



*Research Articles*

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# **Challenging Socio-Economic Marginalization: Paulo Freire's Influence in Rural Uganda**

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## INTRODUCTION

**P**aulo Freire's thinking on marginalization, adult education, and sustainable development has been explored in different parts of Africa (Alexander, 1990; Ikechukwu, 1995; Mda, 1994; Nekhwevha, 2002; Okigbo, 1991; Prinsloo, 1987; Vally, 2007; Wamba dia Wamba, 1994), but none of the studies pays attention to the element of theology. This essay explores the intersection of Freirean thinking on adult education, Catholic social teaching, and liberation theology in addressing socio-economic marginalization in rural Uganda. Through the work of Atanansi Community Based Organization in rural Uganda, the study illustrates the effectiveness of Freirean methods in undoing the complex process of marginalization, and the ensuing self-empowerment of rural communities.

In the first section I highlight the global and local background upon which the marginalization of people in rural Uganda has been built, and in the second section I explain the Christian faith impulses that drove the local interventions. In the third section I explain the application of the ideas of liberation theology and Paulo Freire in the founding and operation of Atanansi Community Based Organization. In the last section I discuss the social impact of Freire's ideas in the community, and on me personally.

## NEOLIBERAL REFORMS, CORRUPTION, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC EXCLUSION IN UGANDA

**H**eidhues and Obare (2011) argue that in the 1960s when most African countries got independence, the majority of African leaders believed that the private sector was too back-ward and that government had to play the dominant role. As a consequence, almost all aspects of economic development were primarily government driven. This approach was

aligned with the communitarian African traditional approach to life. With this mindset and with donor support, early post-independence governments across Africa drew up comprehensive five-year plans, invested in large state-run basic industries, and enacted comprehensive regulations to control prices, restrict trade, and allocate credit and foreign exchange (Owusu, 2003; Heidhues & Obare, 2011). In several African countries Heidhues and Obare (2011) observe that the “number of trained people increased substantially, major investments were made in infrastructure (roads, ports, telecommunications, and power generation), and health and education improved significantly.” Indeed, “annual economic growth in Sub-Saharan Africa averaged 3.4% between 1961 and 1980 while agriculture grew by about 3% per year over the same period” (Heidhues & Obare, 2011).

At independence and throughout the 1960s, a report produced for the World Bank by Warnock and Conway (1999) notes that Uganda had one of the most vigorous and promising economies in Sub-Saharan Africa. The country relied overwhelmingly on agriculture, which accounted for 90 percent of exports in 1960 and two-thirds of the country’s GDP. Uganda had a large subsistence sector – the non-monetized sector comprised almost one-third of the country’s economic activity, and much of the population remained outside the formal economy. The report further indicates that Uganda’s economy did relatively well in the 1960s, as GDP growth averaged 4.8 percent per year from 1965 to 1970.

However, in the late 1960s and through the 1970s, Heidhues and Obare (2011) note, the growth engine in African countries began to slow down partly due to the post-independence civil wars, coups and counter coups. By the mid-1970s, African countries like Uganda that at independence had been at the same development level with Singapore, lagged behind in economic performance. Several scholars (Heidhues, Atsain, Nyangito, Padilla, Ghersi & Vallee, 2004; Heidhues & Obare, 2011) note that the low development performance led to high budget and balance of payments deficits and significant public debt. By 1980, output was actually declining, and by the end of the 1980s, Sub-Saharan African countries were facing fundamental problems: high rates of population growth, low levels of investment and saving, inefficient use of resources, weak institutions and human capacity, and a general decline in income and living standards.

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As a result of changes and challenges in the global economy, African countries were encouraged and manipulated into borrowing huge sums of money from western banks. However, the money borrowed by African banks ended up in the pockets of corrupt government officials, unnecessary white elephant projects, or on luxuries by leaders; and very little was invested to attain sustainable economic growth (Toussaint & Comanne, 1995). By the early 1980s according to Kashambuzi (2012a), many African and other developing countries had accumulated huge debts beyond their economic capacity. Private lenders withdrew their support and demanded repayment of loans. As a consequence, inflation and interest rates grew, making it even more difficult for countries to borrow from international lending agents or countries; and as a consequence the inability to offer social services to their populations.

## Imposition of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs)

The increased economic downfall compelled Third World countries to also, borrow from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to service their loans. The IMF and the World Bank provided assistance with conditions designed to address domestic economic imbalances (Kashambuzi, 2012a). The conditions that were designed and advocated for by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and other Western donors were the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) for all developing countries around the world, especially Sub Saharan Africa that would 'benefit' from the loans and grants. The SAPs required macroeconomic stabilization, privatization, and free market development (Heidhues & Obare 2011).

According to the World Bank (2006), the SAPs were implemented in over forty countries in Africa including Uganda for two decades (1980 to 2000). The conditions attached to the neoliberal economic reforms according to Brohman (1996) and Kashambuzi (2012a) included: (1) rolling back inefficient state from intervention in the economy; (2) elimination of state planning and introduction of self-regulating and market forces; (3) privatization, deregulation, liberalization of economies and devaluing the local currency; (4) implementation of fiscal austerity through retrenchment of public servants, reduction or elimination of subsidies, raising taxes and freezing wages and/or monetary policy by raising interest rates; (5) promotion and diversification of exports according to comparative advantage to earn foreign exchange and repay external debts; (6) promotion of labor flexibility to increase employment and productivity and freezing of trade unions; and (6) reliance on foreign economic experts to guide development and so as to ensure efficient program/project selection.

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Jauch (1999) highlights that due to SAPs most countries in Africa cut their budgets in education and health services, eliminated food subsidies, and abandoned the poor to unaffordable private service providers. The SAPs overall resulted in increased external debt burdens, wide income gaps, massive brain drain, higher capital flight, weakened balance of payments, deteriorating infrastructure, higher unemployment, poor agricultural productivity, and a rise in political and civil conflicts (Jauch, 1999).

## Effects of the SAPs in Uganda

Although NRM government formally dropped the SAPs neoliberal reforms in 2009, it has continued to implement some versions of the reforms. Kashambuzi (2012b) notes that a continued implementation of versions of the reforms partly explains why the majority of Ugandans are still trapped in poverty, unemployment, hunger, illiteracy and disease.

In Uganda the neoliberal reforms created more problems for ordinary Ugandans than solutions. Over 100 government agencies such as Coffee Marketing Board, Lint Marketing Board, Foods and Beverages that supported rural farmers to market their agricultural produce were phased out. Banks such as Uganda Commercial Bank and Uganda Cooperative Bank were sold to private entrepreneurs leaving ordinary Ugandans with limited access to low cost loans for their business. Uganda's state-subsidized transport network was also affected through the privatization of Uganda Railways, Uganda Transport Company, and People's Bus Company leaving ordinary Ugandans at the mercy of private entrepreneurs.

While the World Bank and IMF viewed the retrenchment of public servants and reducing the number in the military as great 'successes,' some studies (Hansen & Twaddle, 1989; Langseth & Mugaju, 1996; Zuckerman, 1989) note that the retrenched public servants became jobless, their families and dependents were affected. Most of the laid off public servants were no longer able to afford school fees for their children, as well as healthcare for their families. With no employment in the cities to support their lives, most public servants moved to their ancestral rural areas where many died poor.

Furthermore, the process of transferring the public enterprises to private entities left serious criticism. Motta and Moreira (2004), Parker and Kirkpatrick (2005) reveal that the privatization process was tainted with high levels of corruption, cronyism where most of the enterprises went to prominent politicians, their relatives or to those who pay bribes to the politicians in exchange of the enterprises at a pittance. In countries like Uganda and other African countries with weak governance systems, most of the bureaucrats and politicians suspected to have been involved in those scandals went unpunished (Tangri & Mwenda, 2001).

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Whereas the macro neoliberal reforms were touted as successes, they left Uganda in a worse economic situation. The reforms widened economic disparities in the country with politically connected individuals enriching themselves with privatized government enterprises leaving the majority of Ugandans especially in rural areas with limited access to social services such as healthcare and education; and poor markets for their farm produce. The liberalization reforms economically exposed Ugandans especially the rural poor to predatory economic entrepreneurs who became extremely wealthy through exploitation of the poor.

Due to increasing poverty over the years, the Uganda government has come up with several well intended economic development programs, which in the end benefitted corrupt government functionaries and their cronies. According to the Office of the Prime Minister (2017), Uganda's national development strategy has run programs such as the (1) Ten-Point Program, (2) Plan for Modernization of Agriculture, (3) Poverty Eradication Action Plan, (4) National Development Plan I, II, and the incoming (5) National Development Plan III (as part of the broader Vision 2040). Alongside these phased national development plans, Uganda has implemented other programs designed at the national and international levels to promote social economic and political

development. Some notable programs implemented in this period at the national level include; National Agriculture Advisory Services, *Entandikwa*, Prosperity for All, Youth Livelihood Fund, and Operation Wealth Creation. While these programs have been well intended, the programs have been riddled with massive corruption and their impact especially in rural areas has been minimal, leaving the rural poor trapped in an unending cycle of poverty.

## The Impact of Corruption on Uganda

Whereas one of the key promises of the current National Resistance Movement government of President Museveni who has been in power since 1986 was the promise to root out corruption from the public sector, several recent studies (Tangri & Mwenda, 2001; Amundsen, 2006; Burnett, 2013; Tangri & Mwenda, 2013) show limited progress in such effort. The Ugandan government itself acknowledges the existence of massive corruption in the public sector principally manifested through forms such as bribery, extortion, illegal use of public assets for private gain, over-invoicing and under-invoicing, payment of salaries to non-existent “ghost” workers, direct embezzlement of national funds (Republic of Uganda, 2003).

**Table 1**

*Uganda Corruption Perceptions Index*

Year	Global Rank	Score
2019	137	28
2018	149	26
2017	151	26
2016	151	25
2015	139	26
2014	142	26
2013	140	26
2012	130	29
2011	130	29
2010	134	-

*Note.* Rank is out of 198 countries. Source: Transparency International - "Uganda-Corruption Perception Index".

Massive corruption in the public service sector has been a big challenge in Uganda over the years, exacerbating an already difficult socio-economic situation especially for the rural poor. Transparency International through its *Corruption Perceptions Index* that ranks countries and territories on how corrupt their public sector is, has for years ranked Uganda among the most corrupt countries in the world as shown in Table 1.

Massive corruption in the public sector over the years has exacerbated socio-economic exclusion of many Ugandans. The social category that has borne the brunt of corruption has primarily been the urban and the rural poor who increasingly cannot afford, and access needed social services; or engage in socio-economic activities that can help them break out of the cycle of poverty. The United Nations Development Program (2019) identifies Uganda among the poorest countries in the world, ranking Uganda 159/189 on the *Human Development Index*.

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The map below of the Uganda National Household Survey (UNHS) that was conducted by the Uganda National Bureau of Statistics (2016/2017) illustrates the levels of poverty in each of Uganda's regions. This paper is specifically focused on the "Busoga" region of Uganda where I was born and raised.

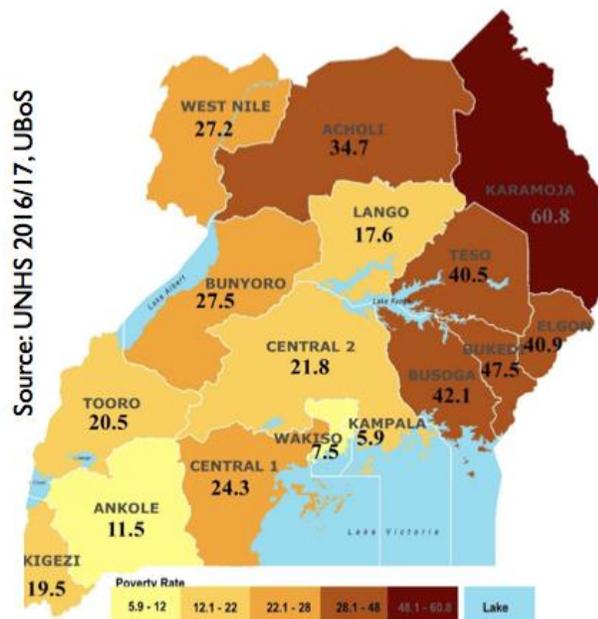


Figure 1. Source: Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBoS), 2016/17

Okidi and Mugambe (2002) observe that 96% of Uganda's poor live in rural areas. Luuka District is located in rural "Busoga" region making it a concentration of poverty due to the way government currently functions. A report by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2016/2017) highlights that Luuka is among the least economically developed districts of Uganda. Of the adults in Luuka only 7.3% have an "Ordinary Level" education (equivalent of Junior High); 67.4% of the people live in semi-permanent houses; and only 14.1% are within a 5km walking distance to the nearest public healthcare facility. The report further notes that only 3.7% of the population has access to clean, treated, piped water – which affects the hygiene, and the health of the population in Luuka District. A rural, poorly educated, predominantly subsistence farming community, with limited formal education and access to healthcare in Luuka, is the definition of a population trapped in a demeaning cycle of poverty. It is this disturbing poverty perpetuated by predatory macro neoliberal

economic models and massive corruption, that sparked our reflection on possible local self-help interventions.

## Socio-Economic Marginalization and Faith-Driven Interventions

I am an ordained and practicing Roman Catholic priest who grew up in poverty in the “Busoga” region of Uganda. I know how poverty demeans people and takes away their God-given dignity. The poverty experienced in Uganda can be explained as a result of hollow economic models, policies, and programs that do not prioritize the poor; and economic exploitation of the vulnerable by a few entrusted with public power. The Bible (English Standard Version, 2016 used) condemns man-made poverty caused through greedy exploitation and impoverishment of others, and the nature of God presented as a hater of exploitation, a lover of Justice, and liberator of the oppressed (Elliot, 1992).

### The Bible and Social Justice

In the book of Deuteronomy 16:20 God says “Justice, and only justice you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the Lord your God is giving you”; and in Exodus 20:15 God directly commands the Israelites “You shall not steal.” Further in Exodus 22: 21-25 God warns people against oppressing the foreigner, and taking advantage of the widow and the fatherless. In the Bible God is in defense and protection of the poor and vulnerable.

Several prophets the Bible also echo the message of justice for all in society. Through the prophet Jeremiah for instance, God implores His people to “Learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (1:17). Jesus too in the Bible is presented as one who came to fight for the liberty and empowerment of those who have been exploited and oppressed (Luke 4:18); while James 5:1-6 warns in graphic imagery those who exploit others out of greedy, as people who have “fattened” themselves for the “day of slaughter.” The Biblical teachings on social justice are summarized in the words of the prophets Micah and Amos summarize well the Biblical teachings about social justice. Micah says “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love tenderly, and to walk humbly with your God” (6:8) ; and the prophet Amos says, “Let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24).

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### Catholic Social Teaching and Social Justice

Over the years a socially focused teaching within the Catholic Church known as Catholic Social Teaching has developed. Different Popes and the Second Vatican Council produced documents such as *Rerum Novarum* (Leo XIII, 1891), *Quadragesimo Anno* (Pius XI, 1931), *Mater et Magistra* (John XXIII, 1961), *Pacem in Terris* (John XXIII, 1963), *Populorum Progressio* (Paul VI, 1967),

*Octagesima Adveniens* (Paul VI, 1971), *Laborem Exercens* (John Paul II, 1981), *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* (John Paul II, 1987), *Dignitatis Humane* (Second Vatican Council, 1965); that have been foundational in Catholic Social Teaching (CST). The themes addressed by CST include the life and the dignity of all people, the call to family, community and participation of in life of all; the rights and responsibilities of all persons; the option for the poor and the vulnerable; the dignity of work and rights of workers; human solidarity; and the care for the environment.

## Liberation Theology and the Interrogation of Rural Marginalization

Catholic Social Teaching laid ground for the birth of a socially conscious theology within the Catholic Church especially in Latin America. “Liberation Theology” as it came to be known, brought together Christian theology and socio-economic analyses. The guiding impulse of Liberation theology was how Christians could respond to existing oppression especially socio-economic marginalization. Liberation Theology proposed addressing the root cause of all poverty, which was the sin of greed. Sin was formulated in social terms and not merely in attributed to the “Satan” or individual personal acts. Liberation Theology established a relationship between Christian Theology and activism in the areas of economic justice, poverty, and human rights.

One of the earliest thinkers of Liberation Theology, Gutierrez (1974) proposed a methodological approach that would start from the “bottom-up” instead of a “top-down” as had traditionally been especially in the Catholic Church. Gutierrez and others such as Leonardo Boff, Juan Luis Segundo, Helder Camara, and Jon Sobrino argued for a theologizing that took the perspective of the poor and the oppressed. They argued for a “preferential option for the poor” a concept that was coined by the Jesuit priest Pedro Arrupe (Arrupe, 1968). Gutierrez (1974) particularly illustrated the concept by arguing that God throughout scripture had a particular preference for those who are “marginalized, “unimportant”, “needy”, “despised”, and the “defenseless.” Gutierrez in clarifying the terminology “preferential option” stressed that “Preference implies the universality of God’s love, which excludes no one. It is only within the framework of this universality that we can understand the preference, that is, ‘what comes first’ (Gutierrez,1991, p.112). Gutierrez (1990) argued that doctrine or “orthodoxy” needed to be in a circular, symbiotic relationship with practice, creating an “orthopraxis.”

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As earlier mentioned, I am a Catholic priest who belongs to the religious order parts of whose constitutions strongly emphasize a concern for social justice and a “preferential option for the poor” (Congregation of Holy Cross, 1986, 2:1-14).

The Bible, Catholic Social Teaching, Liberation Theology, and the Constitutions of the Congregation of Holy Cross offered me tools with which to question the poverty I grew up in, and the marginalization I continued seeing in my rural home area. Paulo Freire as demonstrated in the next section, provided a pedagogical process for interrogating socio-economic marginalization in the community and processes on how to respond to the social realities as a community.

## FREIRE'S ADULT EDUCATION PEDAGOGUE AND INFLUENCE ON ATANANSI CBO

Whereas Brazilian educator Paulo Freire is sometimes framed merely as a humanist, it is evident that he valued and respected the Christian world view as evidenced by his five years of work with the *Christian Democratic Agrarian Reform Movement* in Chile; and his work with the *World Council of Churches* (Freire, 1970a; Pace, 1997). Freire can be framed as a Christian Socialist who was influenced by, and also contributed to the winds of Liberation Theology that blew in Latin America during his time. He employed metaphors drawn from Christianity such as the need for liberators to undergo “radical conversion” in their worldview, and cultivate “devotion” to the cause. The “bottom-up” approach of Liberation Theology that centers the poor and the marginalized and decenters the elites, is very much a part of Freire’s thinking and

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approach. Through the process of “conscientization,” he argued that peasants could be awakened to realize how poverty can be, and has been manufactured, and the agency or power, marginalized groups have

to cause social change. Freire’s thinking is rooted in a Christian respect of the dignity of the human person and concern for the poor and marginalized groups.

As one whose family has lived and continues living in the Luuka area, I have experienced poverty in my life, and I have struggled with poverty around me. As a Catholic priest out of Christian charity for many years I gave out financial handouts to a lot of poor people in the area, but I noticed little social impact. It is when I explored other approaches to the challenges in the community that we noticed some change. I now consider myself a community organizer, a facilitator, or animator for social change.

Freire (1970a) considers “conscientization” as the process of facilitating marginalized peoples cultivate a critical awareness of the negative social reality they live in, and the power they possess to cause social transformation. To Freire (1970a) every epoch “is characterized by a complex of ideas, concepts, hopes, doubts, values and challenges in dialectical interaction with their opposites striving towards their fulfillment” (p.73) which the facilitator and the community need to dialogue about and create “generative themes” of the epoch. Through regular visits and conversations over the years with different categories of people such as the elders (men), women, and youth in the villages in Luuka District of Uganda, one of the themes that emerged was the theme of economic poverty. The country’s operative economic models have largely benefitted individuals within government, or those close to government. A huge segment of Ugandans especially in rural areas such as Luuka are wallowing in extreme economic poverty.

Freire (1970b) argues that for the process of critical consciousness to be kicked into motion, learners need to “gain a distance from” their everyday lives so that they can look at local experiences with new eyes. The means of facilitating the marginalized to step away and look at their social realities differently is what Freire called “codification” (Freire, 1970b). Codification is done through researching challenges within the local community, and creating relatable scenarios drawn from the community. With my longtime experience in the community, research ability, and

listening to stories from the people in the village, we created several local narrative scenarios, that formed our initial oral discussions. The scenarios ranged from locals who abuse their wives, married teenagers who died during childbirth, children who have died of malaria, youth who were academically gifted but didn't continue on with formal education; to local farmers who couldn't find a market for their produce and farmers who have sold their land to move to urban centers.

Freire calls the community dialogues about the created local scenarios a process of “decodification.” The initial dialogues in Luuka were held at the local Catholic village chapel. This approach is no different from what Latin American Liberation Theologians did in organizing peasants in “base Christian communities” to reflect on social challenges in the light of the gospels. Through my facilitation, local perspectives over the created oral narrative scenarios from the village respectfully dialogued with the ideas from my years of formal education, leading our community to “problematize” our local socio-economic challenges. The respectful encounter of ideas or perspectives Freire (1970b) argues, is directed at bringing about “a synthesis between the educator’s maximally systematized knowing and the learner’s minimally systematized knowing—a synthesis achieved in dialogue” (p. 217).

Freire abhors models of education that are top-down in dealing with local needs. He specifically argues against the “banking” model of education where “knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (Freire, 1970a, p.58). Such an education for instance where outside teachers or international development agencies come with prepackaged answers to local problems, is oppressive and disrespectful. He argues for dialogue and mutual respect

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between teachers and learners in the process of creating knowledge. It is through the dialogues that the perceived local issues can be problematized, and then be framed within the larger, systemic issues similar to the ones highlighted within Uganda at the opening of this study.

The dialogues heightened the villagers’ awareness of the complex systems behind the local social challenges such as the lack of markets for their farm produce, the poor roads in the community that made it difficult to transport farm produce to markets, the absence of speak able healthcare in the community, the absence of a strong education for their children in the community, the increasing food insecurity due to the government promoted growing of sugar cane; and the massive cutting down of trees for sugar cane growing that was creating an environmental disaster. While the local politicians appeared in communities around election time to give out hand-outs such as hoes, dresses for women, and small amounts of money to individuals; it was all seasonal, and politicians didn’t address the larger social problems within the communities. What started out from the local Catholic village chapel, grew to include everyone, of every faith, and of every gender within the community.

Continuous dialogue over a long period of time led the community to understand how some local challenges are caused by larger, structural challenges related to national politics; while other local problems were related to local culture and beliefs. For instance, the strong belief in ‘evil spirits’

("emizimu emibi"), 'generational curses' ("okulaama"), and 'evil spells' ("eirogo") makes some people in the community believe the cycle of poverty in which they live is a generational curse or spell that has been passed on from their great, great, grandparents to which they have no power over. Interrogating such beliefs or myths was important in changing the views about the socio-economic challenges within the community.

Freire theorized that learning and social change happens through a continuous dialectical process of dialogue and action. He noted: "The act of knowing involves a dialectical movement that goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action" (Freire, 1970a, p.). Scholars inspired by Freire's emancipatory pedagogy have illustrated the dialectical process in forms similar to the illustration below:

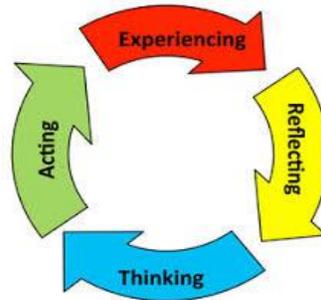


Figure 2. Source: Kolb & Kolb, 2018

Dialogue and reflection on the socio-economic challenges within the community is what inspired the founding of Atanansi Community Based Organization (CBO), that is registered with Luuka District and the Uganda government as a community-run, self-help organization. Registration with government was strategic in the sense of providing legal cover, and staving off sabotage by government and politicians to the local efforts. The primary goal of Atanansi CBO is to address socio-economic marginalization under three interconnected projects that address the areas of 1) Holistic education for children within the community, 2) Livelihoods development for Women within the community, and 3) Youth Entrepreneurial skills development. The three programs intentionally prioritize children, women, and the youth since they tend to suffer most in a patriarchal, rural Ugandan settings. Given the limited financial resources within the community, a phased development approach was adopted for implementation by the community. The three core areas of Atanansi CBO are shown in the illustration below:

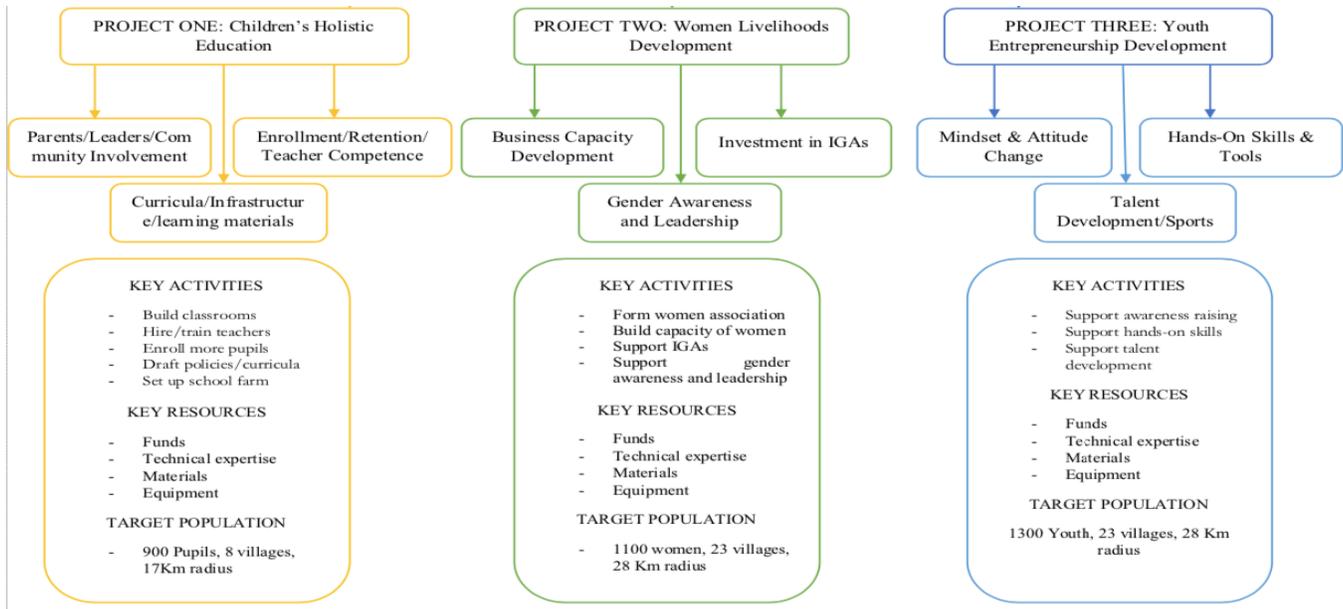


Figure 3. Core Development Areas of Atanansi CBO

Under the project of Holistic Education, the goal was to provide a strong grade school education where the children could come with the capacity to read well, write well, express themselves well; with strong numeracy, and social skills. To achieve this, we needed good teachers facilitated with the resources they need to function; and also, the intentional development of extra-curricular activities such as music, dance, drama, games and sports. While in principle the government provides free primary education for all children via the Universal Primary Education (UPE), the UPE program is riddled with challenges such as underfunding, teacher absenteeism, poor supervision, and overcrowding in classrooms. Children barely learn much, and finish primary education with low literacy levels, and low skills that can hardly enable them to excel at other levels of education. Few government officials and politicians take their children to UPE schools in preference for private schools that are better run, better supervised, and better resourced.

To achieve a Holistic education, Atanansi CBO founded a community grade school which came to be named Atanansi Primary school. The school was located at the local Catholic village chapel named after St Athanasius the very name of the villager "Atanansi" who donated the land many years ago on which both the chapel and the school sit. The members of Atanansi CBO donated construction poles, used iron sheets, labor, and other construction materials to help build the school. The mode of running the school that was agreed on by the parents, the teachers, and administrators was to build strong linkages between the "school-community-home/household" as levels in the education of the children. No children are sent away because of lack of tuition fees because parents have the option of paying in kind for the running of the school in items such as agricultural harvests. A six-year development plan in running the school was designed, accepted, and is being implemented in three phases. The illustration below shows the development plan which is currently in its second phase:

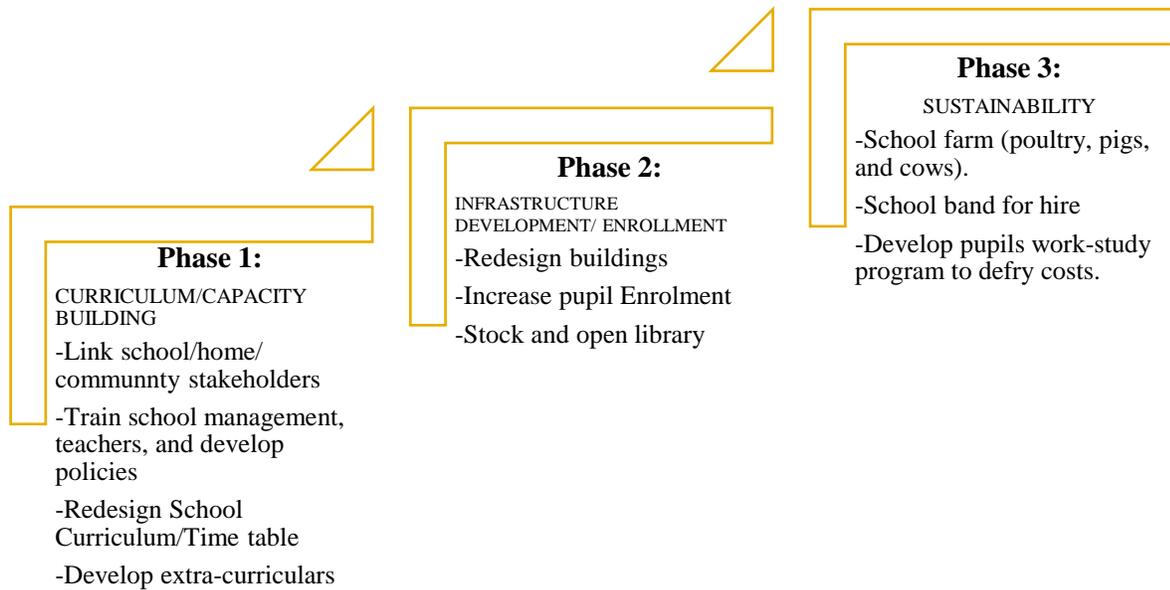


Figure 4. Development Phases of Atanansi School

After several trainings of teachers, administrators, and the school management committee about the school's philosophy, the needs it answers and the nature of education being sought, the school opened in its first year with 89 grade school students. The enrollment has grown over the years and was at 250 before the outbreak of Covid19. Two sets of students from Atanansi have sat the national managed Primary Leaving Exams (PLE) at Atanansi since its inception, and they have gone on to do well in high schools in other parts of the country. There are remedial classes for struggling students, and the development of extra-curricular activities such as music, dance, and games and sports has built the children's confidence, social skills, and levels of articlacy. Atanansi school has an active Parents Teachers Association (PTA), and the parents have so far baked 100,000 bricks to build better classrooms for their children. Good partnerships are also being cultivated with individuals and organizations interested in education in rural Uganda. But even when such partnerships have born financial support that has helped with buying teachers textbooks, children's reading books, and hygiene products for girls; at its core Atanansi Primary school is a community initiated, owned, and directed effort.

The Women's livelihoods program was and continues to be focused at improving the economic livelihoods of the women who in many cases are socio-economically marginalized due to their gender in the predominantly patriarchal and rural Uganda. To promote the Livelihoods development a community women's group was started that came to be known as Atanansi Women Association (AWA).

The development of the women's group included the registration of women in the community, establishment of a leadership structure with specific responsibilities, the identification of possible Income Generating Activities (IGAs), the training of women in how to run the identified IGAs, and mobilization of financial resources for the IGAs. The goal of the IGAs was/is to empower women economically. Atanansi CBO relies for training on the expertise of trainers from local organization that share experiences similar to Atanansi CBO. Testimonial teaching or training

where trainers from elsewhere share their experiences has been powerful in our rural village setting. The activities of AWA include training in better agricultural methods such as the growing of vegetables for both home consumption and the market. There has been skills development such as the making of liquid soap, wax candles, art and crafts, charcoal briquettes from agricultural waste; and just before the outbreak of Covid19 a partner donated ten sewing machines to train the AWA women in how to sew school uniforms and make reusable menstrual pads. Other activities the women are engaged include training in gender equality awareness, basic healthcare, a set of tents and chairs for hire, cooking pots and plates for hire, and the operation of a popular financial savings and credit program. The financial profits are shared quarterly among the members. AWA's development currently operating in its second and third phases is as illustrated below:

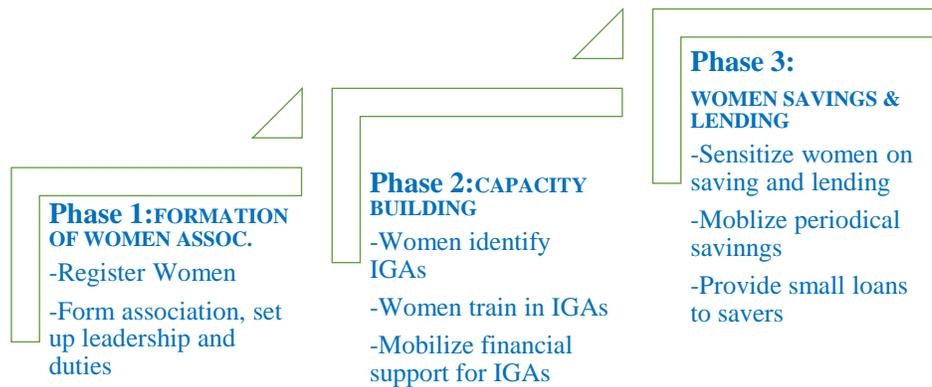


Figure 5. Development Phases of Atanansi Women Association

There are currently 87 active members in AWA drawn from the nearby villages, but the plan is to expand the program to other villages when the current core operating programs are stronger. A total of 1,100 women from 23 villages in the larger Luuka District is targeted in long term.

The Youth Entrepreneurial program is currently still in its infancy. There are 68 youth in the group, and the youth program is intended to provide the youth with hands-on practical skills, develop their talents, and improve their income. The mobilization of the youth is currently through sports especially football or soccer, and netball. Training in agri-business, and the mass production of bricks are the immediate programs that have been repeatedly discussed by the youth as Atanansi CBO explores other skills such as welding and carpentry skills. Just the Women's programs, a total of 1,100 youth in 23 villages in Luuka are targeted when the core operating program have been tested, monitored, and evaluated.

## FINAL DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

**P**overty can be caused by natural challenges, but it can also be caused by deliberate exploitation of sections of society. Rural Ugandans in the Luuka district have experienced socio-economic exclusion primarily brought on poor government economic programs, and massive corruption. A heightened conscientization within the community of the complex ways in which socio-economic exclusion is created and functions is a powerful pathway to addressing

marginalization of any form. Paulo Freire provides needed useful tools to conscientize the marginalized about the complex systems of negative social realities and the possible approaches to finding local solutions. Guided by a Christian world view, Atanansi CBO has employed some of Freire's ideas to move the marginalized toward creating local interventions.

Through respectful local dialogue, reflection, and the building of consensus on local action, the marginalized in Luuka have been able to understand their social realities, design feasible local interventions, and take action. The local approaches built on Freire's thinking have come with several advantages in social transformation. For instance, there has been disruption of a resigned, fatalist mindset rooted in traditional culture and a manipulative, exploitative political culture. There is a noticeable positive change of attitude and mindset in the villages. Locals are rediscovering their voice and agency to change their socio-economic realities. The local community no longer waits for politicians, the central government, or international development agencies to intervene in their social situations.

Other effects include the development of social capital, a heightened awareness of gender and public health issues, access to a strong grade school education for children in the community, greater participation of parents and the community in the education of their children, and improving household incomes, and social skills development through sports. Local capacity has also been built in the areas of improved farming practices, leadership, financial literacy, and business management, and social skills development through sports. Conscientization built on respectful dialogue and questioning Freire rightly observes, can emancipate the oppressed to rediscover their power and humanity.

*...the marginalized in Luuka have been able to understand their social realities, design feasible local interventions, and take action.*

While I am a born of the local community and have actively participated in the emancipatory education initiatives taking place, the privileged status I currently enjoy as a Catholic priest, highly traveled, and highly educated facilitator is not lost onto me. Freire argues that those who commit themselves to an emancipatory education need to undergo an "Easter experience" or a "conversion experience." Freire (1970a) notes,

Those who authentically commit themselves to the people must re-examine themselves constantly. This conversion is so radical as not to allow for ambivalent behavior... Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth. Those who undergo it must take on a new form of existence; they can no longer remain as they were (p.43).

My privileged class status in Freire's view has in some ways colored some of my perception of the social reality, and affected my perception of the marginalized. However well-intentioned I may be in the work of liberation, like other class privileged social change agents, I carry the marks of "deformations, which include the lack of confidence in the ability of the people's ability to think, to want and to know" (Freire, 1970a, p.60). To Freire (1970a), I need to undergo a "conversion to the people" (p.61) so as to be enabled to "live in communion with them" where I can consequently work *with* them instead of *for* them; or *on* them as the oppressors do.

Learning to respect and value the judgment of the predominantly illiterate local people has been one of the biggest challenges. But I have made great progress. Many “top-down” ideas from me in the Atanansi CBO initiatives have always failed miserably. I have learnt through experience humility; and I have learnt through experience the power of powerless, and the power of acting in “communion” or “comradeship.”

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