

CLIMBING THE HILL:

Poverty Alleviation, Gender Relationships, and Women's Social Entrepreneurship in Lake Victoria, Tanzania

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ABSTRACT This paper tells the story of how a group of women in a Lake Victoria fishing community in Tanzania addressed the poverty status of their community through their agency and social entrepreneurship and, by doing so, also their subordination relative to men. Their efforts to improve their situation in the community landed them in men's traditional space. In order to occupy that space without stirring antagonism, it was crucial that the women apply their practical, cultural, and relational skills in a way that did not jeopardize men's cultural roles and sense of worth. The paper argues that women's entrepreneurship is circumscribed by social relationships that do not work in their favour. Thus, to become change agents in an economic sense, they also need to be change agents in a social relational sense. The paper also illustrates how Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* – practical wisdom or prudence – is useful for understanding what poverty alleviation and social entrepreneurship requires.

Introduction

In addition to owning and controlling the means of production, in many fishing societies, men assume the leadership roles within their communities as well as their homes (Acheson 1981; Carsten 1989; Rangan and Gilmartin 2002). Women's roles have therefore been subordinate to those of men, and confined to domestic reproduction, household and marriage. Despite the importance of women's contribution in the development and maintenance of households, they are seldom factored into governmental or non-governmental assistance programmes that target the very households that they sustain (Bahigwa *et al.* 2005). Women are rarely consulted in decision-making regarding production processes that define their rural society and economy.

There are, however, exceptions to this rule. For example, in parts of Africa women have been involved in the fishing enterprise through ownership, processing and trading (Overå 1993). This is also true for women in Lake Victoria, where they have and continue to be part of beach seine teams and are sole- or co-owners of fishing vessels and gear (Medard and Wilson 1996). Here and in other areas

of Africa they are often involved in the trade of fish (Gerrard 1991; Odotei 1992; Geheb *et al.* 2008; Béné *et al.* 2009) and in Lake Victoria also in fisheries management. However, it is still first and foremost the men who draw fish from the water. The view that men should hold sway over the fishery is also deeply embedded in the culture of the communities riparian to Lake Victoria, where this study is situated (cf. Gerrard 1991; Madanda 2003; Geheb *et al.* 2008). Here, a man is socialised and en-cultured from childhood to believe that he is destined to go fishing and that he is to be the family's breadwinner. It is generally assumed that domestic tasks are outside the man's sphere of responsibility, although not necessarily free of his influence. After a hard day's work on the Lake, he feels entitled to relaxation and rest.

In the past, women's involvement in the fishery has in large measure been confined to the subsistence level. But with the change in the Lake fishery from subsistence to commercialisation since the 1980s (Gerrard 1991; Jansen 1997; Abila and Jansen 1997; Jansen *et al.* 2000), the role of women in the fishery has expanded. Particularly since the proliferation of the Nile perch (*Lates Niloticus*) fishery in that decade (Mkumbo 2002), women have participated in the trade of fish (Medard and Wilson 1996; Medard 2003, 2004; Onyango 2005; Geheb *et al.* 2008). Their involvement has also enabled them to play a more active role in the development of their communities.

This paper examines how one women's group created a community organization, the "Tweyambe Fishing Enterprises" (TFE), which has become an important change factor to the benefit of their own community and indeed an example to other communities in the Lake region of Tanzania. It demonstrates how women have taken steps to tackle the problems of poverty and underdevelopment and, at the same time, have also changed their subordinate status relative to that of men within their community. Notably, they have created a larger action space (Isaacs 2004; Barberton and Kotze 1998) for themselves and their community without jeopardizing their culturally underpinned roles in a way that could have backfired on their enterprise.

Theoretically, this paper draws on Aristotle's *phronesis*, as discussed by Flyvbjerg (2003) and Jentoft (2006). It argues that practical and contextualized knowledge, including the social relational capabilities and skills which are captured by this concept, have proven to be an important asset when dealing with poverty and women's subordination. The paper illustrates that women's social entrepreneurship is circumscribed by social relationships that work to their disfavour. In order for them to become change agents in an economic sense, they therefore also need to be change agents in a social relational sense.

We discuss our analytical perspective first by locating the Tweyambe women's issues and concerns within the development of feminist epistemology in Africa. We use this to argue that the women's activities are best understood through the concept of social entrepreneurship (Dees 1998a; Alvord *et al.* 2004; Austin *et al.* 2006; Mair and Martí 2006; Yujico 2008). We then describe who these women are, why and how their project was realized, what they accomplished by it, and how their communities and social relationships changed as a consequence. Finally we

discuss what their example represents and what lessons can be learned for poverty alleviation, rural development, and women's empowerment and liberation.

Theoretical Perspectives

Feminist research in Africa

Feminism, perceived as bringing together those with interests in establishing, defending and ensuring that women get their rights in political, economic and social fields (Hooks 2000), gained a foothold in English-speaking sub-Saharan Africa in the 1970s and 1980s. It especially envisioned an agenda for what has been called "African feminism" (Ampofo *et al.* 2004:686). It focuses on women's perspective on gender and women's involvement in liberation struggles, democratization and other social reforms, health, gender-based violence, sexuality, same-sex relationships and education. According to Arnfred (2004; Ampofo *et al.* 2004), this understanding of feminism is built on a western perspective and had a great influence on feminist research in Africa through donor-driven research at the expense of independent theoretical and innovative empirical research from an indigenous African perspective. This western perspective was largely influenced by liberalist ideology (Bracking 2005), in which the problem was framed as an issue of incorporating the majority poor into the political system without interfering with the privileges of the rich.

"African feminism" is feministic thought as it is expressed in and from this region, and is best understood through issues that have been raised in practical policy and research. It prominently focuses on women's poverty, subordination, and empowerment, and on women's daily life experiences in their rural communities (Ampofo *et al.* 2004). This is also the locus of this investigation, in that the Tweyambe women's group is seen as rooted in culture and local traditions, and we looked at statuses and roles that women have played; for example, as leaders within their communities.

Although feminist thought and research in Africa was initially externally influenced, this has now changed, and what has emerged are studies rooted in, and driven by, local realities and agendas (Nzomo 1998 cited in Ampofo *et al.* 2004). This approach is largely a response to social and political developments in Africa rather than an outgrowth of feminism in the west (Ampofo *et al.* 2004). Women and children have borne the brunt of the recent economic crises in this region, as measured in high child mortality rates, lowered female literacy rates, the continuing confinement of women to agricultural labour, and their exclusion from modern, technical, and scientific fields (*ibid.*).

In reaction, women are now increasingly demanding a broader "political space" (Hickey 2005:995); they want to forge new relationships between state and society. Thus they seek to shift the relations of power that shape the complex association between politics, poverty and poverty reduction. Most importantly, they argue that they should become more involved in the process of correcting these disparities (Hicky 2005; Ampofo *et al.* 2004).

Gender asymmetry and inequality, particularly the distinction between public (political) and private (household) spheres, certainly existed, and still does, in indigenous African social life. Here, female subordination takes intricate forms grounded in traditional cultures, particularly because it is partially influenced by the 'corporate' (i.e. ethnic group) and 'dual-sex' patterns (i.e. strict division of labor) that Africans have maintained throughout their history (Manicom 1992). Moreover, feminist debates in Africa have so far not focused so much on theoretical questions, the female body, or sexual identity as in the West (Mama cited in Ampofo *et al.* 2004). Rather, as in many of its third world counterparts, feminist discourse in Africa is distinctly heterosexual, supportive of motherhood, and focused on issues of 'bread, butter, culture, violence and power' and how to be mothers while taking up careers (Overå 1993).

Women social entrepreneurship

This case study follows the trajectory of African feminist perspectives by focusing on the material basis for fishing communities struggling with underdevelopment, gender inequity, and women's poverty. It is about women's struggle to improve the living conditions and the well-being of the community as a whole as well as for themselves. More precisely, it is a case study of women's social entrepreneurship, which is generally agreed to involve new initiatives for creating social transformation (Dees 1998a, 1998b; Alvord *et al.* 2004; Austin *et al.* 2006; Mair and Martí 2006; Yujuico 2008). In the literature, the term social entrepreneurship involves three perspectives. The first views entrepreneurs using business skills to build projects that ultimately also meet social goals (Emerson and Twersky 1996 cited in Alvord *et al.* 2004). Such projects are initiated for social impacts but they are also designed to be individually cost-effective. The second perspective, put forward by Dees (1998a, 1998b), takes the view that entrepreneurs start and operate projects not because they are meant to be economically profitable but in order to address a social problem. The third perspective regards social entrepreneurship as a means of initiating social change in communities beyond the particular problem/s that they set out to address. Here, the entrepreneur brings short term change which is meant to have long lasting effects (Alvord *et al.* 2004).

In the case of the Tweyambe women's group, the third perspective is most applicable. We examine how the Tweyambe women as social entrepreneurs addressed their immediate problems by utilizing their capabilities and resources – that is, agency (Sen 2000) – and how this led to fundamental and potentially lasting change in gender responsibilities and relations. As Alvord *et al.* (2004:261), we use this third perspective to explore the link between social entrepreneurship and "sustainable societal transformation". In using the concept of social entrepreneurship, Alvord *et al.* (2004) examined the patterns of innovations, the best practices in the leadership and patterns of scaling up projects with regard to the sustainability on the nature of innovations. This is also to say that they analyzed the types of activities that a social entrepreneur can initiate. This is also the approach that we follow in this paper.

Our analysis explores what leads social entrepreneurs such as the Tweyambe women's group to initiate innovative activities and projects. It also investi-

gates the characteristics of leadership that they adopted and what role the social context played in the strategies chosen. Such contexts are believed to be critical in determining the course of action that entrepreneurs can take. We scrutinize this context by looking at the activities that the Tweyambe women's group undertook, and how their gender relationships were transformed as a consequence. We use Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* (Flybjerg 2003; Jentoft 2006) to analyze the experiences gained and the lessons that can be learned from this case study. In Aristotle's terminology, *phronesis* represents prudence or practical wisdom gained from experience. It entails the use of value-rationality as opposed to a) practical instrumental rationality or *techné*, and b) universal, analytical rationality, which he called *episteme* (Flybjerg 2003).

The argument advanced in this paper is that it was through the mobilization of their *phronetic* knowledge that the Tweyambe women were able to surpass the boundaries of their gender relationships and succeed as social entrepreneurs. As community members, they knew from experience what demands and dilemmas they could expect to confront; for instance, that the men would easily feel intimidated by their initiative. They were aware of the catch that Zygmunt Bauman talks about that, despite its resources, community tends to put restrictions on freedom. As Bauman (2001:4) writes:

Missing community means missing security; gaining community, if it happens, would soon mean missing freedom. Security and freedom are two equally precious and coveted values which could be better or worse balanced, but hardly ever fully reconciled and without friction.

The Tweyambe women's group went against the community norm of what women are supposed to be and do when they initiated the Fishing Enterprises. This paper tells the story of how they managed to solve Baumann's dilemma; that is, not to lose community while enhancing their freedom.

Methods

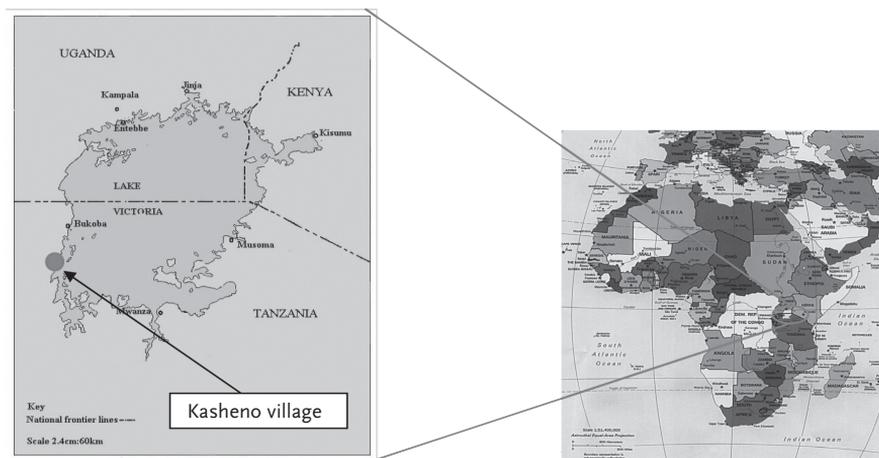
Our interest in the Tweyambe women's group was influenced by their emergence as a household name in Lake Victoria fisheries. We were also inspired by reading what other people had written about the group, particularly Medard (2002, 2005). Tweyambe was always positively referred to during stakeholder meetings on fisheries management and community development which we attended or read about. The group was often invited to such gatherings and seen by fisheries authorities, non-governmental organizations and others as a role model and a living example of how to address poverty, women's empowerment and community development. Medard's work also magnified this group at a time when institutions were being built for the Lake's fisheries management. However, ten years have passed since her information on this group came to light. We therefore asked ourselves whether there could be additional and more recent lessons to learn from the group as they have continued to strive to address poverty in their community.

Qualitative research methods were used for data collection. During three weeks of September 2010 we held six interviews with all the group leaders, district officials and a few selected opinion leaders and some few men (some of them husbands to TFE members) in the Kasheno village where the group is located (see map, Figure 1), and in the Lake region. Also during this time, we arranged three focus group discussions with the group members. These discussions were centered on group activities, projects that they instigated, and gender relationships. We asked the members and their leaders about their activities since the group started, the challenges they have faced in recent years, and their relationships with their husbands. We were also interested in their participation in fisheries at the local, national and regional levels. District officials were questioned about development plans for the village and their opinion about the group's activities and operations. Unpublished but official literature on the area was also accessed at the Kagera regional and Muleba district offices. Further information reported in this paper originates from visits made to this community and interaction with this women's group over a period of ten years from 1999 to 2010.

Data were analysed in the field and afterwards. Issues pertaining to the group's activities and our interpretations of them were discussed with the group members to a level where no new information was forthcoming. Our preliminary conclusions were also raised with group members not involved in the formal interviews, and with district fisheries authorities, colleagues with research experience from the area, and with other people in the village and outside.

We collected data about events that happened from the time the group was formed in 1990 until 2010. Information about activities until 2000 was similar to Medard's (2000, 2005). This was mainly because no new members had joined the group since its beginning, and we largely spoke with the same people who Medard interviewed. We refer the reader to Medard (2000, 2005) for a detailed description of these activities. We provide a short summary of this first decade in Part A of Table 1.

Figure 1: Map showing location of Lake Victoria and Kasheno Village (Residence of TFE)



The Tweyambe Fishing Enterprises (TFE)

'Tweyambe' is a word derived from the Haya ethnic community (who speak a dialect of the Bantu language), meaning 'lets help each other'. The Haya women reside in Kasheno village, which is part of Ruhanga sub-location, which again is part of the Muleba district of Kagera region. This is on the western side of Lake Victoria in Tanzania (Figure 1). The formal name of the group is the Tweyambe Fishing Enterprise (TFE).

The Haya also occupy the southern parts of Lake Victoria. Historically, they are known to have been self-reliant cultivators and to have excelled in smelting and forging, as well as in the trade of salt (Vansina 1995). Fishing was also part of their mixed economy. Today, only farming and fishing in combination form the economic basis of their community. Agriculture is intense during the rainy period (from February to May, and October to December), while fishing is continuous but less intense during this time.

Gender Roles

Among the Haya, men were traditionally the 'breadwinners' while women were the 'bread-makers'. Men were involved in iron smelting, which took place where water was available (Schmidt 1997), whereas women's responsibilities were confined to the home (Guyer 1986). Women looked after the children. They cooked food, fetched water, cut and collected grass to graze their animals (see also Medard 2000, 2005). This is still largely the pattern in this area.

The marriage practice requires that women leave their home and join that of their husband, which indicates that women have limited command in their new homes. Polygamy is still practiced. Once married, the traditional rule of the community was that a woman was not allowed to own any land or property, except

for the house that the husband would build only for her. Men were, and still are, the homeowners and head of the family. Thus the husband has exclusive authority to make decisions on all matters in the home (Larsson 1991). Women can decide what to cook out of the pantry store, but it is stocked by the husband. In general the husband commands and decides on things brought into the house while the wives direct things inside.

The relationship between husband and wife may be illustrated by the handling of a grasshopper, locally known as *nseene*. The *nseene* is a delicacy among the Haya people (Mors 1958). The collection is done when there is an abundance of grasshoppers. Women prepare the dish, which is served only to men. It is still a practice that when the wife serves her husband *nseene*, he then gives her a *Kitenge*, a garment which women wrap around the chest or waist, over the head as a headscarf, or as a baby sling. The act of giving a *Kitenge* is understood to imply the husband's respect of his wife and is a symbol of the bond of love between them. Still, the fact that this luxury is reserved for men with women in a serving role, suggests the subordination of the latter to the former, as the transaction is basically on his terms, even if it is not necessarily experienced as that.

Despite women's agricultural labor (KRA 1997; Sethuraman 1998; see also Medard 2000), their contribution to economic and social well-being has traditionally been inadequately recognized and greatly undervalued by the community. This is despite changes in Tanzanian law in support of women's roles. At the level of the community and within the household, women still assume the inferior position. Women are thus largely perceived as "spare tires" and not "driving wheels" in addressing community welfare, with the village chief in the driver's seat; never known to be occupied by a woman. Women's subordinate position is also culturally institutionalized in the TFE community.

The early phase: Activities between 1990 and 2000

Table 1 shows a sequential order of the activities that the TFE initiated, the sources of funding, and the status at the time of our fieldwork. Before starting the group in 1990, the women in the village had a practice of assisting one another during bereavement by contributing money for burial expenses. These events seem to have provided the avenue for them to start TFE, as they gave ample opportunity to meet and discuss other issues. Such occasions brought the whole community together and, as is the tradition in the Haya as well as in other communities in Tanzania, the sitting arrangement during burial occasions is gender sensitive. By sitting apart from men, the women shared life experiences and stories as a way of expressing sympathy with the bereaved.

According to Medard (2000, 2005), and confirmed by the women we interviewed, one major problem prompted these women to start TFE. The Kasheno village is at the foot of a steep hill. In the 1990s, services such as markets for fish and other produce, health facilities and school, and the agricultural fields were all located at the top of the hill. The women had to strenuously climb every time they needed to access these services. Because of this commonly shared problem, fourteen women decided to get together, form the TFE, and this subsequently led to several other activities, listed in Table 1.

The group commenced by setting up the leadership structure, administered through an executive committee comprised of a chairwoman, secretary, treasurer and two committee members, all elected by the group members. According to the statutes that they established, the executive committee is required to solicit both internal and external material and non-material support for the group's growth. They are also responsible for the overall management of the group's activities and projects. The chairwoman is mandated to lead all meetings of the group, represent the group in various external meetings and negotiations, and she is also a bank account signatory. The secretary's role is to take and keep all minutes and records of the group, represent the group in external meetings in the absence of the chairwoman, and she is also a signatory to their bank account. The treasurer's responsibilities are focused on management of group funds including being a signatory to their bank account. One of two committee members is assigned to oversee that all members, activities and projects are undertaken in an environment of harmony. She is in charge of group discipline. The other member is the project coordinator. All group members, except one who is older, are between twenty-five and forty. Most of the members have primary level education. They all come from the Haya ethnic community and are married within the same community.

After forming TFE, the women established a credit and savings scheme. Each member contributed an agreed amount every week, and the money was put in the bank. Group members then ventured into several other activities, including trade in bananas, groundnuts, handicrafts and grass (see Table 1). Such small-scale trade allowed them to play their cultural roles effectively. In the beginning, they did not initiate anything that would have taken them out of the village. In addition to trading, they purchased a boat and hired a person from their community to fish with it. They also started a nursery school, water transport, and a forestation project (Table 1). They even paid household taxes for their husbands and, as they originally had discussed, donated money to the village government for the construction and maintenance of the road leading to the village. They managed to initiate these activities through profits saved from fishing activities, member's contributions, small-scale business and boat transport. With the exception of paying taxes for their husbands, all other activities are still ongoing or are being revamped. They however, sold the transport boat due to management. Water transport required that at least two of them to be on board when the boat went out. In doing this they were at times forced to spend nights out due to bad weather, mechanical problems among others.

By the year 2000, TFE had operated about nine different projects (see Table 1) that helped their community to develop (see also Medard 2000, 2005). The improved infrastructure, especially the road, has brought more people to the village for fish or to visit the TFE. The road has also made it possible for motorcycle transport in and out of the village.

Table 1: Summary of activities initiated by the TFE between 1990 and 2010

Year	Activity	Source of funds	Status of activity as of 2010 (our follow-up)
<i>PART A: Activities undertaken between 1990 and 2000 (See also Medard 2000, 2005)</i>			
1990	Group formation	Members contributions	No new members have been recruited since formation
1992	Started a credit and savings scheme	Members contributions and savings	Ongoing
1993	Small-scale trade of bananas, groundnuts, handicrafts and grass for roofing and home 'carpeting'	Own funds from weekly contributions	Ongoing
	Started fishing operations	Funds from donors	Fishing boat under repair as at the time of fieldwork
1995	Started a Nursery school	Savings from the profits earned	Ongoing
1996	Invested in Dagaá fishery	Savings from profits	Boat under repair
	Paid household taxes for their husbands	Savings from profits	Stopped because tax scrapped by government
1997	Started water transport (purchase of a boat)	Loan from Kagera Fisheries Project	Loan still outstanding but activity stopped because boat sold.
	Purchased a plot on which they planted 2000 tree seedlings	Savings from profits	The area is now a thick forest
1998	Donated USD 250 to the village government for road maintenance	Savings from profits	Road in fair condition and in use
1999	Activities since 1992 continued to be implemented. No new activity was started until 2003.		
<i>PART B: Activities undertaken between 2003 and 2010</i>			
2003	Leaders of the group were elected to Beach Management Unit (BMU) leadership	No funds involved	Members continue with their BMU involvement
2007	Planted 300 tree seedlings	Savings from profits	Ongoing
2008	Bought additional land in the village	Savings from profits	Planning to construct a shop and an eating place

Year	Activity	Source of funds	Status of activity as of 2010 (our follow-up)
2009	Contributed about USD 80 to construct classrooms for the primary school in their village	Savings from profits	Primary school operational
	A group member elected to the primary school board	No funds involved	Member continues on the board
	Started a goat project (members are given milk goats)	Savings from profits	Ongoing
	Members assisting HIV/AIDS victims with items such as soap, sugar, and transport to seek medical help	Savings from profits	Ongoing
2010	Group members participate in awareness creation about land, marriage and inheritance laws	Support from other Non-governmental Organizations	Ongoing

Consolidation phase: Activities between 2000 and 2010

Some of the TFE activities in the last decade can be traced back to 1998, when the Fisheries Division of Tanzania decided to restructure its management system by forming Beach Management Units (BMUs) in a co-management regime (Hoza and Mahatane 1998, 2003). The introduction of BMUs created an opportunity for the TFE members to venture into community leadership. With the subsequent expansion of BMUs at the divisional, district and all the way to the Lake level, 30 percent of the posts were set aside for women at each beach. This requirement led to the election of two women from TFE to positions in the BMUs at their beach. Moreover, one TFE member was elected as divisional BMU treasurer. Given her added responsibility in the group, she decided to quit the TFE management but remained an advisor to the members. As a consequence of her resignation, TFE held an election for all three of the executive committee posts.

Despite the many successful undertakings that the TFE initiated in recent years, the last decade has been far from smooth. While the group has remained intact with the original members still active, internal tensions have occurred. Around 2005, the top leaders were accused of colluding and spending their bank savings without members' knowledge. This allegation was not well received by these leaders, who defended themselves by arguing that every withdrawal from the bank followed agreed procedures. However, this explanation was not fully convincing to all members. The members resolved to ask these leaders, especially the chairwoman, to resign. She complied, but her leaving did not end the group's problems.

The resignation of the chairwoman had an impact on the group's momentum. Her departure led some organizations working with TFE to reduce their contact with the group, as it was the chairwoman who used to communicate with them. Activities such as boat transport stopped, as the expelled member claimed

ownership of the outboard engine that was acquired for the same. The issue had to be taken to the District Fisheries Office which helped resolve the conflict, returning the equipment to the group. During this period also, the group's scheduled meeting frequency reduced, and activities slowed down. However, members' enthusiasm about the group never faded; the ideas they had initiated were kept alive, and they started to think of new projects. Slowly the members recovered from the setbacks and the momentum started to pick up again.

In 2007, the TFE planted 300 tree seedlings in the same area where they had planted in 1998 and in 2000. A year later they bought additional land in the village center in which they wanted to construct and operate a store and an eating place. The idea was to make food available to fishers who were employed in various boats and were not from the village. This is a plan they still hold.

Given their expanded participation in the village decision-making system, in 2009 they helped to start a primary school in the village, which is currently operational. By the time of our fieldwork, the school was preparing candidates for their first national examinations of class seven. The school was officially approved by the local district education committee to begin in 2009. This period coincided with the government's efforts in ensuring that there was at least a primary school in each village in the whole country. Local children who attended schools outside the village were all transferred to this new school. TFE donated about eighty US dollars for the construction of classrooms, and continues to play an important role in the school; for instance, one of their members serves on the school board.

In 2009, the TFE initiated a new project where they bought a milk goat. This was a real innovation as cows were the only source of milk known in this village. They resolved to distribute the goat's offspring until each member had one. During our visit, three members had already received a goat, and were making money by selling the milk. Additionally, the group leaders were involved in rigorous law awareness programs. We learned that they were part of a group of women from the district who had been educated as trainers (TOT) on issues related to land, marriage and inheritance legislation of Tanzania. They were therefore engaged in passing information on these laws to other women in the villages where they lived and those in their neighborhood. Finally the group started a support program for twelve people in their village with HIV/AIDS. The group provides items such as sugar, flour and protein foods. They also arrange transportation for medical assistance.

TFE influence and impact has grown beyond the village level. Indeed, several other women's groups have been formed after being inspired by TFE (see also Medard 2002). On many occasions, TFE leaders have been invited to share their experiences at local, regional and national conferences and workshops. Tanzania Fisheries authorities and the Lake Victoria Fisheries Organization (a tripartite organization bringing together fisheries authorities and researchers from Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda) have also used TFE leaders as TOTs on BMU formation, operations and as resource persons in disseminating information on fisheries management issues.

Action Space and Gender

The projects initiated by Tweyambe women led them into the action space traditionally controlled by men. For instance, the women borrowed money from the group to pay school fees for their children who were in secondary schools. Such financial deals were always arranged by men. One woman told us that in 2009, her boy had passed grade seven national examinations, and was required to go to a school in which school fees were about 120 us dollars. The husband did not have the money, and neither did he have any way of getting it. She suggested the possibility of borrowing money from the TFE. The husband consented, which solved the problem. Another woman also told us that she and her husband could not afford an iron roofed house. After discussing this issue, they agreed to ask for a loan from the TFE in order to purchase the iron sheets. The husband would mobilise other items for the house cheaply from the village. When we were in the village, she took us to her house which, appeared to us, was a great joy in her heart as something that she was able to achieve. Similar stories kept flowing in from TFE members. A woman proudly told us "I have helped my husband, because it is his responsibility to build a house and even pay school fees."

However, the women also indicated that before 2000 men started interfering with their activities. The men thought that the women had acquired a lot of money and that their own involvement was called for. This is an argument we also got from our interviews with men in the village. The men confirmed that their intervention had no bad intention; they only wanted to assist the women because they were generating substantial amounts of money by the projects they had initiated. Men were of the opinion that their intervention would help avoid conflict between the women over their use.

When the women realized men's intention to intervene, they feared that their success was starting to backfire on them. They worried that their aims were in jeopardy and that steadily, they were being drawn back to where they were before they formed their group. The women felt the heat coming from their men, who believed that it was their traditional right to be in control. The women resolved to avoid confrontation, and agreed to diligently continue with their contribution to household basic needs, especially the provision of food. With the worsening of the economic situation in the area, men realized that they could no longer alone provide for their household needs. They thus had no option but to agree to the women's efforts. The women continued to play their female roles as per the cultural definitions, albeit in different forms. For instance, they employed people to take care of their children in the kindergarten. They also hired people to help them with domestic activities such as cooking. They even recruited people to work in the agricultural fields. This made it possible for them to concentrate more time and effort on TFE activities and to participate more fully in decision-making touching the whole community.

Discussion

The story of TFE is about women's struggle to bring their community out of poverty. But is also a story about how women succeeded in expanding their action space, and hence their freedom (Sen 2000), by their own agency. By forming the TFE and getting involved in a number of social, economic and governance activities, including fisheries and fisheries management, these women empowered not only their community but also themselves (Rowland-Serdar and Schwartz-Shea 1997; Klenk 2004).

Action Space

The women's social entrepreneurship, addressing poverty in their community, has not been without challenges. They had to confront traditional perceptions of the appropriate roles and responsibilities of women relative to men within both their household and their community. By pushing to expand the boundaries of women's action space, they also helped to broaden the action space of their local community but, in doing so, they moved into the action space traditionally controlled by men. For women to acquire more space, men had to yield some of theirs. This could hardly have been avoided, and it was bound to create problems. Regardless of, or even because of, the achievements of the TFE, their enterprise provoked reactions in Kasheno village and from men that could easily have jeopardized it. Indeed, the Tweyambe women's enterprise has been an uphill battle, not only in the literal sense. It required women to play their roles with skill and reason. They have been careful not to antagonize men or to put themselves in conflict with cultural gender roles. This could hardly have been achieved without their deep knowledge and understanding of the norms of their community and their social relationships and obligations with others, especially their husbands. This is an advantage of entrepreneurship that originates from within (Gerrard 1995), rather than from outside, the local community – even if external support has proven essential in this case, as in many other instances where women have taken the lead (Cunningham and Mathie 2003; Gibson-Graham 2005).

Poverty alleviation from below

The TFE story shows how poverty alleviation, empowerment, and gender are closely connected. Poverty alleviation from the bottom-up involving women in an entrepreneurial role requires their individual and collective empowerment (Bruin *et al.* 2006; Godwyn 2009), which again calls for a redefinition of gender roles and community rules. Interestingly in this case, the process did not commence with the latter but with the former. The change in gender responsibilities and relationships did not start the entrepreneurial process. Rather gender roles changed as a result of the projects that TFE initiated. Although the women were careful to consult the men, they did not ask for their permission to establish TFE. They just did it by their own decision. But through the TFE and its accomplishments, the women acquired a different position relative to that which dominated when they launched their enterprise. The implementation process created a new zone for negotiation of gender responsibilities and relationships. This made it possible for

the women to argue with the men from a position of strength rather from the subordinate position that they traditionally held. They entered these negotiations with the understanding that they would not be able to fully comply with household and community expectations; for instance, with regard to their role as 'bread-makers.' Still it was important for them to employ a strategy where they could keep the harmony within their family and community while at the same time remaining effective as entrepreneurs, as the latter unavoidably took time away from their domestic responsibilities.

In the Kasheno village something had to be done to ease women's burden. The steep hill they had to climb every day to get to the fields and to access essential services and commodities for their daily living was a challenge. However, the women were also concerned about their overall well-being – availability of adequate food, a sense of belonging, being respected and treated fairly, good and supportive family relations. Hence, their initiative was aimed at improving their own conditions as well as those of the community. This was a core issue and the driving force that led them to initiate their project and to confront gender responsibilities and relations that traditionally had held them back.

In particular, the Tweyambe women were thinking about (i) what state they wanted their community to be in vis-a-vis the challenges that they faced; (ii) whether what they were doing (such as establishing a credit scheme, kindergarten, fishing activities, paying school fees and taxes for their husbands) was really desirable and what the priorities should be; (iii) who would really benefit from the activities they initiated; (iv) what kind of power mechanisms they needed in order to stay on course; and finally (v) what they would do if men felt intimidated and decided to sabotage their enterprise.

These are all important questions from the perspective of entrepreneurial poverty alleviation, empowerment and gender. Question (i) is about objectives, and required reflections about social values and desired futures. Question (ii) is about means; how effective and realistic they are given the resources they controlled and opportunities that existed, and what is more urgent. Question (iii) is about social ethics, distribution, and value judgements. What they saw as beneficial to them as a group of women may not be so to other people in the community, including men. Question (iv) requires answers that relate to community governance. Again, this involves issues that are infused with social values, but also matters of a technical and institutional nature. It requires knowing how to make sure that initiated activities can continue and receive favorable appraisal and legitimacy. This also requires a clear understanding of the degree to which decision-making processes are synchronized with the socio-cultural structures and norms of the community; for instance, who should be involved and have a say (Onyango and Jentoft 2010). Question (v) requires an ability to see ahead, anticipate how others might react, to be prepared for eventualities and risks, and knowing how to respond to different scenarios. What would happen if they failed to realize what they set out to do? Entrepreneurial failure and success both come with social costs, be they about losing face, envy, intimidation, gossip, dependency, or social exclusion (Paine 1972; Barth 1972; Du Toit 2004).

Poverty expertise

It is important to recognize that women's entrepreneurial agency needs to be understood comprehensively. Entrepreneurship is not only about economic investment but also about social relationships. The latter does not require scientific or technical knowledge as much as ethical and practical knowledge; that is, the kind of knowledge one acquires by being embedded in a particular community and culture. This is the knowledge that Aristotle termed *phronesis* (Flyvberg 2003). Without *phronesis*, the women who formed the TFE could not have been as successful as they have proven to be.

This argument can be made not only with regard to this particular community but to entrepreneurship and development in communities ridden with poverty in general. This is also, we hold, why development initiatives of donor agencies external to the local community, despite their expertise on fisheries, so often stumble (Gerrard 1991; Hersoug *et al.* 2004). Typically, a fisheries development expert is one who is well equipped with scientific and technical knowledge (what Aristotle termed *episteme* and *techne*). A 'true' fisheries development expert, however, is one who also has *phronesis*, because in small-scale fisheries the expert needs to work with local people. *Episteme* and *techne* are knowledge that tends to make the expert feel superior, whereas *phronesis* makes him humble, patient and thorough. The latter is a much needed quality when listening to the "Voices of the Poor", who Narayan *et al.* (2000:2) hold to be "the real poverty experts."

The Tweyambe women had less *episteme* and *techne* in the beginning, but they did have *phronesis*. In other words, they knew their social, political and cultural context, which has proven essential for successful entrepreneurship (Greenfield *et al.* 1979). They had the relational skills that made it possible for them to deal with people in their community, including their husbands. The activities and projects that they took on were many and diverse, as shown in Table 1. They were not of a large scale but still provided important learning. It is to be expected that as their enterprises grow in scale, they will need more *episteme* and *techne*, which an external expert like a government agency or a non-governmental organization (NGO) could help to provide (Bennet 2005).

This is also to say that poverty alleviation and women's empowerment need to be dealt with from within the community, as is the case with TFE, and not only from outside. The women of the TFE have thrived because they were able to do what they set out to, while following the norms of the community. They avoided conflict by abiding with the rules, but also managed to stretch them in a way that effectively expanded their action space. They brought new issues to the table, but they also knew what not to do. In relation to their community and the men, they showed "deference and demeanor", by wisely employing the interaction strategy that Goffman (1967:15) termed "avoidance." But they also learned this relational skill the hard way. By choosing not to communicate in the beginning, especially with regards to the financial details of their project activities, they met resistance from the men. As a consequence, they changed the way they operated in their social relationships with each other as well as with their spouses. They are still working on their internal relationships that at times have been strained, as when

one of their leaders was accused of embezzlement and had to leave. This is an issue that was yet to be resolved when our interviews took place in September 2010.

Conclusion

By the application of practical local knowledge and relational skills (*phronesis*), the Tweyambe women provide a strong argument for a socially engaged approach to feminist epistemology, women's social entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation. It is important to recognize that their resolve to address their poverty status and empowerment is constituted within their specific social, cultural and historical contexts.

Without disregarding the need for an etic (outsider) perspective on poverty alleviation, women's empowerment and entrepreneurship, the emic perspective (Headland *et al.* 1990; Jentoft 2007) is also essential. Not only is it important to situate social entrepreneurship, poverty alleviation and women's empowerment within communities, it is also necessary to acquire a deep understanding of how women perceive their own world, what their "logic of consequentiality" as well as their "logic of appropriateness" are (March and Olsen 1989:160-162). In other words, one needs to understand how women entrepreneurs calculate the benefits and risks of their actions, as well as how they estimate what their social obligations are and what expectations rest upon them, including their ideas about gender and power. The emic perspective would also help to reverse the norm of women being perceived from a gender-neutral perspective, which usually involves a male bias (Jackson 2006). There is hardly anything 'neutral' with regard to women's absolute and relative poverty. Rather, it is a matter of social equity and justice. Therefore, women's poverty must be defined from women's perspective; that is how they see themselves, their capabilities and opportunities to increase their action space. This is an epistemological requirement that rests as much on social researchers as fisheries development experts.

African feminist research has always emphasised issues of location, environment and culture as they affect women's struggles for well-being and poverty reduction. Poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, which is most prevalent in the rural population (Whitehead and Lockwood 1999; Allison and Ellis 2001; Ellis and Bahiigwa 2003; Ellis and Freeman 2004), has forced women to adopt very practical and localised steps in demanding representation and respect for their legal rights in a culture characterised by asymmetry, inequality and gender bias.

In this region of Africa, it has always been a woman's responsibility to acquire fuel for cooking, prepare food, till the soil, in addition to handling a range of other productive and reproductive tasks, which has meant that their action space has been confined to the domestic sphere. Men's roles, on the other hand, have provided them with an action space that has extended beyond family and homestead and into the public sphere. This dichotomy, however, no longer holds true with the Tweyambe women. They have broken out of their traditional spatial boundaries and entered into the space of men. This has not happened without challenges and risks pertaining to their enterprise. This is also what makes

women's entrepreneurship different from men's entrepreneurship. In those areas where the Tweyambe women have now engaged themselves, men do not have to surpass their traditional action space in order to become effective entrepreneurs. Not only do women have to break out of their action space; they also have to occupy the space that is controlled by men. Men are generally freed from this extra challenge; the ground for social entrepreneurship is already prepared for men. Thus it is not expected that women will enlarge their space without problems. It is predicted in feminist research, and it was also anticipated by the Tweyambe women. The TFE learned how to confront their challenges by employing their *phronesis*.

Amartya Sen (2000:36) argues that freedom is essential for development and well-being. In his view, 'freedom is both the primary end and the principle means of development.' It is Bauman's (2001) argument that although community provides security, it also reduces individual freedom. We may also see the story of the Tweyambe women in this light. They were obviously not free to define and implement their enterprise in whatever fashion that they may have liked. But it can also be said that the women's use of *phronesis* provided them with the freedom to engage in activities that they, without this knowledge, would have been restrained from. In other words, *phronesis* represented an asset rather than a liability (Gerrard 1995). *Phronesis* is not necessarily what makes you think twice but what makes you think differently and smart about the things you want to accomplish. The Tweyambe women needed to know what they could do and could not do, given the social and cultural conditions of their community. They were not only clear about their goals but also about the process they had to follow in order to realize them. This is important in explaining their achievements. It is also a general lesson for women in other communities who are thinking of launching similar projects of social development and emancipation. In order for women to become change agents in a social and economic sense, they also need to be change agents in a relational sense.

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