Interim findings
CBOs within the official development aid system in Kenya

The research project 'Towards inclusive partnerships: the political role of community-based organizations and the official development aid system' investigates the factors that enable and constrain the political roles and potential of community-based organizations (CBOs) in Kenya. It explores the operational realities within the official development aid (ODA) system in which CBOs operate and analyses the 'chaos of urgencies' they face, including donor demands, economic emergencies and the social emergencies of members. This study examines the daily practices of two CBOs in Nairobi, Kenya that have contrasting positions in the ODA system: one is fully integrated into the system, whereas the other receives small amounts of funding intermittently from local funders. The following are the interim findings and policy messages from the project.

Interim findings:

- **Only a very few NGOs take CBOs as equal partners and decision makers:** Both CBOs studied have virtually no existing professional relationships with financially more powerful organizations (i.e. donors or I/NGOS) in which they are treated as actors in their own right. However, the CBO that is fully integrated into the ODA system has one relationship with an INGO that contradicts this statement. In this case, the CBO initiates the agenda (and, as a result, this agenda is more focused on human rights than health) and is provided with core support, thus allowing the CBO to invest in long-term activities that follow the demands of its constituents rather than donors. Moreover, the funding is flexible in terms of budgeting and implementation. CBO representatives describe this relationship as unique and effective, because it enables them to have an actual impact on the lives of its members.

- **In most other cases, CBO work bolsters the status of I/NGOs and feeds into their work, but the relationship is generally one-sided and based on a sense of superiority on the part of the I/NGOs:** We have observed that both CBOs are also used as a means to reach the objectives of their 'partner' I/NGOs. These I/NGOs are local offices of international NGOs, mostly with Kenyan staff and accountable to the head office. Although we do not doubt the good intentions of these NGOs, these types of 'partnerships' are generally characterized by paternalism, info-extraction and tokenism and based on a perceived sense of superiority on the part of the NGOs. NGOs express the need for CBOs to build capacities so they can fit into the ODA relationship, while they take credit for the work that CBOs do, often without crediting the CBO as well. At the same time, the NGOs play by different rules. For example, CBOs are requested to frequently write detailed project and financial reports, while reverse accountability (i.e. towards the CBOs) is non-existent, even when so-called equal partnerships are established within a consortium. The NGOs in these relationships, thus, work with CBOs via managerial principles, which in this particular CBO-NGO relationship they themselves do not adhere to. Both CBOs used the term 'colonial' in referring to this type of relationship.

- **CBOS are frustrated about the way NGOs engage with CBOs**: This frustration leads to CBOs not revealing their work to their partner NGOs and, in some cases, it has driven them to reject earmarked funding. The CBO that is fully integrated into the ODA system feels that it is able to negotiate space with NGOs a little bit. This ability to negotiate is partly because donors and multi-lateral organizations have insisted on community participation, but also because of this CBO's reputation in the I/NGO world. The CBO uses negotiation as leverage to demand the NGO's accountability for their ways of operating and (unrealistic) requirements (although with varying results). Negotiation success depends, however, on the orders and

agendas from the home office or NGOs higher up the aid chain. The CBO positioned outside the aid chain has very little space to negotiate and make demands.

- **Working in equal partnerships, networks and alliances, allows CBOs to perform their political role in several ways:** CBOs that work in equal partnership with NGOs are able to engage in efforts aimed at changing structural power relations. Supported by such relationships, CBOs, for example, initiate advocacy agendas, represent their communities in (international) policy spaces, and engage in dialogue and networking with influential stakeholders. Being part of networks and alliances increases CBOs access to, and legitimacy within, such (policy) spaces.
- **Inflexible funding obstructs CBOs emergency responsiveness:** Both CBOs are confronted with all sorts of economic and social emergencies. For example, community members who are arrested or raped often call upon the CBOs to help them. These emergencies require flexible un-earmarked funds, for example, to pay bills or for transport or hospital costs. For CBOs it is hard to access such flexible funding, and this obstructs their emergency responsiveness.
- **Inflexible funding requirements challenge inclusive development approaches:** The CBO positioned outside the aid chain experiences a lot of inflexibility in terms of funding requirements. For example, to be eligible for funding, CBOs need to show a lot of evidence that they are able to take on certain responsibilities within a project, or must have built a credible reputation through similar work in the past. Such inflexible funding requirements exclude CBOs in stages of organizational development and growth, despite their ability to contribute to sustainable development.

Policy messages:

- Despite the desire for equal partnerships, within the current ODA system, I/NGOs are still more powerful, both in relation to donors as well as CBOs. Increased autonomy and flexibility for CBOs, as well as mutual accountability, would allow CBOs to perform their political role more effectively.
- It is important to work towards a new type of partnership, in which I/NGOs work from the idea that they help CBOs to reach independence, instead of engaging them in partnerships that strengthen the position of the I/NGOs more than that of the CBOs. To support this new type of partnerships, consider how the ODA system can adapt to CBOs and what is needed to achieve this, rather than the other way around. In addition, develop an instrument to monitor mutual accountability within I/NGO-CBO partnerships.
- Involve CBOs from the very start of a programme. In this way, agenda setting and implementation are informed by, and can fully meet, community needs and desires, as well as their ways of working. Donors can support CBOs in terms of capacity building, however, the CBO should take the lead in deciding what capacities are built. In other words, reverse the ODA system in terms of decision making and implementation, and place CBOs fully in charge of the latter, with support from NGOs and donors.
- Support long-term change and structural interventions, rather than short-term results. As advocacy is generally unstructured and difficult to plan in advance, allow for flexible budgeting. Allow for decent salaries, health insurance, etc., in order for people to be able to sustain themselves while risking their lives at the frontline of activism. Short-term funding is also possible, but within a long-term framework. Relatedly, allow for flexible 'emergency' funds, which can be called upon in the case of unanticipated (although important) events.
- Promote and fund collaboration between groups and networks in order for them to work towards a unified advocacy agenda. This is important in order for them to be able to speak with one voice, giving them a stronger position when influencing policy. This collaboration should be spearheaded by CBOs, instead of NGOs, which is currently the case.

- Promote flexibility in funding CBOs that are in the stage of organizational development and growth, and try to understand organizational growth from a CBO perspective, meaning using different criteria, such as relevance to community members, ability to address emergencies, and ability to organize and mobilise the community in activities, among other things.

Knowledge products:

- Woensdregt, L. (2019). Towards inclusive partnerships. INCLUDE blog, 17 January 2019. https://includeplatform.net/towards-inclusive-partnerships/
- Wainaina, D. and Woensdregt, L. (2019). Towards inclusive partnerships. Presentation at the INCLUDE expert meeting at Leiden University, 10 January 2019, The Hague, the Netherlands
- Van Stapele, N. (2018). 'Chaos of urgencies' and CBOs. Presentation at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 3 December 2018, The Hague, the Netherlands
- Rwigi, E. and Van Stapele, N. (2018) Community-led research and action. Presentation WASAFIRI and USAid, 25 October, 2018, Nairobi
- Van Stapele, N. (2018). Community-led research and action. Presentation at Department for International Development (United Kingdom),20 July 2018, Nairobi, Kenya
- Van Stapele, N. (2018). Community-led research and action. Presentation at Mercy Corps, 2 August 2018, Nairobi, Kenya

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Web link:

http://includeplatform.net/new-roles-csos-inclusive-development/cbos-within-official-development-aid-system-kenya/