Women's Agency in Social Change and Development:

Self-Reliant Communities
Towards a Model for Policy Change

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As the economy grows more global than local, the respect of local socio-political and environmental aspects of life is often reduced. Global trade, along with corporate activities focusing on maximizing profits increase transportation of goods, natural resources, and jobs away from local communities. As Trans National Corporations are not required to take responsibility or accountability for actions outside of their shareholders' demands for profit, corporate power has been shown to be dangerous for local communities' ability to enjoy healthy and sustainable environments. If by law, corporations are designed to produce profits, no matter the outcome or cost to the local environment, social conditions or needs of people will unlikely be met, unless they turns a direct profit. With increasing power being given to corporate bodies through the World Trade Organization and trade agreements such as North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or the pending Free Trade of the Americas (FTAA), corporations "now have the power to force national governments to defend corporate interests" (Goldsmith 1996:266) which is above the voice of collective democracy.

> *When basic necessities are no longer produced locally, people lose an important base for understanding how their everyday lives are connected with the environment and lose respect for the systems that sustain them. Community, equity and security also suffer.*
> (Perkins:1996)

It is precisely for these reasons that we will discuss in this 5 part paper the need for community self-reliance in development work, towards healthy living spaces for the "benefit of present and future generations" (Kumar 1996:420) balancing the social, political, economic and ecological needs. In order to achieve this social change in development work towards self-reliance, part 2 explains how women's agency is central to the process. In part 3, women's agency in development and social change will be demonstrated through alternative economic strategies of micro-credit and community currency. I call on policy makers to respond to the proven research which demonstrates women's needed agency in development work and social change, and to put in place policies that facilitate this process. Therefore, step by step in part 4, utilizing a case study of my work in Vanuatu, I pull apart the problems of development work where there is a lack of women's agency in the process. And finally in part 5, I outline a 'Model' for successful development towards self-reliant communities which addresses how to implement strategies that foster women's agency in the process.

Part 1: Community Self-Reliance

> The aim of self-reliant development – producing a diversity of goods and services at a community level scale to meet local needs.
>
> (Nozick 1992:43-44)

In Gandhi's view, local self-reliance, or *swadeshi*, is where villages build strong economic bases, satisfying local needs through local goods and services. Community Economic Development towards self-reliance is therefore much more than simple local economic regeneration and employment creation. This process understands that "economic activity should have objectives wider than simply maximizing the financial return on capital" (McRobie 1987:3). As McRobie suggests:

> A new economics is needed that takes into account not only the profitability of a given activity but also its effect upon people and the environment including the resource base.
>
> (McRobie in Schumacher 1996:28)

Therefore, a self-reliant community, in contrast to conventional economics, is one that directly addresses locally the *triple bottom* line approach: a concern for the social, economic and environmental factors that all contribute to a healthy and sustainable living experience. When a community understands its local wants and needs, and has the ability to control its inputs and outputs by using their own resources and inner strengths to meet its needs, it can then define and design its own future. The opportunity to use local profits in order to create more local jobs that respond to local needs and desires, offers a greater autonomy and freedom to decide its priorities and enable local people to secure more control over their economic and social environment (McRobie:2; Nozick:62) . In light of a globalized and ever expanding economy, who best to design a community's future but the people themselves who best understand local conditions and can therefore provide the best service such as health promotion and education through their economic gains.

And it has ecological benefits. With local production and consumption, communities are forced to live with their own waste bi-products so they learn how to minimize or reuse them. Furthermore, in reviving community-based business, communities begin to "restore trust and personal accountability between consumer and producer which in turn re-establishes home identity and rootedness" (Nozick:63).

It is argued by McRobie (1987) that the only way to truly have a human face in economics, one that cares for the whole of the community, comes from an understanding of the values of family and community, co-operation, friendship, sharing, and creativity. It is here that people find an enjoyment of their jobs, not as an undesired task to feed one's family, but as an addition to the health and enjoyment of the group. With local households and small private or cooperative enterprises understanding the need for local community self-reliance and decentralized decision making, the community appreciates and respects every decision since they affect each member equally.

Yet the goal of healthy self-reliance towards development is not one of isolation, but local interdependence. As Nozick (60) puts it: "interdependence, as opposed to dependence". Therefore, it is argued that in local community development – although successful development feeds off the success of the community – there are numerous advantages to the market economy. Kumar (1996) argues that for Gandhi, self-sufficiency would also include interdependence with other villages, and foreign markets. Yet while claiming that interdependence is a healthy approach to development, it is also not the intention of self-reliant communities to lose control of their local economy to outside forces, and never to the before local needs are first satisfied.

The voice of Adam Smith resonates in Gandhi's view of economics since Smith also believed in the importance of the local needs being satisfied first, before extending to outside markets. Smith believed local self-reliance was key to the overall success of the economy, yet students, followers and policy makers of today, who contend they adhere to Smith's philosophies, have focused more on the principle of the free market through the 'invisible hand' than on Smith's holistic view of economics. This holistic view envisioned a healthy economy through local self-sufficient terms, which once accomplished, communities, cities and states could look outside the local space toward export marketing and comparative advantage trading – interdependence.

In this vein, Gandhi believed that the village community ought to be an "extension of the family rather than a collection of competing individuals,"(Kumar :419) where the goal was not personal or even familial gains, but the self-sufficiency of the village community as a first step before entering any considerations towards external markets. In Gandhi's eyes, "[m]ass production is only concerned with the product, whereas production by the masses is concerned with the product, the producers and the

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process…for the benefit of present and future generations"(Kumar :420). Therefore, Gandhi's vision of *swadeshi* was for the market to serve the community rather then forcing people to fit into the market (Kumar:420).

Yet there are many problems that also arise within the ideology of community self-reliance. One cannot suggest that if corporations were non-existent the world and its communities would be in harmony. Many societies have grown up learning how to be individualistic, and humans are prone to do what is best for themselves as a survival mechanism. Schumacher (1994) believes that in societies who are exposed to capitalism, the individual trend is strong as it "relates to certain very strong drives of human nature such as envy, and greed"(Schumacher:31). As Schumacher (1994) notes, a "buyer is essentially a bargain hunter: he is not concerned with the origin of the goods or conditions under which they have been produced. His soul concern is to obtain the best value for his money" (Schumacher:29). Therefore, to say that a community will collectively do what is best for itself once it gains control of its destiny is naïve. Many problems arise in communities and often decisions are made by individuals who are thinking only about personal gain, and, have the power to influence the decision making process. Yes, families and environments evoke sentiments of caring and partnership (Nozick:55), but many people act as individuals, for their own personal gain. Therefore, it is sometimes preferable to have a centralized system for certain services such as health clinics and education facilities. If these are centrally guaranteed to all members of an area, then equality and diversity may be better distributed.

A second problem arising from decentralization is a concern that corporations can influence and/or purchase rights to land and resources owned by local communities. The more decentralized the easier it may be to impose corporate rule in certain areas. This is seen in Indian Narmada Valley as damns are being built on indigenous land, forcing millions of rural land owners to move to new locations at huge social costs[1]. With a history of colonization in India, and with increasing power being given to Trans-National Corporations through the World Trade Organization (WTO), it is clear that too much decentralization may in fact put communities at risk from large corporations and outside forces imposing on a people's way of life and self-determination. As a result of these observations, there needs to be a

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[1] See Arundhati Roy's Power Politics, South End Press, Cambridge, 2001.

careful balance between a decentralized system run by local communities and a centralized system run for the benefit of the larger society.

A third problem that arises in the methodology of self-reliant communities is that the goal is sometimes pushed to the extreme, attempting to be completely disconnected from the outside world, and completely return to the 'traditional ways'. This becomes an impossible task and has the potential to take the focus away from the initial reasons for self-reliance. There are many benefits to globalization and when the negative effects can be addressed and corrected through local needs assessments where choices for improvements can be made locally, we may be better off. Communities do not have to cut themselves off from all 'outside' influences, which would result in the community becoming exclusionary and closed to new ideas and human growth. Diversity, along with an understanding of ones place of origin, are healthy steps towards self-reliance, while understanding how important it is to share and grow from others. Just as it is in a globalized world where "we forget who we are and where we come from…Rootlessness, transitoriness and dispossession are the fall-out of an increasing trend toward globalization and global competition" (Nozick: 1992), being exclusive can also be just as unhealthy.

One can see that community self-reliance is a very positive force in reducing potential and proven negative effects resulting from globalization and conventional economic forces. As a key to development, self-reliance needs to be understood locally, historically and holistically where achieving a balance of power is always difficult, and one that has to be constantly monitored for the safety, enjoyment and health of self-reliant communities.

Part 2: Women's Agency in Social Change and Development

As academics and practitioners continue to debate women's agency in development, they challenge the inadequate and misinformed national and international developmental policies which often misunderstands the local social, political, environmental and economic environments affecting women and their agency for social change (Warren and Bourque:1991, Peterson and Runyan:1993, Tong:1989, Sen:1999, Pearson:1992). These authors challenge the perceptions and role of women's work, debating not merely the value of women's work in communities towards positive social change and development,

but the consequences of either underestimating, misrepresenting or economically misplacing women's work.

As women's work is valued as productive (seen as economic, read as monetary gains) or as reproductive (seen as a natural role, read as childbearing and household chores), the misconceptions and misrepresentations can be devastating in development work. As a result, academics such as Zavella (1991) and Fernandez-Kelly (1983) have followed up on the debate of valuing women's work and the effects of the garment industry on women in the 'global assembly line'. What one woman considers a good job in the city away from home, another may believe her freedom is taken away. As one woman enjoys her daily role of minding the children and cleaning the house in her community, another is angered by the repression and lack of freedom in her local patriarchal system. As one academic sees women at large committed to family values and community well being, another writer accuses the other of paternalistic views towards women and of generalizing women's agency.

What must be understood in development work is that what is valued in one space is not necessarily valued in another. As a result, it is argued here that when doing development work towards sustainable local and self-reliant development, understanding women's agency as a force for social change must be understood locally through local values, wants, needs and commitments of the members involved.

Yet in turn, women's agency in development takes on a particular perspective based on women's "participation in home and community life and as those who have paid the biggest price for conventional economic development" (Conn,et al 1994:121). The authors therefore believe that women's work in development has 4 main features guiding positive development and social change (Conn,et al 1994:121-127):

> (1) *Redefining the meaning of productivity* where unpaid work in the home and community, performed by women often in addition to paid work, is not only essential to the cash economy, but without it the formal economy could not operate.

> (2) *Establishing a multiple-bottom line* where in women's community development work, it is recognized that economic activity does not happen in a vacuum, isolated from community life, but rather a healthy social, cultural, ecological, and spiritual environment is essential. This opposes the conventional economic development which elevates the financial bottom line above all other concerns in the community.

(3) *Developing collective resources* proposes "co-operative relationships within and between communities for mutual benefit…which have offered the best way for women to achieve control over critical aspects of their lives". Women's expertise, based on their personal and community relationship and activities have shown considerable success.

(4) *Ensuring collectivity* where "careful attention and planning is required to ensure that meetings, workshops and conferences represent the communities they serve". Co-operative structures are therefore a framework for equalizing power through democratic decision-making.

Similarly, Madeley (1995) quotes from an India NGO, Grama Vikas, which means village development, where "the battle against poverty can only be won when people learn to work together and plan their own development through collective action"(115). And Sen (1999) points out that an increase in women's participation does not only generate results for women in general – a reward on its own merit – but it also provides for social benefits as women are a major influence on social change and the development process (201, 202). In the eyes of Gramas Vikas, the role of women is critical as "change is only possible when rural woman involve themselves in decision making and programme implementation". As Sen (1999) expressed:

> Nothing, arguably, is as important today in the political economy of development as an adequate recognition of the political economic and social participation and leadership of women.

Part 3: Alternatives Economics

As the dominant neo-liberal economic system values money more than real goods and services or people, in turn increasing wealth disparities between economic-social classes, while sacrificing the environment for short-term gain, alternatives economic programs defined and utilized by local people, in terms of their own wants and needs is a powerful way to re-invent Gandhi's vision of *swadeshi*.

The need for a turn toward local self-reliance through alternative economic programs is seen by CUSO (1999) in developing nations where most food-exporting countries' wealth is often derived from what communities produce, yet the poorest sector of the economy has been those same producers CUSO (1999) questions "*how can it be that the wealth-producers become the poorest part of the economy?*" concluding that the current economic system is simply unsustainable.

Therefore, CUSO (1999) identified the *market system* and the *money system* as two mechanisms which allow the neo-liberal model to wreck devastation on an increasing population. Some NGOs like

Oxfam and the Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives work at the macro-level (*market system*) creating documents and dialogue to rectify the most glaring problems and create a critique of the neo-liberal paradigm and its policies. Yet CUSO (1999) believes there is also the need to develop economic systems at the micro-level (*money system*), through alternative economic programs that respect individual rights, social harmony and the environment.

Alternative economic projects include micro-credit schemes, cooperative enterprises, community currencies, agriculture, and other community-based economic development programs which "promote community dialogue and create analysis tools about economic security issues" such as alternative insurance or risk-sharing systems to cover health care, natural disaster, old age and other human security issues (CUSO:1999).   Furthermore, there is an obvious connection to work on alternative agriculture, energy, housing and local environmental management which, in tandem, can reduce possible negative impacts of the global economy.

As "the empowerment of women is one of the central issues in the process of development for many countries in the world today" (Sen:202), it is quite important for policy analysts to understand and advocate for an increase in women's agency. One way to achieve an increase in women's agency – which is "one of the major mediators of economic and social change" (Sen:202), – is through promoting local currency and micro-credit schemes that would offer women these opportunities. Therefore, micro-credit and community currency, as two distinct types of alternative economics will be discussed next, displaying women's agency in development and social change towards self-reliant communities.

Micro-credit

In Rubinstein's (1998) "Summary of Micro-credit", he explains that development studies have not only created awareness of the negative impacts of globalization, they are helping to strengthen local communities by documenting the implications of development projects for women.

With many initiatives to empower communities by providing alternative access to financial resources, the efforts of *Women's World Banking* (WWB) helping women to rise from poverty towards self- reliance is an important example(Rubinstein:1998). Since its inception born out of international development concerns raised at the 1975 UN Conference on women, it has focused on bringing better education, health care, family planning, equality and peace to the daily lives of women and their families.

Women's World Banking has had tremendous success extending credit to poor women, deemed "unbankable" by other agencies. To date, with affiliates established in Asia, Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe, it has served 500,000 clients worldwide, 80 % of whom are poor and enterprising women. Using small business loans averaging $300(US), practical business training and international peer workshops, the women's bank has found a recipe for success that is resulting in a 95 % repayment rate on its loans and improved living standards for its clients, their families and communities (Rubinstein's:1998).

In defiance of the Bangladeshi banking system, which treats women as second class borrowers, the Grameen Bank wanted to establish a 50-50 ratio of women and men borrowers. But they soon discovered that the women are far more effective agents of change:

> when an extra income comes into the household through the woman, children's diet,
> family's health and nutrition and the state of repair of the house receive the highest
> priority.   (Rubinstein:1998)

Men, it was found, are more likely to spend some of their income on self-gratifying consumption. It was also found that women are much better credit-risk than men and more responsible managers of meager resources. In poor societies such as Bangladesh, where family laws are not well enforced, and traditions come before the law, the incidence of men abandoning their dependent wife and children is far too common: "Economic empowerment of women has had a dramatic impact on the stabilizing the family unit" (Rubinstein:1998).

Nancy Barry, associate director of *Women's World Banking* asserts that, "what women need is access, not subsidy. They need opportunity, not paternalism" (Rubenstein:1998).   With gained access to credit – by forming rotating credit associations, individual business ventures, agricultural, production and child care co-operatives, savings groups, as well as loan guarantee funds which give women-controlled community businesses access to financial resources – "we can use it to generate the funds to satisfy all other needs," says Michaela Walsh, a conference participant appointed to generate support for an international bank for women (Rubenstein:1998). This empowers women to move towards expanded local stewardship over environmental and economic resources within the community (Rubenstein:1998).

And similarly, women's agency in development through micro-credit with the Indian Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) established in 1972 as a trade union for self-employed women

is seen by Srinivas (1998) as she exemplifies women's agency in social change. The fact that it has grown with the inspiration and support of three movements, SEWA encapsulates the struggles of the poor and women agency in development models:

> 1) Labour movement with the belief that the self-employed have rights to fair earnings, decent working conditions and protective labour laws.
>
> 2) Co-operative movement to evolve an alternative system, where the workers themselves would control their own means of production.
>
> 3) Women's movement which strives for the recognition of women's work and for a fair share for their contribution.

SEWA measures the effectiveness of their training efforts through two concrete objectives: increasing the income earning capacity of their members to become self-reliant and increased solidarity among them (Srinivas:1998). SEWA's members who have identified and developed sub-sectors of the economy such as dairy farming, gum collection, salt farming, plant nurseries, and embroidery, normally considered women's work (read non-wage activities) have successfully been converted into wage labor. Through encouraging women to form self-employed producer groups whereby they can find new markets for their products, SEWA has succeeded in minimizing seasonal migration, caused by lack of employment (Srinivas:1998).

SEWA also encourages women to hold accounts in their own names which is revolutionary for traditional Indian society where financial accounts are almost always managed by or passed down along patriarchal lines (Srinivas:1998). As a testimony to women's ability in matters 'outside the home', the repayment rate is astonishingly high (96%) by the yardstick of commercial banks. Furthermore, there are no government subsidies which allows SEWA to successfully stay self-sustainable (SEWA:1991).

Yet perhaps more important than just access to credit, SEWA has concentrated on empowering women to use all of their resources more effectively, giving priority to capital accumulation so that loans are not taken primarily for consumption and survival. Through their own research, praxis and local understandings, SEWA (1991) understands that

> poor women's disadvantages in earnings and working conditions are compounded by the lack of supportive services available for them. Consequently, women have been articulating the need for social services and security systems.

Therefore, women's groups that receive loans also receive training in financial management, legal rights, and business management. SEWA organizes workers on supportive services programs, which can all lead to further organizing on economic issues, using grassroots techniques, utilizing principles of collective organization, working with various women's village organizations, empowering women to meet their needs and for better health services, child care, and common forms of insurance to protect their lives and livelihoods (Srinivas:1998). Many SEWA groups have begun health cooperatives and opened childcare facilities. A further sample of SEWA programs include: "Health Activities: Community Health Programme, Maternity Benefits Scheme, Occupational Health, Family Welfare", " Smokeless Stoves", "Life Insurance Scheme, "Water and Sanitation and Housing", "Protecting Against Family Violence and Sexual harassment", and "The Legal Aid Centre" (SEWA:1991).

Four thousand members of the SEWA trade union established the SEWA Bank in 1974 as a cooperative. Today SEWA has over 220,000 members, 362 producer groups, and 72 cooperatives with a Board of Directors, elected regularly by the shareholder members who each have an equal vote. Due to resulting increased income and greater status in their communities, SEWA(1991) reports that these women have a much stronger voice in village-level decisions normally made by male leaders. It has been documented that in the Indian villages of Gujarat, and in the city markets of Ahmedabad,

> women are speaking out more, taking leadership roles, and realizing how far they can go when they have collective bargaining power for wages and better working conditions.   (Srinivas:1998)

Sen (1999) also believes that micro-credit, empowers women to achieve ownership of land and capital in developing countries and achieve a "balance of economic and social power between men and women" which tend to be, in developing countries, very heavily biased in favor of the male members of the family (201). These schemes, along with combating domestic violence and improving education and family health has built a strong case for the recognition of women as powerful agents for social change in development.

Community Currency

> *Rather than seeing wealth as created by mass output of centralized industries, we need to see that wealth is generated by the thousands of economic exchanges which occur within a community and focus on increasing these local exchanges.*
>   (Nozick 1992:44)

Another way in which women continue to show their agency in social change is through utilizing community currency and barter trading systems such as LETS, HOURS and Time Dollars which are grassroots projects generating local exchange using alternatives to the national currency. Most communities find it hard to participate in the economy, and almost impossible to benefit from it because they lack national currency. These programs "stimulate local economic activity, easing the pain of recessions and currency crises" (Gaines:2002). Therefore, alternative currencies allow communities to improve human security -- economy, food, and health by (CUSO:1999; Meeker-Lowry:1996):

> (1) Putting their own value on goods and services with a commitment to community building
>
> (2) Encouraging local production to satisfy community needs, and
>
> (3) Understanding the role of economics and money, protecting communities from the kind of economic crisis that hit SE Asia in 1997.

It is for these reasons that one can appreciate the rise in the local currency movement which is:

> providing a positive way to respond to the alienation from the natural world fostered by an expanding global market place, and to restore the possibility of regional economies based on social and ecological principals.
>
> (Schumacher:29)

In an expanding and globalizing world, community currency systems have helped to decentralize the control of land, natural resources, industry, and financing and serve the people living in an area in an equitable way. These systems are designed to create an infrastructure that encourages local production for local needs. As Michael Linton, a Canadian who designed the first Local Exchange Trading System back in the early 1980s wrote, "A local currency can't leave the community it serves, so it ensures connections between people exchanging skills, goods and services"(Bakhi, 2001). Therefore, Community Currencies promote healthy and sustainable spaces since the system is based on:

- Understanding local wants and needs
- Utilizing local assets
- Creating local jobs
- Promoting cooperation and egalitarianism
- Spending money internally
- Guiding towards self-reliance

Yet, according to Raddon (2002) in *Community, Currencies, Value and Feminist Economic Transformation*, community currency is not intended to be a protest of or separatist movement from the national currency. Instead, programs are focused on building the "community around a full spectrum of exchange relationships resembling market transactions, barter and gifting". Its design as a "complementary currency" is to overcome a shortage of national currency and to "widen the mutual aid networks of separate nuclear families" (Raddon:2002). The system tends to encourage a more trusting, cooperative community, engendering accountability as everyone is linked to the local trade (Gaines:2002). Thomas Greco, author of *Money: Understanding and Creating Alternatives to Legal Tender* believes community currency systems improve the health of communities as

> locally owned businesses are more likely to use local suppliers, reducing the environmental costs of transport and stimulating local production. They are more likely to employ local people, and they contribute to the culture and uniqueness of a community.   (Gaines:2002)

Because most transactions are from casual and personal services, community currencies are seen as "household activities and neighborly favours…where the boundaries of gender are fluid" (Raddon:2002). With work often accounted for with some form of credit to ensure fairness and reciprocity, women's skills and efforts, once taken for granted, are acknowledged. Raddon (2002) believes that although community currencies cannot function as economic indicators on a national scale, they indicate that "monetization is not always antagonistic to women's caring".

Similarly for Perkins (1996), after examinations of development documentation which shows that the building of community often depends heavily on economic roles which are now often filled by women, she believes that many successful community-building initiatives have been led by women through the use of small-scale structures, co-operative processes, shared information and resources, consensus decision making and reliance on local support networks. Again, women's caring is not always antagonistic to monetization.

Yet placing a monetary value to unpaid work raises serious questions concerning the value of women work:

> Should we try to remove caring work from the domain of female responsibility by measuring it with "masculine" measures? Or should we guard women's care and the intimate relations it sustains under the aegis of the

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"feminine", where it cannot be robbed of its heartfelt meanings, and reduced to cold
hard cash?   (Raddon:2002)

Both Gaines (2002) and Raddon (2002) argue that community currencies provide a powerful answer to the debate of splitting the values of caring and that of money towards reconstructing and revaluing money itself. Local currencies programs, through their structure, have an opportunity to rebalance gender relations as they re-embed money in a broader set of values, "which are the same values that motivate and guide caring work"(Raddon:2002), urging a "deeper appreciation for the way money connects people in relationships of trust and mutual satisfaction of wants when it is transacted on a human scale" (Gaines:2002). These are, at minimum, the values of human relatedness and interdependence.

Alternatively, as Gaines (2002) points out, not everyone is convinced of the merits of these systems. Some do not believe in the power of community currency systems to be strong enough to effect change on the money and banking system and thus will only seek solutions at the local level through evading the political sphere.

Yet, as shown through the examples of Alternatives Economics of Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Women's World Banking (WWB) and Community Currencies, development documentation shows that not only are these alternatives making an impact on development policies, they are also empowering women with a window of opportunity to effect the social changes that they have made locally, onto a larger scale.

Sen (1999:212) calls for more research as he notes "women's agency is one of the more neglected areas of development studies". Here I challenge this view, not only as student of Community Economic Development and Anthropology, but also as an experienced researcher and field worker. Not only has there been professional and academic research done to this effect (as shown above), but also, in my experience working with NGOs both locally here in Canada and overseas, it appears obvious to me how important women's agency for positive social change is, not only to the individual women, but to the community at large. It seems puzzling to me that Sen (1999), as an Economist, would call for more research on women's agency in development in terms of policy implications, instead of acknowledging what has already been done. Not only is it clear in my field experience, it is also clear in the experience,

policy and mandates of the four international NGOs that I have worked with, along with the literature on women's development, documented by Banks, NGOs and academics in the field, as demonstrated above. I am not sure what type of evidence Sen is requesting in order for policy shift to occur for women's agency in development. What is striking is the lack of acknowledgement of the research, and more importantly the lack of academic recognition of women's agency towards development and social change.

As a case study on the agency of women in development projects, I now turn to my own field work experience in Vanuatu, in order to explain the project, the outcomes, the failures and the lessons learnt: Why this project failed, and how it could succeed through women's agency.

PART 4 – Case Study: Vanuatu Eco–Forestry Sawmill Project:

In this case study I will be looking at the work that went into the Foundation of the Peoples Of the South Pacific (FSP) Eco-Forestry Sawmill Development project, the process and the outcome in the community of Naone in the Southern part of Espiritu Santo Island, Vanuatu. The project will be evaluated step by step and include up to date local developments which have devastated the progress as half the village of Naone has eroded and falling into the river/ocean a few months back from a land slide and the recent events which have forced FSP International to launch a lawsuit against the village as loans are not being paid back and money is being pocketed by individual members.

In terms of my experience in Vanuatu, I am going to be looking at the women's role in development in Vanuatu -- and the lack there of – and in particular, suggest community currency as a model for balancing the role of women's work as valued culturally towards healthier self-reliant communities.

Project Summary:
From 1997-2001, the South Pacific Community Eco-Forestry project (SPCEF) worked with communities in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Kiribati to develop country specific and appropriate models for community led sustainable forest management. The *eco-timber* alternative offered through the SPCEF project gave village landowners in the three Melanesian countries the option to manage and utilize their forest resources sustainably through providing a range of quality tropical hardwoods directly to local and export markets. The success of these South Pacific pilot projects would ensure more funding for other villages around the South Pacific.

The purpose of this project was to increase the income earning opportunities of rural communities by establishing socially, environmentally and ecologically sustainable, economically viable forest based

industries for production of eco-timber and selected non-timber forest products. In other words, develop elements of some of the work initiated by the SPCEF program, with the focus shifting away from 'eco-timber' and more to eco-products and business, and environmental planning generally. The overall objective of this project was to enhance the quality of rural life through the conservation and sustainable development of their forest and tree resources maximizing the benefits to the community from use of their forest resources. Through rural based and community led development, providing employment and skills, the outcomes would better secure villages from devastating effects of globalization as large and small international firms are unsustainably cutting down their forests for nominal fees, leaving their forests bare and natural resources ruined. Informed and joint community decisions made about both the short and long term use of their forest resources – based on a full understanding of the

value of their resources and the impacts of forest disturbances – could, in time, sustain their rural life.

In Vanuatu, the project assisted a small rural community, named Naone in the Southern part of Vanuatu's the largest Island, Espiritu Santo, through all stages of resource management; from forest ecology awareness, community commitment, forest inventory and management, community based development, sustainable timber production, through to setting up channels linking community producers directly with markets for eco-timber (FSP Vanuatu Final Report:2002). Naone has about 120 members that belong to the village, with roughly 80 members who come and go into the community. Naone spans about 300 acres and is divided by 2 main land holding families and 2 church groups: Pentecostal and Presbyterian. Many of the children go away to boarding school on the island and come for holiday and festival visits.

My Involvement:

When I arrived, the project had already been running for 4 years. Intensive *Participatory Research Action* (PRA) workshops[2], Business training[3], Forestry Management[4] along with Social and Environmental Awareness workshops[5] were already completed. The project funding from the EU had ended and the village was awaiting the arrival of the sawmill from Australia which was already 2

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[2] Involving women's active participation and demonstrating 'How to run Committees'
[3] Book Keeping, Marketing and Documentation
[4] Bush, Chainsaw and Sawmill Operators, Log Scalers, Timber Treatment, Tree Selection with Marking, and First Aid

weeks late in arriving. I was introduced into the village as a student volunteer and defined my own role as to what I saw was necessary in the village after an initial 2 week stay. I quickly learnt that my role would be to encourage active participation in the project through direct communication with the Chief and active members towards the making of an Action Plan before the sawmill arrived as the community did not appear to be ready for such a large scale project.

Therefore, as a representative of FSP (understanding their mandate of 'BY' and 'FOR' the people, with a direct inclusion of Women) I attempted to promote Naone's ownership of the project through encouraging:

- Clear understanding of their project: (re)creating awareness, plans of action and decisions 'by' the people)
- Clear communication links to the FSP office(s) and within the village of Naone
- Action 'by' the people. I was in Naone, NOT to do their work, but rather to assist and encourage Naone in their efforts, answer any questions or troubles through my direct link to FSP, and ultimately bridge the communication and understanding gap between the office(s) and the Village.

Problems:

➢ **Village communication:** In order to fullfill these tasks, I had the fortunate experience of a rotating eating schedule where each day I would visit a designated house in the village. This schedule was set up by the project Committee to facilitate my stay and was an excellent opportunity to for to learn from each and every member their thoughts, views, concerns and joys of the project. This turned out to be the most fruitfull of my activities as I learned that what the villagers would tell me in the private of their own home, they would not share that with the community in making the Action Plan.

➢ **NGO/Village communication:** It became more clear that the communication between the village and the office was very obscure. Most people did not understand the project's main objectives and although there seemed to be a real struggle to learn and develop skills, often miscommunication would cause delays in action which would not get completed or would get confused with other objectives.

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[5] Addressing domestic violence and environmental degradation

One example of this miscommunication was the timing and dates of village meetings that would be scheduled and either the NGO or the community members would not show up. Understandable in many development projects where patience is required as each party is learning, but this became not only ridiculous but dangerous as the sawmill arrival date was closing in and there was no plan of action.

Another example is the arrival of the sawmill which took such a long time to arrive that FSP began to lose face in the eyes of the village; my task, which I created, was to encourage the village to approach FSP and ask how to speed up the process and find out what is taking so long.

➢ **NGO/NGO communication:** I eventually found out Juliette from the Women's Center had previously done a Participatory Research Action (PRA) workshop in Naone, December 2001, one year after FSP had completed their own PRA workshop, *which caused confusion and therefore no action in Naone.* Nobody from Naone, during the 9 day workshop, told Juliette that FSP had already done the PRA last year with action plans drawn but not completed. This mis-communication was not cleared up for over a year while FSP and the Women's Center were independently conducting follow up solutions to the two actions plans made.

Resulting from the PRA workshops, 2 activities were decided upon. An Awareness Workshop for the whole community arranged by Naone's "Wild Yam Committee" would focus on Environmental awareness, co-operation issues, and domestic violence. Secondly, FSP would initially assist each woman in setting up her own agro-forestry plot. With the mis-communication, workshop attempts were not very effective which confused, independently of each other, both FSP and the Women's Center.

➢ **Sustainable Community Goals Unclear:** I became worried as the level of preparedness was quite low and no plan, objectives or goals were set in place in the community. It seemed that although there was lots of hard work already completed by the local FSP office, performed by two *local* employees, much of the project's particular set of actions was left up to the organizing abilities of the community. Which seemed slim as most of these techniques were very new to most members.

Yes, PRA workshops were conducted, but goals were never agreed upon. There were a number of problems addressed in the PRA workshops that were *not* being addressed through action as mentioned above. Namely, the water supply was broken causing women to be extra busy, and a major

land slide was possible if tree planting to secure the ground along with some houses being moved were not immediately addressed.

It became clear to me that equality of decision making in the village was not addressed seriously. Through participatory observation and discussion with each individual in every household, I realized that everyone had different individual goals then a larger vision for the community. And the women would not speak out in public as they did to me in the quiet of their homes. Most women feared that the community would not benefit, but rather only a few members would – particularly the working men. I soon realized two huge dilemmas in the project. Firstly, I became aware that the village was divided into 2 large families, which was visibly divided into 2 church groups and most importantly 2 land resources with differing visions and outcome goals of the project. Secondly, the community had voted in favor of paying the working men in cash for their time and effort, as opposed to all funds going straight into a community fund. My concern was 4 fold:

- First, the villages of Vanuatu are not used to a cash economy and members tend to spend cash as soon as they receive it. What is also needed is the understanding that there needs to be enough surplus to pay the loan each month. Without payment into a community fund, there is no chance there will be enough money for the loan.

- Secondly, men who receive cash tend to purchase non necessary items that only benefit the individual, and often it goes to alcohol which in turn is dangerous for the women who get abused by the drunken men.

- Thirdly, most villagers do not understand the importance of spending community money inside the community. Mostly each penny earned in Vanuatu tends to leave the village level as soon as it comes in.

- And fourthly, land resources were in dispute. I learnt that there are two main land holding families where one family in the village wished the project was for the benefit of the whole community, as their fore-fathers had requested before they died, while the other major land holding family wanted the profits for their own family.

What was clear to me is that Naone does not need a cash economy. However, this would help for education, health and sanitation. If money goes to unhealthy and unnecessary individual needs, such as white bread, white rice, white sugar and alcohol, the project serves to enmesh rural communities into a dependent cycle within the global economy. A development project is about more than increasing cash flow, it is about community health, empowerment and sustainability.

➢ **Village Chief not living in village:** Although the Chief was strong, he was not living in the village as he still worked on another Island as Chief of Police. This weakened the power structure as he was not involved in the project helping to keep the community's goals on task firmly and accountably, rather, he was very skeptical of the project's goals.

➢ **Village co-operation decreased:** which explained the individualistic goals causing the project to stall. Members were not helping each other out with basic duties to keep village clean and organized. There was a community dinner and I was shocked to see that many of the working crew did not attend, not even the elected committee leader I spent some time asking them to come and join the dinner and if they would not I asked them to explain to me why they wouldn't come. On a few occasions, I was persistent enough that a few men joined in on the dinner prepared by all the women instead of explaining their reluctancy to join.

➢ **Education, Health and Nutrition:** If education, health and nutrition are problematic and in need of services, development projects should be addressing these shortcomings directly in their action plans. They were not. Women were walking 5 miles to the nearest health facilities which offered little more than cough syrup. The water system was broken increasing women daily work, and children had to attend school out of the village. The main food supply was purchased in the main town, 20 miles away, and it is expensive and unhealthy: white rice, white sugar and white bread. Village money was being wasted on unnecessary and unhealthy food items in a place where food crops grow very quickly and where ocean and river food supplies abound. In my view, education, health and nutrition was a serious problem and it was not being address through the project goals.

➢ **Domestic Violence and Alcohol abuse:** Although the project was economically based, I believe that development projects should be holistic. If the men abuse their wives, sisters and daughters, and it gets worse with alcohol abuse, my first action would be to implement a plan so that money would not be used for alcohol. This also results in women not speaking their views to the community or to the NGO.

➢ **Commitment, Accountability, Responsibility:**   It became apparent to me that the representatives of Naone were not only lying to each other about their goals some were lying to me about their abilities and goals and I could not understand why. Although I did address this issue to each member casually and privately, I also addressed it formally in community meetings, but I soon learned that I needed more experience cross-culturally, in terms of Vanuatu social environments, to understand and pursue this dilemma. Basic organizational tasks were not being implemented and there was no way to measure success or failures or to learn form the mistakes. Money was even going missing.

Conclusion of Problems:

As the project came to an end in February 2002, the Naone village project was in chaos. The workers have not only stopped paying the loan of the sawmill, they have maxed out their $300,000 credit limit offered to them by FSP I (International) as a security measure. As of today, the workers are contacting out the sawmill to other islanders at $1000/day for personal profit and FSPI is launching a lawsuit against the village.

Solutions:

> *If communities were more empowered to understand and manage their own affairs, including their own resources, in inclusive and informed ways, then issues of leadership, consensus, establishment and working towards common community goals would, by good Melanesian practice, become much more reintegrated and functional.*
> (FSP Final Report 5.2.3)

➢ Madeley (1995) has seen through his experience in development work that the level of social organization amongst the poor is low. He believes that one of the best and effective ways Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can help the development process is to help the poor organize themselves, and in turn, increase their own power. As Madeley (1995:94) quotes Muhammad Yunus, Professor of Economics at the University of Chittagong and the researcher who organized the Grameen Bank:

> If the poor can organize themselves, then no political party can ignore them, government actions and policies will have to start tilting towards the poor.

➢ But there are concerns about the larger picture. This project is not just about a sawmill project. FSP's Mandate is Community Development. There needs to be a serious look at how this project will continue to affect the social, political and economic structure of Naone. As an example, when I looked at Naone's plan, I was afraid because they are choosing to pay the sawmill workers in Vatu (Vanuatu's national currency). After spending a few short months in Naone, I am afraid the men will waste the Vatu outside of Naone on things such as drinking and smoking (as I have seen) causing tension, abuse and frustration in Naone. NGOs must take a closer look at how this project affects the whole community (see Appendix: <u>Community Development</u>) while promoting and making tangibly available *Community Economic Development* strategies (or some similar strategy) within Naone to consider this whole. In this light, FSP along with Naone may choose a different path and decide not to pay the men in Vatu but maybe rather pay all workers with needed family or village items (such as food, workshops, health care, or local housings supplies).

➢ To be much more successful, I believe that this project needed a system of community currency which would have addressed my 4 concerns:

1) New introduction of a cash economy
2) Men spending the money on non-essential items and alcohol.
3) Women's work and time undervalued resulting in community needs not met
4) Land resources were in dispute.

A system of community currency, to allow the Vatu to circulate within the community of Naone a few times before it finds its way outside the village or South Santo, would have changed the unequal balance of power and held money into the community for locally relevant wants and needs. In this way, the Vatu could more clearly benefit the whole, larger community as explained earlier in the discussion on Community Currencies (pages 12-16). All work would be valued locally with the returns locally relevant benefiting the community at large, addressing all four concerns at once.

With an understanding of women's roles locally, which has shifted and been undervalued due to recent influences of British and French colonization which ended in 1979, a community currency system could be the tool for locally re-valuing the importance of women's work toward sustainable development. Why should the working men be paid in cash, and not the women working at home, raising the children, and preparing the food for the men in order to be able to work and spend the

money on themselves? This system may potentially reduce the risk of misrepresenting and misplacing women's work in a safe and culturally responsible manner.

Even though FSP's strong position which values and integrates women in the process of development with PRA workshops being an integral part of the process, women were eventually left out of the benefits, and the community lost control of the business. It is my belief that it is the responsibility of the NGO to carefully determine the impact assessment of large scale projects. Although I am not from the geographical area, and therefore do not understand the complexities of the society, I knew that by paying the men in cash was a bad idea as it promoted individual interests and discouraged community members' co-operation. When a decision was made to pay the boys in cash, the FSP office should have flagged this as problematic and quite possibly devastating considering the problems Ni-Vanuatu people have in handling and spending money. Many projects in Vanuatu are ruined by individuals who act for their own benefit and literally steal the community's resources. One powerful solution to the problem of a new cash economy is a *community fund* which should be a requirement in a project which requires community money to:

1) repay the loan per month
2) be sustainable in the future in terms of forest practices and job creation
3) build the community needs and wants through income

I believe FSP had a difficult but firm role to play in helping to organize Naone's financial decisions. The lesson to not pay workers in cash has been learned, yet to see are the possible dangers of community run financing and women's empowerment which has its own set of difficulties which need to be addressed specifically to each regions' social particularities.[6] It is my belief that if community currencies were used, linking common community goals and working together in the local, village-based action planning, FSP could have had succeeded in towards:

> a wider range of strategic life and survival skills could be imparted by the project...Build[ing] on the excellent grassroots initiatives already developed by FSP, enhanced by increased participatory planning and management of natural resources.   (FSP Final Report 6.5)

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[6] see Amianyr Rahman, Effects of the Grameen Banks, University of Manitoba, 1998.

➢ In my last two talks with some of the Naone women, I saw the real, honest concern in their faces and voices: how will they or Naone benefit from this Project? Things are taking too long to be organized, communication and organization is low, and people have been talking (*privately*) for too long about their concerns with *not enough action* to clear it up. When I was specifically asked by one women: *"what will become of us and this project after you leave us to work it for ourselves"*, I was scared by this question, wondering why she would see so much hope in me being present (me: the persona of the organization). I responded by strongly, clearly and heartfully encouraging her to speak out openly, to raise her voice and concerns, each time she sees a problem or has a fear. I was honest when I said to her that I believe only she, not me or any International Organizations, can make a real difference through encouraging her community to speak out and to organize themselves. I was also very aware that speaking out may cause serious trouble for her, and so I suggested that she encourages others to speak on her behalf such as the well respected chief, or the her church, or the women's associations – which in turn could all be against her. So I also suggested speaking to friends, the new women's center or even her husband (if not dangerous for her or him), to speak out on Naone's collective behalf when problems occur. If she cannot raise these concerns to the community through other members or to the NGO through PRA workshops or private informal conversations, how can the NGO or its workers help this project forward?

➢ Furthermore, it must be clearly stated that NGOs have a particular responsibility to the communities they work for and need to take on more responsibility in the effect they create through their projects. In offering people new possibilities, there is a danger of making things worse. While we create a project, we also create economic, political and social side effects, and therefore we need to research and consider these closely -- in the village, as well as in the office.

We as organizations need to clearly understand our responsibilities of the effects we create in the communities we work for. It is one thing to say "*by* the people and *for* the people", but each decision needs to be taken in conjunction with each participating member – NGO included. The NGO and the communities are in this together, and the lines of understanding must be aligned.

Therefore, NGOs need to help put in place structures that are locally relevant before continuing to implement a project that may cause more harmful side effects than its worth. They must be willing to tackle these initial measures at the start and acknowledge this difficulty. In order to accomplish these tasks, it is ultimately imperative that NGOs must take the time, as Madeley (1995:112-113) suggests,

> to live locally, take the trouble to understand local people and the way they work, and find out what they [really] want….[NGO members must be] prepared to live among the community and try to understand them. [Particularly] during the project's design stage… drawn[ing] upon a more informed and sensitive basis.

➤ It is therefore my recommendation that there is a need for an on the ground advocacy worker trained in Community Development in order to continue to steer this project sustainability. *This person must be able to live in the village and work in the office in order to workably link these 2 differing and important knowledges.* There is too much miscommunication between office and village, offices and offices, and within the village itself: this destroys trusts, planning, efficiency and ultimately sustainability. By bridging the communication gaps between the office(s) and the Village (creating links/understandings between these different knowledges) *through the assistance of a Community Development Advocacy person, we can clearly, honestly and respectfully, guide the village, and the village can guide us.* A trained *Community Development Advocacy person*, who can guide Naone in this *new* pilot project experience, thus bringing a full, responsible, understanding of Community Development to the Community itself, would thereby truly be working '*BY*' and '*FOR*' the people.

Funding is always tight, yet if we, as professional and responsible organizations working 'by and for the people' can create an understanding for this moral need, then in turn, we can _truly_ give the funders what they also need: Facts, Details, Numbers, and Results on paper -- that they call 'success'. As a friendly, but serious reminder to all: Life and death matters, we are not playing a game here, we need to think about Community Development as a whole.

Case Study Conclusion:

Although the growing global economic system works against community building in many ways, nevertheless, grassroots community-building initiatives have continued to grow. In initiatives that embody social change, women's work and women's ways of working have been central. If communities are to become sustainable, strong and self-reliant, women's agency is central to this process.

A word of warning. Depending on women to defend communities and repair the damages of larger-scale economics would amount to burdening women. Therefore, as Perkins (1996) is quick to assert this does not mean that men's participation has not been important or necessary, but rather, that clearly men have made significant contributions to community building and should be continually encouraged to participate.

Part 5: *Collaborative Team Management Strategy:*
A Model for Self-Reliant and Successful Community Economic Development

Upon investigating FSP's work towards setting up an Eco-Forestry Sawmill project, initiated *by* Naone and *for* Naone, it was determined that any future development projects would need to incorporate an integrated community economic development strategy that directly addresses the specific needs and concerns of the local community[7]. Action Anthropology[8] including *key informant interviews*, *focus* and *nominal* groups, as well as Asset Based Community Development Workshops (ABCD) (Kretzmann & McKnight:1993) will be utilized to initiate a potentially very successful and innovative *Collaborative Team Management Strategy*[9] – incorporating the project into the community needs, and the community into the project. Part 5 is threefold:

1) I will begin by defining and explaining the *Collaborative Team Management Strategy(CTMS)*.

2) Explain through an Action Plan how a *Collaborative Management Team (CMT)* will balance the needs of the community towards a successful project.

3) Discuss some risks associated with a *CMT* and the *CTMS* with ways to mitigate them.

There are 3 assumptions asserted in this Model:

A) That there is sufficient education in the community to support at minimum 3 members who have locally relevant reading and writing skills.[10]

B) That there is a cultural structure in place that allows for open communication along with an interest in collaborative team work. This would guarantee opportunities for a number of different individual leaders to come forth and represent the community's myriad of wants/needs/talents through the *Collaborative Team Management* model.

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[7] see Naone's PRA workshop conclusions discussed in the Problems:NGO/NGO Communication section page 19.
[8] Action Anthopology works to discover community problems and to identify potential solutions towards community self-determination and scientific truth (van Willigen 1993:57).
[9] There are many different team management strategies. See appendix "Shared Decision Making Model" VIDEA 1999. I propose a '*collaborative team management strategy*' with representatives from local goups and social structures and that of the NGOs working as an accountable team – refer to Appendix: Naone's Committees.
[10] For Naone, Bislama and English would be required for undersstanding bank requirements and to follow the development process and project program).

    C) That the community begins with a commitment to complete the project and is seen to have the integrity, accountability and responsibility required to complete the tasks.

1) *Collaborative Team Management Strategy (CTMS):*

Since development organizations, such as NGOs or governments, tend to do much of the planning, strategizing and development activities for communities, one must question how appropriate each step is in considering the local and historical identities for what would be most wanted and needed in the communities:

> There is a concern that when community mobilization is an extension of outside forces, it tends to be driven by the sponsoring sector.
> > (Ellsworth 2001: 28)

One must also question whether development in this way addresses and responds to local needs before implementing any community initiatives? What is needed is an understanding of the ways in which the local community actually experiences their own local and historical realities, addressing their own problems and solutions which they define as socially, environmentally and economically successful advances.

A Collaborative Team Management Strategy is thus required that *equally* mixes both NGO and community needs, addressing visions, goals and concerns on both sides. This team will be drawn from already existing social structures within the community, drawing on representatives from leaders, women, men, youth, elders, religious group(s) and any group that is locally recognized[11].

> It is clear that...there are many informal associations doing critical community work. Just because they do not have a name or offices does not mean they are not there [therefore] effective development work and community organizers must find, honor and enhance the associational relationship already at work.
> > (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993: 375)

The representatives are organized into teams where each is given control over some of the decisions about the way their area is to be run. This is the best way to help groups have a say in their organization, fostering commitment and goal orientated actions[12] (VIDEA 1999). Through this holistic team approach, a true local and historical understanding of the social, environmental and economic

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[11] Refer to Appendix: Naone's Committees
[12] Refer to Appendix: "Shared Decision Making Model"

aspects can be achieved. This allows for a true interrelationship of how the communities actually experience issues[13] (Ellsworth 2001: 28) which if not addressed will undermine the sustainability of the project and of the specific goals defined by the community. One must remember that "community change processes are complex undertakings and require multiple talents and a lot of teaming… combining roles and developing more and more leaders" (Henton 1997:153). The success of the project depends on this collaboration.

2) ACTION PLAN(12 months): Creating an active *Collaborative Management Team (CMT)*:
0 – 3 months

➢ It is important to get an understanding of the community's representatives before selecting the *Collaborative Management Team (CMT)* (see Appendix: Naone's Committees). Therefore a *Community Development Manager* (*CDM*), will spend an initial 3 months living in the community in order to become familiarized with the local structures and the social environmental capacities. During this time, the *CDM* will be conducting a series of educational meetings to inform the community about the project including potential risks and benefits, and what the role of both the *CDM* and the *CMT*. There will be informal open discussions about the project which will take place in general community meetings, as well as individual settings to give every man, woman and child a chance to speak, write, read, draw or use parables to explain their opinions and views, in their own place, at their own pace[14]. This will be accompanied by *Key Informant Interviews*, *Focus* and *Nominal* groups[15] (Erwin: 2000) followed by a more formal Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) workshop series in order to raise any ideas, concerns or goals the community has. Through the ABCD series of workshops, the *CDM* will help guide the community to:

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[13] Such as drinking and wife abuse in Naone, see Naone Problems pages 19-20.
[14] See Problems: Village Communication page 18
[15] *Key Informant Interviews:* Lengthy interview with knowledgeable representatives such as Chief of the village, women organizations, church, etc. *Focus Groups* and *Nominal Groups* (see footnote page 31)
    Focus Groups: Under the guidance of the interviewer or moderator, 6-12 people of roughly equal status with some identifiable common interest, characteristics or shared knowledge (ie: women, church, or employment groups), discuss specific questions, problems or areas of experience.
    Nominal Groups: More structured and controlled than Focus groups, with moderator directive and where specific priorities and consensus are sought. Meant to air out issues but NOT intended to make or settle on policy or long range planning.

A) Identify and *map* the communities' *goals*, *assets* and *skills*.
B) Identify *capacities* of the communities – formal and informal.
C) Identify how the project will mobilize, utilize, enforce and expand these local capacities.

<div align="right">(Kretzmann & McKnight 1993: 38)</div>

Here, the *CDM* needs to walk a fine line between assessing the community's social organization and attempting to understand how to hear and understand the needs of the individual members in order to plan sustainably for the community's benefit as a whole. Building trust and relationships needs to be built and it takes time. And there is always a danger that the *CDM* will be used or lied to for personal gain and mischief by community members; yet if the *CDM* is always clear in each task that the project is designed to be "*by* the people and *for* the people", the community is held responsible as a group and must be willing to address internal strife through strong leadership[16].

Because there are many social groups and organizations in every community and since the *CDM* has only a short 3 month period to determine the Action Plan, *Stratified Sampling*, taken from the most common local social homogenous groups[17] should be utilized to determine who the strong and accountable representatives of the community are. These methods require the *CDM* to have adequate field experience as the methods used are *not* intended to be implemented as a formula, but rather the *CDM* must have the interpersonal personal and cross cultural skills to understand and respect the local social environment. This would allow the *CDM* to use locally appropriate ways in approaching sampling studies; more than results and specific information, the *CDM* is looking for trust, building true relationships with community members (ie: through sharing life stories or whatever comes natural to the CDM) to determine both   (1) what is *actually* needed and wanted[18] and (2) who the effective leaders of the group are so that they can be mobilized in locally appropriate ways. Many concerns arise in performing a specific goal of S*tratified Sampling*. It is possible that through following a formal structure of sampling, community members may begin to lie for their own benefit – such as to advise you of certain leaders who are not the best but that they would gain if certain people were in power – or infighting,

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[16] Refer to Appendix: Leadership; see Problem Section page 18
[17] Refer to Appendix: Naone's Committees for example of social homogenous groups
[18] Through PRA, interviews and informal discussion

jealously and competition may break out if the sampling turns into an informal election. Worse yet, through this process, the *CDM* could undermine the power structure already in place.[19]

Must be careful in determining the wants and needs of the village and must follow local protocol. Is it correct to speak to women in private? Does it put her in danger to tell you things in private or in public? Can she tell you things in front of her husband, her family, her children? I have found that the best way to reach the individuals true desires, wants and needs, is through private informal discussions in confidence, only after a certain level of trust has been established.

3 – 5 months

➤ After the 3 months, upon compiling the data, the *Community Development Manager* will choose, along side any accepted local power structure(s), all the necessary representatives that ought to be involved in the *CM[20]T*. There will be a community vote (locally appropriate assumption) on the choices of the *CMT representatives* before finalizing the accountable team. Local representatives will then learn the *Collaborative Team Management Strategy* through a series of 3 workshops on team management. The *CMT* members will then meet with their groups to discuss mission and vision statements and present these back to the *CMT* in order to agree on a common set of principles which will then be taken to the community for discussion and approval.

An evaluation will be filled out by the *CDM* expressing the viewed commitment of the community to the project. This will help the *CDM* to determine whether or not to continue the project or to cancel it if serious concerns have arisen. Canceling a project often would not be the case, but this procedure is put here as a check-in and as professional confirmation that, although outcomes may not be clear, the project should go ahead. Any concerns should be raised and addressed first at the NGO office and administrative level and next to the community if necessary[21].

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[19] Such as the chief in Naone who is the elected leader, or the priests who are respected decision makers

[20] The *CMT* should meet every 2 weeks after each representative has time to complete bi-weekly tasks from their represented group's work; meeting days must fit a local schedule and may therefore be a flexible day; Refer to Appendix: "Shared Decision Making Model" and "Leadership"

[21] Naone's project should have stopped until clear set objectives and goals are set in place by all members from the start, particularly the land and goals/visions disputes. Otherwise, infighting and divisions will occur once the project begins. Goals can and will be flexible, but the community must begin with a unified vision and objective with basic structures in place.

5 – 8 months

> ➢ The first and most important task of the *CMT* will be to mobilize the community's *goals, assets, capacities* and *resources* assessed in the Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) workshops. The *CMT* will select its strategy based on the workshop assessments and begin to mobilize its members into action. They will identify their short-term goals for the next 3 and 6 months. Although the community should be informed of each step by their individual group or organization's representative, actions will be posted outside a chosen common place in the community for accountability and strong communication. This practice will continue each 3 and 6 months as goals are reached. *Goals should have been small in approach and celebrated often, as large goals will only set members up for disappointment as new problems arise.*

8 – 12 months

> ➢ The second action of the *CMT* will be to promote the local economy by mobilizing community members identified from the ABCD workshops towards creating a locally sustainable market. In the 8-12 month action plan period, teams of specialized volunteers through government or NGO funding (such as CUSO or CIDA specialists) will assist the communities in:

> 1) Creating a local currency scheme:
>   Keeping earned money in the community and valuing all work. Because local currency "operates on the principle of 'give and take', it helps to build a symbiotic, interdependent relationship among community members" (Nozick 1992:54)

> 2) Creating local production of locally needed items:
>   Encouraging through weekly workshops, local craftspeople to make clothing, furniture and locally needed and desired accessories.

> 3) Creating a local market:
>   Selling goods produced locally creating jobs and promoting local knowledge[22].

By consciously applying strategies to keep local dollars circulating and multiplying *inside* the community boundaries, much can be achieved in terms of needed and wanted development. Through promoting

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[22] Traditional Medicines workshops could have been a great resource for Naone to expand the local business into other markets in Vanuatu and internationally – expansion of local employment out of project.

local buying practices, local organizations, businesses and individuals will benefit and will support a successful project initiated by the community[23].

3) Risks associated with the *CTMS* and ways to mitigate them:

➤ There's a danger that community members and groups will not be inclusive towards each other for social reason or that members might want to gain individually from this endeavor. A critical question is whether these boundaries can be healed. Therefore Kretzmann & McKnight (1993: 375) suggest that it is necessary to investigate what relationships the community already has towards one another and determine how these exclusions can be minimized through existing local knowledge, understandings and traditions which can encourage hospitality, rather than exclusion[24].

➤ Another risk is the danger of mis-communication and setting goals too high whereby members are frustrated when deadlines and expectations are not met[25]. We need to start small and celebrate the little steps that will encourage members in their endeavors – community development is a slow, slow process. A chart ought to be set outside in the community showing ongoing process (successes and failures) so as everyone can be included through up to date information sharing and goal orientated achievements.

➤ One must questions whether development assistance endeavors can successfully achieve self-reliant communities which support local ideas and commitments successfully addressing the challenges of an "office" reality versus that of the community. Through a *Collaborative Team Management Strategy* (*CTMS*) that mixes both the NGO and community member's local representatives

> rather than [the NGO] act as the inventor…this new way will result in structurally reformed enterprises, services and governments redefined by their new capacity to respond to community rather than manage, replicate and proliferate local initiatives.
> (Kretzmann & McKnight 1993: 374)

This approach is highly interactive and flexible between the community and the Development Manager, offering an alternative to the more typical linear approaches to development planning which

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[23] see Part 3:Community Currency; see Part 4:Naone Problems for further understanding
[24] Such as the divisions in Naone between the two land holding families and the two churches: page 20
[25] See Naone's Problems: NGO/Village Communication page 19. Sawmill not coming and members waiting for FSP to organize; start to blame FSP for delay; community was not ready anyways, no plan, no goals set out, division in community.

puts significant investment into concrete, measurable goals for funding purposes and is dependent on agency restrictions (van Willigen:1993:74-75). The *CTMS* process is focused instead on the discovery of goals and means of achieving them, while ultimately maintaining community control and fostering the growth of community adaptability offering higher opportunities for self-reliance and sustainability for future generations. One cannot simply do development projects, the relationship with the community that makes it possible must evolve taking lots of time and patience on the part of the Development Manager.

In concluding part 5, we can listen and learn from the failures in Naone. Development assistance must learn that what communities need most is the power to make their own decisions that affected their resources that sustain them. Through creating *a Collaborative Team Management Strategy*, based on accountability, integrity and responsibility, the *Community Development Manager* can be more effective in mitigating the problems that will undoubtedly arise throughout the project and beyond, into the lives of the community and future children who learn from their elders. In so doing, the NGO will succeed in developing a true and responsible project "*by* and *for* the people" where it is the process not the results that take precedence in a win-win relationship.

CONCLUSION: Women's Agency in Social Change and Development

As Sen (2001:38-40) noted early in his book, *Development as Freedom*, he outlined 5 distinct types of instrumental freedoms theories that policy analysts need to pay attention to:

> 1)*political freedom* or civil rights, refer to the political opportunities that people have to choose their governments and criticize them through political expression and uncensored press.

> 2)*economic facilities* refer to opportunities individuals respectively enjoy to utilize resources for the purpose of consumption, or production, or exchange.

> 3)*social opportunities* refer to education, health care and all public works which help individuals live better.

> 4)*transparent guarantees* openness in dealing with others under "guarantees of disclosure and lucidity…preventing corruption, financial irresponsibility and underhand dealings".

> 5)*protective security* provides a social safety net for preventing individuals or populations from being reduced to abject misery, starvation or death. Fixed institutional arrangements such as unemployment benefits and famine relief.

Sen (1999:38) notes, one freedom without the other will only ever offer partial development, whereas together they strengthen their joint importance. As Sen outlines the need for an integrated analysis of economic, social, and political activities, one must begin to see that development calls on a respect for the myriad of differences between villages, cities and states. In concentrating on the roles and interconnections of the five instrumental freedoms, each space much be understood locally and historically before policy could include a healthy understanding of each freedom.

That is why I argue that self-reliant communities through strong local economic bases, interdependently associated with other communities, who are able to build their voice towards influencing and guiding external decision making of the state or corporations, has a profound effect on development. Ultimately, self-reliant communities have the opportunity to better address the 5 instrumental freedoms that Sen postulates where "freedom is not only the primary object of development but also its principal means". Once attained it allows for a full and sustainable development process.

Appendixes

- **References**
- **Vanuatu Map**
- **FSP Letter to Chief Patu**
- **James' daily community eating schedule**
- **Team Management Model**
- **Community Development**
- **Naone's Community Development**
- **A Leader Model**
- **Naone Kometis (Committees)**
- **Photos of Naone Women**
- **Photos Building Houses; Mother and Baby**
- **Photos Naone Chief and family**

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