

Doing it for themselves

The long-term success of community development projects, writes PDG Stuart Batty, hinges on engagement, empowerment and personal responsibility within the community.

In 2007, thousands of people from the surrounding communities of Mwiki, Tanzania, gathered for the official opening of the Rotary New Zealand funded Mwiki Market. A community leader addressing the gathering called upon all secondary students and others in attendance to do everything possible in their lifetime to make Rotarians and all other NGOs redundant.



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"If you don't," he said, "Tanzania will be forever aid-dependant."

Today, Mwiki Market is reputed to be the largest of its type in Tanzania, twice-weekly bringing together thousands of small-holder farmers to sell their produce to thousands of buyers, who travel from as far away as Kenya, Uganda and Burundi.

So many economic and community development activities are not sustainable if donor partners fail to acknowledge that "it's not about us, it's about them".

Mwiki, with the support of Rotarians from Arusha (some three hours' drive away) in partnership with New Zealand Rotarians, formulated a concept and design that would fund and empower the Mwiki community to build their market, and for Mwiki to become the community it is today.

Fifteen years ago,

In 2005, two years earlier, at the request of their community leaders, I visited farms and community gatherings to listen to representatives of some 38,000 small holders. They had themselves determined their community needed to lift itself out of poverty by, among other things, establishing a market. Together, the people of

Mwiki was a dot on the landscape; today it boasts a vibrant community, with physical and organisational structures and facilities, including buildings, a sealed highway, kerbs and drainage, auxiliary businesses and suppliers, together with community welfare facilities – all directly attributable to people, young and old, taking on board what was profoundly said in 2007.

Much has been achieved since 2005, but in an age of ever-changing



For an in-depth look into what Rotary 'Down Under' has been doing in the field of economic and community development, see this month's feature starting page 14.



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ABOVE & RIGHT: Mwika Market is reputed to be the largest of its type in Tanzania, twice-weekly bringing together thousands of small-holder farmers to sell their produce to thousands of buyers.

knowledge, the success of such activities is often thwarted by theorists and bureaucrats who lack any concept of the real world as they judge from their position of affluence what they consider is best for those at the other end of the spectrum. The challenge for them and donor partners is to avoid creating global "social welfare".

Lifting people out of poverty requires the creation of self-determination through transference of skills and encouraging people to

do it for themselves. Engagement, empowerment and personal responsibility must be part of every activity, concept and design. Economic and community development is not built on theory from outsiders, but by communities determining their own capabilities and needs on their pathway to self-sufficiency.

Often, donor partners fail to recognise that most community leaders in developing countries are in

fact literate, connected with the wider world through their iPhone or iPad, which they often utilise in pursuit of a first introduction with donor partners.

It is essential in any development activity that a holistic approach is encouraged at the outset, taking into consideration, among other things, good governance, the environment, gender and disability sensitivities, demographic forecasts, and long-term sustainability. •