

## **DYNAMICS OF INDIGENOUS ORGANISATIONS: THE *SENGU* GATHERING OF THE MATENGO PEOPLE OF MBINGA DISTRICT, TANZANIA**

By David Gongwe Mhando

Centre for Sustainable Rural Development, Sokoine University of Agriculture,  
Post Box 3035, Morogoro, Tanzania  
Email: David\_mhando@yahoo.com

### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper explores the dynamics of Sengu, an indigenous organisation among the Matengo people of Mbinga District, Tanzania. It explains how Sengu has been transforming over time and fits itself among the Matengo Society. Based on literature review, formal and informal interviews, oral histories and participant observation, the paper traces the development, organisation, roles and disintegration of the pre-colonial Sengu. Furthermore, it explains how and why the present Sengu has been revived and transformed to suit the current developmental challenges of the Matengo people in Kindimba, and in other Matengo villages. The findings reveal that the potential of indigenusness, prevailing spirit of collaboration, sharing, environmental conservation, declining revenue from coffee as well as good leadership of the Sengu committee are among the reasons for its successful revival and operation. The revived Sengu has been transformed in terms of members' composition, area of coverage, organization and functions. The paper suggests that developmental activities in any society have a higher chance of success if focal features, local knowledge and beliefs of the people are recognized and appreciated. Furthermore, leaders with vision and commitment are of paramount importance for the existence and successful operation of indigenous organizations.*

Key words: *Mbinga, Sengu, Matengo, Indigenous Organisation, SCSRD*

### **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

#### **Emergence and Importance of Indigenous Organisations**

From time immemorial, human beings have lived and worked together in communities. Through living together, humans have managed to accomplish difficult tasks that otherwise would have taken significantly longer or, which may have never been realized at all if let to the devices of solitary workers. Researchers have explained the essence of humans and their motivation to live together and, consequently, organize themselves into groups. Bertrand (1958) defined cooperation as any kind of social interaction involving two or more persons or group working together to accomplish a common end(s) or need. Bertrand accepted cooperative behavior as more appropriate for human existence, rather than competition within the family and neighborhood groups, or within most religious and fraternal organizations. Bertrand borrowed the example of the existing relationship between animals and plants to show the importance of humans living together by levelling the cooperation in relations to other humans. Bertrand also mentioned three types of

cooperation. First, is symbiosis, where both partners are mutually dependent and benefit from the profits of their partnership. Second, is non-contractual informal cooperation, which is common with family, neighbors, and other groups that have close relationships, especially in rural areas. Third is formal cooperation that provides an economic function and is deliberately contractual in nature; reciprocal rights and obligations of the parties are more or less specifically spelled out under this alliance. Here, even if participants are not acquainted to one another, they have an obligation to the achievement of the explicit purpose of the organization.

The emergence of cooperation in a community has been traced to the daily problems and/or obstacles facing members. Organizations were thus seen as the mechanisms that would assist members in overcoming them. Scott (1976) accounted for the emergence of indigenous organizations due to the day-to-day difficulties facing people in a society. He claimed that the possibility of an emergence of indigenous organizations would be higher in societies with communal traditions. He cited the example of rotary credit organizations of southern Asia where a group of ten people each regularly contributed a small amount to a general pool and the sum would be periodically distributed to each member, in turn. This rotation process often went for weeks or months until all members received the pool. The distributed money could be used for major expenditures such as marriages, funeral, school fees, illness or paying debts. The purpose of such a process is to provide poor families with a lump sum of cash that would otherwise be difficult to accumulate.

Burkey (1992) defined an organization as a group of people who come together to pursue a common interest to individual or group improvements in the spheres of economic, political and/or social development. Burkey identified two types of organisations: indigenous and exogenous. Indigenous organizations, common amongst family groups and neighbors, have been associated mostly with village life, where people in their traditional setting are organized and work together, in turn, to assist each other in completing the tasks which otherwise would have taken too long for one family to complete. Indigenous organizations include local-level groups with an organizational base such as gender and age-based groups, ethnic associations, traditional religious boards, and other social units. Indigenous organizations have been defined as purely traditional grassroots associations built on the principles of co-operation (Warren, 1996); as grassroots groups or associations, which have undisputed authority in the community (Srinivas, 1996); as a traditional grouping of individuals who are co-operating on the basis of culturally recognized principles for economic pursuit (Gebre, 1996). However, the definitions have focused on economic interests and limited a possibility for indigenous organizations to engage on social matters. An example is cited on how neighbors in the farming areas have always found it profitable to work together for their mutual benefit in terms of both economic and social (Bertrand, 1958).

Indigenous organizations have been associated with most common features of rural areas where neighbors have assisted each other in their domestic and farming activities. Gebre (1996) outlined common features of indigenous organizations in most of the Ethiopian agricultural communities whereby family labor is supplemented by 'communal' and exchange labor. Other common features were indigenous work parties, reciprocal and festive labor. From the ongoing discussions, it is obvious that, since rural areas still operate on a fairly informal basis in carrying out many of their farm and off-farm operations, indigenous organizations are not only common, but also necessary. Other scholars have pointed out that some indigenous organisations have been established by external forces, but maintain traditional principles. Uphoff (1986) and Stavenhagen, (1997) gave

examples of such indigenous organisations that were established by external force, which include community-wide development planning associations, hometown association, savings and credits unions and traditional religious groups. Furthermore, there is a possibility for indigenous organisations to be a blend of both modern and indigenous features; such organizations use local knowledge that exists in their particular society and respond quickly to changes from within and external to their community.

Man has been involved in voluntary actions to such a degree that it has become a part and parcel of his life. Studies have classified voluntary associations as one form of indigenous organizations. Narayama (1990) viewed voluntarily organizations as a form of indigenous social groups found in varying degree. To him voluntary services act as private enterprise for social progress, whereby members of certain indigenous organization, without external control decide to meet the needs of special groups. Bratton (1995) defined voluntarily organizations as groups organized for the pursuit of some common interests of the members, without state control. Mehta (1994) outlined three stages of voluntary actions in developing countries. First, based on social conscience which has been defined as the feeling of discomfort on the part of people; second, arranged by people who have a “center approach” and thirdly, when a small group of people with certain interests in common agree to meet and act together in order to try to satisfy or achieve a certain purpose for their own benefit. Thus, previous researchers defined indigenous organizations as those without elaborated structures or written down rules to govern the behavior of the members whose activities and relationships is loosely tied to their mutual needs and interests.

The literature cites three major contrasting perspectives on indigenous organizations: rational economist, moral economist and the modern. While the rational economist perspective treats indigenous organizations as things of the past that will be wiped out by modernization, the moral economists argue that despite the colonial period in African and Asia, indigenous organizations have survived and they will continue to do so. The rational economists, Popkin (1976) and Vidrovitch (1976) applied the ideas of modernization theorists in promoting western technology and culture as a key to development, while designating traditional features, such as indigenous organizations as things of the past. They stressed more on capitalist development, while asserting that non-capitalist features, including indigenous organizations, will decay and be replaced with viable structures that are compatible with capitalist features. Rational economists further argues that for development to occur, modern organizations should replace indigenous organizations. Hence indigenous organizations are regarded as traditional obstacles to changes that would bring about modernization. Rational economists went further to advocate that all features of moral economy characterized by patriarchal agrarian economy with low inputs surplus (including indigenous organizations) should be wiped out by the capitalism system in order to give room to modern capitalist’s structures like modern organizations. Furthermore, rational economists claim that it is desirable to transform traditional forms of organizations to modern ones that are more efficient at using time and resources.

Riggs (1964) described indigenous organizations as local communities that are technologically backward, conservatively controlled by parochial agents, which consume more than serve and invest. Besides, indigenous organizations were seen as being constrained by their low level of technological development, poor production techniques; it was demanded that they should be replaced by advanced methods, and that peasants should be taught to adapt. To rational economists, replacing traditional structures with modern ones was the only solution to bring development.

Furthermore, they emphasized individualism, as opposed to collective actions that is the base of moral actions. To rational economists, individuals act in a self-interested manner; individuals are capable of making decisions after evaluating options and possible outcomes, hence the choice, based on their preference and values, will be beneficial to individuals. Individual actions and the need of profit maximization are of paramount importance in this case. In addition, rational economists claim that other features such as urban ethnic associations or rotary credit associations are temporary or transitional aid to people undergoing modernization and it is anticipated that they will give way to truly modern form of associations (Popkin, 1976).

Moral economists, on the other hand, analyse the relationship between the economy and indigenous social institutions and argue that despite colonialism in Africa and Asia, indigenous organisations did not die out as claimed by rational economists. Hyden (1980) claimed that colonialism was an established system of control aimed at facilitating maintenance of law, order and collection of taxes; colonised people were supposed to finance the colonial economy and make it profitable. Colonialism had to dismantle traditional systems of governance and replace it with “modern structures” which would facilitate colonial objectives. Scott (1976), however, claimed that indigenous organisations were not swallowed by capitalist’s structures and have remained intact because of its traditional solidarity, their greater capacity for collective action and local co-operation. He went on to say that, the more communal the organisations were, the easier it was for them to defend their interests and maintain the organizational structures. Hyden (1980) argued that the capitalist system failed to capture both the peasantry economy and indigenous organisations in Tanzania. He mentioned the dominant nature of agriculture, which is highly dependent on natural forces, such as rain, soil, and weather, as one of the reasons attributed to its failure. Hyden added that, despite colonialism, peasants remained powerful and held back capitalism’s influence. He noted that although most indigenous organisations in Tanzania are unregistered and do not exist in the list of formal organisations, they are nonetheless part and parcel of an integral system and are very important to peasants’ survival in rural areas. Thus, indigenous organisations are still active and beneficiary to societies as will be explained in later sections.

Scott (1976) argued that non-capitalist settings are more moral, more humane and protective to their people. Relationships and organisations in a moral society work very well: labour exchange among families, burial associations, beer parties, and the like, were done by all members. Moral economists view rural areas as representative of a ‘closed society’ with collective responsibilities, whereby no one was allowed to starve while other members have enough to eat. Therefore, since most of the members had low income, indigenous structures were aimed at enabling members to share risks and burdens common to them all. Fierman (1990), Gebre (1996), Esman and Upphof (1984) all ‘advocate’ that indigenous organizations found in most of the rural areas today do not have pure traditional features, but they have a blend of both indigenous and endogenous features. They proposed that most of the organizations found today have a mixture of formal and informal patterns called “*quasi formal*”. The proponents of this school, conclude that it is possible to have indigenous organizations with a fair degree of formality, with written rules, and delineated authority roles filled by members. Indigenous organizations have managed to have offices, membership registries, and can accommodate women’s participations in leadership matters, all of which was not accommodated in the past. They further claim that indigenous organizations have not been static, but have changed to accommodate new challenges facing them. Some indigenous organizations are modern in form, but have considerable informality in their actual operation. Brown (1982) cited the example of indigenous organization in Botswana that deals with burial; they are entirely indigenous but with

almost all the characteristics of a formal group, such as having deliberate, well-defined roles and rules, monetarised transactions, functional specificity and highly instrumental tasks.

Basing on three major contrasting perspectives on indigenous organizations: rational economist, moral economist and modern, this paper borrow ideas of the modern theorists who argued that despite the introduction of colonialism, indigenous organizations did not die, but rather, disintegrated and later on transformed in a way that fits the present developmental challenges. This paper will explore how the *Sengu*, an indigenous organization among the Matengo ethnic group of Mbinga District, Tanzania, depicts these features.

## RESEACH SITES AND METHODS

### The Research Site and the Matengo People

Mbinga District is among the five districts of Ruvuma region in southern Tanzania. The Matengo ethnic group residing in Mbinga District are Bantu speakers who are commonly referred to as the 'people of the woods'. The word Matengo is derived from *kitego* (in Matengo) or a 'dense forest' which referred to the vegetation in Mbinga District before it was subjected to intense cultivation (JICA, 1998). The Matengo constitute 60% of the District population, with a population density of 34 people/km<sup>2</sup>, as of 2000. The other ethnic groups in Mbinga District are the Ngoni, the Manda and Nyasa. The Matengo, who mostly occupy the Matengo highlands, lives in mountainous areas at altitudes between 900 and 2000 metres above sea level (Pike, 1938).

### Methodology

This paper is based on field experience of the SCSR D staff and JICA Experts from 1994-2012. Information on pre-colonial *Sengu* was gathered from literature and from the oral histories of elders in Kindimba village. Informal interviews with the villagers gathered information concerning the nature of collaboration among the Matengo and the possibility of a revival of *Sengu*. Furthermore, needs assessment studies, focus group interviews, consultative meetings with villagers, district leaders as well as the Roman Catholic Church, participant observation in various stages of the project also collected important information. In addition, records were gathered through participation in village meetings, surveying of the project sites, construction activities and records from the *Sengu* committee.

### Landholding System among the Matengo

The past social political organisation of the Matengo showed that, in a village, headmen and elders were important units of social and political leadership. For years, the Matengo society has lived communally with people collaborating in most socio-economic activities. The Matengo have a custom whereby a patrilineal extended family lives on and cultivates one interfluvium (*ntambo*), a spur between one mountain stream and another. *Ntambo* as a geographical unit refers to a unit on the mountainside that is circumscribed within the river tributaries (JICA, 1998). In addition, an *ntambo* can also be defined as a social-ecological unit that shapes the unique pattern of land use and socio-economic organization among the Matengo whose villages and sub-villages were established through the *ntambo* system. The height of the *ntambo* ranges from 100 to 600 metres and its area ranges from 10 to 70 hectares. (JICA, 1994).

The history of the Matengo shows that initially an *ntambo* was developed by one person who settled there and established a family. Usually, the marriage system of the Matengo is polygamous, so that after a few years, the family increases in size and forms a *musi*. *Musi* is made up of several

households with a common ancestor and is regarded as an area occupied by many households or a small village (Schmied, 1989). Thus, the *ntambo* landholding evolved from a single clan that settled, and then, generations later some members expanded outward within the *ntambo* until the entire *ntambo* was occupied. The first person to settle in the *ntambo* established a *musi* which united people for the common goal of collaborating in agricultural activities, environmental protection, social and cultural activities.

### **Social Organisation of the Matengo**

The social organisation of the Matengo is very unique. During the settlement and development of the *ntambo*, people who are related settled in the same *ntambo*, but those who were not related settled differently and keep distance. Studies have revealed that *ntambo* is occupied by a minor patrilineal or extended family (JICA, 1998); this explains why people in the different *ntambos* are not closely related. People of the same clan collaborate with each other in most of their development activities. Land ownership in the *ntambo* has been passed from one generation to another. As noted before, the development of an *ntambo* begins with formation of one *musi* but later on, another *musi* may develop in the same *ntambo*. The head of the *musi* directly controls the *ntambo* and all the people who live in that *ntambo*. It has been noted that the number of *musi* increase in relation to the children (mostly sons) who leave the house of the head of the household to establish their own *musi* in the same *ntambo*, which often happens after the death of the head of the household. It is estimated that the process of development of the *ntambo* from the initial stages until it matures normally takes about three generations (JICA, 1998). In every *musi*, there existed a customary structure called *Sengu*. The word *Sengu* originated from the past traditions of the Matengo. In those days, there were a few houses in the village and people lived a communal life. *Sengu* was the place where people of the same ancestor would assemble in the evening to discuss various important issues such as family matters, marriage and even work plans (JICA, 1998; Nsenga, *et al.*, 2004). In addition, descendants of the same ancestor would eat together. The leader of the *Sengu* was the head of the household. Mr. Nicodemo Kinunda (90 years) narrated:

*The Sengu gathering was for both women and men, although they were held differently. Women prepared food, which was consumed by all members of the clan. It is said that Sengu system was very good because orphans were given food first and were raised without problems. Usually, men taught boys on matters relating to the tradition of their tribe and how and what it take to be a man, while women taught girls domestic activities and how to manage their families after marriage.*

A gathering similar to *Sengu* is also shared in other societies. Devendra (1994) noted that people have formed organizations in order to achieve what they are unable to achieve individually. It therefore follows that organizations have assisted people in managing their affairs and in creating a better life for their family and community in general. Furthermore, individuals have different needs such as food shelter, accomplishment and companionship that cannot be met by living alone, and these needs were satisfied in the context of *Sengu*. Clans planned how various activities such as cultivation, weeding and even harvesting should be executed. In most cases, people worked together to open new farms, cultivate, plant, weed, and harvest their crops together. Hence, organizations such as *Sengu* were formed because the urge to act in a group is fundamental to man: humans have lived together in order to do together things that are beneficial to the members of a group. In summary, in *Sengu* gatherings people shared all their activities in a communal way. Besides that, it has been reported that *Sengu* controlled and managed land use in the *ntambo*. Land was also controlled communally, which implies that the *Sengu* system kept people together and played a

central part in the lives of the Matengo. The late Mr. Komba of Kitanda sub-village in Kindimba village narrated:

*Sengu foresees reproduction of its members. If it was noted that a son has got married and could not get children, the head of the Sengu would send him away for some time. During his absence, his brother would sleep with his wife and bear children. Through this way, Sengu was assured of existence of its members.*

Similar features like those of *Sengu* have been noted by Cheema (1978) who found indigenous rural organizations in Malaysian villages (“*Khairat Kematian*”) functioned as traditional life insurance schemes for their members, whereby each households paid a certain amount of money annual and if they needed assistance, for example when a member of the household dies, then the deceased’s family would be given a specific amount of compensation in cash or material assistance for burying the dead. Similarly, there were other material benefits for activities such as marriages, feasts and other social functions.

### **Disintegration of the *Sengu***

Colonialism and Christianity were driving forces for the decay of *Sengu* (Hills, 2001; Rutatora & Nindi, 2008). Colonialism introduced western education and Christianity which challenged traditional organisations all over Tanzania and *Sengu* was not an exception. Missionaries introduced Christianity and western education whereby Matengo children were enrolled in schools far from their homes, for example, at Peramiho and Likonde Missions. At school children were introduced to European culture, which was different what they were taught at *Sengu*. Soon after completing school, most of the educated people also migrated to town to search for employment and other benefits, which was more attractive than what was offered at the *Sengu* (Hills, 2001). A well-established custom of eating together in *Sengu* was challenged and discouraged by the missionaries and was regarded as an inferior practice (Rutatora & Nindi, 2008) and families started to eat on their own, and later to decide most of their family matters individually privately. The privatisation of land also directly affected the *Sengu* system because some villagers started to make business and even settled in towns that offered many business opportunities. Thus, *Sengu* was left without a leader and thus each family began living individually.

The introduction of coffee and a money economy also brought about the disintegration of the social organisation of the Matengo. Initially, coffee was introduced at Miyangayanga village by the son of the Matengo chief, Chrisostomus Makita in the 1930s and later on spread to other villages ( ). Makita introduced coffee as a cash crop, aimed at enabling the Matengo people to cultivate and be able to pay their taxes to the colonial government. However, the introduction of coffee brought about both positive and negative effects; specifically, land ownership changed from communal to private ownership. Land under coffee was owned individually and even its produce was not shared. Privatisation of land reduced the amount of available land since most of it was divided among the villagers and used commercially. This forced the Matengo who had a shortage of land to start migrating from the old villages in the highland areas to the new settlement areas in the lowlands such as Lupilo, Masimeli and Kitanda villages.

After independence, the government abolished all forms of traditional organisations such as chiefdom in favour of the village government. Thus, all people were subordinate to the village leaders and thus, most of the development activities were organised by the government. To a great extent, apart from self-help groups, most of the indigenous organisation spontaneously collapsed, if they were not abolished outright (Maghimbi, 2000). Despite all these changes the Matengo society was observed to continue with the same process of *ntambo* formation and establishment. Despite the

collapse of the traditional system, which was brought by the introduction of the coffee, economy and European education system, the spirit of collaboration and working together, sharing benefits and environmental conservation has influenced social organisation of the Matengo. There is considerable evidence that some elements of *Sengu* still prevail within the Matengo. This is manifested through social organisation for development activities. In other areas, it was reported that there remains informal cooperation for activities such as labour exchange between families and borrowing of seeds to exchange with grain harvest. An example was given by Pokhreal and Willet (1996): if a long illness affected a member of the community, neighbours would take turns to relieve his family and even to take him to the hospital. In case of death, each household was supposed to be represented by one member who would attend the cremation.

The contemporary Matengo society may be characterized as having a relatively stable socio-economic foundation, which is of paramount importance to appropriate utilization and management of the *ntambo*. Traditional forms of organizations that exist in the Matengo society for example, exchange labour parties (*ngokela*) and the revived *Sengu* seem to be effective in terms of uniting people for better management, sharing benefits and sustainable use of their resources. By 1992, however, the government re-introduced civil society organisations, giving a room for various informal organisations to re-emerge. This was came after realisation that the government cannot supervise all development projects in the country and thus, giving room for people to be at the centre of development process.

### **SCSRD PROJECT AND REVIVAL OF SENGU**

This section explains how implementation of the Sokoine University of Agriculture Centre for Sustainable Rural Development (SCSRD)-JICA project identified the spirit of collaboration among the Matengo people and used the same to revive their traditional organisation (*Sengu* gathering) and how it was transformed to meet the current development challenges in Mbinga District.

SCSRD-JICA project was formulated from the experience gathered during the Miombo Woodland Agro-ecological Research Project (MWARP), which was implemented in Mbinga in by the SUA staff and Japanese experts between 1994 and 1997. The MWARP explored the indigenous social and farming systems of the Matengo people. In order to improve the productivity and sustainability of these systems, the project adopted a holistic and integrated approach, emphasising endogenous and bottom-up participatory development as well as a multidisciplinary strategy. Based on the lessons learn from the MWARP project, the SCSR project developed a sustainable rural development methodology or called the SUA Method (Mattee *et al.*, 2004). The SCSR project was implemented in Mbinga District (2000-2004) and Uluguru mountains (specifically in Nyachilo and Kibogwa villages located in Morogoro district from 2002-2004). Institutionally the SCSR-JICA project was implemented adopting a participatory multi-stakeholder approach involving four stakeholders: Mbinga and Morogoro district councils, religious/non-governmental organisations, SCSR/JICA and village communities.

The implementation of the SCR project in both model areas adopted the SUA Method that has four distinguished features. First, emphasis on the importance of fieldwork and understanding the reality gained through field work. Secondly, recognizing the potential of indigenusness through examples of resources, technology, knowledge, wisdom and systems, which a community has nurtured and developed. The SCR project acknowledged that when the community recognise the potential of indigenus then endogenous ways of development might be realised. Third, emphasis



on community participation, which will be used as a foundation of the bottom-up development: participation involves various actors, including local government authorities, NGOs and religious organisations that share a common understanding of the reality. Fourth, determination or identification of focal features of the area which serve as guiding principles for joining researchers to identify the sets of problems facing the community. The fifth and sixth processes are learning which allow feedback systems as well as monitoring and evaluation of the projects respectively. The following section reveals how the SUA Method was used as a central point during the implementation of the SCSR D project in Mbinga District.

### ***Revival of Sengu Spirit***

The spirit of collaboration among the Matengo has made it easy for the village leadership to organise the villagers from *musi*, sub-villages to the village level to participate in the development activities. The importance of utilising indigenous organisations and the advantages that can be obtained by working in a group has been acknowledged. Furthermore, the risk for an individual to live alone and miss assistance he may require in case of problems has been noted. Cheema (1978) mentioned roles played by organisations in the existence of man. First, there is the solidarity function by bringing people close to each other. It goes without saying that by organising themselves into groups, members become closer to each other and increase social cohesion. Second, it encourages cooperation and self-help and, thirdly, it unites and gives a common identity. Gebre (1996) viewed indigenous organisations as genuine associations whose people co-operate in various activities. He noted that indigenous organisations serve as an expression of social solidarity and sources of security because of interdependence among members. He cited functions of some of the indigenous organisations in Ethiopia that help members in land preparation, weeding, harvesting, and threshing. In addition, members participate in community activities such as building churches, mosques, schools, roads and bridges. Other functions of organisations include maintenance of peace and order, mutual help in various social occasions such as wedding and burial ceremonies. Studies conducted among the Matengo enabled SCSR D to, among other issues, identify and capitalise on the spirit of collaboration among the Matengo as its focal feature during the intervention in Mbinga District.

From 1999-2004, SCSR D had a project which was aimed at developing a method for sustainable rural development. Although there were several activities in Mbinga District, this paper deals with revolutionary trends of *Sengu* institution and how it facilitated the construction of the hydro-milling machine and other developmental activities in Kindimba village. The process started by conducting an assessment of the needs and willingness of the villagers in order to assess the livelihood and perception of the villagers (SCSR D/JICA, 2006). This participatory study, which adopted the principles of the SUA Method, was conducted both at the individual and group level and gender difference was observed in order to capture views and perception from both side. The importance of involving target groups in all stages of the project has been acknowledged. Amour (1994) and Mattee *et al.* (2004) emphasised that rural projects could easily achieve their objectives if they ensure local participation at all stages of the project activities, empower the people to coordinate project activities, and allow them to be the masters of their own environment. In order to solve problems existing in a particular community it is important to start with the existing knowledge and experience and combine these with technical knowledge. Therefore, in order for the community to take the leading role in promoting a project, it is very important for the community to understand and to acknowledge the advantages to be gained from the project.

SCSRD project was aimed at building the capacity of the actors to identify and act to solve their challenges. SCSRD was aware that to bring development to a section of the society that needs it has been a challenge for many development practitioners. Development practitioners have realized that to make the development processes sustainable, target groups should be directly involved in all stages of development process such as problem identification, planning of the solution, executing and evaluation of development projects. It is from this background that the need was emphasized to involve villagers in identification and planning interventions. The participatory study established the needs and challenges of the villagers. Two issues were of paramount importance: cheaper milling services through construction of the hydro mill (a grain milling plant which uses hydrological generated water), and environmental conservation. The villagers selected implementation of both. The hydro mill project was designed to follow a *ntambo* perspective which will combine planting of trees and environmental conservation. Moreover, the hydro mill machine would increase the availability of the livestock barn as well as increase manure quantity and quality, while reducing women's workload on pounding cereals (Nsenga *et al.*, 2004; Araki, 2007). Thus, stakeholders were identified and invited to contribute on the construction of the hydro mill and other activities related to environmental conservation. Partners were villagers of Kindimba, the government of Kindimba village, Mbinga District Council, the Roman Catholic Church via its development wing (CARITAS), and SCSR (Araki, 2007).

SCSRD proposed that villagers should be at the center in management of the project activities, while other stakeholders should be facilitators. The SUA method stressed and acknowledged that for the development process to be meaningful and beneficial, the villagers of Kindimba must be placed at the center of the process and should be given the leading role in development activities (Matee *et al.*, 2004). Thus, SCSR emphasized the importance of building capacity among the villagers in order for them to take the leading role. Amour (1994) underscored the importance of the external organisation to empower local organisations to be able to solve their problems. He emphasised the necessity to consider community organisations as an objective in itself since indigenous organisations allow beneficiaries to assume management of their own initiatives. The long-term benefit of empowerment of the local community is, among other things, to assist local organisations to reduce dependence on external assistance.

By 2000, there were six hydro mill machines in Mbinga District, all of which were constructed by CARITAS (Araki, 2007). The SCSR team visited all the hydro mill machines and learned from their experiences in management. None of the machines were under the management of village leadership, but rather under CARITAS. Thus, the proposed model at Kindimba village was the first of its kind, aimed at testing the ability of the villagers to manage sustainably their own development project. During the stakeholders meeting, representatives from CARITAS were not comfortable with villagers managing the project, and instead proposed that it be supervised by the Church. On the other hand, SCSR and District council emphasized people centered approach to be adopted in construction and management of the hydro mill machine (Araki, 2007). However, negotiations among the stakeholders came to the conclusion that the villagers should be empowered to manage daily activities of the project, while other stakeholders will be consulted from time to time.

SCSRD acknowledged the contribution of villagers who owned diesel milling machines. By 2000, it was estimated that at Kitunda Sub village of Kindimba village there were 32 diesel operated milling machines. For many years, they offered milling services and sold animal barn to the villagers. Thus, it was important that they were consulted and their opinions considered during the planning phase

of the project. Although the milling costs at the hydro mill machine was estimated to be almost half of the diesel operated machines, owners of the diesel machines agreed and participated in construction activities.

Since the villagers were mandated to supervise the project, their participation in construction activities was a key element. Initially, it was not clear if the village government would supervise the project, or if another organ should be formed to oversee the project. Most of the villagers proposed formation of another organ, separate from the village government. They cited past experiences where the village government had failed to supervise development projects like shops, cars and machines (Mahonge, 2009). Likewise, they cited their village primary society, *Ngaka*, which had failed the coffee farmers. Finally, it was agreed to form a committee, named *Sengu*, which adopted the traditional of collaboration and reflection of potential for indigenusness among the Matengo (Nsenga *et al.*, 2004; Araki, 2007). Amour (1994) pointed out the importance of using indigenous organizations as an entry point to accessing a community. Likewise, SUA Methods emphasizes a participation approach when working at the community level through identifying existing informal and formal organizations, as well as spotting problems through existing formal organizations and more informal family groups. Thus, SCSR D desired that project activities should create understanding with the local community, and gain confidence of the local people, whilst meeting some urgent needs that have been identified by community organizations. Thus, it was at this point that the old spirit of *Sengu* was revived. It was thought that the project would be successful and sustainable if the villagers would sit and work together as if in a *Sengu* context. The mission was to challenge the villagers to collaborate as how their ancestor did during *Sengu* for the successful completion of the project (Nsenga *et al.*, 2004; Araki, 2007).

Although the pre-colonial *Sengu* was family-based, the present one has been transformed into village-based. This shows that current indigenous organization has both traditional and modern features. Cheema (1978) provided a different example of structure of indigenous organizations in Malaysia, where a village could have more than one organization (*Khairat*) and all villagers must belong to one of them (at least). The household head, always the father, pays subscription and represents the household in every event connected with the organizations. Cheema found *Khairat* organizations to be very simple and based on neighborhoods, whereby all community members were obliged to join one of the existing organizations.

The village government cautioned that the *Sengu* committee might be dissolved at any time, if it contradicted the village bylaws (Kurosaki *et al.*, 2011). During the formation of the *Sengu*, care was observed to draw representatives from of all sections of the village; the Roman Catholic Church, women, villagers and the village government. Amour (1994) stressed the importance of involving the community and noted that if all sections of the community were equally involved, then there is a high possibility for the desired results to be distributed to whole community. The *Sengu* committee was given the mandate to coordinate the project activities and liaise with all stakeholders. For successful completion of the project, villagers were to be mobilized to provide manpower for clearing the site and canal, contributing building blocks for construction of the canal and a milling houses. The *Sengu* committee was organized from the ten cells, sub villages up to the village level. This organization structure facilitated communication from the *Sengu* committee to the villagers. The organization structure was used during conducting project activities; for example, division of work was done from ten cell, sub-villages up to the village level. The *Sengu* committee made an

implementation schedule while sub-village and ten cells leaders mobilized the villagers and supervised the activities.

The project utilized water from Mungaka River for operating the machines. To ensure constant supply of water and future sustainability of the project, neighboring villages (Mungaka) were consulted and sensitized on the importance of conserving the source of the river. This went hand in hand with sensitizing the villagers who cultivated close to the river. They willingly agreed to stop cultivating and even plant trees in other areas. The proposed site for construction of a water intake identified during the survey was considered by the villagers to be a sacred place and the team was advised to consult traditional leaders before commencing of construction. Based on the SUA Method's spirit of respecting people's values and beliefs, the traditional ritual of throwing cassava and local brew upon the ground was conducted by elders. Thereafter, the villagers were comfortable to start construction activities.

### ***Execution of the Hydro Mill Project***

The *Sengu* committee mobilized all able-bodied the villagers (children, women, men) during construction activities. The work was divided into portions, from ten cell leaders, sub-village and village levels. There were three steps, building water intake, digging and construction of the canal, construction of the bridge and the milling houses. Villagers participated through provision of manpower and donation of building blocks. An estimated 1,200 (95%) of mature and abled villagers participated during the construction activities (Kurosaki *et al.*, 2012). It has been established that indigenous organizations are likely to perform better in local areas than modern organizations. Their formation and model of operation that suits rural areas than otherwise are the major causes of their good performance. Gebre (1996) noted that in the 1960s, the Ethiopian government found a decree that abolished indigenous organizations and replace them with farm workers co-operatives. However, performance of the newly-formed organizations was very poor compared to the local indigenous organizations. Patanapongsa (1994) also supported the view that indigenous organizations adapt easily to local culture and agree with ideas of solidarity, collective responsibility and equity.

Apart from the villagers themselves being mobilized for the project, frequent visits were made to the site from the district leaders, SCSRD and Church, boosted the morale of the villagers to a great extent. As pointed out earlier, the hydro mill machine utilizes water for running the milling machine. To obtain enough gravity for running the machine, water was diverted from the river via the constructed canal, which was then used to run the milling machines and then returned back to the river. In this way, there was assurance that the project activities did not significantly affect the amount of water in the Mungaka River.

The hydro mill machines started operation in 2002, attracting not only villagers of Kindimba, but other neighboring villages of Mahenge and Myangayanga. The daily management of the hydro mill machine remains in the hands of the *Sengu* committee, although the management of the project finance involves one representative from all the stakeholders (except SCRSRD). Nsenga *at al*, (2004), SCSRD (2005) and Minako (2007) accounted as why the villagers accepted the idea of reviving *Sengu* and actively participated in construction of the hydro mill machine. First, principles of the SUA Method were adopted to identify focal points and the potential of indigenous alliances among the Matengo. Naming a committee *Sengu*, and reviving the traditional spirit of collaboration among the Matengo resulted from this method. Secondly, in 2000 the revenue from coffee had declined and

villagers had limited alternatives apart from collaborating in the project whose proposed milling costs would be reduced by half as compared to those of private owned diesel milling machines. Furthermore, the project was successful because of volunteering spirit and collaboration in development activities of the villagers. Stakeholders worked tirelessly to realize the dream and the village government provided a conducive atmosphere for the project to take off. However, all those would not have been possible without the coordination of the *Sengu* committee. Devendra (1994) studied the performance of local organizations in India and accounted for the reason why voluntary organizations are potentially superior in organizing development activities. First, members are not only dedicated to the task of enforcing development, but they also have better rapport with the people. Second, they are not bound with rigid bureaucratic rules and procedures, and thus they can operate with greater flexibility, and learn from experience. Third, their effects not only are more economic, but also their ability to motivate public participation in development activities increases.

### **The Dynamics of *Sengu***

The present formation and structure of villages in Tanzania are largely a result of the policies of Ujamaa village. Villages are a political unit, where people collaborate in development and other social activities like a family. As we saw earlier, *Sengu* was a clan-based organization whose activities and nature of collaboration did not go beyond the clan. The present *Sengu* is village based, whose composition, organization and functions have changed to suit the current challenges. For example, the villagers work and collaborate in construction of a village road, hospital and school which benefits the whole village. Even construction of the hydro-mill machine drew people from all the six sub-villages for the common goal. However, what has not changed is the spirit of collaboration, working together and having the same common goal towards development.

The yearly calendar of the Matengo family is fully occupied by various activities; coffee production, *ngolo*, and valley bottom cultivation, and animal keeping leaves little time for other activities (Nindi, 2004; Mhando and Itani, 2007). Since the *Sengu* was adopted from the traditional Matengo, the members of the *sengu* committee were expected to work on a voluntary basis. However, it was further considered that members would not be able to conduct their own activities and at the same time participate in *Sengu* activities. Thus, a token of Tshs. 200/= was set aside as a motivation for members on duty. Based on the nature of the activities, it was soon realized that members of *Sengu* were overburdened (Araki, 2007). Informal interviews with wives of two committee members, revealed that they were overburdened because their husbands left most of the activities to them. Thus, although the hydro mill was beneficial to the villagers, it brought conflicts to families of some members. Even a motivation allowance of Tshs. 200/- was considered to be very low. Lack of allowances also discouraged participation of some of the village government leaders and district officials (Kurosaki, *at al*, 2012). However, despite those shortcoming, members of the *Sengu* committee were very committed and continue to perform their duties for the development of the village.

Although SCSR D informed the villagers' right from the inception stage that they would not be provided with any financial assistance for the project, some of the villagers, especial retired village leaders and elders, did not believe that members of the *Sengu* committee were not benefiting from the project finances or from SCSR D. Furthermore, there was power struggle, where critics claimed that the *Sengu* committee was becoming more powerful than the village government and its members were likely to be selected for village leadership during the upcoming elections (Araki, 2007; Mahonge, 2009). This brought conflicts and misunderstanding among the villagers. The

conflicts reached a point that the village assembly decided to dismantle the committee and its activities were placed under the village government and the elders. However, it did not take a long before the village government was overburdened in supervising the project activities. Furthermore, contrary to their expectations, the leaders of the village government could not access revenue from the hydro mill machine project. Thus, the *Sengu* committee was reinstalled again (Mahonge, 2009) and, to date, it is still in control. The dynamics of the *Sengu* committee was an important learning stage for the villagers. The *Sengu* committee stepped aside and allowed others villagers to take over its activities, however, following the failure to deliver adequate management and the deterioration of services that followed, the management was placed with the *Sengu* committee again.

The pre-colonial *Sengu* was held differently for men and women; gender groups had their different responsibilities. The same trend manifests itself in day-to-day lives of the Matengo: men control cash crop (coffee) and women take charge of food crops (beans and maize). However, the revived *Sengu* committee has nagged some features of the Matengo customs. Composition of the *Sengu* committee has uplifted the position, role and responsibilities of women. Out of six committee members, two are women. In addition, women have taken a leading role in other activities such as the secretary of the project who weighs grains and collects money. Studies on indigenous organisations have shown that they differ from one continent to another. However, all have similar features such as contributions to the family income working together, social security, mutual help, and in other cases, the position of women has improved. Gebre (1996) argued that indigenous organisations may not be very relevant to highly industrialised countries, but they are still very relevant to most of the villages both in Asia and Africa, where most of the people lack insurance for their livelihoods and still depend on nature for their survival.

Although the villagers were informed that the project aimed to provide cheaper milling services, there was speculation among them that the project would also provide electricity for the villagers. SCSRD and other stakeholder made it clear that this phase of the project would install only millings services, but later on, perhaps there would be a possibility. With accessibility of telephone communication in the rural areas, the project also provided a chance for villagers to charge their mobile phones cheaply.

### ***Spill-over effects of revived Sengu***

#### *Nursery of local species and hybrid coffee species*

The functions and activities of the *Sengu* committee did not end with the construction of the hydro mill machine. The Matengo established of farmers' groups to solve some challenges, for example, to help understand that the hydro mill machinery would not last without conserving the environment. The *Sengu* committee also influenced the formation of groups, which promoted environmental conservation, and management of trees nurseries. The seeds of group formation started in 2006 when a *Jiokoe* (to rescue yourself) group was formed. Farmers' exchange visits and training workshops were among the methods, which enhance group formation in Kindimba village (Araki, 2007). Besides, groups aimed at diversification of economic activities through trials such as beekeeping, fish farming, tree nursery, and valley bottom cultivation were formed (Araki, 2007).

It is interesting to note that after the revival of the *Sengu* committee in Kindimba village, others adopted its spirit. Araki (2007) and Kurosaki *et al.* (2012) documented that the neighboring village of Mundeki approached the *Sengu* committee of Kindimba for consultation on how to build their own hydro mill machine. Furthermore, in Mtungu sub-village (Kindimba), villagers also initiated

their own small hydro mill machine. The construction took place between 2005-2009, utilizing and benefited from experience of members of Sengu committee. The same applied to Kitanda village who also learned from the experiences of Kindimba to initiate a hydro mill machine.

Since coffee cultivation is a main cash crop among the Matengo, the *Sengu* committee, in collaboration with Tanzania Coffee Research Institute, (TaCRI), Mbinga zone, initiated nursery trees for hybrid coffee clones which are resistant to two major disease, Coffee Berry Disease and coffee leaf rest; if well-utilized, the nursery will enable framers to replace their conventional coffee varieties to high breed varieties.

#### *Construction and rehabilitation activities*

The *Sengu* committee, took the leading role in the rehabilitation of the village-based dispensary and later on, mobilized the villagers to build a secondary school, which is now operational. All the villagers from 7 sub villages participated equally in construction of the hydro mill, regardless of their location. However, it was noted that villagers from Mtungu sub-village, which is located far from the hydro mill will not benefits equally. Basing and utilizing the *Sengu* spirit of sharing the benefits, members of the *Sengu* committee used income from the hydro mill machine to assist them in distribution of water pipes. Furthermore, the *Sengu* committee, mobilized the villagers and started distribution of piped water in all sub-villages

#### *Electrification Dreams*

During the initial stages of the project, villagers dreamt and wished if the project will not also produce electricity for the villagers. However, SCSR-D-JICA project did not focus into producing electricity. However, in 2009, *Sengu* committee, with collaboration with NGO called "Light for Africa" have turned this dream into reality. Although limited budget hindered distribution of electricity in all sections of the village, but crucial social institutions such as the Church, dispensary, and secondary school were lighted. All those achievement have been possible because of dedication and vision of the *Sengu* committee.

#### **Conclusion**

The people themselves formulate indigenous organisations in their communities in order to collaborate and reduce their heavy workload. Traditional organisations and self-help groups have helped the people to perform their economic and social development both at the sub-village and village level. Self-help groups have done most of the development activities such as the construction of schools, dispensaries, churches, roads and even hydro mill projects. Therefore, indigenous-based representative organisations have better chance of uniting people to in order achieve their common goals. Although the pre-colonial *Sengu* disintegrated after introduction of colonial rule, its spirit has remained among the Matengo people for many generation. The revived *Sengu* has indicated the spirit of the Matengo which is collaboration and working together, sharing the benefits and environmental conservation for sustainability of present and future generations. The *Sengu* committee has managed the test of time because its leaders are committed with a vision for development. The successful revival and operation of *sengu* is a weakening call for the rest of Tanzania community: appreciation of indigenous knowledge and potentials is very crucial for successful implementation of community project activities.

## REFERENCES

- Amour, Tani. (1994). "Sustainable Use of Natural Resources by Community Organisations in Central American: Experience of Alafo Project, in Linking Farmers Organisation and Researchers: UK: ODI Agricultural Administration (*Research and Extension*) Network, Network Paper 50
- Araki, Minako (2007). Local notions of participation and Diversification of group activities, in Southern Tanzania, *African study Monographs, Suppl. 36: 59-70, March 2007,*
- Baseheart, H. (1972). Traditional History and political change among the Matengo of Tanzania, *Africa, 42: 87-97*
- Bratton, M. (1995). Farmer's Organisations and Food Production in Zimbabwe, *World Development, 14 (3): 367-384*
- Burkey, S. (1996). People first: a guide to self-reliant, participatory rural development. London. Zeb Books
- Cheema, S. (1978). Rural Organisations and Rural Development in Selected Malaysian Villages: *Asia and Pacific Development Administration Centre, Kuala Lumpa, Malaysia*
- Gebre Yntiso. (1996). Organisational Dimensional of Development in Ethiopia: The place of Local Institutional in Development Agenda: *Nilo-Ethiopian Studies Newsletter, No.3/4*
- Hills, S (2001). The Death of Mganda, Continuity and Transformation in Matengo Music. *African Today. 48.4 (2001). 27-41*
- Hyden, G. (1980). *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry,* University of California Press, Berkeley. pp 205-249
- JICA 1998. Integrated agro-ecological Research of Miombo Woodlands in Tanzania. Final Report. Faculty of Agriculture, Sokoine University of Agriculture and Centre for Africa Areas Studies, Kyoto University
- SCSRD/JICA (2006). SUA Method: concepts and case studies, The Summary. SUA Centre for Sustainable Rural Development and Japan International Cooperation Agency. Morogoro
- Mahonge, C.P.I (2009). Impact of incentives in the development of social Forestry: A Case of the Matengo Highlands in Tanzania. *International Journal of Social Forestry, 2009, 2(1): 86-100*
- Mhando, D.G & Itani, J (2007). Farmers coping strategies to a Changed Coffee market after



- Economic Liberalization: The case of Mbinga District in Tanzania. *African Study Monograph, Supplementary Issue, Volume 36*. 39-58
- Mattee, A.Z; Araki, M; Rutataora, D.F; Kakeya, M; Kobayashi, S; Tanaka, U. (2004). Introduction of the "SUA Method": Concept and approaches to Sustainable Development, in Rutatora, D.F; Tarimo, A.J.P; Mattee, A.Z; Mtengeti, E.J (eds). *Perspectives and approaches for Sustainable Rural Development in Africa*, SUA/JICA, Morogoro, Tanzania
- Mehta, P. C: (1994). Voluntary Organizations in Tribal Development: *Shiva Publishers Distributors, India*
- Nindi, S.J (2004). *Dynamics of Land use systems and Environmental Management in Matengo Highlands, Tanzania*. (Unpublished). PhD Thesis, Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University, Kyoto
- Nsenga, J.V; Mahonge, C.P.I; Mtengeti, E.J; Rutatora, D.F; Tamura, K; Itani, J; Kanda, Y, Araki, M; (2004) The SUA Method: The Case Study from Mbinga in Rutatora, D.F; Tarimo, A.J.P; Mattee, A.Z; Mtengeti, E.J (eds). *Perspectives and approaches for Sustainable Rural Development in Africa*, SUA/JICA, Morogoro, Tanzania
- Kurosaki, Ryugo. (2007) Multiple uses of small scale valley bottom Land: case study of the Matengo in Sothern Tanzania. *African Study Monographs, suppl.36: 19-38, March 2007*
- Kurosaki, R.; Mhando, D.G; Araki, M; Nindi, S. J (2012). Warsha: Mpango wa Kutembeleana Kidimba na Kitanda (unpublished). Proceedings of a Farmers exchange Visit between Kindimba and Kitanda Village, 1-2 September, 2011. Mbinga, Tanzania
- Srinivas, Nindhi: Taking Account of the Dept of ditch: Understanding Local Organisation forms, their problems and strategic responses: *in Indigenous Organisations and Development* Warren. M & Blunt P (Eds) 1996 intermediate Technology Publications, London
- Scott, J.C (1976) The Moral economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia, *Yale University Press, New Heaven. Pp. 5-11, 202-206*
- Stavenhagen, R. (1997). Indigenous Organisations: The Rising factors in Latin America, *Cepal Review 62, pp 63-68*
- Patanapongsa, N. (1994). My working Experiences with Farmers organisations in Thailand, in Arnaiz, M (1995). Farmers Organisations in Technological Change Process, An annotated Bibliography, *Agricultural Administration (Research and extension Network), ODI network paper 53 pp 41*

- Popkin, S. L (1976). *The Rational Peasants: The political economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*, University of California Press, London, pp 184-233
- Pokhrel Durga, & Willet, Anthony. History of an Indigenous Community Management Organisation on Nepal: in *Indigenous Organisations and Development*: Warren. M & Blunt P (Eds) 1996 intermediate Technology Publications, London
- Narayama. E.A. (1990). *Voluntary Organisations and Rural Development in India*: Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi
- Rutatora, D.F and Nindi, S.J (2008). Endogenous development and Moral Economy: a case of the Matengo Society in Mbinga District, Ruvuma region, Tanzania in Kimambo, I.N; Hyden, G; Maghimbi, S and Sigumura, K (eds) in *Contemporary Perspectives on African Moral Economy*, Dar Es Salaam University Press, Dar Es Salaam.
- Warren, Adedokun, Akinta Omolaoeye. (1996) *Indigenous Organisations and Development: the Case of Nigeria*: in *Indigenous Organisations and Development*: Warren. M & Blunt P (Eds.) 1996 intermediate Technology Publications, London
- Vidorovitch, C (1976). The political Economy of the African Peasantry and Modes of Production In Peter C.W. Gutkind, Emmanuel Wallerstein (Eds) *The political Economy of Contemporary Africa*, Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 90-111