

Study Circles: The Kenyan Interpretation

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Abstract

This article presents the findings from a qualitative study on a community self-help group in Western Kenya utilizing the study circle model promoted by a Swedish non-governmental organization. It focuses on interaction between the Scandinavian model of study circles and the Kenyan tradition and practices of chama, i.e. informal cooperative societies, often women groups, operating as merry go rounds. By in depth analysis of a specific case of introduction and interpretation of the study circle in an Eastern African context our ambition is to contribute knowledge about the impact of the extensive spread of Scandinavian popular education ideas in the region.

Keywords: agency, chama, knowledge traditions, popular education, transnational spread of educational ideas, study circles

Introduction

This article presents the findings from a qualitative study on a community self-help group in Western Kenya utilizing the study circle model promoted by a Swedish non-governmental organization. It focuses on interaction between the Scandinavian model of study circles and the Kenyan tradition and practices of *chama*, i.e. informal cooperative societies, often women groups, operating as merry go rounds. By in depth analysis of a specific case of introduction and interpretation of the study circle in an Eastern African context our ambition is to contribute knowledge about the impact of the extensive spread of Scandinavian popular education ideas in the region. Since the 1960s Scandinavian popular educators have spread ideas about folk high schools and study circles in the region (Nordvall, 2009). The most obvious example is the Folk Development Colleges in Tanzania, funded by The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), which resulted in more than 50 folk high school-inspired adult education intuitions which are still in operation (Rogers 2013, 2018).

Swedish popular educators involved in the establishment of Folk Development Colleges in Tanzania, claimed that the Nordic tradition of “folkbildning” could be a tool for decolonialization (Norbeck 1985). With its egalitarian structures, oral orientation and roots in popular movements, it was perceived as an alternative to authoritarian educational traditions spread by the former colonizers (Rydström 1996). In a study of the Folk Development Colleges as an example of educational transfer Rogers (2000) find common ideological familiarity between the ideas on adult education of Julius Nyerere (former Tanzanian president and prominent African intellectual), and of Swedish popular education. However, as demonstrated by Dahlstedt & Nordvall (2011), the anti-colonial rhetoric among Swedish popular educators engaged in Tanzania went hand in hand with a formation of Swedish national identity which was constructed in relation to colonial stereotypes of the ‘primordial Other’ and the ‘Enlightened European’. Thus, paradoxical elements could be traced in the Swedish engagement in Tanzania, at least on a discursive level and in relation to identity processes among the Swedish popular educators.

However, in-depth empirical research on the actual practices, i.e. the non-formal educational activities organized in Eastern Africa with support from Swedish aid, and how the ideas of Nordic popular education have been implanted, is missing, though some research indicating the present status of the Folk Development Colleges in Tanzania exists (Rogers 2000; 2013;2018). The influence of Nordic popular education ideas in Kenya is less explored, save for some research done on the implementation of study circles in rural communities in the coastal regions of Kenya as part of a project focusing on introducing Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to enhance member’s economic opportunities (Ater & Hatakkaa 2013; Hatakkaa et al 2020). Hatakkaa et al (2020) conclude that the combination of informal education with democratic and participatory elements, which characterized the study circles, and support in terms of provision of computers, printers and Internet access, led to positive economic outcomes for the participants. By introducing the ICT in combination with an educational approach that was based on the participants’ own interests as articulated in an open and informal setting, the project enhanced learning and agency related to the real needs of the groups, according to the authors. The study circles, the focus for the project, were based on groups that “already existed as community groups” (Hatakkaa et al 2020, 68) that received training in the study circle model as it has been developed in the tradition of Swedish popular education (“folkbildning”) (Ater &

Hatakka 2013, 84-85). However, although a link between the new study circles and preexisting local social structure is implied by Hatakka et al (2020) the report does not address the interaction or dynamic here between, i.e. how the study circle idea is translated and adapted to the social order of the already existing community group. Therein lies the gap that we address in this paper.

Besides relating to, and contributing to, the above-mentioned literature on the spread and adaptation on Scandinavian popular education ideas, this paper also relates to a common theme in literature on comparative education: the spread of educational ideas (Beech 2006, Rappleye 2006). However, unlike most of the research done in this area which focuses on the spread of educational models and program within the formal educational system, our study pays attention to the spread of popular education ideas and practice linked to processes within civil society and non-formal educational settings. When doing research on the global transfer of popular education ideas and institutions rooted in civil society, it is necessary to consider other dynamics than those that characterize the transfer of educational ideas within formal education. When researching the transfer of ideas between the formal education systems, national curricula, nation-state bureaucracies and organizations for international relations need to be studied. On the other hand, when looking at civil society it instead becomes crucial to consider the agency of individual actors, networks and informal and social contexts in which ideas are introduced, interpreted and adapted (Nordvall, 2018).

Inspired by the arguments of neo-institutional researchers such as Czarniawska and Sevón (2005), we argue that globally mobile educational ideas and concepts, such as the study circle, are translated in the local contexts in the sense that they are transferred, transformed, and given a new meaning. Consequently, “a thing moved from one place to another cannot emerge unchanged: to set something in a new place is to construct it anew” (Czarniawska and Sevón 2005, p. 8). When studying the global dissemination of adult education ideas and models of European origin in the African context it is crucial to emphasize both the contingency of the local adaptation processes related to the spread of ideas as well as the presence of global power structures and discourses with origins in the colonial era. The strong presence of a will among Scandinavian actors to show the way for development in countries in the global south, indicates a discourse on international solidarity that contains elements from colonial legacies (Dahlstedt &

Nordvall 2011). Thus the often explicitly anti-colonial intentions expressed by Scandinavian popular educators involved in spreading the study circles and folk high school idea may very well include elements of cultural imperialism as described by Edward Said (1995).

However, instead of presupposing the influence of such cultural imperialist elements, or any other predefined function of the study circle in the studied context, our analytic attention is directed by an interest in the local meanings and social functions of the study circle. More exactly, besides identifying how participants make sense of the study circle idea, we use as an analytic tool Emile Durkheim's functionalism concept which considers all aspects of a society, which is a complex system whose parts work to promote stability, serve a function and are thus indispensable (Crossman, 2020). Any new idea that comes into society is just a part of this complex system that needs to be absorbed and work together with the other parts to promote stability and solidarity. In this case, we explore how study circles as an idea came into the Mazingira collective and was absorbed and used to improve the lives of community members. By doing so, aim to add knowledge about how the aid-supported Nordic non-formal adult education idea of study circles was introduced and implemented in a Western Kenya located community collective or *chama* called Mazingira and how it interacted with local knowledge systems and educational traditions.

Before we introduce the local context and the method of the study, a few words need to be said about the Scandinavia study circle model. In the Scandinavian context a study circle refers to a group of people who meet regularly and study together. It was developed as an educational method in the context of popular movements in the early 1900s and is associated with democratic and egalitarian ideals formulated by movement intellectuals at the time. In contemporary Sweden, study circles is a mass phenomenon, involving a substantial part of the population, organized by civil society based study organizations that receives state subsidies. The study circles cover a wide range of topic, from cultural activities, languages, politics and craft (Larsson & Nordvall, 2010).

The study circle can include various activities and they are used in different ways. However, even if there is variation is great there is a certain 'study circle grammar' (Larsson, 1995) that contains 'rules' such as: There should be no examinations or merits to be gained. Participation should be voluntary and commercial arrangements are prohibited. The study circle should be

open to all, i.e., without requirements of educational background, age, etc. Study circle groups should include somewhere between 3–10 persons and they should meet for 3 hours at minimum three times, or preferably once a week, 10 to 15 times during a term. It needs to have a leader, but it need not be an expert – it could be one of the participants (Larsson & Nordvall 2010). This ‘grammar’ could also be found in the administrative routines that have developed in Sweden, as a way to distribute subsidies to study organizations organizing study circles.

Pastuhov (2018) notes that the study circles, on the one hand, could be defined as adaptable to changing circumstances and the needs and the interests of the participants. On the other hand, definitions could also consist of idealistic perceptions, linking it to ideas about democratic citizenship, which do not necessarily correspond with actual practices. Thus, there is a potential discrepancy between the ideals and the actual practices of study circles in Scandinavia that has been pointed out in previous research.

Our ambition in this paper is not to locate a core meaning of the study circle. Instead, we pay attention to how the study circle idea is presented in the local context. When communicating the tradition of study circles, the Swedish-based NGO We Effect¹ in this case, have both accentuated the Swedish history and tradition of study circles, and elements of its ‘grammar’ in their interpretation of the study circle tradition which they disseminate in region.

Methodology

Chama women groups

This article is an ethnographic study utilizing semi- structured interview and observation schedules as data capture tools. It is set in rural Western Kenya among a, largely, farming community where a Swedish NGO – We Effect – has promoted the use of study circles as part of their development aid focusing on environment conservation. It traces the activities of We

¹ We Effect was founded in Sweden in 1958. Much of their work is based on cooperative organization and they argue that cooperatives were a fundamental part of the modernization of Sweden. In line with that idea, they support cooperatives and other democratic membership organizations in developing countries. (<https://weeffect.se/om-oss/>, visited 2021-05-01.)

Effect, Miti mingi and Mazingara in a linear manner. Among the development activities that We effect sponsors in Kenya is environmental regeneration for which Miti mingi, a leading national umbrella farm forestry organization promotes which in turn supports Mazingira local community collective or chama in Western Kenya. Mazingira collective is a Chama (Swahili for association) or Merry-go-rounds in English are made up of people with a shared vision and, in most cases, needs. Traditionally, members of Chama were female in line with the strict gender roles and responsibilities (men ensured survival of the family and home while women offered support in terms of advice, and picked up home chores) that prevailed (Sifuna, 1990; Karani, 1987; Srujana, 1996 and Staudt, 1987) but this is changing as men have started registering into these groups (Njoroge, 2015). Indeed, the strict gender lines were even further enforced and reinterpreted by the colonial masters who first gave men relevant training and paid employment in colonial posts they set up in the new Kenya colony and elevated men's status in the community through giving them the privilege of having money to use (Srujana, 1996, Staudt, 1987). However, the current Chama bear a resemblance of these traditional collectives of women as far as they are informal groups of people converging to save and borrow pooled resources in a rotational manner as well as tap on important networks when faced with different kinds of problems (Kosiley, 2014). Since the Chama meet fairly regularly, they offer a community-based structure that is useful for community capacity-building activities such as one conducted by International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES, 2017) when they conducted a women empowerment and community education program before the Kenyan general elections of 2017.

Participants

The participants on this project were the Mazingira collective members and Miti Mingi members and thus were purposefully sampled. The Mazingira collective has over 50 members; because of there are both active and inactive members, it is not easy to put an exact figure to it. In total 4 people were interviewed once at Miti Mingi and 5 people were interviewed once in Mazingira. Of the group at Mazingira, 3 were interviewed twice and 2 got a home visits in which ethnographic observations were conducted in their homes. Pre-data collection activities included a document search to locate local development projects that received Swedish Aid; both financial and, technical. Later the selected participants took semi-structured interviews and were subjected to an observation schedule.

Data collection tools

The semi-structured interviews for Miti Mingi members sought to understand their relationship with We-effect. The interviews aimed to understand the nature, and quantity of support Miti Mingi received from We effect. It was also important that the interviews explored the details of the training received on study circles from We effect and the same training later given, in turn, to Mazingira members. The semi-structured interviews for Mazingira members sought the details of the training received from Miti mingi on study circles and, particularly important, the way the Mazingira members interpreted this training in their day to day activities of improving their community. For instance, what was the value they placed on this training? How were they utilizing study circles as a tool for improving their life in the community, how were they interpreting it and including it in the arsenal of knowledge that they already had and were using for their good? These individual interviews also highlighted the participants view on challenges and opportunities inherent in using study circles as community development tools.

Analysis

The resultant data from this part of the project was analyzed thematically (Patton, 2002). Through thematic discourse analysis, identified themes were linked to the data in an inductive manner. The analysis was based on a background framework of the Functionalism concept which considers all aspects of a society serve a function and are thus indispensable and any new idea that comes into society is just a part of this complex system that needs to be absorbed and work together with the other parts to promote stability and solidarity (Crossman, 2020). We followed a stepped process that begun with reading and re-reading the transcribed interviews and observation notes and coming up with codes. We combined these codes into themes that represented the data, and then examined in detail which themes to report. We choose themes worthy of reporting as per our aims and research questions.

Results

This report is confined to the interpretation made of study circles by Mazingira collective members from when they were trained to how they make use of the circles in their daily lives. Some findings are included of the perceptions and processes that Miti Mingi used in preparing and training Mazingira members. From the observations and interviews with Mazingira

members, it was clear that the study circles had been re-interpreted and adapted for use in practical ways those in instances differed from the intentions and training content offered by the trainers from Miti Mingi. The findings also showed that there was perceptible difference in the way Mazingira members used and viewed study circles according to their levels of education. The more educated members used the circles as alternatives for knowledge and even consulted other information platforms such as the internet to increase their knowledge about economic activities such as fruit farming and later, even, taught other members what they had learnt.

Study circles according to Miti mingi umbrella organization of farm foresters in Kenya

Miti Mingi, having a focus on increasing the tree cover in the country to benefit farmers, started in 2013. Since it depended on donor funding (We effect being one such donor) had the obligation to uphold the donor guidelines when training affiliates. These guidelines included ensuring that they maintained a 37% women involvement in any training or development activity they undertook using We effect funds.

Our challenge has been to get more women in residential training (since they may not be able to leave their homes as are care-givers) and so we are moving towards more non-residential trainings in the community. We have not addressed this issue 100% but we are still doing it. We have started engaging men to spread our gender equality message by training them of the importance of letting the women attend training and ensuring that the women are represented in all trainings. We have partnered with an organization called “men for gender equality”. Men here are trained to talk to other men to allow their wives to come for trainings. (Miti Mingi CEO)

According to Miti mingi trainer, his understanding of a SC activities should not necessarily include politics but most important should include social issues that impact their lives. He said:

...in the context of Miti mingi I can say SC is an arrangement where farmers organize a forum where they are able to learn from each other...not more than 10...they can also bring in someone with expertise in a certain subject that they want to learn about. They then learn in their context. (Trainer-Miti Mingi)

Asked whether SC is for specifically for farmers, the trainer said that for them at Miti Mingi it was because the association worked among farmers. But he personally acknowledged that it could be useful in any other context away from farming though it was beyond his mandate to explore these other uses of study circles using the donor funds they had.

The trainer at Miti mingi, after going through SC training thought it was an important tool immediately useful for local farmers given the current gaps created by inadequate resource allocation to support activities among farming communities. In answer to the question about his initial thoughts on what a SC was before he was trained:

I read the history of SC and how it brought in a lot of social change in Sweden at a time when not many people were formally educated and they did not know their rights...and SC was used to disseminate information to them and they became empowered... and I compared that to where we are at this time when (farm) extension services are lacking...it is not easy to get someone to give them (farmers) technical knowledge on different things...personally I thought that this is something that if it can be well implemented and embraced by (agricultural) producers then it can be a powerful tool to disseminate information and knowledge and empower farmers to learn from each other and improve their work. It can be a very powerful approach (to empowering farmers) given the gaps we have in this country in the field of extension. (Miti Mingi trainer)

Prompted, this trainer went ahead to elaborate what he meant by ‘...if well implemented’ he noted that although the farmers received the idea well and are enthusiastic in taking part in SC, due to resource constraints Miti mingi could not afford to keep a staff at all of their affiliate association sites to monitor how the farmers trained on using SC picked up its use to solve the problems they experienced. At times when farmers needed some information materials, they relayed that information to Miti mingi and staff there downloaded that material off the web or liaised with other partners to have the material sent to the farmers. The farmers needed to have someone in place to provide material they needed.

Mazingira: Chama meets and interprets study circles

Miti Mingi staff trained their Western Kenya affiliate Mazingira members on developing and using SC in 2016. Membership of SC in Mazingira is drawn from among the local farmers; most of whom are already members of the local Chama groups some of which, at this time, have both men and women. Chama offered SC a structure on which to enter the community of Mazingira members because not only did Chama offer an already formed group of people familiar with each other and with a shared goal but also it offered a group ready to learn given that they already practiced educational activities.

The Miti Mingi trainers used the training material sourced from We Effect almost in its entirety. The important difference here is that the language of training was a mixture of English and Kiswahili (Kenya's National language which almost all Kenyan spoke).

At this level, although it was still important that farmer activity sponsored by We Effect have as many women as it can recruit, the trainers did not lay it down as a strict percentage of participation. This is because they opted for activities that already had almost 100% women participation. Activities such as tree nursery development and food security activities attracted many more women than men and at time no men at all. In forming a new study circle when an old one resolves and womens' options Mazingira CEO says:

... If they come in with a need left over from their original group, they will be trying to see how this group solves the issues through seeing who has been trying to do the activity in question. For example the women saw that their main challenge at home was getting food (food security) they formed a SC for food. They prioritized food. They meet every Monday at 8 am and contribute 300Ksh for buying food and giving one member per week.

The Mazingira CEO further elaborated the rules of conduct for SC members. In addition to the general rules about SC presented by We Effect, discussed earlier, local affiliates added their rules to ensure good discipline in SCs. These rules included; members who were late for SC sessions paid a fine of one shilling per minute up to a maximum of 20 shillings or about 2 US dollars. Such a rule ensured member punctuality and was not necessarily viewed as a practice that made SC membership undesirable. Members who totally missed an SC session would be fined 200 Kenyan shillings (which could purchase at least 3 kilograms of Maize flour; a staple of Kenya)

so as to be briefed on the content of the missed session. Further members contributed at least 50 Kenyan shillings so they could pool this cash and buy refreshments during the meetings that sometimes went over meal times. These rules ensured members took SC activities seriously. Asked why the punitive rules (paying for lateness and no-show for circle meetings) Mazingira CEO explained:

Members pay so they are briefed on what went on in the meeting when they were away. This is because all along they have been part of the process then they missed so should pay something small...like 200 hundred (Kenya shillings) as lesson cost them (others) a lot. They add a day extra for those who have not attended the full lessons.

Participant's take on their study circle activities

Farming

The Mazingira membership is made up of farmers, most of whom practice mixed farming by keeping animals and crops. These people have learnt farming from various backgrounds such as from their parents as a member says of the skills she learnt from the father:

Most of the times I was taking with my father, and he used to get a lot of milk, and he could sometimes ask me to carry some of the milk. He told me that he learnt all of this from where he came from. He comes from Central Kenya. So when he came here he decided to practice what he had learned from Central Kenya and bought one cow. We started milking it after sometimes. (J.Mazingira member).

Some members learnt from neighbors and especially fellow women were considered eager to share their knowledge to improve other people' lives:

When I moved here I realized that neighbors were not buying vegetables and also chicken. So I challenged myself also not to buy. So I decided to plant because you can see how neighbors have done it and they can explain to you where you do not understand. Especially planting carrots and cabbages, you know us from our homes we don't have that knowledge. (L.Mazingira member).

The respondent L. further gave the reason for engaging with women in the community is that they are available to help:

You go to the shamba and probably after seeing her good vegetables you can ask, how did you prepare your vegetables? Then she may take the seeds to show you. So she will demonstrate how it is done as you observe. So again when am doing it at my place I call the person who taught me and ask, am I doing the right thing? What did you say we do here? (L Mazingira member)

To stress the practical usefulness of SC a member states that when SC came to her association, she realized its usefulness and, together with her group members started using it. The group members are people who already knew each other were able to quickly form an SC focused on a common need they faced.

So study circle has allowed us to get information because when you say your dairy cow is giving 8 liters and his/hers is giving 2 liters you can learn from each other. Study circle has made us get a lot of information. Even it has gotten to the level of study circles for food away from farming, new ideas are coming up. Even others were suggesting having a study circle for paying school fees. You see, so people have embraced it and they are coming up with many good news ideas. (Mazingira J SC member).

For Mazingira members who were interviewed, their relationship with new knowledge they get from study circles has involved including what they consider important for their lives and leaving out what does not work for them. Mazingira member L describes how she has improved. Although Mazingira member L was involved in activities such as raising chicken before using the knowledge she picked from her parents and other relatives she has come in contact with, she learnt how to better raise them from teachings at SC. She had not taken her chicken rearing activities seriously enough so had not been keen to learn many details about that process from her contacts. Being involved in SC about chicken rearing offered her opportunity to focus more on this activity and a community of peers to which she deferred to for supervision as she improved her chicken raising activity. Including what she knew about feeding and giving shelter to chicken with new knowledge about better care from the SC made her a better farmer. She says:

Before I used to give my chicken 'kitchen waste' (left over food). I realized that when chicken eat salt they get sickly and die. Kitchen waste has a lot of dirt which is poisonous for chicken. Chicken also need to be kept in clean surroundings. Chicken need your care just the way you care for yourself. (L. Mazingira member)

L also learnt from the SC that in order to make more profit out of chicken rearing as a business, she needed to invest both time and resources in order to get returns. This involved buying feed, ensuring the chicken are clean and healthy. This meant that if she continued with her way of raising chicken then she would not do it as an income generating business.

Indeed, during the third visit in which ethnographic observations were done in her home, it was apparent that she has embraced the learnings from SC on raising chicken. She has a barn with different sections for layers and chicken for meat. She had also invested in chicken feed that was prepared by a fellow SC member who also raised chicken.

For Mazingira member J, a fruit farmer being involved in an SC has spurred his appetite for learning which has seen him seek information from sources such as the internet, fruit markets and other farmers. He had worked as a semi-skilled laborer learning on the job as a ship builder, maintenance staff at a gold mine in Tanzania and later as a driver for the cotton industry in Tanzania. In 2003 he came back home and decided to get a means of raising his family and farming is what leant itself easily for this. This is because his father raised sheep, planted flowers and loved trees. His father was among the first indigenous Kenyan to be trained at the renowned agricultural college named after the English Lord Egerton.

I remember when I was in class three and we were living in Zambia, my father was a manger in one of the farms and he had allocated us children plots in the farm to plant tomatoes and sell to the other workers in the farm to supplement our pocket money. (J. Mazingira member).

After being raised in a farming family, he felt “at home” with it. However, his land was too small to plant the Kenyan staple maize enough to feed his family and sell surplus to meet his financial obligations. He started farming with Irish potatoes that he found people around there farming but soon realized that when there was a glut he could not make much profit out of selling his harvest. He then ended up planting and selling passion fruit after doing research and realizing that it

could fetch more money. He ignored the entire naysayers who wondered if he could feed his family through fruit farming alone.

As time went on he kept on diversifying on the types of fruit he planted according to how much it could fetch him in the market and how suitable his farm was for its growth. He says he was open to learning and trying new things because of his involvement in SC. When we visited his farm he had a variety of fruit plants among them Kiwi, passion fruit, tree tomato, grapes and strawberry. He gets information about taking care of these fruits from many sources including other farmers, internet and experts that he meets at SC meetings.

Discussion

Although the findings supported the Functionalism concept (Crossman, 2020), where a new idea was absorbed into a community and remodeled for the good of community members, they indicated an active interaction with the indigenous knowledge traditions and ways of life. It was apparent that the study circles ideas work to improve Mazingira members' lives in ways that had not even been imagined by the Miti Mingi trainers.

Notable educational and philosophical aspects that came from African indigenous educational philosophy focused on, among other things, an education that prepares and supports people to live successfully in the community (Sifuna, 1990). This role resemble how study circles and folk high schools in Sweden during the early 1900s have been portrayed, in the sense that they involve socio-economic marginalized parts of population in an collective effort to change their social conditions (Arvidson, 1996; Larsson, 2013).

Contemporary ideals and practices of study circles in Sweden are often characterized by high level of horizontal relations and highly individualized motives of participation, and as place where participants often are looking for personal development beyond domestic demands and demands related to working life. In contemporary Sweden the study circles have been described as a space where participants may enact their individual wishes and personal interest, in a welfare state where their basic social needs have already been met (Pastuhov, 2018; Sundgren, 1999).

In contrast, as adapted and practiced in Mazingira, the study circles in Western Kenya focused more on improvement of life of members without unduly flagging some details of hierarchy in the group such as members who got fined for missing meetings, coming in late for sessions, talking while the chair was also talking, even if all this may also be construed as activities that bring order into the group's processes. Mazingira members can be said to be products of the African educational philosophy and way of life with its strict gender and other community structure (Sifuna, 2019 and Karani, 1987) and the colonial education which initially focused on creating a workforce for the colonial administration posts set up all over the country as earlier discussed (Srujana, 1996; Staudt, 1987).

The SC's initial focus of addressing under-development and widespread social and economic inequalities felt in the Swedish society in the wake of the 19th century (SC training materials, 2004) remain largely the same (especially economic inequalities felt in the local Kenyan communities) but the methods of accomplishing this tasks has changed according to needs and context. In the local Kenyan community participating in this project, the SC has become basically a survival tool by local farmers faced with increased land fragmentation, hard economic times and environmental degradation among other characteristics of changing times as experienced by most local communities in Kenya.

Largely, for these participating farmers' group, SC remains just a community development tool with hardly any references to Sweden and Scandinavia origins. This imposed narrative, which seems to be influential on a managerial level in Miti Mingi in some sense may be problematized in as far as cultural imperialism is concerned, fades away when the study circles are put into practice at the grassroot level.

However, although no gospel of superior Swedish or European cultural ideas are spread or picked up at this grassroot level, we can see that the spread of the study circles creates distinctions between chamas. Indeed, to some extent it can be said that the study circles introduced a hierarchy among chama in that the ones supported to start study circles by We-effect and Miti Mingi were higher level compared to other local chama without such support.

Finally, although the chama's version of the study circle differs from many of the ideals linked to study circles in the Scandinavian tradition, this transformation on the other hand, is fully in line with one of the early promoters of study circles in Sweden, Oscar Olsson, who once envisioned

them in the early 1900s – as something that should develop organically and suit users in their differentiated circumstances and contexts. And in addition, as pointed out in previous research on study circles, discrepancy between study ideals and the actual study circles is widespread phenomenon also in the Swedish context.

Conclusions

We explored how the aid-supported Nordic non-formal adult education idea of study circles was introduced and implemented in a Western Kenya located community collective Mazingira and how it interacted with local knowledge systems and educational traditions. Generally, apart from the referent study circles, Mazingira members usurped the essence of the study circles and made it their own through fitting it into their community structures and activities complete with local norms such as meeting rules. They used the study circles in creative ways to improve their lives and that of community members such as for collecting school, fees for their children and satisfying the typical Kenyan thirst for formal education. They used it to procure healthy food for their families and ensure their survival despite the prevailing uncertainties attending their community such as poverty and want. We also found out that study circles as supported by We effect could easily create hierarchies in the community chamas when community members perceived chamas that received this support as of a higher level.

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