



Learning in Communities of Practice: How to Become a Good Citizen in Self-Help Groups in Rural Tanzania

Benta N. Matunga

1 INTRODUCTION

When asked about their motivations for joining local self-help groups in rural Tanzania, members frequently offered two reasons: *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. The exact meaning of these Kiswahili notions are hard to translate in English, but it revolves around the idea of community development which combines the aims of *kujiletea maendeleo*, achieving self-development, and *kusaidiana*, helping each other. In Tanzania, the notion of *maendeleo*, in its different interpretations, has historically connected the goals of the nation and the aspirations of communities (Mercer, 2002). Since independence in 1961, *maendeleo* has been embedded in the famous state-building policies of familyhood and self-reliance, *Ujamaa na Kujitegemea* (Nguyahambi et al., 2020: 73). Even today, the notion is continually used in public discourses to

B. N. Matunga (✉)
University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä, Finland
e-mail: benta.n.matunga@jyu.fi

The University of Dodoma, Dodoma, Tanzania

emphasize the roles and responsibilities both of the state and its citizens. The Tanzania Development Vision 2025 accords high priority to ongoing learning involving the effective transformation of mindsets and culture to promote attitudes of self-development imbued with the spirit of self-reliance at all societal levels (United Republic of Tanzania, 1999: 17). While the history of self-help groups in Tanzania dates back to pre-colonial times (Rodima-Taylor, 2013), in different forms they continue to provide important arenas for citizens' organizing in contemporary Tanzania (Nguyahambi et al., 2020).

Self-help groups are local, often quite informal, civil society organizations that pool their resources to solve the immediate problems of their members (Tesoriero, 2006). Typically, they are small voluntary associations of 10–30 people, mostly women, who come together to address their common problems through mutual help (Fatimayin, 2015; Kilonzo, 2020). Self-help groups can be formed based on shared interests, trade, proximity, agriculture and socio-economic background. These groups meet weekly or monthly, depending on their practices, which include organizing savings, internal lending/borrowing, repayment of loans, planning activities and social bonding. Various studies have linked self-help groups to socio-economic elements and participatory learning (Aikaruwa et al., 2014; Waddell, 2005), and economic empowerment and survival (Alemu et al., 2018; Naik & Rodrigues, 2017). Additionally, they have been seen as satisfying social functions (Aikaruwa et al., 2014) and as arenas in which to build capacities for citizenship engagement in a bottom-up manner, while offering the space to participate, interact and take part in decision-making in everyday activities (Gaventa, 2016; Gaventa & Barrett, 2012; Kilonzo et al., 2020).

Therefore, this chapter focuses on self-help groups not only as arenas for improving self-reliance and economic well-being, but also as spaces for learning citizenship at the local level. It draws on Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of learning as situated legitimate peripheral participation, according to which novices gain full competence through participating in **communities of practice**. Thus, learning is something that happens in a variety of informal contexts in the day-to-day lives of people in different settings (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice have been defined as groups of people informally bound together by shared expertise and passion for a joint enterprise, which develop a repertoire to address this enterprise (Wenger & Snyder, 2000: 139; Zaffini, 2018: 38); as relations among persons, activity and the world (Lave &

Wenger, 1991: 98); or a social process of negotiating competence in a domain over time (Farnsworth et al., 2016: 143). Typically, communities of practice are seen to have three major elements: domain, community and practice (Farnsworth et al., 2016; Li et al., 2009; Wenger, 2009). In this chapter, I conceptualize self-help groups as communities of practice and, based on qualitative research in Mpwapwa District, Tanzania, address three main questions: What kinds of communities of practice do self-help groups represent? How do participants describe their learning in self-help groups? What sort of connections do participants draw between learning good membership practices in self-help groups and good citizenship in general? Exploring these questions illustrates the ways in which the participants in self-help groups understand their own learning in relation to their general goals of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*, and whether they draw connections between being a good member in a self-help group and exercising good citizenship more broadly.

In what follows, I first discuss the notion of communities of practice in the context of learning citizenship, then I briefly describe the methodology and the study context. After that, I delineate the kinds of communities of practice self-help groups represent—focusing on their characteristics, analyze how members describe their learning in self-help groups and discuss how they draw connections between membership in self-help groups and citizenship in general. In conclusion, I argue that participation in self-help groups contributes to local development at a grassroots level. The particular domain of self-help groups and the combination of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* creates a flexible space where good group membership and good citizenship at the community level can involve economic progress and a willingness to help others in diverse combinations. I also argue that such existing group activities and dynamics of learning could be more profoundly utilized by outsiders in designing development initiatives and identifying new communities of practice to be jointly established in a spirit of mutual learning.

2 LEARNING CITIZENSHIP IN COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

This section discusses theories that focus on how learning is embedded in the course of participation in a community of practice, combined with the idea of the contextual nature of citizenship, which is learned through participation in diverse groups. Learning is viewed as a situated activity

giving rise to legitimate peripheral participation whereby novices participate in communities of practice and gain knowledge and skills, fully taking part in the socio-cultural practices of a community (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Such participation comprises reciprocal relations between persons and practice, since the movement of learners-newcomers towards full participation in a community of practice does not take place in a static context (Lave & Wenger, 1991: 116). In this view, learning in communities of practice varies depending on contexts and settings; for instance, the communities discussed by Lave and Wenger include midwives, tailors, quartermasters, butchers and recovering alcoholics, although the conceptualization of the process by which communities learn can be generalized to other social groups (Li et al., 2009). In analysing the notion of legitimate peripheral learning in communities of practice, Brooks et al. (2020) argue that knowledge and skills flow in one direction—for example, from expert to novice—but this sits less easily with the idea of a small community group, whose members work and learn together. However, I suggest that learning in communities of practice does not always involve novices and experts, as reflected in self-help groups.

To understand such learning, the literature suggests that three characteristics are crucial to investigation: the domain, community and practice (Farnsworth et al., 2016; Li et al., 2009; Wenger, 2009). The domain is defined by a shared sphere of interest and competence that differentiates a particular community of practice from others. Therefore, analysis of self-help groups explores what differentiates each group from other social constellations and identifies the broad characteristics shared by all groups.

The notion of community refers to the social structures that encourage learning through interaction and relationships among members (Li et al., 2009; Wenger, 2009), who engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information (Li et al., 2009; Mohajan, 2017). Lave and Wenger's approach conveys a general sense in which people learn through mutual engagement in an activity which is defined by the negotiation of meanings both inside and outside the community (Fuller et al., 2005: 53). Mutual engagement is part of what matters in the group and requires the contributions and knowledge of all (Wenger, 1998). In this vein, analysis of community focuses on activities jointly undertaken by the members of self-help groups, their structure and how learning is enhanced based on their description.

Practice involves a shared repertoire of resources, experiences, ideas, stories, tools, documents, information and ways of addressing recurring problems (Li et al., 2009; Wenger, 2009). The shared repertoire of resources differs from one community of practice to another, but is constantly used in a manner that enhances members' efforts to attain their goals (Zaffini, 2018). Handley et al. (2006) suggest that individual learning should be thought of as emergent, and as involving opportunities to participate in the practices of the community. In that vein, analysis of practice in self-help groups focuses on the kinds of resources that are shared and how resources are used, based on their members' expressed views.

According to Wenger's (2009) notion, the achievements of communities of practice, including learning, are enhanced by the proper functioning of the three elements mentioned earlier. While Edwards (2005) criticizes the notion of learning in communities of practice for not being clear about how individuals learn something new, it should be pointed out that Lave and Wenger (1991: 53) do not focus on the individual mind, but, rather, argue that learning implies becoming able to be involved in new activities, perform new skills and function to master new understandings in the context of community—a process wherein both participants and practices evolve. Combining this view with the notion of citizenship, I argue that through participating in self-help groups, members acquire new skills and knowledge that enable them to function as good members and, further, potentially good citizens. The idea of learning citizenship by participating in communities of practice resonates with notions of multiple communities of citizenship (Clarke et al., 2014), and strongly reflects the close connection between local conceptions of good residency and good citizenship (Ahimbisibwe et al., 2020; Ndidde et al., 2020). Additionally, it draws on the idea that through participation in everyday groups, members learn skills relevant for citizenship, such as expressing opinions (Neveu, 2014: 87). In what follows, I describe the particular context and specific self-help groups where learning in communities of practice is explored.

3 METHODOLOGY AND INTRODUCTION OF THE GROUPS

The study was conducted from May to July 2020 in three villages in the Mpwapwa District of the Dodoma Region, Tanzania. The area is dominated by agro-pastoral, rural communities whose livelihoods depend

on small-scale livestock-keeping and farming activities. The major food crops are maize, sorghum, a variety of fruits and vegetables, and cash crops including sunflowers and sesame. The major livestock include cattle, goats, sheep, pigs and chickens (United Republic of Tanzania, 2012). In 2012, the district had a total population of 305,056 of which the majority, 80%, lived in rural areas (United Republic of Tanzania, 2013). A number of indicators, such as low-income levels, unemployment, under-nourishment and an insufficient supply of poor health services, depict high household poverty levels in the area (MDPO, 2013). This state of affairs has encouraged marginalized, impoverished communities, who are excluded from formal employment and financial sectors, to organize themselves as self-help groups which encourage their members to support each other (Aikaruwa et al., 2014) in solving their immediate social and economic problems (Kilonzo et al., 2020; Tesoriero, 2006).

For this study, I selected three self-help groups with at least five years of experience in working together. These include Sayuni and Amani, operating as a Village Community Bank (VICOBA) (see Ahimbisibwe and Ndidde, this volume)—to which members voluntarily contribute for saving purposes, internal loans and repayments—with 29 and 26 members, respectively. Vunjaukimya is a group of 12 women cultivating a variety of vegetables for food and income, which is saved by the group. They also joined the VICOBA as a single entity with a loan book in their name in order to access loans to cater for the group's need to expand its gardening activities. The study employed a qualitative research approach involving the author's staying in the villages and participating in the groups' activities in their real-life environment, such as meetings, social events and group projects.

In-depth interviews were conducted with 35 members of self-help groups—Amani (15), Sayuni (11) and Vunjaukimya (9); focus group discussions (FGDs) composed of 6 to 10 members were also conducted in each group. The interviews and discussions were conducted in Kiswahili, a national language used daily by the group participants. The recorded interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis (Drisko & Maschi, 2016) was employed, reducing the data to specific subthemes based on the research questions for more detailed analysis. First, the elements of self-help groups as communities of practice—domain, community and practice—were explored, based on participants' descriptions of the reasons for establishing and joining groups, the ways the groups are organized

and the joint activities conducted. Second, analysis of the descriptions of how the participants experienced learning situations identified three main ways: listening while participating in group activities, observing and imitating what others do, and ‘trial and error’ experimentation. Third, the reflections of the participants on whether the attributes considered relevant for a good group member are also characteristics of a good citizen were analyzed. In what follows, I will discuss these findings in more detail.

4 SELF-HELP GROUPS AS COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

In this section, I examine the characteristics of self-help groups based on Wenger (2009) and Li et al.’s (2009) framework focusing on its three central elements: domain, community and practice.

A *domain* is defined by a shared sphere of interest and competence that differentiates communities of practice (Li et al., 2009: 6; Wenger, 2009: 1). In both FGDs and interviews, participants repeatedly described the reasons for establishing and joining groups as *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* in times of both sorrow and happiness. Therefore, the combination of the interests that prompts the goals of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* can be interpreted as a particular shared domain, which differs from the domains of other groups such as churches or family. The notion of *maendeleo* was ultimately defined in terms of having opportunities to progress from a lower to a relatively higher standard of living: for example, being able to accumulate savings, engage in small businesses, afford house maintenance, clothing and farming requirements such as fertilizers and seeds, pay school fees and be assured of sufficient food. Other aspirations include contributing to village activities without facing difficulties, keeping livestock and increasing farming lands and, therefore, harvests of food and cash crops. The shared domain of interest was dominated by the social and economic needs, as narrated in the following:

I learned how to run a small business in the group; now I can easily get money to buy more savings shares, purchase items such as a mattress and television, pay school fees and so on. I can borrow money for farming requirements and so increase my food and cash crop harvests. I can also contribute to village development without a struggle. To be honest, I have learned more *kujiletea maendeleo*. (Participant No. MK019 Amani June 2020)

Thus, what members learned reflects the fulfilment of responsibilities to their households, groups and the community at large. In addition, participants described having increased their capacity-building skills, which enabled them to exploit the opportunities available in their settings. In the same vein, they described having acquired self-confidence, social networking ability and leadership skills and collective decision-making capacities, as one interviewee described:

Before I joined the group, I did not have enough confidence to stand and speak in front of people. However, through participating in group activities, such as meetings, discussions and events, I gained more confidence, and now I can even contest for a leadership position in the village. (Participant No. RU029 Vunjaukimya June 2020)

This extract demonstrates that members accumulated competence and empowerment not only socio-economically, but also through increasing their individual activism and the courage to grasp opportunities, which made a great difference. This is in line with Lave and Wenger's (1991: 53) findings that learning in communities of practice develops the ability to take on new activities requiring the performance of new tasks and functions in order to become competent.

As members described their learning trajectories, it became apparent that not all aspects of the process were replicated among all the individuals of a group at the same time. Based on their own proffered opinions, it emerged that some had experienced negligible changes in their personal *kujiletea maendeleo*. As such, they were not doing well in terms of saving, improving their homes, educating their children, assuring household food security and the like. Nevertheless, they continued to contribute to and participate in their group's activities—meetings, social events and projects—hence maintaining their membership. This reveals that learning in self-help groups is a process in which not all learners will attain all the anticipated goals, while still becoming good members in other ways, indicating variation in processual outcome.

The second element proposed by Wenger and Li et al.'s framework—*community*—is construed as a social structure that encourages learning through interaction and relationships among members (Li et al., 2009: 6; Wenger, 2009: 2). The authors further noted that learning together

in the course of carrying out joint activities is important in communities of practice. I suggest that learning is necessary because it provides innovative skills that can instigate positive change in communities. This is reflected in self-help groups which have social structure and joint activities that enable learning, through interaction, to do things differently in order to fulfil the aims of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*; this is exemplified by the growth of leadership structure in groups, whereby members elect their own leaders, chairpersons, secretaries, cashiers, security, discipline and personnel. The leaders then organize and coordinate the groups, making sure that all members obey set rules and that things are working smoothly. Meanwhile, the rules address issues such as timely loan repayment, meeting attendance, active participation in group activities and social events. Thus, members learn from their leaders and each other in a participatory way, thereby becoming competent and experienced. This resonates with Wenger and Snyder's (2000: 142) findings that communities of practice organize themselves, set their own agenda and establish their own leadership.

In addition, self-help groups engage in various joint activities that facilitate interaction, such as participation in face-to-face meetings, social events and group projects. Meetings were held on a weekly basis by the Amani and Sayuni groups and once a month by the Vunjaukimya group, but could be called any time in an emergency. The meetings were pivotal for discussion, buying shares, disseminating information and clarification of issues, obtaining and repaying loans, paying contributions and planning programmes. Failure to attend meetings incurred group-agreed penalties "*kasunzu*" ranging from 500 to 2,000 TZS (0.22 to 0.86 USD) to strengthen personal commitment. With these measures, members learn to be self-disciplined in regard to time-keeping and fulfilling their *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* responsibilities. Thus, meetings are crucial for the development of common understandings about decision-making and for reaching consensus on actions to take together to solve the challenges being faced.

Members also participate in and learn at various social events involving their colleagues and the community at large: funerals, illnesses and weddings, for instance, depending on the specific arrangements of the groups. Participation in social events also involves obligations to fulfil other needs in the community. For example, Sayuni had a basket fund

to support children identified as needy in their community, catering for health insurance, school uniforms and other items, to which each member contributes 300 TZS (0.13 USD) weekly. Other joint projects were also initiated, with Sayuni and Amani group members keeping pigs and constructing an office, respectively.

The third element—*practice*—is where members interact and share repertoires of resources and learn how to perform various activities efficiently (Li et al., 2009: 6; Mohajan, 2017; Wenger, 2009: 2). Self-help groups share various types of resources such as a cashbook and box, a bank account, attendance register and minute's book, along with intangibles like experience, ideas and knowledge. They also collect cash regularly, while some have assets they have acquired and own together. How resources are used effectively depends on the intended objectives of the group. For instance, all the groups in this study had a bank account, the aim of which, according to them, was not to protect their savings but because it was often a requirement for loan applications to various sources.

We opened a bank account as one of the requirements for obtaining loans from local government 'Magufuli funds' for women, youth and people with disabilities. We have a cash box for savings for social goals and children's funds. Our cash rotates through members' hands as loans for their development projects. (FGD Sayuni group July 2020)

Similar explanations were provided by other self-help groups when revealing how they learn to share resources. In addition, during interactions all members share ideas, experience and knowhow, which enables them to develop joint knowledge of how to solve the challenges they encounter. They also learn how to make effective use of resources such as loans by making timely repayments for others to access, and keeping good records of each member's shares and savings for future reference. These interactions and the sharing of various resources demonstrate the element of 'practice' in self-help groups suggested by Wenger (2009: 1) and Li et al. (2009: 6).

Next, I turn to analysis of the different ways in which members of self-help groups as communities of practice engage with available learning opportunities.

5 HOW MEMBERS OF SELF-HELP GROUPS LEARN *KUJILETEA MAENDELEO* AND *Kusaidiana*

The major ways that learning takes place in the daily practices of groups in their particular spheres include: *first*, learning by listening and participating in group activities; *second*, learning through observing and imitating what others do within and outside the groups and incorporating it into one's own practice; and *third*, learning through practice involving trial and error.

First, learning through listening and participating in groups' activities such as meetings, social events and projects is facilitated by participating in meetings and paying attention during discussions and other events taking place as narrated below:

I have never attended a seminar or any training; instead, I have just followed the group regulations by listening when our constitution is being read, and I participate in discussions during meetings ... By being in group I learned how to open my own personal savings account at NMB Bank once I realized that I can also save safely at the bank. (Participant No. AA003 Amani June 2020)

As this excerpt illustrates, members learn through participation in their group's activities without external facilitation. Others own a fixed asset—the Vunjaukimya group, for example, own land for gardening—that keeps members committed, united and keen to learn to maintain their property, leading to a “we feeling” that enhances their enjoyment of working together towards the goals of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. Furthermore, all groups had succession plans whereby members registered their next of kin to take over in case of circumstances that hinder or terminate the full participation of an individual: one Sayuni group member had registered her daughter-in-law, who took over her membership upon her decease, while sometimes school children represent their parents in meetings and other group activities. These practices reflect an interest in learning preparedness to ensure the future continuity of the groups. Through social events, members learn by being together and offering support in times of joy and sorrow. This mutual support allows members to cope with the challenges facing them confidently, and simply get going, while also learning how to do things better depending on circumstances.

Second, members explained that their learning experience did not only take place in activities specifically associated with the groups but also through observing and imitating what others do both within and outside the group, and adopting aspects into their own practice. As one research participant described:

Before I joined this group, I was just a smallholder farmer with no alternative source of income. However, after joining the group I managed to accumulate some savings, obtained a loan and purchased a motorcycle bodaboda. I now sell water at 400 TZS (0.17 USD) per bucket; each day I can make up to 10,000 TZS (4.31 USD). ... I found myself making good profit. ... One guy my age in the village is selling water like me. One day I visited his place and noticed great improvement in his housing structure and materials—concrete blocks. It was an amazing development! Maendeleo makubwa! I asked myself how he managed to do that, then I also started saving and managed to construct my own good quality house. ... Then, as a result of observing how women within our group managed to engage in small-scale business and participate actively in group activities while sustaining their families, I also advised my wife to start a business. I obtained a loan from the group and provided her with 80,000 TZS (34.50 USD). She started by selling fruit and vegetables and now she owns a grocery shop in the village. (Participant No. BP004 Amani June 2020)

‘Outside learning’ was further illustrated by a comment made in one of the focus groups:

When we participate in social events such as funerals in the village, sometimes we observe what others do and learn how to improve our situation. (FGD Sayuni July 2020)

Learning through observation and imitation also engenders changes in fundamental ways of thinking and doing. Lave and Wenger (1991: 71) noted that apprenticeships provided opportunities to observe the master, journeymen and other apprentices at work as a route to becoming a competent, skilled expert in a given field. However, in the case of self-help groups there are no clear divisions between newcomers and experienced members; rather, they all learn together by observing what others do within and outside their particular groups, which enables them to imitate successful modes of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*.

Third, members occasionally learn through the simple application of ‘trial and error’ principles, which sometimes leads to success, sometimes not, as emerged during FGDs:

We started by keeping chickens, but this did not prove profitable; then we tried keeping pigs and we are now progressing well. (FGD Sayuni, July 2020)

Their experiences of trial and error methodology and their outcome were also discussed at the Vunjaukimya FGD:

Sometimes we find that ‘trial and error’ can work: for example, we started cultivating onions without timing the weeding and controlling pests properly and the harvests were poor. However, when we tried again, using proper timing and pest control, harvests increased twofold. (FGD Vunjaukimya July 2020)

Clearly, if participants’ ‘trial and error’ of a particular practice works, they will continue with it; yet, equally clearly, they are ready to seek problem-solving alternatives by experimenting with other methods.

6 CONNECTIONS BETWEEN BEING A ‘GOOD MEMBER’ AND A ‘GOOD CITIZEN’

Kujiletea maendeleo and *kusaidiana* as motivation for participating in the self-help groups resonates with the overall understanding in contemporary Tanzania that good citizenship involves contributing to the nation’s development. Therefore, in this section I analyze how research participants themselves make connections between being a good member of a self-help group and being a good citizen. It should be noted in advance, however, that, despite the extensive prevalence of the notion of *maendeleo* in state discourses, the idea of a good citizen was mostly discussed by participants in terms of being a good householder, a good member of the village and vis-à-vis local governance; very little reference was made to the state or to being Tanzanian.

The connection between a good membership and citizenship was explored by first determining what were considered the qualities of a good member of the group, and, second, by prompting whether these attributes would also define a good citizen (*raia mzuri*). In the interviews

and discussions, participants provided a broad range of attributes, many of which involved adhering to group regulations, including attending meetings, participating in discussions, respecting others' opinions, buying shares and repaying loans on time. Additional attributes include commitment to group projects and events, cooperation with and care for others, trustworthiness, avoidance of bad language, discretion, self-discipline, sobriety, humility and a positive outlook. Furthermore, a good member has a respectable place of residence in the village and contributes to village development activities. It is notable that all the attributes assigned to being a 'good member', relate to individuals' general responsibilities for *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. In addition, participants elaborated that by engaging in groups, they also promote *maendeleo* more broadly in the village and, thus, at the level of local government. For example, they contribute to the purchase of school desks and the construction of teachers' accommodation and school buildings, in resonance with the public discourses of *maendeleo* that emphasize the responsibilities of citizens to contribute to the development of Tanzania at large, together with the government (Nguyahambi et al., 2020).

On the question of whether these attributes also define good citizenship, the participants had different views. Some were positive that a 'good group member' definitely provides the template for 'a good citizen', because even before joining a group, one should be a 'good member' of the village community with the kind of character that enables one to work together with others in *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. In addition, a 'good citizen' participates in village events such as funerals, meetings and development activities, and can confirm his/her citizenship by birth or registration and residency at the village level. This implies that those allowed to join the self-help groups are already 'good citizens', and identified as such by the village authorities and the community more broadly.

However, other participants had different views based on their own experience, as shown by the following excerpt:

It is not always true that a 'good member' is also a good community member, and hence a 'good citizen' in all respects. This is because in groups like ours, we have strict bylaws and regulations, which shape an individual; since she benefits from the group, she learns to behave well. However, in the community she behaves differently, becoming rude and irresponsible. For example, one of our group members confronted another

person and the village authority penalized her for presenting a bad image of citizenship. (Participant No.VN 034 Sayuni May 2020)

In this statement, good citizenship is defined based on individual behaviour; this might be well-disciplined in the context of the group due to the benefits that accrue, but may not be as acceptable in the wider community. In an additional view, being slow in *kujiletea maendeleo* in the group was not perceived as failure of good membership nor good citizenship, provided good membership was demonstrated in terms of *kusaidiana*:

Some members have made no changes in *kujiletea maendeleo* since they joined the group. For example, they do not have good houses nor businesses, and only work for other; they cannot afford to buy more shares in order to get loans and so on, yet they normally participate well in group activities and social events.

Overall, however, a good group member and a good citizen of the village were seen to share similar characteristics, such as being responsible, interacting well with others, and being able to learn *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*. This is similar to Ndidde et al.'s (2020: 110, 111) findings concerning citizenship in Uganda, where it is perceived mainly as a good and responsible membership in a community. There is flexibility in the differing emphasis placed on *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* in terms of the pace of learning new skills and the knowledge to be able to fulfil these aspirations; in general, even if a member does not achieve the group's goals, s/he can still be considered a good member and a good citizen based on other criteria.

7 CONCLUSION

Drawing on the notion of communities of practice, this chapter addressed three main questions concerning self-help groups as spaces of learning citizenship in rural Tanzania. First, it explored the characteristics of self-help groups as communities of practice, analysing their central elements of domain, community and practice. Second, it investigated participants' reflections on their learning experiences in the self-help groups. Third, it scrutinized the ways in which participants drew connections between

learning good membership practices in the self-help groups and good citizenship in general. The findings show that the domain of self-help groups appears to be a particular combination of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana*, achieving self-development and helping each other. The shared group activities, as well as the regulations and routines that governed their organization, supported the domain in a variety of ways. Participants learned informally while participating in the groups, and drew diverse connections between the ideals of good membership and good citizenship. Based on these findings, I propose three conclusions concerning learning citizenship.

First, the domain as combination of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* indicates that organizing in self-help groups is motivated both by unfulfilled socio-economic aspirations and an acknowledged need for mutual support. Learning through participating in self-help groups supports the idea of being self-reliant, of using and increasing one's own resources, and interacting with other members to promote improvements. These ideas resonate strongly with the discourses of *maendeleo* circulating at the state level, and the position of a citizen as a responsible contributor rather than right holder. The self-help groups, even if not drawing many explicit connections with citizenship vis-à-vis the state, nevertheless strengthen such a role as participants learn to take responsibility for the improvements in their lives rather than demanding them from the government sector (see also Kilonzo et al., 2020).

Second, the domain of *kujiletea maendeleo* and *kusaidiana* provides a flexible learning community. If some participants were not very successful in learning to implement new development initiatives, they nevertheless could be regarded as good members and good citizens at the village level when being active in social events and helping others. Therefore, the good citizenship learned does not only include the capability to enhance socio-economic development, but also preparedness to fulfil more social functions. While self-help groups, on the one hand, were considered to be for those who already enjoyed good citizen status in the village, on the other, their strict regulations and guidelines were also seen as offering the possibility to learn to be a better citizen of the village. Good citizenship, discussed mainly at the community level, was seen to revolve around self-discipline and good conduct, but it also included the ability to articulate opinions and negotiate.

Third, modes of learning by participating in self-help groups are not fixed. Learning takes place continuously by listening, observing, imitating

and by trial and error. These ways resonate with Lave and Wenger's (1991) explorations of how learning happens in communities of practice; however, they are in slight contrast with their notion of learning through legitimate peripheral participation. There are no clear learning dynamics between newcomers and old-timers or apprentices and masters in self-help groups; rather, in the course of shared activities these positions are interchangeable according to different contexts and places, and different participants can occupy the role of expert depending on the task.

In conclusion, communities have ways of organizing that address their interests, while learning citizenship is closely tied to practical activities. This kind of existing knowledge, skill and learning interest should be taken into much greater account in planning and designing development interventions which could facilitate establishing new communities of practice, sometimes with participants from outside of the particular communities. These would enable mutual learning and contribute to the goals of self-development and helping each other, but perhaps would also introduce new ways of perceiving ideas of good citizenship and the roles of citizen and state in bringing *maendeleo*, development, for all.

REFERENCES

- Ahimbisibwe, K. F., Ndidde, A. N., & Kontinen, T. (2020). Participatory methodology in exploring citizenship: A critical learning process. In K. Holma & T. Kontinen (Eds.), *Practices of citizenship in East Africa: Perspectives from philosophical pragmatism* (pp. 159–175). Routledge.
- Aikaruwa, D. B., Sumari, G. A., & Maleko, G. N. (2014). Social functionality of self help groups in Tanzania. *Journal of Business Administration and Education*, 5(2), 99–136.
- Alemu, S. H., Van Kempen, L., & Ruben, R. (2018). Women empowerment through self-help groups: The bittersweet fruits of collective apple cultivation in highland Ethiopia. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 19(3), 308–330. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19452829.2018.1454407>
- Brooks, J., Grugulis, I., & Cook, H. (2020). Rethinking situated learning: Participation and communities of practice in the UK fire and rescue service. *Work, Employment and Society*, 34(6), 1045–1061.
- Clarke, J., Coll, K., Dagnino, E., & Neveu, C. (2014). *Disputing citizenship*. Bristol University Press.
- Drisko, J. W., & Maschi, T. (2016). *Content analysis: Pocket guide to social work research methods*. Oxford University Press.

- Edwards, A. (2005). Let's get beyond community and practice: The many meanings of learning by participating. *The Curriculum Journal*, 16(1), 49–65. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0958517042000336809>
- Farnsworth, V., Kleanthous, I., & Wenger-Trayner, E. (2016). Communities of practice as a social theory of learning: A conversation with Etienne Wenger. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 64(2), 139–160. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071005.2015.1133799>
- Fatimayin, F. (2015). Empowering women self-help group members through open and distance learning. *Huria: Journal of the Open University of Tanzania*, 20(1), 61–72.
- Fuller, A., Hodkinson, H., Hodkinson, P., & Unwin, L. (2005). Learning as peripheral participation in communities of practice: A reassessment of key concepts in workplace learning. *British Educational Research Journal*, 31(1), 49–68. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0141192052000310029>
- Gaventa, J. (2016). *Can participation 'fix' inequality? Unpacking the relationship between the economic and political citizenship* (Innovation Series 5). The Coady International Institute, St. Francis Xavier University, Igniting Leadership. <https://www.participatorymethods.org/sites/participatorymethods.org/files/Gaventa%20Coady%20Innovation%20series5%20Can%20participation%20fix%20inequality.pdf>. Accessed 3 May 2021.
- Gaventa, J., & Barrett, G. (2012). Mapping the outcomes of citizen engagement. *World Development*, 40(12), 2399–2410. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2012.05.014>
- Handley, K., Sturdy, A., Fincham, R., & Clark, T. (2006). Within and beyond communities of practice: Making sense of learning through participation, identity and practice. *Journal of Management Studies*, 43(3), 641–653. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-6486.2006.00605.x>
- Kilonzo, R. G., Matunga, B. N., Chang'a, H. H., Kontinen, T. (2020). Habits of contributing citizenship: Self-help groups in Rural Tanzania. In K. Holma & T. Kontinen (Eds.), *Practices of citizenship in East Africa: Perspectives from philosophical pragmatism* (pp. 139–155). Routledge.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Li, L. C., Grimshaw, J. M., Nielsen, C., Judd, M., Coyte, P. C., & Graham, I. D. (2009). Evolution of Wenger's concept of community of practice. *Implementation Science*, 4(11). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-4-11>
- MDPO. (2013). *Land, Climate, Economy, Agro-ecological Zones and People* (Unpublished report). Central Zonal Office Singida, Tanzania.
- Mercer, C. (2002). The discourse of *Maendeleo* and the politics of women's participation on Mount Kilimanjaro. *Development and Change*, 33(1), 101–127. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00242>

- Mohajan, H. K. (2017). Roles of communities of practice for the development of the society. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People*, 6(3), 27–46.
- Naik, M., & Rodrigues, A. (2017). Women empowerment through self help groups: Realities and challenges. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 22(6), 01–09. <https://doi.org/10.9790/0837-2206120109>
- Ndidde, A. N., Ahimbisibwe, K. F., & Kontinen, T. (2020). Gendered citizenship in Rural Uganda: Localized exclusive and active. In K. Holma & T. Kontinen (Eds.), *Practices of citizenship in East Africa: Perspectives from philosophical pragmatism* (pp. 105–120). Routledge.
- Neveu, C. (2014). Practicing citizenship from the ordinary to the activist. In E. F. Isin & P. Nyers (Eds.), *Routledge handbook of global citizenship studies* (pp. 86–95). Routledge.
- Nguyahambi, A. M., Chang’a, H. H., Matunga, B. N., Kilonzo, R. G., & Kontinen, T. (2020). Contextualizing citizenship in Tanzania. In K. Holma & T. Kontinen (Eds.), *Practices of citizenship in East Africa: Perspectives from philosophical pragmatism* (pp. 73–89). Routledge.
- Rodima-Taylor, D. (2013). Gathering up mutual help: Relational freedom of Tanzanian market-women. *Social Analysis*, 57(3), 76–94.
- Tesoriero, F. (2006). Strengthening communities through women’s self-help groups in South India. *Community Development Journal*, 41(3), 321–333. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsi066>
- United Republic of Tanzania. (1999). *The Tanzania Development Vision 2025*. Ministry of Finance, Planning Commission, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. <http://www.tzonline.org/pdf/thetanzaniadevelopmentvision.pdf>. Accessed 31 March 2021.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2012). *National Sample Census of Agriculture 2007/2008: Small Holder Agriculture, Volume II: Crop Sector–National Report*. Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Cooperatives, Ministry of Livestock Development and Fisheries, Ministry of Water and Irrigation, Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Environment, Zanzibar, Prime Minister’s Office, Regional Administration and Local Governments, Ministry of Industries, Trade and Marketing, The National Bureau of Statistics and the Office of the Chief Government Statistician, Zanzibar.
- United Republic of Tanzania. (2013). *2012 National Population and Housing Census: Population Distribution by Administrative Areas*. National Bureau of Statistics. Ministry of Finance, Dar es Salaam and Office of Chief Government Statistician, President’s Office, Finance, Economy and Development Planning, Zanzibar, Tanzania.
- Waddell, S. (2005). *Societal learning and change: How governments, business and civil society are creating solutions to complex multi-stakeholder problems*. Routledge.

- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511803932>. Accessed 3 May 2021.
- Wenger, E. (2009). *Communities of practice: A brief introduction*. https://www.ohr.wisc.edu/cop/articles/communities_practice_intro_wenger.pdf. Accessed 11 November 2020.
- Wenger, E. C., & Snyder, W. M. (2000). Communities of practice: The organizational frontier. *Harvard Business Review*, 78(1), 139–145.
- Zaffini, E. J. (2018). Communities of practice and legitimate peripheral participation: A literature review. *Update: National Association for Music Education*, 36(3). 38–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8755123317743977>

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

