**Paper Title: Community development – building on
contradiction**

Hilde van Vlaenderen & David Neves

1   Introduction

Community development practitioners continuously search to improve the
effectiveness and sustainability of their endeavours. Numerous approaches and
strategies have been designed and implemented with varying success. This paper does
not intend to promote or to evaluate any particular approach. It argues however that
within any approach, thorough insight into the negotiation of the notion of
development between the stakeholders in a project can provide an important tool to
enhance the success of the endeavour.

This paper aims to contribute to the enhancement of community development
programmes by providing a dialogical-activity theoretical framework to analyse
stakeholder interpretations and actions in a community development context. It is
argued that such framework enables simultaneous insight into the development
process and impetus for change.

The paper first presents the dialogical- activity theoretical approach. This is followed
by an application of this approach to the analysis of a project in which the author was
involved. The third part of the paper reflects on the analysis in terms of optimising
development efforts.

2   A dialogical-activity framework

Activity theorists embrace activity as the explanatory nexus of human behaviour.
They regard activity as 'a purposeful process in which a *subject* (i.e. development

agency) is connected to an *object* (development goal) through culturally constituted *mediational means* (i.e training courses) (R.Engestrom, 1999, p.35). In other words, human behaviour is seen as socially and culturally mediated activity towards a purpose, obtaining meaning within a social context.

Leont'ev' (1978) makes an important contribution to the conceptualisation of the relationship between the individual and the social, by making a distinction between *Activity, Action and Operation. Activity* is collective in nature and represents the overarching object to which an Activity system (i.e. development project) is directed. *Operations* are the routinised and iterative sets of responses on the part of the individual human subject that are often performed below the level of conscious awareness. *Operations* are the constitutive elements of (and subsumed beneath) *Actions (i.e* training*)*, which are, characterised by goal-directedness and intentionality. The utility of this three-part typology is the manner in which it allows for a heuristically useful distinction between individual goal-directed actions (i.e. actions of development agencies or development beneficiaries) and overall collective object-orientated activity (i.e. a project).

According to Y. Engestrom, (1993, p.68) activity systems are not stable and harmonious, but evolve through the resolution of their inner contradictions and tensions or contradictions which arise from the injection of new elements into the activity system. Y. Engestrom argues that these contradictions are the driving forces in what he calls 'learning by expanding' (Engestrom, 1987). This is a process by which the participants in an activity system construct a new object based on a resolution of inner and outer contradictions.

R. Engestrom (1995, 1999) expands the Activity theory analytic schema through the inclusion of semiotic and communicative elements inspired by the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin. She takes Bakthin's notion of utterance as a unit of analysis. In accordance with Bakthin (1981) she argues that utterances are culturally shared and distributed cognitive artefacts. They exist on the borderline between oneself and the other. In order to operationalise the utterance as a unit of analysis for activities, R. Engestrom (1995) invokes Bakthin's notions of *Voice*, *Social language* and *Speech genre* and

bridges them to the Activity theoretical concepts put forward by Leontev and Y. Engestrom. This is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Conceptual schema of the proposed similarities between levels of activity, components of the Activity System and Speech.

Bakhtin	**Leontev**	**Engestrom**
Social Language	Activity	Object/Outcome
Voice	Action	Subject -object
Speech Genre	Operation	Rule/tool (mediational means)

Adapted from R.Engestrom (1995, p.200)

Bakthinian *social language* corresponds with Leontev's level of activity. Social languages are intertwined with the object of referentiality. They exist outside the individual subject and reveal themselves as external collective activity rather than products of an individual sovereign consciousness (R. Engestrom, 1995). *Voices*, which are akin to Leontev's action, depict the speaker's subjective perspective, through which her/his perception of the world is accomplished. R. Engestrom (1995) adds however that this subjectivity needs to be contextualised within the limits of the speaker's community and the referentiality of the activity. *Speech genres* are rule like illocutionary packages used by speakers (Wertsch, 1991). The constitutive element of voices never stands free of at least one speech genre, because the individual speaking voice appropriates, populates and ventriloquates socially defined patterns or genres of speaking (Bakhtin, 1981).

In the next section, the communicative actions of the stakeholders in a project (activity system) will be analysed using the analytical tools of speech genres, voices and social languages. Thereafter, contradictions and tensions will be elucidated. Before the analytical results can be presented, a description of the project is provided in the section below.

3   Project[1]

Currently, large scale mining companies need to meet certain international (World Bank and IFC) standards to be granted permission to explore and subsequently exploit

---

[1] No detailed information on the project can be provided to ensure confidentiality

new mining areas. The main principle informing these standards is that mining projects should positively, or at least not negatively, impact on the natural and social environment in which they are situated. In terms of developing countries, projects should contribute to the development of the local communities in which the project is planned.

In order to achieve this principle the IFC requires the execution of a social impact assessment of the positive and negative impacts of the proposed project on local communities as well as the compilation of a management plan to mitigate impacts, including a community development plan.

A project, in which the author was involved in conducting the impact assessment and preparing the management plan is outlined below.

3.1 A mining project in central Africa.

The project concerned a feasibility study of a potential gold mine in Africa. As part of the feasibility study a socio-economic impact assessment was conducted by a team of independent social experts, engaged by the mining company.

The proposed site for the mining is a rural mountainous area with scattered villages, interspersed with agricultural fields. The local population (133 villages, organised in 21 local administrative entities) is impoverished and has been subjected to long term civil unrest. There is a lack of social infrastructure in terms of health and education and a lack of employment opportunities. Local livelihoods consist predominantly of subsistence agriculture and artisanal mining. Agricultural returns are marginal as a result of poor farming practices and unfertile soil. Artisanal mining is risky and does not provide sufficient and steady income.

The socio-economic studies conducted included the following:
- a socio-economic baseline of the villages potentially affected by the project. This was based on qualitative interviews with key stakeholders, focus groups, observation and survey data. The criteria for including the villages was: impact

by the potential mine in terms of resettlement, health and economic loss and potential beneficiaries of employment and local of development;

- an impact assessment, using a standard impact rating methodology;
- a resettlement plan, developed in accordance with international (IFC) guidelines, outlining the process, compensation and livelihood restitution required for those potentially to be resettled or losing assets (i.e. land);
- a stakeholder engagement plan developed in accordance with international standards, outlining how people have been consulted throughout the impact assessment process and how they should be further consulted in the future;
- A community development plan, outlining the development projects and process to be undertaken by the mining company, should the project go ahead. This plan was based on identified needs.

Several direct and indirect stakeholder groups were involved in the project, namely:
- the mining company intending to develop a commercial venture and needing to comply with international standards in terms of community development;
- the independent consultants, engaged by the company, conducting the impact assessment and formulating recommendations in line with international standards;
- the local communities potentially impacted upon and in need of development;
- the international community, setting the standards for commercial ventures in developing countries in terms of development. This latter indirect stakeholder was represented in the project by the consultants.

4   Genres, voices and the social language of development

In this section the project is analysed in terms of an activity system of development. First, the main speech genres used by stakeholders in the activity system are presented. These are then considered in relation to the voices (or communicative actions) of the activity system. Finally, the referential social language of development in the project is described in terms of how contradictions are played out.

Data for the analysis was obtained from the project's minutes of meetings, reports, notes, discussions, interviews and workshops.

4.1. Speech genres

The speech genres are the sub conscious, socially defined, packages of speech. Eleven important speech genres were identified within in the project. These are presented below.

(A) The speech genre of 'Need and Neglect'

The speech genre of 'Need and Neglect' makes reference to material deprivation, and lack of government support and is expressed in terms of need for basic social and physical infrastructure and services to be provided by the mining company. Most community meetings and interviews conducted as part of the project included the presentation of a 'needs list' including all basic social services.

(B) The speech genre of 'Loyalty'

This speech genre is differently expressed by the stakeholders in terms of their respective communities. Local residents almost invariably prefixed their statements by making a reference to their leader and community. The mining company discussed the feasibility of development commitments in terms of company budget and policy. The consultants expressed a divided loyalty. They introduced their public meetings by stating that their task was to uphold IFC international standards in terms of the relationship between the mining company and the local community. However, at the same time, they expressed their loyalty towards the mining company in terms of giving them recommendations to succeed in their endeavour and they told communities that their task was to ensure that they benefited from the project.

(C) The speech genre of 'Expectation'

This speech genre was very strongly expressed by both the mining company and the community. Several documents were sent or read out at meetings in which the community expressed its expectations from the company in terms of meeting their needs, providing employment and engaging them in the project. Individual conversations with community leaders emphasised these expectations. The mining company on the other hand had a very strong expectation of the feasibility of their project. This was clear from their press statements and annual reports.

(D) The speech genre of 'Participation, Fairness and Transparency'

This speech genre was predominantly used by the consultants, who prepared information leaflets for all stakeholders, explaining these IFC endorsed principles in terms of impact assessments and community development within the project. In workshops with local communities, participation was elicited and information about the mining company's and the consultants' activities presented to enhance transparency. Communities also employed this speech genre in terms of their request for fairness and participation in the project

(E) The speech genre of 'Fear and Mistrusts'

This speech genre was predominantly used by the local community but, to a certain extend, also by the mining company and consultants. In public meetings and household interviews, community members repeatedly voiced their fear of loss of livelihoods, loss of abode without compensation and mistrust of promises made by the mining company in terms of development programmes and employment. The mining company and consultants displayed a degree of mistrust in terms of information provided by local communities concerning local dynamics, assets and needs. This was acknowledged in reports written by the consultants.

(F) The speech genre of 'Standards and Procedures'

This speech genre was employed by all stakeholders in terms of their particular standards and procedures. The mining company adhered to their policy documents in terms of community engagement and community development (predominantly based on international standards). The consultants promoted the IFC international standards in their information leaflets, reports and meetings. Local communities insisted on appropriate representation at meetings and meeting protocol in terms of who speaks and how decisions are made.

(G) The speech genre of 'Authority'

This speech genre was predominantly used by the local leadership in terms of their own community. At a meeting a community leader occasionally stood up and told the attendants what was acceptable and what not without allowing discussion, stating 'we as a community will ….' Occasionally, in situations of conflict, the mining company took a more autocratic approach in its interactions with the community, defending its position by stating its rights in terms of the national law (mining code) and international standards.

(H) The speech genre of 'Threat'

The speech genre of threat was employed by local leadership and community groups. At times when they felt that their needs and requests were not timely and adequately responded to they threatened the mining company and the consultants with withdrawal of collaboration and protest. This was voiced as follows: 'You cannot work in this area without my permission'.

(I) The speech genre of 'Impartiality'

This speech genre was only employed by the consultants, who maintained their impartiality in conversations with both the mining company and the communities in stating they their task was to uphold international standards in the project. They typically started every meeting with introducing themselves as 'an independent company, not employees of the mining company'.

(J) The speech genre of 'Personal Profit'

This speech genre was predominantly employed by the local communities. Whereas in public meetings community needs were prioritised, in individual or small focus group interviews personal gain often took priority. This was voiced in terms of 'as leader of this community I expect the mining company to buy me a car' or 'we as artisanal miners need to be compensated first' or 'I think that my son should get a job'.

(K) The speech genre of 'Reputation'

This speech genre was employed predominantly by the mining company. The company publicised community interactions which promoted a positive reputation. Photographs of company employees providing relief assistance to local communities (handing out of blankets and school materials) and photographs of meetings with local and regional leaders were displayed.

(L) The speech genre of 'Good intent'

This speech genre was used by the mining company, in particular by employees with responsibilities for community liaison and community development. In discussions with the consultant and other company members they repeatedly stated that ' the project is a great opportunity to bring development to the local communities'.

4.2. The voices and social language of development in the project

Voices represent the level at which the speakers' intentionality and agency become manifest in the activity system (social language), albeit within the limits of the speakers' community and referential object or social language (R. Engeström, 1995).. Whereas the speech genres of the project were derived in an inductive and grounded manner from the data, the voices were explicated and extricated from the speech genres and author's theoretical and interpretative knowledge of development contexts.

The referential potentiality (social language) of development is characterised by four dimensions, outlined below:

- **Experience**: Opportunity- Risk (is the project seen as a development opportunity or as a risk ?)

- **Motivation**: Contribution - Benefit (is the motivation for involvement in the project to make a contribution or to receive benefits?)

- **Interest:** Self – shared (is the interest in shared or individual benefit?)

- **Approach**: Emic–etic (are the interactions based on local norms, values and needs or are they inspired by needs, norms and standards outside of the local setting?).

These dimensions provide a framework for the main voices. Six core voices were identified,, each consisting of several speech genres. In Table 2, five of the identified voices are presented in terms of the dimensions and the speech genres they employ. The sixth voice is of as different nature.

Table 2: Voices in terms of the dimensions of the social language and the speech genres they employ

	Voice 1	Voice 2	Voice 3	Voice 4	Voice 5
DIMENSIONS					
Experience					
Opportunity	x	x		x	
Risk			x		x
Motivation					
Contribution				x	
Benefit	x	x	x		x
Interest					
Self		x	x		x
Shared	x			x	

Approach					
Emic	x	x	x		
Etic				x	x
SPEECH GENRES					
	A, B, C, D, F	A,C, H, J	A,E, J	B, D, F, K, L	C, E, F, G H, J

The nature of the voices, and the stakeholders using them are discussed below.

Voice 1: Development as an opportunity for shared benefits

This voice defines development as a means of having communal needs addressed. It typically uses expressions of suffering, need and neglect, combined with expectations of the developer in terms of deliverables and process. Development is a democratic process in which all stakeholders are fair and transparent and due local procedure is followed (including loyalty to local leadership).

This voice is typically employed by the local community members and is constituted by several speech genres such as: Need and neglect, Loyalty, Expectation, Participation, fairness and transparency, Standards and procedures.

Voice 2: Development as an opportunity for individual benefits

This voice speaks of development as an individual benefit. It uses expressions of need and neglect and employs threat and authority to have personal expectations met.

This voice was used predominantly by local officials and local interest groups and is constituted by several speech genres such as: Need and neglect, Expectation, Threat, Authority and Personal profit.

Voice 3: Development as a potential negative impact on the status quo

This voice sees a development project as a further threat to the individual's already deficient situation, resulting in further loss. It mistrusts promises in terms of personal gain.

This voice was used predominantly by local community members and is constituted by several speech genres such as: Need and neglect, Fear and mistrust and Personal profit.

Voice 4: Development as an opportunity to make a positive contribution

This voice defines development as an opportunity to make a positive contribution, in terms of meeting the needs of others and simultaneously its own (reputation). . Development is a democratic process in which all stakeholders are fair and transparent and due local procedure is followed.

This voice was used predominantly by the consultants and the mining company and is constituted by several speech genres such as: Loyalty, Participation, fairness and transparency, Standards and procedures, Good intent and Reputation.

Voice 5: Development as a risk to goal achievement

This voice defines development as a risk to self interest and goal achievement and is based on mistrust of other stakeholders. Standards and procedures serve an autocratic interaction with other stakeholders.

This voice was used predominantly by the mining company and is constituted by several speech genres such as: Threat, Authority, Standards and Procedures, Fear and mistrust, Expectations, Personal Profit.

Voice 6: Development as a the application of a procedure

This voice defines development as the execution of a predefined set of rules and procedures, impartial in terms of the stakeholders involved.

This voice was used predominantly by the consultants and is constituted by several speech genres such as: Standards and Procedures, Impartiality and Loyalty.

4.3. The social language of development in the project: contradictions within and between stakeholders

It can be derived from the above that the social language of development in the project has several voices and speech genres used variably by the different stakeholders. Within this multifaceted definition of development, several contradictions can be identified within and between the stakeholders. These are described below.

The local community

For the local communities, development is simultaneously defined in terms of an opportunity or a risk in terms of needs satisfaction. The speech genre of Needs, Expectations and Mistrust are intertwined.

Need satisfaction is simultaneously defined in terms of a shared community process and a selfish personal fulfillment. The speech genres of Participation, fairness and transparency and loyalty are alternated with the speech genres of Threat, Authority and Personal gain.

The mining company

For the mining company development is defined in terms of an opportunity to make a contribution towards the needs fulfilment of other, whilst simultaneously being an opportunity or a risk to its own goal achievement. Whilst the speech genres of good intent, participation, fairness and transparency and reputation are predominant, this is occasionally alternated with speech genres of own profit, authority and threat.

The consultants

Whilst the consultants partake in several of the voices above (i.e. expressing local needs, making a contribution), their definition of development is predominantly cast in terms of Impartiality and applying Rules and procedures.

Interactions between stakeholders

Differential needs and expectations

Both the mining company and the local community have their specific needs and expectations. The local community desires its communal needs to be addressed, whilst, certain individuals demand personal needs satisfactions. The mining company aims to make a success of its development programme as part of its overall commercial venture, thereby enhancing its good reputation. Within the company some individuals emphasise the success of the commercial venture whilst other embody the 'good intention' aspect of the company.

As a result of differential needs and goals, which at times can be reconciled and at other times clash interactions between the mining company and the local community are characterised by an alternation of democratic and autocratic interactions.

Differential loyalties

All three stakeholders express loyalty to their own communities: the local community to its leaders and local cultural codes and conduct, the mining company to its policies, management and budget and the consultants to the international (IFC) standards. This invariable causes tensions in the overall goals and procedures of the project.

Multiple loyalties

The consultants embody the voice of international standards and procedures. However as a result of their facilitating role between the stakeholders they also vacillate between the various other voices, using alternately the speech genres of the community's needs and expectations, the mining projects expectations as well as good intent. This continuously jeopardizes their professed impartiality.

Differential interpretations

Although all three stakeholders adhere to the notion of participation, fairness and transparency, these notions have different meanings for the different stakeholders, derived from their particular context (traditional rural African culture, global corporate culture, global international policy culture).

4.4 Contradiction as an axis for change

As stated above Y. Engeström's (1993) argues that through working on contradictions between different stakeholders in an activity, new innovative rules and tools (and definitions) develop, as such enhancing the development activity. Contradictions, if left dormant, may destroy the joint referential object of the activity. In other words there may not be a joint project in which different stakeholders take part, but rather three different projects expressed in isolated voices.

It is argued then that the explicit acknowledgment of contradictions in a development project and ongoing negotiation of the definition of the project should be a core component of any development activity. In terms of the focal project addressing the contradictions would involve:

- explicating the needs and goals of each of the stakeholders;

- unpacking the abstract notions of participation , fairness and transparency;

- developing an understanding of the differences between community, corporate and policy cultures in terms of principles and procedures;

- unpacking the role of the consultants in terms of their the loyalties and impartiality.

These contradiction should then be shared and negotiated between the different stakeholders in terms of developing a joint reference for the project. However such

process is not a one off endeavour and a system needs to be put in place where this meta-level reflection on the development process is documented and monitored. The referentiality of the activity system (the Project) should be periodically revisited and re-negotiated by all stakeholders.

5   References

Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). The dialogical imagination: Four essays. (M. Holquist, Ed.) (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Engeström, Y. (1993). Developmental studies of work as a testbench of activity theory: The case of primary care medical practice. In S. Chaklin, & J. Lave. (Eds.), Understanding practice: Perspectives on activity and context (pp. 64-103). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Engeström, R. (1995). Voice as communicative action. Mind, Culture and Activity, 2(3), 192-215.

Engeström, Y. (1987). Learning by expanding: an activity-theoretical approach to developmental research. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit.

Engeström, R. (1999). Imagine the world you want to live in: a study of developmental change in doctor-patient interaction. Outlines, 1, 33-51.

Engeström, Y. (1987). Learning by expanding: an activity-theoretical approach to developmental research. Helsinki: Orienta-Konsultit.

Leont'ev. A. N. (1978). Activity, consciousness, and personality. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.

Wertsch, J. V. (1991). Voices of the mind: a socio-cultural approach to mediated action. Hepstead: Harvester.

Hilde Van Vlaenderen
Independent Social Consultant
H.Vanvlaenderen@wanadoo.fr