternative ideological or religious frameworks. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Hilhorst proposes we investigate the duality of the discourse, as she thinks it is not very helpful to view the discourse in terms of hegemonic structures (2003: 81); this view would ignore local discourses and local responses to development, as "local actors are not merely overcome by development" but also "interpret, bend and negotiate it" (Hilhorst 2003: 9).

By criticizing the tendency to view development exclusively through binary oppositions – good or bad, success or failure – I am merely stating that these opinions are based on peoples' perceptions and subjectivity and leave no room for gray areas. As stressed in the introduction and again earlier in this chapter, it is important to go beyond these binary oppositions and to study what is happening within development and in certain development locations; that is, to study the micro-politics of development. It is

evident that not all NGOs are equally successful or respectable. When I first visited Kachala in 2004, I noticed that the ELDS had erected a sign on the road where you turned into the village saying that it was an ELDS field site. When I asked the ELDS management staff in Lilongwe about the purpose of this and other signs they had put up, the explanation I received was that these were measures taken to prevent fake NGOs from going into the community with potential foreign donors, showing the ELDS projects as their own and then swindling money out of the clueless donors. They explained that this was becoming more common and they had to take these precautions against "pirate" NGOs.

The description of NGOs as nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations has lead to the misconception that NGOs are apolitical organizations that help those who are impoverished for reasons other than profit (Fisher 1997: 442); for this is not always the case. As Hilhorst (2003: 6) notes, Karina Constantino-David (1992: 138) discusses fake NGOs, "which hide under the cover of development," but in reality only exist for political or economic reasons. The notion that NGOs are nonprofit is somewhat ambiguous; they need to survive as bureaucracies, which requires more financing than solely what is spent on their development projects and beneficiaries (Thomas and Allen 2000: 210). Therefore, in some cases, NGOs have become more "businesslike;" sometimes aiming for material reward along-side other more altruistic goals (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 27). However there have been extreme cases in which under the guise of NGOs, money is defrauded from donors in the name of development. In the context of the Philippines where Hilhorst conducted her fieldwork while working for a local development NGO, she stated that it was common for NGOs to accuse each other of being fakes; "opportunists looking for self-enrichment" or "cover organizations for politically subversive purposes" (2003: 6-7). This points out the diversity of the NGO sector and exemplifies how different NGOs have different motives behind their operations, some even going as far as conning donor money out of donors with deceptions and tricks.

The NGO "business" can provide a dilemma regarding their loyalty and accountability (Thomas and Allen 2000: 213). The survival of NGOs depends upon private donations and funding intended for development, irregardless of the success of

their projects on the ground. Thomas and Allen assert that this shapes NGO interventions on the ground and also how they present their projects to the public and within international forums (2000: 213). This dilemma has also been stressed by Crewe and Harrison (1998: 73), they cite Hulme and Edwards' (1997) assertion that NGOs' high dependency on official donor money undermines NGOs' relationships with those they intend to help. However, if the NGO sector has become so businesslike, the "success" on the ground might also induce more funding, based on the idea that donors would like to "invest" in successful NGOs rather than unsuccessful ones. However, this is not a certainty; if the politics behind the methodologies and policies involved in the NGO's structure are not popular among donors or contradict values held by the donor community, the donor is not likely to fund the organization. An example of this could be an NGO employing a methodology or policy that contradicts the donors' preconceived notions of how to "do development." This brings us back to the subject of donor-NGO-beneficiary power relations and Thomas and Allen's point that NGOs are more accountable to their donors than the communities in which they work. Yet power relations between donors, NGOs and beneficiaries – regardless of their omnipresence or lack thereof – do not indicate that all NGOs are bad or good, failures or successes. It merely demonstrates the complexity within the development field and NGO sector. In the following section, development partnerships and donor-recipient power relations are discussed.

Development Partnerships

The terms "participation" and "participatory" first became part of the development jargon in the late 1950s (Rahnema 2003a: 117). Since the early 1980s, the concept of partnership has become increasingly influential in development planning and thinking. This can be seen as a response to apparent development failures. "Developers" realized that disappointing development results could be derived from their failure to interact with, understand and involve their intended beneficiaries during the process of development planning (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 160-161 and Rahnema 2003a: 117).

Development partnerships have come under scrutiny within development literature (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 69 and Makuwira 2004: 113). Donors have been

criticized for treating local organizations as "passive recipients, unable to manage their own affairs" (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 69); while some donors have set up explicit conditions for their aid, indicating that they assume they know better than the recipients about their needs and development priorities. The most obvious examples of conditioned aid are the structural adjustment loans provided to governments, which require them to make complex changes to their economies. These neoliberal changes are usually comprised of minimizing the role of the state in the economy, reducing the public sector with fiscal reforms, privatization of state owned companies, elimination of subsidies, and labor market deregulations (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 69; Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 8 and Ferguson 2006: 11). According to Crewe and Harrison, aid conditionality "implies a clear acknowledgement of unequal power" – "[w]e have the money, you want it, so you better behave as we think correct" (1998: 70).

Rahnema (2003a: 122), who points out some of the challenges to participatory development, asserts that the followers of participatory development tend to disregard a basic principle of learning: "that no one learns who claims to know already in advance." This applies to both sides of the partnership and poses problems to the very idea of development partnerships. He mentions that it is not necessarily only the "development agents" that suffer from this "we know best" attitude, as "local" or "traditional" knowledge systems are just as likely to be biased and full of prejudices. With aid conditionality and the "we know best" attitude in mind, the depiction of development partnership as a co-operation between equals is problematic (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 71). Crewe and Harrison ask: "Is the idea of partnership therefore merely empty rhetoric, a form of 'political correctness' without substance? What does the rhetoric tell us about the relative power of givers and receivers?" (1998: 71). They go on to discuss conditioned aid in a macro-institutional context; the power-plays between institutional "partners," such as donors, governments and local organizations. There are conditionalities of some sort in most, if not all, development partnerships. Although exercises in power, conditions for aid do not always have to be negative, such as conditions that serve to improve accountability and transparent parameters for development projects. Thus the empty rhetoric discussed above does not necessarily apply to all partnerships, such as grassroots partnerships where there are generally fewer

and often different conditions for aid; but it does raise an important question: What are the dynamics of development partnerships and can they ever be completely equal?

Makuwira (2004: 113) mentions that despite the importance attached to the concept of participatory development within development, "there is very little understanding of how NGOs actually engage their beneficiaries in the decision-making processes of identification, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the projects that affect their beneficiaries' lives." In the case of Malawi, there is little literature on how NGOs in Malawi operate and how they include beneficiaries in the decision-making processes of development programs (Makuwira 2004: 116).

Development methodologies in the name of partnership have been invented (the ELDS projects in Kachala could serve as an example of this) to increase the roles of the "locals" in development. One example of these methodologies is participatory rural appraisal (PRA), which Chambers describes as "a growing family of approaches and methods to enable local people to share, enhance and analyze their knowledge of life and conditions, and to plan, act, monitor and evaluate" (2003: 102). These approaches emphasize the need of "putting the last first," that is, the need for "reversals" within development "to empower lowers and to reveal local realities" (Chambers 2003: 102). As explained by Chambers:

> The essence of PRA is changes and reversals – of role, behavior, relationship and learning. Outsiders do not dominate and lecture; they facilitate, sit down, listen and learn. Outsiders do not transfer technology; they share methods which local people can use for their own appraisal, analysis, planning, action, monitoring and evaluation. Outsiders do not impose their reality; they encourage and enable local people to express their own (2003: 103).

These methods have been viewed by some as a counterbalance to the power of dominant development discourses (Mosse 2000). However, as pointed out by Crewe and Harrison, this approach – which stresses the importance of equality and participation – has a tendency to think in binary oppositions, such as outsiders-locals, rich-poor, and urban-rural (1998: 161). This approach is also not exempt from the structurally unequal nature of development partnerships which is elaborated on in following sections. David Mosse (2000), talking of PRA methodologies and their emphasis on local knowledge, stresses

the need to examine the practices of local knowledge production. By giving examples from a rural development project in India, based on PRA methods, he demonstrates how local knowledge (such as community needs, priorities, interests and plans) can be seen as constructed through the planning context itself. This, he argues, reflects the social relationships and micro-politics that the planning systems entail. Mosse - referring to the PRA project in India - maintains that the local knowledge (and local needs) are socially constructed, manipulated and shaped by locally dominant groups and local perceptions of what the development agencies are able to deliver (often with short term benefits in mind). Finally, he points out that frequently participation is merely empty rhetoric; a buzzword development agencies use, "symbolizing good decision-making without influencing it."[41]

Crewe and Harrison assert that most development projects reflect donors' preferences rather than partners' or recipients' preferences. This is hardly a surprise they say, since donors choose their own consultants and decide whether or not to finance their own experts' proposals (1998: 89). These donor-recipient relations, although most likely common, do not reflect all donor- recipient relationships. Sometimes NGOs seek out donors to support projects that are to some extent already planned by NGOs and local development experts, as was the case in Kachala. However, donors *always* have a say in their projects and evidently do not sponsor projects they themselves deem unworthy or conflicting with their development politics; implying that recipients are still relegated under the whims of the donors.

As noted in Chapter 2, the ELDS provided money, tools and advice for the projects. Advice from the ELDS would first go through the Executive Committee, who would then forward it to the project committees and project participants.[42] I was informed by the Executive Committee and project participants that to date they had always followed the advice given by the ELDS. According to some critics of development partnerships, the reality of this "advice" is that at times it can be perceived as more like a mandate (see Crewe and Harrison 1998). These critiques claim that because of the unequal nature of development partnerships and the unequal roles entailed within these partnerships, advice from donors are more likely to be followed like orders than taken as

[41] For further examples of anthropological research on PRA experiences, see Pottier 1997.
[42] See organizational chart in Chapter 2.

advice people have the option to turn down. For example, it may have been hard to say no or do things differently than the ELDS had advised, since the money and the implements were provided by them. According to the above critique, this would put the ELDS in a position of control within the partnership.

The reasoning behind this presumed unconditional following of NGO-donor advice is that it would be devastating for a development project and its beneficiaries if the NGO were to pull out, rejecting further assistance for the project. Therefore beneficiaries, allegedly, do not reject the ideas and advice of the NGOs, even when it conflicts with their own ideas, as they do not want to perturb the NGOs' projects and funding. I do not mean to imply that the ELDS would react in such a way should their advice not be carried-out, I am only pointing out the unequal amounts of power held by the two parties within such a partnership. Kachala is perhaps a typical example of a partnership in a development project where one party has the funds and the other has only themselves and their land (if they had any). A partnership based on equality may be hard to imagine under these circumstances.

When I asked the Executive Committee if they could say no to the advice of the ELDS, their answer was: "Yes, we have the ability to say no, but so far every advice they have given has been according to our requirements for the project." They also asserted that the ELDS projects were based on equality and that they could speak out if they felt the need to. On the other hand, it was in the interest of the ELDS that the projects be successful and therefore, to give sound and profitable advice since their donors, the ICA, visited intermittently[43] to follow up on the project's progress.

With a "development" system based on donor-recipient relationships – whether it is between large institutions such as the World Bank and governments, smaller institutions such as grassroots NGOs and Community Based Organizations (CBOs), or even individual donor-beneficiaries – acknowledging the unequal power-structure of donor-recipient relationship is necessary if improved equality is to be possible. Because of these structurally unequal relationships that are at the core of the development system, development partnerships based on 100 percent equality might never exist; the only way to achieve the possibility of full equality (if ever possible) would be to abandon this

[43] I was informed at the ICA headquarters in Reykjavík, Iceland that they tried to visit their fieldsites at least once every two years.

existing "system of development;" however, my intention here is not to propose an alternative to the current "development system."

As pointed out by Crewe and Harrison (1998: 88) the structurally unequal relationship between donors and recipients within this "development" system can be elucidated through Mauss' work *The Gift* (1970). Mauss claims that there are no neutral gifts, that there are always certain social relations involved in giving and receiving. "[T]o give is to show ones superiority, to show that one is something more and higher ... To accept without returning or repaying more is to face subordination, to become a client and subservient" (Mauss 1970: 72 as quoted in Crewe and Harrison 1998: 88). These social relations (and power inequalities) surrounding gift giving which are the subject of Mauss' work, do not mean that we can predict behavior within donor-recipient relations; although they serve well as an example of the structural inequalities embedded within development partnerships based on donor-recipient relations. As mentioned by Crewe and Harrison, these power dynamics structure the relationships between donors and recipients, although they do not necessarily condition their behavior; rather, they condition the impact they have on each other (1998: 90).

People in development partnerships learn to adapt their behavior in anticipation of their donors' will, or where they see potential reward (Mosse 2000). Often local people accurately identify where the control of material assets lie and adapt their behavior according to their donors' presumed wishes to get a piece of the pie (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 157). With donor-recipient relations in mind, this does not seem unfamiliar at all. When I go to a bank and ask for a loan or go to an employer in search of employment, I also adapt my behavior in anticipation of where I see potential benefit. I try to talk and dress in a certain way, anticipating their (the donor's, employer's, or potential partner's) image of the "perfect" loan taker (beneficiary) or the desired employee.

These donor-recipient power relations may seem unequal, and in many development partnerships (if not all), they are. However, this does not change the fact that partnerships and co-operations based on misconceptions, miscommunication, and misunderstandings are unlikely to yield "success," or should I say, acceptable outcomes for all parties involved. As noted by Makuwira, ideally "participation should result in freedom, exercised in an environment where different views find a common platform"

(2004: 120). This freedom will not be achieved in partnerships where the "we know best" attitude persists. Acknowledgment of the structural inequality of donor-recipient relationships among donors would perhaps lead to an improved sense of equality, facilitating discussions of development matters without bias or having to worry about losing funding or aid.

The donor's (ICA) involvement in the ELDS projects in Kachala was not visible on the ground as the project's execution was entirely in the hands of the ELDS and the villagers. The ICA, while based in Iceland, received progress reports on the development projects they funded in Phalombe District from the ELDS headquarters in Lilongwe and occasionally they would travel to Malawi to observe the progress first-hand. Partnerships within development are in many cases more complex than the simple donor-recipient dichotomy implies, as the chain of partners does not only consist of two links. There are many links in this chain of developmental partnerships, as can be seen in the ELDS organizational chart in Chapter 2. Donors are in many cases intermediaries to local communities, as donor-recipient categories overlap as almost all donors are also recipients themselves, receiving funds from elsewhere (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 88). For example, 60 percent of the ICA funds intended for ELDS development projects in Malawi come from the Government of Iceland through the Icelandic International Development Agency (ICEIDA) (ICA 2005: 20); funds which originally are derived from Icelandic taxpayers. The ultimate recipients of development interventions – that is, the people on the ground – affected by the outcome of the "development," are also a link in the chain. Within the partnerships they may have a more structurally unequal role than other links in the chain; however, this does not necessarily mean that they have a role of total subordination with little or no agency and freedom of expression within the development projects. As mentioned by Crewe and Harrison: "The portrayal of 'beneficiaries' as either passively obedient or defiantly resisting the 'developer' does not fit with reality" (1998: 175). For example, it was through the agency of villagers that the development projects were initiated in Kachala, which shows how this last link of the chain – those who are farthest away from the donors providing funds – can have crucial influence.

Partnerships and co-operations based on donor-recipient relations will always be unequal to some extent, it is in their nature. Equality can probably be improved in many development cases and should be, but we should also acknowledge that 100 percent equality (if it exists at all) will be hard to achieve. I am not mocking actions and campaigns fighting to achieve equality within development partnerships and within society; they are immensely important and I support them. What I am arguing is that we have to add inequality to the equation; we cannot take for granted that there is either 100 percent equality or no equality at all within partnerships. Partnerships, just as development, are not simple, clear-cut processes. Like all other human relations, every partnership is socially constructed and negotiated; they are not static entities, but are complex social processes where partners with different backgrounds and varying social, economic, and political ideologies come together (whether they are from the same or different social settings).

Categories of different roles in partnerships, such as "developers" and "beneficiaries," are neither exclusive nor static; rather, they are fluid, fragmented and unstable (Crewe and Harrison 1998: 24), as there are different views, micro-politics, and power relations at play within these groups. As mentioned by Hilhorst (2003: 211), "[t]he nature of partnership and the roles and discretion of the partners involved are always under negotiation, and the way in which the partnership evolves reflects the power processes taking place." These roles can also be seen to overlap. For example, the chairperson of one of the ELDS project committees in Kachala had a different role than those who were merely project participants. Similarly, a participant sitting on the Executive Committee would interact more frequently with the ELDS and play a "larger" role within the structure of the development project than the average project participant.

In the end, development partnerships – based on inequality or not – *must* communicate and co-operate in a somewhat open forum where ideas, opinions, development priorities and meanings can be discussed openly if an acceptable outcome for all parties involved (local communities, donors, "developers," and "development experts") are to be achieved. It is evident that a partnership based on egalitarian principles would help to accomplish such an open forum just as improved communication between partners might provide enhanced equality. However, as Crewe and Harrison

rightfully point out, because of the structural inequality in the nature of donor-recipient relationships, better communication would only provide a sense of equality instead of "real" equality (1998: 74). If this open forum and exchange of ideas and opinions is not in place, there is a likelihood that the outcome will be perceived as a failure by one or more participants in the development partnership. These communications between partners within development partnerships are required because of a fundamental problematic within "development;" different groups and partners have different perceptions of development notions and development priorities. The development industry is based on relative terms such as poverty and development, which have different meanings in different social settings and social contexts. These terms are not static (just like development partnerships themselves) and their definitions should therefore not be taken for granted by "Western" development "experts," Third World development "experts," or "local" village development "experts." To conclude this thesis, I provide a brief summary of its content and arguments in the final chapter.

6. Concluding Notes

In this thesis I have described the Kachala/ELDS development projects and discussed various issues of "development." As mentioned in the introduction, post-development theories, influenced by Michel Foucault's understandings of knowledge and power, have been influential in anthropological literature on development since the early 1990s. The idea of seeing development as a hegemonic discourse, an instrument of control by the "First World" over the "Third World" is inseparable from ideas of post-colonialism. Escobar's argument that development has become what colonialism was before it, an instrument for producing knowledge and exercising power over others (1995: 9) points rather obviously to this; suggesting that "development" is in reality a form of post-colonialism. He claims that development is "an invention and strategy produced by the 'First World' about the 'underdevelopment' of the 'Third World'" (Escobar, 2005: 342). These arguments do not seem to fit all development programs as development on the ground, where they are being implemented, appears to be much more diverse and complex than that; as can be seen in the Kachala case study. Viewing development in hegemonic terms (although appropriate in some contexts) does not account for what is taking place on the ground where the "development" is being implemented and thus downplays the complexity of development dynamics. These approaches oversimplify "development" and "modernity" and the "First World" and the "Third World." They do not account for the agency of "locals" or "Third World" inhabitants in development and how they shape and negotiate their own development discourses (see also Hilhorst 2003: 81 and Walley 2004: 264).

Post-development critiques apply to many development programs. However, development is a reality in communities worldwide and therefore open to anthropological research. Projects are emerging all over the world in the name of development and development has significant implications for communities in many parts of the globe. The development projects in Kachala village is just one example of how development is being implemented and becoming a part of daily life at the ground level. Development is being implemented in diverse ways with varying results throughout the world and should therefore not be ignored or simply dismissed as inherently bad or disempowering without

further research. Local-specific research on how development is being performed and how it affects the communities involved is required to elucidate the complex nature of development processes.

Generalizations of the inherently bad "political agenda" of development (although appropriate in some development cases) undermine the range of choices people have in communities like Kachala village. By rejecting development and modernity post-development theories are denying people of the choice of development. Escobar (1995: 217) talks of the need to "unmake development" and find alternatives to development. According to him (1995: 222), inventions of new models of development, such as sustainable development, are not alternatives since they "remain within the same model of thought that produced development and kept it in place." However, advocates of post-development theories have not offered any concrete alternatives to development. Without alternatives it is hard for communities to simply abandon "development," as suggested by post-development scholars, if they want to "improve" their lives (which is one definition of development found in development literature). The paths people take towards their goals, whether it is through development institutions or through their own agency and community based institutions, have broadly been defined as "development." With post-development critiques in mind the question arises: Should these goals (which often are categorized as development or modernity) be abandoned, and if so, what would be the alternative? If there were an alternative framework to conceptualize these "goals," how would this framework be different from "development," other than another term being used; considering how broadly development is defined and how relative the term seems to be with its variety of definitions in different settings and contexts?

Viewing the Kachala/ELDS development projects with the literature of development in mind, the question arises whether the Kachala/ELDS development case (since it is not clear that it is a complete failure; at least not yet) is an exception? Or could it be true what has been suggested, that development failures are overrepresented within development literature (Edelman and Haugerud 2005: 2 and 53 n. 5)? I do not believe that the Kachala/ELDS case is exceptional. I have already argued that outcomes of "development" initiatives are relative; what one perceives as a success another might see as failure. I am not implying that "development" is inherently good or successful or that

the Kachala/ELDS development projects should necessarily be seen as a success but that development projects should not always be dismissed as inherently bad or failures. The reality is more complex than that. It is not reasonable to generalize that all "development" is bad or a strategy or instrument of control over the "Third World" by the "First World." These views do not seem to fit with reality since it is not only the "First World" that wants to "develop" but people in the "Third World" desire development as well. To abandon "the devil of development" people would have to be coerced to abandon a certain way of thinking, not only in the "First World" but in the "Third World" as well. However, as argued in this thesis, this "way of thinking" (development) takes on many guises and is not universal. Thus poverty and development are not invariable, universally applicable terms and discourses.

Although not my main intention, this thesis has suggested that the long and well documented history of "development failures" might be related to development methodologies. I do not want to imply that there is one development method that guarantees "success." In fact, the belief in such absolute solutions is most likely inseparable from the "history of development failures." The blind belief in one model of development paying little attention to context and circumstances and with little or no communication or co-operation with those on the receiving end has in some cases had devastating effects. Development schemes such as the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) offered by the World Bank and the IMF to countries which cannot say no to their packages of conditioned aid because of their financial status and debts (often to the same institutions), has in some cases had damaging "side effects." These neoliberal projects which were designed to liberate markets from state "distortions" (Ferguson 2006: 11) and attract private investment have resulted in a minimized role of the state and consequently diminished social services for the public. On the subject of Structural Adjustment Programs in Africa, Ferguson (2006: 11) says: "Instead of economic recovery, the structural adjustment era has seen the lowest rates of economic growth ever recorded in Africa (actually negative, in many cases), along with increasing inequality and marginalization." The aim of these programs seems to be geared more towards establishing a neoliberal world system than anything else.

It seems that post-development critiques of development with their tendency to divide the world into dichotomies of powerful versus non-powerful apply more directly to a certain kind of "development" rather than to small scale or grassroots development, as in the case of Kachala. It applies obviously to cases where large institutions come in and offer aid with conditions (such as the SAP development packages). With their conditioned development aid, based on a methodology derived from political and economic domination, these larger institutions often seem to have an agenda aimed towards political and ideological changes within countries rather than helping those in need. However in this thesis we have seen that development is not always the case of large institutions coming in and dictating what should be done. People on the receiving end of development can also have agency in development processes, as in the case of the Kachala development projects where the people sought assistance themselves and played a role in planning and executing the projects.

The Kachala/ELDS projects were initiated by four women, four years prior to my research; when they went to the District Agricultural Development Officer from the Ministry of Agriculture in search of assistance regarding agricultural failures derived from the drought during the 2001-2002 farming season. Villagers asked specifically for the development interventions found within the village during my fieldwork and were involved in the development process both as individuals and through the establishment of committees that consisted of villagers engaged in the projects. The villagers of Kachala were not the only ones who emphasized their initiation of the projects; ELDS development workers also emphasized that it was the villagers who came to them, not vice-versa, and that the villagers had asked specifically for an irrigation project and animal rearing projects. The ELDS stressed that it did not believe in a top-down approach, where development workers entered a community and told people what to do; rather, they believed in an approach where the people defined their own problems and priorities. I will not conclude this thesis by predicting whether the Kachala development projects will be successes or failures, or by generalizing that development is inherently good or bad, as this would contradict my argument. Nonetheless, I will state that both sides of the partnership – the ELDS development workers and the project participants – in the village of Kachala generally considered the projects a success in 2005. However, it

is premature to conclude that the projects will not be monopolized by a few or the local elite, as the projects are still young; only time can tell how the Kachala projects will develop.

In this thesis I have also addressed local definitions of poverty and development in Kachala. I have illustrated, through examples from Kachala village and elsewhere, how notions of poverty and development are not static and invariable, but relative and negotiated. Meanings of development can differ between different social settings and contexts; they are based on different social, economic, and political ideologies and are derived from different "social realities." Therefore, development notions should not be taken for granted. I also emphasized the importance of going beyond the politics of binary oppositions based on relative concepts, such as good and bad, success and failure. Such notions are relative and not absolute; thus, to understand development dynamics in certain places and within certain organizations, we have to understand how these notions are defined, negotiated and used within different localities. Another issue that has been raised is how vast and diverse the NGO and development sector is and how generalizations over these sectors often seem like simplistic echoes of critical (or not so critical) political opinions on development and the NGO sector. Because of the diversity of development institutions and programs, "development," when observed at the ground level, does not always seem to fit the picture of "development" portrayed in scholarly literature.

Taking a relativist stance towards development and notions from within development such as that of poverty, as proposed by Sen (1984: 329); means that poverty will never be eradicated as it will always be found in societies, and societies will never be fully developed. This way of thinking may be problematic for those who think in "absolute" binary oppositions. It is important to acknowledge the relativity of the terms used in development and that they take on different meanings in different localities. Because of this, projects that seem to be working in one location may not work in other places. Projects working in a Malawian village for example, will not necessarily work in India, Mali or Ecuador, or even in other Malawian villages; as social, economic, political and micro-political realities and ideologies (to name a few) are likely to differ.

I have also argued that if outcomes of development projects are supposed to be considered acceptable by development partners ("locals" and "developers"), communication between partners *must* take place. Outcomes of development are based on relative and subjective perceptions but the more a partnership is based on egalitarian principles and an open forum for development ideas is promoted, the more likely it is that partners will reach a consensus based on equality. Partnerships are fluid and fragmented entities, socially constructed and negotiated like other human relationships. However, donor-recipient relationships found in development partnerships have structurally unequal traits which should not be ignored. Full equality will never be achieved in donor-recipient partnerships, but acknowledging that development partnerships are structurally unequal could be a step towards *increased* equality within them. Since donor-recipient relationships are at the core of the current "development system," the only way to abandon structurally unequal donor-recipient relations within "development" would be to abandon the way "development" is being performed. However, I leave this topic of alternatives to the current "development system" open to other scholars, as while it is an important avenue of investigation, it has not been the topic of this thesis.

"Development" today takes on many guises and different discourses of "development" seem to be emerging in different localities. Development as an already defined absolute should therefore not be the main focus of researchers studying "development" as the term development is relative and takes on different meanings. Because of its relativity and diverse definitions, the focal point should be how development is being defined and performed on various "development" sites by the numerous and diverse organizations around the world. This would serve to shed light on the complex phenomena of development dynamics. As Walley (2004: 17) points out, this complexity, "depicting social life in terms of diversity of ideas and practices" should not be overwhelming and result in despair. Acknowledging this complexity is the first step towards understanding it, even if different meanings, ideas and practices coexist, overlap or are in a constant state of transformation (Walley: 2004: 17).

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Appendix: Research Ethics Certificate