THE HARAMBEE MOVEMENT IN KENYA THE ROLE PLAYED BY KENYANS AND THE GOVERNMENT IN THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION AND OTHER SOCIAL SERVICES.

CHIENI, SUSAN NJERI
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS, MOI UNIVERSITY, KENYA

INTRODUCTION

The kind of life that people in different parts of the world lead is dependent upon the economic and social development of the country that they are living in. The economic and social development of a nation especially in the developing countries is determined to a large extent by the quality and quantity of formal education available. In many instances, educational accessibility has been a problem. In Kenya for example, the demand for education exceeded supply before independence up to today. As a result, a solution was urgently needed; thus the *Harambee movement.

In this paper therefore, I aim to discuss the harambee movement in Kenya in relation to its provision of education and other very crucial social services. The argument will be that despite the many problems that have been associated with harambee, it has been quite a success. In relation to this, the following sub-topics will be tackled:

i) Meaning of the term Harambee
ii) Background of the Harambee Movement
   - In traditional African Societies (Kenya)
   - During colonial times.
   - At Independence.
iii) The different forms that it takes.
iv) The contributions of Harambee to the improvement of the quality of life of Kenyans.
v) Indigenous peoples participation in the Harambee
vi) Government participation
vii) Problems experienced in Harambee
viii) Recommended solutions
ix) Application of the concept of Harambee to other developing nations.
x) Conclusion.

* Harambee is a Kiswahili word that means "Let us all pull together"

Meaning of the term Harambee

Harambee is a Bantu word which has its origins in the word Halambee. This word was originally used by porters at the coastal parts of Kenya like Mombasa, Lamu, Malindi and later throughout the county (Ombudo, 1986). It is normally pronounced as haa-raam-bay. Literally, it means "Let us all pull together", and is variously described as away of life in Kenya (Ngethe, 1979) and a traditional custom of Kenyans (Kenya Development plan, 1979). The word has also been adopted as a political slogan to symbolise the unity of man to help achieve a worthy end. It encourages Kenyans to give their best in order to complete any task at hand for community development.
The term is used in the discussion of economic and social developments in Kenya just as similar concepts are used in many other developing countries all over the world, e.g. "ujamaa" in Tanzania and "humanism" in Zambia. It embodies ideas of mutual assistance, joint effort, mutual social responsibility and community self-reliance. It is therefore an informal development strategy of the people, by the people (with assistance from external sources, including the government) for the people (Akong’a 1989). The efforts of the people, Non-governmental Organisations (henceforth referred to as NGOs) and the government come together in a co-operative endeavour to speed up development.

Background of the Harambee Movement in Traditional African Societies.

Harambee is not new but a traditional principle which existed in every traditional society in Kenya. Each society had self-help or co-operative work groups by which groups of women on the one hand and men on the other organised common work parties, for example to cultivate or build houses for each other; clear bushes, harvesting etc. The security and prosperity of the group was therefore dependent upon the persons being mindful of each other’s welfare. Different names were given to this term in different communities: Kikuyu-Ngwatio; Luo - Konyir; Luhya - Obwasio; Kamba - Mwethia; Maasai - Ematonyok etc.

During Colonial Times:

Many development strategies deployed in developing countries (former colonies) were developed in western countries in completely different socio-economic, historical and environmental circumstances. This is the reason why self-help and co-operative socio-economic institutions supported and encouraged by the government were started.

This concept was evident during colonial times especially in the area of provision of education. At this time, Kenyans started opposing missionary (read colonial) education. This was due to the feeling that the missions were determined to control education and undermine the African culture while on the other hand, the colonial government did not provide adequate educational facilities. They therefore started the independent schools i.e. schools not controlled by the missionaries. These schools were established and managed by local people and their leaders. This background reveals that the concept of working together for the benefit of the wider society was in existence as a concrete theme even before independence.

At Independence

The philosophy of Harambee was established at independence when the destiny of Kenya was placed in the hands of the Africans. In order then to translate the political aspirations of the populace into tangible benefits, the government initiated measures for rapid economic and social development. "The envisaged Social development objectives entailed the promotion and implementation of programmes aimed at enhancing the quality of life of the nation’s families." (Government of Kenya, 1988).

This concept of harambee is associated mainly with the late president Jomo Kenyatta. This is because it gained momentum when he popularised it as a mobilizing slogan. On 1st June 1963 (Madaraka day), he said, "-------- as we participate in the pomp and circumstance, and as we make merry at this time, remember this: we are relaxing before the tall that is to come. We must work harder to fight our enemies - ignorance, sickness and poverty. Therefore give you the call HARAMBEE. Let us all work harder together for our country Kenya (Harambee! 1963)

Later, on the day of the state opening of parliament on 13th December, 1963, he further reiterated the need for co-operative effort for a successful Kenya:

-------- Our moto "harambee" was conceived in the realisation of the challenge of national building that now lies ahead of us. It was conceived in the knowledge that to meet this challenge, the government and the people of Kenya must pull together. We know only out of our efforts and toil can we build a new and better Kenya. This then is our resolution--------.

Forms of Harambee

Before discussing the achievements and shortcomings of Harambee, it will be in order to pinpoint what exactly goes on during harambees. What normally comes into the minds of many Kenyans when this term harambee is mentioned is the one aspect of fund raising; but harambee is much more than this. Another most important aspect is the contribution of materials and labour to various development projects. Among others, Harambee is based on four major principles:

i) Bottom up development strategy. This means that people at the community and grassroots level participate actively in the planning and implementation of the local development projects.

ii) Participation is guided by the principles of collective good rather than individual gain. What this means is that the end product benefits the public rather than just an individual.
iii) The choice of the project is supposed to be guided by the felt needs of the majority instead of leaving the task to the government and other change agents whose priorities in terms of project selection may not be those of the people, the ultimate beneficiaries.

iv) The project implementation is supposed to maximize the utilization of local resources such as labour, funds and materials which would otherwise have remained unmobilized or expensive (Akong’a 1989).

The harambee projects are mainly locally initiated and implemented. Contributions, (especially money) come from the more affluent sections of the society. Other contributions may come from across all socio-economic groups in the country. These harambee projects are normally in two main categories:

i) Self-help activities geared towards the construction of public utilities which cannot easily be provided for by the government. Some examples are primary schools, secondary schools, health facilities, water projects, cattle dips, churches, gully control and afforestation projects. They are usually assisted by the government and Ngos in the form of materials and manpower.

ii) Women Groups - these are aimed at alleviating situations of poverty and work overload. This comes from the realization that women are over loaded with work and that they are poor. The activities that they are involved in are like contributing money (merry-go-round), marketing of commonly held goods to obtain money for buying and operating flour mills, poultry keeping, domestic water tanks construction, bee-keeping, iron-roofed houses construction, farming and basketry. These groups are registered by the District Social development Office so that they can receive aid from the Ministry of Culture and social Services, Ngos and the Women’s Bureau.

Other forms of harambee aimed at helping individuals have also picked up momentum. Examples are like Pre-wedding fund raisers, hospital bill harambees, harambees to assist youths go for further education locally and abroad etc. These forms of harambee have in one way or another improved the quality of different people and communities in Kenya.

The Contribution of Harambee towards the Improvement of the quality of life of Kenyans.

The harambee concept embodies the ideas of assistance, joint effort, mutual self responsibility and community self-reliance. As such, it has been responsible for substantial developments in the provision of basic needs and social service facilities. It has brought about near miracles especially in the country-side. Aided by the government, Harambee self-help projects have been responsible for the building of over 200 schools, 40 health Centres, 60 dispensaries, 200 nursery centres, 42 bridges, 500 kms of rural access roads etc throughout the country (Bailey 1993 P.169). These social service facilities started on harambee basis, whether taken over by the government for operation and maintenance or not, provide “basic needs” to a large segment of especially rural people. It will be quite in order to discuss some of the actual contributions of harambee towards socio-economic development in Kenya.

i) Education: The most striking feature of harambee has been the growth of harambee schools. These have played a very major role in the provision of secondary education to pupils who could not be admitted to government schools. To date there are about 600 harambee schools. In fact, many of the government aided schools were started on harambee basis. In a study carried out by Mbithi and Rasmusson (1977) subjects interviewed about the perceived benefits of harambee learning institutions stated that:

The educational projects freed parents for other more productive work. It also saved money that was previously going towards the employment of househelps. Literacy rates went up due to accessibility of the institutions in terms of their availability and distance. Few people talked about immediate benefits from educational institutions but many said that there would be long term benefits in terms of employment and thus better incomes. These educated people would in turn participate in future harambees leading to further development. Some of these learning institutions are nursery centres, primary schools, harambee Secondary schools, Institutes of Science and technology, village polytechnics etc.

ii) Health Centres: The success of health institutions depends on whether the government takes over or not. If the project is taken over, then the surrounding communities benefit. As such, major plagues and illnesses are dealt with thus, better health for the people. This facility is especially beneficial in that due to economic constraints few people can reach national, provincial and district hospitals for treatment. Thus, the nearness of the health centres saves transport costs enabling especially women who carry out majority of the agricultural activities in rural Kenya to participate in these more economically viable activities. Health centres also generate employment opportunities and a demand for other community services eg. water.

iii) Water projects: There are different types of water projects. Some are just domestic water projects like water tanks, while others are massive; serving large areas. The availability of safe (clean) drinking water leads to improved health. Like in the case of health services, short distances to the water collection points enable women to save time and participate in more productive incoming
earning activities, as an example, the water is also used for agricultural and livestock development, therefore improved lifestyles.

Water projects also have spin-off effects. For instance, the water can be used for agricultural and livestock development, thereby improving lifestyles. Improved water availability can lead to the establishment of other facilities such as schools, cattle dips, and primary schools. Employment opportunities are also created.

(iv) Cattle dips: These facilities have led to improved health of livestock, reduced deaths, more reliable source of income, and more marketable and regular milk output. The proximity of the cattle dips reduces costs and eases service.

Harambee efforts have been providing productive infrastructure with potential significance for employment creation and increased incomes. However, we need to note that this depends largely on the type of harambee project being undertaken. If fund-raising is the overwhelming portion and labor contribution minimal in the project, then it is amenable to manipulation and the stimulation of a significant employment impact through the Government of Kenya's direct or indirect influences. Where harambee is a case primarily of labor contribution, however, no "new" employment is created through it and no incomes are directly being made.

In most advanced areas like the central province of Kenya, harambee is mainly concentrated on improvements of recurrent needs of existing projects (equipment, supplies, etc.); the employment coefficient will obviously be lower than for initial capital construction projects.

The size of harambee has increased steadily in aggregate terms. Many projects have been undertaken and completed through the spirit of harambee. Some involve colossal sums of money which the government could not have managed to disburse to the various communities concerned. As an example, during the period 1967 - 1987, contributions for self-help projects in the country amounted to K£ 294,381,870 (Bailey, 1989).

The success of harambee in Kenya is attributed to the sharp awareness by Kenyans of the benefits to be reaped. This encouraged them to participate and contribute generously.

Indigenous People's participation in Harambee.

Experience in the technologically less developed societies has taught that social development which is the process by which the standards and conditions of living of the majority of the people in a community are improved, cannot be accomplished without a firm cultural foundation and the involvement of the majority of the people themselves. A continued close collaboration between the people through their self-help efforts and the government through the provision of necessary services was therefore stressed by the late president Jomo Kenyatta in his speech on independence day, 12th December, 1963 when he said that: "-------but you must know that Kenyatta alone cannot give you everything. All things we must do together to develop our country, to get education for our children, to have doctors, to build roads, to improve or provide all day-to-day essentials -------." He therefore reminded Kenyans that the new government would not provide free things for people but that they had to work. He exhorted people to forget the past and help one another and themselves to build a new Kenya. As a result, in Kenya today, one of our most dramatic examples of Harambee is to be seen in the nations' self-help movement, focused on human development. Every person takes it as his/her responsibility to see each harambee project through to the fruitful end.

Government Participation

In recognition of the desirability of the Social cultural dimension to development, the Kenyan Government has actively supported self-help projects through the provision of manpower in construction or when the project is completed, materials and funding.

The government also monitors harambee projects. This is for example in the projects selection criteria for projects to receive rural development funds. Examples of projects approved by the government are cattle dips, fruit tree nurseries, afforestation projects, fish ponds, agricultural processing factories, etc. These projects are seen by the government as being able to increase production, productivity, and create more employment opportunities.

In some cases, the community puts up facilities which are then taken over by the government if they have attained the required standards. A good example is schools and health centers. "The Government's encouragement in Kenya is a recognition of the cultural dimension in the development process" (Bliss, 1988).

Problems Experience

As with any other phenomenon of such wide-spread but amorphous and changing nature, there are problems with harambee. This is not a criticism of harambee. What we need to note is that the role of harambee in the provision of essential and physical infrastructure is considered to be an extremely positive aspect of Kenya's development. The problems are mainly financial.

i) Unstaffed and non-operating social-service facilities especially where there is no outside funding. An example is health-centres, secondary schools, and water projects. In this case, the concept of "seed money" (Geist 1984) can be applied especially for water projects. In such cases, harambee collections may be made for giant water projects which are beyond the financial capabilities of the
communities.

Thus, the collection is seen as "seed money", because the project is deliberately started on a harambee basis in order to attract major donor financing. If the government does not or is unable to step in, the projects may be incomplete, lack staff and other supplies. The community Development officer had this to say in this connection:

The trouble is that groups don’t realize that schools and dispensaries and different from other projects; so we had alot of trouble after the harambee call, as people were building secondary schools and dispensaries without troubling to find out if there was money for drugs, teachers and so on (lamb, 1914)

ii) Proliferation and fragmentation - This is due to competing sectarian and political initiatives. For example, with two candidates competing in politics, the future of the projects started by losing candidates is in jeopardy. Sectarian competition leads to the starting of duplicated projects which cannot be rationalised economically. This is because the client population for the facilities is just too small to consider staffing, nor financially well off to maintain the facility on a harambee basis.

(iii) Harambee, a gap filler - That is, it is only supposed to take the slack left by inadequate resources allocation from other sources. It is seen as playing only a supplementary role by the government planners and therefore sometimes left to survive as best as it can:

These institutions concerned with providing needed social services include, in addition to the government ---- the Harambee movement ---- the services of all these institutions are welcome supplements to the major social programs of the Government and will be encouraged to extend their services especially to the rural and urban poor (G.O.K., 1979).

(iv) Land holdings: Harambee projects especially in rural areas aim at increasing the incomes of those with land. However, the growing number of the landless rural population cannot take advantage of them. In other instances, some people may have land but if the project relies solely or overwhelmingly on female labour which is devoted to other non-productive activities, e.g household chores, it may not succeed. The problem of marketing the produce may also hinder development i.e. the produce may be there but there is no market for it or the market is inaccessible or irregular.

This therefore limits employment and incomes from these directly productive activities. The snowball effect of this will be that village polytechnics and craft centres become mobilised. This promotes the vicious cycle of poverty.

v) Poverty and unemployment: Economic development problems are global but in developing countries, they are very persistent. In Kenya, about 10 million of the rural population lives below the poverty line (Cheruyalew, 1996). This is compounded by unemployment which is one of the major hurdles to development in Kenya. President Moi said in the Economic Reforms for 1996-1998 that: "It is common knowledge that poverty and unemployment are the major challenges facing us as a nation."

In the budget speech in June 1997, the Minister of finance said. "The most daunting challenge facing our nation today include creation of adequate employment, opportunities to absorb the large numbers of new entrants into the labour market." (Sunday Nation, 1997).

Table 1: Persons Engaged: Recorded Totals June 1993 - 1996 ('000)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self employment and unpaid family</td>
<td>1,475.5</td>
<td>1,505.5</td>
<td>1,557.0</td>
<td>1,606.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers</td>
<td>56.2</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>61.1</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Sector</td>
<td>1,466.5</td>
<td>1,792.4</td>
<td>2,240.5</td>
<td>2,643.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>299.8</td>
<td>3,356.2</td>
<td>3,858.6</td>
<td>4,313.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ref: Sunday Nation (6th June, 1997)

13 million Kenyans can work, 4.3 million (1997) are employed i.e. 1.5 million in proper wage job, 2.8 million are blacksmiths, roadside mechanics, carvers, petty traders and a motley of other types who together constitute the**'Jua Kali’ Sector. The balance of about 8.7 million falls under peasant farmers, Pastoralists and idlers. Land is becoming less and less as a result of subdivisions caused by population growth.
growth. This affects harambee in that few people can contribute and in most cases, the goal set is not achieved (i.e. Money needed for a project.) until after many fundraisers.

Other problems are the mode of collection. In some cases, people are forced to participate through salary deductions and group pressures eg. no contribution, no dipping cattle, or children being sent home from school.

**"Jua kali" is a Kiswahili word that means 'hot sun' because most of these workers do their work in the open air.**

**Recommended Solutions**

The types of projects, programs and services provided through harambee should seek to answer the question: How can harambee assist the unemployed, under-employed, the unproductively employed and increase incomes? By the unemployed, I am referring to new graduates leaving the education system at different points, the unproductively employed are mainly the women who are involved in activities like drawing water, fetching firewood, pounding grain etc; while the working poor are those who are employed but whose returns for their labour is consistently below the level considered adequate to supply an acceptable level of basic needs. These are the urban informal sector, pastoral and semi pastoral communities, rural households headed by women and the landless agricultural labourers.

Harambee should focus on directly productive activities i.e. those expected to increase production, productivity and incomes. These projects need to be evaluated right at the inception. If this is not done, later monitoring and regulation will prove too late coming after many resources have been misallocated.

The government should play a more active role in the running of projects, especially those that have been completed eg health centres, schools and water projects. Together with NGOs they should give more grants to those projects that show signs of being productive to alleviate their collapse.

**Application of the concept of Harambee to other developing Nations**

The role that harambee has played in Kenya’s development has differentiated Kenya from the rest of the developing world. Self help of course exists in other parts of the developing world but what really makes Kenya different is not the spirit of public motivations and mechanisms, but rather the success of the government in providing reasonably clear signals, guidelines and assistance to harambee.

It is a private sector, non-governmental phenomena, but its long-term sustainabilities and success have depended on and will continue to depend on government performance as well. This is worth imitating.

**CONCLUSION**

Self-help groups are social groups that have economic objectives and functions. They aim at promoting social and economic needs of their members. The harambee movement, which stresses working together for the good of the community as a whole and individual persons as well is an example of a partnership that lasts; that of the government and of the people of Kenya, to make the quality of life of Kenyans better. Many Kenyans have much to thank Harambee for.

**REFERENCES:**


