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# ‘Community of Schools’: A Case Study of Development, Participation and Integration in Cato Manor Township, South Africa

Anthony L. Wagner V '17, Gettysburg College

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# 'Community of Schools': A Case Study of Development, Participation and Integration in Cato Manor Township, South Africa

## Abstract

By the end of the twentieth century, a subfield of anthropology known as critical development studies emerged - in large part due to the work of James Ferguson and Arturo Escobar - as a critique of post-colonial development programs and NGOs of the West that were at work in much of the developing world - most notably sub-Saharan Africa. Development was largely panned by these early researchers as a means by which Western powers habituated problems in the developing world so as to create a profitable industry of development. Contemporary anthropological inquiries have called for an increasingly field-based approach to the study of development so as to better understand how development organizations are managed and regarded in their host communities. Many anthropologists - such as Gardner, Lewis, and Mosse - argue that organizations which successfully integrate into their communities and actively seek local perspectives and participation are more likely to defy post-colonial anthropological stereotypes about development organizations. This paper adds to a growing literature on these organizations by examining the role that one small community based organization (CBO) is playing in a predominately black township of Durban, South Africa. The Umkhumbane Schools Project (USP) is an American-South African joint program aimed at improving mathematics and science scores among underserved high school youth in five secondary schools in Cato Manor Township. An examination of the problems schools face in Cato Manor, the structure and history of USP, and perspectives on the program's success reveal that the organization has integrated within Cato Manor as it continues - with mixed results - to create key participatory roles for South African educators, students, parents, and community members. This paper explores the challenges CBOs face in implementing their programs and grapples with how to define and measure CBO success all while attempting to move anthropological exploration of development beyond critique and towards an increasingly qualitative measure for understanding the humanity of development.

## Keywords

Development, Critical Development Studies, South Africa, Anthropology, NGOs, CBOs

## Disciplines

Anthropology | Growth and Development | Secondary Education

## Comments

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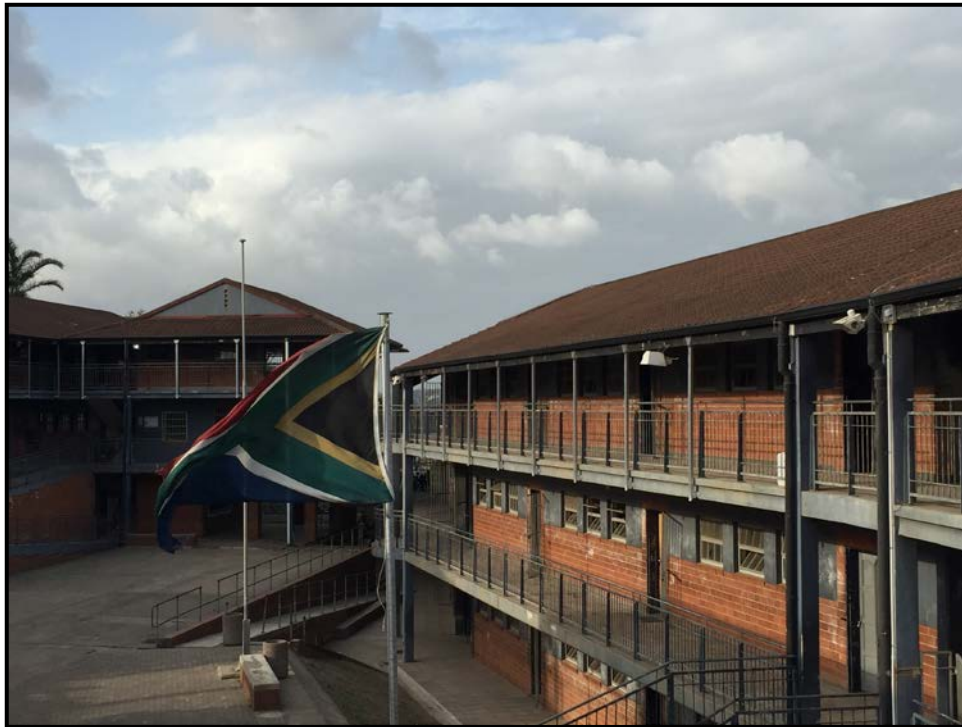
**‘Community of Schools’:  
A Case Study of Development, Participation and Integration  
in Cato Manor Township, South Africa**

Anthony L. Wagner V

Department of Anthropology  
Gettysburg College

Honors Thesis

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**Wiggins Secondary School – Cato Manor Township. July 2016. Photo by Author.**

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It would be difficult to thank the hardworking educators, administrators, and learners of Cato Manor's secondary schools enough for the generous amount of time they gave me through interviews and discussions. Many of them told me to use this research project to help their schools. With that in mind, I hope that this paper adds to anthropological discourses on development and sparks an interest in conducting more qualitative case studies in places like Cato Manor in search of the humanity of development.

## Introduction

As she finished her last sip of tea, Christina Munnik, assistant director of the Umkhumbane Schools Project (USP), pondered my question near the end of our interview at a café in the Glenwood neighborhood of Durban, South Africa. USP is a small community based organization (CBO) operating in five secondary schools in Cato Manor Township – a predominately black neighborhood of Durban. Through supplemental math and science programming, it seeks to improve student pass rates in the aforementioned subjects in an effort to help underprivileged students competitively apply to university. I asked her about USP's ultimate goals in Cato Manor, as the last silver beams of sunset disappeared outside. Christina answered:

You want to actually...put ourselves out of a job...we would like to empower the schools enough...to take this on. But at the same time, there is a role for us to play as a fundraising organization, as an organization that can raise money in a way that a government school can't really go out and raise money or doesn't have time to do.

Having studied anthropological discourses regarding the post-colonial era of development, I was surprised by what she had said. I was used to seeing the all-too-familiar images of international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) swooping into rural communities to distribute boxes filled with cheap toys and dollar mart hygiene products for the purpose of a quick photo-op that could be used in fundraising pamphlets back home. Through my own observations and interviews with people in Cato Manor, I had concluded that USP was different in many ways. Christina's answer alluded to USP's desire to work with teachers and community members in Cato Manor to create local ownership of the organization's goals and programmatic perpetuation. If development is an industry, as many anthropologists suggest, Christina did not seem interested in benefiting from it.

Using USP as a case study of development in South Africa, this paper seeks to use its presence as a point of analysis and comparison within broader anthropological critiques of development and the discipline's evolving theoretical lens on the subject. The literature of critical development studies – a subfield of development anthropology forged by Ferguson (1990) and Escobar (1992) – overwhelmingly focuses on large NGOs and intergovernmental organizations that operate using a top-down development approach, while little attention has been given to smaller community based NGOs that work on development issues within local communities in the developing world. Recently, anthropologists such as Katy Gardner and David Lewis have argued for the discipline to view NGOs and their work through a more field-based ethnographic approach. This paper will add to the existing literature by examining the role that one small, community-based nongovernmental organization – USP – is playing in the world of development and globalization, and, more specifically, in South Africa – one of the most socioeconomically unequal societies in the world. On the one hand, I am interested in exploring how this NGO fills in the gaps that exist within the South African secondary education system, complementing if not replacing services that would otherwise be the responsibility of government or family. On the other hand, I am interested in exploring how this NGO has integrated into the local community, and how it mediates between the needs and demands of township youth and their families, and the requirements, regulations, and networking demands that operating in a township of South Africa make. Building on my own ethnographic work with the Umkhumbane Schools Project in South Africa, as well as a number of other anthropological studies that have been conducted on small, community-based NGOs in developing countries, I ask how the work of these NGOs compares with the work of larger NGOs and intergovernmental organizations as analyzed in the existing literature. How do small, community-based NGOs fit

into their host communities? Are local actors engaged in problem solving and administration? How do these organizations measure their impact/success? How do communities measure impact/success? My goal is to ascertain whether the work of small, community based NGOs can provide an alternative view of such organizations and development compared to that which prevails in critical development studies. By answering these questions, this study will add to a small but growing literature within the discipline regarding how international NGOs operate in local spaces in an effort to move anthropology beyond critique.

I will begin this paper by briefly examining the evolution of thinking about and conceptualizing NGOs within the field known as the anthropology of development. Specifically, I will show that critiques of development that came from the discipline in the last quarter of the twentieth century were based on critical theories about development that drew on post-modern critiques of power, representation, and identity, but that were not rooted in substantial fieldwork among NGOs or their target communities within the developing world. More recent work by anthropologists calls for an increase in rigorous ethnographic fieldwork that result in informed case studies – a mandate to which this study responds.

Using contemporary anthropological frameworks regarding the role of NGOs, I will then move into a discussion examining how NGOs can successfully integrate within their host communities while sparking participation among local actors. After a brief contextual discussion regarding the current state of the South African education system, I will dive into the methodology and findings of my own research using comparative case studies of locally initiated NGOs as an anthropological guide. I will use my own observations to highlight the challenges township schools face, and reflect on how successful USP has been at reaching its goals. Most importantly, I will use my findings in Cato Manor to address how organizations such as the



Umkhumbane Schools Project integrate into their host communities and, using qualitative data, measure the level of success USP has achieved in sparking community participation in programming and practice. A brief discussion regarding the future of USP will underscore the complexities of CBO development in the South African context and how these organizations address issues of sustainability while attempting to create community-level social change.

### **Anthropology of Development**

Critical development studies within the field of anthropology emerged in the last few decades of the twentieth century. Anthropological discourses on development – enforced by reactions to lingering colonialism and hegemonic encroachment of the West and North in the developing world – largely panned development and organizations involved in development as counterproductive to social progress and embedded within an inherently neoliberal – or market driven capitalist – agenda. Ferguson’s (1990) groundbreaking work in mountainous Lesotho revealed a brand of ‘development’ disinterested in the social and political complexities of rural Basotho culture, and how international organizations such as the World Bank created a development imaginary in which the Third World could be categorized generally in terms of its geography, industries, and demographic characteristics. In essence, the same development schemes that could be implemented in Lesotho could also be used in a country such as Nicaragua because they were both undeveloped – despite the two countries’ unique histories, cultures, and problems. Ferguson’s critique alludes to a fierce capitalistic worldview through which the economic agenda of the West was injected into the policies and practices of developing nations in an effort to create a globalized capitalist economy.

In 1992, Escobar – a contemporary of Ferguson – opined on the direction of anthropology’s approach to development *writ large*:

This critique of development as discourse has begun to coalesce in recent years... Third World reality is inscribed with precision and persistence by the discourses and practices of economists, planners, nutritionists, demographers, and the like, making it difficult for people to define their own interests in their own terms – in many cases actually disabling them to do so (25).

As one of the most respected and prolific writers on the subject, Escobar warned social scientists to be cautious of nuanced versions of development that were being put forth by the West via ‘fashionable’ alternatives such as ‘sustainable development,’ ‘women and development,’ ‘grassroots development,’ etc. (Escobar 1992, 26). Governments and development organizations were using favorable and flashy diction to raise money and implement projects and programs that nevertheless ignored local perspectives and the potential for community participation. At that time – nearly twenty-five years ago – Escobar argued for a rejection of the development ‘paradigm’ and a turn towards allowing local communities and partners to create and implement their own solutions to solve their own political, social, and economic problems – an important feature of Ferguson’s critique as well. Specifically, Escobar (1992, 27) called for anthropologists to turn towards a paradigm in which ‘an interest in local autonomy, culture and knowledge; and the defense of localized pluralistic grassroots movements’ were emphasized, rather than traditional development schemes.

Like Ferguson, Escobar argued that development was a tool by which socioeconomic inequality had been perpetuated and exacerbated in many developing nations in the post-colonial era. Traditional development strategies, in essence, had ‘underdeveloped’ the Third World, creating a cycle of dependency on the West (Escobar 1992, 47). He writes:

Development proceeded by creating abnormalities (“the poor,” “the malnourished,” “the illiterate,” “pregnant women,” “the landless”) which it would then treat or reform. Seeking to eradicate all problems, it actually ended up multiplying them to infinity (Escobar 1992, 25).

Much the same as the 'illegality industry' of African migration to Europe in the first decade of the 2000s, which thrives and relies upon a continuation of the migration crisis, success of the development industry in locations such as sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America at the turn of the twenty-first century relied almost entirely upon the worsening and perpetuation of issues like poverty, hunger, inadequate infrastructure, and inequality within state education systems in order to survive and grow over time (Andersson 2009). Measures of success for development organizations relied upon systemic regional, state, or local failures in the Third World to tackle various humanitarian crises. Development goals were needed only so long as there was something to development. Thus, development was a means by which to spread Western 'institutions and styles' while at the same time a measure of 'production and management' for the West to control developing areas (Escobar 2005, 342). Critical development studies was focused on revealing the realities of development as a social system through which aid was being offered in a way that led developing nations to become increasingly dependent upon the West, international organizations, and massive NGOs. The irony of development was that it offered neither help nor hope and that the aims of development organizations were rooted in a long-term strategy of spawning dependency and inequality in places where inequality and poverty were already the tantamount issues. The field of anthropology, being interested in relationships based on equality and equity between the West and the developing world after centuries of colonial rule, as well as creating bottom-up strategies for social problem solving, were alarmed by what was unfolding. Escobar writes (2005, 348): 'Such a critique also contributes to devising means of liberating Third World societies from the imaginary of development and for lessening the Third World's dependence on the episteme of modernity.'

Yarrow's (2011) case study of Ghana, for example, shows that many Africans are disinterested in profiting from NGO work and would much rather 'sacrifice' their chances to make more money or to build connections with international NGOs so as to sidestep Western development schemes. In an industry that is not truly aimed at alleviating poverty or solving critical economic problems, it is unsurprising that development programs, with their substantial influx of money, are seen mainly as a source of personal enrichment. Local skepticism was exacerbated by neoliberal reform. Development has thus come to epitomize an opportunity for selfishness and greed by international and local actors who wish to benefit any way they can from the underdevelopment they perpetuate. Unfortunately, development has, over time, taken the place of colonialism and imperialism as a means by which Western powers can profit and consolidate their power over economically disadvantaged societies that suffer from alarmingly high amounts of inequality. That is not to say, however, that some NGOs are not engaged in work that is creating viable solutions to the problems many communities in the developing world face. Indeed, ethnographic case studies show that many small, community based organizations are doing good and important work.

In contrast to Ferguson and Escobar, Fisher (1997, 441) writes that previous critiques of NGOs and their practices have been 'based more on faith than fact' and notes that as of the late 1990s few case studies had been conducted by anthropologists to determine what was happening in local communities where NGOs and development agencies actually operate. He believes that new methodological approaches must be used to study and interpret development given that NGOs have both grown in number and 'have also forged innovative and increasingly complex and wide-ranging formal and informal linkages with one another,' and that '[t]hese relationships

have begun to have profound impacts both on globalization and on local lives' (Fisher, 441). His conclusion about the role anthropologists can play in understanding NGOs is important:

Additional work by anthropologists will not only contribute to knowledge of what NGOs are doing but will also provide insights into anthropological conceptions of communities, local and translocal networks, technologies of control, and the political role of intellectuals (459).

Given the complexity of social relations that NGOs pose in host communities, ethnographic case studies may be key to assessing how well they integrate and successfully implement effective programs and initiatives.

Gardner and Lewis (2005) also underscore the important role that anthropologists can and should fill in terms of contemporary discourses regarding development. They write that ethnographic fieldwork allows anthropologists to become 'insiders in the aid industry' who 'can play a part in ensuring that the issues of equity and participation within the "development process": (as opposed to the simpler, more measurable notions of economic growth and technological change) are uppermost in the approaches and practices of those working development' (345). Gardner and Lewis add that through case study analysis anthropologists are 'well equipped to monitor the process of project implementation, which in effect is the task of monitoring social change. In the course of monitoring, anthropologists need to assess whether three-way communication is taking place between planners, implementors and population' (355). Thus, the benefits of case study analysis are double fold in that it both allows anthropologists to become better informed about on-the-ground development through participation, and, because of their exposure, it allows them to observe whether development agencies are using local actors as resources with which to counter poverty, inequality, and inequity.

Likewise, Mosse (2013) recently wrote that new anthropological approaches used to understand development are increasingly focused on case studies in specific locations – in other

words, ethnography. Mosse writes that new anthropological interpretations regarding the work of NGOs are needed because little is actually known about local encounters between NGOs and community members: ‘What elements and relations of power are involved, who and what the significant actors are, what purposes are served by processes of connection/disconnection (development/counter development), and what autonomy is achieved or lost are not known in advance’ (231). He believes that ‘ethnographic treatment of development as a category of practice’ will allow those in the field to understand how development organizations and NGOs are practicing a ‘local negotiation of development’ within their host communities (Mosse, 227, 231).

Arguments calling for a turn towards ethnographic case studies seek to find what should be considered the humanity of development. Which is to say that ethnography – the most basic utensil in an anthropologist’s toolkit – can help shed light on previously unseen faces – NGO workers, community members, sponsors, educators, etc. – and local relationships created by development. Researchers can use case studies as microcosms from which conclusions and interpretations regarding the larger framework of global development can be explored. Thus, the structure of modern development can be understood through local situations, injustices, and progress. Geertzian by nature, this level of analysis allows ‘thick description’ to guide future studies of development and will benefit the field moving forward as a way to untangle how community partnerships and complex cultural interactions are spun together (Geertz 1973). That being said, the field must be wary of striving for a universal or whole understanding of development, as development is unfolding in thousands of communities around the world – each one different from the next in terms of problems, culture, polity, and history.

## **Participation and Integration: NGOs and Development**

Before discussing my own case study, it is important to discuss the means by which NGOs – large and small – incorporate themselves into their host communities. Lewis and Kanji (2009) write that the concept of ‘participation’ is vitally important to successful bottom-up development. Participation refers to the access that local populations have to the decision-making process. Previous critiques of development, such as Ferguson and Escobar, have lamented that participation was often nonexistent because it ran contrary to the neoliberal agenda. On participation, Lewis and Kanji write:

Central to this new thinking was the concept of ‘participation’: the need to build a central role in decision-making processes for ordinary people, instead of their being ‘acted upon’ by outsiders in the name of progress or development. Participatory development emphasized the idea that people themselves are ‘experts’ on their problems and should be actively involved in working out strategies and solutions (72).

Development from within – a concept that emphasizes the importance of local participation – underscores the importance of local experts. Local experts are able to both understand and, given proper resources, solve problems that exist within their community – problems created by gaps within government service delivery caused by inequality, poverty, corruption, etc. Lewis and Kanji write that international NGOs – no matter the size – have effectively become extensions of the state in the developing world, reaching into areas of need where governments cannot provide due to a lack of state capacity. They note that previous development schemes often sidelined local actors; although, this appears to be changing:

Development projects rarely involved local people in the processes of their design and execution, and they were instead looked upon as largely passive ‘beneficiaries’ of such interventions. For [those] who began experimenting with participatory approaches, the key idea was to reverse this by creating the conditions for people to plan and enact solutions to the problems that they faced by drawing on their knowledge and understandings (Lewis and Kanji, 74).

Due to changes in the mission and structure of NGOs, efforts have been made to ignite local community involvement in development and problem-solving strategies. In theory, participation should lead to local investment among those who are stakeholders and, thus, a growing local interest in the success of the development organization's mission. These efforts appear to be particularly fruitful among small community based organizations (CBOs) where a focus on specific locales appears to be more conducive to sparking participation. CBO work, however, is not without its challenges.

In a handbook for NGOs, Rochester (1999) writes that CBOs encounter many challenges and 'vulnerabilities' not faced by their larger counterparts. Three of these challenges are relevant to my observations in Cato Manor: first, that the success of a CBO is 'heavily dependent on the work and commitment of a smaller number of key individuals. Principal among them is usually the most senior – sometimes the only – member of the paid staff.' Secondly, CBOs are vulnerable because they 'operate on a knife edge' budget. Finally, Rochester writes that CBOs are not always good at adopting 'a long term or strategic perspective' (3-4). The author also touches on an important point is that small CBOs often get in 'over their heads' in terms of scope and programming: 'Other small agencies have found themselves coping with higher numbers of users, often because they have been persuaded to provide services for groups other than those for whom they originally catered' (46). All of these challenges are quite relevant and affect a CBO's ability to adapt, integrate, and grow within its host community – each necessary for the implementation of bottom-up approach to development or, perhaps more appropriately, countering non-participative development schemes.

Watkins et al. (2012) suggest that NGO success and failure are usually hinged on a relatively high level of uncertainty that exists within the host nation and community. 'NGOs face



enormous uncertainties at the input boundary of their organizational field – in the fluctuating, unstable, and sometimes capricious nature of their funding and of the aspirations they are supposed to meet’ (Watkins et al, 292). These uncertainties are perpetuated by financial and/or social instability within host communities and because of ‘working outside the usually reliable infrastructure of an industrialized society’ (289).

Gauging the success or failure of CBOs in terms of their efforts to integrate and spark participation within host communities is useful to anthropological discourses on the topic as the field moves beyond critique. Despite their conclusion that NGOs often do not completely fulfill all of their promises, as is partially the case in my own case study, Watkins et al. show that qualitative data can be used as an accurate and realistic measure of participatory ‘success.’ Although many NGOs and some social science disciplines are inclined to reach for quantifiable data to support programmatic success or failure, this case study will measure how successful the Umkhumbane Schools Project (USP) has been at integrating within Cato Manor Township and creating opportunities for local participation within secondary schools by revealing what local actors and USP staff believe and say. On-the-ground interactions and observations allow the researcher to tell a more complete and humanistic narrative than do hard numbers and statistics. Watkins et al. write (286) that, ‘anthropologists’ vivid case studies of development aid practices on the ground, [ask] whether or not NGOs have fulfilled their promises to empower communities and transform the lives of individuals.’ The transformation of lives can mean a great many things, and not all of them well-meaning – the colonial era, for instance, arguably transformed most black South Africans’ lives for the worse; however, this study seeks to answer how USP’s presence has created opportunities for educators and learners to engage with new people and

ideas through meaningful exchanges and experiences related to supplemental mathematics and science education.

### **Educational Development in South Africa**

Before discussing my own findings regarding the above discussion of development, integration, and participation, this paper will now turn towards the current South African context in which the Umkhumbane Schools Project (USP) case study is positioned. Twenty-three years after Nelson Mandela's election and the fall of apartheid, the South African education system continues to grapple with crippling levels of racial socioeconomic inequality. Salisbury (2016, 43) writes: 'As the post-apartheid era in South Africa stretches into its third decade, economic divisions between races remain.' The locus of my case study is a predominately black township in the eThekweni municipality in Durban, South Africa. Without doubt, the facilities, infrastructure, administration, and general ethos of the schools in South African townships are, in many ways, failing the learners and families that they serve. These failures have far reaching consequences for young South Africans and South African society as a whole. The South African Departments of Education do not have the capacity to provide enough financial and/or material resources for schools situated in poorer communities, while former Model C schools – white schools of the apartheid era – continue to thrive as they did before 1994 in large part due to alumni networks with deep pockets and corporate sponsorships. Timaeus et al. (2013, 271) write:

...the school system remains to some extent a prisoner of its past. Many schools operate in inadequate buildings and a significant minority of rural schools still lack electricity connections, phone lines or running water. Moreover, many older African teachers received a very poor training in apartheid-era colleges, but it has proved difficult to establish professional development programmes that win the support of the entire teaching profession and effectively address the inadequate skills of some teachers.

Despite 'large-scale reform efforts in the past two decades,' the South African government appears unable to solve the education crisis in the near, or even distant future (Salisbury 2016,

43). During my fieldwork in Cato Manor, I saw many signs and symptoms of the education system's inadequacies. Many of the schools in which USP operates were built within the last decade, but looked as if they had been standing for half a century or more. Broken windows, classrooms without electricity, stolen water pipes, and unkempt sports fields were all signs of schools struggling to keep up. Cato Manor – and the schools therein – is situated between two campuses of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN) and is within view of the relatively posh and predominately white Glenwood neighborhood. From USP's office space in Wiggins Secondary, the famous, gleaming stone tower of UKZN's Howard College campus is teasingly visible in the distance, as is the private primary and secondary school of St. Henry's Marist College.

Indeed, race and geography seem to make all of the difference in school funding and learner opportunities. Cato Manor is, after all, a black township. At least two of the schools in which USP operates – Mayville Secondary and Wiggins Secondary – are surrounded by informal settlements in which thousands of people live in structures handmade from leftover tin, cardboard, and plywood. Many learners I met lived in households with dangerous illegal electricity hookups. Inadequate water supply in these informal communities makes sufficient hygiene unrealistic. Thousands more live in rows of pastel colored government housing units that line the hills and ridges of Chesterville and Bonela. Tuck shops selling Coca Cola, Vodacom airtime, and chips are on every corner. Children can be found in the evenings doing cartwheels or playing soccer on potholed pavement roads that are littered with broken glass and rubbish. Chickens roam from yard to yard in the hot sun as minibus taxis honk their way through the maze of roads and alleys looking for passengers on their way to the Pavilion Mall or Durban's city center.

One can be in the elite neighborhoods of Glenwood, Davenport, or Morningside within a ten-minute drive – a seemingly foreign world and a totally different South Africa. Here, high fences surround colonial style homes. Coffee shops, newly renovated shopping malls, and expensive boutiques can be found lining beautifully manicured streets. Kids here might catch an Uber to the beach on a lazy Friday afternoon after violin practice, or will make plans to meet on Florida Road, Durban’s popular nighttime scene.

Learners who live in Cato are not likely to attend university when, or if, they graduate from secondary school. Kids in Glenwood, however, are more likely to be caught at a going-away party for a friend attending UKZN or the University of Cape Town before they too go off to university. More will be said later regarding the problems township schools face in Cato Manor; however, studies have shown that access to quality education in South Africa provides a lifetime of benefits for those lucky enough to attend high-performing secondary schools. Salisbury (2016) writes that white South Africans are more likely to benefit from additional years of education than are black South Africans, largely due to the quality of their secondary schooling in that schools in white neighborhoods are almost always better equipped and managed (43). Alarmingly, he writes that white students earn ‘forty percent more per additional year of education’ than do black students. Likewise, Keswell (2009, 13) writes:

...race now plays a strong role in determining how educational attainment comes to be valued in the labour market. The potential economic consequences of such a dramatic divergence in opportunities available to Whites and Africans are likely to be far reaching.

Leibowitz and Bozalek (2014) show that racial inequality has disproportionately put black learners at a significant disadvantage in attaining access to post-secondary education opportunities given the ‘vested interests of many in attempting to vouchsafe privileges enjoyed in the past’ within the highest echelons of South Africa’s political and economic elites (105). As

one might imagine, gaps within the South African education system are key areas of focus for non-governmental organizations interested in education development.

## **The Umkhumbane Schools Project**

### Methodology

This paper will now embark on an ethnographic examination and case study analysis of a community based organization (CBO). I spent approximately ten weeks between May and August 2016 working with the Umkhumbane Schools Project (USP) in Cato Manor Township located in Durban, South Africa. I offered my assistance as a student intern for the duration of the ten-week experience during which I came to know USP's staff, schools administrators, educators, and learners quite well. I became involved with the CBO's programming by helping with office work, mentoring ESKOM Science Expo participants, observing Saturday maths classes, and spending a large amount of time circulating between the five schools and talking with teachers and learners. I often found myself in the middle of strategic planning discussions and even helped organize a community youth history festival to mark the fortieth anniversary of the 1976 Soweto uprisings, and an African Leadership Academy community service visit in the township soon after. My methods of analysis consist of participant observation and semi-structured interviews. I kept a detailed field log for the duration as well. I interviewed Martha Bishai, director of USP; Christina Munnik, then-assistant director of USP; and ten educators and school administrators from each of the five Cato Manor schools in which USP operates: Bonela Secondary, Chesterville Secondary, Mayville Secondary, Umkhumbane Secondary and Wiggins Secondary.

Regarding the terminology, I frequently use South African English to describe the schools and the people involved. Teachers are often called 'educators,' and students are often

called ‘learners.’ You will find instances of me using these words instead of their American English counterparts throughout. Additionally, where appropriate, I have changed the names of teachers and informants to protect their privacy.

### Challenges in Cato Manor

Mrs. Hari’s classroom at Bonela Secondary School was originally supposed to be a computer room. It is its own brown cinder block structure, across the morning assembly grounds and apart from the rest of the school buildings. Now, without running water or electricity (or computers), Mrs. Hari uses it as her science laboratory. A container filled with water sits on her desk which she frequently uses to throw on students smoking marijuana beneath her window. With a smile, Mrs. Hari remembers how, as a young teacher, she used to take her students on overnight excursions and even gained Bonela ‘green flag’ status as a school that was environmentally sustainable because of her efforts to create a wide array of science activities and clubs for her learners. She remembers the ‘let me save the world’ mentality that led her to the position of sole physical science educator at Bonela in 2003 – a profession that she thought would bring her ‘contentment.’ Five years later, she began to become demotivated. ‘Red tape’ from administrators in the school and the Department of Education made it difficult if not impossible to continue providing excursions and organizing scientific experiential opportunities. The motivation of the learners, too, appeared to have taken a nose dive. One day, after arriving back at school from an excursion with a group of her learners, she found all of the potted flowers her class had planted smashed, withered, and broken against the wall and door of her classroom. ‘All in pieces,’ she recalls, ‘[a]nd you [could] just see the [disappointment] in the learners’ faces that were involved. Not to mention what happens to the teacher.’ She explained that like many of

her colleagues in Cato Manor, she began to feel as though ‘nothing you are going to do is going to make a difference.’

Mrs. Hari’s experiences speak to the great number of challenges that educators, learners, and parents face in Cato Manor’s schools, and although an entire volume could be filled about each of the issues I heard or saw during my fieldwork, I will do my best to outline them here. The problems of Cato Manor Township are more deeply rooted than the ‘extreme failure,’ as Martha Bishai, director of the Umkhumbane Schools Project, put it, of math and science pass rates. Drugs, vandalism, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, crime, lack of parent involvement, underfunding, administrative mismanagement, language barriers, collapsing school buildings, mediocre teachers, dangerous living conditions, single parent households, and learner deaths are all areas of great concern in Cato Manor. An assistant principal explained that many of Cato’s problems stem from the ‘social ills’ of the greater community. In the year 2015, he said, - flipping through an exercise book he keeps on his desk filled with problems in the school - thirty-four students in his school were pregnant. The week before our conversation, one of his school’s grade eleven learners died suddenly – a student without parents who was taking care of her two younger siblings. The deputy principal and other school staff pitched in money to hold a funeral meal, but he was not sure what would become of the student’s siblings. Another teacher told me that a few years ago she witnessed a female learner having an abortion in one of the school’s classrooms. Another teacher at the same school told me that most of her students have been ‘affected or infected – one way or the other’ by HIV/AIDS.

At Mayville Secondary School, we would often arrive in the mid-afternoon heat to find that all of the learners had been sent home early. Vandals from the community kept stealing the school’s water pipes. As we sped away across speed bumps towards Wiggins, Christina Munnik,

assistant director of USP, explained to me that they had to send the kids home early because the toilets would not work without any running water. This happens quite frequently. ‘So they just release the whole school,’ she said, ‘Which, if you think about the long term effects of having a shorter school day on such a regular basis – it’s very alarming.’ One of the teachers at Mayville was adamant that she believes community members ‘just [sit] there and feel like: “I don’t have any money today, what can I steal from their classroom?”’ One school principal lamented that an eighth of the school’s budget was spent on security alone – and that it still was not enough. They used old desks, chairs, and other mangled pieces of furniture as a barricade on the side of the school where there was not a gate to keep burglars out. The school serves a student body of over 1000 learners, and the budget they are given from the Department of Education is expected to be used to cover the costs of electricity, water, new desks and chairs, to fix broken windows, and to frequently have its ancient-looking paper copier serviced. ‘We have to work with whatever we have,’ she told me while looking over large stacks of paperwork on her desk, ‘and it’s very difficult.’ A teacher at Umkhumbane Secondary told me that she thinks the resource gap is getting worse. She told me that years ago the Department of Education provided one school psychologist for a group of sixty schools. They rarely saw this person, so the role of counseling troubled students fell on the teachers. ‘We are the ones that...offer support and lend support....[I]f they don’t have us they don’t have anybody.’ As an example, she relayed that she has often driven ill students to a local health clinic herself during the school day.

Many schools have sought additional sources of funding to help pay mounting expenses. Another school’s principal, who has begged local companies for sponsorship or monetary gifts, exclaimed:

I can tell you: not a single private company is pumping money to our school. Not a single [one]! I’ve been here ten years. Not that we have never tried. We have written letters.



They never respond. They tell us about budgets, but you will see, in the former white schools, you will see, eh, boards...[that say]...so and so is sponsored by this company....Never happens with us.

Indeed, help from the outside seems unlikely, save for NGOs and CBOs. This speaks to a larger problem stemming from South Africa's apartheid era. I can count the number of white South Africans other than USP I saw in the schools during my ten weeks in Cato Manor on one hand. Mrs. Thipe, the principal at Wiggins Secondary, remembered an instance when a new teacher arrived for their first day on the job. The new recruit was white. Mrs. Thipe believes that the teacher must have thought 'Wiggins' was the name of a coloured or mixed race school – not one in a predominately black township. The teacher told Mrs. Thipe that they would need to start the next day instead, so as to 'sort out' their things. Mrs. Thipe laughed: 'That was the...last time I saw [them].' Like many different spaces in post-apartheid South Africa, Cato Manor has become an island in terms of race, socioeconomic status, and resource distribution. On another level, the schools in Cato Manor themselves have become isolated from the greater community. A teacher at Bonela remembers how nobody from the community came to help when one of the school's classrooms caught on fire. The charred support beams and blackened bricks remain. Martha's analysis of the situation is striking: 'People don't have a sense of stewardship' for the schools.

Perhaps the greatest problem each school faces is a lack of parent engagement. Every educator, administrator, and USP staff member listed this as a huge hindrance to the success of learners moving forward. Based on the reaction he has received from parents, Mr. Masondo, head of the mathematics department at Wiggins, told me that he and his colleagues feel as though they 'are punishing' parents when they call them for parent-teacher meetings. A teacher at Mayville said that many parents blame teachers and administrators for their child's failure or lament that they simply do not have the time or money to travel to the school for a meeting.

Massondo believes that the perceived lack of parent engagement has made it difficult to create effective communication with learners in school, as well as provide educational support at home. While he admits that many parents are likely too busy to come to school functions because they work long hours and into the night, he and other educators expressed frustration at the lack of support the schools receive from parents that, he felt, would go a long way in solving many of the schools' problems.

Back at Bonela, Mrs. Hari recalled how students booed their peers at an assembly when they were being recognized for winning a prize at a science competition. She believes that motivated students are often targeted by their less-than-enthusiastic peers on account of their ambition. Another teacher explained that for many students, 'science has become dead to them because of the lack of resources.' The schools have become increasingly frustrated with what they see as a widespread demotivation of learners over time. A teacher at Chesterville told me that most learners 'would rather sit than stand. They would rather walk than run.'

However, I worked with many students during my time with USP who showed a great deal of ambition and an incredible work ethic. Although many students are clearly not living up to their potential, I found blanket statements about learner motivation misleading. For example, one learner I worked with was competing in a regional science expo. Her project was focused on Xhosa and Zulu cultural perceptions regarding whether the use of snake bile in religious ceremonies made one's teeth fall out. Like many of her peers, she did her own research, put together an experimental plan, conducted interviews and a survey in the community, went to the medicinal market to get samples of snake bile, and used pH tests to make conclusions about the substance's acidity. Simply said, the potential for hard working students can be found in each of the five schools.

## Community of Schools

Emanuel Masondo was quite alarmed when he first arrived in his position as a mathematics educator in Wiggins Secondary School in 2008. ‘The pass rate of this school in mathematics was at sixteen percent, which was a shock to me,’ he told me on a rainy morning in his second floor office at Wiggins. Learners gazed in through the window as they scurried by on their way to buy snacks at the tuck shop. Water was pooling in the courtyard between the red-bricked wings of the school. The physical science pass rate among grade twelve learners – called ‘matrics’ in South Africa – was nearly as dismal, being lower than forty percent. Masondo remembered that he was quite worried at the time about the low numbers – he still is, in fact. These statistics become even more disturbing when one discovers the achievement level needed for grade twelve learners to ‘pass’ the exams. In the latest version of the Department of Basic Education’s curriculum, a learner must score at least thirty percent out of one hundred on an exam to pass. That is to say that when Masondo first set foot on the concrete courtyard of Wiggins Secondary, only sixteen percent of grade twelve learners were scoring thirty percent or higher on their final mathematics examination. *Sixteen percent.* The percentage of those students who scored high enough to even think about applying to a post-secondary institution was even lower. Students need to score much higher than thirty percent to be considered competitive applicants for schools like UKZN, no less the University of Cape Town or Stellenbosch University in the Western Cape. If Masondo was going to survive in his new position at Wiggins, he was going to need help – help that seemed unlikely from the Department of Education. Without any experience working with aid organizations or NGOs in his short time as an educator, Masondo began to write pleas to local funders for resources to help him at Wiggins Secondary:

So I wrote the proposal to different...companies...including Telkom. And one of the place[s], it was...CASME, the institution of maths and science at its place in the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Edgewood campus. So, I dropped my proposal there which was requesting whoever who can come and assist with the support of mathematics and science because...I needed a sponsorship.

Masondo's proposal found its way into a stack of other such proposals at CASME, the Center for the Advancement of Science and Mathematics Education at UKZN. There it sat for more than two years without any response.

Martha Bishai and her family arrived in Durban in 2009. Her then-husband had been offered a medical research position at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal affiliated with the Howard Hughes Medical Institute of Chevy Chase, Maryland. At home in Baltimore, Martha was directing a small, inner-city NGO, named the Compass Project, which focused on giving at-risk youth outdoor experiential learning opportunities in the surrounding Maryland countryside in an effort to build self-confidence, character, and create a sense of community. This endeavor, along with raising four young children of her own, made an international move difficult to consider. As an incentive, HHMI informally agreed with Martha that they would provide seed funding for a similar project located in Durban if she made the move.

When she arrived, she immediately began researching the many problems South Africa was facing some fifteen years after apartheid. She was most interested in continuing her work with youth in urban or peri-urban communities and so turned towards the nation's struggling education system. Given the nature of HHMI's mission, Martha knew that mathematics and science would be an appropriate focus for any project she would develop. Inequality, geography, and race all eventually led Martha to Cato Manor. Martha says that she first became aware of Cato Manor by 'literally...driving around': 'I would go and drive around and look in communities and ask people about them, and read.' During her site visits and research, she made

contact with CASME. Despite their suggesting that she look in rural areas and offering to introduce her to schools there, Martha insisted that she was interested in doing work in Cato Manor or another place like it. One of CASME's administrators told her that he might have a contact at a secondary school in the township that could help:

And so, he said, um: "As a matter of fact, I have a proposal here that's been sitting on my desk for about two years...with nothing ever really done about it." And he said there's a math teacher – at least there was two years ago – a math teacher at one of the Cato Manor schools, who had written a proposal.

That math teacher – Emanuel Massondo – was more than relieved to finally receive a call back about his ideas. After meeting with Masondo and talking with other stakeholders at Wiggins, Martha decided to develop a project in Cato Manor and was granted a substantial and supposedly renewable grant from HHMI. Using Masondo's proposal as a guide, the Umkhumbane Schools Project sought advice and support from teachers and administrators during the development stage.

Initially, the Umkhumbane Schools Project's goals were fairly simple and straightforward. While Martha still hoped to provide learners with 'experiential learning' opportunities in order to 'give students exposure and broaden their horizons,' she and Masondo both decided to focus their efforts on raising pass rates and improving the quality of math and science results at Wiggins Secondary School. Back in his office, Masondo told me that 'passing should not be the problem:'

...for us it should be say – how many distinction[s] can we make? Or how can we make sure that we are producing distinction? The first thing was to make the learners to pass mathematics and science.

Masondo was interested in not only boosting math and science pass rates, but also helping learners with the most potential achieve high enough scores on their matric exam results that they could, with confidence, apply for university. Given that Cato Manor is positioned near two

campuses of UKZN, and not far away from other institutions, Masondo believed that his students should be the ‘first’ to get into the universities. Originally, USP offered supplemental math programming for some of the most promising learners each Saturday in Wiggins, Mayville, and Bonela Secondary Schools. With the grant from HHMI, USP was able to develop lessons, buy schooling supplies, and pay their staff – many of whom were teachers in the three secondary schools – for the Saturday maths sessions.

Soon after their programming began in the initial three schools, Masondo introduced Martha to teachers from Chesterville and Umkhumbane Secondary Schools as well – both part of the greater Cato area. Martha became interested in creating a community among these schools and developed her own programming model. The ‘community of schools’ organizational model is different than how most other NGOs operate. Martha explained that most NGOs working in South African education development function in one of two ways. The first model, she explained, involves an NGO ‘sinking a lot of deep resources into one school.’ In sum, an NGO might arrive and ‘adopt’ a school and focus all of its energy and programming on that one school. The biggest problem with this model, Martha believes, is that continuity and sustainability are difficult to achieve if the NGO closes down or moves on – both of which are common due to a paucity of funding opportunities. Simply said, long term effectiveness and strategizing are anything but guaranteed.

The second type of model is when an NGO arrives in a school, or even many different schools, and puts all of its resources into handing out as many textbooks, iPads, laptops, or some other gadget as they can. Martha believes that this model is a ‘completely market driven thing’ without any sort of ‘relationship building’ between the NGO and the community. Success among these sorts of NGOs is measured by how many ‘things’ are dispensed.

The community of schools model, however, is a hybrid of the two. Martha's vision was to connect the five secondary schools in Cato Manor so that they could share resources, ideas, solutions, and experiences. She believed – and still does – that a coordinated attempt to channel the diversity of the five schools would help strengthen and build the Cato Manor community as a whole. Although these schools are all fairly close in proximity to each other, very little interaction was occurring between their management and staff. 'Community is like a lightening spark,' Martha told me, 'Community can...grow. Community...becomes something where you've got all these cross-fertilizing partnerships: people, you know...so it's just different...Even in people's imaginations, when you talk about community, it's like all of a sudden it comes alive.' Martha and Masondo hoped that the newly formed CBO would help link teachers from different schools together so that they could share their frustrations and voice their concerns in a constructive space. Additionally, they hoped to get school administrators involved in USP's decision-making.

Among learners, the community of schools model began working fairly quickly. Two Saturday math sessions were established: one in Wiggins Secondary and one in Umkhumbane Secondary. Mayville, Bonela, and Wiggins learners went to Wiggins. Chesterville and Umkhumbane learners went to Umkhumbane. Learners began to make friends and share learning experiences with peers from different schools and communities – something that had never really happened before. Christina Munnik, an American and assistant director of USP, told me that the community of schools model seems to 'allow development to happen from within' the schools. Instead of implementing programs for the sake of using funding or introducing a Western-style strategy, USP began by engaging teachers in developing the curriculum, providing feedback, and helping in the management of the organization. USP's programmatic design follows Lewis and

Kanji's (2009) framework for 'participatory development' in that educators and administrators from within the schools have become key players in the CBO's success (72). In sharp contrast, but perhaps not surprising, Christina told me that she feels many NGOs have been misguided in their attempts to create meaningful progress in Cato Manor:

If you study development, that's one of the biggest – not necessarily failings, they do good work – but...it's fraught with challenges. So, a lot of times people come in, drop something and leave, and the people [in the community] don't necessarily know what to do with it.

Schuller's (2012) work – aptly named *Killing with Kindness* – in post-earthquake Haiti explores how many NGOs gathered on the small island nation to implement programming using a top-to-bottom approach without consulting local community members or Haitian officials. In an example of just how absurd development efforts were, Schuller recalls how one such organization, *Sove Lavi*, held a conference for Haitian women on HIV/AIDS and domestic violence. The conference was viewed differently by various stakeholders involved in its planning and implementation: the NGO, and likely the media, saw the conference itself as a tangible success while those on the ground – displaced women suffering from HIV/AIDS – saw the conference as a waste of time and resources because they had not been part of the planning process and felt as though they had learned nothing (Schuller, 62). Schuller elaborates that such program implementation often confuses aid recipients who do not really know what to do with the services being provided: 'projects seemed to appear from out of nowhere, not having arisen from a discussion of problems or priorities' (71).

Christina signed on to work for USP precisely because its mission was different. Instead of running with their own agenda, she saw that Martha was interested in directing resources using a bottom-up strategy by 'coming in and listening first and foremost rather than talking.' The focus on mathematics and science education stemmed from Masondo's vision. 'That was



something that the schools themselves wanted from us,' Christina reflected, 'and...Martha said: "Okay, this...is your highest priority so this is our highest priority.'" USP's approach is different than examples in Haiti provided by Schuller that sought a 'client-patron' system where the population was provided with a service on which they had no input (Schuller, 59).

Organizationally, Martha is often faced with the difficulties of working in Cato Manor. 'Communication isn't easy,' she told me. Emails are almost unheard of. Documents and paperwork must be hand delivered to each of the five schools every day, which makes planning cumbersome. A great deal of time is spent driving from school to school. Few teachers have access to a printer and even less have their own laptop computers. Many of the schools only have a handful of computers that are used by administrators. Christina was often frustrated with how schools would abruptly change their timetables and schedules. Bell schedules for class periods would fluctuate from day-to-day and week-to-week:

It could be – there could be no rhyme or reason. Like the principal's mother-in-law died and everybody's going to the funeral. It's like it's – sometimes the students don't know what's going on. Um, it makes it hard...even when you put out plans in place, you have to be adaptable. You have to be flexible to work in this environment.

All of these problems are specific to communities like Cato Manor. During a visit to Durban Girls' College (DGC) – a well-to-do private school in the posh community of Morningside – I was struck by the differences I saw. DGC and its meticulously kept lawns and gardens had a swimming pool, an indoor fitness center, a large book-filled library (nonexistent in Cato Manor), an art gallery, and its own marketing executive who was quick to inform visitors that one hundred percent of DGC matrics pass their exams and one hundred percent of DGC matrics go on to attend university. DGC is just fifteen minutes down the highway from Cato, but truly a world away.

Today, USP's goals remain mostly the same. The CBO continues to offer Saturday mathematics courses at both Wiggins and Umkhumbane Secondary Schools. USP also provides outside-of-the-classroom opportunities for students to experience hands-on science practicums and develop their own experimental projects through participation in a regional science expo competition – both of which they would not otherwise have access to. These programs are offered with the hope that students will improve their math and science exams scores enough to apply to and gain admittance to a tertiary institution upon graduation. My discussion will now turn to what I perceive to be USP's success in Cato Manor in relation to these goals, and how its presence and programmatic model have changed the community of schools.

### Success and Change

It was unusually hot for a July day in South Africa – sweat was beading on my forehead and it was only mid-morning. Since I had arrived for my first day with USP the month before, this day was at the top of the project's priorities. The African Leadership Academy (ALA) was having its annual reunion event in Durban and had decided to work with USP for its day of community service. ALA is a big deal on the continent. Through bursaries, many of Africa's most promising youth attend this prestigious secondary school based in Johannesburg with the hopes of becoming tomorrow's leaders. Martha was hoping that working with ALA would lead to a fruitful connection – perhaps a generous donor, a new branch in the networking tree, or maybe even a life-changing opportunity for one of USP's learners in Cato. For weeks we had planned the event. We decided to split the ALA volunteers among the five schools. At each school they would participate in a beautification project. At Umkhumbane they would plant flowers, at Wiggins they would collect rubbish on the hill below the school, and so on. Martha and I made trips to the store to get food, drinks, trash-bags, you name it – if it had to do with

pulling weeds, clearing brush, or picking up litter, we were ready. A great deal of USP time and money had been spent on this effort. I called local implement companies looking for donations and was proud to have gotten a mammoth of a weed whacker donated for the day to cut the grass around Mrs. Hari's classroom at Bonela – which was where I was stationed and waiting for the ALA volunteers to arrive. The volunteers arrived nearly an hour late. What I saw as a success in terms of getting our learners exposed to different people with different experiences turned out to be a logistical nightmare. Volunteers at the other schools were apathetic to our planned projects and complained about the heat and the mounting bags of pulled weeds. One of the volunteers accidentally rolled partway down the hill at Wiggins, barely dodging a serious injury. Students did not show up to help at another school. I could not help but think that the ALA volunteer day seemed far away from Masondo's visions of Saturday maths classes. It also made me wonder about the success of the Project in Cato and how success is measured by its different stakeholders – although I was still pleased about acquiring the mammoth of a weed whacker for the day.

The success of USP's programming can be analyzed in a number of different ways. Unless engaged in a 'how many gadgets can we distribute' model, it is often difficult for small CBOs to quantify their success. The same is true for USP. Statistically, USP staff and educators were hard pressed to find data that showed the organization has caused drastic quantifiable change since its inception in 2012. Martha told me that, in terms of whether schools are performing much better in math pass rates, there has been very 'minimal impact on that.' Although, as stated earlier, I am hesitant to use data in a qualitative-based case study to support notions of success, Martha stated that she would declare programmatic success if a substantial number of grade ten learners who had passed through USP's Saturday math program sustained

pass rates of fifty percent or higher in following years. Likewise, Christina reflected that USP has been successful, but with ‘a ways to go.’ Many teachers claimed that pass rates have in fact improved at their schools because of USP. One teacher made a somewhat doubtful claim that one hundred percent of his school’s science students were now passing their exams. Mrs. Thiye, the principal at Wiggins, said:

Looking at the results...we’re improving in maths and physics, it is because of those interventions. Without that intervention we wouldn’t have moved. Maybe we would be moving by one percent or two percent, but because of the NGO’s intervention we are able to move.

One teacher shared that she thought students were still doing ‘predominately bad,’ but that they seemed to show a keener interest in understanding why math is important. Another teacher shared that although he has seen a ‘bit of improvement,’ ‘it’s nothing to write home about, to be honest.’ Given the fast paced environment in which USP operates, it has been difficult for Martha and her staff to calculate quantitative success. In an interview, she told me that – in tracking their first cohort of grade ten math program participants at Wiggins Secondary – by the second year of operation, pass rates were in the upper fifty percent range with twenty-two percent earning marks of over fifty percent. This is, of course, a far cry from the numbers Masondo saw when he arrived at Wiggins in 2008. Still, quantifiable success is difficult to keep track of in a community where many different NGOs come and go. One principal told me that he was unsure how successful USP has been because progress at his school could come from the contributions of other NGOs as well. A maths teacher with nearly thirty years of classroom experience declared that his students must be learning something from USP’s work when he caught one of his students teaching peers in the shaded hallways of Chesterville. He described the encounter:

One of the grade eight learners said...”No sir, I know maths now – more than you do!”

I said...’why do you say so?’

“Eh, sir – they taught us to do maths like this, like this, like this, like this...”

So I could [see] that now this Umkhumbane Project is...really working.

Regardless of how effective USP has been at raising both the quantity and quality of pass rates, Martha insists that the CBO is ‘not a waste of time,’ although she adds that, ‘it could be so much better.’

There are, however, other and perhaps better ways to measure success. I found that most teachers and administrators were quite pleased with the work of USP simply because of the support they provide both in and out of the classroom. Martha emphasized that she believes schools find it ‘reassuring’ to have a ‘partner there that’s at least trying with them, at least really [trying to] understand what they’re up against and is supportive.’ Pulling out an award won by one of his learners and slapping it on the desk during an interview, a deputy principal declared that, ‘Martha has exposed those learners to the outside world of Expos, doing experiments, blah, blah – I can mention so many things.’ He added: ‘She has made a lot of difference to these kids.’ Indeed, participation in the ESKOM Science Expo has been a highly successful initiative for USP. The Expo is an annual event where students from around Durban are invited to enter original scientific experiments for competition against learners from different schools in the region. Through coaching, afterschool work sessions, and financial sponsorship, USP has provided many students with the opportunity to participate. Before USP, participation in this event was unheard of in the five Cato schools. I worked with the 2016 cohort of Expo learners. Their ideas were fascinating and their drive to compete, compelling. One learner decided to conduct a survey related to the safety of illegal electrical hookups in informal settlements. Another built models of rooftop gardens to test their effectiveness at conserving heat. One bright learner tested whether music helped students in his school concentrate better on exams. Still

another surveyed young women in her school to see whether a lack of tampons in her school effected female absenteeism in school during menstruation. The list goes on. For the first time, these students were able to pursue scientific inquiries with the help and support of dedicated and well-resourced teachers and mentors. One of the students I worked with had never used a keyboard before. I type this paper using the same laptop he used to write his research plan and findings. A group of the 2016 cohort went on to compete in the national competition in December. Simply said, these programs are making a positive difference in the lives of Cato learners – most strikingly when tangible success is measured qualitatively.

Through a partnership with UKZN, USP has also provided learners with a mobile science lab that drives around to each school so that they can use volt meters, chemistry lab equipment, and other items their schools lack to conduct actual scientific experiments and finally put classroom theory into practice. Exposure to these types of experiences has, as one teacher put it, led to a ‘change in mentality of students in [their] motivation’ and ‘confidence.’ Moreover, teacher-training sessions – in which teachers learn about curriculum development and problems within the schools that they have previously requested – have proved effective. One teacher said that these resources have allowed him to be more ‘innovative’ in the classroom. It ‘opens up your way of thinking’ about the classroom and learners, he said. Masondo told me that USP has ‘played a very significant role in terms of educators’ development.’ Likewise, a teacher at Chesterville shared that ‘you get motivated’ when you see the time and effort that USP has put into helping learners and educators.

Martha has noticed that the ‘community part’ of the project ‘is really sparking.’ She told me that many teachers from different schools are staying in touch and getting together after school – things that did not happen before USP entered Cato. Christina recalled seeing two

teachers from one school having coffee together at a shop as she was passing through Glenwood. In terms of student success, Christina told me that she believes USP has ‘created real lasting impacts on individuals.’ Many learners in the township ‘don’t have a lot of reason to be optimistic,’ Martha explained. By offering learners opportunities to get together, have fun, and learn something, USP is providing more than, as Martha says, ‘transient fun;’ rather, time spent on Expo projects or in math class are a series of developmental experiences through which friendships form via problem solving and academic challenges. Additionally, teachers expressed that USP programming has been successful at improving learners’ English literacy, enthusiasm in the classroom, and seems to be empowering young girls. All of this is not to say that USP has achieved all of its goals. I tend to agree with Christina’s assessment that the project ‘still has a ways to go.’ A teacher at Mayville expressed that it is unlikely USP will ever provide solutions to all of her school’s problems:

‘They are helping, but eh! We are a big community and you cannot be able to, to provide the help – the 100% help that you can be able, we want. Because even the government, even the government – this is supposed to be done by the government! The department! The government is supposed to do this.’

During a time of drastic educational inequality in South Africa, there is something to be said for success measured both by USP and the schools in its offering opportunities that the government is not able to provide.

The organization has only been in operation in Cato Manor since 2012 and since then its goals have changed drastically. Although still focused primarily on maths and science programming, the nature of Cato’s problems have caused USP to widen its vision. Projects like ALA’s community visit, a history day event honoring the fortieth anniversary of the Soweto uprising, and various other special projects show that USP’s main objectives have veered from the original course. The HHMI grant – which turned out not to be renewable – dried up long

before I arrived in May 2016. Thus, because of some additional financial support, USP's programming capabilities became more flexible than before. Christina noted that the vast needs of the schools have affected the structure of USP, and that the community of schools model 'lends itself to taking on a lot.' I worry that the vast challenges presented by the community's problems and the structure of the community of schools model are opening USP up to future failures without significant financial support and both a realistic and long term strategic plan. Important to this point, Cepek's (2012) study of Randy Borman's CBO in a rural Cofan community of Ecuador showed that the organization's operations were 'ruthlessly contingent' upon '[a]ccess to outside resources' (119). Regardless of how it is measured, programmatic success relies on a steady stream of resources and organizational sustainability.

### Participation and Integration

The wind was whipping gum wrappers and crisp bags around the courtyard of Wiggins as I walked from USP's office in the administrative section of the school back towards the classroom where Expo learners were hard at work creating charts and tables to show the results of their experiments. I passed by one of the classrooms and noticed something I had not seen earlier: Martha was with three or four young women – learners from Wiggins – poking freshly cut flowers into a molded foam centerpiece. 'This is going to look beautiful,' she said to the learners, wearing their gray uniforms despite it being the weekend. Masondo had told us the news earlier in the week – one of the students at Wiggins had died suddenly while playing soccer on the intramural fields below the school. Nobody seemed to know how or why she had died. In fact, in the days prior she had seemed perfectly healthy. Martha had purchased the flowers and supplies so that the deceased girl's friends could make a flower arrangement for the funeral service. I knew she did not use USP money for the expense. It came out of her pocket. Just



weeks earlier, Martha and her son visited the family of a grade eleven learner from Mayville who had tragically died after a freak accident in their informal settlement home. I stood beside her a few days later at the memorial service where, with crying eyes after the singing and dancing subsided, she hugged the student's family and teachers. It was clear at these moments of grief and tragedy that Martha felt an attachment to Cato Manor – an investment in the lives of its people. Equally plain was that many Cato residents felt the same about her.

As discussed above, community integration and participation by local actors in the design and implementation of CBO programming are vital to the creation of a bottom-up partnership. Through my observations and interviews, I found that USP has been at least partially successful at sparking participation from educators and community members but that challenges remain moving forward. For example, Martha does not know how to speak isiZulu – the first language of most of Cato's population. At times, lack of fluency in isiZulu has made it challenging to build strong relationships with teachers in the schools. Christina reflected that it is often difficult to get the 'full story from people because they can't communicate fully and I can't communicate fully.' Christina, however, speaks a great deal of the language and was given a Zulu name by learners during a Fulbright fellowship the year before in a different township of Durban: *Sbongile*, which means 'we are grateful.' Most Zulu teachers and learners simply called her Sbo. During a semester abroad in South Africa, I received the Zulu name *Themba*, which means 'hope.' Most of the learners I worked with called me that name instead of Anthony – in fact I am sure that many of them had no idea what my English name was. Having a Zulu name and being able to greet and ask basic questions in the language certainly made it easier to build relationships within the schools.

Christina felt as though USP has been quite successful at building up ‘credibility’ with the organization’s school partners:

...getting ourselves ingrained in the schools has been a long journey, but we’re at a point now where we’re fully ingrained. We have a lot of leeway. We have a lot of trust built up with the schools, and that is worth – that is huge.

This trust and comfort could be seen in the daily interactions that USP staff had with teachers, administrators, and students alike. Teacher often joked with Martha and Christina and many divulged details about their personal lives, such as they had an aching knee or what their plans were for the weekend. Martha herself has developed mutual respect with many educators. One teacher from Mayville told me that she was stunned that Martha went to visit a deceased learner’s family in a nearby informal settlement because other white people would have been too afraid to go there. Martha believes that her race and nationality have been helpful in integrating into the community: ‘People expect me to be different. So, if they think it’s weird that I’m white and I’m there, maybe they just think: “well, that’s just the way Americans are.”’ However, neither Martha nor Christina live in Cato Manor. Martha lives in the rather opulent neighborhood of Glenwood – just over the ridge from Cato. She has found, however, that her work with USP has created problems in terms of integrating into white South African social circles more than it has in the township. Few parents of her children’s peers understand what Martha is actually doing in Cato Manor. While problematic in many respects, this should not appear surprising given South Africa’s history of poor race relations and racial inequality. Regarding interactions with her white South African friends, Martha said: ‘They’ll say: “Oh, how’s it going. That, that’s so nice that you’re doing that.” But...not one of them has ever wanted to come and see.’

Students seemed particularly comfortable and even happy to see USP staff when they made visits to the schools. I would often hear ‘*Themba! Themba! Over here!*’ being yelled over

the roar of break period by learners from our math class or Expo program. On my last day with the program in August, learners made cards and wrote tributes to me. One learner wrote, ‘you mean a lot to us...I am very [grateful] having [you] with me and also helping us...you mean a lot.’ Two learners gave me a five Rand coin to remember them by. After only ten weeks, I felt as though I had been accepted into some aspects of the school community. Martha stressed that not all integration has been a positive good. She worries that USP’s presence in the schools has become ‘a little bit routine’ in the eyes of some administrators. Although Martha does not yearn for recognition, she is frustrated that these individuals either do not appreciate USP’s role, or that it does not register in some people’s minds that USP is benefiting their school in some way. Regardless, Martha is happy about how, through its size and programming, USP has become ‘responsive’ to its community through the partnerships it has cultivated over its five years of existence.

It is clear that USP has been successful in many ways related to creating opportunities for participation among local stakeholders in Cato Manor. Masondo, after all, was the cofounder of the Project. He currently serves as head of curriculum, a teacher with the Saturday maths program, and a member of the directorship that oversees annual planning. Masondo clearly feels a sense of ownership and pride in relation to USP and its goals. Other teachers lauded USP for its involvement of individuals in the schools and its seeking input from educators. A teacher from Bonela said that he feels as though USP cares about his opinions: ‘If [USP] had introduced something new...[they] always asked us to sit back and assess: is this working? Is it not?’ He also shared that he believes Martha and Christina are professional in their management of USP in that they always talk to the school’s administration before organizing a new event or program. Furthermore, and perhaps most importantly, he said: ‘They [keep] you feeling like you [are] a

part of it.’ An educator from Umkhumbane Secondary said that she does not trust NGOs that come and go from the community or that always push paperwork on teachers. ‘But not all of them are the same, no I can’t say that,’ she told me. USP, she said, ‘make[s] a positive impact. They help us.’

Other teachers are concerned that USP has not sought nearly enough participation from local actors. Regarding the community of schools model, a teacher at Bonela told me:

...this Umkhumbane Project is dealing with five schools in the area. And I think that’s the one thing that I’ve seen...not reach its full potential yet. Uh, the actual networking and the sustainability of how these five schools would work and would manage if Martha suddenly is not there - or [Umkhumbane Schools] Project is now closed down - what happens then?

The same teacher described her embarrassment when the administration congratulated her at a school wide assembly as one of her learners had recently attended the national ESKOM Science Expo competition. She felt as though she had done very little to help the learner and that USP staff had done all of the work. A teacher at Chesterville Secondary remarked that he believes USP should involve more South Africans in its leadership so that ‘when these people from America leave South Africa, they leave someone behind who is going to further their aims and goals.’ These teachers’ observations are concerning. I, too, noticed opportunities in USP’s programming where increased local management would have both made sense and created some level of sustainability for the project’s goals in the future. Although teachers are busy grading exams, attending workshops, or involved in other activities, a few of them expressed frustration that they have not been more involved in the programs benefiting their students. The most accurate method of measuring the success of local participation is to seek out local perspectives in an effort to discern whether USP’s model shadows Mosse’s (2013) framework of a ‘local negotiation of development,’ instead of what Schuller (2012) concluded to be a

counterproductive form of development in Haiti. Although integration has been successful, a great deal of work remains in making participation a more vital part of USP's leadership. These concerns have become increasingly relevant given that, since the end of the HHMI grant, USP's long-term financial security remains uncertain at best.

### Future of a Community of Schools

With both hands cradling her cup of tea, Martha – wrapped in a blanket as the cool evening air filled her dining room in Glenwood – said that she believes there is 'so much wealth in community.' The candlelight flickered in her eyes. She repeated one of her favorite sayings: 'If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.' We had just concluded a two-hour interview where she discussed the future of a community of schools. It was August and I was beginning to wrap up my time in Cato Manor. There were many goodbyes to be said to the teachers and principals who had given me some of their precious time to talk about their community, lives, and schools. Christina had recently announced that she had accepted a position as a math resource teacher at a secondary school in another neighborhood of Durban. Her time as assistant director of USP had come to an end. The daunting problem of finding funding had made Martha increasingly busy in the last few weeks as she applied for grants and wrote proposals. All of this together with what I had heard from educators in the schools about sustainability and creating more partnerships made me curious about USP's next chapter in Cato Manor.

My interviews with teachers and administrators made one thing quite certain: they were concerned about USP's uncertain future. Many teachers close to the heart of USP, including Masondo, understood the tentative nature of funding and the vulnerabilities that CBOs face. 'It would be a great loss to lose a project of this nature,' Masondo told me. He did not have the time

to step into Martha's role if she had to leave and was worried that schools in Cato would go back to where they had been before if USP closed down. When asked what would happen if USP left, a teacher at Mayville echoed Masondo's fears: 'A lot of problems, eh? A lot of problems.' 'We'll have nowhere to run to,' she bluntly concluded. If USP remains, some teachers offered suggestions for how it might focus on different areas of need. As the Department of Education appears increasingly overwhelmed in its handling of township schools, one teacher remarked that he would like to see USP expand its programming into all subjects and disciplines – an unrealistic expectation given the lack of funding and small staff size. The very aspects of USP that have proved helpful to its successfully countering traditional development schemes – smallness, integration, participation, and flexibility – also appear to be its greatest weaknesses.

Martha has concerns about the program's sustainability as well, and admitted that it has become dependent on one person: Martha Bishai. In fact, Martha's name has become synonymous with USP in the schools. Cepek's (2012) work with Randy Borman points to a similar problem: strong, charismatic CBO leadership can be both a positive good and a threat to sustainability. Cepek writes:

[Borman] woke up early each morning to cook breakfast for the Cofan schoolchildren, and he spent many of his evenings and weekends helping the students with homework. In general, Borman feels that his work as [CBO] director is all-consuming in terms of the time, energy, and focus it demands (118).

From early mornings eating jellied toast on the drive to Wiggins to late nights dropping chess tournament participants off at their homes, Martha's life, like Borman's, has become consumed by the day-to-day operations and worries of running the CBO. Given Martha's constant presence in the schools and her seemingly bottomless amounts of energy, it was unclear if educators from schools like Chesterville and Mayville understood that USP was created as a partnership between Martha and Masando, and not just a Martha enterprise. In a discussion on whether the program

would be able to sustain itself moving forward, Martha was quite frank in that she did not believe the program would be able to continue as it has for the last five years if she decided to leave. Her realistic reflexivity here does not point to a failure of the program; rather, it underscores a challenge that CBOs such as USP face in operating in places like Cato Manor. There is a reason why Masondo sent a plea for help to CASME when he first came to Wiggins Secondary: he had neither the time nor the resources to do the work that USP has taken on since 2012. The nature of township schools makes it difficult for educators to roll up their sleeves and put in more hours after the last school bell rings in the afternoon. Organizations like USP provide much-needed support, extra hands and ears, and a means by which to add an extra day or two of programming to the curriculum, although, as Cepek writes of Borman, the work of these organizations in ‘[c]onceptualizing, funding, and operationalizing projects is tiresome and frustrating’ (120). Although teachers and principals should certainly play a role in managing organizations like USP, perhaps other community partners are needed to help staff and support small community based organizations in an effort to create sustainability and more opportunities for participation.

In our interview, Martha relayed that the worst case scenario for her would indeed be that she would pack her bags and go home knowing that, in the end, her family had all moved back to the United States and that the project had become too expansive without an adequate financial foundation. Indeed, she reflected that a lack of money was not allowing the community of schools to develop as she had envisioned. Martha emphasized that, ideally, the project needed to develop a donor base, a capital endowment, and hire a fulltime staff member to manage the financial aspects of USP. ‘There are some days,’ she told me, ‘when I just think this is...I need to give up.’ However, Martha said she would not be happy with such an outcome:

[I want to make] it so that it's not just a here today, gone tomorrow, you know, that was nice while it lasted, but it's all gone. So, the strategy for that is this, what I've talked about already, which is making a lot of people care about this project.

At the very least, Martha hoped that, if the worst-case scenario unfolded, aspects of the program would live on through partnerships that USP has built in Durban. The AHEAD program, a key aspect of USP's programming that advises students as they apply for university and seek bursaries, was part of the Project she hoped could survive without the organization. Likewise, she believed that affiliations USP has established with UKZN could continue to provide USP's goals of academic and social upliftment in the schools. Her dream, however, would be to secure enough funding for USP to manage its math programming through the end of 2017 while she looked for an institution in the United States that would be interested in hiring her as a member of the faculty and using USP as a site for 'testing the effectiveness of education interventions,' and exploring how USP 'fits into the overall education NGO landscape...and how [that can] inform broader inquiry into the respective roles of public, private, and nonprofit actors in achieving the goal of educational access and equity for economically and culturally marginalized communities.' Martha hopes that an institutional affiliation could create sustainability and allow USP to grow in the future. 'I have no doubt I could make it work,' she said.

Although vitally important, the future of Cato Manor's community of schools relies on more than just funding. The eventual goal of USP's model is to create enough social upliftment within the five schools that the entire community might begin to change. In essence, the work of USP and other such CBOs amounts to a social movement of sorts. In a guide on creating change in schools produced by Harvard's Family Research Project, Lopez (2003) writes regarding the role of parents:



To develop knowledge and skills, parent leaders participate in trainings, mentoring sessions, small group meetings, and public actions. From these experiences parents and community members expand their understanding of educational matters (3).

Similarly, Robins and Fleisch (2016) use an NGO in Cape Town, called Equal Education, as a case study to show how education-based NGOs can create spaces in township communities for young people to become engaged in community organizing and creating social change. They write that involvement in this organization:

...shifted [learners'] political consciousness, which had previously been confined to competition between high schools over soccer teams and uniforms, to realizing that the problems faced at one school were in fact problems faced by all schools in working-class communities (159).

Both of these examples underscore the profound notion that change and social upliftment can be put into motion when a community comes together as a whole to face its challenges. Indeed, people in Cato Manor shared similar sentiments. In line with Ferguson and Escobar, Mrs. Hari emphasized that 'more involvement of the local population' would likely help sustain and build upon the change USP had created. Mrs. Thipe said that parents must become involved and aware of the problems that her school is facing: 'it should be a problem that is owned by every South African. If there is a problem in school, it should be owned by all of us...' In order for widespread social change to occur in Cato Manor, parents, teachers, community members, learners, businesses, local policy makers, religious organizations, and CBOs must all begin engaging in serious dialogue regarding how education in the community can change for the better from the inside out. Indeed, education is an issue that means a great deal to more than just CBO staff and educators. James (2014) shows that South African families believe that one of the most important tools with which to overcome socioeconomic inequality and become upwardly mobile is attaining a quality education. Development, thus, should not be focused on what NGOs can do for communities, but, rather, on what communities partnered with NGOs and other

organizations can do to create as much constructive progress as possible within township schools. It is unlikely, however, that USP, its staff, or the schools themselves will be able to counter all of the problems Cato Manor Township faces. Teachers and administrators interviewed expressed that Cato Manor's problems are likely shared by every township in South Africa. Sweeping social change that addresses problems stemming from socioeconomic inequality – like vandalism, child-headed households, and a crumbling school infrastructure – will only be possible if the South African government and elite forge transformative policies that seek to reverse the nation's growing inequality and counter new forms of Western influence therein.

## **Conclusion**

Using Ferguson and Escobar as a theoretical foundation, this paper has broadly been concerned with turning the attention of anthropological discourses regarding development towards a more robust discussions of NGOs and CBOs based on reflexive and descriptive ethnographic case studies, as called for by Fisher, Gardner and Lewis, and Mosse. Recent work done by researchers – such as Lewis and Kanji – has shown that small community based organizations can be effective vehicles by which insider and outsider partnerships can be used to progress on issues like math and science education in all different types of communities. Through participation, some CBOs allow local actors to become key players in organizational leadership and programmatic implementation as well as efforts to sustain the constructive work of NGOs over time. Moreover, integration within the community helps organizations develop good working relationships with their host community partners. Comparative case studies of small CBOs, such as those of Cepek and Schuller, show that participation and integration are complex strategies that take a great deal of time and resources to implement. Cepek's book on

Borman's work in Ecuador highlights the many headaches that are attached to working for a small NGO including time management, dealing with disinterested community members, and working through bureaucratic red tape that CBOs often encounter in developing nations.

Schuller's work highlights examples of NGOs in post-earthquake Haiti that have been wittingly counterproductive at producing bottom-up solutions for the many problems that continue to plague Haitians as NGOs focus on their own marketing strategies and media exposure. Specific to this case study, however, the literature shows that the post-apartheid South African system of education continues to grapple with the burdens of racialized socioeconomic inequality that negatively and disproportionately affects black learners more than any other race group. Simply said, school communities in black South African townships have become spaces of interest for aid organizations focused on education.

The literature points to the focus of this study: how are small, education based CBOs working in black South African townships defying traditional notions of development and reimagining bottom-to-top development? My own work in Cato Manor Township has shown that ethnographic case studies are an effective means by which to better understand CBOs, the work they do, and the communities in which they operate. Using the Umkhumbane Schools Project as an example, I found that CBOs are quite capable of successfully integrating within their host communities rather quickly and creating moderate to high levels of local participation within a few year of operation. Many issues regarding CBO structure make it quite difficult for organizations like USP to reach their full potential for programming and change including financial insecurity, small staff size, a wide array of community problems, and difficulties measuring success and – perhaps more importantly – deciding what, exactly, success means. More work must be done with township-based education NGOs to determine whether my

observations are singular or speak to a broader yet complicated set of NGO-community social relations in South Africa. Regardless, USP's community of schools model appears to be aware of and well versed in the perils of neoliberal development – ideas and hegemonic practices they have tried their best to avoid. Worth noting is that, as aforementioned, USP is an American-South African led venture. It would be advantageous to the field to explore how non-Western CBOs from countries without a strong colonial tradition approach development as nations such as China have substantially increased their investment in sub-Saharan Africa, and as many domestic CBOs have opened up shop on the continent.

With all of this in mind, I am reminded of Gow's (2008) reflection on the interactions between 'local knowledge' and modernity and between the 'inside' and the 'outside':

If arguments in favor of...countermodernity are to be taken seriously, then such knowledge encounters in the field of development, as in planning and implementation, offer potentially fruitful areas of investigation (13).

Indeed, further anthropological case studies are important as the discipline navigates the fine line between critique and a more constructive public discourse on the many issues that socioeconomic inequality has perpetuated in an increasingly globalized community. Intellectual curiosity and reflexivity in our work can be helpful tools in creating a broad literature regarding effective NGO practices and community based social movements. It is clear that anthropology can play an important role in helping different groups of people work together to view development or counterdevelopment through a clearer emic lens.

I end with a final reflection on USP's role in development. USP's work on mathematics and science education in Cato Manor Township is undeniably important. In a recent email, Martha informed me that two learners whom the organization has worked with for many years were recently accepted into the University of Cape Town and University of the Witwatersrand –

both amongst South Africa's finest tertiary institutions. There is little doubt in my mind that they would not have been accepted to these institutions without the support of USP. These successes are tangible results of USP's efforts. However, as anthropologists we must be conscious of the fact that such success, and indeed the work of USP in general, is based upon Western measures of progress introduced to South Africa during the colonial era. In a parallel example, Comaroff (1996) shows how Western styles of clothing created new social norms and standards during the colonial era as a 'British effort to incorporate African communities into a global economy of goods and signs' that led to 'the particular features of the culture of industrial capitalism: an enduring impetus toward competitive accumulation, symbolic innovation, and social distinction' (19, 28). Likewise, I worry that Western aid organizations' focus on math and science literacy, pursuing tertiary education, and attaining a well-paying job tap into the same colonial worldview. This is the great irony of post-colonial progress in places like Cato Manor. The Zulu people of Kwa-Zulu Natal did not need mathematics or a university degree to live comfortable lives in the pre-colonial era; however, it is clear that colonialism and subsequent development imaginaries have fundamentally altered their understanding of what it means to be successful in an increasingly globalized society.

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