

**ATTRIBUTIONS AND PARADOXES OF AGENCY IN
SOCIALY SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Perspectives from Small-Scale NGOs in Jinja, Uganda

Anna Kärkkäinen

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Attributions and Paradoxes of Agency in Socially Sustainable Development: Perspectives from Small-Scale NGOs in Jinja, Uganda

Kärkkäinen, Anna

Supervisor: Tiina Kontinen

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ABSTRACT

During the past decades, sustainable development has become an important phenomenon in the global development discourse. The concept has been widely used by both large international bodies such as the United Nations as well as small grassroots organization. In the beginning, the interest was mainly in questions of environmental and ecological aspects of the concept but especially since the introduction of the Human Development Approach the importance of social and cultural aspects of sustainable development became more important. In the discussions on Human Development and sustainable development, the people are in the center of the discussion. Both concepts emphasize the importance of agency, both for individuals and for communities.

This research examines how agency is conceptualized in the discourses of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aiming towards sustainable development in Jinja area, Uganda. Overall, this research aims at contributing to the discussion around socially sustainable development because of its increasing importance in the planning, evaluation and funding of development projects and programs worldwide. The goal of this research is to understand how the NGOs attribute agency to different actors in their development interventions. In addition, this research examines the paradoxes that the NGOs manifest in regard to agency in their processes aiming towards socially sustainable development.

The main research data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Altogether nine Ugandan NGO actors working in five different small-scale NGOs were interviewed. All the NGOs had 'sustainable development' in their values or visions for the future and 'sustainable development' was many times mentioned on the NGOs' web pages, office walls, or project plans. The research revealed that agency was mainly attributed to four different groups of actors: individual NGO activists, local volunteers, local leaders and community members. In addition, agency was attributed to the NGOs. The research also revealed paradoxes in relation to power, knowledge and information sharing, trust and networks and money. Interestingly, the agencies of different actors were found to intertwine with each other in the processes of sustainable development in a way that resulted in enablement and disablement of the agencies of different actors in different situations.

Key words: Sustainable development, socially sustainable development, agency, paradox, Uganda

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1	INTRODUCTION	1
2	UGANDAN CONTEXT	4
2.1	Political Context	5
2.2	Civil Society in Uganda	7
3	AGENCY	11
3.1	Agency in the Human Development Approach	12
3.2	Agency and Culture	15
3.3	Agency and Power	16
4	SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT	20
4.1	What is Development?	20
4.2	Sustainable Development in the Global Context	21
4.3	Social Sustainability in the Development Discourse	23
4.3.1	Rootedness and Social Capital as Factors for Social Sustainability	24
4.3.2	Communities and Institutions as Factors for Social Sustainability	25
4.4	Critique towards Sustainable Development	27
5	RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	31
5.1	Starting Points for This Research	31
5.2	Methods of Data Collection	32
5.3	Description of Data	35
5.4	Data Analysis	37
5.5	Reflections on the Ethics, Reliability and My Own Role in This Research	38
6	ATTRIBUTIONS OF AGENCY	41
6.1	Individual NGO Activists – Self-Motivation as an Important Factor to Pursue Sustainable Social Change	41
6.2	Involving Local Volunteers – Agency for the Individuals or for the NGO?	43
6.3	Local Leaders – An Attribution of Community Agency	47
6.4	People in the Communities – Agency through Material and Mental Support	50

7	PARADOXES OF AGENCY	54
7.1	Paradoxes of Power	54
7.1.1	Power in Relation to Other Actors: Enabling, Limiting and Demanding Agency	55
7.1.2	Monitoring: NGOs Way of Denying or Supporting Agency?.....	59
7.2	Paradoxes of Knowledge and Information Sharing	62
7.2.1	Communities Sharing Knowledge and Information to the NGOs.....	63
7.2.2	Sensitization from the NGOs to the Communities	65
7.3	Paradoxes of Trust and Networks	69
7.3.1	Creating Trust and Enhancing Local Leadership within the Communities...	70
7.3.2	Trust and Networks in Relation to ‘Outsiders’	72
7.4	Paradoxes of Money	76
8	CONCLUSIONS	80
8.1	Agency in Socially Sustainable Development.....	82
8.2	Suggestions for Further Research	84
	REFERENCES	85
	APPENDIXES	
	Appendix 1: Interview Outline	
	Appendix 2: Matrix for Analysis (with examples)	

Abbreviations

CSO	Civil Society Organization
HDI	Human Development Index
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
KY	Kabaka Yakka
LC	Local Council Chairperson
LCD	Least Developed Countries
LRA	Lords's Resistance Army
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NRA	National Resistance Army
NRM	National Resistance Movement
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UPC	Uganda People's Congress

1 INTRODUCTION

During the past decades, an important phenomenon in the contemporary development discourse has been the increasing concentration and emphasis on sustainable development in the development interventions. In the beginning, the interest was mainly in questions of environmental and ecological aspects of sustainability but especially since the introduction of the Human Development Approach and the Human Development Reports by UNDP the importance of social and cultural aspects became more important also in the academic discussion. The Human Development approach replaced the centrality of economic growth in the development policies by broader notions of development as a human-centered rather than a commodity-centered process (Throsby 2008, 2).

Nowadays the Human Development Approach is commonly accepted and sustainable development can be found as a main goal for many development actors. The concept has developed a significant position in the discourse of different development actors across the world and can be found from program plans, organizational values and codes of conduct of both small and large scale development actors. The concept is widely used by large international bodies such as United Nations as well as small grassroots organizations. In addition, sustainable development has become an important measurement for governments funding various development projects in the global South. Therefore it can be claimed that the concept of sustainable development has become one of the most widely used global 'buzz words' for gaining funding and justify development interventions during the past two decades (Scoones 2010, 153).

Therefore, in this research I want to specifically review the phenomenon and discussion around sustainable development because of its increasing importance in the planning, evaluation and funding of development projects and programs worldwide. As the concept is very widely acknowledged across the world among different kinds of development actors it has sometimes even become a mantra for different actors to gain funding, acceptance, and professionalism. At the same time, sustainable development has also been able to create true success stories and positive change as it has allowed solutions initiating from the global South and the people themselves living in those respective areas.

More specifically, the emphasis in this research is on the socially sustainable development which is the vaguest by its definition out of the different dimensions of the sustainability – ecological, economic and social. In addition to these dimensions, the concept also incorporates culture and cultural sustainability either as a core of the concept, as a part of the social dimension or as its own, fourth dimension. In this research, I will discuss cultural sustainability as a fundamental part of the idea of sustainability and development as a whole.

In the discussion on Human Development and sustainable development, the people are in the center of the discussion. Both concepts emphasize the importance of agency, both for individuals and for communities. The concept of agency has deeper roots in the sociological and development discussion and several common concepts of today's development attempts have drawn ideas from the theories on agency. In addition to the concept of sustainable development and sustainability, also for example the concepts of empowerment and participation in development interventions have been influenced by this discussion. (e.g. Deneulin & Shanani 2009, 30.)

As the people are in the center of discussion, it is important to think how agency can be exercised within the existing social context and the parameters of a development program or a project. According to Cleaver (2007, 241), diverse possibilities to exercise agency are not enough as there needs to be recognition of the importance of the structure too. Therefore the questions of *why* and *how* people act in the processes and *the effects* on different actors are important.

The aim of this research is to examine how agency is conceptualized in the discourses of small-scale non-governmental organizations (NGOs) aiming towards sustainable development in Jinja area, Uganda. Overall, this research aims at contributing to the discussion around socially sustainable development at the global scale as well as more specifically in Uganda. This scope was selected because, according to Banuri and Najam (2002), it is important to look at the processes and actions that have potential to lead to sustainable development rather than try to measure it. Therefore my goal is *not* to measure sustainability of any specific development interventions or make arguments of what kind of projects lead to socially sustainable development. Rather, my goal is to understand how the NGOs attribute agency to different actors in their development interventions and find

out what kind of paradoxes do the NGOs manifest in regard to agency in their processes aiming towards socially sustainable development. Therefore, the research questions are:

1. To whom is agency attributed in the development NGOs aiming towards socially sustainable development in Jinja area, Uganda?
2. What kind of paradoxes do the NGOs manifest in regard to agency in socially sustainable development?

Since my geographical and societal focus is on Jinja, Uganda, I will begin this report by describing the Ugandan context before proceeding to the theoretical discussion. The theoretical discussion is divided into two chapters: in chapter 3 I will concentrate on the concept of agency in the framework of this research and in the chapter 4 I will look at the overall concept of sustainable development and socially sustainable development more precisely. In the chapter 5 I will describe my research methodology before continuing to the analysis in the chapters 6 and 7. Lastly, I will draw conclusions in the chapter 8 and give suggestions for further research on the topic.

2 UGANDAN CONTEXT

The Republic of Uganda is a country located in Eastern Africa. It lies across the equator and it has borders with Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Democratic Republic of Congo and South Sudan. The population of Uganda is around 35 million and the population growth rate is 3.2% which is one of the highest in the world. Almost half of the Ugandan population is under 15 years old. (UNDP, 2013a.)



Picture 1: Map of Uganda (CIA, 2013).

At Human Development Index (HDI), Uganda's country rank is 161 out of 187 countries. Therefore Uganda is not only considered among the group of Least Developed Countries (LDC) but is also located below the regional (Sub-Saharan Africa) average. Despite the low ranking on HDI, Uganda has shown improvements in the Human Development during the past decades. Between 1980 and 2012 Uganda has been able to increase the life expectancy at birth by 4.4 years, mean years of schooling by 2.8 years and expected years of schooling by 7.2 years. On economic scale, Uganda's GNI per capita increased by about 125 percent between 1985 and 2012. (UNDP, 2013c.)

In 2013, the government of Uganda launched a strategy paper for the socio-economic development of Uganda called Vision 2040. The aim of the vision is that Uganda would reach the status of lower middle income country by 2017, progressing to an upper middle income category by 2032 and reaching the target per capita GNI of \$9500 by 2040. (Republic of Uganda, 2013.)

Ethnicity is very important in Uganda and many people still characterize themselves according to their tribe. The main tribes are Baganda (16.9%), Banyakole (9.5%), Basoga (8.4%), Bakiga (6.9%), Iteso (6.4%) and Langi (6.1%). (CIA, 2013.) Each tribe has their own language and they are traditionally located in a specific area in Uganda. Jinja area is part of Busoga kingdom and therefore most people living there are Basogas. However, there are also people from Baganda tribe and Northern and North-Eastern tribes, for example Itesos, in the area. The main language in the area is Lusoga, however in Jinja most people also speak English, which is the official language of Uganda, as well as Luganda, which is the most commonly used language in Uganda.

2.1 Political Context

Uganda has a very colorful history. Until the 19th century Uganda was governed by several kingdoms based on ethnic groups. At the time, the main kingdom was Buganda kingdom. Later, the British attached Uganda to its colonial empire and thus a wide range of different ethnic groups with their own political systems and cultures were grouped together inside Ugandan borders. Uganda gained its independency on 1962 and the first post-independence election was won by an alliance between the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) and Kabaka Yakka (KY). Between 1962 and 1986 Uganda had a number of presidents, including Idi Amin whose dictatorial regime in 1971–1979 led to death of about 300,000 Ugandans. (UNDP, 2013a.) During that time all the people with foreign heritage were also forced to leave the country and for example groups of people with Indian origin were forced to leave Uganda despite their Ugandan citizenship.

The violence did not end with the era of Idi Amin as Milton Obote, who had been the Executive Prime Minister during the first post-independence government, took over power in 1980. This period was also characterized by guerilla war and human rights abuses that

led to the death of about 100,000 more people. However, insurgency towards the government led to overthrowing of Obote and one of the leaders of the insurgencies, Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, took over power in 1986 with his National Resistance Army (NRA), the armed branch of the National Resistance Movement (NRM). Since then, Yoweri Museveni has been the president of the Republic of Uganda. (UNDP, 2013a.)

The insurgent groups of Joseph Kony's Lords's Resistance Army (LRA) continued operating in the northern parts of the country all the way until 2008 when peace agreement was finally signed. Since then, Uganda has generally experiences peace and stability. (UNDP, 2013a.) However, President Museveni has been criticized for his failure to defeat the LRA earlier. The war in the Northern parts of Uganda has led to death, disablement and displacement of a huge amount of Northern population and some critics claim that Museveni has not been motivated to end the war to keep the attention away from other issues in Uganda, related to for example health, education and corruption.

In terms of governance, during the 1990s the government promulgated a non-party legislative and presidential election and for two decades Uganda was governed by a non-party regime. Later, in 2005, Uganda amended the constitution and therefore removed the presidential term limits and legalized a multiparty political system. Since then, Uganda has held two elections for presidential, parliamentary and local elections. (UNDP, 2013a.) The last election was held in 2011 and President Museveni was elected for another 5-year term.

At the lower governmental level, there is a unique system of leadership in Uganda which reaches all the way down to the village level. The lowest administrative unit is a village which is governed by a Local Council 1 and Local Council Chairperson 1 (LC1). LC1 is the lowest position of the governmental hierarchy and is typically held by the most educated and honored member of a community or a village. The LC1 is selected in community meetings through a voting system or a common agreement. There are also four more administrative units governed by LC2, LC3, LC4 and LC5: a parish, which typically contains around 5–10 villages; a sub-county which typically contains 5–10 parishes; a county which is made up of several sub-counties; and lastly the district which contains several counties and municipalities in the area.

2.2 Civil Society in Uganda

There have been a growing number of civil society organizations (CSOs) concentrating on development issues in Uganda during the past three decades. This has been seen as a response to the growing frustration to the perceived failure of governmental development interventions and at the same time as a reflection of successful non-governmental practices in other countries, for example Grameen Bank in Bangladesh. (Barr & Fafchamps, 2006.) Overall, CSOs are widely believed to have the potential to increase the democratization processes in Africa, including in Uganda. There are two different kinds of evidence where this assumption derives from: firstly from the historical role that the CSOs have played in democratic transitions in various countries over the past decades; and secondly from the theoretical expectations of the democratic potential of organized associational activity. (Robinson & Friedman, 2007.)

As described in the previous sub-chapter, Uganda has experienced some form of authoritarian rule under civilian and military regimes and is currently ruled by a government that has democratic features. The pre-2005 non-party regime accepted the right of independent civil society organizations to organize and engage in policy advocacy. After the political transition of 2005 the political features and institutions, including the ones related to the functioning of civil society, remained in place. (Robinson & Friedman 2007, 645.)

According to Robinson and Friedman (2007, 654), the civil society in Uganda shows considerable diversity in activities, including actors such as faith based organizations, trade unions, community based organizations, professional associations and interest groups. However, most actors are still engaged in welfare provision and service delivery rather than membership-based organizations with a strong grassroots constituency. Civil society actors providing health services, education, social welfare, and economic development are in the majority whereas groups engaged in governance work, protection of human rights, and democracy-promotion are in minority. Financially, CSOs are mainly dependent on the foreign donors and the government as the Ugandan private sector is rather weak. In addition, Ugandan public sector has been downsized due to structural adjustments. (Robinson & Friedman 2007, 648.)

Based on the research by Lister and Nyamugasira (2003), CSOs play a number of roles simultaneously in the policy processes in Uganda and the CSO engagement with government in policy processes has been increasing. However, CSO engagement is often offered through structured and defined processes and inclusion in such policy processes is unpredictable. In their study, Lister and Nyamugasira (2003) presented six roles that the CSOs were found to play in policy processes in Uganda. Firstly, CSOs play a role of contributors invited to participate in policy formulation processes at national and district levels. Secondly, they play a role of ‘pressurisers’ that exert pressure on both formulation and implementation by campaigning and lobbying. This role was found to be usually played by international NGOs (INGOs). (ibid., 98–100.)

The third role of CSOs in policy processes was found to be in service-delivery activities. This role is typical for majority of Ugandan based CSOs, especially outside Kampala. Through the service delivery the vast majority of poor people have contact with policy and therefore the CSOs can play a bridging role between state and citizens. Based on the research, this is commonly the most critical role as implementation is usually the stage of the policy processes where failures occur. The fourth role of the CSOs in policy processes in Uganda was found to be the monitoring role of government activities. However, it was found that this role is weak at all stages of policy process. The reason for the weakness of monitoring was perceived to be lack of awareness of the importance of monitoring and the potential role of CSOs in this area. (Lister & Nyamugasira 2003, 100.)

The fifth role was the introduction of new approaches and techniques. However, according to Lister and Nyamugasira (2003), main examples of innovations were coming from INGOs. Lastly, the sixth role of CSOs in the policy processes in Uganda was identified to being mobilizers by doing awareness-raising and capacity-building of poor people to influence policy themselves. This was perceived as a longer-term CSO strategy and was sometimes adopted in case the direct influence routes of the CSOs had been blocked. (Lister & Nyamugasira 2003, 100–101.)

However, the problem identified in the research by Lister and Nyamugasira (2003) was that the donors funding CSO sector in Uganda are often adopting an oversimplified conception of the roles of CSOs. The donors tend to separate ‘service delivery’ from

‘advocacy’ roles and therefore fail to appreciate situations in which the CSOs play several roles simultaneously. This separation prevents creation of vital synergy between different roles and forces the CSOs to respond to donor models by identifying themselves as either ‘service-delivery’ or ‘advocacy’ organizations, even if they have traditionally been involved in both activities. This might also lead the CSOs to be financially dependent on government which can restrict CSOs’ ability to hold government to account.

According to Uganda’s National Development Plan 2010–2015, the government of Uganda acknowledges the role and the multiplicity of the civil society sector in Uganda (Republic of Uganda, 2010). However, in the longer term strategy, Vision 2040, the role of civil society is not elaborated very closely. In Vision 2040, it is stated that one of the challenges Uganda has historically had is weak civil society and civic participation. The participation, cooperation and transparency of all actors, including not only civil society but also private sector, media and cultural and religious leaders, is perceived important for the success of Vision 2040. (Republic of Uganda, 2013.)

More specifically, Vision 2040 states that especially with questions related to environmental resources and environmental sustainability it is important that the civil society is able to be actively engaged in the processes. Therefore the government needs to strengthen the civil society actors’ access to information, build the capacity of civil society actors and create an enabling environment for civil society’s participation. The aim of the Vision 2040 is to provide more funding for the Local Governments so that they are less dependent on central government and can rely more on their own local initiatives for wealth creation. According to the Vision 2040, this will also be supported by promoting civic education, participation of civil society and free flow of information between the civil society and the governmental officials. (Republic of Uganda, 2013.)

Otherwise, there are no other marks made on the Vision 2040 on the role of civil society in the society, for example in provision of services. In the National Development Plan 2010–2015 it is stated that some of the civil society organizations have even been contracted for service delivery at the district level. However, according to the National Development Plan 2010–2015, the government perceives the CSOs’ dependency of their donors as a problem because the dependency is perceived to encourage accountability towards donors over accountability to the local population. (Republic of Uganda, 2010.) Therefore, civil society

is rather perceived as a partner working together with the government in monitoring and seeking funding for the Vision 2040 activities. (Republic of Uganda, 2013.)

In addition, the government perceives that there is a lack of comprehensive and consistent framework to institutionalize the interface between civil society actors and various Ministries, Departments and Agencies at both national and district level. In relation to registered NGOs, the problem is stated to be in the current NGO law that constraints the engagement between NGOs and the government and that rather fuels mutual suspicion than cooperation and partnership. Furthermore, it is perceived that there is little empirical information available for the government about what NGOs do, where they do it and the impact of their activities. Thus, the outcome of the work done by NGOs is not meaningfully captured in the national development statistics. (Republic of Uganda, 2010.)

3 AGENCY

The concept of agency plays part when discussing people's capabilities to affect their own lives or their power as the originators of acts (Cleaver 2007, 226). According to Oxford Reference Online (2011), in sociology and philosophy agency means "the degree to which a subject is able to determine the course of their own actions. The concept is generally used in the context of discussions about the factors that shape everyday life and place a limit on agency." It is also "a term relating to the capacity of human beings—also often called actors, or agents—to determine their own lives and futures, rather than being merely the product of determining influences".

As the concept of agency has long roots in the sociological discussion it also includes dichotomies, such as balances between individuality and relationality, and enablement and constraint. In this research, as also commonly, agency is conceptualized relational because in the realities of development interventions, agency is ultimately exercised in the social world of communities and the NGOs. Thus appropriate ways of being and behaving cannot be considered purely as a matter of individual choice because the structure of the society shapes the opportunities and resources available for individuals. (Cleaver 2007, 226.) Therefore the questions of culture and community are closely related to the concept of agency.

In addition to the dualism of individuality and relationality, theorists (e.g. Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1984; and Archer 2000) have also discussed about the balance between enablement and constraint. This brings the concept of power to the discussion. In the discussion on enablement and constraint the question is if agency is "generative of individual transformations and social change, and how far it is subjected to the 'discipline' imposed by social norms and sanctions" (Cleaver 2007, 226). For example Giddens (1984) recognizes the structural constraints in the social space where agents operate. However, he is also positive about the possibilities of individual agency.

The discussion on agency has also been strong in the feminist literature. When considering this viewpoint, McNay (2000) claims that new forms of constraint have been emerging in the past couple of decades that can no longer be understood only through dichotomies of

male domination and female subordination. According to her, inequalities are emerging also along generational, class and racial lines in which divisions among women are as important as divisions between men and women. The agency needs to explain the differing motivations and ways that transform cultural meaning and resources. This, again, makes it necessary to think about agency within power relations. (McNay 2000, 1–4.)

Conceptually agency is rather complex as there are no clear boundaries for the concept. The question remains if all actions are constitutive of agency. (Cleaver 2007, 240.) There also exist complexities in the implementations of agency. Many times decisions are made by groups, not individuals, and the possibilities to affect collective choices differ according to the given context. (Deneulin & Shahani 2009, 28.) Therefore it is important to think further how agency can be exercised within the existing social context and the parameters of a development program or a project. Diverse possibilities to exercise agency are not enough as there needs to be recognition of the importance of the structure too. The knowledge of *why* and *how* individuals act and the *effects* on different actors need more emphasis in analyses. (Cleaver 2007, 241.)

Overall the concept of agency is very widely discussed in the sociological literature. For the purposes of this research I limit my review of the concept to the extent it has been used in relation to human development and, further, sustainable development. I will discuss the concept in relation to the questions of culture and power as these two concepts are important also in the discussion on socially sustainable development.

3.1 Agency in the Human Development Approach

One of the main contemporary development theories emphasizing the importance of agency is the Human Development Approach (also called as Capability Approach or Capabilities Approach) that was originally developed by the economist-philosopher Amartya Sen. In Sen's most important work *Development as Freedom* (1999), development is defined as the expansion of capabilities or more precisely as the persons' "freedom to lead lives that they have reason to value" (Sen 1999, 87). Later, Sen's work has been developed by Martha C. Nussbaum and number of other scholars. The main

objective in capability approach is to expand what people are actually able to do and to be (Nussbaum 2011, x; Deneulin & Shahani 2009, 23).

The Human Development Approach has had a massive impact on international bodies that discuss global welfare, such as World Bank and United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Today, there are only few countries that do not produce their Human Development Reports annually. (Nussbaum 2011, x.) According to the Human Development theory, development is not only increase in incomes but it is broader and dependent on more determinants such as social and economic arrangements (education, health care) and political and civil rights (liberty to participate in public discussion). Social institutions that relate to all the sectors of the society contribute to the development through their effects on enhancing individual freedoms. (Sen 1999.)

The key terms of the Human Development Approach are *functionings*, *capability* and *agency*. In this approach an individual practicing agency is understood “as someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well” (Sen 1999, 19). Therefore, Sen’s perception of agency is centered to the individual agency and is closely related to the concept of freedom.

Particularly, Amartya Sen’s theory is concerned with “the agency role of the individual as a member of the public and as a participant in economic, social and political actions” (Sen 1999, 19). Sen argues that in development practice “the people have to be seen ... as being actively involved – given the opportunity – in shaping their own destiny, and not just as passive recipients of the fruits of cunning development programs” (Sen 1999, 53). From this perspective, development relies on individual agency: people’s freedom to make decisions, define priorities and choose the best means to achieve development (Deneulin & Shanani 2009, 27–28). The state and the society should not have ready-made delivery but rather a supportive role in strengthening and safeguarding human capabilities. (Sen 1999, 53).

According to Sen (1999, 75) functionings “reflects the various things a person may value doing or being”. These things may be very elementary ones, such as being well-nourished, but can also contain very complex activities such as being able to take part in the life of a

community. There are both direct and indirect valuations in the lives of human beings, meaning that some functionings may directly enrich person's life (such as being nourished or being healthy) and some others may contribute to the further production. Sen gives an example of this by discussing about education. Education of an individual can add value to the overall production in the economy and also at the same time increase the income of that individual. However, the individual can also benefit from education by being able to read, communicate, argue, choose a more informed way and being taken more seriously by others. In human capability approach these broader roles are valued as much as the direct value of education. (Sen 1999, 293–294.)

The last main concept of Sen's theory – capability – is defined as a freedom to achieve different combinations of functionings that person has reason to value. In other words, capability is a freedom to achieve various lifestyles. (Sen 1999, 87.) Capability is not only a set of abilities residing inside a person but also opportunities created by the combination of the political, economic and social circumstances and the personal abilities. Therefore it is important to distinguish between *internal* and *combined* capabilities. A society might produce internal capabilities very well by providing education but at the same time it might restrict the person's capability to take part in political life by denying free speech. On the other hand, some societies might be very open for their citizens to participate public discussion but they fail in providing education or health care which both are crucial for people to participate. The Human Development approach is focused on choice as it perceives that any good society should be promoting a wide set of opportunities to its people which people then may or may not exercise – the choice is theirs. It is also close to the ground as the main questions it asks and answers are ones that human beings pose in normal lives to their selves and to others: “What am I able to do and to be? What are my real options?”. (Nussbaum 2011; 18–22, 106.)

This freedom centered understanding of the process of development is an agent-oriented view. Individuals should be able to shape their own future and help each other if there are adequate social opportunities available. According to Sen, there is a strong rationale for recognizing the positive role of free agency. (Sen 1999, 10–11.) Ultimately, agency should be central to addressing the deprivations of today: poverty, unfulfilled elementary needs, occurrence of famines, hunger, violation of political rights, neglect of women and so on. Expansion of freedom and agency is seen in the Human Development Approach as both

the end and the means of development. Development consists of the removal of various types of unfreedoms that leave people with no choice of exercising their reasoned agency. (Sen 1999.)

3.2 Agency and Culture

The questions of culture and values are critical in the discussions on agency because of the human diversity itself – our values tend to be heterogeneous. As a concept, culture is without question one of the most complex ones in social science. Being used in several disciplines from anthropology to literacy to sociology and even further it is difficult to pin it down with a precise definition. For the purposes of this research, the concept of culture is understood in its most important sociological use as referring to “the whole texture of a society and the way language, symbols, meanings, beliefs and values organize social practices” (Bocock 1992, 230). To this I would like to add that culture is our everyday practice and it is dynamic as its nature.

The cultural approaches to development in both theory and praxis are no more unusual and the popularity of these approaches has been growing because they seem to serve variety of interests. Also the discussion on agency tends to emphasize the importance of culture in relation to the agency. Watson (2006, 58) argues that there is a wider shift and convergence in attitudes towards culture from both governmental and non-governmental actors in development and this can be seen also in the success of Human Development thought. In search for post-colonial future, many actors want to integrate culture into development after years of colonial and modernizing approaches in which local cultures have been devaluated. However, some critics claim that also the development itself is a cultural construct of West (Schech & Haggis 2000, 53).

According to Sen (2004, 38) it is important to think *how* and *how not* culture matters. When thinking about issues of pluralism and differing cultural values it is important to remember that no culture is homogenous. In every culture there are varying voices even though many times the most powerful ones have the access to writing and political expression. However, the voices of minorities, women, rural people and other marginalized

groups must also be heard even though they might not be as strong. (Nussbaum 2011, 106–107; Sen 2004, 43.)

In contemporary discussion the understanding of heterogeneities, complex interactions and the worlds of meaning have gained more and more attention and the concept of culture has become more and more important in search for effective development. Also Olivier de Sardan (2005) claims that the cultural approach to development involves interactions between heterogeneous norms, cultures, values and knowledge. This includes the notion that development also includes confrontation, negotiation and power struggles. Informal and transversal structures such as networks and different levels of relationships are seen important in development and social change. Olivier de Sardan also notes that processes of development are diachronic which acknowledges the historical perspective to development. Lastly, development should not only highlight the external constraints but also the capacity of innovation of individuals and local groups.

As mentioned, for some theorists, agency is more prescribed by the culture the agents are members of. Culture is understood having constraining effects because of the difficulties of acting beyond the roles that society has placed for us. Social institutions are seen constraining us invisibly by presenting accepted ways of thinking and doing things. (Bourdieu 1977; Archer 2000.) However, Bourdieu (1977) also suggests that agents are potentially capable of generating change through both routine practises and purposive acts. Creative agents can be able of overcome constraints and generate cultural change.

3.3 Agency and Power

As mentioned earlier, the exercise of agency is also tied to questions of power and authority. To be an agent depends on the ability to act and make a difference. Thus, to be an agent requires exercising some sort of power. The power to act is constrained by social structures, which usually means that some individuals are in better social positions to deploy resources, to shape rules and to exercise power than others. (Clever 2007, 227–228.) However, agency is not only about choice but it can also be about challenging existing power relations. Agents can question norms and the ways things are commonly

done, challenge inequitable distribution of resources and claim and extend rights. (Cleaver 2007, 230.)

According to Kabeer (1999a), agency has both positive and negative meanings in relation to power. In the positive sense agency is ‘power to’: it is “people’s capacity to define their own life-choices and pursue their own goals, even in the face of opposition from others” (Kabeer 1999a, 438). The negative sense of agency refers to ‘power over’ meaning that some actor or actors have the capacity to override the agency of others for example by using violence, coercion or threat (ibid.).

Still, not all agents are in equal position to make decisions and not all choices are equal either. Our world views and norms often have strongly gendered and socially stratified ideas of how an individual should behave giving the social identity they have. Most commonly gender and class caste can shape engagement and outcomes for different people. (Cleaver 2007; 230–231, 235.) There is also an association between poverty and disempowerment for the reason that incapability to meet basic needs often leads to incapability to exercise meaningful choice. This is because making choice requires alternatives that are often missing if person is suffering from poverty. (Kabeer 1999a, 437.)

However, according to Kabeer (1999a, 437), even though if basic survival was not dominant in people’s life, not all choices are equal as some of them have greater significance than others when it comes to their consequences on people’s lives. She makes distinction between first-order choices that fundamentally shape person’s life (such as choice of livelihood, whether and who to marry or whether to have children) and second-order choices that affect the quality of life but do not define it more deeply. According to Kabeer (ibid.), agency is not only potential *ability* to exercise choice but more about the real *effects* these choices can have. Therefore the emphasis should be on the expansion of people’s ability to make strategic choices in their life.

The following table shows the three interrelated dimensions within the ability to exercise choice can be understood: firstly, resources form the conditions under which choices are made; secondly, agency is at the core of the process by which choice are made; and lastly, achievements are the outcomes of choices. In this table resources refer not only to material

resources but also to the various social and human resources that enhance the ability to exercise choice.

Resources	Agency	Achievements
(pre-conditions)	(process)	(outcomes)

Picture 2: The ability to exercise choice according to Kabeer (1999, 437).

Another important aspect of agency is to recognize the importance of unconscious motivations and self-disciplining of conscious actions. Not all acts are the results of conscious strategy but they can be acts of everyday habits and routines. (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens 1984.) Often, agency tends to be operationalized as decision making but in reality it is more than just observable actions. For actions to become real there is a need for both material possibilities and sense of agency, or ‘power within’ (Kabeer 1999a, 438). The meaning, motivation and purpose that people bring to their activity are important parts of agency as well. Agency can take a form of negotiation, bargaining, manipulation, deception, subversion and resistance too as well as even more cognitive processes of analysis and reflection. It can be exercised both by an individual as an individual or by a group of individuals organized as formal or informal groups. Important point is that people need to conceptualize their own agency, have a *sense* of agency. (Kabeer 1999a, 438; Kabeer 1999b, 4.)

Participation and agency are closely related as participation is a process where people act as agents either as individuals or as members of a group. Participation is about the freedom to make decisions concerning the matters that affect one’s life and also to hold other accountable for the promises that have been made. (Deneulin & Shahani 2009, 30.) However, participation alone should not be seen as leading to benefits in all cases. For example gendered agency and participation is commonly translated as counting the number of women participating in local committees or councils. This however does not reveal the gendered dynamics in the meetings or gendered norms of articulation. The number of women participants does not reveal who are privileged or oppressed. (Clever 2007, 237.) According to Cleaver (1999), there has not been inadequate understanding of the role of structure and agency in social change. Participation in itself is often understood as

empowering, regardless of the actual activity. In reality, there usually exist limitations to the genuine participation due to the wider structural factors shaping the development intervention.

In conclusion, in this research I define agency, following Sen (1999) and Bourdieu (1977), as capability to act and influence both personal development and societal and cultural change based on the values of the agent. As according to Kabeer (1999a), agency is understood not only as visible actions but also as being able to take multiple forms, such as negotiation, bargaining and resistance – as well as having sense of agency. However, as agency is relational, it is important to acknowledge that social institutions can have enabling and constraining effects on one's agency. Further, it must be acknowledged that, despite these definitions, in this research I am more interested in attributions and paradoxes of agency rather than starting from a strict definition for the concept. These attributions and paradoxes are created in the framework of socially sustainable development which is discussed further in the next chapter.

4 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

4.1 What is Development?

In general terms, ‘development’ has been regarded as desirable objective with material progress and improved living standards. However, the conceptions of ‘development’ embed also notions of culture. As modernization theories have had such a pervasive influence to development thinking it is sometimes difficult to separate ideas of modernization from the ideas of development. As modernization is a process of economic and social change that emerged originally in Europe, some critics including Schech and Haggis (2000, 15) claim that the whole thinking of development has its “cultural home in the European Enlightenment”. A number of scholars (e.g. Gardner & Lewis 1996; Olivier de Sardan 2005) perceive that despite of the crisis of development orthodoxy there still is need to redress poverty that could be tackled with anthropological approaches to development. In these approaches culture is brought in the centre of development theory and practice.

In the discussion on sustainable development the concept of development is typically understood as Human Development that was already discussed in the previous chapter. In the Human Development Approach, the expansion of freedom and agency is understood both as the *primary end* and the *principal means* of development. Sen (1999) also calls them the constitutive role and the instrumental role of freedom in development. According to Sen, this aspect of the approach makes this theory different from the ones that only concentrate on the economic growth. In the Human Development Approach, substantive freedoms include some very elementary capabilities like being able to avoid undernourishment, starvation, escapable morbidity and premature mortality. But they also include being literate and numerate, enjoying political participation and freedom of speech. These freedoms are important in enriching people’s lives and development is a process of expanding these freedoms. This overall expansion of freedoms refers to the constitutive role of freedom in development. (Sen 1999, 36.)

Sen also understands freedoms as the means of development. Different kinds of rights, entitlements and opportunities also contribute to the expansion of freedom in person's life in general. This is not only because the expansion of one kind of freedom contributes to the development as a whole because development itself is understood as a process of enlargement of freedoms. In addition, there is interrelation between different types of freedoms meaning that one freedom might advance freedoms of other types. For example, political freedoms in the form of free speech and elections promote economic security whereas education, health care, and other social opportunities facilitate economic participation. Economic opportunities and participation further generate personal welfare and increase public resources for social facilities. Sen describes five types of instrumental freedoms that, according to him, "tend to contribute to the general capability of a person to live more freely, but they also serve to complement one another." (Sen 1999, 38). These five are political freedoms, economic facilities, social opportunities, transparency guarantees and protective security. (Sen 1999; 10–11, 36–38.)

4.2 Sustainable Development in the Global Context

In the past decades, the discourse on the concept of sustainable development has been increasingly important when discussing on issues concerning global development. Originally the concept of sustainable development was prompted in 1970s by the debate following a report of the Club of Rome which drew attention to the environmental consequences of economic growth. However, the concept took more substantial shape in 1987 when the report by the World Commission on Environment and Development, "Our Common Future", was published. (Throsby 2008.) Since the introduction of the Human Development Approach and the first Human Development Report by UNDP in 1990, the valuation of social and cultural aspects has become more important along the ecological and economic ones. As mentioned, the Human Development approach replaced the centrality of economic growth in the development policies by broader notions of development as a human-centered rather than a commodity-centered process (Throsby 2008, 2).

The concept of sustainable development, its meaning and the global procedures to enhance it have been negotiated in several global conferences since 1992. Sustainable development

has been legitimized following the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development that was held in Brazil in 1992 (Earth Summit); the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development held in 1993; the World Summit for Sustainable Development that was held in Johannesburg in 2002 (Nurse 2006); and the latest Rio+20 Earth Summit held in Brazil in 2012. In these conferences the concept has been negotiated to its global form through formulation of different action plans and guidelines such as the Brundtland Report and Agenda 21 (ibid.).

Originally, the report by the World Commission on Environment and Development, “Our Common Future”, defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED 1987, 43). There are three commonly accepted dimensions within the concept of sustainable development: ecological, economic and social. (WCED, 1987.) Later, sustainable development has been regarded as a process of reconciliation of three imperatives: firstly the ecological one of living within global biophysical carrying capacity and maintaining biodiversity; secondly the social one to ensure the development of democratic systems of governance in order to sustain the values that people wish to live by; and lastly the economic one to make sure that the basic needs are met for everyone worldwide (Robinson & Tinker, 1997; Dale, 2001).

In this research the concentration is on the social sustainability and I will not go to the economic and ecological aspects more thoroughly. Traditionally the social dimension has also included the cultural view but in the recent studies it has been also separated as its own dimension or even referred to be the central dimension for sustainable development as a whole. (e.g. Hawkes 2001; Nurse 2006; Duxbury & Gillette, 2007.) In this research culture and so called cultural sustainability are considered as inseparable and fundamental aspects of the idea of sustainability and sustainable development as a whole. I will not go more precisely in the concept of cultural sustainability but I will discuss culture as part of the idea of sustainability and development throughout this paper.

4.3 Social Sustainability in the Development Discourse

In the Brundtland report, the concept of social sustainability is described as being based on ethical principles, such as social justice, equity within and between generations, and peace and security (WCED, 1987). Consistently, Munasinghe (1993) has defined socio-cultural sustainability as a concept that seeks to preserve the stability of social and cultural systems, including the reduction of destructive conflicts. It has also been defined as “a life-enhancing condition within communities and a process within communities that can achieve that condition” (McKenzie 2004, 12). The concept of social-culturally sustainable development seeks for the community’s ability to transfer awareness of social sustainability from one generation to the next. Widespread political participation of citizens (McKenzie 2004, 23) and the grass-roots participation have been considered as important definers of the concept (Munasinghe 1993, 3).

In the discussion on the concept, socially sustainable communities should have a sense of community responsibility and mechanisms to recognize the existing strengths and needs. Besides recognition, the communities should also be able to fulfill their needs where possible. (McKenzie 2004, 23.) Similarly to the ideas of the Human Development approach, Williams (2003, 14) adds that this capacity requires individuals to have “the freedom to choose how to improve their quality of life in the context of their own communities and social networks”.

Therefore, the concept of values is an important aspect for social sustainability. Social sustainability relates not only to the stability of social systems but also to the maintenance of community values. These values relate to the ethics, value systems, language, education, work attitude, class systems and so on, that influence societal relations and systems. (Nurse, 2006.) Importantly, in sustainable development there is a desire to ensure that the transformation will not only happen but will also persist. Initiatives striving for sustainable development are investing in the process of rootedness that I will discuss more in depth in the next chapter. Sustainable processes should be able to adapt to changing times as well as changing contexts. (Banuri & Najam 2002, 72–74.) Consistently, Williams (2003, 18) claims that “socially sustainable communities have the capacity to deal with change and to adapt to new situations.”

4.3.1 Rootedness and Social Capital as Factors for Social Sustainability

According to Banuri and Najam (2002) rootedness in the local context is the most important factor in the concept of sustainable development. Also Friberg and Hettne (1985, 220) have claimed that the development to be sustainable it should be rooted in the specific values and institutions of the specific culture. Initiatives that emerge from the community and build on local traditions and wisdom have understood to be able to create ownership and pride that many times are missing in projects planned and implemented by outsiders. Therefore, actions that focus on building social capital rather than physical capital can drive society towards sustainable development. (Banuri & Najam, 2002.)

The concept of social capital has indeed been relevant in the discussion on social sustainability. Social capital refers to capability to handle social, economic and environmental problems and to be active in shaping the development of the whole system. It consists of the values and norms of the society, human capital and labor force, local knowledge of the environment as well as health and life expectancy and the cultural and social integrity. (Hediger 2000, 484–485.) Valuing and protecting the positive aspects of disparate cultures and preserving the cultural diversity are perceived as essential aspects of sustainability. (McKenzie 2004, 23; Munasinghe, 1993.)

According to Banuri and Najam (2002), there is more transitional aspect to the perspective of rootedness in the local context as it does not only involve communities in implementation and design of development projects but also help build communities to make collective decisions in general. In sustainable development, the design phase must happen not before the implementation but during implementation. It must begin with a search for practitioners who are sensitive to the environments they work in and innovative in the approaches they adopt in their practice. (Banuri & Najam 2002, 88.)

As mentioned, one of the important factors in the discussion on sustainability is that the positive transformation will not only happen but will also persist. According to Banuri and Najam (2002), community rootedness can sustain the effort long after the external resources and interests have dried up. Therefore for development to be sustainable and

sustained, it has to be ‘contextual’, rooted in context. Civic activities exercised by the individuals in the local context can contribute to the social capital, bring people together, build partnerships and networks, and develop new ways of collaboration and interaction. (ibid.; 57, 82.)

Also according to Dale and Onyx (2005), many communities address complex issues of sustainable development through forming networks as they are powerful means of distributing knowledge. The networks can also lead to reconciliation of previously competing interests and information. Networks are composed of actors who are connected with ties where different ties create different networks (Borgatti & Foster, 2003).

4.3.2 Communities and Institutions as Factors for Social Sustainability

Many development actors perceive ‘community’ as the way to achieve socially sustainable development in the contexts where development interventions are taking place. Questions remain how to define, access and form partnerships with the ‘community’. (Watson 2006, 59.) Indeed, concentration on communities has shown problems as it tends to forget differences between people and the local heterogeneities within the community. (Gardner & Lewis 1996, 112.) Communities have been perceived as homogenous groups that collectively know what they would like and what would be the common interest. It has been typical to understand certain traditional institutions (e.g. village councils) as entry points to the communities and by building on them development has been seen as culturally appropriate. However, these traditional institutions are sometimes falsely seen as something eternal and unchanging and it is easily forgotten that these institutions too are embedded in complex social and political processes. Also, including only traditional institutions is inevitably political because legitimizing some representatives is likely to mean promoting one ethnic group or such over another. (Watson 2006, 59–65.)

In this common view the meaning of ‘community’ refers to a small village or town in which people live in physical contact to each other. However, according to Banuri and Najam (2002, 58–59) there are also broader conceptions of the word ‘community’. According to them, these broader conceptions are especially relevant to the practice of sustainable development. The conception can also include imaginary communities like

nations of ethnicities or even communities of knowledge like scientific communities. (Banuri & Najam 2002, 58–59.) A community is culturally defined and it is rooted in the specific values and institutions rather than physical space (Friberg & Hettne 1985, 220).

These broader conceptions bring out that successful sustainable development initiatives are aimed at *building* communities. Sustainable development is not about solving a single problem but developing capacity to solve a succession of problems. In this the goal of building a community is placed at the center and viewed as a necessary condition of sustainable development. The community's interests and involvement are important not only because they make implementation easier but also because the building of communities is in itself a key measure of sustainable development. (Banuri & Najam 2002, 58–59.)

Another important factor for creating social sustainability is investing in *institutions*. Institutions can be understood as arrangements that can “bring about a harmony between individual actions and collective interests” (Banuri & Najam 2002, 96). Therefore, investing in institutions means investing in social norms, values, principles and decision-making rules. The presumption is that when people start taking care of the water, they automatically become concerned about their environment and they start taking care of their resources. Therefore effective village-level institutions with a massive network of participating people would allow creation of beneficial and functioning structures with a low cost. Investments in the local institutions would also benefit for the development to be more sustainable. (Banuri & Najam, 2002.)

According to Banuri and Najam (2002, 100), the key to strong institutions is communication and partnerships. In fact, according to Banuri and Najam, the building of community institutions rests on open system of communication. Communication is created from building a system for dialogue and consultation with and within the community and it enables transferring the actions and expectations of different stakeholders to each other. It has been even perceived that sustainable development is actually not about designing a process; it is about sustaining a dialogue. (Banuri & Najam 2002, 98–99.)

Partnerships, in their part, bridge across different divisions of the social domain like disciplines, agendas, interest groups, functional groups, income groups, political groups

and genders. In the practices of sustainable development the attempt is to overcome one or more of these divisions. Also according to Newman and Dale (2005), sustainable development and agency can be stimulated through a diverse mix of bonding ties and bridging ties. Bonding ties refer to social networks that are created inside homogenous communities and repeated during ongoing personal contacts, whereas bridging ties involve the networks to other groups outside the community that connect people to others with diverse social backgrounds. Both, the lack of bridging ties or too many bonding ties, can inhibit agency. (Newman & Dale, 2005.)

4.4 Critique towards Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has been widely accepted but has also been criticized. Much of the criticism has been targeted towards the vagueness of the concept and the lack of a comprehensive theoretical framework for sustainable development (e.g. Qizilbash, 2001; Jabareen, 2004). However, for the purposes of this research, instead of concentrating on conceptual criticism I will look at criticism that has linkages to the concept of socially sustainable development in the small scale NGO development interventions specifically.

Firstly, it is important to understand that culture shapes what is understood by sustainability and development and how people act upon it (Nurse, 2006). Thus one line of criticism towards sustainable development is concerned about the equality of different cultures in the discussion on sustainable development. According to Nurse (2006), sustainable development world is informed by Western notions and expectations especially from various global and national donor agencies. The problem emerges if Western science is seen as the cause or the solution to the development problems in the global South and, at the same time, traditional or localized, non-Western knowledge is either seen as backward and problematic or, conversely, romanticized. Therefore it is important to understand that culture should not be considered only as another aspect of sustainable development but also as basis for questioning the meaning and practice of sustainable development. It is important to question whose agenda is being served after all. (Nurse, 2006.)

Therefore it is important to also notice that even though theories for more flexible and diverse courses for change towards sustainable development are supported, there still

remain barriers as well. It is common that the Western donors have procedures that may in reality make it problematic to value local priorities or enable the communities to take advantage of the opportunities that have been created. In addition, donors might be unwilling to support processes that aim at improving the interaction between the state and the local communities. (Satterthwaite, 2003.)

Another interesting criticism in relation to this research is the criticism on sustainable development paradoxically being devoid of politics despite it includes interaction between people and also environment (Bryant 1991, 164). According to Ferguson (1994, 86), the problem of this lies in perception of people being purely individuals. This perception places the burden of underdevelopment on the individuals and at the same time reduces political and structural causes of poverty. This makes development as something that can be reached through people changing their attitudes. In line, Botchway (2001, 146) argues that “this constitution of development with its emphasis on participation, empowerment and sustainability in development projects reflects a blindness to the wider socioeconomic processes which contributed to the need for development.”

Therefore, as an increasing number of development institutions raise interest in sustainable development critical questioning of political nature of sustainable development becomes important (Elliot 2006, 236). According to Bryant (1991, 164), sustainable development is often presented from a techno-managerial perspective in which strategies, such as including social values and encouraging grassroots participation, can be implemented without conflict and negotiation. Therefore he argues that the way sustainable development is presented fails to address political issues that are vital for the success of sustainable development strategies, such as who actually formulates and implements the strategies and what does grassroots participation actually mean. (Bryant 1991, 164.)

Newman and Dale (2005) in turn criticize the importance of social capital as a primary indicator of community's ability to engage in sustainable development. Even though social capital is an important component in sustainable development its amount does not directly correlate with the success of problem solving process. Newman and Dale suggest that ‘bonding’ social capital consisting of strong community ties can in fact be negative in excess quantity as it can “lead to the enforcement of social norms that hinder innovative change” (ibid. 477). They suggest that ‘bridging’ ties outside the community can allow

actors to bring about critical social changes and therefore agency can be reached through a dynamic mix of both, bonding and bridging ties. Thus, paradoxically, those communities who actually are open to outsiders can create the type of social capital that rather creates than hinders agency. Therefore Newman and Dale (2005) argue that to optimise the capability to engage sustainable development, bridging ties outside the community should be encouraged whereas bonding ties kept to a minimum in order to encourage connection between different networks and increase access to resources outside the group.

Consistently, according to Mansuri and Rao (2003), external agents have a strong influence on the sustainability of the projects. Based on the qualitative study conducted in Malawi, Kleemeier (2000) argues that despite the perception that participation is the most effective mean in both delivering and sustaining development outcomes strong participation and agency alone are not enough to ensure sustainability of development intervention. There is also a need for strong institutional support from external agencies to reach sustainability. Even though the communities are successful in creating a project they many times lack the material resources and connections to sustain the efforts (Cleaver, 1999).

Therefore Mansuri and Rao (2003) suggest that even though sustainable development projects are commonly based on strong individual and community involvement they also suffer from the problem of being ignored by government after completed. In case the communities are unable to lobby for continued support, their ability to sustain such project is limited. Therefore, even though community participation has become important for sustainable development, it must be recognized that it does not offer an unproblematic panacea for sustainable development (Elliot 2006, 236.) It has even been argued that participation has substituted the structural reforms that would be needed for wider social change (Botchway 2001, 135).

Lastly, there has also occurred criticism towards sustainable development when it comes to the possibility to generalize sustainable practices in the larger scale. Even though the importance of rootedness in individual and particular is important for sustainable development, the developments should also serve as a trigger for broader changes in the society. However, only a very few civil society organizations have been able to grow their bottom-up approaches bigger which has been perceived problematic. (Banuri & Najam 2002, 68–72.)

Overall, sustainable development is an important and legitimized concept in the global policy making and development interventions both on the global and local scale. However, the concept has also been criticised as presented above. In this research, the concentration is on the social aspect of sustainable development which emphasizes the importance of development interventions being rooted in the values of the people and the communities. Based on the literature presented in this chapter, socially sustainable development is also based on open communication, participation and networks. Next, I will proceed to introduce my methodology and data that I collected from NGOs aiming towards sustainable development in Jinja, Uganda.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Starting Points for This Research

I started this research project at the end of 2011 after starting my studies in an International Master's Degree Program for Development and International Cooperation. Already at the beginning I expressed my interest towards questions of culture, sustainability and agency especially in the context of concrete development practices and interventions. For a long time I have been interested in how development actions are negotiated in the contexts where groups of people with different social and cultural backgrounds usually operate. These ideas were already present in my Bachelor's thesis where I was looking at the perceptions of Finnish development cooperation actors on development practices in Afghanistan.

My focus became clearer in the spring of 2012 when I got an internship placement from a small local NGO in Jinja, Uganda. My placement supported me with my research and was positive about my data collection during the internship. At that point I decided to focus more precisely on the concept of sustainable development. One reason for the focus was theoretical one: I believe that it is valuable to review the phenomenon and discussion around sustainable development because of its increasing importance in the planning, evaluation and funding of development projects and programs worldwide. The concept is very widely acknowledged across the world among different kinds of development actors and has even become a mantra for different actors to gain funding, acceptance and professionalism. At the same time, sustainable development has also been able to create true success stories and positive change as it has allowed solutions initiating from the global South and the people of the specific areas themselves. Therefore, it provides an interesting base for analysis and debate.

The other reason for selecting socially sustainable development as a focus point was that my Ugandan host organization's core mission was to aim towards sustainable development in their development practice. Therefore I was able to have a close look at the daily practices of such small scale NGO and how they perceive socially sustainable development

in their work. I believe that my work in a local NGO helped me to further understand the functioning of the other NGOs in the area and the actors who were interviewed for the purposes of this research. Through my experiences during my internship I was able to understand the language used in the NGOs, the local governmental structures and even meanings behind the words.

It is important to notice that in this research, with its limited data, I am not aiming at providing a perfect or comprehensive picture of all NGOs in Uganda or even in Jinja area. I realize that the NGO sector is very complex and diverse both locally and globally. This is clear also when thinking about Jinja area as it has for long been a 'hot-spot' for foreigners wanting to set-up a development NGO in Africa. In addition, especially during the last decade, setting up an NGO has become very popular activity among middle class Ugandans. Therefore there are tens of different kinds of development organizations in this specific area that are many times focusing on for example orphans and street children. However for the purposes of this research I chose organizations that have more holistic view on development and that are specifically aiming towards sustainable development in their projects and programs.

5.2 Methods of Data Collection

This research is a qualitative research. Qualitative approach is appropriate when the interest is in people's and organizations' everyday practices and how they perceive the world around them. I also apply constructionist viewpoint in a sense that I accept that there are power dynamics around this research. I won't be making any overall assumptions or try to find one 'right answer', as there are different ways of seeing things and different interpretations depending on the people taking part in this research. (Laws 2003; 27, 273.)

The concept of *meaning* is important in qualitative research (Eskola & Suoranta 1998, 51). Also in this research, importance is on understanding how things and issues related to the questions of socially sustainable development and agency are perceived and acted upon in the NGOs. When talking about human beings and their ways of being, meanings are always present. Meanings permeate our understanding, and change according to the

cultural and social context. Therefore reality is whatever the informants report to the researcher and entering 'reality' as such is impossible because reality is whatever is found from the processes of understanding and interpretation. Thus, reality is socially constructed and collective conception. Language on the other hand is a product of this social reality as well as a producer of it (Eskola & Suoranta 1998; 45, 138–139).

I started my journey to Uganda in the beginning of August 2012 and I collected the research data in October and November 2012. As the data collection method I decided to use semi-structured interviews. I selected this method because interviews are a good source of empirical data when the researcher wants to gain information about people's experiences or views in some depth. (Laws 2003, 286.) Another benefit of semi-structured interview is that in contrast to structured interviews, the researcher is able to adjust to the situation easily (e.g. Davies 2008; Hirsjärvi et. al. 2009). I had prepared an outline for the interviews (Appendix 1) but I was also able to alter the wording and the order of the questions. In addition, semi-structured interviews allowed me to include supplementary questions in order to gain open ended responses in the interviewees' own words. (Davies 2008, 105–106; Hirsjärvi et. al. 2009, 205.)

For semi-structured interviews to be successful, it is important that the interviewees are selected carefully and the researcher is able to trust the information they provide. (Laws 2003, 286.) For this research, the interviewees were mainly found through personal contacts and therefore I was able to be sure that they were working in the NGO sector. At first, my tactic was to make random phone calls and send emails but this tactic appeared to be fruitless. People did not pick up or their phone numbers were outdated and I did not receive replies to my emails. My second tactic was to approach the data collection through the connections I already had. At the point when I started concentrating on data collection, I had been in Jinja for about 2.5 months and I had created a good network of friends and colleagues around the town. Through that network I was able to connect suitable interviewees who then led me to other possible interviewees.

All in all, I successfully collected nine semi-structured interviews. The interviews were conducted in time and space outside of usual social interaction. The language used in the interviews was English and no translator was needed. All of the interviewees had gone through at least basic education and were therefore able to clearly communicate in English.

The interviews were recorded with the consent from the interviewee. During one of the interviews the battery of my recorder ran out and thus I had to capture rest of the interview by writing notes. The quality of sound of the recorded interviews was fine and clear enough to create transcriptions later on. Overall, the transcription and the notes resulted in a bit over 110 pages of text with 1.5 spacing.

I was also planning of doing more comprehensive observation in the NGO where I was working and the NGO head had approved my plans prior to my arrival to Uganda. However, in the end I had to drop my plans of observation. There were three reasons for that: firstly, I was given a lot more responsibility in my job than I was expecting in the first place. This was great for my self-development as a development cooperation professional but required more time and dedication, and left me with a very little time to write a comprehensive observation journal at the same time I was working. Secondly, as the organization was very small and we were all working together, my colleagues also became my close friends. Therefore I found it challenging to jump from the role of a colleague and friend to the role of a researcher within the given timeframe. Lastly, as I was holding a rather important role in one of the programs of the organization, I found it challenging to assess my own work as a researcher. For these reasons I decided to drop the idea of more comprehensive observation and concentrated instead on understanding the context through my work and selecting a good sample of interviewees for the purpose of my research.

After returning back to Finland and transcribing my data, I wanted to refocus my research according to what I had learned in Uganda and from the interviews I had collected. As my research relies on empirical data, it became clear at that point that *agency* was playing an important part in the descriptions of my interviewees when they were talking about their practices for enhancing sustainable development. I want to mention that, as typical to the qualitative research process (e.g. Hirsjärvi 2009, 126), during this process my thinking has been in constant transformation and therefore my research questions have also been reframed again and again. I wanted to approach this research without any strong preprogrammed ideas or pictures of how things work in the NGOs that I was interviewing. Indeed, I wanted to get an idea of how they perceive sustainable development that they say they want to enhance, and what kind of concrete actions and examples they have for doing this.

Therefore my aim was to apply *methodological populism* which is an approach that considers that grassroots groups and actors have knowledge and strategies that should be explored without commenting on their value or validity (Olivier de Sardan 2005, 9). Put another way, I have tried to avoid ideological and populist views where “a romantic vision of popular knowledge” is painted (ibid.) I believe my internship created a good basis for this approach as at the point I started to collect interviews I already had a realistic picture of the NGO sector in the area. In addition I was able to understand the concrete functioning and procedures that are expected from the NGOs in Uganda and the role of the local governance that plays a significant role in the development cooperation practices.

5.3 Description of Data

According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998, 135), any good qualitative research contains rich descriptive data: people’s own written or spoken words, their artifacts, or their observable activities. Qualitative research should provide ‘thick descriptions’ of social life. Thus, for the purposes of this research I interviewed nine people in Jinja, Uganda during October and November 2012. Four of the interviewees were women, whereas five were men. They were all Ugandan by origin and they worked in five different Ugandan grassroots NGOs in Jinja area. (See Table 1)

Finding suitable interviewees was rather easy in Jinja as the town is very popular among both international and local NGOs and there are plenty of concrete development interventions going on in the area. The interviewees were selected from small NGOs operating in the area. In the end I was able to narrow the sample even more specifically to NGO actors who work in such organizations that had close connection to the concept of sustainable development. All the interviewees worked in NGOs that had ‘sustainable development’ in their values or visions for the future and ‘sustainable development’ was many times mentioned on the NGOs’ web pages, office walls, or project plans. Such definition was beneficial for the purposes of this research because I wanted the interviewees to have their own perception of the concept of sustainable development’ rather than me defining it to them from my perspective.

Another choice was to select interviewees who were Ugandan by origin and who all worked with NGOs that were also founded by Ugandans. Often research concentrating on development interventions deal with projects and programs where people from global North and global South are in interaction and there is less research on interaction between the local NGOs and those to whom the NGOs actions are targeted to. Therefore I wanted to add another viewpoint by looking at intervention done by people with the same national origin as those people to whom the intervention is targeted.

The interviewees had differing backgrounds in the NGOs they were working in. Some of the interviewees were the founding members of the organizations whereas some of them had come on board through volunteering. All of them had very insightful opinions and views about the purposes and daily functions of the organization they were working in. It was not difficult to motivate the interviewees to talk and discuss more. However, for some of the interviewees, some of the questions appeared to be difficult to understand. For example, the question “What kind of factors enable sustainability?” seemed to be difficult in a few interviews and therefore it was transformed to “What kind of things are in advantage when you try to reach the sustainability in your projects?” or such. In this, the nature of semi-structured interviewees was extremely important as I was able to transform the questions according to the interviewees’ level of understanding.

Table 1: The main characteristics of the interviewees.

Interviewee	NGO	Gender	Position	Years in NGO
1	A	M	Technical Director	5
2	A	M	Site Manager	4
3	B	M	Founder, Program Coordinator	0,5
4	C	M	Field Officer	2
5	B	F	Founder, Nurse (running health projects)	1
6	D	F	Founder, Director	6
7	D	F	Program Officer	6
8	D	F	Field Officer	3
9	E	M	Founder	8

As mentioned earlier, the face-to-face interviews were conducted with a semi-structured method because I wanted the interviews to be more discussion like situations when there is room for deeper questions and interaction whenever needed. This way the interviews allowed flexibility and natural flow of discussion. All the interviews were pre-arranged and held in different locations around the town, mostly in the NGO offices or different cafeterias with a peaceful corner. All interviews were managed without any interruptions or presence of any outsiders. The main goal of the interviews was to understand personal aspects of the NGO activists on how the concept of socially sustainable development is perceived in their organization and what kind of concrete actions the organization has to enhance it. I had an interview outline (see Appendix 1) that I followed but I let the conversation flow and direct the interview. As I knew all of the interviewees were rather busy in their schedule and as it was difficult to come up with a suitable time for the interviews I concentrated on the topic and on the functioning, practices and ideas of the organization and the interviewee and left the more personal questions to minimum.

5.4 Data Analysis

In this research, I utilized content analysis as my method of analysis. Content analysis is both a loose theoretical framework as well as analysis of written, heard or seen contents. Content analysis is a tool to examine these contents by categorizing and summarizing similarities and differences. It is a valid qualitative analysis method for this research as its focus is on the meanings of the research content. (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2009; 91, 103–105.)

According to Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009), content analysis creates summarized descriptions of the studied phenomenon and then links these descriptions to the larger theoretical contexts of the phenomenon. I started the analysis for this research by carefully reading and rereading the transcriptions made from the interviewees and organizing the content in to a table with explanatory categories. As I had the concept of agency in the processes of socially sustainable development as my main focus, I created the table according to the presumption that I will be able to find acts of different actors from the research data. Therefore the table included categories such as ‘Who?’, ‘What?’, ‘How?’, ‘Why?’, etc. (see Appendix 2). After placing the research data into the tables, I continued

the process by reading and rereading the tables and making research memos to create summarized descriptions of the phenomenon under study. As the aim was to rely on the interplay of theory and empirical findings in the process of analysis, the final focus for this research was finalized only at this point. By analyzing the data it was clear that there were certain categories that were continuously visible in the data. For example, it was clear that information sharing and knowledge production were perceived crucial by all the interviewees and therefore it required further analysis. As according to Kiviniemi (2007, 80), the central aim in qualitative research is to create this type of synthesis by finding central categories and basic dimensions that can describe the phenomenon under research (Kiviniemi 2007, 80).

I must make a note that my presumption was that the attributions of agency would be easily determined in specific situations or project phases. For example, my presumption was that I could make conclusions such as “NGO and the local people are attributed agency in the planning process but the local government is not.” However, as I continued the process of analysis it came clear to me that in social environment of development interventions such statements are in fact impossible. Despite that, the means to socially sustainable development are many times represented in such simplistic way: for example: “full agency and ownership of the locals’ leads to socially sustainable results”. Therefore I felt it necessary to discuss this paradox among some other through the common themes that were used to describe the attributions of agency.

5.5 Reflections on the Ethics, Reliability and My Own Role in This Research

At the time I was collecting the data I was also working in a local NGO and therefore some of the interviewees knew me originally as an intern of that specific organization. I believe this was beneficial as I had already created rapport with the interviewees and they knew who I was as a person. When asking interviewees to participate my research as well as at the beginning of each interview I cleared that the research was purely for my own, academic purposes and were in no way attached to the work of my host organization. Here,

I also informed that all the data is confidential and only used for the purposes of this research.

This process of informed consent and confidentiality is important in terms of social research ethics. Informed consent refers to the relationship between the researcher and the research participants. The participants should be able to make an informed decision about whether they want to be involved in the research or not. Therefore the researcher is responsible for explaining what the research is about and who is undertaking and financing it. In addition, it needs to be explained why the research is being undertaken and how it will be disseminated. All this needs to be done in a manner that is understandable to the participants. (Davies 2008, 54.)

However, it is also important to notice the possible effects that I as a researcher might have to the research data. In order to reduce bias and build reliability for the research, it is important to exercise constant reflexivity. This means “open reflection on the researcher’s own point of view and how it influences their perceptions” (Laws 2003, 27). According to Davies (2008, 4), reflexivity means turning back on oneself. It is important to analyze how the final products of research have actually been affected by the process itself and personnel conducting research. However, reflexivity also means bringing background assumptions about people and situations to the fore and examining them. (Laws 2003, 27.)

As mentioned, I had never been to Uganda or Africa before my internship there. Therefore I actively avoided of making any presumptions of the functioning of local NGOs there or what kind of working methods, challenges and perspective these NGOs might have. During the data collection I aimed at keeping open mind and accepting the information given to me as the ‘reality’: as information given to me from that specific interviewee’s context and perspective, at that time and that place. The aim was to document and understand other’s understanding – “exploring the points of view of the research subjects” (Silvermann 2011, 133).

One topic that came up from basically all interviewees was money. The question of lack of funding came up in all interviews even though I never asked about the financial matters of the NGOs. This might be because the insufficient funding is one of the main challenges that the NGOs face in the area. However, my appearance might have also affected the

interviewing situation. According to Taylor and Bogdan (1998, 134), our own being and who are affects the way the interviewees respond to us. Depending on who we are in their lives as well as different social categories to which we belong, such as age, gender, race, or class do have an effect on how the interviewee respond.

I understand that being a white, European person might have an effect on how the interviewees responded to me. At the same time I recognize myself being part of the development aid system by being a student in the field of development and conducting research on a theme related to it. Therefore it must be noticed that this might have an effect on the research data. Even though no one straightly asked me for donations, my appearance might raise hope that I might be able to provide financial support through my connections if the NGO managed to make themselves and their work look professional and successful. I also recognize that using different ‘development buzzwords’ or development jargon in international development aid system is a way of creating professional picture and therefore such language might have been used only because of me being the interviewer.

Therefore, it is clear that there are some limitations to this research. Less than five months in Uganda and interviewees of nine NGO representatives cannot provide a full picture of the realities of development interventions aiming towards sustainable development as the interventions tend to be different depending on their context. However, the aim of this research is to look at the topic from the perspective of these NGOs working in Jinja area. Yet, to increase the reliability of this research I was able to reach saturation points during the data analysis and noticed reiteration in my interviews and interview themes.

6 ATTRIBUTIONS OF AGENCY

In this chapter I will present the results for my first research question: to whom is agency attributed in the development NGOs aiming towards socially sustainable development in Jinja area, Uganda? From the research data it was possible to recognize four different main groups to whom agency was attributed: individual NGO activists, local volunteers, local leaders, and lastly the people in the communities. In addition, the interviewees attributed agency to the NGOs. As the agency of the NGOs was mainly described in relation to the other actors I will discuss it in relation to them throughout the whole analysis.

6.1 Individual NGO Activists – Self-Motivation as an Important Factor to Pursue Sustainable Social Change

The individual NGO activists attributed agency to themselves by discussing often about their own motivations to do NGO work in Uganda. The agency was manifested through founding an NGO or working in the field of community development in Uganda. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, all interviewees were Ugandan by origin. Their motivation to act mainly rose from personal interest and will to see and be part of the change in the Ugandan society. Some of them also had roots in specific villages or areas where their organizations worked, either by being themselves from the villages or having family living there. All of them had been able to reach education above the basic level and most had obtained a University level degree. One of the interviewees described his motivation to found and run a community development NGO as follows:

“I felt compelled to do something for myself, for my community to really change the cycle of poverty in my village --- when I went to University I did a Bachelor’s degree in Development Studies and I think that in all this I needed to do, with empowerment it doesn’t necessarily mean money, it means that I have to really first empower people with what I had. I was empowered in mind, so I had to do mentoring sessions with young people. I tried to help them to find goals in life and align their ideas. And later on I feel that there were missing gaps in education, women empowerment,

training, vocational training, so I started [the NGO] out of that motivation.” (Interviewee 9)

Therefore, the interviewee’s first motivation was based on his own experiences living in a poor community and therefore he felt motivated to work with his fellow community members with what he had accomplished. Later, he started to analyze the wider picture of Ugandan society lacking of proper education and other services which led to founding the NGO. Also other interviewees reported that their motivation initiated from the incapability of the Ugandan government to address issues such as low educational level of Ugandans and the lack of adequate health services. The inability of the government made them feel that they have an obligation to act. Some of the interviewees felt strong frustration for the missing link between the grassroots and the government services to meet. They felt responsibility to take action in the situation where the government is too weak to address the problems and felt strongly that they also have the possibility to affect the situation in the areas where they work.

I also have another end of it, like I want to support my community, like Uganda. It’s a country that is so underdeveloped so I feel like contributing to this development, just being part of development of the country. And my other friends they also have the passion to support the communities to grow because it is where they grow up from and I think everyone feels that he should contribute to this. Apart from, personally I think that we have the responsibility to be part of development... yeah. (Interviewee 3)

“There are people there in the villages who are not able to come from the villages to come to the hospital and then there are those places where government health facilities are not there.” (Interviewee 5)

The concrete actions were not only targeted to improve the lives of specific groups of people but also towards harmful habits and taboos that were perceived to affect the Ugandan society as a whole. According to Bourdieu (1977), the culture affects the agents but at the same time, the agents can also be capable of creating social transformation through routine practices and purposive acts. This will to change harmful habits and cultural behavior was brought up in several interviews and was a clear motivation for many NGO actors in their own personal agency to work for socially sustainable development.

The interviewees perceived NGO activism as an important way of tackling issues that in their opinion needed a cultural change. One of the main examples given was improving the status of women in the Ugandan society.

“I wanted to be part of that change, to see a difference coming to my community. I am passionate about how women are treated, about how people perceive them, especially under the cultural setting where they sometimes are not given the opportunity to... to participate, to engage as actively as they can and yet they have their ability, I trust in that process and because of that I wanted to work with women, to ensure that I create, together with them, a change.” (Interviewee 6)

Therefore, the NGO activists attributed agency to themselves as they described their personal decisions to join or found an NGO. They wanted to act either because they were disappointed with the Ugandan government and its capability to provide basic services, for example education, or because they wanted to see a change in Ugandan society and culture, for example in the way women are treated in the society.

6.2 Involving Local Volunteers – Agency for the Individuals or for the NGO?

Most interviewees reported that their NGO recruits individuals from the local communities to work as volunteers in the projects. Having local volunteer was not perceived only from the practical point of view as being free workforce for the projects but they were also described to have important roles as linkages between the mass of community members and the NGO. Thus the volunteers were attributed agency in two ways: as being willing to work concretely with the NGOs activities and as mentally supporting the NGO in order to enhance the trust and cooperation with the rest of the community. The efforts of the local volunteers were highly valued and it became clear that many functions of the NGOs were perceived not feasible without local volunteers. One of the interviewees described the importance of volunteers as follows:

“...the local volunteers help to bridge between the community, the local people, and the organization. So, you use the local volunteers

to deliver the information to the community and then the community uses the local volunteers to get the information to the organization.” (Interviewee 4)

Considering the first, more practical side of local volunteers' agency, it was stated that the volunteers have several roles in the development interventions, for example when conducting surveys and trainings in the communities. It is thus rather obvious that the local volunteers provided not only mental support but also economic benefit to the NGOs. Even limited contribution of time and talent of selected community volunteers can significantly reduce costs, contributing to the cost effectiveness to be reported to the donors, and to longer-term sustainability (Oakley et. al. 1991, 16–18; Eyben and Ladbury, 1995). However, the interviewees did not mention the reduction of project costs when the involvement of the local volunteers was discussed. Rather, the emphasis was on the personal development of the volunteers and enhancement of social sustainability of the projects. One of the interviewees described how previous volunteers had become paid staff in his NGO and how the volunteers had been able to spread their knowledge beyond their own communities:

“Locals from the villages have become trainers --- So, today, the trainings have expanded in number of places, and the guys whom I have trained have turned out to be trainers to give it with me. And then, also foresee the work; work has expanded so some of the guys are trained to foresee the work together with me.” (Interviewee 1)

Some interviewees reported that their intention was to hire local volunteers as official paid staff members later on when they will have more financial resources. One of the organizations had already succeeded in hiring previous volunteers and some of the interviewees had worked as volunteers first themselves, either with the same organization or some another. Being an unpaid trainee was perceived as a way to gain more skills and knowledge which would later on lead to a paid work. One of the interviewees described his own experience of moving from being a volunteer to a paid employee:

“We select these people by interviewing them. Our guy: “Please can you do this as part of training without getting paid?” You can find somebody “No no, for me I can't work without being paid!” Others, which are like me, somebody can pick some knowledge without being paid. Yeah, by the end of the day, somebody, after

getting that knowledge you can be paid! Like me, because in the beginning I was just being paid something little because I was a trainee. But now, I can get something which can help me in my daily life.” (Interviewee 2)

Thus the time as volunteers was also perceived as a training period for the possible employment later on. However, the rest of the interviewees did not state if the motivation for the volunteers was to take part in the activities from the individual point of view or more from the community development point of view. None of the interviewees reported that they knew the motivation of the volunteers to take part in the processes that were administrated through the NGOs. However, it was realized that the volunteers' efforts should not only result to the benefit of the NGO and the whole community but it should benefit the individuals themselves as well. The benefits of volunteering were perceived to be important for the personal development of the volunteers.

“For us what we do is we encourage them to become trainers, to train them to get skills to be trainers and then we monitor how they train. A role that we would have played, they take on that role because they feel empowered, they feel trusted, but above all, their knowledge stays with them. These tools that they have learned do not disappear in a year or two.” (Interviewee 6)

From the second point of view, involving local volunteers was perceived as increasing social sustainability in the development interventions. Local volunteers were described to be providing information to the NGOs that can be hard to reach for outsiders. In the research data, the importance of the local volunteers was also described to enhance social sustainability in the projects as the volunteers were perceived as capable of creating trust in the community. The volunteers were also seen as being able to share the information in a more reliable way than the project workers themselves who were considered 'outsiders'.

“This is why we say we want to make sure it is sustainable and involving the locals so the volunteers we are working with.... --- they understood what we want to do, or what we are doing so the community normally trusts what the locals, their fellow locals say. So, if I came from another village and said I want to start organization here they would think I want to make money out of them, but if local, their fellow local explains them and say this is what we are doing, this is what we have in the budget, they will

understand and believe him or her more than they would believe me.” (Interviewee 4)

Thus, the volunteers were perceived fundamental for the NGOs work as they were able to ensure trust and acceptance of the communities. Volunteers were also seen as providing continuity and sustainability to the NGOs efforts. Many interviewees trusted in the continuation of project activities, such as trainings, with the effort of the local volunteers. As one of the interviewees described, the knowledge and skills were seen to stay with the volunteers who would then continue to spread them among the other community members even after the NGO was gone.

“If you don’t involve the community then it is not going to be sustainable, otherwise if you go, you will go with the knowledge and everything. --- We train them to take control of those projects” (Interviewee 4).

Even though the motivations of the volunteers were not addressed in the research data, it is clear that the will to become paid workers and gain knowledge and skills through volunteering are important drivers for the individual volunteers themselves. The will for personal development and the self-motivation of the local volunteers should not be forgotten or undervalued as they are important in the process of exercising individual agency.

Therefore, it would be important for the NGOs also to find out more profoundly what are the motivations for the individual volunteers to take part in the activities of the NGO. This information would be useful in the capacity building of the volunteers who can be important agents in the creation of social transformation processes that are socially sustainable. Otherwise, if the personal development is not considered and the input of the local volunteers is only considered as a sort of community solidarity that is performed through the institutions created by the NGO, the agency of the local individuals might be undermined or even limited. According to Green (2000, 68), the capacity of individuals to bring about change should not be undermined as it might lead to construction of community members as passive agents only capable of acting through the institutions created by the NGOs. One of the interviewees tackled this question as he explained the

way he perceives the volunteers in his NGO – not as just workforce for the sake of the project but rather as future leaders and partners.

“And for me as a person I am reminded of the one key concept is that what you see in people is what you get. So if you see potential, people will give potential. If you want to take people as tools then they work hard. But if you want to look at people as potential leaders and partners then you bring out the best from them.”
(Interviewee 9)

In addition to the personal motivations of the volunteers, the NGOs also have their motivations in relation to having local volunteers. With the efforts of the volunteers the NGOs seek to work as cost-effectively and close to the local communities as possible and for that they need the agency of the local volunteers. At the same time, the local volunteers perceive benefit in working with the NGOs but to benefit they needed the involvement of the NGO in their specific communities. Therefore it seems that the agency of the NGO both enables and strengthens the volunteers’ agency and other way around. What could limit these agencies would not therefore be one of these actors gaining more agency but actually the weakening of it. As this observation deserves more attention, I will come to it more in depth later in the sub-chapter 7.1.

6.3 Local Leaders – An Attribution of Community Agency

The local governments are holding rather important role especially when reaching remote areas and while starting activities in new communities. Most of the interviewees perceived that it is impossible to act without the acceptance of the local leaders. Therefore, the interviewees attributed strong agency to the local leaders because it is mostly in their power if the NGO is allowed to continue their activities in a specific community or even talk to the community members. As one of the interviewees described, it is not possible to enter communities without the local leaders’ acceptance:

“Because before you can go anywhere there has to be community entry. And that includes the community leaders. You can’t just come to a community and do what you want. --- ... first we talk to the community leaders, they move and talk to the villagers. Until...”

*until they argue with the villagers we can't talk to the villagers.”
(Interviewee 5)*

As mentioned already in the sub-chapter 2.1, in Uganda the system of leadership is hierarchical and it reaches all the way down to the village level. Typically, the NGOs have to go through several different levels of administration, usually starting from the LC3s, to finally have approval to start any activities (surveys, village meetings, and finally projects or programs) in a certain village. The consultations might also include meetings with District Health Officers or other higher officials. Therefore the actions, opinions and openness of the local administrators of each level have a fundamental role in the actions of the NGOs. Knowing correct procedures is important in Ugandan context, as described by one the interviewees:

“...because the district is aware we are working in that district, we have registered with that district. --- So we go to the sub counties with letters to introduce the program, and so, we discuss with them how best we can work because they are leaders there, and they are influential people so they know how, will help us work, how we penetrate to the community and how we will work basically. --- And so, after the sub county gives us a letter that introduces us to the local councils, so we go down to the local councils. --- ...like they are the grassroot and then we always want to reach out the grassroot” (Interviewee 8)

It was stated several times that without cooperation with these administrative units accessing remote villages is impossible. Even though the cooperation with the local leaders was sometimes taking time and effort, overall the power held by the local leaders was perceived positive. The power of the local leaders was seen as a sign of democracy as the leaders were selected by the community members themselves. For example the LC1s are selected in the community gatherings or meetings of each village. The negative side of the system was stated to be that occasionally the LC1s do not support some activities, for example health education, and it might take a lot of effort to gain their acceptance. However, most interviewees perceived the local leaders as having understanding as they were described to be educated and knowledgeable of the main issues in their respective communities. Further, the acceptance of the LC1s was commonly perceived as acceptance of the whole village or community, as described by one of the interviewees:

“With the community leaders it is because most of them have been to school. So, they know, once you present it to them and make it clear to them, they will look at it and be like: Ok this is good. --- If you have the community leaders on your side then with the people it is all about the marketing.” (Interviewee 5)

Therefore, one of the main roles of the local leaders was supporting projects that aimed at bringing new information to the communities through education. The role was seen especially important when the education was concerning topics that are culturally sensitive, such as sexual health. As the local leaders are selected by the villagers themselves and they are members of those very same communities, they hold a certain authority in the communities. Therefore, it was perceived that if the local leaders support the information given by the NGO, the message is more effective and trustworthy to the community members as well. One of the interviewees described the importance of local leaders in culturally sensitive issues as follows:

“See, cause with culture here it’s very important, so see how with whatever you’re bringing is no way contradict to their culture and if.. if it is going to contradict with their culture then there has to be community sensitization but that cannot be done by you. So what you have to do is to educate the community leaders to sensitize the community. So from there --- they call for a general meeting for the whole village... --- (and) if the community is ready to receive they will and they will give you the floor to speak to them.” (Interviewee 5)

Therefore, the interviewees attributed strong agency to the local leaders in the processes of socially sustainable development by referring them as important links between the NGO and the local people, and providing support for the ideas that might not be familiar especially in the rural areas. The local leaders were perceived as the voice of the whole community and not so much as individuals with their own perceptions and motives. Interestingly, the interviewees perceived the acceptance of the community leaders as purely positive in relation to the overall development of the communities. At the same time, resistance of the leaders was perceived as purely backward and problematic to the overall development of the community.

6.4 People in the Communities – Agency through Material and Mental Support

The interviewees perceived the local community members as not only receiving objects but also as active participants in their development projects. The community members were seen as having input for the further development of their own lives as well as of the whole community. The agency of the people living in the communities was presented in two different ways: firstly, the community members were described as taking responsibility in some practical functions of the projects, mainly through provision of materials or skills for the purposes of the project. Secondly, the interviewees perceived that it is important that the community members ‘own’ their development and break away from cycle of poverty by learning and accepting new ideas.

Most interviewees described that, in addition to the volunteers giving their time for the projects, they also expect the communities as whole to support the projects and programs. This was perceived to be adding to the ownership of the community members and was perceived to be important for the sustainability of the development efforts. The concrete support was mostly described as provision of resources, such as materials or human resources. The resources were described to be for example a place to stay overnight or provision of food and water or building materials for the use of the project. One of the interviewees described the ways the communities participate in her NGOs projects as follows:

“We talk to the villagers themselves, they, they know, sometimes they are willing to offer space, sometimes they are willing to offer space for free trainings, free venues, sometimes they are willing to offer like, sometimes some of them have trees so they are willing to offer two or three pieces of wood for us to do a demonstration drying rug so they can learn from it and to us, that is a contribution from the community because if you do not ask you do not get but if you do asset mapping it is easier for you. --- We look at them like we are here today just to help you but this is your process, you need to own this process.” (Interviewee 6)

In addition to the concrete provision of resources to the NGO projects, the community members were also attributed agency in a form of analytical processes, motivations and

having power within themselves. Most of the interviewees perceived that the core of sustainability is in the sense of agency of the community members' – that the community members feel that the development processes are theirs in comparisons to the NGOs. One of the interviewees described the motivations as follows:

“...we, in my own view, sustainability will only occur in [the NGO] if the beneficiaries of the program feel the real sense of the program in their... once they see calling the program my program and they are calling it their program I am thinking I am closer to sustainability. Like that's how I perceive and my goal in all these many years I have run [the NGO] is to try as much as possible never at one time take decisions as a person but in consultation with community members and I have seen it very very sustainable. -- at this point I am concerning of having the members of the community at the center of the projects we are implementing.” (Interviewee 9)

Therefore, as according to Kabeer (1999a, 438), agency is more than just observable actions: it is also the meaning, motivation and purpose that the people bring to their activity. Therefore, for the actions to become real there is a need for both material possibilities and sense of agency, 'power within'. The need for the people to understand, want or own the development processes came up in most interviews, as described by one of the interviewees:

“...they really also have to understand why it is beneficial to their community, why they actually need to participate, why is it relevant for them to be part of this story.” (Interviewee 6)

However, the motivation of the community members was not perceived important only for the sake of the community development and well-being of the community members. The analytical processes and the motivation of the community members were also perceived important for the agency of the NGOs. The interviewees stated that the concrete activities of the development intervention would be jeopardized if the community members did not feel that they own the process. Therefore the agency of the communities and the community members was not perceived valuable only as such but it also played an important role in building the agency of the NGOs. As described by one of the

interviewees, implementation of projects and reaching the goals of sustainability were not perceived feasible if the community members did not have motivation to own the projects.

“...first of all they need to own the project, they need to accept that it is their own, the project is going to benefit them in the first place because if they don't own the project it will be hard for you to implement, and even the sustainability part of it will be hard.”
(Interviewee 8)

Another important aspect of agency in relation to power within oneself is that not all the actions are a result of a conscious strategy but agency can be exercised also through everyday habits and routines (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens 1984). Also in the theories of socially sustainable development the aim is to ensure that the development will not only happen but will also persist – sustainable processes should adapt to changing times as well as changing contexts (Banuri & Najam 2002, 72–74) which makes everyday actions important. Consistently, some interviewees emphasized that the positive development is not happening only through a project or a program but it should be rooted in the normal everyday life of the community members in order to create socially sustainable outcomes. One of the interviewees described the importance of agency in the longer perspective as follows:

“Because when we are working with them, we make them understand their role in community, that they are part of development, that there is no one who is exotic or comes from a far that is going to come and help them. It is going to be themselves, they just need to know how to do it, trust in themselves, because we mostly talk to them about self-esteem and believing in themselves as members of community.” (Interviewee 6)

Therefore it can be argued that the interviewees attributed strong agency to the community members in relation to power within themselves. Their motivation was also perceived as a condition for the project to function and therefore the agency of community members had also an input to the agency of the NGOs. Therefore, it is clear that the provision of material or human resources to the projects is not the only way agency was attributed to the local communities. Sense of agency and motivations of the community members were also perceived important in the processes of socially sustainable development.

Overall, answering to the first research question, it is clear that there are some specific groups that are attributed agency in the research data: individual NGO activists, local volunteers, local leaders and the people in the communities. However, as mentioned in the methodology chapter, during the analysis it became clear to me that when looking at specific situations or project phases it is impossible to make a difference of who has agency at any specific situation or project phase and who has not. In fact, the realities of development interventions are characterized with social interactions of different actors and therefore there exists a complex network of agencies that intertwine with each other in the processes of socially sustainable development. This observation also reveals paradoxes of agency especially in relation to the community and other actors in the development projects by NGOs. In what follows, I will move to my second research question and discuss these paradoxes further.

7 PARADOXES OF AGENCY

In the previous chapter I mainly answered my first research question: to whom the agency was attributed in the research data. In this chapter I will continue to the paradoxes of agency in socially sustainable development. As mentioned already, it is possible to recognize different groups that are attributed agency but when looking at different situations the concept becomes vaguer. Based on the research data, there is not such situation in the processes of socially sustainable development when agency would be held specifically and precisely by a specific actor but rather the agencies intertwine with each other.

Therefore the result is paradoxical in comparison to the normative literature on socially sustainable development in which giving agency to the local communities is presented as a rather simplistic solution to reach sustainable development goals – as if it would be possible for one individual or a group to hold full and exclusive agency in a project that is in reality functioning through the cooperation of many actors with their own motivations and expectations. This result is in line with previous research (Bryant 1991; Elliot 2006) that suggests that sustainable development is many times presented from a techno-managerial perspective in which strategies, such as including social values and encouraging grassroots participation, can be implemented without social interaction even though ultimately sustainability rests on inclusivity and reconciling and negotiating between different needs and interests.

These observations reveal more paradoxes in relation to agency in socially sustainable development that are further related to power, knowledge and information, trust and networks, and money. In this chapter I will discuss these paradoxes further.

7.1 Paradoxes of Power

As discussed in the sub-chapter 3.3, agency is closely tied to questions of power and authority. To be an agent depends on the ability to act and make a difference – which requires exercising power. However, this power is many times not evenly distributed and

some individuals are in better social positions to exercise power than others. (Clever 2007.) These questions were brought up also in the research data as the interviewees described different situations of exercising power. No actor was perceived as a sole holder of power but the power held by different actors was rather seen in relation to each other – either as enabling or limiting the agency of other actors. However, it was clear that power and agency in a form of resistance was not perceived positive. In this sub-chapter I will further analyze agency and power by looking at the paradoxes related to them in the processes of socially sustainable development.

7.1.1 Power in Relation to Other Actors: Enabling, Limiting and Demanding Agency

The concept of agency can be used in the context of what places a limit on agency in an individual's life or on the other hand, enhance the capability to exercise one's agency. In social life there are always some individuals that are in better social positions to deploy resources, to shape rules and to exercise power than others. (Clever 2007, 227–228.) Power also affects on how much each individual can enhance or place a limit on other people's agency. Based on the research data, there were clear dependencies between different actors that either limited or enabled the exercise of agency of the actors in the processes of socially sustainable development.

When discussing development interventions that aim at socially sustainable development, I found that there actually is no agency that would not be reliant on the actions and agency of the other actors involved. For the NGOs to exercise their own agency they are reliant on the decision making of the local communities and the motivation of the local people. At the same time, the communities are many times reliant on the information and resources provided by the NGOs in order to exercise their agency for the development of their communities. As one of the interviewees described, for the project to be sustainable both the power and agency of the NGO and the local community is needed – NGO as providing materials and community members as owning the project.

“So to it stay up and running you can equip the clinic but in time, if it is not owned by the community, after 6–7 months it is going to

fall. So you need the community to get involved, you need to ask their ideas so they'll know that this is ours so if we don't run it well it is going to collapse anytime.” (Interviewee 5)

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the willingness of the locals to take action and put resources in to the development processes was perceived as a sign that the people are feeling satisfied with the process. However, many times the resources from the communities were also perceived crucial for the continuation of the activities of the NGOs. As mentioned in the sub-chapter 6.4, in many cases the communities had been asked to provide the NGOs resources during the development intervention in the village or community. This kind of cooperation was perceived as a way to include the community members in the processes, create a sense of responsibility and to create ‘ownership’ and trust.

However, it is important to examine the relationship between the agency of the NGO and the community and its members deeper. The community members’ provision of both material and mental support to the NGO is not only a way of exercising agency for the community and its members – it also is a way of enabling NGOs agency. If the communities would find the NGO and its activities irrelevant, the community members would most likely not support the projects with resources which would make the functioning of the NGO impossible. The community’s decision not to provide the NGO any resources was perceived as a sign that the community members are not happy with the project. Therefore, the acceptance of the community was perceived as crucial for the whole existence of the project and the NGO in a specific village. One of the interviewees described this discussion on power as follows:

“So we... we ask the community whether they can provide the trainees and the trainers some eats and drinks during that period. And the other thing is, the school or the community, they provide some water to use in the project by that period. That one, we do that to see the community whether they are happy with the project which is going in the community. That’s why we told them whether they want to provide us some water, whether they want to provide us some food.” (Interviewee 2)

However, if the local communities can be perceived as enabling the agency of the NGOs it must be also recognized that the NGOs alike make decisions that have effect on the agency of the communities and the community members. In the end, the decision of which village or community is chosen to work in a partnership with the NGO lies mostly in the hands of the NGO. In addition, in some interviews it was stated that if the communities cannot provide enough resources for the partnership the community will not be able to join the cooperation. Therefore the power lies with the NGO even though the ideal presented in the interviews was working together as partners.

“Do we have a place to stay, can they provide drinking water, will they provide food. If all that is yes, then that goes to the list of schools possibly maybe chosen from.” (Interviewee 1)

Enabling agency was also brought up in the research data through the use of local volunteers. As mentioned already in the sub-chapter 6.2, many interviewees reported that one of their activities was to recruit locals to become volunteers in their respective villages or communities. This was perceived as a way to reach socially sustainable development that would carry also after the actual project or program had been finished and the NGO would not be present in the area anymore.

The more in depth reason for the practice of training volunteers was to reach the communities and the community members, to create trust and to build for the future in the sense that the volunteers might be able to become paid workers for the NGO. Many interviewees felt that without these local volunteers sustainable results would not be possible to achieve. Therefore the volunteers were perceived as enabling the functioning of the NGO to aim towards the goals that the NGO has set for its action and even existence – which would be in this research be the aim towards socially sustainable development.

At the same time, the NGO enabled the local volunteers to exercise their agency by working in the institutions set up by the NGO. The interviewees attributed agency to the NGO as it is able to create structures where the locals can actively influence the development of their community. In addition, the interviewees perceived information sharing as an important function of the NGO. The information might include knowledge about health related issues that has not been available especially in very rural locations.

One of the interviewees explained the balance of power between the NGO and the volunteers as it being a relationship where the local volunteers can take the lead but the NGO is still there to help them with any questions they may have:

*“...we make sure that the volunteers, the local volunteers we are working with take the lead and we only help them to answer questions that they don't have much knowledge about.”
(Interviewee 4)*

Volunteering should also be considered from the side of those people's agency who are not volunteering. Not every community member can become a volunteer as the NGOs tend to place criteria for the volunteers, for example requiring all volunteers to be literate. The danger of limiting the agency for some at the expense of enhancing it for others is something worth analyzing for the NGOs. Some local innovations can easily be left unnoticed if the volunteers start spreading the knowledge they have received from the NGO. As the knowledge spreads, it easily becomes hegemonic and therefore it can be harder to challenge for those who have been left outside the 'volunteer bubble'.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, agency can also be limited by other actors. Even though the NGOs are to some extent enabling the agency of the community members, it must be acknowledged that to some extent they might also be limiting it. In addition, the requirements from the local leaders or the expectations from the community members might also limit the functioning of the NGO. An example of this kind of intertwining enablement and limitation was presented by an interviewee who described a situation from a project in her NGO. She explained that when they start planning a new project the role of the NGO is to share roles and responsibilities to the community members. Therefore the NGO exercises its power by demanding the individuals to take part in the development process. This can be either enabling or limiting to the agency of the community members – depending on the motivation of the one's taking action.

Usually, when we start a program, we... we together with them [community members] develop roles and responsibilities, what we expect of them and what they should expect of us because we highlight when the program is going to start, how is it going to end, what activities are we going to do so we give them roles and responsibilities. (Interviewee 6)

However, the actions of the individual members also enable or limit the functioning of the NGO as the decisions of the individual community members to participate or not to participate the project affects the resources available and, more importantly, if the NGO is able to function according to its values. Further, also the local leaders many times have expectations: the interviewee described that the LC1 expects the NGO to share responsibilities and mobilize community members. Therefore the LC1 is able to both limit and enable the work of the NGO – limit through placing conditions on them but enabling through allowing them to work in the community.

The interviewee also described that the sometimes the individual community members expect more than what the NGO can offer and they might therefore not do as much as the NGO would hope. Therefore, the individuals and the community as a whole also has enabling and limiting role in relation to the NGO. Therefore, it can be argued that agency in the processes of socially sustainable development is a very complex formation of different actors limiting an enabling each other's agency. In the end, all agencies in such processes appear to be demanding agency as they demands enablement from other actors.

7.1.2 Monitoring: NGOs Way of Denying or Supporting Agency?

Some interviewees perceived that monitoring the progress in the local communities is one of the main keys to ensure socially sustainable development. One of the interviewees described that random monitoring visits to the project sites are the best way to make sure that there is a sustaining structure at place and that the local volunteers are continuing the work “in the rightful way”, meaning the same way as the NGO has instructed them. She perceived monitoring as the only way to find out about possible challenges that would need to be addressed in order to reach sustainable results.

“What we have to do, that usually affects the development, sustainable development is that organizations do not monitor. Now this is a very critical issue that has to be put into consideration. Monitoring has to be as regular as possible because then you... that is the only way to find out challenges and that is the only way you can address them. So when you empower communities make sure that they use that.” (Interviewee 6)

According to the research data, monitoring is executed in two ways: firstly, by randomized visit to the communities done by the NGOs, and secondly, by recruiting local volunteers to do monitoring. One of the interviewees described the monitoring system in her NGO as being based on randomized visits to the local communities. The interviewee described that the local volunteers hold trainings based on the knowledge they have received from the NGO and these trainings are held according to a work plan that has been created in cooperation with the NGO and the training participants. The most important reason for the randomized monitoring visits was to follow if the meetings are taking place and if the given information is correct. The interviewee found it important that the community volunteers continue using their knowledge and are able to motivate other members of the community to receive and use the knowledge as well. She described the justification for monitoring as follows:

“This is the way to know if there is actually sustainable structure, yeah. Because they are doing it voluntarily, they are doing it with or without you but above all, they are doing it in the rightful way that you have done it.” (Interviewee 6)

As mentioned, sometimes monitoring was also done by the community members themselves. In those examples the agency was attributed to both the NGO and the community members. The community members were explained to be the concrete ‘eyes’ and ‘ears’ in their communities. However, the reason for them to monitor the progress was initiated by the NGO and the aim of the monitoring was to see if everything is going as planned initially – if the people were acting as expected and using the information given to them. One of the interviewees described the system in her NGO as follows:

“...we will have an eye and an ear for the groups, for each group. And then, our eye will be to see everything that takes place. If we have a sanitation program, project, and we have an eye, we will task that eye to go and see is every member who attends the training doing what we learned. And it will like... you’ll build that structure within the community for them to monitor and then to keep the project coming.” (Interviewee 8)

Therefore, when the responsibility over the practical functioning of the development intervention is given to the local volunteers, the transformation requires constant negotiation and decision making on the roles and responsibilities regarding the future: again, the volunteers use their agency to make the decision to work voluntarily for the purposes of the NGO and the NGO uses its agency through holding on to the expert role by overlooking the work of the volunteers and helping if there occurs challenges.

However, in addition to these viewpoints it is also valuable to consider the possible resistance of the local community members and volunteers. In this case the resistance could take a form of not following the plans that have been made with the NGO, not taking part in the activities or modifying activities to the extent that they are perceived as not being 'rightful' by the NGOs. As according to Kabeer (1999a), agency can take multiple forms that can indeed include not only resistance but also bargaining, manipulation, deception or subversion. However, these kinds of other forms of agency were not perceived positive and the reason for monitoring was purely to make sure that the work is actually done in the communities: that the training sessions by the volunteers are held and that the people will continue using the knowledge and instruments that they have learned. Therefore, if the work had not continued, it was perceived purely negative and as something that would only cause harm to sustainable development of the community. Furthermore, none of the interviewees mentioned that they analyze why there is resistance in the community or mentioned that this type of sense of agency would be used to enhance social sustainability.

Therefore the paradox of power in relation to agency in socially sustainable development is two-fold: firstly, in the social environment of development interventions the agency of actors can have both enabling and limiting effects in the agencies of other actors. Therefore it is impossible to say who holds agency at a specific situation because the agencies are intertwined and demanding. Therefore agency cannot be understood from a techno-managerial perspective as if it would be possible to relinquish full agency to one actor in the social processes of development interventions.

Secondly, it is clear that the NGOs are exercising their agency through monitoring the development processes in the communities. The interviewees perceived monitoring as a way of ensure that the communities continue working with the topics introduced by the

NGO and therefore perceived it as a way of ensuring there is a sustainable structure at place. However, they did not value and analyze the possible resistance of the community members even though they also perceived the motivations and exercise of agency of the community members valuable for the sustainability (as presented in the sub-chapter 6.4).

7.2 Paradoxes of Knowledge and Information Sharing

In this sub-chapter I will discuss the theme of knowledge and information sharing and the paradox that it has in relation to socially sustainable development. Many times, in socially sustainable development the knowledge from the local communities is perceived the ‘right’ knowledge, and therefore all the interventions should be based on that knowledge in order to create agency and sustainable results. However, in reality there are heterogeneities within any communities (Gardner & Lewis 1996, 112) and therefore there cannot exist one collective knowledge inside any community. In fact, there are many different types of knowledge depending on the individuals who are members of that specific community.

All interviewees mentioned knowledge and information sharing as one of the main factors to enhance socially sustainable development in the communities where the NGOs work. In the research data, the sharing knowledge and information was perceived important to both directions: from the communities to the NGOs and from the NGOs to the communities. The communities were perceived capable of transmitting their knowledge about the specific problems and needs of their respective communities to the NGOs and the NGOs were described as being able to provide information that was missing from the community members and that would enhance the standard of living in the communities. All interviewees described their NGOs activities including some sort of training to the communities where they worked at. These trainings included lessons regarding health related issues, hygiene, how to keep household finances, how to build in an eco-friendly manner, and so forth. At the same time, the interviewees described that the knowledge regarding the communities’ context is important as it can help ensuring sustainable development results.

In this sub-chapter I will discuss both directions of knowledge and information sharing. First, I will start with the knowledge and information shared by the community members to

the NGOs; and secondly I will discuss the knowledge and information sharing from the NGOs to the community members. Overall, my argument is that for the sustainable development not only the knowledge and information from the communities is important but rather there needs to be exchange of information from both directions.

7.2.1 Communities Sharing Knowledge and Information to the NGOs

According to Banuri and Najam (2002) rootedness in the local context is the most important factor in the concept of sustainable development. In the literature on socially sustainable development, initiatives emerging from the communities and building on local wisdom and culture are perceived as the most effective way of creating sustainable results through ownership and social integrity (Friberg & Hettne, 1985; Hediger 2000).

Consistently, all interviewees expressed that their development interventions value local knowledge and the opinions of the local people. As the interviewees all worked in NGOs that were based on the values of sustainable development this was not a surprising finding. However, in many cases information was collected only through structured methods which mostly included collection of facts (regarding number of children in the family, number of meals per day, and so on) rather than utilizing deeper, historical and contextual knowledge of the community members. Most interviewees described that they start planning their development activities by organizing a baseline survey or a set of community meetings to find out the opinions and viewpoints of the local community members. Two of the interviewees described the process of acquiring information as follows:

“And then we also conducted a survey, a basic survey to find out what people desire and need, what ought to be done in the communities. So, education is one of the things that has been hinted on a lot of times, health and sanitation and agriculture.”
(Interviewee 4)

“Basically before we even start of thinking about a program we go to a community and then we make a survey, from the different communities, what is... what exactly is affecting the women there. What are they thinking about what is affecting them...”
(Interviewee 6)

Many of the interviewees attributed agency to the local community members as they perceived that only through this dialogue they can get to the core of the problems to be tackled in the area. Overall, the interviewees assured that they value the community members' perception and knowledge of the issues affecting them, as demonstrated in one of the interviews:

“...we ask the local leaders to open up for the community members to bring in their ideas. And then when people bring up the ideas and then we ask them at that moment to elect an interim executive committee for [the NGO]. And then they elect their committee. --- we ask them [the committee] to go out and sort out the particular programs that they want. And eventually, when we see we have the resources we do that program not dependent on what we think but depending on what the community thinks.” (Interviewee 9)

However, despite the interviewees claimed that they utilize, appreciate and value the knowledge and information provided by the community members they still admitted that rarely the concrete solutions suggested by the community members have been brought into practice. These solutions suggested by the community members included building a borehole for the village, admitting scholarships for school going children and providing equipments to start a business like motorcycle taxi. The reason for not to take action towards these suggestions was mostly stated to be lack of resources or inability to provide these solutions, as described by one of interviewees:

“...the local community has plenty of expectations. They have basic...umh... they have their concerns in the areas which we mentioned about that we intent to help them in but they have expectations out of that, that exceed beyond what we can offer to the community.” (Interviewee 4)

I will go to the issue of money and financial resource in the sub-chapter 7.4. However, it is important to make a notice that the NGOs incapability of responding to the suggestions and ideas coming from the local communities is problematic when thinking about socially sustainable development. As mentioned, based on the principles of socially sustainable development, the community members are encouraged to rely on their local knowledge on what are the problems and solutions to make positive development happen. Because of the

limited resources that the community members possess and the weakness of the government to provide basic services to them, the community members are forced to function and resolve the problems in the structures of the NGOs. However, the NGOs might not be able to provide all the resources needed for the solutions suggested by the communities. Therefore, the community members are at the same time enabled and disabled to use their agency: enabled by being able to use their knowledge and expertise but disabled because the structures provided by the NGO cannot provide the resources needed to answer to the needs.

Green (2000) criticizes this kind of establishment of a relationship between knowledge and agency. According to her, this relationship suggests that the community members lack the capacity to bring about social transformation by themselves and can only participate in the development processes through institutionalized structures built by the NGOs or other development institutions. Therefore, the community members are easily constructed as “passive agents awaiting the emancipator intervention of development organizations” (ibid., 68) – needing outside structures to actually exercise their agency and utilize the local knowledge on which the socially sustainable development is thought to be built on.

7.2.2 Sensitization from the NGOs to the Communities

The interviewees perceived the role of the NGOs in the development interventions as experts in specific themes, such as health or environmental issues. In this respect the interviewees were keen on attributing agency to the NGOs: as expert institutions with information and knowledge that can benefit especially rural communities. The concept of ‘sensitization’ was brought up in several interviews. The concrete actions to share information or ‘sensitize’ included, for example, organizing trainings on health related issues, entrepreneurship or human rights. At the same time, the local community members were presented as not aware enough to make changes in their lives and that was perceived as one of the reasons why there have not been sustainable development results before. Therefore it must be noted that the perceptions of the interviewees were in contradiction to their opinions that the community members themselves are able to identify what are the problems and solutions in their respective communities. One of the interviewees described

that sometimes the community member's do not perceive that there would be anything to change in their way of life – until the NGO provides them with the new ideas.

“Most of the members of communities are like used to their routines and way of living and they don't feel like they need to change or like they need anything like that but when you sensitize, when you create awareness as an organization the community feels like “Maybe we need this, make we can change this, maybe our community can be like other communities.””(Interviewee 8)

However, the interesting paradox in the relationship between the normative thinking of sustainable development and the research data is that even though the ideas of socially sustainable development many times perceive local knowledge being the key for exercising one's agency and reaching sustainable community development, the knowledge may be constituted of information that is not always correct or can be harmful to some of the community members. Therefore most interviewees perceived that there is a need to spread information in order change harmful habits. One of the interviewees described such harmful habits as follows:

“Cause most ladies believe, if you don't produce each year your husband is going to leave you. And then most young girls are, they are forced into marriage. If you are thirteen and you are asked to marry some old guy because he has something he can give to the parents for them to survive, so the culture is huge. --- So, it is what you have to fight, it is something that you are fighting. But, you have to fight stating the disadvantages. You can't just come and tell them “ok, this is not right, this is not right.” You have to state to them why is it not right.” (Interviewee 5)

Indeed, many interviewees believed the main cause of the problems in the communities was that the people did not have access to appropriate information on issues such as health, environmental protection or income generation. They also reported that it is challenging to change attitudes because the problems were resulting from cultural taboos and beliefs that could not break since the community members did not have access to education or other sources of information, such as TV or radio.

“...people in Uganda most of them it is very difficult to change their mind from bad brick to this kind of brick, this is very difficult.

Especially all peoples who are not educated, somebody who do not mind about the environment.” (Interviewee 2)

“And it is first, mostly in those hard reach areas, leave alone the towns, everyone can look at the TV and be like “Ok, I can go with that.” But with the villages they don’t have that. So it is what their great grandfather told them that they are moving on with.” (Interviewee 5)

The interviewees argued that as especially in remote areas there are gaps in such knowledge and information and filling those gaps would create sustainable development in the communities. Being healthier, more aware and considering different options critically were perceived as ways of creating and enforcing the agency of the community members. Through increased knowledge, people might start taking initiatives, learning from each other and experimenting new ideas. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that the normative ideas of relying purely on local knowledge should be challenged as innovation rarely arises in a vacuum without outside influences.

Therefore, it is too simple to claim that the wisdom and the seeds for the communities’ socially sustainable development lie purely on the knowledge already existent in the communities. The paradox is that in fact there does not exist one ‘rightful’ community knowledge and many times the dominant knowledge is harmful for some members of the communities. In such situations, sharing information between different actors can create sustainable development and enhance the agency for the marginalized community members. Social interventions, being forms of social interaction, also include negotiation and sharing and the community members should not be expected to live isolated from other social contexts.

Therefore, learning from each other and equal dialogue both during and as a result of the development intervention should be emphasized in order to strengthen the agency of the community members. As according to Banuri and Najam (2002), communication in the form of building and sustaining a system for dialogue and consultation with and within the community is important in order to reach socially sustainable development. As one of the interviewees described:

“...basically what we do is to ensure that we educate communities including young mothers, women and men also about issues of human rights awareness and advocacy, we engage them in community based trainings, dialogues.” (Interviewee 6)

However, it is important to emphasize that, from the point of view of socially sustainable development, it is still important that the information is accepted and perceived beneficial by the ones who receive it. As in any social interaction where new ideas are shared, also during the development interventions the community members can exercise their agency by either accepting or rejecting the knowledge that has been given to them.

In relation to knowledge sharing, the interviewees did not perceive the community members as purely receiving, passive objects of information. According to them it is important that the community members also own the information in order to reach sustainable change. The community members were attributed agency as the interviewees described that there is no way of forcing new information to the community members. Ownership was brought up again as the interviewees stated that in order to the sensitization to work the community members need to feel that they own the information. It was stated that the community members themselves have the choice of utilize and pass on the information to others. In the research data, breaking out of harmful habits and taboos was perceived as an important factor in order to create sustainable results. In practice, the best way of introducing ideas was explained to be presenting an example of a different way.

“So, it (cultural taboos) is what you have to fight, it is something that you are fighting. But, you have to fight stating the disadvantages. You can’t just come and tell them “ok, this is not right, this is not right.” You have to state to them why is it not right. And you have to make it clear to them cause with Ugandans culture is important.” (Interviewee 5)

One interviewee described an example from a sanitation program her NGO was running. One of the first goals/targets of the program was to work towards cleaner environment through sensitizing community members about importance of garbage disposal and keeping cooking utensils dry and clean. The NGO had a model project of 15 households that they educated about sanitation and how a dirty environment affects their children’s health. They also helped the households to build drying rugs for their cooking utensils and

garbage bins for their waste management. The good example from the model households resulted in 30 more households wanting to learn how to build their own drying rugs and garbage bins as the households saw the improvement in the health of the model households' members.

The NGO perceived this as a way to increase the social sustainability of their projects because the initiative now started to rise from the households instead of imposing the idea to them. This can also be considered as the interviewee attributing agency to both, the NGO as well as to the locals. The interviewee perceived that the agency of the community members to accept or not to accept the new way of doing things in order to reach better health as a key to socially sustainable outcome.

*“So to us, that was practical, that was an impact because if people can ask before you go to them then that means there’s a need and that means they have seen value in whatever you have trained.”
(Interviewee 6)*

It is obvious that the NGO is able to exercise its agency through information sharing by acting as a trainer. Through this agency of the NGO can be however created agency at the individuals' level where some people utilize their agency and make the decision to accept, utilize and develop further the information they have received. The new information also becomes part of the deeper knowledge of the specific individual. Later, the agency of these individuals may create wider community agency and processes of analysis and dialogue. Therefore, the possibilities of knowledge and information sharing should not be undermined when discussing the possibilities to reach socially sustainable development.

7.3 Paradoxes of Trust and Networks

The literature on sustainable development mainly emphasises the networks and trust inside the communities. According to Banuri and Najam (2005), sustainable development initiatives are aimed at building communities in a way that they are able to solve a succession of problems through open communication and creation of institutions. The activities exercised by the individuals in the local context should therefore bring people

together, build partnerships and networks, and develop new ways of collaboration and interaction. Consistently, the interviewees also perceived the trust and networks within the communities valuable. They emphasized the importance of local leadership and the trust within the community was perceived to improve the capability to work closer together as a community.

However, paradoxically the interviewees also emphasized the importance of creating networks and linkages outside the communities' sphere in order to reach sustainable development. Many interviewees perceived that for the sustainable development to occur, there cannot exist only agency within the community but in fact, there needs to exist networks between the communities and different outside actors, including various governmental officials and private sector actors. Interestingly, the interviewees also referred to themselves as 'outsiders' in relation to the communities despite the fact that typically in development discourse outsiders refer to the relationship between the global North and the global South. In this sub-chapter I will discuss trust and networks in relation to agency within the communities and between the communities and the 'outsiders'.

7.3.1 Creating Trust and Enhancing Local Leadership within the Communities

According to Newman and Dale (2005), agency can be stimulated through a diverse mix of bonding ties and bridging ties. Bonding ties refer social networks that are created inside homogenous communities and repeated during ongoing personal contacts, whereas bridging ties involve the networks to other groups outside the community that connect people to others with diverse social backgrounds. Both, a lack of bridging ties as well as too many bonding ties, can inhibit agency. Too many bonding ties can play a negative role for one's capability to exercise agency in case it prevents an individual from getting needed information, if it imposes social norms that discourage innovation or if it leads to resistance of others outside the community. However, the benefit of strong bonding ties is that they lead to greater level of trust, which is perceived to be essential for any social relations. (Leonard & Onyx, 2004.)

Consistently, the interviewees perceived that trust within the communities is fundamental for sustainable development to occur. They described the development interventions as being facilitation towards building stronger bonding ties – stronger feeling of working together for the development of our community, learning from each other and sharing knowledge. Therefore, to reach socially sustainable development, the NGOs wanted to encourage both strong individual agency and community agency. One of interviewees described the importance of trust and networks within the community for the sustainability of development results as follows:

“If I am working directly with that project and then the next day I am not there, who will be, who is going to take on that role, so the team must be supportive, community members must be willing to support their leaders, and then you have to set a goal, and then you have to make sure you look for avenues for resources, whether you have a donor or not.” (Interviewee 8)

Some interviewees perceived the strong leadership system especially important. As described in the sub-chapter 6.3, the local leaders hold an important role in the remote communities. The LC1 of each community is someone respected and mutually selected representative from inside the community. Therefore the leadership role of the LC1 or other respected members of the community was perceived important. Strong leadership was mentioned as one of the main resources that enables socially sustainable development. The leadership system was built within the community and was therefore perceived to be enhancing the bonding ties. The role of the NGO was mainly to facilitate the process, as described by one of the interviewees:

“(The role of the NGO is to) guide the community to trust their leaders. And then you continue to train the leaders. --- I feel like it’s all leadership, if it is well managed then it will be successful.” (Interviewee 9)

Therefore, in line with the sustainable development discourse, the interviewees perceived that in order to reach socially sustainable development it is important that the trust and networks within the communities would enhance and get stronger. Trust and networks within the community were perceived as increasing individual and community agency as they would increase the communities’ ability to work together and maintain and come up

with solutions to the common issues in the communities. The interviewees perceived that a strong individual agency of the local leaders in a form of strong leadership system is an important factor in a long run. However, paradoxically, they also perceived that it is equally important to enhance the trust and networks outside the communities' own sphere. Next, I will discuss these networks and the perceptions of 'outsiders'.

7.3.2 Trust and Networks in Relation to 'Outsiders'

In reality, bridging ties relate more closely to the development intervention processes than bonding ties as it refers to actors accessing outside information and overcoming social norms with support from outside their local network. Overall bridging ties are perceived beneficial but there are problems too in case the 'outsiders' are culturally insensitive to the communities. (Newman & Dale 2005, 481.) Even though the discussion on socially sustainable development many times concentrates on the trust and networks inside the communities, the interviewees perceived that the networks and trust to the 'outsiders' are equally important.

First, I want to tackle the question of 'outsiders' and 'insiders' as it is especially interesting when the community development interventions of small local NGOs are discussed. As mentioned earlier, many of the interviewees had a personal contact to the villages or areas where their organization worked or they had otherwise a personal relationship with the lifestyle of remote villages. Despite this personal touch the interviewees mostly referred themselves as 'outsiders' in relation to the people living in the villages where the community development interventions were executed. One interviewee described the line between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' to be between the ones being 'local' or 'not local':

"...so the community normally trusts what the locals, their fellow locals say. So, if I came from another village and said I want to start organization here they would think I want to make money out of them, but if local, their fellow local explains them and say this is what we are doing, this is what we have in the budget, they will understand and believe him or her more than they would believe me." (Interviewee 4)

This poses an interesting paradox to the discussion on socially sustainable development as the ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’ in the theoretical discourse mainly refer to the relationship between the global North and global South. However, based on the research data, the line between the ‘outsiders’ and ‘insiders’ is not that clear and easily determined. The interviewees referred to themselves as outsiders but they still many times have connection to the villages or – at least – they are all Ugandan by origin.

As discussed in the previous sub-chapter, trust was perceived important when discussing networks of people working towards socially sustainable development. Therefore, the interviewees also perceived that in order to the cooperation between the NGOs and the communities to be successful, there needs to be trust from the community member’s side towards the NGO. The trust was perceived important with both the local community members overall and the local leaders specifically. One of the interviewees described that being open with the local leaders helps to create trust:

So we are very open with them [local leaders], we have regular meetings with them to update what is happening. --- So when they know what is happening they go to the community and also help backup the information we give to the community. Yeah. So... the local authorities, normally, when they come for meetings all they need you to be open to them and work with them. (Interviewee 4)

In addition to the local leaders, the interviewees also attributed agency to the community members as individuals and the communities as whole. The trust was perceived fundamental for the agency of the NGO: without trust from the community there cannot be cooperation. The interviewee continued about the trust from the community as follows:

“The other factor is creating trust in the community. So if the community trusts the organization then they work with you. If they don’t trust you they won’t work with you. They are always against you.” (Interviewee 4)

However, not only were the networks between the NGO and the communities discussed but the interviewees emphasized highly the importance of creating wider networks in order to reach sustainable development outcomes. Also according to Kleemeier (2000), strong participation and agency within the communities are not enough to ensure sustainability of

development interventions but there also needs to exist strong institutional support from external agencies to reach sustainability. The interviewees attributed agency to the NGOs by explaining their role as builders of these linkages between the communities and outside actors. The outside actors included mainly different governmental officials as well as local service providers (e.g. health care officials). The lack of such wider communication was perceived as a major problem for the development of the communities and the role of the NGO as a builder of these linkages was perceived vital in order to create sustainable change.

Therefore, through building the linkages between the communities and the outside actors the NGOs aimed not only towards enhancing the standard of living for the community members but also towards enhancing the agency of the communities and the individual community members. The enhancement was done by widening the communities' space for discussion, awareness and possibilities to get assistance. One of the interviewees described the reason for building these networks as follows:

*"... we are trying to in every project, we are not trying to be part of the project for a long time like funding and trying to find sources for that project but want the project to run itself after that two years... --- And that's why we want to build partnerships, we want to link up to the government and also other players that... we want to create some kind of support system, like networking, yeah."
(Interviewee 3)*

By encouraging building networks the interviewees perceived that the longer term development would be more accessible than purely through the activities introduced by the NGO. Through the widened networks the communities could take their development efforts further than what the NGO can offer.

*"...we have something called public-private sector partnership because communities are supposed to be served by the government but in the hard reach areas you find that the private person is the one serving because there is no government facility. So we go through that private partnership... public partnership so that we build the link between the private and public so that government brings in some support. So that the private service providers will subsidize their services so that the community can afford."
(Interviewee 5)*

Mostly the limitation for the activities provided by the NGOs was explained to be the lack of money. I will go to this question in the next sub-chapter. However, there were one type of outside networks that were not discussed by the interviewees widely but that should be addressed – the linkages to the policy processes to create sustainable social policy in Uganda. The interviewees mainly described socially sustainable development to be a process that continues after the actual NGO intervention and is therefore owned by the people taking the process further.

Therefore it is interesting to question if sustainability in basic services related to, for example, health care and education is actually approachable through purely NGO initiated, small scale development interventions. None of the interviewees described if they encourage the communities to engage in advocacy towards the governmental decision makers at the national level even though couple of the NGOs did have activities in advocacy, for example towards the Ministry of Education. Still they did discuss the problem of lacking basic services and recognized the responsibility of the government in providing them.

Education, like I said, which is the key to success, every child is entitled to education. And supporting the universal Millenium Development Goal of universal primary education so we are supporting the government because the government is not fulfilling... it's not living up to the expectation to getting everyone to the school but there are a lots of thing that need to be done in the school, everyone has to go to the school for free. So, this is an area that lacks. (Interviewee 4).

Therefore, it is clear that the projects that small scale NGOs run do not primarily encourage the individuals and communities to demand for their basic rights but instead they aim at fixing the gaps in health, education and other basic human rights that have not been fulfilled by the Ugandan government. The interviewees attributed Ugandan government very limited agency – or even denied its agency – as they described it to be incapable of delivering the basic services. At the same time, agency was strongly attributed to the communities and their capability to maintain and create networks with a number of other actors in order to fix the gaps in the basic services. Through these networks with local leaders and officials, service providers and the private sector, the NGOs aimed at

creating innovative and possibly functioning structures for specific communities. However, the agency of the communities to maintain these networks and structures removes the responsibility from the Ugandan government and the therefore maintaining and coming up with sustainable solutions to keep the services running was – in the name of sustainable development – perceived to be responsibility of the communities.

7.4 Paradoxes of Money

As all the interviewees worked in a small scale NGOs it was not surprising that the lack of funding was brought up frequently in the interviewees. The main problem was not just the lack of money but also the human resources needed for fundraising. Overall, the main challenge in working towards the goals of sustainable development was perceived to be the difficulty to reach adequate financial resources for the development projects. Therefore, lack of money was perceived to hinder the possibilities of the NGOs to exercise their agency to some extent. Because of scarce financial resources the NGOs were perceived as not being able to work as they would wish for and the expectations towards their projects were described to be higher than what the NGOs were able to provide.

However, lack of financial resources can also limit the agency of the communities' and their members. Many interviewees described that they often collected the required information from the community members and only after that decided if they can start any projects in that community. One of the interviewees described the procedures in his NGO as following:

“We do a baseline for every project and find out the need and then, if we have the capacity to get involved, then we do.” (Interviewee 3)

The chance to reach sustainability was perceived as one of the main arguments when deciding where to start activities. The projects were perceived as a financial risk for the NGOs and therefore the interviewees saw that it is not valuable to start using resources to projects that would not result to sustainable development.

“And that much money, is it going to be helpful to keep the projects up and running or is it going to or is it just going to start the project and that will be the end. So you have to look into those things even before you start spending the money. It is after seeing... cause it is a risk that you are going to take. --- So you have to look at that and that is when you start running the project. Because if it is not going to be sustainable, if it is not going to sustain itself after pulling it from the ground then that... might not be the right way to approach that project so you have to find ways to see how sustainable this can go. Other than just putting it up and being like “Ok I am done with that - next”.” (Interviewee 5)

As argued in the sub-chapter 7.2, this kind of practice might have a limiting effect on the agency of the local communities. The interviewees attributed agency to the communities by describing that the value the knowledge on problems and solutions that the communities have. However, at the same time the NGOs also hold the power to decide if they start any projects based on that information which removes the agency away from the communities'. The lack of money was represented a neutral reason for not starting projects based on the solutions suggested by the communities. However, despite the lack of money, the interviewees still attributed agency to the NGOs as they described the NGOs being able to move to other, less costly practices if the solutions emerging from the communities are not financially feasible. One of the interviewees described the problematic between the communities and the NGO as follows:

“When you take a program to community they expect to have millions and millions of money because for some reason, now that you are coming with this program everyone believes that there must be a lot of funds for the program so the expectations of the community sometimes are high so they don't give their best which sometimes affects the program.” (Interviewee 7)

Therefore money plays role also in relation to trust between the communities and the NGOs. The question is if true partnership can be created in case the local communities have to, sometimes repeatedly, give up their ideas and solutions and instead work within the structures provided by the NGO. In addition, it is valuable to question if these structures provided by the NGOs can respond to the problems expressed by the communities. Eventually, it might be a limitation to the agency of the people living in the communities if, for example, they have already received health education but their main

concern is that they do not have proper employment that could buy them things, for example the medicine that they now know they could be using for birth control. Therefore, there are clear limitations to what the NGOs can offer.

“So many of the locals are looking at things like being given hard cash to help solve their problems, they are looking at sponsorships for children to school, they are looking at creating jobs for everyone which we’ll do in the future with agriculture because agriculture will give you an income. But they want like... “Can you buy me a motorbike so I can start riding? Can you open me a shop?” Yeah. So they are looking at that kind of thing. Then, “Can you construct us a hospital?” So, they don’t know how much money our organization has and where we intent to stop, so their expectations are a bit higher.” (Interviewee 4)

Therefore, it is interesting to speculate what would happen if there was as much money as a small scale NGO needs for anything they wish to do for the community development. Would the NGOs still work as closely with the communities or would they go straight to larger scale interventions, such as building a hospital or a school? Or is the sustainable development thinking, as understood in the research data, actually a way of providing professionalism and justification to very small scale NGOs with limited financial resources? This also brings us to the question if the appreciation of the local knowledge actually is genuine and would the solutions emerging from the communities – such as financial support for children’s school fees – be supported by the NGOs if there was more money?

Obviously, the research data does not provide answer to these questions. However, it is interesting how little the effect of inadequate resources is discussed in the literature on sustainable development despite the fact that basically any development interventions require some sort of funding and resources. Based on the research data the lack of funding clearly encourages many aspects of socially sustainable development, for example NGOs to come up with innovative solutions by creating networks to public and private sectors. In addition, it clearly encourages NGOs to work with the communities as closely as possible to receive not only knowledge and information but also as much resources as possible, including volunteers and physical resources like building materials, food and water. These attributions of agency to the local communities and the ownership of the project were also

perceived as the core of socially sustainable development, as described in the previous chapters. Therefore money should be considered when discussing agency in socially sustainable development.

8 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research was to review the phenomenon of sustainable development and discussion around it. The concept of sustainable development was selected because of its wide and increasing importance in the planning, evaluation and funding of development projects and programs worldwide. More specifically, the emphasis of this research was on *socially* sustainable development and further, the concept of agency. Having deeper roots in the sociological and development discussion, the theories of agency have provided ideas for many common concepts of today's development discourses, including sustainable development (e.g. Deneulin & Shanani 2009, 30). Having people in the center of discussion, the importance of individual and community agency is fundamental for the discussion on sustainable development.

This research concentrated on grassroots NGOs aiming towards sustainable development in Jinja, Uganda. The research data was collected by interviewing nine Ugandan NGO actors from five different grassroots NGOs that all had sustainable development as one of their main goals, missions or values. This scope was selected because, according to Banuri and Najam (2002), it is important to look at the processes and actions that have potential to lead to sustainable development rather than try to measure it. Therefore my goal was *not* to measure sustainability of any specific development interventions or make arguments of what kind of projects lead to socially sustainable development. Rather, my goal was to understand how the NGOs attribute agency to different actors in their development interventions. In addition, I wanted to find out what kind of paradoxes do the NGOs manifest in regard to agency in their processes aiming towards socially sustainable development.

The interviewees attributed agency mainly to four different groups of actors: individual NGO activists, local volunteers, local leaders and community members. In addition, the interviewees attributed agency to the NGOs which was discussed in relation to the other groups throughout the whole analysis. In many cases, agency was attributed to individuals but there were also attributions for community agency. However, these differentiations were not strict or largely important in this research. Rather, it was interesting how the agency was not attributed only through practical activities but also through more analytical

processes. Most of the interviewees perceived that the core of sustainability is in the sense of agency of the community members' – that the community members feel that the development processes are theirs in comparisons to the NGOs. Most interviewees felt that it is important that the communities 'own' the development processes in order to reach socially sustainable development. These considerations are also important for the previous discussions on sustainable development and agency.

However, along the analysis it became clear that my presumption that the attributions of agency would be easily determined in specific situations or project phases proved to be wrong. In fact, the agencies seemed to intertwine with each other in a way that resulted in enablement and disablement of the agencies of different actors in different situations. For example, many times NGOs were reliant on the agency of the community members in order to exercise their own agency or vice versa. I found this paradoxical in comparison to the normative literature on socially sustainable development in which giving agency to the local communities is presented as a rather simplistic solution to reach sustainable development – as if it would be possible for one individual or a group to hold full and exclusive agency in a project that is in reality functioning through the cooperation of many actors with their own motivations and expectations.

Therefore, I further examined the paradoxes in relation to agency in socially sustainable development and found out that there were also other paradoxes manifested in relation to agency in socially sustainable development. In relation to knowledge and information sharing, it was notable that, in line with the normative thinking on sustainable development, the interviewees emphasized the importance to utilize the knowledge existent in the communities. Despite that the solutions initiating from the communities were hardly ever realized. Most of the solutions emerging from the communities were explained to be not financially feasible for the NGO, such as financial support for children's school fees. Therefore, these practices related to knowledge and information seemed to both enable and disable the community members' agency as the NGOs appreciated their knowledge but at the same time they forced the communities to function and resolve their problems in the structures of the NGOs. In addition to the paradoxes of knowledge and information, the interviewees stated that many times the core problem is, in fact, the lack of information inside communities. Therefore most interviewees perceived that there is a need to bring information inside the communities in order change habits that

in fact prevent sustainable development. This information was many times related to subjects such as health, basic business skills or environmental issues.

In relation trust and networks, the literature on sustainable development emphasizes strengthening of communities. The interviewees also found trust and network within the communities important but they increasingly emphasized also the importance of networking with the 'outsiders'. Therefore, the interviewees perceived that for the sustainable development to occur, there must exist networks between the communities and different outside actors, including various lower level governmental officials and private sector actors. These networks were perceived to widen the communities' space for discussion, awareness and possibilities to get assistance. However, interestingly, the networks towards the decision makers at the higher governmental level were not discussed to a larger extent. Therefore the interviewees largely denied the agency of the Ugandan government and rather emphasized the agency of the communities in maintaining sustainable development through the networks.

Lastly, I discussed the paradoxes of money as the lack of adequate financial resources came up frequently in the research data. Interestingly, the questions related to money are not common in the discussion on sustainable development despite the fact that money tends to be prerequisite to running any development projects. Money and lack of money were also perceived as having an effect on the agency of the communities and the NGOs. Therefore, it is interesting how little the NGOs were using resources towards national advocacy work for better public services. Only one of them was engaging in the processes of social policy formation despite the fact that most of the needs from the communities were explained to be related to lack of public services such as health care or education.

8.1 Agency in Socially Sustainable Development

As the data for this research was limited to a specific geographical area and to specific small-scale NGOs, it is impossible to generalize the results of this research in a larger scale. However, there are some similarities and differences visible in relation to previous literature on agency and socially sustainable development.

It was clear that, to some extent, the interviewees perceived culture as a having constraining effects to the development of the communities. However, as according to Bourdieu (1977), I found that the community members and the NGOs were attributed agency also in a sense that the interviewees perceived them being capable of generating cultural change towards more sustainable development, especially in relation to health and other sensitive issues. Therefore, in line with Kabeer (1999a, 438), it is clear that agency in the processes of socially sustainable development is more than just observable actions. The need for the people to understand, want or 'own' the development processes was perceived important also in the scope of this research. However, based on this research, not all forms of agency were equally valued in the development interventions of small-scale NGOs. Some forms of agency, especially resistance towards development interventions, were perceived purely negative. In fact, such agency was even considered as hindering the processes of sustainable development.

Consistently with previous research (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1984; Banuri & Najam 2002), I also found that agency is not only important in the framework of the project or programme itself but it should also exist in everyday habits and routines in order to create socially sustainable development. According to the interviewees, sustainable development is happening through building communities, trust and networks that maintain also after the actual project has finished. The results of this research support the findings of Banuri and Najam (2002) because the interviewees perceived bringing people together, building partnerships and networks, and developing new ways of collaboration and interaction highly important. However, based on this research I find that discussing the interactions and networks only at a very local level is too simplistic when considering truly sustainable and long-lasting outcomes and the needs emerging from the communities.

Lastly, it is clear that agency and sustainable development cannot be perceived from purely techno-managerial perspective. These findings are in line with the ones of Bryant (1991) and Elliot (2006). My results indicate that in the processes of sustainable development there is no one individual or a group that holds full and exclusive agency. In reality, the agencies always intertwine, enable and disable each other in the social environment of development interventions.

8.2 Suggestions for Further Research

For the future research, it would be interesting to find out how the *community members* attribute agency in the similar processes of socially sustainable development as used in this research. The interviewees of this research experienced that they are working very closely to the community members and, ultimately, they experienced the relationship rather uncomplicated. However, selecting interviewees differently could bring very different perspectives to issues of power, knowledge and information sharing, trust and networks, and money. It is also possible that the main themes would be something else than what presented by the NGO activists. The interviewees of this research were mainly highly educated, with knowledge of international development discourses such as the ones concerning sustainable development. Therefore their understanding is also affected by the academic understanding of the concepts and interviewing people without such background would bring out totally new viewpoints.

Considering further, it would be interesting to examine the concept of sustainable development in community development projects with a critical perspective in relation to universal human rights. Typically, in the discussion on sustainable development it is perceived purely positive if the people living in poor communities are able to exercise their agency. Consistently, in this research it was clear that sustainable development was perceived mainly as the communities' ability to 'own' their development. It was perceived important that the communities manage to actively create and maintain networks that can help the communities to reach basic social services, such as health care. This kind of thinking however tends to take away the responsibility from the Ugandan government and puts the pressure mainly on communities and individual community members. Therefore it would be interesting to consider even further if the strong emphasis on the agency of individuals and communities can also have a negative impact in relation to sustainable development – and even to fulfilment of human rights.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix 1: Interview Outline

1. Introduction: Can you tell me something about yourself? Age, education, previous experience in development NGOs?
2. Work: Freely describe your work and duties in this organization. How did you come to work with this organization? How long have you been working with this organization?
3. Processes: Describe a typical process of a project or a program in your organization? What happens first? Where do the ideas come from? What happens next?
4. Roles: What kind of role does your organization have at different stages? What kind of other roles are there?
5. Sustainable development: In the development NGOs we often use the term of sustainable development which is understood in many different ways. Could you tell me, in your point of view, what does sustainable development mean?
6. How, in your organization, do you take in to account the sustainability? How does it show in your vision? What do you do in regard to sustainability in different stages of the project described previously?
7. On the basis of your experience, what are the main factors that enable sustainability? How about the factors that hinder it?
8. Could you describe me an example of a successful development project? What kind of project is in your opinion no successful?
9. In general, do you have any suggestions how to ensure sustainable development project? In community, in ways of planning and implementing, etc...?
10. How do you perceive the future of your organization? What kind of future do you imagine for the communities you work with?

Appendix 2: Matrix for Analysis (with examples)

What?	...we want the locals to take charge... (Interviewee 4)	Before we start the trainings we usually do what we call orientation so the communiies have orientation of the program and we work with the LCs to make sure we have the biggest number of members in the community that day (Interviewee 7)
How?	we train them to take control of those projects; recruiting locals on permanent basis who will be running and coordinating those projects	
Why?	...then in the long run we will withdraw slowly by slowly when they are ready to take over an run those projects, so we don't want them to collapse when we are gone.	...so they can ask all the questions. So that they know why is it important to participate, how relevant it is so that they can be part of it.
Context?	Continuation of the development and projects	
To whom?	...for the community to work in a long run.	
Enabling factors?		First of all, them understanding why it is important. Them being facilitiated with rightful resources they need to use, and also umhh... them seeing the direct benefits of what the program is doing to their community, if they see change it is easier for them to ensure that they continue with the process.
Hindering factors?		
Consequences?		Then, they voluntarily say "I am going to be the leader, I think I can keep time, I am going to be the eye, I think I can be the ear, I'll take the records, voluntarily. Because then they understand.