Concept and Process of "Community Empowerment and Networking Program

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Concept and Process of "Community Empowerment and Networking Program"

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Abstract:

Community Empowerment and Networking Program is an innovative approach to community development that seeks to optimize utilization of local resources and opportunities, without restriction to any specific sectors. The program was developed to effectively produce positive socioeconomic impact within target communities by maximizing synergistic effects from appropriate coordination of three functions of African Institute for Capacity Development (AICAD), namely Research and Development, Training and Extension, Information Network and Documentation. During the process of program development, exhaustive reference was made to experiences from various community development programs around the world.

The program targets community groups which have common interest with regard to community development, poverty reduction, and improvement of livelihoods. The purpose of the program is "to empower target communities to take an initiative in community-driven development activities towards poverty reduction". The overall goal is "to improve the social and economic livelihoods of the target communities". If successful, the model will be expanded to embrace more regions in East Africa and elsewhere. The program was initiated in selected regions in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in March 2006. These are referred to as "Model Regions". The east side of Mt. Kenya including Embu, Mbeere and Tharaka districts is the model region in Kenya, while the model

regions in Tanzania and Uganda are Kibaha and Mityana districts, respectively.

The areas of intervention and target community groups will be identified on the basis of results of field reconnaissance in the model regions. In order to benefit the target communities, appropriate approaches for intervenention in the target community groups will be identified through participatory methods. The basic approaches include "community mobilization and participation", "transfer of appropriate knowledge and technologies to the communities", "addressing problems which hinder the communities from development", "generating ideas for community development", "planning and implementation of community development activities by communities", "networking the participating communities for information sharing". Other approaches could also be considered when and where required. In order to keep abreast with the needs of the communities, mechanisms for receiving inquiries and inputs from the communities will be established. The data accumulated through this program such as needs, problems and opportunities within the communities, as well as the ways of coping with them, will be stored in a database, regardless of their perceived success or failure. The information will be utilized in future when dealing with other similar cases.

Specific activities in the program such as participatory community surveys, needs analysis, research implementation, training, extension, and community development, will be implemented and facilitated with the help of AICAD's partners. These include universities, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), national and international research/training institutes, central and local governments, and private organizations/enterprises. AICAD will take the role of coordination and management of the whole program. Community coordinators will be identified from local human resources in the model regions as a channel of communication between communities and AICAD. In order to ensure the sustainability of the community development activities, local human resources such as extension workers and active farmers will be fully utilized.

Background

    African Institute for Capacity Development (AICAD), an autonomous institute established in 2000, aims at achieving poverty reduction and socio-economic development in Africa through human capacity development. It is a joint venture between the three countries of East Africa, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda with the support of the Government of Japan through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).

    AICAD has three core functions namely Research and Development (R&D), Training and Extension (T&E), Information Network and Documentation (IN&D). R&D facilitates research projects in order to generate knowledge and technologies to be used for poverty reduction. T&E provides demand-driven training and extension programs. The function of IN&D includes collecting, processing, storing, retrieving, and disseminating information. The three functions are geared toward linking knowledge to application within communities in order to reduce poverty in Africa.

    Community Empowerment and Networking Program (CENP) was thus developed to effectively produce positive socioeconomic impact within target communities by maximizing synergistic effects from appropriate coordination of the three functions of AICAD. In this paper, the innovative concept and the unique approach of CENP is presented (Fig. 1).
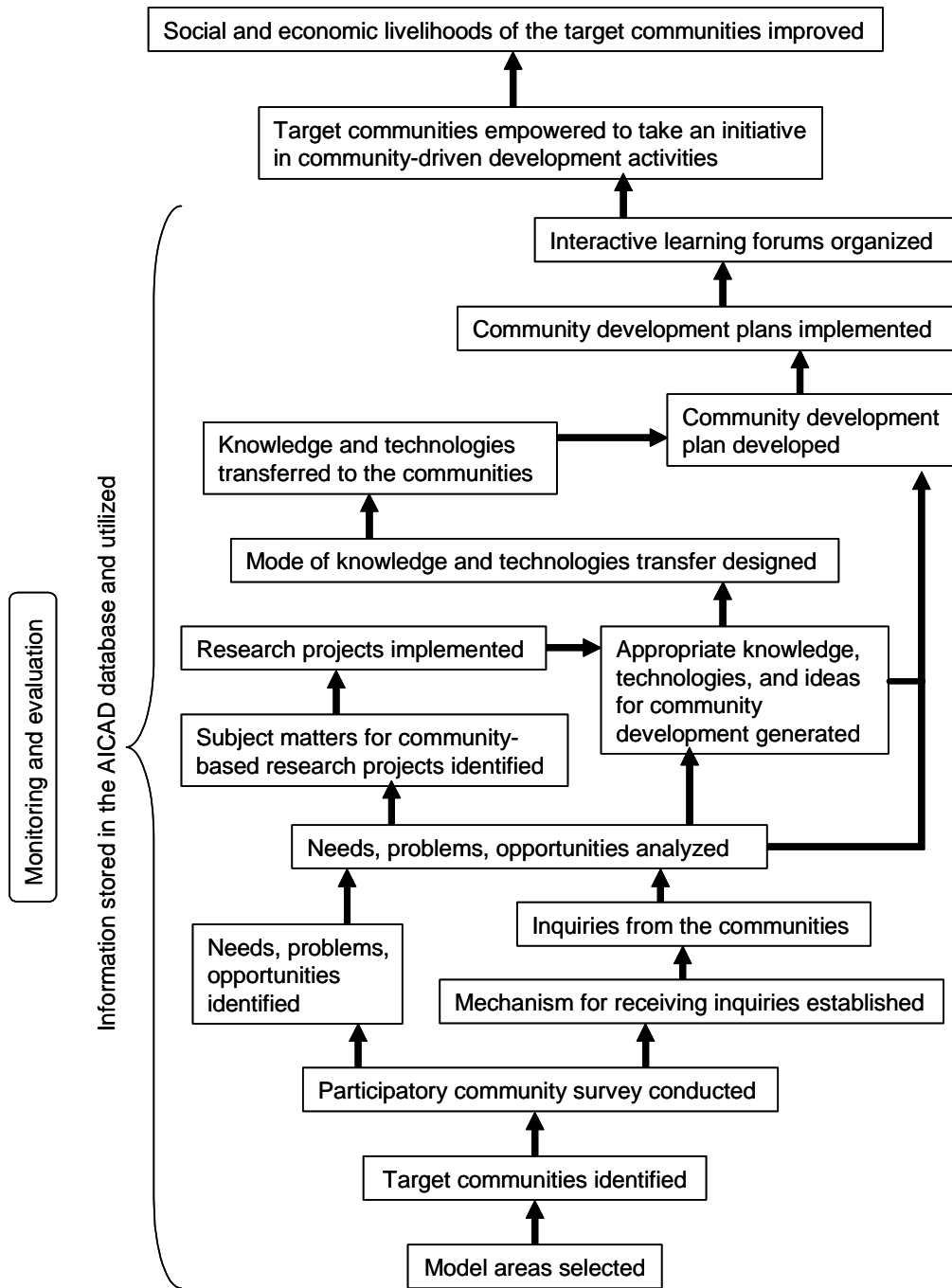
Social and economic livelihoods of the target communities improved

Target communities empowered to take an initiative in community-driven development activities

Interactive learning forums organized

Community development plans implemented

Community development plan developed

Knowledge and technologies transferred to the communities

Mode of knowledge and technologies transfer designed

Research projects implemented

Appropriate knowledge, technologies, and ideas for community development generated

Subject matters for community-based research projects identified

Needs, problems, opportunities analyzed

Inquiries from the communities

Needs, problems, opportunities identified

Mechanism for receiving inquiries established

Participatory community survey conducted

Target communities identified

Model areas selected

Monitoring and evaluation

Information stored in the AICAD database and utilized

Fig. 1   Flow Chart of Community Empowerment and Networking Program

Objective of the program

The program covers community groups which have common interest with regard to community development, poverty reduction, and improvement of livelihoods. The purpose of the program is "to empower target communities to take an initiative in community-driven development activities towards poverty reduction", which is intended to be achieved as direct benefit to the target group. Since various projects will be designed for respective target communities, the specific purpose of each project shall be set differently (Fig. 2). The overall goal, "to improve the social and economic livelihoods of the target communities", is intended to be achieved through indirect and long-term impacts/effects of the program. Activities to be implemented in the program shall be aiming at achieving this common overall goal.
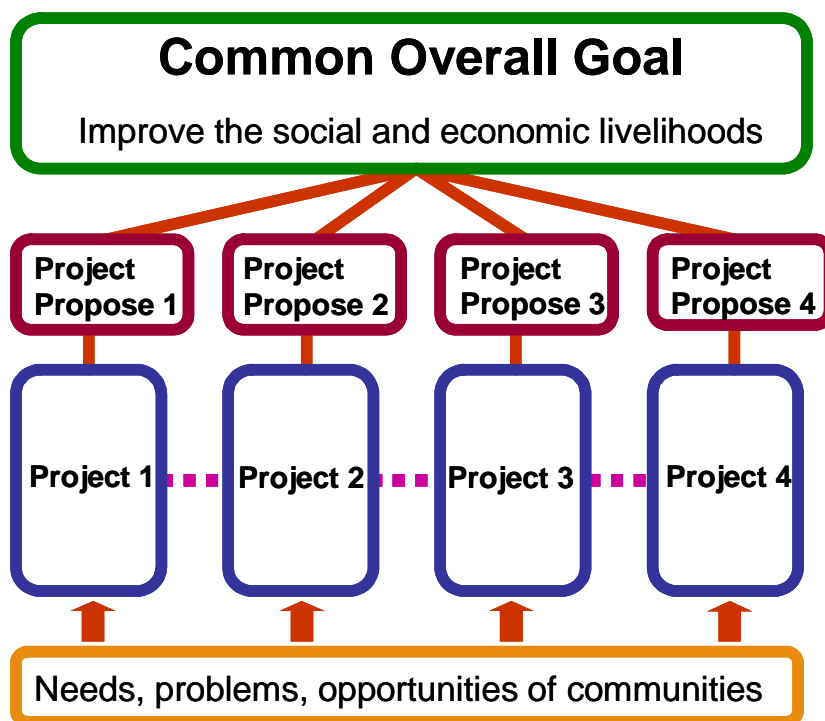

Fig. 2　Implementation structure of Community Empowerment and Networking Program

Model regions

　　　The program was initiated in selected regions in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in March 2006. These are referred to as "Model Regions". The unit for model regions was specified within the local governments' structure. The model regions have been selected on the basis of set criteria, such as poverty indicators, meteorological conditions, geography, environment, ethno-genesis, culture, access, social security, existing resources, infrastructure, population, etc. Existence of ongoing and past development activities have also been considered for selection of model regions. The east side of Mt. Kenya including Embu, Mbeere and Tharaka districts is the model region in Kenya, while the model regions in Tanzania and Uganda are Kibaha and Mityana districts, respectively (Fig. 3).
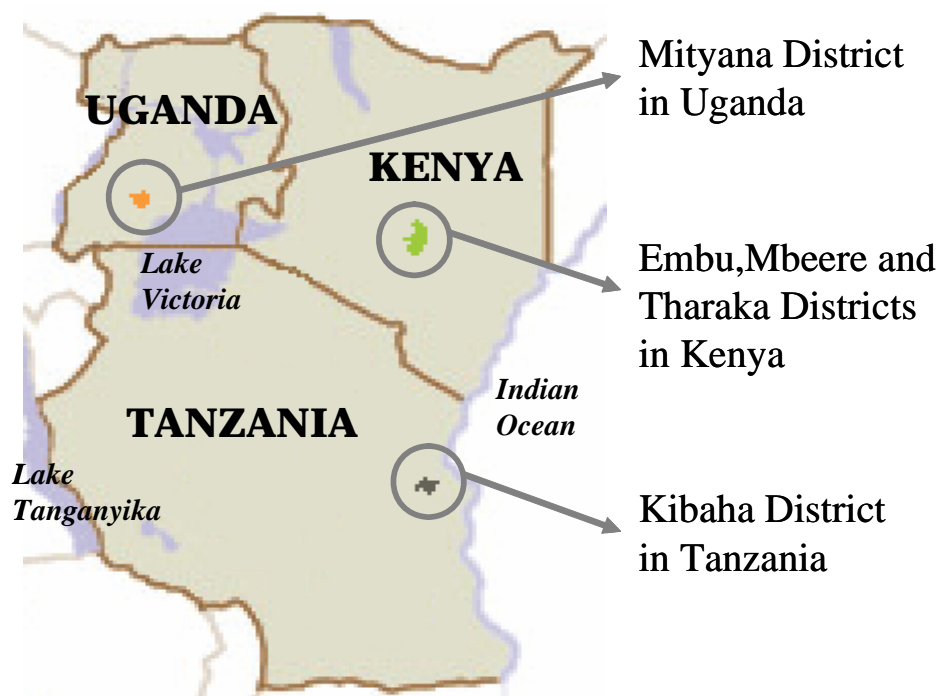

Fig. 3　Location of the model regions in
　　　　Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda

Structure of implementation

　　　Specific activities in the program such as participatory community

surveys, needs analysis, research projects, training activities, extension activities, and community development activities, will be implemented and facilitated with the help of AICAD's partners. These include universities, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Community Based Organizations (CBOs), national and international research/training institutes, central and local governments, and private organizations/enterprises. AICAD will take the role of coordination and management of the whole program. Community coordinators will be identified from the local human resource base in the model regions as a channel of communication between communities and AICAD. Community-based activities will be facilitated through the community leader because leadership is one of the essential aspects for community development. In order to ensure the sustainability of the community development activities, local human resources such as extension workers and active farmers will be fully utilized. Each specific activity will be monitored and evaluated periodically using appropriate monitoring and evaluation methods for the purpose of quality control.

Field reconnaissance

Areas of intervention and target community groups will be identified on the basis of results of the field reconnaissance in the model regions. Under-utilized local knowledge, technologies, resources, and opportunities such as indigenous/local products and useful indigenous plants will be identified through the field reconnaissance. The program will intervene in the effective utilization of these for improvement of livelihoods, and address challenges that hinder their effective utilization. Areas where technological innovation/improvement is required will also be addressed. Basic information about community groups in the model regions should be collected. Ongoing and past activities, culture as well as socioeconomic status will be considered to identify areas of intervention and target community groups. As need arises, communities will be mobilized to address particular issues. Community coordinators and reliable intermediaries such as NGOs and CBOs will also be identified through the field reconnaissance.

Participatory community survey

In order to benefit the target communities, appropriate approaches for intervention in the target community groups will be identified through participatory methods, such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and

Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). Through the participatory community survey, knowledge and technology gaps as well as specific needs for each target community group focusing on effective utilization of development opportunities will be identified. Baseline data on the target community groups shall also be collected in a participatory manner. Understanding the actual status of the communities is a fundamental activity for success of the program. The community participatory survey will be the base of the all activities followed, therefore require enough time and efforts.

In order to keep abreast with the needs of the communities, mechanisms will be established for receiving inquiries and inputs from the communities in order to ensure that the program benefits the communities. The role of community coordinators will be to maintain contact between communities and the program.

Approaches to community needs

Under the framework of CENP, various projects designed for respective target community groups will be carried out toward achieving the common overall goal (Fig. 2). Information and data captured through the community participatory survey will be analyzed by the community groups and experts to determine appropriate approaches for each project. The basic approaches include "community mobilization and participation", "transfer of appropriate knowledge and technologies to the communities", "addressing problems which hinder the communities from development", "generating ideas for community development", "planning and implementation of community development activities by communities", "networking the participating communities for information sharing". Other approaches could also be considered when and where required. Characteristics of each approach are as follows.

Knowledge and technologies transfer

In order to fill the gaps identified within the target community groups, appropriate global knowledge and technologies will be utilized where applicable. The knowledge and technologies will be transferred to the target community with the help of appropriate intermediaries. Modes of knowledge and technology transfer could be varied and could include for instance, grass-roots training, information dissemination through media, farmer's seminars, workshops, demonstration, manuals, etc. If necessary, the identified knowledge and

technologies will be tested and translated into dissemination packages.

Community-based research

In case appropriate knowledge and technologies will not have been identified, the gaps should be filled by knowledge and technologies generated through research. Problems which hinder the communities from development could be addressed by research. Ideas for utilizing local resources and opportunities for community development could be generated through research as well. Research topics will be selected by the target communities in order to meet the diversified needs of the communities. Research topics selected by researchers are often different form the community needs (Prateep 2004b; Shiratori 2005). The research projects will be community-driven in order to ensure that the knowledge and technologies developed through research will be used by them (Oizumi 2004; Prateep 2004b). The target community groups shall develop plans and implement research projects with the help of professional researchers who will be identified through AICAD's network/database. Although data analysis may be a task for the professional researchers, the results will be assessed by the community groups in order to ensure that they are effectively utilized by the communities.

Community-driven development activities

In order to empower the target communities, planning and implementation of community-driven development activities will be facilitated through the community leaders. The community development plan should be focused on effective utilization of local knowledge, technologies, resources, and opportunities for improvement of livelihoods. The community development plan should be developed on the basis of self-reliance so as to ensure sustainable implementation. Appropriate guidance on planning and implementation of community development activities will be provided in order to harmonize the concepts of the community development plan. The community development plans will be shared and discussed with the other participating community groups for improvement at a forum to be set by the program organizer.

Basically the community development plan will be implemented by the community groups based on self-reliance. However, as the need arises, the community groups will be supported and facilitated in implementation of the community development plans through provision of relevant information,

knowledge, technologies, and materials.

Interactive learning among communities

In order to enhance the efficiency of the development activities, a network of the participating communities will be established for information sharing (Fig. 4). A series of interactive learning forums will be organized within a model region and among model regions to mobilize local wisdom, local resources, knowledge, technologies, good practices, as well as the results of each particular activity. Various means of interactive learning forums could be employed such as workshops, exchange visits, information and technology exchange. Networking the communities will create an opportunity for the indigenous people to express opinions and share experiences (Prateep 2004a; 2004b), which is expected to accelerate community centered development.
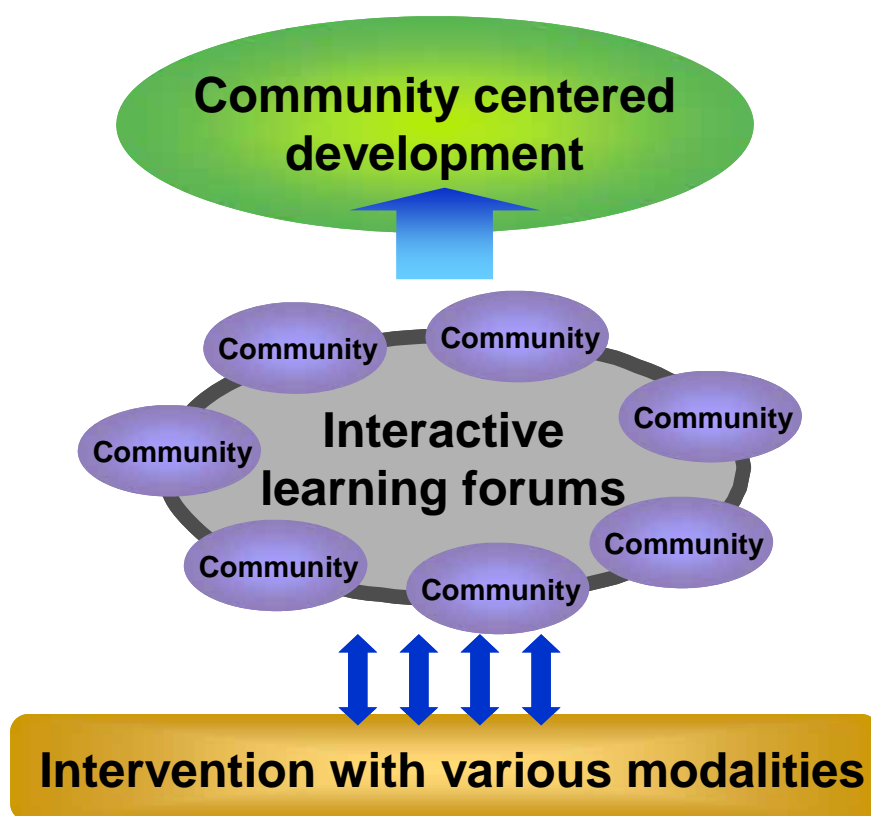
Fig. 4   Networking the participating
communities for information sharing

Expected outcome and scaling-up strategy

CENP is an innovative approach to community development that seeks to optimize utilization of local resources and opportunities, without restriction to any specific sectors. Activities will be expected to have synergistic effects. It is expected that the model will realize balanced development of the economy, society and environment in the model regions so as to improve the livelihoods. It is also expected that the target communities will be inspired to address pertinent issues by themselves and recognize the importance of self reliance, which is absolutely essential to reduce poverty (JICA Regional Support Office for Eastern and Southern Africa 2006, Prateep 2004b). If successful, the model will be expanded to embrace more regions in East Africa and else where.

Scaling-up will be done through information sharing with development partners. The data accumulated through this program such as needs, problems and opportunities within the communities, as well as the ways of coping with them, will be stored in a database, regardless of their perceived success or failure. The information will be utilized in future when dealing with other similar cases.

In the end, it is expected that CENP will be geared toward attainment of the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), namely eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empower women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, developing a global partnership for development.

Acknowledgement

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