

Sweating to Help Themselves: Self-Help and the Contradictions of Citizenship and Development in Decolonizing Kenya*

By Kara Moskowitz

University of Missouri—St. Louis (moskowitzk@umsl.edu)

A few years into independence, the landscape throughout much of Kenya transformed as locally initiated schools and hospitals suddenly dotted the countryside. State actors had encouraged citizens to take on the responsibilities of development through *harambee*, or self-help. Communities keenly took up the charge, but their projects rarely aligned with the national development plan. When they undertook self-help projects, local groups put forth alternative visions of Kenya's development path. In response, the state withheld funding for recurrent expenditures. Though communities built schools and hospitals at a frenetic pace, these buildings often sat silent and empty for years on end, without teachers or nurses, desks or medications—expenses that fell to the central government.

The empty schools and hospitals revealed disputes between local groups and the state. *Harambee* engendered contestation, partly, because it occupied an ambiguous arena—often government orchestrated, but just as often, absent of government intervention and dependent on citizens' initiative, capital, and labor. The inconsistent participation of state actors generated deliberations about the meaning and form of development, about government responsibilities, and about the rights and duties of citizens. Communities debated these questions with state officials and, over time, Kenyans formed more concrete views on these issues. Opinions varied among Kenyans with uneven access to the state and uneven local resources to draw on. Even so, archival and oral evidence suggests that, while many communities eagerly took on the initial obligations of local development, as the outcomes of their early experimentations with self-help unfolded, they increasingly came to expect assistance.

Actors from competing arms of the state often disagreed about development models and methods. With self-help, however, a broad bureaucratic consensus formed. Officials agreed on *harambee's* utility in providing inexpensive, local development widely across Kenya. This local development could not come cheaply, though, if the government was forced to hire a slew of nurses and teachers every time a community built a school or health center. Over time, technocrats attempted to monitor self-help programs more closely, and state officials began refusing to fund some of these programs.

*The CLIR-Mellon Dissertation Fellowship, Emory University's Laney Graduate School, the National History Center's Seminar on Decolonization, and the University of Missouri-St. Louis's International Studies program supported research for this article. Richard Kemboi and Oliver Kamave provided research assistance in Kenya. Thanks to Clifton Crais, Kristin Phillips, Julia Bailey, Kristin Mann, Peter Little, and the reviewers of this journal for their comments and suggestions.

Consequently, just a few years after independence, a marked shift occurred in the exercise of *harambee*. As the government proved itself unreliable, Kenyans turned to patrons, particularly politicians—who individually supported local programs, eschewed national development plans, circumvented bureaucrats, and subverted state hegemony. Self-help transformed from a program emphasizing self-reliance to one where Kenyans created and enacted a clientelistic political culture, contributing to an increasingly transactional postcolonial milieu. Simultaneously, self-help carved out the lineaments of unequal citizenships, as access to elites determined access to state resources, excluding the already marginalized while expanding their responsibilities in local development. In this way, *harambee* compounded existing regional, gender, and class inequities.

This article engages with historiographies on development, the state, and citizenship in decolonizing Africa.¹ The literature on international development has emphasized the invention of development and the “Third World.”² While these works have revealed the politics of development “expertise,” the discursive focus has provided little insight into the texture of development practices on the ground, or how development shaped the material well being of the poor.³ An examination of self-help illustrates how a diverse set of actors came together in rural spaces and negotiated who decided the development priorities of the new nation, how Kenyans accessed resources, and what constituted the obligations of the state and the rights of citizens.

Despite the range of actors involved in development, historians have largely accepted the axiom that, in the 1960s, “the agent of development was the state,” and consequently, that developmentalist regimes expanded and entrenched bureaucratic power.⁴ Recent work has raised questions about the statist model and periodization. Gregory Mann argues that the “prehistory of neoliberalism” began in the early postcolonial era, when nongovernmental organizations began shouldering functions of state sovereignty.⁵ *Harambee* programs in early postcolonial Kenya reveal similar patterns,

¹ For historians, Frederick Cooper’s emphasis on the concurrent emergence of international development and independent African states has been enormously influential. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

² James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: ‘Development,’ Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Leander Schneider, *Government of Development: Peasants and Politicians in Postcolonial Tanzania* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014).

³ For exceptions, see Monica Van Beusekom, *Negotiating Development: African Farmers and Colonial Experts at the Office du Niger, 1920–1960* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001); Priya Lal, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

⁴ Colin Leys, *The Rise and Fall of Development Theory* (London: James Currey, 1996), vi, 7; Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, xiv. For a critique of this scholarship, see Tania Murray Li, “Beyond ‘the State’ and Failed Schemes,” *American Anthropologist* 107, 3 (2005), 383–94.

⁵ Gregory Mann, *From Empires to NGOs in the West African Sahel: The Road to Nongovernmentality* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 5. Similarly, Jean and John Comaroff have used case studies

though they also reveal the multiplicity of development practitioners beyond state and NGO actors. Jomo Kenyatta's governmentality was marked by its lack of institutional heft. Fiscal constraints combined with ongoing efforts to centralize power meant that physically present local governments were intentionally defunded, and the overextended central state entered into rural lives episodically. In response, Nairobi officials empowered community groups to implement certain development programs, such as self-help projects.

Kenyans then used these experiences to make sense of decolonization. As in other African postcolonial settings, multivalent notions of citizenship emerged from negotiations not about citizenship itself, but about development.⁶ In working out how development would be distributed, diverse actors ultimately defined Kenyan citizenship. The transactional nature of citizenship also drove the creation of new inequality in early postcolonial Kenya. Though citizenship in decolonizing Kenya was built through the promise of state resources and development, these promises were not delivered universally or equitably. As inequalities were (re)mapped onto gender, class, and ethnicity, Kenyans began expressing disparate ideas about citizenship, belonging, and rights.

This article argues that self-help project sites became contested spaces where different actors put forth ideas about development and citizenship in the new nation. The article focuses especially on the decade after independence, when self-help practice shifted dramatically and when Kenyan citizens actively negotiated their relationships with the new state. It begins with a short historical background, while the second section explores how Jomo Kenyatta built on colonial community development models, but reframed self-help to emphasize the duties of citizens in nation building. The article then turns to conflict between rural Kenyans and state officials over self-help. The fourth part shows how political elites increasingly donated money to self-help projects, remaking patrimonialism. The final section examines how reliance on self-help and individual patronage—rather than on a centralized, redistributive system—intensified existing forms of regional and gendered inequalities, though it also illustrates how some Kenyans responded to marginalization by forming their own mechanisms of support.

The article relies on archival and oral sources. Written sources on social services, local government, and community development were drawn primarily from the Kenya National Archives, but also from the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. These records showcase the range of actors involved in self-help, and simultaneously, reveal national-local tensions. The consulted records thus pertain to spaces extending from the local to the global. The locally oriented written records primarily concerned areas

from Africa to reveal neoliberal antecedents. Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving toward Africa* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2012).

⁶ The connection between subaltern ideas of citizenship and the politics of decolonization and development remains largely unexplored, though this has recently begun to change. See Lahra Smith, *Making Citizens in Africa: Ethnicity, Gender, and National Identity in Ethiopia* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945–1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

where the author collected oral histories—Kenya’s western highlands, on the border of Rift Valley and Western provinces.⁷

This rural, multi-ethnic region has long occupied a paradoxical space in Kenya’s political economy—part of the fertile highlands, but peripheral compared to “the capitalist-core” nearer to Nairobi.⁸ All the people I spoke with were farmers, more than half were women, a few were former agricultural officials, some were squatters, some landowners, some were relatively wealthy, but the majority lived modest lives. They were Kalenjin (Nandi), Luyia (mostly, Maragoli), and Kikuyu, and they ranged in age from about 60 to 100 years old.⁹ When I collected oral histories, I sought to have those I spoke with guide our discussions, though I was particularly interested in local implementation of self-help and rural political imaginaries. At times, Kenyans narrated oral histories that contradicted one another, or contradicted archival evidence. These were moments of critical importance because they revealed the contours of postcolonial debates, sometimes about national politics or development policy, but also about more parochial disagreements over class, gender, labor, and community belonging. While the sources as a whole provide evidence on self-help in specific locations, these projects were part of national and transnational programming, and this article contends that such local accounts also tell us a great deal about histories at a much broader scale.

A Labor of Love? Colonialism and the Rise of Self-Help

Development was always central to colonialism’s counterpart, Christian evangelism. Missions put forth ideas of advancement that promised deliverance, but also provided paths to upward mobility.¹⁰ Though Kenyans “recomposed” these interventions, encounters with missionaries often first spawned African desires for social programs, especially Western education and healthcare.¹¹ In the 1930s and 1940s, the British colonial government also began focusing on African welfare, a shift born in part from the launch of

⁷ The author spoke with 111 rural Kenyans at eight rural sites, and completed, in total, two years of archival and oral research. Those interviewed on the Rift Valley side of the border live in what is now Uasin Gishu County, and primarily identify as Nandi. Those interviewed on the Western side of the border live in what is now Kakamega County, and are primarily Luyia (mostly, Maragoli). A small number on both sides of the border were Kikuyu.

⁸ Christopher Youe, “Settler Capital and the Assault on the Squatter Peasantry in Kenya’s Uasin Gishu District, 1942–63,” *African Affairs* 87, 348 (1988), 393.

⁹ Both the Kalenjin and Luyia are corporate ethnic identifiers. The Nandi and Maragoli are one of a number of respective subgroups of each.

¹⁰ John Comaroff and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), xiii.

¹¹ Derek Peterson, *Creative Writing: Translation, Bookkeeping, and the Work of Imagination in Colonial Kenya* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004); Michael Jennings, “‘A Very Real War’: Popular Participation in Development in Tanzania during the 1950s & 1960s,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 40, 1 (2007), 76.

the British welfare state.¹² Metropolitan actors extended ideas of voluntarism and community development through self-help to colonial spaces.¹³ By the mid-twentieth century, policymakers increasingly embraced self-help, since it could provide services that states with inadequate tax revenues could not.

Though self-help promised to deliver social services on the cheap, in Kenya, it quickly proved inadequate. As local development projects swelled, local government spending grew exponentially, vastly outpacing tax returns.¹⁴ G.M. Bebb, the district commissioner of Tambach, described the general situation in the mid-1950s, “To sum it up the cry is improved services all round but of increased revenue to meet the cost, I see little sign.”¹⁵ Exacerbating the problem, in 1955, the colonial state forced some African District Councils (ADCs) to implement the Swynnerton Plan—a massive program to privatize land ownership for African smallholders.¹⁶ Development costs rose sharply, further exceeding local revenue, and ADCs took out large loans. Samburu District, for example, spent just £4,500 in 1951, but by 1955, the district spent £73,000 annually. The district’s expenditures had grown by sixteen times in a matter of four years.¹⁷

Kenyan yearnings for development resonated little with enforced land registration and titling. British administrators imposed these measures in response to Mau Mau, a particularly decisive moment for Kenyan community development. The Emergency provided openings for a policy overhaul, and colonial architects coupled agricultural reforms with social ones. Colonialists used the Emergency to justify restructuring rural landholding and “reforming” Mau Mau detainees, aiming to rehabilitate economic and social pathologies simultaneously. Detainee rehabilitation accelerated community development outside the camps, which focused on delinquents and the destitute.¹⁸

Clearly, the state envisioned an expansive form of community development not intended to empower Africans, but to remedy the moral ills of the colony through mandatory African participation. Both social and agricultural reforms were the coercive brainchild of colonial administrators rather than the initiatives of African communities. Land reform programs required African District Councils to take on loans and residents to

¹² Joanna Lewis, *Empire State-Building: War and Welfare in Kenya, 1925–52* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 1.

¹³ Emma Hunter, “Voluntarism, Virtuous Citizenship, and Nation-Building in Late Colonial and Early Postcolonial Tanzania,” *African Studies Review* 58, 2 (2015), 47.

¹⁴ For similar findings in Tanzania, see Michael Jennings, *Surrogates of the State: NGOs, Development, and Ujamaa in Tanzania* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2008).

¹⁵ G.M. Bebb, DC Tambach, 7 September 1957, JA/12/225, KNA.

¹⁶ MPK Sorrenson, *Land Reform in Kikuyu Country: A Study in Government Policy* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1967); Angelique Haugerud, “Land Tenure and Agrarian Change in Kenya,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 59, 1 (1989), 61–90.

¹⁷ Rift Valley Annual Report, 1955, KNA.

¹⁸ Luise White, “Separating the Men from the Boys: Constructions of Gender, Sexuality, and Terrorism in Central Kenya, 1939–1959,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 23, 1 (1990), 24.

pay taxes to programs they did not want. Rehabilitation forced detainees, delinquents, and the destitute to reform in order to rejoin society.

Colonial community development not only involved coercion and a greater tax burden, but it also demanded Kenyans take on greater labor obligations. “Self-help” became a euphemistic way of repurposing longstanding colonial labor practices. The state forced Kenyans to labor on colonial development programs, such as irrigation and soil erosion schemes.¹⁹ African District Councils also regularly depended on compulsory labor. A 1962 memo noted that ADCs could continue to rely on “minor communal services” for maintenance work and the construction of buildings.²⁰ The imposition of these programs even as Kenyans demanded different types of development foreshadowed future contention over the form, function, and financing of community development.

Not all colonial development entailed government coercion and forced labor. Some programs depended on voluntary local labor and investment. A 1953/54 colonial report on education contrasted ADC practices of levying taxes on residents for school building with emerging practices in which “very often, labor and materials [are] supplied by the local community.”²¹ Unlike government dictated programs, many Kenyans wanted to improve access to education in their communities and willingly contributed to self-help schools. These programs established a precedent for communities to take on school construction. They shaped expectations about the labor and financial responsibilities of local communities for their own development during decolonization.

Notions of self-help were not only transferred from metropole to colony, but in the late 1950s and early 1960s, international donors of various ideological persuasions increasingly championed self-help. China’s 1958–1960 Great Leap Forward campaign—though of much greater inspiration to Kenya’s southern neighbor, Tanganyika—emphasized rural collectivization and self-reliance.²² In general, bilateral donors and transnational institutions placed increasing weight on the mobilization of self-help as a prerequisite for grants and loans. In March 1963, President Kennedy’s Clay Committee published its report, proposing that “self-help should be demanded of the recipients” of American aid.²³ American policy proved particularly influential for Kenya. “This is Community Development in Kenya”—a government pamphlet published in 1964—was

¹⁹ Opolot Okia tracks how the Kenyan colonial state continued to rely, legally, on compulsory labor, because the ILO definition “excluded many coercive labor practices, including communal labor.” Opolot Okia, *Communal Labor in Colonial Kenya: The Legitimization of Coercion, 1912–30* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 4–5.

²⁰ See Commissioner for Local Government to all PCs, 29 October 1956, DC/UG/2/3/50, KNA.

²¹ “Report of the 1953/54 Committee on Financial Relations Between the Kenya Government and African District Councils,” JA/12/224, KNA.

²² Lal, *African Socialism in Postcolonial Tanzania*, 53, 59.

²³ Usha Mahajani, “Kennedy and the Strategy of Aid: The Clay Report and After,” *Political Research Quarterly* 18, 3 (1965), 657, 659. See also USAID Mission to Kenya Program Division, P 573 Subject Files: 1961–1980, Box 2, PRM 4 Program Evaluation FY 63, Department of State, Record Group 286; March 20, 1962; National Archives at College Park, MD (NACP).

based on a booklet first published by the United States Agency for International Development.²⁴

As independence approached, rural Kenyans had long mobilized to provide new services in the absence of state assistance. They had also frequently been compelled to labor for, or pay taxes to, the state in the name of community development. The decolonizing state increasingly depended on, encouraged, and coerced self-help development as a way of garnering aid and recusing the government from providing assistance. While Kenyans desired some of the services borne of these programs, they also sought greater local control over the course of their own development. Divergent ideas on self-help and development, and consequently on state obligation and citizens' rights and duties, made future conflict over these issues ineluctable.

From Self-Help to Harambee

When Kenyans celebrated independence in 1963, they did so in a setting of political and economic possibility, but also of paucity. While the fertile land in the Rift Valley highlands provided potential for a more prosperous future, the schools, hospitals, and roads in the area were inadequate. The independent government was fiscally limited, and—like other African governments—drew inspiration from colonial policy, continuing with the approach of community development through self-help.²⁵

President Jomo Kenyatta adopted *harambee*—“pull together” in Swahili—as the maxim of his administration. He used this maxim initially to move the country away from the political animosities that developed during independence negotiations and towards the task of nation building. Nation building, he argued, would not fall solely to new state leaders, but to new citizens as well, largely through their self-help efforts. Given the connections, *harambee* became synonymous with self-help.

According to an official pamphlet on community development, Kenyatta said, “[T]he actual business of Community Development is the concern of every Government Department, every voluntary organization, and in fact every citizen of Kenya. Community Development in Kenya means the democratic process of including people, as well as Government, in planning and working for the type of society we wish for ourselves.”²⁶ In articulating the importance of all Kenyans to these processes, Kenyatta advanced an idea of postcolonial citizenship that stressed duties over rights.

Kenyatta's self-help included a new imaginative element, a further responsibility for citizens. Kenyans were not only to labor physically to develop themselves, but also mentally. The independent plan for self-help emphasized local control. Unlike colonial self-help, postcolonial self-help was to be “conceived and executed by the people.”²⁷

²⁴ Pamphlet published by the East African Literature Bureau, 1964, JA/31/19, KNA.

²⁵ John H. Hamer, “Preconditions and Limits in the Formation of Associations: The Self-Help and Cooperative Movement in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *African Studies Review* 24, 1 (1981), 114.

²⁶ Pamphlet published by the East African Literature Bureau, 1964, JA/31/19, KNA.

²⁷ Ministry of Labour and Social Services Local Government Commission of Inquiry Memoranda, 1966, JA/7/9, KNA.

Communities—not colonial bureaucrats—would imagine their own development and then enact it. As the community development officer of Western Province noted in a message at the end of 1965, “I am satisfied that during the passing year, many of you, if not all, accepted community development as your own concern and not an imposed idea as it was the case in the colonial days.”²⁸ Local ownership was crucial to gaining broad acceptance for the *harambee* idea, since it signified a departure from colonial imposition and the use of *corvée* labor.

Kenyatta purposefully distanced his administration from the colonial state to legitimize his rule and popularize his development policies. He intentionally linked self-help to a deeper, utopian past for the same reasons. As with many other policies, the government emphasized the precolonial roots of *harambee*, arguing that it was “a development philosophy well embedded in [African] traditions.”²⁹ State actors used *harambee* to harken back to precolonial communal cooperation. Simultaneously, it evoked a present moment of Kenyans pulling together, and elicited, too, visions of a better future. The broad discourse conflated temporalities and moved seamlessly across space. *Harambee* signified local communities coming together to improve their own lives, while also suggesting broader development extending to the scale of the nation. Accordingly, *harambee* took on a multitude of meanings. This expansiveness was essential to *harambee*’s appeal, allowing Kenyans to draw from it what they liked.

While government discourse empowered citizens, officials had no intention of making all self-help equal. Kenya’s *harambee* policy presupposed a hierarchy, distinguishing between projects that would contribute to national development and those that would not. A pamphlet on self-help published by the East African Literature Bureau reveals the incongruity of the *harambee* message: “Community development does not solve national problems like unemployment ... Community development is a planned programme of helping citizens to solve their own local problems by using their own resources.”³⁰ After asserting the immateriality of local development to national progress, the writing abruptly switched tune. Citizens, the next sentence argued, “may learn that they are a part of Government and, therefore, people are also responsible for the work of Government. In these ways, community development makes a real contribution to the building of Kenya and to Kenya’s development.”³¹ These opposing notions reflected disparate ideas about development in postcolonial Kenya and underscored the ideological contradictions of state making. The state’s authority and relationship to citizens remained under dispute. Though state makers would try to gloss over these inconsistencies, the absence of a coherent hegemonic project would later provide openings for citizens to contest state policy.

²⁸ H.M. Stanley Njeru, Provincial Community Development Officer, Western Province, 1966, DC/KMG/2/4/32, KNA.

²⁹ Kefa Onyoni, for PS Ministry of Housing and Social Services to PS Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1978, ACW/1/425, KNA.

³⁰ Pamphlet published by the East African Literature Bureau, 1964, JA/31/19, KNA.

³¹ *Ibid.*

State actors matched rhetorical dissonance with administrative dissonance, dividing self-help programs into two separate categories—“social and domestic facilities” and “economy developing.” The government then administered these two programs separately. This classification system reveals how state officials attempted to define, and prioritize, certain forms of development. Establishing two forms of self-help buttressed government rationalizations for providing assistance only to deserving projects, as officials argued that the majority of these projects would not generate direct economic development for the whole nation.

Yet, in the 1960s and 1970s, local communities most commonly undertook “social and domestic” projects, primarily focusing on schools and hospitals, and also participating in adult education, sports, and cultural affairs. In categorizing all of the above projects as social and domestic, the government also tacitly categorized them as non-economy developing, and thus, as unworthy of state assistance.³² The economy developing classification mostly consisted of infrastructure projects and agricultural ventures. These programs made up just over a quarter of the total value of self-help work in 1968.³³ Communities did attempt these more technically complicated programs, such as building cattle dips or milk coolers, though much less frequently compared to the fervor with which they built health centers and schools.

Kenya’s community development plan presented further contradictions, stressing local autonomy while highlighting government orchestration. The Ministry of Community Development and Social Services reconciled this paradox by reasoning that self-help naturally occasioned cooperation between Kenyans and their government. Citizens’ needs would shape development planning so “that local plans [would] be in tune with the larger picture.”³⁴ The Ministry happily concluded: “In this way, government plans truly reflect the needs and wishes of the people; objectives of the people and the government are one!”³⁵ Nonetheless, the Kenyan state created a pyramid organization of community development staff to facilitate cooperation between local self-help groups and the government. A 1964 circular outlined the complex structure—comprised of national, regional, local authority, location, and sub-location development committees—for “directing” community development and “channeling” assistance to self-help schemes.³⁶

Kenyan communities initially contributed the majority of the money and labor for self-help. In 1968, 94 percent of the total cost came from the people themselves.³⁷ The total value of local donations to self-help programs also grew dramatically over time.

³² Ronald Ngala, Minister of Co-operatives and Social Services, to G.J. Njenga, Director, Department of Community Development and Social Services, 1968, BY/54/1, KNA.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “Draft Circular: National Development Committees,” 16 October 1964, JA/31/19, KNA.

³⁷ Ronald Ngala, Minister of Co-operatives and Social Services, to G.J. Njenga, Director, Department of Community Development and Social Services, 1968, BY/54/1, KNA.

Between 1964 and 1977, yearly contributions to self-help increased by thirty-five times.³⁸ Kenyans not only contributed cash, but labor and raw materials. Government officials also expected relevant ministries, international sources, private individuals, and business firms to supplement self-help funding. Kakamega District's health center accounts illustrate the uneven partnerships self-help frequently produced. In 1968, Kakamega communities contributed labor, material, and cash, totaling 93 percent of the donations towards health centers in their province. The central government, for its part, contributed a mere 7 percent of the cost of these programs.³⁹

Official publications suggested that community development would blossom through balancing local needs with national development plans, through voluntary labor and donations, and through the provision of small government grants. On the ground, things looked quite different. Early on, inconsistent rhetoric and policy on self-help revealed disagreements about Kenya's developmental trajectory and about the obligations of both citizens and the state in nation building. The remainder of this article will show that, as Kenyans came to possess more specific visions of development and came to adapt firmer views on government obligation, they began contesting the national policy on self-help. In turn, the state responded by withholding funding. Taking advantage of the opportunities this impasse provided, political elites played a growing role in these projects. Increasingly, Kenyan groups circumvented the state bureaucracy and negotiated with individual actors for assistance with their projects.

Negotiating Self-Help

Self-help became a space, both mental and physical, where Kenyan hopes and desires came to be enacted. These developmentalist imaginaries unfolded alongside the invention and elaboration of the state and citizenship—still inchoate political philosophies, laden with contradictions. In his community development plan, Kenyatta articulated a citizen-state relationship heavy on citizenly duties and light on government obligation and citizens' rights. However, the postcolonial government, in other settings, had made promises to provide education, medical care, and social security to all citizens equally.⁴⁰ Kenyan expectations coalesced, then, in a setting murky with conflicting assertions and promises and further complicated by Kenyan ambitions.

In this context, self-help was initially “well-received,” according to former agricultural official Alfred Machayo.⁴¹ Many rural Kenyan communities anticipated improvements to health and educational facilities, but they were also prepared to provide some of the labor and financing for these projects, just as they had done in the colonial era. Despite adopting the labor precedents set under colonial rule, many also trusted

³⁸ Kefa Onyoni, for PS Ministry of Housing and Social Services to PS Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1978, ACW/1/425, KNA.

³⁹ Department of Community Development, Kakamega, to Provincial Medical Officer, Kakamega, 20 November 1968, BY/54/1, KNA.

⁴⁰ Kenda Mutongi, *Worries of the Heart: Widows, Family, and Community in Kenya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 165.

⁴¹ Interview by author with Alfred Machayo, Chekalini, November 1, 2012.

postcolonial government assurances that communities would head *harambee* projects. This idea appealed to Kenyans who had detested colonial coercion and had aspired to guide their own development. They appreciated, further, that self-help offered greater local autonomy than other expected financial contributions, especially taxes. Uasin Gishu resident Paul Sitiene, recalled, for example, “This one, the tax payment, was not working for me. They were just collecting something for nothing. There was no service.”⁴² On the other hand, oral historical evidence suggests that many western highlands households readily donated to self-help, largely, because their contributions produced visible results. Jotham Njau Mwangi’s recollection of *harambee* differed considerably from Sitiene’s remarks on taxes. Of self-help, Mwangi said, “It was just development.” He added, “We worked together because it benefitted us.”⁴³ Promises of local autonomy and desires for tangible community development marshaled immense action on self-help projects throughout Kenya.

Harambee also shaped ideas about the relationship between communities and the national government. Frederick Kemboi arap Tum Kiptulus said, “I really didn’t understand what the *serikali* (government) meant back in those days after *uhuru* (independence), but I thought everything belonged to the government. Later, *harambee* was introduced by Kenyatta. And that is when we learned that anything that came out of *harambee* belonged to us.”⁴⁴ *Harambee* projects gave Kenyans the sense of ownership that they longed for, both of development and of the government. Tum Kiptulus continued, “We came to realize that the government is us now, the community.”⁴⁵ Joseph arap Bir’geng offered a similar understanding, “The community is the pillar, and that should be the *serikali*.”⁴⁶ For rural residents, self-help reaffirmed self-government, and it attested to the importance of community to both.

Mobilized by the belief that they had the right to choose local development priorities, Kenyans enthusiastically created self-help projects. Soon, however, the government decided that communities were too eager. While officials publicly lauded the importance of self-help in Kenya’s development, government records reveal increasing panic about uncontrollable local groups. The 1966 minutes of a Rift Valley district commissioners meeting mentioned that the demand for *harambee* schools had become “chronic.”⁴⁷ Similarly, in 1967, the Rift Valley Province annual report noted, “The problem of controlling ‘mushrooming’ self help projects continued.”⁴⁸ Throughout Kenya, bureaucrats encountered, and bemoaned, similar problems.

⁴² Interview by author with Paul Sitiene, Sosiani, November 21, 2012.

⁴³ Interview by author with Jotham Njau Mwangi, Lumakanda, November 5, 2012.

⁴⁴ Interview by author with Frederick Kemboi arap Tum Kiptulus, Leseru, November 22, 2012.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Interview by author with Joseph arap Bir’geng, Sosiani, November 20, 2012.

⁴⁷ Minutes of the Meeting of the District Commissioners, Rift Valley Province, 25 February 1966, HB/27/8/6, KNA.

⁴⁸ Rift Valley Province Annual Report, 1967, KNA.

Officials crafted increasingly heavy-handed policies to regulate self-help, but local enthusiasm often prevailed as communities skirted state regulatory mechanisms.⁴⁹ This trend—which revealed tensions between local charge and national coordination—continued throughout Kenyatta’s tenure and into Daniel arap Moi’s presidency. A 1979 Rift Valley Province report noted that Kenyans initiated projects without proper planning when their “zeal was misdirected and Community Development machinery namely the staff and committees not fully utilized.”⁵⁰ When citizens began projects without official approval, they contested state restrictions on their local autonomy, and they put forth alternate development priorities.

Many Kenyans recounted that, initially, they did not want the government to play a role in their projects. Hoseah arap Keter, a Nandi farmer in Uasin Gishu, recalled, “We thought that if the *serikali* was given the responsibility to build, they will take the premises. We were asking ourselves, ‘what is our responsibility after owning the land?’ It is our responsibility to head the institutions. The *serikali* was only to employ the teachers and nurses, and other people. We wanted to own the buildings.”⁵¹ Placing significance on building ownership suggests that notions of possession, likely originally centered on land, were extended to development generally. Other oral histories support this premise. Peter Muchai, a Kikuyu farmer in Western Province, said, “Development was if you have something that belongs to you.”⁵² The emphasis on ownership illustrates communal desires to control local development.

Community-centric understandings of *harambee* and government help explain local disregard for state prescriptions. In Chekalini, a village on the eastern edge of Western Province, a self-help group continued building a health center despite official efforts to halt their progress. The provincial medical officer wrote in 1966 that the self-help group had not sought the medical statutory board’s permission to open the health center, and without the board’s approval, it was operating illegally.⁵³ The officer’s orders to close the health center, “and to see that the premises are demolished,” achieved little.⁵⁴ Though the Chekalini community eventually adapted their project, they refused to follow the local officers’ instructions. This form of conflict over *harambee* revealed disagreements about who had the authority to direct local projects.

When communities worked with officials, it was not always to their benefit and could propel them to avoid government management in the future. In 1967, a district officer wrote to his district commissioner in Kakamega about a self-help cattle dip in Kambiri. The district officer recounted how people spoke with frustration about “the

⁴⁹ J.G. Njenga, Director of Community Development and Social Services to all Provincial Community Development Officers, 25 July, 1968, BY/54/1, KNA.

⁵⁰ Rift Valley Province Annual Report, 1979, KNA.

⁵¹ Interview by author with Hoseah arap Keter, Sosiani, November 21, 2012.

⁵² Interview by author with Peter Muchai, Lumakanda, November 6, 2012.

⁵³ S.N. Ngure, PMO, Western to the DC, Kakamega, 1 September 1966, MOH/8/157, KNA.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

miscalculation and wrong advices rendered by the then Veterinary Assistant.”⁵⁵ He added that the project had cost the community 3,000 shillings, “a big loss to those poor people who sweated themselves to help themselves and achieve nothing in the end.”⁵⁶ The district commissioner responded to the appeal for redress without sympathy: “Advise them to regard the loss as the baby that dies, and a couple tries to get another.”⁵⁷ The overextended and often undertrained bureaucracy made such errors throughout Kenya. With little compassion for communities thwarted by government blunder and with little advantage to following government procedure, local self-help groups increasingly avoided state regulatory mechanisms.

The state’s inability to control community development programs stemmed at least partially from the absence of state officials at self-help sites. In the 1964 minutes of the national committee meeting, Daniel Arap Moi, an MP in the Rift Valley Region at the time, said that “he was disappointed that no [community development] officers could be appointed for more than half the Districts of the Region.”⁵⁸ Adding to the problem, community development staff were the first to be let go during budget crises. A cabinet memo noted, “What we consider as most unsatisfactory is the fact that ... the first to be axed are invariably Community Development workers.”⁵⁹

For a government that hoped communities would take on vast development responsibilities but also follow guidelines with little oversight, growing local defiance signaled trouble. Unable to convince Kenyans to voluntarily submit to government regulation, the Kenyan state began withholding resources.⁶⁰ The December 1964 minutes of the national committee for community development make clear that this strategy had been a possibility since independence. At this meeting, a Ministry of Local Government representative suggested that, “self-help projects which would involve subsequent recurrent expenditure by Councils, should be avoided. This included schools, health centres, youth centres, and nursery centres.”⁶¹ Yet, aside from land, Kenyans most wanted these developments. Kenyan communities continued building schools and hospitals, while the Kenyan state increasingly denied financial support for these programs, again revealing conflicting visions of development.⁶²

⁵⁵ DO Central to DC Kakamega, 1 March 1967, DC/KMG/2/4/32, KNA.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ F.M. Nthenge, DC Kakamega to the DO Central, 3 March 1967, DC/KMG/2/4/32, KNA.

⁵⁸ “Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the National Committee for Community Development,” December 8, 1964, JA/31/19, KNA.

⁵⁹ G.S.K. Boit, PS to All PS’s, [undated, likely 1965–66], JA/31/19, KNA.

⁶⁰ This was a favored tactic employed by the Kenyatta state to centralize power. Daniel Branch, *Kenya: Between Hope and Despair, 1963–2011* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011).

⁶¹ “Minutes of the Inaugural Meeting of the National Committee for Community Development,” December 8, 1964, JA/31/19, KNA.

⁶² Though state actors were reluctant on the whole to commit to recurrent expenditures, the final section of this article shows that when they distributed resources, they did so inequitably, particularly across region, ethnicity, and gender.

Rather than fund schools and hospitals, officials tried to press state development priorities onto recalcitrant communities. State officials were especially keen to use self-help for the creation of new road networks. Road construction entailed little government investment, minimal technical expertise, no recurrent expenditures, and further, would better connect farmers to state-regulated markets. A 1969 monthly report illustrates one government strategy to correct citizens' misguided development priorities. The settlement officer advised that internal road access could only be improved through self-help and suggested that "at least monthly there should be meetings in various areas attended by heads of department of the area to institute the idea."⁶³ This strategy—where local government officials tried to persuade communities to practice specific forms of self-help—seems to have produced few results, since government officials continued complaining about their inability to control self-help groups.

Despite administrative and financial stringency, at times, the central state intervened even more forcefully, compelling communities to provide donations, material, and labor for self-help. A 1966 Ministry of Labour and Social Services' memorandum asserted: "Inevitably in any country there will be communities who see no reason to change their attitudes and whose philosophy of life will be based on traditional thinking. In these circumstances, the projection of ideas is necessary in order to stimulate social change."⁶⁴ The document then elaborated that accepted political leaders, such as cabinet members, should "spearhead the social revolution necessary in these communities."⁶⁵ The plan for "backwards communities" controverted the local ownership self-help allegedly fostered. At the same time, the oblique phrasing on the imposition of ideas possessed unnerving parallels to coercive colonial policies.

Coercion was borne from the state's quest to control development, and officials pressured communities throughout Kenya to conform to national planning. The minutes of a 1969 district commissioners meeting in Western Province reflect this practice: "A decision was made that in 1970 some force should be used in the collection of self-help funds with quotas say shs. 5,000/= being given to sub-locations as a target for the whole year."⁶⁶ These government directives had repercussions in local settings. A Kenyan farmer complained to his district officer in 1969, "I am surprised that people just come at my home during my absence and take my things before I am told what is going on ... I tried to find out whom they were, and was told that they did that because they wanted me to pay for the school building."⁶⁷ The use of force for self-help illustrates the contestations these programs engendered, exposing disagreements over labor obligations, financial responsibilities, developmentalist imaginaries, and spatializations of authority.

⁶³ Senior Settlement Officer, Sotik, Monthly Report, July 1969, AVS/13/21, KNA.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Labour and Social Service, "Local Government Commission of Inquiry Memoranda," 1966, JA/7/9, KNA.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Minutes of the District Commissioners' Meeting, Western Province, 19 December 1969, HB/27/8/4, KNA.

⁶⁷ William A. Kigame, Kakamega, to the DO Lugari, 20 June 1969, DC/KMG/2/4/33, KNA.

Oral histories support archival evidence on forced self-help. Kenyans in the western highlands said assistant chiefs came to their homes asking for a precise amount of cash, and in the absence of a contribution, would confiscate valuable goods. Selena Chelimo Barno recalled of local leaders taking her family's property, "We were afraid that maybe it was the order of the *serikali* to do such, so we were afraid that if one raises an alarm or complains, the same person could be arrested."⁶⁸ Barno's reflections were perceptive, since—in many instances—state ordered quotas catalyzed local compulsory collections. Central state actors attempted to impose their visions of development when they mandated donation quotas, regulated *harambee*, and required the creation of specific types of self-help projects.

The state reversal on, and intrusion into, a program that had once been lauded for being community-led, did not go unnoticed or unchallenged. The 1968 minutes of a Rift Valley district commissioners meeting noted, "Concern was expressed because it is thought that certain ministries carry out development projects which are not regarded by the local people as priorities. District Commissioners felt that local people should be consulted before any project is started."⁶⁹ Kenyans, in other words, were well aware that their visions of development diverged from those of the government.

Rural Kenyans were not only aware, but they were resentful, of government attempts to exert influence on their projects. Over time, they also came to resent the dearth of government assistance. Nandi farmer Samuel Kimeli Kiplagat recalled, "We were overburdened ... education you have to bring, hospitals you have to pay. Things which the government should have taken, because it was heavy for the people. The government returned that burden to the people."⁷⁰ Many recounted the weight of their extensive responsibilities. Mary Kitur, another Nandi farmer, said, "After independence, some people had difficulties taking their children to school, but there was no reaction from the government."⁷¹ Though rural Kenyans had initially articulated a limited government role in their projects, they soon came to realize that they could not complete the programs they most desired without aid.

Incompatible ideas about development, the state, and citizenship collided at self-help sites. Through self-help, Kenyans came to define more specific responsibilities for the state. Western resident Dana Iboso said, "It was our responsibility to build schools, because it was our kids. But it was the responsibility of the government to build health centers, because we were new and didn't know where to get such services."⁷² Western farmer Ainea Alulu recounted similarly, "The hospitals were the responsibility of the government. But, the government wasn't helping us, so we did it ourselves."⁷³ Many

⁶⁸ Interview by author with Selena Chelimo Barno, Leseru, November 28, 2012.

⁶⁹ Minutes of the Meeting of the District Commissioners, Rift Valley Province, 5 February 1968, HB/27/8/6, KNA.

⁷⁰ Interview by author with Samuel Kimeli Kiplagat, Sugoi, January 10, 2013.

⁷¹ Interview by author with Mary Kitur, Leseru, November 19, 2012.

⁷² Interview by author with Dana Iboso, Lumakanda, November 12, 2012.

⁷³ Interview by author with Ainea Alulu, Lumakanda, November 14, 2012.

Kenyans came to conceptualize government obligation based on a combination of their aspirations, their financial and technical abilities, and state promises. A consensus seems to have emerged about state responsibility for the projects local people deeply desired, but were unable to complete without government assistance.

With this in mind, local groups increasingly contested how the government defined its obligations. In 1969, a provincial community development officer remarked, “People of Western Province were not hard working and only did half jobs in self-help projects in the belief that the Government could come in and finish off.” He then elaborated, “This could only be avoided through education and understanding of the masses to remove ill-conceived ideas that the people have done so much and the Government so little.”⁷⁴ The officer’s observation reveals the growing conceptual rift between citizens and the state on government obligation and citizens’ duties. By refusing to complete their self-help projects, communities asserted a vision of more robust government support.

A New Political Contract

In withdrawing funding from *harambee* projects, the state broke earlier promises, contributing to perceptions of an undependable government. Samuel Kimeli Kiplagat exemplified this view, noting: “We used to contribute [to *harambee*] because we didn’t depend on the government ... When you depend on the government, you don’t know whether they will give you some money or not.”⁷⁵ This unpredictability opened up spaces for new actors—especially national politicians and transnational development practitioners—to participate in self-help.

Increasingly, politicians used growing rural discontent to strengthen their authority. Many Kenyans recounted that political elites personally brought contributions to their projects. Most residents of Sosiani village remembered, for example, that Minister of Health Joseph Otiende visited to donate 20,000 Kenyan shillings to their health center. The archival record supports these accounts, revealing that Minister Otiende gave 20,000 shillings to a number of communities in the 1960s.⁷⁶ Ainea Alulu recounted members of Parliament coming to donate money and convincing the government to provide nurses.⁷⁷ Alfred Machayo said that it was common for politicians to come to rural villages and give money.⁷⁸ Personal *harambee* donation came to be expected and played a part in refashioning patron-client relationships.

⁷⁴ Minutes of Administrative Officers’ Meeting, Western Province, 16 July 1969, HB/27/8/4, KNA. Frank Holmquist found that, though many communities started self-help as a way of garnering outside help, they came to realize that that external aid was not guaranteed. Even so, he argues that this type of initiative ultimately pushed the state to spend more on social services. Holmquist, “Self-Help: The State and Peasant Leverage in Kenya,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 54, 3 (1984), 78, 85.

⁷⁵ Interview with Kiplagat.

⁷⁶ MOH/8/157, KNA.

⁷⁷ Interview with Alulu.

⁷⁸ Interview with Machayo.

As communities sought support and politicians distributed aid, they engaged in old practices of mutual reciprocity where dependents exchanged labor and loyalty for protection and prosperity. In receiving donations in independent Kenya, rural residents understood they had entered into a political contract. The patron-client relationships of the postcolonial era retained familiar forms of exchange, as rural Kenyans continued to trade allegiance for political favor. Some aspects of patronage had changed, however. Though political elites still presented their distribution of development resources as coming from their own wealth, it was frequently drawn from the state treasury, from more senior officials, or from business associates.⁷⁹ In addition, the growing number of political actors provided Kenyans with openings for new affinities and new paths to patronage. Client loyalty was no longer marked by military service, but rather, electoral support, and client labor was more their own; their protection and prosperity now largely came from development.⁸⁰

The engagements between the beneficiaries of self-help contributions and the individual donors provide insight into how patron-client relationships took form in this setting. With the donations from the Minister of Health, for example, recipients anticipated further assistance. The Thompson's Falls maternity ward self-help committee requested Otiende "spare time to meet a delegation ... The Committee is confronted with some urgent problems which can only be solved with your personal assistance otherwise members will feel disappointed and frustrated."⁸¹ This self-help committee expected the private assistance of Minister Otiende, rather than general assistance from the Kenyan state. In negotiating for aid, Kenyans not only came to understand personal donations as indicators of future assistance, but they also came to realize that political elites acted as the most dependable channels to state resources.

When Kenyan politicians visited self-help sites, they made no distinction between what the state provided and what they as individuals provided, attempting to instill images of themselves as equivalent to the state. Of elite contributions, Sylvester Barngetung Sing'ari said, "Kenyatta personally brought donations for community development. And, no one," he added, "could contribute more money than the president."⁸² Not all Kenyans in the western highlands were so sure about the provenance of the contributions. Rael Serem initially said, "Kenyatta sent the money. Everything—schools, health centers—it all came from Kenyatta." Then, she seemed to reconsider, "But it was from the *serikali*

⁷⁹ Jennifer Widner has argued that contributing to numerous harambee projects was expensive for politicians, who needed to acquire personal wealth through the business world or convince senior officials to assist. Jennifer A. Widner, *The Rise of a Party-State in Kenya: From 'Harambee!' to 'Nyayo!'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 63–64.

⁸⁰ Both Joel Barkan and Gabrielle Lynch have suggested that *harambee* allowed candidates to create a record of service to their constituency, a record integral to their electoral success. Joel Barkan, "The Electoral Process and Peasant-State Relations in Kenya," in Fred M. Hayward, ed., *Elections in Independent Africa* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1987), 229; Gabrielle Lynch, *I Say to You: Ethnic Politics and the Kalenjin in Kenya* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 106.

⁸¹ J. Nderitu, Clerk of the Council, to the Minister for Health, 26 May 1966, MOH/8/157, KNA.

⁸² Interview by author with Sylvester Barngetung Sing'ari, Leseru, June 10, 2015.

(government). During that time, we understood Kenyatta as the *serikali*.⁸³ Meanwhile, Sally Kogo said of *harambee* donations, “We were just hearing that somebody sent something.”⁸⁴ This mode of resource distribution allowed individual politicians to become gatekeepers to state wealth. In turn, the growing importance of garnering elite support for self-help projects played a role in delineating multivalent relationships between citizens and the state.

It was not just national politicians who participated in self-help to a greater extent as the 1960s and 1970s wore on, but foreign governments and transnational institutions as well. These external agencies represented the newest set of non-state actors working to deliver social services in Kenya during the twentieth century. Development agencies and bilateral donors followed from the long history of external intervention to provide education and healthcare, though their objectives were decidedly more geopolitical than those of missionaries.

UNICEF provided aid to self-help projects as early as 1961,⁸⁵ and CARE, Freedom From Hunger Campaign, and the Ebert Foundation—along with other newly established nongovernmental organizations—also furnished assistance.⁸⁶ The majority of external aid for self-help projects in the early independent era came from other nations. This aid included both financing and technical support. By 1964, Kenya had received offers of assistance for self-help from over twenty nations around the world.⁸⁷ The United States was one of the most active external funders, and USAID had a special self-help fund.⁸⁸ This fund would not cover recurring expenses, and was essentially meant “for roofs, not walls or labor,” according to Carroll Hinman, the director of the USAID mission to Kenya at the time.⁸⁹

Kenyan communities became aware of the growing role that external donors played in self-help projects. The chairman of the Lumakanda community development coordinating committee wrote to the district commissioner of Kakamega in 1966, “Your assistance will prove that Lumakanda can help and develop itself with the Assistance from Central Government in kind (including foreign aid).”⁹⁰ A secondary school headmaster illustrated a similar knowledge of external funding for self-help, writing in 1967 that he used a USAID grant of 7,000 shillings to purchase blocks, roofing material, wood, and

⁸³ Interview by author with Rael Serem, Leseru, June 10, 2015.

⁸⁴ Interview by author with Sally Kogo, Leseru, June 11, 2015.

⁸⁵ Asst. Commissioner for Social Services to the PS, Ministry of Local Government and Lands, 12 July 1961, JA/31/17, KNA.

⁸⁶ J.G. Njenga, Director of Community Development and Social Services, to all Provincial Community Development Officers, 25 July 1968, BY/54/1, KNA.

⁸⁷ Pamphlet published by the East African Literature Bureau, 1964, JA/31/19, KNA.

⁸⁸ Carroll S. Hinman, Director of USAID, to Mr. GSK Boit, PS Ministry of Cooperatives and Social Services, 29 December 1967, MOH/8/157, KNA.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Moses Kevogo Mudaki, Chairman, Lumakanda Comm. Dev. Co-ord Committee, 27 October 1966, DC/KMG/2/4/32, KNA.

cement.⁹¹ An editorial in a Kenyan student newspaper praised the United States, remarking that regional progress was “largely due to the United States Government, the Kenyan Government, and to the citizens of the surrounding area.”⁹² Clearly, Kenyans—ranging from students to bureaucrats to national politicians—had developed extensive knowledge about the sources of external funding. Kenyans attempted to gain access to this aid, and they began to imagine external funders as potential patrons. Despite self-help’s internal orientation, the program actually further entrenched extraversion in postcolonial Kenya.

Pulling Together or Pulling Apart?

The institutionalization of a community development system requiring both local responsibility and patron financing had vast implications for material inequality.⁹³ Policymakers were well aware that certain groups and regions became further disadvantaged by self-help programs, though they did little to counteract growing inequality. The permanent secretary of Natural Resources wrote in 1978, “Left on its own, as is the case, self-help could result in undesirable imbalance in development.” He went on to suggest a vague solution for poor communities, “Concerned efforts must be made to take them along in the self-help and development tempo in which the country is marching.”⁹⁴ For marginalized groups, however, the development march carried on, often without them.

Notwithstanding its welfare-oriented origins, *harambee* acted as a counter-welfare program, since the more privileged were more capable of creating and participating in self-help programs.⁹⁵ These communities could raise greater amounts of money, they could draw on the skills of their better-educated populations, and they were more likely to possess links to political elites. Self-help both perpetuated existing regional inequalities and heightened intra-community inequality, as local leaders sidelined marginalized members of society, particularly women and the poor.⁹⁶

⁹¹ Harry Nachtigall, Headmaster Emusire Secondary School to the DC, Kakamega, 24 August 1967, DC/KMG/2/4/33, KNA.

⁹² North Nyanza Educational Development, 615-AB-65-AH-5, Chavakali, 1963; USAID Mission to Kenya Program Division, P 573 Subject Files: 1961–1980, Box 2, PRM 4 Program Evaluation FY 63, Department of State, Record Group 286; NACP.

⁹³ For a contemporary analysis of how community participation perpetuates inequality, see Kristin Phillips, “Dividing the Labor of Development: Education and Participation in Rural Tanzania,” *Comparative Education Review* 57, 4 (2013), 641.

⁹⁴ JHO Omimo, PS Ministry of Natural Resources to Mr. L.O. Kibinge, PS Ministry of Finance and Planning, 4 April 1978, ACW/1/425, KNA.

⁹⁵ For a statistical analysis of regional differentiation in self-help, see Edgar V. Winans and Angelique Haugerud, “Rural Self-Help in Kenya: The *Harambee* Movement,” *Human Organization* 36, 4 (1977), 334–51.

⁹⁶ For some of the literature on long marginalized pastoralists, see Thomas Spear and Richard Waller, *Being Maasai: Ethnicity and Identity in East Africa* (London: James Currey, 1993); David Anderson and Vigdis Broch-Due, eds., *The Poor Are Not Us: Poverty and Pastoralism in Eastern Africa* (Oxford: James

Even so, the state was aware of the need to appear mindful of uneven development. A cabinet development committee memorandum stated, “The Ministry was conscious of the fact that Government is committed to assisting the less developed areas.”⁹⁷ This supposed commitment never translated into reparative policy. The same memorandum continued, “Consequently, the North Eastern Province got a share equal to that of the other Provinces.”⁹⁸ An equal share of grant money would not undo years of unequal development, and the government never wholeheartedly invested in these areas.⁹⁹

In combination with the government’s aversion to redistributive policies for historically neglected areas, past inattention to these regions meant that residents were less educated, presenting additional challenges for accessing aid. An adviser to a *harambee* health center in Kericho wrote to the Ministry of Health in 1967, “During colonial days we, in rural areas, we were neglected; and thus we were left with less health services. But this has also been aggravated by illiteracy that is common in rural areas of Kenya.”¹⁰⁰ Uneducated populations encountered obstacles for submitting self-help applications, and thus, obstacles to garnering government support.

An understanding of the state was also integral to successful grant applications. A note from a Treasury official illustrates how the application process could privilege certain regions: “It is intended to distribute these grants, as equitably as possible to the Provinces.”¹⁰¹ Thus, the official added, every Province could apply for K£14,000. “It is expected,” he continued, “that each Province will be able to formulate sound proposals within this ceiling. However, if any Province is unable to do so, its allocation will be diverted to other Provinces from whom supplementary proposals will be invited.”¹⁰² This explanation lays bare how a purportedly unbiased system benefitted better-educated regions with greater political knowledge and cultural capital.

Quantitative figures also suggest that self-help produced inequality. A 1968 report stated, “Central Province with a decreased number of projects from 1967 had a markedly increased valuation and moved into first place among the provinces on the basis of valuation.”¹⁰³ In 1968, *fewer* projects received *greater* funding. Grant aid for self-help

Currey, 1999); Dorothy L. Hodgson, *Once Intrepid Warriors: Gender, Ethnicity, and the Cultural Politics of Maasai Development* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

⁹⁷ GSK Boit, PS to All PS’s, (undated, but likely 1964–66), JA/31/19, KNA.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Charles N. Chomba, DC Kakamega to PC Development Officer, Western, 29 December 1965, DC/KMG/2/4/32, KNA.

¹⁰⁰ Councillor Tim Mibei, Adviser to the Committee Roret Health Centre, Kericho, to the PS, Ministry of Health, 7 November 1967, MOH/8/157, KNA.

¹⁰¹ P. Ndegwa, PS to the Treasury to All PCs, All Provincial Planning Officers, 3 November 1971, BN/87/19, KNA.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Ronald Ngala, Minister of Cooperatives and Social Services, to G.J. Njenga, Director, Department of Community Development and Social Services, 1968, BY/54/1, KNA.

became increasingly concentrated, rather than more evenly distributed. In addition, Central Province—the most developed province in Kenya—had the highest valuation.

Previous research offers similar conclusions. In 1972, Central Province spent the most per capita for self-help programs (Table 1). North Eastern Province—a very poor province, albeit one with a low population—did receive the highest central government contribution per capita of all the provinces. Even so, Western and Nyanza—two other poor provinces—received very little central government contribution per capita.¹⁰⁴ Western ranked last, and received one-eighth the per capita government contributions that Central received. These numbers not only reveal the government’s unequal self-help funding, but also the uneven abilities of different regions to raise money from their own residents. Per capita contributions of Central residents were almost four times as much as those by Western residents, and were twice as much as the second highest per capita local contributor, the Rift Valley.¹⁰⁵ Clearly, *harambee* disproportionately benefitted communities with a broader tax base, better-educated populations, and closer connections to elite actors.

Table 1. Per Capita *Harambee* Contributions

Province	Total	Rank Order	Contributions by the People	Contributions by Central Government
Central	0.54	(1)	0.50	0.025
Coast	0.23	(4)	0.17	0.031
Eastern	0.23	(4)	0.20	0.019
North Eastern	0.25	(3)	0.16	0.079
Nyanza	0.19	(6)	0.17	0.011
Rift Valley	0.27	(2)	0.23	0.016
Western	0.15	(7)	0.13	0.003

Source: Bigsten, *Regional Inequality and Development*, 160.

Self-help not only intensified regional inequalities, but also local ones, especially in its marginalization of women. *Harambee* revealed the gendered politics of development in postcolonial Kenya firstly in its division of labor. Men primarily became the trustees of local development, the conceivers of change that Kenyatta had so emphasized. Men attended the meetings (*baraza*) to discuss and plan self-help projects, and they often made decisions about monetary donations on behalf of their households. Theresa Ngososei recalled of women’s exclusion from these spaces, “Women were reluctant to attend *baraza*

¹⁰⁴ This was also undoubtedly a product of Kenyatta’s efforts to punish and marginalize the Luo.

¹⁰⁵ Arne Bigsten, *Regional Inequality and Development: A Case Study of Kenya* (Nairobi: Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi, 1977), 160–61.

because we weren't given opportunity to share our views."¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Ruth Malakwen Cheptekeny said, "During those days men were very rigid, so they were just attending *baraza* without telling women what they were going there for and how these *baraza* were called ... whatever these men were doing outside the home was not disclosed to women."¹⁰⁷ Though the mental labor of self-help was inequitable, the physical labor was more even. Women were expected to contribute labor by collecting building materials, while men completed the construction work.

Further, communities often excluded women's issues from the support leveraged for mainstream *harambee* projects. A Chepkorio self-help group wrote to the minister of Health about their efforts to build a maternity wing, illustrating the hardships women faced without broad community backing:

Mr. Minister Sir, we have estimated the ward is to be extended will be 15,000/- and we have tried to collect the above figure and we are ready to do most of the labour by hand and still work hard to obtain accessible materials like stones, bricks, etc. Therefore Sir, we look upon you and request you to take our case to your ministry and consider assisting us ... Sir, we hope that you can help to remind our husband all over to help us too ... Mr. Minister, Sir, every mother donated 5/- and still continue till we see in reality the problem solved having enough space with health conditions thus create healthy people in a healthy nation.¹⁰⁸

Even when women drew on state-favored gendered tropes about mothering the nation, they encountered difficulties completing their self-help projects. Because rural women often had little control over household incomes, financing self-help posed major challenges in the absence of community or state support. At the same time, women generally knew less about the channels to state funding. Dorcas Lagat recounted, for example, that she "did not know who to follow" to receive government aid.¹⁰⁹

In some instances, exclusion from state resources galvanized women's organizations. In the western Rift Valley, in Sosiani, residents remembered the activeness of women's *kibagenge* (togetherness, or community organizations). Sosiani residents especially emphasized their success building a *harambee* maternal health clinic, noting that women raised the money and collected the materials, while men only helped by driving tractors.¹¹⁰ Priscilla Boit—wife of Paul Boit, the Western provincial commissioner—played an important part leading this women's group.

¹⁰⁶ Interview by author with Theresa Ngososei, Leseru, November 27, 2012. On *baraza* as a lens into twentieth-century Kenyan political history, see Angelique Haugerud, *The Culture of Politics in Modern Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁰⁷ Interview by author with Ruth Malakwen Cheptekeny, Leseru, January 9, 2013.

¹⁰⁸ Mrs. G. Ego, Chairman Chepkorio Maternity Extension Women Self Help Group, to Minister of Health Mr. J. Otiende, 23 March 1967, MOH/8/157, KNA.

¹⁰⁹ Interview by author with Dorcas Lagat, Sugoi, January 10, 2013.

¹¹⁰ Interview by author with Pauline Ngetich, Sosiani, November 21, 2012; Interview by author with Pauline Tum, Leseru, November 22, 2012; Interview with Barno.

Oral histories shed light on how women organized and sought state aid and how the clinic impacted their lives. Zipora Ketera emphasized women's collective imagination on development, recounting that because women "were mothers" and "were going far for clinics," they decided to construct the health center. Like many other women, Ketera stressed the significance of women's initiative, labor, and donations.¹¹¹ Theresa Ngososei emphasized the importance of Boit, but she also emphasized national leaders. She noted that women felt so "empowered" by their success that they invited then Vice President Daniel arap Moi to lay the first stone.¹¹² Pauline Tum said that the health center helped her and her family and, to this day, it is the only one in the area.¹¹³ Archival evidence supports Tum's recollection. At the beginning of 1968, the only maternity clinic and health center in all of Uasin Gishu District was in Eldoret. Self-help groups had just completed construction in Soy and Moiben, but the Sirikwa County Council could not afford to run these clinics.¹¹⁴

All over Kenya, women actively participated in self-help projects, particularly maternal and children's wards. A great deal of archival evidence illustrates women's initiatives to improve healthcare. In response to inadequate health services, women in the Mosop division of Keiyo, for example, organized themselves to collect funds for a maternity wing.¹¹⁵ A delegation of women from Cheptarit, Nandi, attended a Sirikwa County Council meeting in 1966 to seek advice on a maternity ward. They had bought a plot of land, collected building materials, and solicited donations from government ministers. The women wanted "to be given a plan so that they will know exactly how much they have to do to get the project accomplished."¹¹⁶ The councilors agreed to help, but "would not commit the Council to incur capital and recurrent expenditure."¹¹⁷ Self-help groups across Kenya confronted difficulties garnering government funding. County councils rarely possessed the financial capacity to support recurrent expenses, and the central government had become progressively unwilling to do so.

In these circumstances, Kenyans increasingly sought political patrons. Marginalized groups often did not possess the political networks to directly access state aid, making elite actors essential. As the educated wife of an official, Priscilla Boit played an important role in Sosiani. She knew how to execute a self-help project, she attended *baraza* to ask for community support, and she communicated with the district commissioner about state aid.

¹¹¹ Interview by author with Zipora Ketera, Sosiani, November 21, 2012.

¹¹² Interview with Ngososei.

¹¹³ Interview with Tum.

¹¹⁴ M.A. Fazal, Medical Officer of Health, to the Assistant Director of Medical Services, 14 February 1968, BY/21/212, KNA.

¹¹⁵ Sirikwa County Council Public Health and Lands Committee Minutes, 11 October 1966, BY/21/211, KNA.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

Sosiani reveals that, in spite of the strength of state exclusion, small openings did exist. Local factors—in this case, a well-connected individual and unified determination—provided the potential for women to experience state and developmental inclusion. Other excluded groups took advantage of similar opportunities when they arose, though their ability to do so was undoubtedly limited in comparison to more privileged Kenyans. Sosiani women articulated a fleeting moment of political belonging when Vice President Moi recognized their contributions to nation building. Women, then, could at times achieve national political membership through *harambee*, but only after overcoming the countless marginalizing forces in place under local and institutional structures.

Conclusion

Despite the possibilities these moments afforded, and perhaps due to their infrequency, self-help played a part in demarcating the boundaries of citizenship, and some Kenyans began defining the government by its exclusiveness. Eunice Tele Maiyo tellingly recounted, “The *serikali* during those days was somebody else, but not us. It was *Mzee* [Kenyatta] and others.”¹¹⁸ This idea differed dramatically from other conceptualizations of the government as community. In opposing herself to Kenyatta—the biggest *harambee* donor of all—Maiyo expressed the rifts that self-help, and its attendant patronage, had produced.

In 1978, Kefa Onyoni, an official in the Ministry of Housing and Social Services, wrote a scathing review of *harambee*, “[T]here has been a progressive tendency towards Politicalisation of the spirit of Harambee ... Closely related to this is the thinly veiled competition that arises in making personal contributions.”¹¹⁹ Onyoni closed his indictment with a pithy evaluation of the deterioration of *harambee*, noting, “Such practices erode the spirit of self-help.”¹²⁰ Perhaps, such practices had *further* eroded the spirit of self-help, but self-help had never been practiced with the spirit the government professed to envision after independence.

Certainly, though, a marked shift had occurred. Rural Kenyans became increasingly disenchanting with the state for its refusal to meet the obligations they had newly assigned it, for its tone-deaf development priorities, and for its withdrawal of aid from local self-help projects. Elites then stepped in to fund *harambee* projects in order to consolidate their authority and attract new clients. Self-help became a site at which a postcolonial patronage system became further rooted in Kenya’s political culture. This mode of governance—and the inequality it produced—would have a lasting impact on Kenyan politics and development.

¹¹⁸ Interview by author with Eunice Tele Maiyo, Leseru, January 9, 2013.

¹¹⁹ Kefa Onyoni, for PS Ministry of Housing and Social Services to PS Ministry of Finance and Planning, 1978, ACW/1/425, KNA.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*