Widening the lens on resilience outcomes in the development context

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Introduction

ChildFund New Zealand's vision is a world free from child poverty. As part of a wider global ChildFund Alliance, ChildFund New Zealand works with National Offices and local partners based in-country to bring about positive change for deprived, excluded and vulnerable children and their families. Working from a strengths-base recognizes that although these communities suffer from overwhelming hardship, particularly economic, there are capacities within to be drawn from and built upon. Fostering the resilience of a community to cope with hardship is a key aspect of ChildFund New Zealand's work.

As pointed out by Bernier & Meinzen-Dick (2014), people have constantly been faced with hardship in the form of natural and man-made shocks and they have constantly devised ways of responding to, recovering from and preventing future impacts. This is true of the communities in which ChildFund New Zealand works. Their resilience is constantly tested, their vulnerability exposed.

Resilience is defined by Bernier & Meinzen-Dick (2014) as the capacity of an individual, household, community or system to respond over time to shocks and to proactively reduce the risk of future shocks, contributing to growth and development rather than merely maintaining stability. Increased resilience is thus a goal that ChildFund New Zealand seeks on many levels – at the community-level, household-level and individual-level.

Evidence of increased social resilience is being revealed through project monitoring and will be referred to throughout this paper. The paper begins by describing the unique way in which ChildFund New Zealand works in five dedicated areas in Africa and Asia. The following two sections will use case studies from Kenya and Zambia to highlight the role of social and cultural capital in building overall resilience, and its impact on women and children. The final section will synthesize the key points of this paper.

ChildFund New Zealand

ChildFund New Zealand is part of the international ChildFund Alliance, a network of organisations from 12 countries. ChildFund National Offices are based in-country and work with local community-based organisations and parents federations, situated in geographic locations determined according to greatest need.

ChildFund recognizes that communities are best-placed to understand their needs and supports them to articulate solutions to the issues they face through the use of a participatory approach to development. Every three years the ChildFund National Office, the local community-based partner, other key stakeholders (such as traditional leaders, and national and local government ministries), the parents federation and children work through a strategic planning process to prepare a community development plan spanning 12-15 years.

For ChildFund Alliance members, child sponsorship is the primary means to secure funding to implement community development plans. This allows ChildFund to respond to the basic humanitarian needs of communities over the long-term, focusing on improved nutrition, water and sanitation, education and health.

On top of this, ChildFund New Zealand partners with the New Zealand Government, private companies and everyday New Zealanders to fund shorter-term projects that layer support to individuals and households over community-wide programmes. Taking a strengths-based approach, these projects aim to build on the capacity of individuals or collectives to provide for their households. In this respect, training is a common component, as is access to finance or resources. Food security and income generation are key outcomes sought.

The case studies presented in the later sections of this paper are examples of short-term projects. They are aligned to the longer-term community development plan but seek to deliver complementary outcomes in a much shorter timeframe.

The implementation of community development plans relies heavily on strong relationships with communities and therefore ChildFund New Zealand has formed special relationships with five countries. Within each country Childfund New Zealand works with one particular area or district. This approach is very different to that of other ChildFund Alliance members or indeed other international non-government organisations undertaking similar work.

These 'Dedicated Programme Areas' can be as small as 50 square kilometres, or as large as 500 square kilometres. In aligning to these Dedicated Programme Areas, ChildFund New Zealand is able to develop deeper, stronger relationships with each local partner and community to better assist them towards achieving their strategic plans. Furthermore, New Zealand's contribution to development in these areas can be more easily measured, quantified and reported to donors.

The five Dedicated Programme Areas where ChildFund New Zealand works are: Emali in Kenya, Luangwa in Zambia, Batticaloa in Sri Lanka, Covalima and Bobonaro in Timor-Leste, and Cao Bang in Viet Nam. ChildFund New Zealand is currently exploring how this approach might work in the Pacific context.

Case Study – Kenya

With funding support from the New Zealand Aid Programme, and local support from ChildFund Kenya, ChildFund New Zealand is currently implementing a three-year project in Emali focused on building resilience to drought. A key word within this multi-faceated project is adaptation. Community members are provided with the opportunity and the resources to re-think how they grow their crops, what agricultural practices they use, and how to provide for the nutritional needs of their children.

The overall goal is for improved community wellbeing through food security. To achieve this goal, nutrition, water infrastructure, improved agriculture and disaster risk reduction activities are being overseen by ChildFund Kenya. In its second year of implementation ChildFund New Zealand is seeing good progress towards the short-term outcomes of the project.

Another key word within this multi-faceated project is diversification. Acknowledging that traditional livelihood activities such as crop production and agriculture are dependent on weather, one key activity of the project focuses on income diversification. Drawing on the heritage craft skills and knowledge of the Maasai and Kamba communities, the project has facilitated the structure of a community craft enterprise called MaKa Emali.

Under the enterprise, four craft groups constituting 88 craftspeople supply high-end local and international markets with their unique products. The Maasai are world renowned for their vibrant beadwork and the Kamba communities have exceptional skills in woven sisal and carved wooden products. This cultural capital is now being recognized in terms of its economic capital – the first nine months of production resulted in shared profits generated through orders totaling over 931,000 Kenyan Shillings (approximately $13,000 NZD).

Craft production is proving to be an alternative and viable livelihood activity for the communities of Emali. Income generated from the enterprise is helping caregivers to meet the immediate and basic needs of children, such as food, clothing and secondary school fees. The enterprise has a strong female membership, providing women with the opportunity to supplement crop and agricultural livelihood activities.

> *"Before the project my child was sent home because the school fees hadn't been paid and my husband is away with cattle but now I can pay the school fees and send him back to school"*
>
> *"I can borrow money now if I get stuck because people in the community know I can pay it back when my next basket sells"*
>
> *"The money has bought things for our children – our kids are better off and happier"*

Monitoring of the project shows good progress towards strengthening the resilience of communities to drought. Furthermore, closer inspection of the craft production initiative is revealing evidence of increased social resilience due to the presence of two important factors: cultural capital and social capital.

Social resilience is concerned with the capacities of people to cope with hardship and the different sources of support that are drawn upon. The capacity of people to deal with hardship is heightened when they have capital. There are three types of capital – economic capital (people's income and wealth), cultural capital (skills) and social capital (ties to family and other types of support) (NCCR North South, 2013).

The cultural capital that exists among the communities of Emali has been recognized and enabled through the craft intervention. External validation of the beauty and worth of this cultural capital has come from buyers. Orders from two prestigious local outlets confirmed the desire for heritage products in Kenya. Similarly, positive feedback and orders from Iko Iko in New Zealand (the current international buyer) has boosted the confidence of craftspeople.

A deep sense of pride over their craft has been rejuvenated amongst MaKa Emali members. Skills and designs that have laid dormant have been revitalized in all three genre of craft – carving, weaving and beading. In some instances, the transmission of knowledge has occurred, from experienced craftswomen to younger less experienced females. A logo has been developed and added to a swing tag label to highlight the craftspeople and the stories that make the MaKa Emali brand. They now understand that their culture and their stories are their point of difference in today's market.

Self-worth, pride and confidence amongst members are valid indicators of social resilience, particularly in communities where poverty in economic terms is widespread. This case study highlights that through the strengths-based approach to development, the cultural capital of communities has been used to leverage both economic and social capital, resulting in increased social resilience.

> *"I have gained more skills and knowledge"*
>
> *"Wonderful to be feeling part of a "women's group"*
>
> *"I feel supported by the group, new friends that I can call on for help if I have a problem with my child"*

Case Study - Zambia

In Zambia, ChildFund New Zealand and a New Zealand-based donor have funded the Youth and Caregivers Entrepreneurship Development Project (Y-CEDEP). The project has been implemented in the Chongwe District of Zambia by a local partner, the Chongwe Child Development Agency in partnership with ChildFund Zambia. Chongwe is located next to Luangwa, ChildFund New Zealand's Dedicated Programme Area. Y-CEDEP has been implemented in Chongwe to understand its potential impact before expansion into other districts.

Small scale farming is a common livelihood activity in this district but is often affected by external factors making it difficult to generate an income to meet the basic needs of life. In recognition of this, community members have pro-actively diversified into other income-generating activities including small business enterprises. Community members have demonstrated their capacity to respond to a less than ideal situation and ChildFund has sought to build on this capacity towards increased resilience.

Over three years Y-CEDEP has provided support to 50 established income-generating groups through the provision of financial loans and a mixture of entrepreneurship and technical training. As a result of this support, groups have experienced increased profit from their business, the opportunity to diversify into other products, and attained new knowledge through exchange visits and market testing.

Increased income has enabled group members to better meet the basic costs of living and provide better nutrition, education and wellbeing to household members in their care[1].

> *"Today I can send my children to school because I can now afford some school supplies"*

> *"I now enjoy the privilege and responsibility of caring for my children"*

Qualitative data collected from caregiver groups has revealed another outcome of the project - increased social capital – that can be drawn upon in times of need.

Y-CEDEP has supported 30 caregiver and 20 youth groups engaged in income-generating activities in an effort to enhance business profitability through capacity building. Caregiver groups are made up of individuals (primarily women) from the same community with the shared goal of providing for their households.

Caregiver groups are recognized as informal, community-based collectives held together by bonds based on trust and strong interpersonal relationships. Roles and responsibilities are negotiated and decision-making within the group is shared. Qualitative data shows that engagement in a group has provided individuals with a valuable support mechanism in which friendships have been formed and bonding has occurred. Relationships have been described as cooperative, reliable and unifying – indicators of social cohesion that contribute to social capital.

> *"Thanks go to the group members for their patience and understanding. Despite all the problems we went through, here we are with part of our goals achieved"*

> *"Interaction has proved to be a very good source of sharing ideas*"

[1] Quantitative data shows that the average household size is 6 people and a high likelihood that a household will include a vulnerable person (for example, a child in school, a chronically ill person, a disabled person or an orphan).

The concept of social capital acknowledges that there are advantages in collective groupings and considers group association to be an important asset, particularly for vulnerable communities. Caregiver groups not only provide a mechanism for collective coordination of income-generating activities and a peer support system, but also access to finance in times of need.

Y-CEDEP has encouraged the establishment and use of village banking as a viable alternative to external lending and this concept has been adopted by those communities that are not in close proximity to a bank. Village banking allows for small loans to be accessed by group members using the profit made from the group enterprise. Interest is charged and this rate varies from group to group. Penalties may also be charged against late payments. Group decision-making around lending and repayments results in high transparency.

Qualitative data reveals that group members with access to village banking appreciate having access to loans, particularly in times of personal need. Access to finance is particularly important given that most community members are not in a financial position to borrow money from institutions such as banks. The ability to borrow money for unforeseen household expenses provides a level of financial security for group members. Furthermore, village banking has enabled many group members to establish individual businesses to supplement income from their group enterprise and other income streams such as farming.

Sometimes referred to as 'family', caregiver groups can provide solace for isolated community members such as those suffering from the HIV virus. Groups are also sites of collective action. As well as income-generation activity, many caregiver groups are also leading or participating in awareness-raising activities around HIV and the prevention of early marriages.

Group association provides social capital. This case study highlights how Y-CEDEP has helped lift caregiver groups to a level of regular income generation that, in turn, has enhanced other areas of their lives and increased social resilience overall.

Conclusion

This paper concurs that the shift from a focus on vulnerability to resilience has been an important one in the development context. The move towards strengths-based approaches enables a focus on success as opposed to failure, and recognition of the capacities inherent within communities to absorb, recover from and reduce the impact of shocks and stresses that regularly threaten their overall wellbeing. No longer will community members be treated as victims, but as active agents in their development.

While vulnerable communities may not be rich in economic terms, there is considerable value in the cultural and social capital that exists. In Emali (Kenya) cultural capital has become the currency to leverage economic and social capital. In Chongwe (Zambia) social cohesion and informal lending within peer groups is evidence of social capital, leading to improved wellbeing.

Both case studies show evidence of empowerment, participation and equity – all factors that contribute to building social resilience. According to NCCR North South (2013):

> *"If someone is empowered, he or she is more likely to be resilient"*

In times of stress or need, these communities will draw on existing social capital to get through. In both cases, social capital is fostered by community-based groups or collectives characterized by shared goals and strong interpersonal relationships. Our experience shows that when thinking about how to build resilience, the role of informal and existing social networks must not be overlooked. ChildFund New Zealand will continue to recognise social and cultural capital as assets as we work towards increased resilience in our Dedicated Programme Areas.

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