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# 'CASTLE IN THE SKY': SAURI MILLENNIUM VILLAGE IN REALITY

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# **‘CASTLE IN THE SKY’: SAURI MILLENNIUM VILLAGE IN REALITY**

*Hellen Kimanthi and Paul Hebinck*

## **Abstract**

*The Millennium Villages Projects (MVPs) were implemented across sub-Saharan African countries to catalyse the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and act as a proof that the MDGs are achievable. The MVP implemented interventions to cater for the eight MDGs in efforts to accelerate transformation of communities towards modernisation. This paper critically explores the MVP’s ‘quick win’ strategy to achieve the MDGs with a focus on agricultural interventions, implementation and impacts on the local community in Sauri Millennium Village (SMV) in Kenya. The study builds on previous studies (Van Kessel 1998; Mango, 1999, 2002; Hebinck, 2001; Mango and Hebinck, 2004 and Hebinck, Mango and Kimanthi, 2015) exploring socio-technical and agrarian changes in western Kenya. These studies were done way before the MVP was implemented in Sauri. The longitudinal nature of the data allow us to an indepth ex-ante and ex-post situational analysis of the dynamics generated by MVP. We argue that the MVP has been prone to many tensions that not only constitute its failure and its rather limited success but also that the MVP-bureaucracy’s reporting of results, outcomes and impact is extremely and continuous questionable. MVP stands for a continuation of the project model of development that has been in existence for decades. A model that is characterised by great discrepancies between policy objectives and implementation, and between planning and the existing everyday realities in the villages. Centrally, coordinated interventions, bound by time and budget and guided by a discourse that seldom resonates with the predominant local conditions, are often ineffective, inefficient and short lasting (Rondinelli, 2013; Olivier de Sardan, 2006; Scott, 1998; Long, 2001).*

*Even though that MVP claims to combine top-down and bottom up approaches, it is generally underpinned by a blueprint and this includes a repeat of ICRAF-expert style ‘model’ of the 1980s and 1990s to exemplify development. MVP has been blind to individual agency and heterogeneity hence the resultant grassroots corruption, elite capture of agricultural inputs, injury of social relations and exacerbation of the existing inequalities within the community. Data collection included largely qualitative methods, including in-depth and key informant interviews, ethnographic observations, case studies, life histories and document and archival reviews. A two-month intense period of data collection in Sauri was concluded in 2014.*

## Introduction

Over the years, the world development leaders have come up with strategies for development; the “integrated rural development” (IRD) approach that was implemented in many countries in the 1970s and early 1980s (Clemens and Demombynes, 2013 :3), the Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) in the 1980s that preceded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) launched in 2000. The shortcomings of SAPs necessitated the need for a new development paradigm. According to Stiglitz (1999), the set of policy recommendations in which SAPs focused on were not sufficient. ‘It focused on trade liberalization and privatization as ends rather than means through which a more sustainable, equitable and democratic growth could be achieved. It did not recognize the importance of strengthening financial institutions. Little attention was paid to the strengthening of institutional efficiency to make markets work, and especially to the importance of competition. In other words, the SAPs model did not consider the ‘underlying factors’ of life in the rural areas which prevents households in the rural areas from participating in the market. There was therefore a need for a paradigm that would be based on a broad conception of development that would have related broader vision of development strategies as well as positioning the role of international development assistance at a different angle including a different way of delivery to the people. In short, the earlier development paradigms viewed development too narrowly and thus did not succeed’ (Stiglitz, 1999 1-2).

With this vision in place, the MDGs were launched as the next development strategy by the world development leaders and experts in the year 2000 at the Millennium Summit where eight goals were set forth that ‘would lead’ to transformation of societies (Stiglitz, 1999, Sanchez et al., 2007). They were described as ‘*the world’s biggest promise*’ that were deemed too important to fail (Wilson, 2013: 2). However, it was realised that most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa were not likely to achieve the goals by the year 2015 and thus MVP was born to speed up the achievement of MDGs. The UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan commissioned the Millennium Project to produce a strategy for the achievement of the Goals, which was then implemented in the Millennium Villages. Headed by Jeffrey Sachs, the Millennium Project comprised a ‘task force’ including representatives of the World Bank, the IMF, UN agencies, ‘civil society’, and the private sector (Wilson, 2013 :7, Carr, 2008, Sanchez et al., 2007, Binagwaho and Sachs, 2005). MVP model stipulates that poverty and hunger can only be reduced by accelerating the transformation of the societies and economies in the South from the use of traditional to modern resources. It forms part of the continued project approaches to development that has not been successful for decades. As Cabral et al. (2006) indicates, it is largely a top-down project as it is based on blueprint even though it claims incorporation of bottom up approaches (Cabral et al., 2006).

MVP follows a modernisation model of development even though it is widely known that the model is associated with fabrication or labelling of communities in-order to create space for intervention (Umans and Arce, 2014). People are labelled as ‘poor’ necessitates ways of intervention that emanates from the interveners’ perspectives which include new mechanisms of control. Problems are identified and categories created about the ‘deficiency’ of the ‘poor’ where labels such as ‘poor farmers’, ‘impoverished people’, ‘inefficient traditional methods of farming’, ‘poor marketing strategies’ etc are given to provide green light for interventions. Hunger is constructed largely through institutionalization, for instance; the agrarian reforms, green revolution and integrated rural development. Successions of development strategies have been witnessed over decades with development discourse remaining unchanged (Escobar, 2011 21-54).

With the increasing criticisms on modernisation models, various approaches have been designed to try and curb the problems associated with top-down development such as ‘fit-in-context’ approaches that make the local actors subjects of their own development. These include fitting in a solution to a complex situation rather than moulding the local realities to fit into the set objectives (Umans and Arce, 2014). However, development is much more complex. Many development projects mainly follow a linear progression of set objectives to achieve the desired results even though in practice, development is never systematic (Long, 2001). It is more heterogeneous and fragmented making up

assemblages (DeLanda, 2006). The assumed linear progression of development is what constitutes the MVP.

Jeffrey Sachs in this MVP model identified 'Big five' development interventions that would set Sauri community on development path. These are; agricultural inputs, investments in basic health, investments in education, power transport and communication services, safe drinking water and sanitation. These big five were supposedly identified together with the 'villagers' who had been assembled to respond to questions already set concerning their status in relation to the eight MDGs (Sachs, 2005 :232-235). In the quest for community information and subsequent implementation, 'villagers', who are said to be impoverished, were lumped together as a mass of homogeneous entities even though the community is made up of heterogeneous groups and individuals with diverse interests, goals, knowledge, desires, education etc (Carr, 2008).

As Wilson (2013) explains, the typical villages in Sub-Saharan Africa comprise of heterogeneous groups of people and differentiated individuals some of whom are powerful business-oriented farmers and already engaged in global markets while others may be small scale farmers who depend on family labour and produce for subsistence purposes. In short, the 'African village' has been misinterpreted and this makes it vulnerable to unintended consequences of the project implementation. For instance, the inputs provided by the MVP such as fertilizers, improved fallow seeds and hybrid seeds are vulnerable to 'elite capture' where the most powerful community members benefit more (Wilson, 2013 :9). Of particular interest in this study is the agricultural interventions that saw farmers in Sauri trained on 'modern' ways of farming, supplied with inputs (hybrid seeds and fertilizers) (Mutuo et al., 2006) and reintroduced to use of fallow technology for soil replenishment (Sanchez, 1999, Kiptot et al., 2006, Kiptot et al., 2007, Mutuo et al., 2006) that was initially introduced by ICRAF in mid-1990s, forming a continuation of the same.

Agrarian development involves technical changes which are mediated through social processes. These developments do not progress linearly as expected by the development planners. The interactions of the interveners with the targeted communities involve social and technical processes as well as encounter of scientific and local bodies of knowledge (re)producing heterogeneity which is inherent in agrarian development (Hebinck, 2001 :119, Long, 2001). These interactions loosen the 'relations of interiority' or rather the internal cohesion and create loose external connections (DeLanda, 2006 :10-11).

We argue that the MVP model follows a project-style linear model that has historically been characterized by failures. The project has been prone to many tensions despite being a high profile project deemed too important to fail. Most of the data produced has been sealed off from the public and questionable reports of its successes have been published; that have been aimed at keeping its inefficiencies under the carpet to prove that MDGs are achievable. Introduction of entrepreneurial style of farming by re-organising the community to facilitate formal ways of marketing and supplying them with inputs was abt taken afar from the local people's social organisations. To some extent, the 'free gift' approach as a strategy for getting farmers to adopt new technologies ignited a 'dependency syndrome' among the farmers who thought that MVP was there to stay and they would continue getting free inputs. Thus after withdrawal of the 'free gifts', most poor farmers could not stand on their own, but the better-off farmers who would otherwise not need any intervention. The community's social relations have been injured and the already existing social inequalities exacerbated.

This paper critically analyses MVP's implementation in Sauri, western Kenya that explores the misplaced hopes of MVP in creating an 'island of success' for prove of concept. We do not deny that the project has had some positive impacts to the people of Sauri sub-location. For instance, it has drawn a number of NGOs that have seen it to several uplifting activities such sponsorship of children from poor backgrounds, protection of water springs throughout the sub-location, community enlightenment etc. We begin with the analytical framework and the methodology for data collection, then an overview of SMV which includes a critical look at Sauri sub-location as the site choice for the MVP implementation and key interventions in relation to agricultural production, followed by an analysis of how data has been produced and communicated by MVP, the project impacts of fixing

solutions to the community and then a conclusion with a summary of the article and suggestion of the way forward in such a messy situation.

### **Theoretical underpinning of mvp and methodology**

The analysis of MVP model in this paper centres on critically exploring the transfer of external solutions to the local problems, implementation processes and outcomes of MVP. This constitutes a heterogeneous and fragmented process which DeLanda refers to as *assemblages*, which underpins this analysis. An assemblage is a whole made up of heterogeneous elements with varied properties that are in relationship with each other (DeLanda, 2006). The property of a whole (assemblage) emerges from constant interactions between its parts which exercise their capacities in these interactions. These 'interactions create an internal coherence and external boundary in arrangements known as *'relations of interiority'*' (Umans and Arce, 2014 :338, DeLanda, 2006). Some processes in an assemblage increase or decrease the degree of internal homogeneity. These are *territorialisation*; whereby some components of an assemblage pursue stabilisation of its identity and *detrterritorialization*, a process in which some components function to destabilise hence forcing an assemblage to transform into a different one (DeLanda, 2006). The local community is composed of smallholder subsistence farmers whom MVP works towards transforming to small scale entrepreneurs to form an entrepreneurial community. This does not go as the local people sharpen their boundaries and retract to their informal groups and informal market organisations.

Assemblages can be multi-scaled; occurring at multiple levels in a society such as at community level, institutional organisation level, state level or even at global level. The social entities within each level are made up of multi-layered elements that have temporal and spatial scales. This defines an element of *hierarchical (social) power relations* within an assemblage that is exhibited by its components. For instance, within a community, there are elders at different levels such as chiefs, assistant chiefs etc who exhibit some power and whose power is recognised by other members of the community. Most development projects make use of this power relations at the local level assemblages to get through to the communities. This benefits more those people in power as well as their close allies resulting to unequal sharing among in the community. On the other hand, elements that land in the community are lifted from other contexts especially in developed world and inserted in another setting to bring about change in processes DeLanda (2006) refers to as *decontextualization* and *recontextualization* (Umans and Arce, 2014). These processes cause disturbances of the existing normality. For instance, MVP's efforts to re-order the community to adopt to 'formal' organisations and structures get contaminated especially by corruption and power privileges hence some community members are inclined to benefit more than others. This erupts conflicts and therefore, injury of existing social relations.

Assemblage theory allows for explanations how heterogeneous elements are able to hold together in a whole (Allen, 2011). Assemblages in the case of MVP constitute ideas, materials, practices, objectives, finances, technology packages and scientific knowledge etc that are lifted from a more philanthropic and scientific environment and fitted to a conceived traditional and 'impoverished' community so as to bring about change in form of a modernised community free from hunger, diseases, illiteracy, gender inequalities etc. Such intervention is assumed to provide an enabling environment for 'proper' governance in an effort to improve especially through formalization of institutions (Murray Li, 2007). However, the local people have their own way of reassembling especially the scientific knowledge, funds and technological packages presented through their agency (Long, 2001) which DeLanda indicates as 'the properties of interacting entities' in an assemblage (DeLanda, 2006 :11).

A community is an assemblage that constitutes groups and individuals with varying properties who interact in various ways forming the property of a community as a whole. The community is therefore not to be taken as a homogeneous entity. Each interacting entity has properties that constitute agency that informs the kind of the relations formed through their interactions. For instance, if we talk of a welcoming community, this is a property arising from interactions of members of the community but that does not mean individual members behave the same. They have agency, which govern their acts

as individuals that reflects on the assemblage as a whole giving it its property. This approach gives room for exploration of general entities with concrete assemblages thus portraying the heterogeneity nature of assemblages (DeLanda, 2006 :17).

The study was done in Yala division, Siaya County which lies in Nyanza Province of Kenya and specifically in Sauri sub-location which was the first Millennium Village that was launched officially by Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, The Earth Institute team and the Kenya government officials in July 2004 (Mutuo et al., 2006 :4). Sauri was chosen for the study because of the much attention the area has received both nationally and internationally in regards to agricultural transformations. Agricultural technologies have been introduced and re-introduced in the area; these include hybrid packages, which have faced resistance from the local people even in the face of a massively funded project like MVP that advocated for use of inorganic fertilizers and improved seed varieties for improved production. MVP had high hopes of transforming Sauri community to a ‘modern’ community.

The study employed qualitative methods of data collection in order to extract detailed accounts of how farmers experience MVP implementation. Various data collection methods were used which are:- ethnographic observations and interviewing, case studies, life histories of cases, semi-structured interviews with key informants, desk study and document review of (available) MVP and extension reports. Informal visits and discussions with the community members during ethnographic observations gave way for understanding the on-goings at the community as well as farmers’ responses to questions about MVP and be able to compare with the available data published by MVP. It is important to note that our efforts to access MVP data from their field and regional offices bore no fruits. However, the use of the above methods provided an opportunity for description of the subjective choice of Sauri as a Millennium Village site, MVP’s confidential data production and analysis, MVP impacts to the community and assumed sustainability measures as viewed from below. A total of 21 participants were interviewed, 5 of whom were key informants and 16 were farmers (cases). The number of farmers who provided us with information include a follow-up of four cases previously interviewed in the previous studies. This provided a good viewpoint of MVP’s position vis-a-vis other interventions in the area and the situation before MVP implementation.

The research units were mainly farmers at household level as they were the targets of the MVP interventions and the level where important processes of interactions with introduced technologies took place. The informants were selected randomly, purposively and through snowballing to include those farmers who have been very active with MVP activities, those who had withdrawn from using the technologies as well as from the introduced market systems, members of newly formed grassroots initiatives, adopters and those who partly use the technologies. Additionally, the key informants were purposively selected due to their knowledge of the MVP operations in Sauri as well as their interactions with the farmers. Some other respondents provided information that served as a confirmation or rather data back-up.

### **The choice for the sauri millennium village. *An ideal choice?***

SMV is made up of 11 villages which are densely populated. It is an area with high potential for agriculture which receives rainfall two seasons a year. Water is readily available as there are natural springs across the villages in addition to Yala river; all of which never dry up (Mutuo et al., 2007). This makes it an area that has a lot of potential for production. Nonetheless, Sauri is one of the areas that have been receiving financial assistance from international organisations for more than two decades now. International Center for Research in Agroforestry (ICRAF) began research in the sub location in the early 1990s along with Kenya Agricultural Research Institute (KARI) while Africa Now, which is a UK based charity organisation worked with the community in the late 1990s to support the building of spring-protection cisterns, CARE Kenya as well as Heifer International also worked in the 1990s while the MVP came in 2004. Ideally, as Schlesinger (2007) argues, Sauri did not appear to be an ideal choice for a site where ‘an experiment’ that aimed at poverty alleviation of the ‘poorest of the poor’ was to be carried out given the development work that has been ongoing in the same area. She wondered; ‘if one were truly attempting to establish a representative baseline of data

for the MVP model, would it not be more logical to choose an untouched locale?’ (Schlesinger, 2007 :2)<sup>1</sup>. However, it is claimed that Sauri MVP was selected on the basis of poverty and hunger incidence in the area (Pronyk et al., 2012 :149, Wanjala and Muradian, 2013).

This triggers a probing question; how did MVP land in Sauri? A knowledgeable respondent in Sauri explained that when ICRAF started research in Sauri in early 1990s on soil fertility as part of the ongoing research in western Kenya at that time, there were key personalities involved with the community. He mentioned that the research was led by Dr. Niang Amadou, a Senegalese Principal Forester who was charged with the responsibility of developing methods for speeding up the adoption of agro-forestry innovations. He brought the idea of improved fallow technology to Luero village, a village within Sauri Millennium Village. In 1997, according to the respondent, Dr. Amadou’s boss, Professor Pedro Sanchez got personally involved in the agroforestry research activities that were going on in the area.

Prof. Pedro Sanchez was the director general of ICRAF at that time (1991-2001), which is headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, and who later on became the director of the Millennium Villages Projects between 2004 and 2010. He was also the co-chair of the United Nations Millennium Village Project Hunger Task Force from 2002-2005 (Earth-Institute, n.d)<sup>2</sup>. The respondent explained that Prof. Pedro worked with them for around three years before leaving. But before he left, he promised the farmers that he would come back with more development interventions. The local people organised a farewell party for him where he was crowned the Chief and named Odera Akang’o, after a famous chief who existed during the colonial period from the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was after a few years, in 2004, that Prof. Sanchez returned with Prof. Jeffrey Sachs and his colleagues from Earth Institute as well as a delegation of donors from the private sector and non-profit organizations to launch the MVP in Sauri.

Even though the MVP was intended to be initiated in a poor area in order to prove the feasibility and effectiveness of village-level interventions, the sequence of events that occurred before implementation of the project in Sauri confirms that the choice for the MVP location was influenced by part of the designers’ knowledge of the area and experience working with the local people of Sauri. Interestingly, some of the staff who joined MVP used to work with ICRAF, advocating for use of agro-forestry technologies (which required use of internal resources) in soil fertility replenishment and were seen as more effective. For instance, Sanchez (2002) suggests that the most effective and appropriate approach to soil replenishment that can help improve the current African conditions better than those used during the Green Revolution are combinations of improved fallows, phosphorous and biomass transfer. This is because they are ‘low-tech’ and knowledge intensive technologies (Sanchez, 2002 :2020). However, upon joining MVP, more focus was on use of inorganic fertilizers, which are externally acquired, to improve soil fertility.

The approach that MVP took in choice of the project site, as Schlesinger (2007) points out, was the consideration of an area that was more likely to succeed and pass as a good example of the possibility of eradicating poverty during ‘our time’ as envisioned by Sachs (2005). The MVP designers should have, instead, opted for an area that is in dire poverty so that it could exemplify the problem depth. Since many villages in Sauri sub location have had experience interacting with external development agents and given that the area is not that badly off as compared to many other ‘poor areas’ in Kenya, one could as well say that the project was foreseen or rather expected to be a success in such a location (Schlesinger, 2007 :3). SMV was as a result of a subjective choice of site.

The key interventions in agricultural sector, which was the most important sector of intervention were; hybrid technology package and introduction of formal organisations mainly for acquisition of inputs and marketing. Farmers were supported with improved seeds, inorganic fertilizers, improved fallow

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<sup>1</sup>Victoria Schlesinger is a writer, reporter and editor who published a story about Sauri Millennium Village Project in 2007 in Harper’s Magazine. She has a website ; <http://www.vschlesinger.com/>

<sup>2</sup> This information this is from the Agriculture and Food Security Centre of Earth Institute, Columbia University website.



seeds and capacity building through intensive extension training on appropriate agronomic practices (Nziguheba et al., 2010 :76). Some of the institutions introduced by the project include farmer cooperatives, cereal bank for grain storage, credit facilities, and a market service centre that hosts some of the farmers' cooperatives. Additionally, farmers in Sauri were trained on the use of the technology package (hybrid seeds and inorganic fertilizers), grain storage, crop diversification and greenhouse technology. MVP almost took over the community activities especially during the first and second year of implementation when most community members seemed too busy with MVP activities every day for as long as there were benefits to reap.

Few reports specifically on Sauri Millennium Village have been published. These include the baseline survey report (Mutuo et al., 2007) and the first annual report (Mutuo et al., 2006) that reported celebration of high yields after the first year of MVP intervention where farmers had been supplied with free inputs; such yields were never achieved anymore and publishing of reports on the progress not only went down but the MVP data has been kept highly confidential from the public.

### **Our data, our currency...keep off!**

This section highlights that MVP reports on impact evaluations have been controversial and done in a closed and confidential manner. External researchers are not allowed to access MVP data that prohibits critique on data production and processing. As Clemens and Demombynes (2013) indicate, project data requires an interactive process of external critique. One reason being that careful assessment of projects reveal the best use of project funding and impact to community (Clemens and Demombynes, 2013 :12). Thus most projects are compelled to publish impressive reports even though the reality is different.

Demombynes (2012) argues that the main problem surrounding data in Africa is data access. Most of the data collected is never used again after a single report is produced. The data is hidden away from the public because of its bad quality or credibility issues that may trigger questions if scrutinized and cause problems for the data producers. Again, organisations may be reluctant to release their data because it is thought to be of high value. They want to hold on to the data and never release it even after publications from such data. However, data produced by public funds should be made available to the public, though with some conditions such as non-access information identifying individuals etc. this public data should be made available to public upon request atleast within 5 years of production (Demombynes, 2012).

The fact highlighted by Demombynes that most data is hidden because of its loopholes is true of MVP. The project has received a lot of criticisms on their reports, from its lack of sufficient measures and data that backs up their claims of success. Some MVP reports published have been found to be false and misleading thus attributing success to MVP falsely. At times MVP has been made to take back some statements from wrong reporting and rectify mistakes after criticisms (Clemens and Demombynes, 2013 :3-7, Pronyk, 2012). How about the false and erroneous reports by MVP at country level that have not been detected? Clemens and Demombynes (2013) note that the critiques they made in response to MVP report (Clemens and Demombynes, 2011) were only credible since the Demographic and Health Surveys allowed for free assessment of MVP success assertions (Clemens and Demombynes, 2013 :12) which otherwise would not have been possible. It raises eyebrows as to how the data is produced and analysed and the reasons for keeping data confidential and closed for such a long time.

The MVP data in Sauri is highly confidential; independent researchers are not allowed to access any MVP data or even contact interviews with MVP staffs on anything related to the project. They, however, do not declare that they cannot give access to their data but takes one in circles that lead to nowhere and conveys a message that 'our data is ours'. We believe that data produced more than a decade ago and reports disseminated should not still be hidden from the public eye. A source on the ground informed us that for one to get access to SMV data, one has to be vetted first and the objectives of their research assessed before being given any access to data or other support. Most of those who

get MVP support for their study usually have objectives aligned to MVP goals and whose results would be in support of the project's claims. We proved this information as true when we sort to seek access to SMV data. After making rounds, we were advised to send an email explaining what we are researching and the kind of data we needed. After sending the email, that was the end. No response was ever given.

The MVP does not want to suffer embarrassment by allowing researchers to access their data that would question their data credibility and expose their weaknesses. Additionally, with some of their reports failing the test of criticisms, this can only constitute one thing; data cooking to fit to their envisioned successes. This does not help development in anyway; practically SMV is no different from any other village and the situation on the ground is more or less the same before MVP implementation.

### **Problems of the 'solution-fix' mvp model**

The 'solution-fix' model of the MVP constitutes drawing of disparate elements together through various practices that are aimed at improvement by implementing various interventions for treatment of the diagnosed deficiencies such as hunger from low production (Murray Li, 2007:264). Since MVP is mainly premised in promoting entrepreneurship among farmers by transforming farmers from subsistence to small-scale entrepreneurs (Sanchez et al. 2009, 40), agricultural production has been geared towards helping farmers produce in surplus so as to venture into markets. It relied more on technical assistance to the farmers such as imparting scientific knowledge through the extension officers, provision of technology packages, formalization of marketing relations etc. There was little attention, if any, paid to, for instance, the existing local knowledge and culture of seeds (Hebinck et al., 2015), local resources and social relations. The scientific knowledge was placed above the indigenous knowledge and farmers were formally organised. Naturally in every community there are already set structures, systems and relationships that work for communities in solving communal and individual problems or rather in daily interactions, that are affected by insertion of external elements.

Solutions are fixed in a way that aims at 'modernisation' of communities through imposition of Western interests and capitalism (Umans and Arce, 2014 :342). The already existing relations, in rural development, are affected by elements inserted into the assemblages which are mainly capital and technology transfers. Such insertion disturbs the internal coherence of assemblages they are attached thus fracturing their relations (ibid.: 348). The interventions designed required reordering of the community to comply to the formal rules for purposes of governing and control. This has had massive effects on the community. MVP tried to incorporate top-down bottom up approaches in its implementation in Sauri; which means diagnosis of deficiencies, finding solutions and involving the community in implementation of the interventions. This erupted more problems especially when the community was partially in charge of their own progression after being pumped with 'appropriate' knowledge by the interveners concerning how to move forward in development. The community has experienced deepening of existing inequalities especially due to elite capture of intervention benefits mainly the agricultural inputs, anonymity among the community members crept in and thus generally *injuring the social relations* among the members.

There have been attempts to 'modernise' through formalization of initially informal interactions and the planning of initially spontaneous activities. For instance, the MVP introduced cooperative systems to the local community to make transactions more formal in-order to replace the already existing forms of traditional exchanges. The cooperative societies that the farmers were introduced to through the project did not seem to cater for the needs of the farmers in the long run. A Market Service Centre (MSC) was established in order to address marketing challenges which include exploitation by middlemen. A total of 8 cooperatives are housed in the MSC. These include grain cooperatives which are Kilimo ni Uhai and Indigent Cooperatives, Gem Horticultural Cooperative, Fish farming cooperative, Poultry cooperatives and beekeeping and honey processing cooperatives. Most of these cooperatives are now not operational. Kilimo ni Uhai cooperative is made for those farmers who are able to buy inputs by themselves and so the prices are subsidized for them. The Indigent Cooperative

is for the poor farmers who cannot afford to buy inputs by themselves and so they are given 25 kilograms of DAP (fertilizers), 6 kilograms of hybrid seeds and 25 kilograms of Urea (Urea for top dressing). The members were required to pay back with a bag of maize (90 kilograms) after harvesting. These inputs are way too little for the amount required in the farms and so they still have to purchase more inputs if they are to reap full benefits of the technologies but most of the indigent farmers cannot afford that.

At the onset of the project, all farmers within the MVP village were eligible for free hybrid seeds and fertilizers that reduced to half the following year and was scrapped off to give way to self-reliance during the third year of intervention. Most indigents quit the arrangement provided since they could not repay due to low harvests. The better-off farmers stood to benefit more because they could afford to buy the required inputs through the subsidy arrangement. In fact, one of the better-off farmers stated that “*I have never planted without the use of fertilizers because I always have the money to buy them. I do not really understand why my neighbours keep claiming that fertilizers are too expensive and yet the soils are so depleted such that without fertilizers one cannot get any good harvest*”. The hybrid package recommended by MVP seems to be more applicable or rather made for the to the able farmers but not the poorest ones. The situations are worsened by the fact that the soils are ‘used’ to fertilizers and can only yield far much less without fertilizer application which they can’t afford. Their own local maize varieties that used to do well even without any fertilizers cannot yield much either. Thus the benefits of the project did not really trickled down to the most needy people in the villages. There is further class division.

There has been exacerbation of the existing relations of inequalities that has been manifested through unequal power, resource and information sharing. In Sauri, there are two prominent clans in Sauri; Kalanyo and Kathomo clan. Members of Kalanyo clan are said to be more aggressive than their counterpart and they constitute a large number of people in leadership positions. They share benefits of leadership among themselves side lining the rest of the community members. Even though MVP used democracy to elect leaders, shortly after, many things changed as some people felt that some of the leaders elected did not qualify to lead people thus they pushed for re-elections and chose the leaders they could ‘collaborate’ with. For instance, the chairlady of MVP executive committee was an uneducated elderly lady who was pushed out to give way to young and educated male leader hence making a continuation of the existing gender inequalities in power. MVP has been in the centre of all these struggles for better position and (unfair) acquisition of resources especially inputs leading to division and social exclusion.

On the other hand, in the spirit of re-organising the community to operate formally, formal storage system (cereal bank) was introduced to the farmers as a profit-making scheme. It is claimed that the cereal bank or contract buying schemes were to be more useful to farmers from the increased grain prices after cumulative storage (Sanchez et al., 2009 :39). However, this never worked out with the local people. It was characterised by loss of resources (maize grains) through unfair means, mistrust, abuse of power, corruption etc. Various actors within the setting had their own interests. Focusing on the local leadership, most respondents cited abuse of power as the main reason why most community structures disintegrated with many members withdrawing their membership. One of the respondents stated that;

*“When the cereal bank was beginning, we collected 1075 bags of maize and the MVP promised to give us additional Kshs 100,000 (1000 Euros) for buying more maize from the farmers to add to the bags we had collected and then they would sell the maize for us. Our maize was sold and we never got anything. These Millennium people really disappointed us. People then refused the whole thing about cereal banking, but the MVP came up with another plan of grouping people in different cooperative societies where most people joined but many have dropped out. However, people have not forgotten about what happened with the cereal bank and that’s one of the things that made some people refuse to join cooperatives. Farmers had already contributed with varying quantities of maize wholeheartedly and with much hope for benefits. I lost five bags that time to the ‘cereal bank’, it was painful”.*

Out of the 16 farmers interviewed in this study, 31 percent are no longer involved with cooperatives or any formal organisation and the cereal bank collapsed. Those who still operate through the cooperatives have some other sources of income and some are the lead farmers. It is evident that in the effort to enlighten farmers to operate formerly, MVP also unintentionally opened the actors' eyes wide open on how to reap where they have not sown. Those who have withdrawn found it unbeneficial and again a loss to continue clinging to the formal organisations as required by MVP.

Struggle for autonomy in order to reduce dependency is characteristic of peasant farmers (Van der Ploeg, 2010). There is increased need by the farmers to set an independent pace for themselves through rebuilding their own social networks. In this case, the farmers in Sauri are now struggling to co-produce through their own means and are increasingly distancing themselves from the formal ways of organisation as introduced by MVP. Farmers realized that the formal systems, especially the cooperatives and loaning schemes, could not adequately address their problems. In fact according to many respondents, the farmers experienced a great loss when operating through the formal systems. Some of them thus chose to disengage and form their own groups that they thought will be more beneficial in the end. Examples of highly territorialized newly formed local initiatives (informal groups) include, The Sinane Widows and Widowers Group, Geno Youth Group and Injili Group all of who fell out of MVP and engage themselves with various activities in order to uplift the status of their members and the community at large.

In addition to the failed cooperative system as a sustainability measure, MVP adopted ICRAF style of investing in few community members to act as examples to other members for continued development. During the previous studies, most of the farmers who were famously called ICRAF-agents were chosen to be lead farmers and facilitate the adoption of fallow tree agroforestry technology (Mango, 2002). They attended seminars and workshops and chose those who were to attend meetings and seminars as well. People did not like them but liked ICRAF staff because they were getting free inputs from them (Adato and Meinzen-Dick, 2007 :163). The approach of picking a few farmers to work with creates tensions among the community members. These farmers are seen as having been favoured and thus arousing jealousy in the community hence breaking social relationships (Mango, 2002, Place et al., 2005).

As an exit strategy, MVP copied the same failed tactics of ICRAF where some farmers were promoted from within the community to facilitate change through empowerment and capacity building. They adopt the technologies and other farmers can learn from them (Kiptot et al., 2006 :168). SMV adopted the lead/master farmer concept to offer an alternative on how farmers acquire new techniques for farming as a sustainability measure (MDG, 2014)<sup>3</sup>. It is a strategy that had previously caused a stir among the community members citing favourism of ICRAF towards the 'ICRAF-agents' whose selection again was linked to a network of kinship relations. There is less hope for MVP to achieve sustainability through such a measure.

## **Conclusion**

African communities have been diagnosed as languishing in hunger, diseases, gender inequalities, etc and African villages treated as homogeneous groups of people. MVPs that were implemented in African countries aimed at speeding up the achievement of MDGs by the year 2015, heavily relied on aid and blueprint. Sauri Millennium Village (SMV) in western Kenya was subjectively selected for MVP implementation. Interventions in agricultural sector included hybrid technology package and trainings on agronomic practices as MVP is premised in producing entrepreneurial individuals who produce surplus for the market thus transforming them from subsistence to small-scale farmers. This paper has explored MVP's implementation in Sauri, highlighting its failures in its 'quick wins' strategy. It contributes to the MVP criticisms on its implementation and achievements.

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<sup>3</sup> From MDG report released in January 2014, Lead Farmer program was launched in 2013 to provide a better alternative of how farmers acquire new techniques for farming. The lead farmers were trained in technical, communication and leadership skills and are expected to share with others in order to create some change within the community.

SMV has been faced with many tensions in its project-development model that has historically been characterised by failures. The project sort to promote some normative standards according to how development is perceived to be like. The introduction of farmers to formal organisational forms and 'modern' knowledge about crop production implied discontinuity with the existing local knowledge, resources and relations as they were seen as inefficient. These organisational packages constitute the construction of 'trade in images' which are sustained through 'labelling' of the community as lacking or needy to legitimize such measures (Long, 2001).

Most of the data produced by SMV is kept confidential and closed from the public even long after dissemination of reports. There is fear of embarrassment through exposure of its shortcomings in data production and analysis compelling them to cling to their data. The highlights in the published reports are about successes of which greater part constitute fabrication. Field evidence shows that most farmers have distanced themselves from most MVP activities which constitute failures such as with the Farmers Cooperatives and cereal banking scheme. Conflicts and tensions among the community members are consuming up the community in scrabble for the benefits of the project. The most powerful and better-off members have been able to benefit more than the poorer farmers who now have nothing to cling to. Instead of MVP helping them to uplift their living standards, they have been pushed deep down into poverty. If MVP would have succeeded, it would provide lessons for governments to allocate budgets for similar programs and earn donor trust. On centrally, MVP requires more financing to sustain its activities rather than the communities being able to stand on their own.

Agrarian change is gradual and may not happen within the specified project duration. MVP was designed such that by 2015, Sauri will be an 'island' of success to prove that MDGs are achievable. This has not been possible. Technological change has been viewed too narrowly as a technical process rather than being approached as a socio-technical process that require long periods of time for transformations to occur. Social changes cannot simply be engineered and results achieved within such a short time. Again, agrarian transformation largely comes from within. It is an endogenous process and that does not warrant development actors to develop communities directly even with deliverance of adequate amounts of 'what the community requires' (Umans and Arce, 2014 :343). There is thus need for an alternative to development that will engineer positive change.

A possibility would be to work with the local people's groups or projects developed 'from below' by the farmers themselves such as the Sinane Widows and Widower group, Geno Youth Group etc. The local people within such groups already have a specific needs they want to address through certain solutions. They may have the plans but lack means to achieve their goals. Working together with such groups can ensure that the local people's needs are well address their perceived problems and ensure continuity as they get exposed and linked to various options that they can incorporate within their structures and systems with time. Success of the farmers' initiatives can be a sustainable alternative source of income that can help them take care of the basic household expenses hence direct surplus produce to market for future savings. This is, however, a long term process of change that should not be bound by time or strict budgets. MVP is based on big push model that implies continuous injection of funds in projects in villages that will otherwise collapse without such funding.

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**Global governance/politics,  
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