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Cultivating political capabilities among Ugandan smallholders:
good governance or popular organisation building?

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Abstract

Opinion is divided about the capacity of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to enhance the political capabilities of disadvantaged groups within an inclusive liberal development paradigm that seeks to advance 'poverty reduction through good governance'. Advocates of inclusive liberalism argue that the participatory spaces created by the good governance agenda have increased the political space for NGOs focused on popular empowerment and policy influence. More radical critiques cast NGOs as apolitical brokers of neo-liberal development which distract from, or are disinterested in, more progressive development possibilities, including questions of redistribution. Drawing on a qualitative study of civil society organisations in Western Uganda, this paper argues that attempts to promote the participation of rural people in inclusive liberal governance spaces has proved less effective in enhancing their political capabilities than strategies based on economic associational development. Whereas strategies for enhanced inclusive liberal participation engage with the formal *de jure* rules of the game in ways that either sidestep or re-enforce the *de-facto* patronage-based political system, associational membership can catalyse shifts in the socio-economic power relations required to enable poor people to gain political agency in ways that begin to undermine patronage politics. This has important implications for both the theory and practice of political capabilities development among disadvantaged groups.

Keywords

Smallholder farmers, cooperatives, political capabilities, NGO, governance, Uganda, democratisation

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1. Introduction

Debate continues about the appropriate goals of development and democratisation and the role of NGOs as actors both within and upon civil society within these processes. The latest 'inclusive' phase of neo-liberalism has involved the pursuit of 'poverty reduction through good governance' facilitated in part by NGOs who promote citizen participation by fostering a pluralist civil society, represent the poor in poverty reduction policy-making processes, and provide services in support of more inclusive social and economic development (Stiglitz, 1998; World Bank, 2004). Cautious optimists focused on social democratic change recognise that the good governance agenda has resulted in an expansion of the public sphere (Williams, 2004; Corbridge, 2007); more radical critics suggest a participatory agenda that fails to tackle the disadvantageous power relations inherent in a capitalist system serves only to legitimise a status quo that de-politicises development and perpetuates inequality (Harriss, 2001; Mosse, 2010). As Hickey suggests (2010: 1152), 'the problem remains one of how to link a politics of recognition with a politics of social justice and economic transformation in meaningful ways.'

Scholars interested in 'putting the politics back in' to development have sought out more politicised frameworks for the study of outcomes for disadvantaged groups. This paper builds on these developments and speaks back to the above debates by applying political capabilities analysis (Williams, 2004) to qualitative research into the empowerment strategies of two Ugandan civil society organisations – a formalised NGO and a community-led microfinance cooperative. Rural economic associational development, defined here as popular organisation around livelihood concerns (Agarwal, 2010), emerges as a more effective approach to enhancing political capabilities among smallholder farmers than strategies aimed solely at promoting citizen participation within 'invited' governance spaces (Cornwall, 2002). Associational membership enhances the ability of disadvantaged groups to achieve socio-economic mobility, collective voice and leadership skills, which, within a capitalist system characterised by patronage politics, can reshape socio-economic power relations in ways that translate into political influence. The alternative strategy, focused on enhanced inclusive liberal participation, engages with the formal *de jure* rules of the game in ways that re-enforce the de facto patronage-based political system by failing to tackle the power relations that perpetuate both under-development and ineffective governance.

The paper begins with a review of contrasting inclusive liberal and social democratic perspectives on the role of NGOs in democratisation, which is followed by an introduction to Williams' (2004) political capabilities framework. Section 4 provides an overview of national and local level political economy in Uganda and Section 5 presents the methodology underpinning the research findings. Research findings and analysis about each of the two case study organisations are then presented in turn and the paper concludes with a synthesis discussion drawing out the implications of the research for both the theory and practice of political capabilities development among disadvantaged groups.

2. NGOs and democratic change: divergent perspectives

Fisher's argument that 'perceptions of NGOs are tied up with contested notions of what it means to do good' (1997: 446) is particularly apparent within debates about the role of NGOs in democratisation. This section traces the emergence of the current inclusive liberal development paradigm and contrasts this framing of NGOs with more redistributive perspectives. Table 1 summarises the discussion.

Table 1: Divergent perspectives on the roles of NGOs in democratisation

	Inclusive liberal	Social democratic
Civil-society building	Foster a democratic, diverse civil society able to make pluralist claims on the state and hold the state in check.	Challenge structural causes of poverty by popular organisation/coalition building; supporting social movements.
Innovation/people-centred alternatives	Innovative service delivery. Local level participatory knowledge generation (PRA, PPAs).	Participatory Action and Learning – conscientisation for social change. Created and claimed space for popular engagement of power-holders. Coproduction of services to address needs identified by social movements.
Representation/ mobilisation	PRSP processes. Participatory governance – increasing 'the power of poor clients in service provision' (WDR 2004).	Popular mobilisation in invited space; mobilisation against exploitative social/ economic/political systems. Training activists; joint mobilisation and representation; linking local to global; promotion of counter-hegemonic ideas.

The severe social costs of structural adjustment combined with economic collapse in parts of Asia during the late 1990s sparked a legitimacy crisis for the international finance institutions (IFIs) and sustained protest from global social justice groups (Craig and Porter, 2006). The response was a more 'inclusive' phase of neo-liberalism which emerged under the Post Washington Consensus (PWC) (Craig and Porter, 2006), within which the terms 'civil society' and 'NGO' became increasingly conflated (Mercer, 2002). This took the shape of the 'poverty reduction' agenda, tied into social protection policies, participatory poverty analysis and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) policy processes; and the 'good governance' agenda, focused on building democratic, decentralised governments, capable of responding to active, empowered citizens represented in policy-making processes by civil society organisations (CSOs) (World Bank, 2001, 1997). The growth of the NGO sector continued into the new millennium with an increase in official development assistance to NGOs of 34 percent between 1991-1992 and 2002 (Banks with Hulme, 2012) and 75 percent of new World Bank projects entailing CSO participation between 2007 and 2009 (World Bank, 2009). NGOs have therefore come to occupy three positions within mainstream development discourse: civil society organisers, both acting as, and cultivating new, watchdogs of good governance; poverty reduction policy advisors acting as representatives of the poor; and sub-contracted service delivery agents.

The neo-liberal framing of NGOs as critical development agents has increasingly been called into question, along with the development agendas with which their prominence has been bound together. NGOs are accused of betraying the alternative development movement and undermining national social contracts by transplanting depoliticised charitable service delivery for the provision of social welfare by a duty-bearing state to its rights-bearing citizens (Brock et al., 2001; Harriss, 2001; Bebbington et al., 2008a). Critics suggest that the language of participation and empowerment that characterised liberation and pro-democracy struggles in the second half of the 20th century has been misappropriated (Dagnino, 2008), to promote, at best, 'a quick and dirty technology for information extraction' (Singh, 2001: 176) and, at worst, a tyrannical practice which perpetuates the capture of resources and decision-making by local elites and development professionals (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). The de-politicisation critique also finds the managerialist approach of western aid agencies, linked to domestic pressures for tangible results, to have constrained space for innovation and national ownership over development priorities and approaches (Townsend et al., 2002; Thomas, 2008).

Scholars within a broadly social democratic school of critique recognise a civil society building role for NGOs, but one focused on popular organisation building (Törnquist et al., 2009); fostering coalitions between disadvantaged groups, social movements and political society (Corbridge et al., 2005; Mitlin and Bebbington, 2006); training activists and securing their access to information that can advance the interests of the marginalised (Williams, 2004; Corbridge et al., 2005); or cultivating receptivity to popular representation and the sharing of decision-making power among political-economic elites (Sandbrook et al., 2007; Törnquist et al., 2009). Such framings take NGOs beyond participatory knowledge generation to the facilitation of action learning processes leading to Frierian conscientisation and the pursuit of social change through popular mobilisation (Hickey and Mohan, 2004; Gaventa and Cornwall, 2006). From this perspective, disadvantaged groups and their support NGOs should reject the depoliticised participatory spaces offered under the inclusive liberal paradigm and return to their social justice roots by supporting popular organisations and movements to claim and create their own spaces (Cornwall, 2002; Harriss et al., 2004), which allow for the participation of previously marginalised actors on more equal terms (Mitlin and Bebbington, 2006).

2.1 Popular organisation building in agrarian contexts

In the agrarian contexts that continue to predominate in sub-Saharan Africa, popular organisation building necessitates engagement with farmers and their associations. There has been an increasing focus on the political potential of these organisations in the South Asian literature (Webster, 2002; Agarwal, 2010) and Latin American literature (Hirschman and Denburg, 1984; Jeppeson, 2002; Bebbington et al., 2008b) but few recent studies of this kind in sub-Saharan Africa, where research since the 1990s has focused principally on questions of economic impact and sustainability (ILO, 2008; Wanyama et al., 2009 are two examples). Cross-regionally, farmer associations have been credited with catalysing socio-economic mobility in support of increased participation in community and political life (White, 1996; Thorp et al., 2005); developing confidence and skills in leading, negotiation and compromise which are then transferred into the public sphere (White, 1996; Thorp et al., 2005); and building the collective power necessary to shape the behaviour of state, market, and political power holders (Webster, 2002; Thorp et al., 2005). Drivers of organisational solidarity in the literature include shared identity on the basis of livelihood, ethnicity or gender, for example (Kabeer et al., 2010; Agarwal, 2010); savings-based finance (Kabeer et al., 2010; Agarwal, 2010); the cohesive effect of a shared

external oppressor, including state-based marginalisation (Thorp et al., 2005); and having a federated structure which is also key to influencing state and market actors at multiple levels (Kabeer et al., 2010; Agarwal, 2010). The comparative effects of homogeneity or heterogeneity on collective action has, however, been the subject of recent debate (Mukherji, 2013; Wangel and Blomkvist, 2013).

NGOs have been credited with fostering the democratic potential of these organisations through organisational development support, building financial and technical expertise (Farrington and Bebbington, 1993; Thorp et al., 2005); and brokering relationships with key state, market or political actors (Webster, 2002; Ferreira and Roque, 2010). Several studies argue that NGOs with an explicit commitment to social justice generate more transformational outcomes among farmers than those focused only on economic impact (Farrington and Bebbington, 1993; Thorp et al 2005; Kabeer et al., 2010). Recent synthesis studies (Banks with Hulme, 2012; Booth 2012) suggest, however, that NGOs have had a negative impact on producer organisations by creating dependency on their financial and technical support, leading to the formation of unsustainable groups (Bano, 2012) draining energy away from justice and equality goals and towards bureaucracy (Igoe, 2003), and undermining existing solidarity by attracting members with more suitable capabilities for participation, such as a higher level of education (Thorp et al., 2005). There is therefore a mismatch between the popular organisation-building role that has been assigned to NGOs in the literature, and the quality of the practical outcomes they have achieved to date, raising a series of questions about the conditions under which farmer cooperatives can be effective agents of democratisation and about how NGOs can support popular actors to contribute to pro-poor change without undermining their socio-economic and political agency.

3. Political capabilities

The theoretical response to suggestions that the practice of participation within development programmes and governance processes has become a mechanical form of de-politicised inclusion has been to seek out more politicised frameworks for the evaluation of participatory development and for the analysis of attempts to promote (or of the processes leading to) political-economic or social change. Hickey (2009) has provided a systematic review of some of these attempts, including Williams' (2004) political capabilities framework, which informs the discussion here. Building on the work of Whitehead and Gray-Molina (2003) and Houtzager and Pattenden's (2003) polity approach, Williams suggests that 'empowerment must be re-imagined as an open-ended and ongoing process of engagement with political struggles at a range of spatial scales', and asks: 'if participation has gained institutional power within development practice, what can this power be made to do?'. Such a question requires an explicitly political response in terms of seeking to understand how participatory practices 'can be exploited to forward particular programmes, values and interests' and what longer-term political value they hold for the poor (2004: 566). Williams also suggests that the end point of political capabilities analysis might be to better understand poor people's changing ability to engage with the state. It is therefore particularly suited to the analysis of an NGO's attempts to catalyse both socio-economic change and more substantive participation and representation within governance processes – engaging therefore in both a politics of justice and a politics of recognition in Hickey's (2010: 1152) terms. More specifically, Williams' framework requires a focus on three key questions which are elaborated further in Table 2: to what extent do participatory development programmes contribute to political learning among the poor; to what extent do they reshape political networks; and how do they impact upon existing patterns of political representation?

Table 2: Williams' (2004) political capabilities framework

Political learning: • Knowledge of formal political rights (which can provide potential bases for struggle).   • Increased awareness of the *de facto* local rules of the game (which can sharpen understanding of appropriate strategies and allies).   • Deepened understanding of how power works and increased consciousness of alternatives.
Political networks: • How are linkages beyond the local re-shaped?   • How are existing roles of brokers and patrons (key mediators of power) challenged or reinforced?   • The complexity of motivations and interests among these actors who are not always driven by self-interest alone.
Patterns of political representation: • Changes to the language of political claims and competition.   • Challenges to repressive or exclusionary political norms.   • Analysis of local cultures of leadership and governance to understand the potentials and limits of change.   • Why are particular elements of political culture valued, and what alternatives are emerging or being imagined?

This contribution to understanding the ways in which development actors can facilitate shifts in power relations between political-economic elites and disadvantaged groups will be examined in relation to the work of the two case study organisations introduced below. The next section introduces their operational environment.

4.   Politics, power and political space in Museveni's Uganda

In 1986, after five years of civil war which emerged in response to 25 years of post-colonial political turmoil, Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) inherited a country in crisis (Mutibwa, 1992). Museveni has since overseen sustained economic growth, averaging 6.5 percent per year between 1990 and 2002 (Francis and James, 2003), and an impressive degree of poverty reduction, from 56 percent in 1992-03 (Krishna et al., 2006) to 24.5 percent in 2009-10 (UBOS, 2012). Extensive structural adjustment in the 1990s, a pioneering participatory approach to PRSP development in the form of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan (PEAP), and far-reaching decentralisation reforms, led to Uganda being vaunted internationally as a model of good practice for democratisation and poverty reduction via inclusive forms of neoliberalism at the turn of the millennium (Hickey, 2005).

The 'no-party' movement system attempted to combine representative politics with popular participation through a combination of merit-based parliamentary democracy and decentralised popular representation (Kasfir, 2012). This laid the foundations for the current five-tier local government system and bottom-up development planning process that begins with village-level priority setting. Village plans are passed up

and amalgamated through the parish and sub-county councils to the district as the highest level of local government. All adult members of a village are members of the village council and village, sub-county and district chairpersons are elected by universal suffrage. In 2005, the NRM returned Ugandan politics to multi-party electoral competition.

Despite these reforms, the regime in Uganda was recently characterised as 'semi-authoritarian' (Tripp, 2010). Challenges to the regime are increasingly met with either co-optation or repression, the NRM continuously channels vast public resources into election campaigns and military expenditure, and regime survival is increasingly fuelled by a system of 'inflationary patronage', defined by Barkan (2011: 11) as 'the need for ever increasing amounts of money to maintain oneself in power and increasing levels of corruption to provide the required funds'. The machinations of this system are evident in Museveni's continual revision of the National Agricultural Advisory Service (NAADS). Subject to endemic local elite capture and corruption, revisions since 2007 include making NRM party cadres members of the local forums that decide which farmers receive seeds and assets, bringing the NAADS secretariat under the auspices of the Office of the President allowing direct association of NAADS inputs with favour from the NRM or Museveni, and an expansion of beneficiary criteria ahead of the 2001 elections, enabling further rent distribution in exchange for votes (Kjaer and Joughin, 2012).

4.1 The political economy of rural Uganda

A history of violent repression and a culture of deference to authority dating back to the pre-colonial era (Mamdani, 1996) has become intertwined with growing socio-economic inequality[1] to undermine political agency among rural communities in Uganda (Brett, 2003; Golooba-Mutebi, 2004). Despite lauded poverty reduction statistics, approximately 70 percent of the population are subsistence or small-scale farmers with an average household land holding of less than a hectare, while 20 percent remain in chronic poverty (CPRC, 2006; ILO, 2008). Structural adjustment has benefited large land owners and urban political elites in Western and Central regions disproportionately (Brett, 1998; Jones, 2009; Krishna et al., 2006), and Uganda's growth rate has fallen from 6.6 percent in 2010-11 to 3.4 percent in 2011-12, linked to the global financial crisis and monetary policies designed to combat soaring inflation (IMF, 2013).

Ethnic tensions continue to run high following the colonial legacy of indirect rule and the intertwining of ethnicity, politics and militarism in the post-colonial era. Years of instability have created a highly politicised land issue, with insecure tenancies arising from conflict and displacement and the colonial legacy of communal land being handed out to favoured tribes. Land fragmentation resulting from all sons inheriting a share of their father's land, vulnerability to contingencies leading to 'distress sale' of land, and reducing soil fertility all contribute to social differentiation and entrenched poverty (Bird and Shinyeka, 2003: 19). Women are excluded from land ownership and have suffered disproportionately from social breakdown including theft, alcoholism and inter-ethnic conflict, and the social costs of structural adjustment such as extra economic pressure for export crop production without corresponding financial gains, and increased costs of social services (Bird and Shinyeka, 2003; Mugyenyi, 1998; Tripp, 2010). Women continue to face significant, sometimes violent obstacles to political or local associational

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[1] This is linked to an absence of substantive agrarian reform – see for example Hickey (2012).

participation and, as principle breadwinners, most have little time to invest in anything but household survival (Lakwo, 2009).

While some farmers have begun to address these challenges through cooperative endeavour – and collective working has a long pre-colonial history in Uganda – the legacy of enforced production for state-run monopoly cooperatives under the British Protectorate, mismanagement of this same model of cooperation during post-colonial turmoil, and the challenge of competing in global markets under 1990s liberalisation, have left many of those farmers who could afford to, averse to engagement in cooperative production and marketing. The process of economic liberalisation that enabled smallholder coffee farmers to gain a higher return for their produce while international prices remained high during the 1990s coffee boom had positive poverty-reducing effects (Deininger and Okidi, 2003), but did little to encourage the kinds of associational forms and relationships necessary for the emergence of a more progressive political force in the longer term.

The prevailing longer-term socio-economic conditions described above have constrained the emergence of these kinds of associational forms among poorer members of rural communities and combined with a culture of 'obedience and deference' (Golooba-Mutebi, 2004) have left many such actors unwilling to take advantage of opportunities for inclusion within local government decision-making (Golooba-Mutebi, 2004; Green, 2008). Further to this, studies suggest that formal mechanisms for participatory governance are dysfunctional and tokenistic, subordinated as they are to centralised decision-making over any resource allocation of consequence, and to the demands of a patronage-based political system (Francis and James, 2003; Green, 2008).

4.2 The Rwenzori sub-region

The qualitative research findings presented below are based on fieldwork conducted between 2009 and 2011 in the Rwenzori sub-region of Western Uganda, a region plagued by conflict since independence. In 1965, the Bakonjo and Bamba inhabitants of the Rwenzori mountains established an independent Rwenzururu kingdom in protest against continued discrimination following exploitative indirect rule by the Batooro kingdom in the colonial era. The guerrilla struggle was finally settled by the creation of Kasese and Bundibugyo districts for self-administration by the Bakonjo and Bamba, respectively, in 1982. Throughout the 1990s into 2001-02, the region was ravaged by the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) insurgency, an Islamic sect estimated to have killed approximately 1,000 civilians and displaced over 100,000 people by 2001 (African Rights, 2001).

The region has a predominantly agrarian economy, with the majority of farmers operating within a customary land tenure system and most households continue to use hand hoes for cultivation (KDLG, 2010). Population growth that is above the national average, land fragmentation through the traditional inheritance system which divides land between all sons, and an increasing concentration of land in the hands of large companies running tea and coffee estates, are leading to increasing pressure on land or landlessness, particularly among younger generations. Poverty levels are above the national average at 30 percent and vary across the districts, with conflict-affected areas suffering disproportionately. The cooperative movement in the Rwenzori sub-region has followed a similar trajectory to the rest of the country, with many farmers now distrustful of cooperative endeavour.

5. Methodology

5.1 Selection decisions and background to the field sites

The findings presented below are not drawn from a comparative study of the two case study organisations, but one where each case allows insights into the different strategies through which NGOs attempt to promote popular empowerment and thus offers a broader perspective on strategies for enhancing political capabilities among disadvantaged groups. Findings about the formalised research and development NGO – RD – are drawn from a twelve-month doctoral study of the organisation conducted over two field visits – from July to September 2010, and December 2010 to August 2011 – that investigated a wider range of intervention areas and organisational dynamics than forms the topic of discussion here. Research into the political capabilities outcomes achieved by Bukonzo Joint Cooperative Union (BJC) took place over three field visits in January, March and June 2011.

The organisations were selected according to a theory testing logic (Yin, 1984), in that they both appeared to be anomalous to an apparent consensus within the somewhat dated development literature about Ugandan civil society, which suggests that CSOs are unable to shape political space for more pro-poor development because of the national and local dynamics described above. RD claimed to have brought about shifts in state–citizen relations in ways that were gaining greater influence for rural citizens over development decision-making. BJC had mobilised its membership to overturn resource allocation decisions at sub-county level in ways that better served their livelihood needs.

Research examining RD's community-level interventions took place in two sample sub-counties – Mahyoro and Bukuuku – selected because together they offered insight into the fullest range of the organisation's interventions and a broad contextual range. Mahyoro is a remote rural area that has historically been sparsely populated but has experienced high levels of inward migration since the 1950s. It is therefore ethnically diverse, but has not experienced ethnically-based conflicts, partly because of the abundance of land. RD supported a group of local activist farmers to set up a community-based sustainable production NGO (CBOMY from here onwards) in the early 2000s, which has supported associational development among farmers in the sub-county. Bukuuku sub-county is located ten minutes' drive from the largest urban centre in the region. Spanning both mountain and lowland areas and populated by both Batooro and Bakonjo, it has suffered from both the Rwenzururu rebellion and the ADF insurgency. There is high population pressure on land and there have been low levels of economic association linked to ethnic and land conflict. Research into BJC focused on two sub-counties in a remote, mainly mountainous, area of Kasese district where the majority of the membership is based, which has a majority Bakonjo population who suffered greatly during both the Rwenzururu struggle and the ADF insurgency.

5.2 Methods and analysis

The fieldwork methods and process of analysis were the same for each organisation, but were naturally more extensively applied with RD. Apart from a review of internal documentation, research with RD involved a total of 40 semi-structured focus group discussions (FGDs) and 123 semi-structured interviews with a range of state, civil society and political actors at multiple levels of organisational operation; it also generated 48 sets of notes from semi-structured observation of organisational practice,

including a data summary of notes from the many staff meetings observed. Research with BJC involved 16 semi-structured interviews with the Coordinator, members of the training team, existing and former board members, existing and former members of the cooperative as well as founder members and more recent members, local councillors from village, parish and sub-county levels, one sub-county chief, a representative from an international donor agency working with the cooperative, and a British ex-patriate who had given advice and support to both RD and BJC and understood the history of the relationship between the two organisations. Five FGDs were also conducted with members of the training team, male and female members who had experienced positive changes in gender power relations within their households in response to BJC training, and male and female members who had not experienced many, or in some cases, any, changes in gender roles (although the research revealed that some had experienced other forms of empowerment and change). Sampling of research participants involved a mixture of purposive, random and snowballing strategies for both case study organisations.

Theoretical and context-specific literature shaped a process of qualitative analytical categorisation which focused on political capabilities analysis of outcomes and analysis of interlinking dimensions of political economy and strategic capacity shaping the behaviour and effects of these organisations in the sample sub-counties. Data reliability and validity has been built upon the triangulation of data from interviews, FGDs and observations from the breadth of actors described above, and evaluation of weight, quality, theoretical significance and the presence or absence of conflicting cases (Dey, 1993; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

6. A research and development NGO (RD)

6.1 Background

Founded in 1996 as a non-membership research institute, by 2010 RD was operating with an international donor-funded budget of GBP £750,000 and a staff team of 28 graduates. It is a 'hybrid' NGO (Edwards, 2009; Bázan et al., 2008) in terms of the diversity of strategies it engages in at multiple levels and its ideological commitment to socio-economic and political empowerment through working within the existing system rather than imagining systemic change (Bázan et al., 2008). It attempts to support smalholder farmers to access markets, for example, but does not engage in campaigns for land reform. The effects of this hybridity in political capabilities terms will be discussed in a follow-up paper. The present paper contributes to the theoretical debates outlined in Section 2 (and lays the foundations for the companion piece) by examining the political capabilities outcomes of RD's good governance and economic associational development strategies.

As the NGO boom took effect in Uganda at the turn of the Millenium, RD drifted away from research towards implementation of donor-driven development projects with an emphasis on participatory methodologies, following some support in developing a PAL handbook from a British academic-turned-consultant in 2002. RD's adaptation of this original methodology into a Poverty Resource Monitoring Toolkit (PRMT) – effectively a series of participatory exercises for thinking about and monitoring poverty and local resources – has been highly donor-driven, with two European agencies commissioning the development and piloting of these tools for civil society capacity building programmes at different times. The rights and governance intervention to be examined here attempts to use PRMT to teach local councillors and village residents about their roles and responsibilities within Uganda's bottom-up planning process, in order to increase the influence of local citizens over resource allocation and increase

collective action for improved use and maintenance of local resources. The initiative is managed by two staff members and delivered through a team of Community Process Facilitators (CPFs) who operate at sub-county level. In theory, CPFs are locally-embedded PAL practitioners, but in practice they operate more like sub-contracted NGO trainers.

The second intervention area focuses on sustainable production among subsistence and smallholder farmers. The focus has evolved over time from food security amidst the ADF aftermath to the provision of training, information, grants and assets to savings groups and producer cooperatives, including supporting such groups to form marketing and micro-enterprise associations. Training is provided by both staff and CPFs and RD has pursued a model farmer approach, whereby certain farmers in a sub-county that are advancing well are expected to carry out training with affiliate smaller and less advanced farmer groups. In 2007, RD began providing cash transfers and action-planning support for micro-enterprise development among chronically poor individuals.

6.2 Fostering good governance

The political capabilities outcomes from RD's good governance interventions, in terms of political learning or the reshaping of political networks and patterns of representation, have been limited. Five out of seven villages visited in Mahyoro were holding regular meetings and village councillors had experienced political learning in terms of having increased understanding about their constitutional roles and skills for monitoring resources and facilitating meetings. Chairpersons who were once not consulting village residents had used resource monitoring worksheets provided by the CPFs and were attempting to engage residents in planning about local resources. None of the villages in Bukuuku were holding regular meetings, though three held annual planning meetings.

There was no substantive evidence of political learning having taken place among other village residents in either sub-county. In Mahyoro, chairpersons lacked enforcement power, while villagers lacked a sense of responsibility for putting actions agreed during village meetings into practice. Village residents framed their role in meetings as receiving information rather than exercising a right of political participation. In one example, an agreement had been made that each household should contribute 1,000[2] shillings towards maintenance of a water source, but the village executive had only managed to collect 10,000 shillings since the last meeting two months before. During another meeting, high numbers of school drop-outs were discussed, but no action was planned in response. There had been an increase in women's participation in village meetings in Mahyoro, but this was linked by councillors and women themselves to increased awareness that 'you can learn things from meetings' gained from their participation within economic associations.

There was no suggestion of reshaped political networks or patterns of representation in either sub-county. Village chairpersons and local residents were unable to say whether or not their priorities had made it into higher level development plans, partly because there had been no feedback process and partly because the information had not been sought out. Neither was inclusion in a development plan a guarantee that priorities would be implemented – a gravity water system requested by a village executive committee in Bukuuku had been sitting in the sub-county development plan for five years.

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[2] Approximately GBP £0.33.

One remote hillside village where RD did catalyse agency for collective action raises interesting issues. In 2007, the CPF worked in partnership with a local activist resident in the village who was already linked to the case study organisation through membership of a lowland farmer association and had been trained to use their PRMT methodology as part of an earlier intervention. Populated by Bakonjo, an ethnic group that until 2006 was entirely unrepresented at district level, the community had suffered both ethnic and geographical marginalisation from state services. Children had to walk down ungraded mountain footpaths each day to lowland schools, where classes were taught in a different local language. The CPF and resident activist facilitated a series of village meetings, resulting in plans for a local primary school and the construction of an access road from the low lands. With no response from the sub-county government, the activist used contacts he had developed through associational membership to mobilise funding for temporary classrooms and parents contributed labour, materials or money. Over time, villagers were able to generate financial support from an international NGO for more permanent structures. Villagers also constructed the road manually, making it easier to access the village on foot, but still inaccessible for vehicles. More recently, the community has stopped maintaining the road, having 'lost interest', seeing no response from the local government, whom they had hoped might meet them halfway by grading the road. Village meetings have also ceased. Local councillors suggest residents see little point in raising their interests when the local government is either unable or unwilling to respond to their needs.

Political learning has clearly taken place among these villagers, but the result is an abandonment of the formal planning system. The local activist expanded his political networks through associational membership, but not in response to RD's rights and governance intervention. Interestingly, the villagers have also sought to shape patterns of representation, but, again, this is not linked to RD's intervention. Failing to advance their interests locally via the formal planning process, certain leaders from the village are members of a Bakonjo Elders' forum that has now successfully lobbied for the carving out of a new sub-county with a majority Bakonjo administration that will therefore have representation on the district council. Having learned the difference between the *de jure* and *de facto* rules of the game in Ugandan politics, villagers are now hoping for a greater share of district resources, but it is questionable whether these will be forthcoming in a context of districtisation without a corresponding increase in decentralised resources (Green, 2008).

6.3 Fostering stronger associations

Research with farmer groups and associations focused predominantly on Mahyoro sub-county and RD's partnership work with a sustainable production organisation (CBOMY) that it helped to set up in the early 2000s because of limited economic associational development in Bukuuku. CBOMY began life as a small group of farmer-trainers who, in the absence of support from the state or NGOs linked to the remote location, wanted to work collectively for local economic development. RD supported these leaders to form a producer cooperative, including organisational development advice and grants for crop trials. Following successful trials CBOMY were able to start their own nursery and won a government tender for their cocoa seeds, which enabled them to build their own premises and start a seed bank that now has 8 tonnes in circulation. In 2004, CBOMY (by now a registered NGO, though still run by local farmers) developed an upland rice initiative with RD's support, which has led to the establishment of a successful rice marketing association with 40 group and 120 individual members, a store and a huller house. RD's capacity building work with local farmer groups and CBOMY itself has also supported the development of an MFA with 17 group members and an information centre – all linked to CBOMY but owned and

governed by local farmer groups. Many of the local savings and farmer groups that now make up the membership of these three farmer-owned institutions have been given capacity-building training and/or grants by RD. RD have also brokered links for CBOMY with international donor agencies who continue to support CBOMY as an independent organisation.

Through their work with CBOMY and local farmer groups in Mahyoro, RD has supported a process of political learning alongside socio-economic development and mobility, which has, in turn, reshaped political networks by encouraging members to take up a variety of leadership positions, and to select and campaign for leaders more likely to represent their interests (Williams, 2004). Members of the seven RD-supported groups and associations engaged during fieldwork explained that households that are advancing economically come to be seen externally as hard-working and well informed. Farmers talked about learning to give advice and relate to people, and gaining confidence in leading and negotiating through their group membership. Together with socio-economic advancement this gives individual farmers the confidence and motivation to stand, and the external support and encouragement for their nomination and election, as community and political leaders. All these groups had members who had gone on to take up positions on NAADS farmer forums, village health teams, parent teacher associations, school or health unit management committees, election as NRM candidates for village up to sub-county council positions, appointment to the executive committees of local councils, or to positions within village or parish level NRM party infrastructure. RD's push for the inclusion of women and increased access to information and training among female and male members was considered by farmers and staff of CBOMY to have contributed to incremental shifts in gender roles, such as women selling cash crops at local markets, although measuring changes at a household level was beyond the scope of this research.

This has created enabling conditions for an increasing number of women to engage in political campaigning, and community or political leadership. Qualitative accounts suggested that campaigning has increased among male as well as female members of these RD-supported groups. RD-supported farmers who were dissatisfied with their sub-county council chairperson lobbied the chair of CBOMY to stand for election in 2011 so that he could better represent the interests of farmers, and then mobilised for his successful campaign. There were five further cases of group members encouraging a leader to participate in either village, parish or district councils and, where necessary, campaigning to get them elected.

Farmers in Mahyoro are also beginning to challenge patronage dynamics, suggesting incremental shifts in local political networks. In one instance, farmers refused to display NAADS signposts in front of plantations they have developed without NAADS assistance. In another, leaders of CBOMY refused to sell coffee seedlings to NAADS officials who were planning to offload them onto local farmers in the dry season because it was the end of the financial year and they needed to 'complete their accountabilities to government'. A local leader explained that where once farmers might have accepted these actions without question, now they actively challenge behaviour that does not serve their interests without fear of losing the favour of these local brokers of development resources.

RD recognise a number of limitations on the outcomes they have been able to achieve in support of socio-economic empowerment among farmers, including the initial exclusion of the chronic poor from their group-based interventions which they have attempted to address through their cash transfer and micro-enterprise initiative. There have also been disproportionate gains for model farmers and CPFs

compared to other members of farmer groups supported by RD linked to the longer-term inputs of training and reflection they have received, as well as exposure to alternative ideas and practices through participation in regional events and fora, and exchange visits to other farms and associations across and beyond the region. RD-supported groups and associations frequently suffer from a lack of ownership among members, which has led to mismanagement in many groups linked to poor enforcement of monitoring and accountability mechanisms. Farmers under economic pressure sell their produce individually, undermining associational capacity to market produce collectively at higher prices, which has a knock-on effect on loan capital within partnered micro-finance associations. Staff also felt little progress has been made for more substantive leadership and influence for women within supported groups, or for more cooperative decision-making and labour within member households. Although these constraints relate primarily to economic viability and sustainability, the associational literature suggests (see for example Thorp et al., 2005), that these characteristics are fundamental to the long-term development of political capabilities in terms of farmers being able to build a solidaristic economic force capable of shaping the actions of state, market or political actors.

6.4 Discussion: political economy and strategic capacity

The findings presented so far suggest that RD has only achieved limited outcomes for political capabilities with their good governance intervention, but have indirectly fostered political learning and begun to reshape political networks by providing sustainable production and associational development support to smallholder farmers. There is no evidence of changing patterns of representation, however, and these outcomes have been constrained by both the interplay between power relations, history and socio-cultural norms and an inadequate reading of and response to the specific political-economic terrain (to use Törnquist's, 2002, phraseology) in each area of operation, which in turn is linked to the donor-driven character of their intervention.

The findings support other studies of governance in Uganda (e.g. Francis and James, 2003; Green, 2008), which cast the formal bottom-up planning system as a façade for an informal patronage-based system that dictates the nature of public resource expenditure. Participants in both sub-counties reported how planning and budget processes were tokenistic and suggested that resources were often diverted either into the pockets of local elites or into NRM election campaigns. Civil servants also explained how the centralised nature of any resources of significance and low levels of taxation left few resources open to local influence. Bukuuku in particular was subject to dysfunctional village politics stemming in part from the absence of multi-party elections at village level. One village chairperson had never held a general meeting since his election in 2001, yet continuously prevented anyone else from holding meetings. Unable to hold him to account through suffrage, people are reluctant to pursue alternative strategies because he continues to preside over the village court and land transactions. A reluctance to challenge was pronounced among villagers and local councillors across the sub-counties, and in addition tothis intertwining of political, judicial and economic power in the village chair, is also linked to a history of deference to authority following years of political turmoil and violent repression as well as deference to social superiors among poorer and less educated community members (as Golooba-Mutebi, 2004, also observes). It is reinforced by elite friendships that lead to the closing of rank against the interests of socio-economic subordinates – the poorly performing 'in charge' of a health centre in Mahyoro had remained in post for ten years without challenge, for example, because he was, as a research participant described, 'a small king' within the community – well connected and beyond reproach.

RD has failed to conceptualise local communities or meeting spaces as heterogeneous socially stratified arenas and has therefore not addressed the socio-economic power relations that shape them within their approach to promoting better governance. The fact that some of these structural barriers to participation are recognised within RD's sustainable production initiatives suggests, like other studies of development in practice (Craig and Porter, 2006; Thomas, 2008; Williams, 2004), that this strategic shortfall is linked as much to the apolitical 'good governance' focus of the donors driving forward the intervention as to low levels of staff capacity for socio-economic analysis.

The socio-economic condition of smallholder farmer communities, combined with spatial marginalisation and inward migration, had also been a driver for self-help in Mahyoro, as observed by two of the activist farmers who formed CBOMY with RD's assistance in the early 2000s; they recognised that the absence of the state or NGO surrogates at that time meant they needed to act collectively to increase local livelihoods. In contrast, Bukuuku's history of ethnic conflict and high population pressure on land has undermined drives for economic cooperation. Its proximity to the main urban centre of the region, where the NGO boom has been most pronounced, might also be linked to the absence of political agency here. Participants talked about the culture of dependency that has emerged in response to multiple donor-funded programmes focused on grant-making and providing allowances and refreshments for community meetings, meaning that communities will now only congregate where there is the potential for material gain. RD has played a part in this but, recognising the damage done, has moved away from grant-making to groups and towards inputs of facilitation, training and information. Donor agendas have also overwritten the lessons of local history. In Kabarole district, self-help groups first emerged on a clan basis, but rather than 'working with the grain' as Kelsall (2008) and Booth (2012) have recently advocated, donors pushed RD towards encouraging different ethnic groups and neighbours within the community to work together. This led to many groups failing, at least in part, because of intra-communal ethnic and land tensions.

RD has engaged in a basic level of power analysis in its attempts to prioritise the inclusion of women and, latterly, chronically poor individuals within its interventions, but findings relating to both initiatives intimate either a lack of deep-felt commitment to tackling entrenched political-economic and socio-economic power relations or an underestimation of the complexity of the challenge. There is a degree of mismatch between organisational ideals and organisational culture. Staff spend very limited amounts of time at village and household level and show a reluctance to interact with and really understand the experiences and priorities of local people. This has been highlighted in successive evaluations, but no action has been taken in response. Staff and CPFs working on both 'good governance' and sustainable production have also, however, been inadequately trained in facilitating the sustained PAL processes that have assisted farmers and other disadvantaged groups to catalyse and sustain effective collective action elsewhere (Bennett et al., 1996; Bianchi, 2002). CPFs operated at sub-county level without a 'train-the-trainer' strategy, leading to an absence of locally embedded activists able to implement or follow up on RD's inputs. In the case of community mobilisation for school building in a Bakonjo village, the local activist had been trained by RD as a CPF through an earlier discontinued initiative, but it is interesting that this locally-embedded resource generated better outcomes for political capabilities in this case.

7. Bukonzo Joint Cooperative Union – a community-led micro-finance and marketing cooperative

7.1 Background

BJC is a micro-finance and marketing cooperative whose membership is 85 percent women and predominantly comprises small-scale farmers growing organic hand-picked coffee in the foothills of the Rwenzori Mountains. BJC was established in 1999 as an association of 11 savings groups, after the coordinator graduated from a Uganda Change Agent's training course[3] in 1991 and returned home to mobilise members of his own clan. BJC has only accepted donor funding in the form of temporary loans to bolster loan capital, for co-financing of assets, in pursuit of social inclusion for the extreme poor through cash transfers and training for micro-enterprise development, or in support of process documentation and international good practice sharing.

Between 2000 and 2003, RD supported BJC through the process of registering as a cooperative society and equipped the BJC training team – established in 2001 – with knowledge and skills in sustainable production. BJC worked with RD as they developed their micro-finance programme area, and RD tried to learn from BJC's savings culture and household-to-household mobilisation approach. When RD began to set up a sub-county micro-finance association in Kasese district, the two organisations went their separate ways. Three BJC members suggested that many of the groups that formed the sub-county micro-finance association supported by RD have folded because they formed in response to a donor-funded initiative and did not have their own established savings culture.

By 2011, BJC comprised 3,887 individuals participating in 201 registered member groups, many of whom are also members or clients of a coffee marketing association established by BJC members in 2005 in response to a fluctuating market and exploitative middle-men. Adding clients and members together, BJC now has more than 5,000 local stakeholders, as well as six full-time staff, six volunteer training officers and 42 'training volunteers'. By 2010, the micro-finance cooperative had a loan disbursement of just under 1.9 billion shillings,[4] and that year the marketing society collected 300,988kg coffee with a market loan value of 1.27 billion shillings.[5] In 2011, they began exporting coffee to a buyer in London.

The BJC vision is 'improving the standard of living by enabling people to realize their potential and become active partners in the social, economic and political development of [their county], the Rwenzori region and Uganda at large'. The particular programme areas described and analysed below relate firstly to their internal capacity building work with member groups and households, and secondly to explicit attempts to influence local governance and resource allocation.

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[3] The Uganda Change Agent Association was formally founded in 1992 after 75 Ugandan activists (including the coordinator of BJC) underwent a training programme developed by Stan Burkey of Quaker Service Norway (QSN), based on the writings of Paulo Freire (www.ucaa.or.ug).

[4] Approximately GBP £618,000 (1January 2010 rates).

[5] Approximately GBP £413,000 (1 January 2010 rates).

7.2 Community-led capacity building

From its earliest days BJC has followed a household-to-household, train-the-trainer approach to mobilising local community members into savings groups and cooperatives, and the organisation has therefore been built from the bottom up. Figure 1 displays how the organisation functions. There is a small training team, who operate at parish level, fulfil a monitoring and documentation function and link to the staff team and board. Group trainings focus on improved farming methods as well as skills for financial and group leadership and management. Groups have representation on Parish Coordinating Committee (PCCs) and groups in active parishes have associated into Primary Cooperatives, who link into PCCs and the Board. There are robust channels for two-way communication from savings groups up to the board and back down. Board members rotate every two years, so that as many members as possible gain experience of leadership.

Figure 1: BJC structure
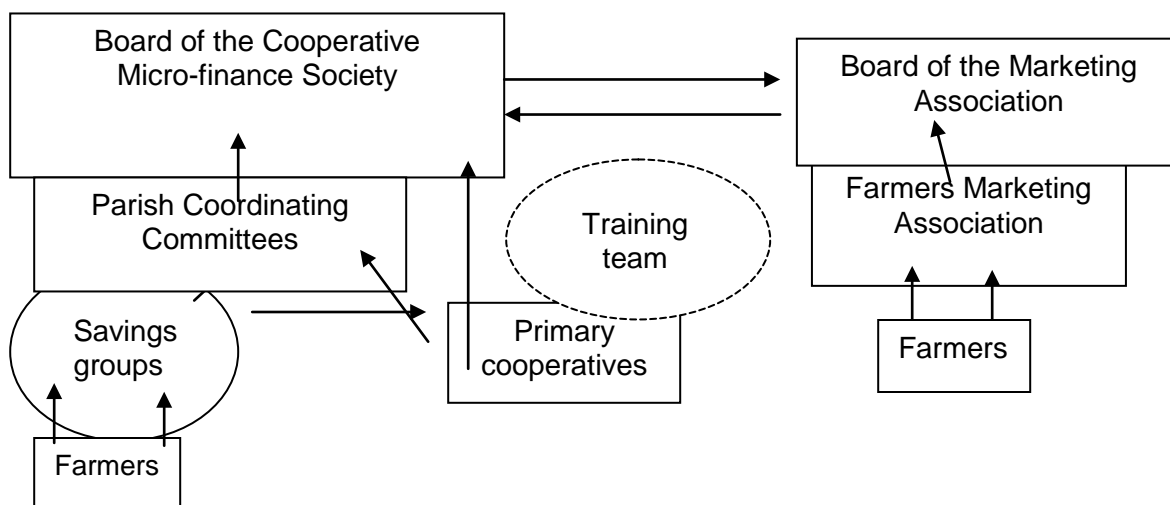
Since 2004 communication has been managed pictorially through the development first of a Participatory Action Learning methodology, and since 2007, a Gender Action Learning System (GALS), in partnership with the same consultant who developed PAL tools with RD. Oxfam Novib has also supported the evolution of GALS as BJC's core operational methodology. PALS overcame inequalities between members on the basis of literacy, but members of the training team explained that the majority female membership continued to face multiple barriers to empowerment linked to a local culture of polygamy, exclusion from land ownership, male control over household finances, domestic violence and alcoholism. Facilitators of the methodology describe it in the following terms:

'GALS is a structured community-led participatory process which is based on and continually reinforces underlying principles of equity, inclusion and gender justice and women's human rights…It aims from the very first meeting to bring about immediate and tangible positive improvements in lives and livelihoods of women and men participants, particularly the poorest and most vulnerable. It adapts very simple diagramming tools: Diamonds, Road Journeys, Trees and Circles to specific gender issues, contexts and organisational needs.' (Internal document, 2009)

7.2.1 Socio-economic mobility, shifting gender norms, and political capabilities

Outcomes from BJC capacity building are impressive. Triangulation of observational and interview data with documentary evidence suggests that members understand the principle of savings and the need to account for money, and have improved farming practices, which have led to better quality coffee, higher levels of production and therefore increased incomes. Farmers report having a direct market for their produce, with a price they can trust supported by a culture of transparency, so that members (using the pictorial methodology) can understand how money is being accounted for and used irrespective of literacy. There have been changes in gender roles within a significant proportion of the member households that have participated in GALS training, including a greater sharing of labour and decision-making and even joint land ownership between men and women in some households – a huge cultural shift in the Ugandan context.[6]

Processes of political learning were associated with these markers of socio-economic mobility and shifts in gender roles, just as they were among farmers supported by RD and CBOMY in Mahyoro. Members reported gaining increased confidence, skills and knowledge from participation within the cooperative, leading to increased numbers of local farmers – and particularly women in this case – in leadership roles within savings and farmer groups. Long-term participation had led to political learning among some members – one woman had become a trainer and documenter and went on to become a sub-county councillor by using the skills and confidence she had acquired. Like this councillor, many respondents talked about fellow members entering politics because of the recognition they had gained about their contribution to the community through participation within BJC. Two out of five members of the sub-county land committee were BJC members and another member had gained a seat on the sub-county NAADS farmers' forum, but then resigned in protest at the corruption of other representatives.

In terms of acquiring a deepened understanding of how power works and alternative possibilities, GALS has begun to create greater consciousness among both men and women about the effects of gender inequality on household income and wellbeing – in effect, teaching men that they themselves are losing out by preventing women from contributing to decision-making or participating in groups and associations. Whether this kind of learning can be deemed political is addressed in the analytical discussion to follow.

Members were divided about the significance of having an increased number of 'their own' taking up political leadership positions. Some respondents felt that it was leading to increasingly positive relations between BJC and the sub-county and district political leaderships, others felt that it has created tension because BJC members ask so many questions. Another limitation has been that increasing the number of women in leadership positions has not necessarily shifted cultural norms towards women, as one woman councillor suggested, 'we are just there like flowers, they can't involve us in planning'. The coordinator also raised doubts about the degree to which invitations to participate in sub-county or district

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[6]A recent impact assessment of GALS training between 2007 and 2010 suggests that out of 291 people sensitised about the benefits of joint land ownership, 61 households now have joint land certificates from their village council and 25 have registered customary joint land agreements. Of 1,096 participants in gender action learning about cooperation in the household and 'in the garden', men are beginning to take responsibility for a few roles like collecting firewood in 449 households; and in 366 households men and women are sharing most or all responsibilities.

level deliberative or decision-making fora have been motivated by the will to include and learn from BJC members or a desire to demonstrate inclusion. The coordinator has, for example, found himself on attendance lists for local council meetings when he was not present, sometimes after having only been invited on the day of the meeting.

7.3 Influencing governance and resource allocation

BJC has attempted to engage with the formal local government system in a number of ways. Trainers have encouraged group members to engage in village meetings, and at times BJC members have participated in budget conferences. Politicians and civil servants throughout the local government structure have attended BJC AGMs and BJC has repeatedly met with NAADS officials at the district and sub-county level to discuss ways in which they could work together. None of these approaches have brought significantly positive outcomes for the membership in economic terms and, overall, members have learned that the only way to influence local governance and resources is by mobilising the membership to finance political processes or circumventing existing brokers, patrons and decision-making processes to generate political leverage beyond the local level.

In one example, members had identified a series of problems affecting their coffee quality and therefore the price they could negotiate from buyers, including theft of ripe beans and farmers mixing poor and high quality beans to bulk up their produce. BJC members agreed to finance a series of council meetings from the village up to the sub-county and district level that enabled a bye-law to be developed for Kyarumba sub-county introducing stiff penalties for actions that undermined coffee quality. Although a district councillor claimed to have enacted the bye-law, it was later discovered that the law was never tabled at the district council and there are concerns that the money members had raised to finance the district council meeting was stolen by a councillor or civil servant. Although this attempt to influence decision-making was not ultimately successful, it failed at the last hurdle, and might have been effective with different individuals involved at the district level.

In a second example, the BJC leadership managed to circumvent a sub-county development plan in which the local government had decided to invest Belgian government funding into a potato-growing project rather than rural electrification to support coffee processing – the more popular proposition among local farmers.[7] With the backing of the membership, the BJC coordinator negotiated directly with the Belgian government, who sent representatives to look at BJC coffee production and marketing work, and then applied pressure on the sub-county to change their plans. BJC were successful in changing the development plan and bringing electricity to the sub-county by mobilising the membership to finance the political process and approximately 10 percent of the overall cost of the project that was needed in addition to the Belgian government funding (a total of 57 million shillings[8]).

The first example suggests that BJC have learned that they can advance their agenda by financing political/legal processes, but this strategy is still vulnerable to a political culture of corruption. The second

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[7] The suggestion here was that local councillors were intentionally introducing an inappropriate project so that it would fail and they could keep the surplus resources.

[8] Approximately GBP £18.500 (1 January 2011 rates).

suggests that members have learned about the *de facto* rules of the game, which, combined with an expansion in political networks beyond the local level, has enabled them to circumvent the existing process for representation and influence resource allocation through an alternative strategy for representation and influence. Although they have not brought about a shift in the culture of leadership and governance, they have acquired enough political knowhow, connections and leverage through critical mass built upon socio-economic development to forward a particular programme and set of interests in Williams' (2004) terms.

7.4 Discussion: political economy and strategic capacity

The political capabilities outcomes achieved by BJC members have been both driven forward and constrained by national and local political-economy. As in the previous case study, the remote location and absence of state and NGO services combined with widespread poverty created fertile ground for self-help in response to mobilisation by the BJC coordinator. This drive has also been rooted in both a long tradition of collective working among the Bakonjo and a history of ethnically based mobilisation linked to struggles against exploitative indirect rule. The dysfunctional operations of formal local governance and the machinations of patronage politics have left smallholder farmers disadvantaged, yet also created motivation for associational solidarity and the seeking out of alternative channels for the promotion of farmer interests. Longer-term BJC members were also able to benefit from the 1990s coffee boom and have continued to build upon this cohesive focus on a viable market.

The gains achieved through associational action would have generated limited dividends for women in real terms – and therefore the majority of the BJC membership – had it not been for the development of a GALS methodology that has begun to shift gender norms within member households and communities. In this, BJC members – and perhaps particularly the coordinator and training team – have demonstrated a capacity for astute reading of the political-economic terrain and the ability to strategise in response. Clearly having inputs of analytical and methodological expertise from the British consultant who worked with BJC to develop GALS (with support from Oxfam Novib) has also been an important ingredient for the effective integration of this methodology within BJC's practice.

BJC's bottom-up approach to organisation building amidst a context of poverty and marginalisation has been effective in generating high levels of commitment to the organisation and its objectives, while creating structures and processes that facilitate both bottom-up representation and – mainly as a result of this – the maintenance of autonomy vis-à-vis external agendas. The integration of self and common interest through their livelihoods focus, combined with Frierian consciousness raising about the mutual benefits of cooperation, has built upon multiple sites of common identity, including ethnicity (originally building up within one clan), livelihood (i.e. subsistence or small-scale coffee farming) and predominantly gender. The organisation has sustained its focus on bottom-up change through their trickle-up programme focused on social inclusion of the extreme poor and has maintained a dual focus on income generation and social change. Much of this must be credited to the coordinator, who has played a leading role in managing this balance and negotiating organisational autonomy while making use of external advice and funding when necessary. He has also played a key role in building robust mechanisms for representation and accountability, including the enforcement of sanctions for loan defaulting, generating high levels of trust in the organisation, which has been key to overcoming the negative legacy of the Ugandan cooperative movement. Dependency on the coordinator's skills and experience has been

recognised as a weakness within the organisation and staff and volunteers are now consciously seeking to 'copy up' his approach, as one member put it.

8. Conclusions: thinking about NGO strategies through a political capabilities lens

The findings suggest that strategies focused on more effective citizen participation within the invited spaces of inclusive liberal governance are unlikely to gain significant influence over resources for disadvantaged groups within the context of rural Uganda at the current juncture. Participation within economic associations – when the right mix of enabling factors are present – can take rural communities closer to linking representation with social justice and economic transformation in Hickey's terms (2010: 1152). Farmers can learn a range of skills from associational participation, which can build their political capabilities for representation in other more formal arenas while addressing their own livelihood interests. Local level political representation does not necessarily translate into greater influence over resource allocation for smallholders because of the national character of politics, but it is perhaps a positive step towards more inclusive economic transformation. These findings support arguments in the literature for a greater emphasis on the links between shifts in socio-economic and political power in seeking to promote more effective forms of governance; add to a small body of evidence highlighting links between economic association and political capability enhancement (Thorp et al., 2005; Kabeer et al., 2010); and draw further attention to the gap in this literature for sub-Saharan Africa.

The evidence presented here provides further support for the body of literature which suggests that associational solidarity can emerge out of a condition of marginalisation (Thorp et al., 2005); can effectively be built upon savings-based finance (Kabeer et al., 2010; Agarwal, 2010) and a federated structure that ensures groups remain a manageable size for the full engagement and participation of members (Brett, 2003; Agarwal, 2010); and is driven forward by robust mechanisms for representation and accountability (Agarwal, 2010; Kabeer et al., 2010). While some studies suggest that homogeneity is not necessarily a driver of effective collective action (Mukherji, 2013), in the context of rural Uganda at the current juncture, the findings suggest that working with the grain (Kelsall, 2008) of existing agency for collective action on the basis of shared identity (whether clan, gender or livelihood-based) may be a more effective approach than donor-driven strategies aimed at fostering collaboration among heterogeneous communities on the basis of residence.

The findings also provide support for arguments in support of formalised NGOs playing a facilitative role in building transformational associational power and further underline the warnings in the literature about donor dependency (Igoe, 2003; Bano, 2012) and de-politicised engagement with their operational environments (Bebbington et al., 2008a). The examples of RD and Oxfam Novib suggest that international and formalised NGOs can support political capabilities development among farmer-led organisations by supporting networking and communication between organisations, donors and skilled activists; focusing on inputs of information, training and advice rather than grant-making; and ensuring that their strategies (and those of the groups they support) are built upon localised power analysis. The discussion also suggests that NGOs and donors can learn much from the experience of community-led organisations like BJC in identifying positive approaches to supporting progressive change without undermining local political agency – paying attention, in Mohan and Hickey's (2004: 63) terms, to 'the strategies employed by the poor themselves'.

Williams' (2004) framework has enabled a politicised analysis of the approaches employed by these organisations and the ways in which these are shaping the capabilities of smallholder farmers over time, which takes the discussion beyond questions of inclusion. The analysis here suggests, however, that Williams' focus on the spaces of interaction between citizens and state actors excludes the critical importance of processes of socio-economic mobility and – particularly perhaps in an agrarian context – shifting gender norms and relations. This suggests that analytical frameworks seeking to increase knowledge about how to redistribute societal power may need to engage with the integration between these political economy processes and Williams' existing dimensions of political capabilities. The limitations involved in the attainment of local political representation within a regime increasingly focused on the extension of centralised power also highlight a need for more research into what makes the difference between the ability of farmers to achieve local representation, and their ability to change the culture of how issues can be represented, in what ways and by what kinds of actor.[9]

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[9] A forthcoming companion paper will consider further the question of how political capabilities analysis can enhance our understanding about effective approaches to elite and direct popular representation of interests in such contexts.

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