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**Kellogg-Kroc Undergraduate Research Grant  
Project Report**

**Democratic Development:  
A look at democracy in the economic development of Nnindye, Uganda**

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Sitting at a house not far from the main road through Nnindye I am conducting my last interview. I speak with a woman in her sixties, though she looks much older; her face is worn by the sun and the strain of a difficult life. Like many people I have met she struggles just to get by. She sells what crops she can harvest from her small plot of land and makes some extra money from sewing, but her income cannot cover even the most basic necessities and the surgery required to save her vision is far beyond her reach. She is nearly blind. Yet she does not complain, she is only answering the questions I have asked. Her story is very matter-of-fact, as if to say, “This is my life, it’s what I’ve been dealt.” As I listen to her story I look out at the road and see a convoy of black pickup trucks and Land Rovers. Men carrying machine guns and wearing body armor ride along, stone-faced, serious. It is clear that this is President Museveni’s motorcade traveling to a nearby event. They rumble down the road that stretches from Kampala to Masaka and pass by a burned out tank, a relic from the war that placed Museveni in the position of power, a reminder of more turbulent days of the past. Just fifty feet away from where I sit the tank stands as a trophy, or perhaps a monument to the battle fought twenty years ago. I know Museveni sees it, but I wonder if he sees the children carry Gerry cans full of unsanitary water, or the inadequate health center, or the fruit stands where villagers sell their goods to try to make a living. Watching Museveni drive off, I ask myself how connected he feels to the lives of the people he represents. I ask how

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connected these villagers feel to their president or even their local councilmen. I want to know how democracy might help improve these villagers' lives.

I spent my summer conducting research in Nnindy, Uganda. Nnindy is a parish comprised of twelve villages located an hour and a half west of the capital city, Kampala, and roughly twenty minutes away from Uganda Martyrs University. Using the resources of Uganda Martyrs University (UMU), and more specifically the university's Outreach Program, my research partner, Jenna Rogers, and I familiarized ourselves with the surrounding community. Touring schools, churches, health centers, and marketplaces we gained a better understanding of life in Nnindy and allowed the villagers to better understand why we were there.

While we acclimated ourselves to the area, Jenna and I used faculty from the university and input from locals to help finalize our survey. It was our intent to make each question culturally sensitive in an effort to make respondents feel comfortable and more willing to answer freely. I also met several times with my translator to insure that we both clearly understood the purpose and scope of each question.

My research interests were two-fold. First, our survey was primarily a needs assessment. Questions ranged from "When were you born?" to "How often do you attend Parent Teacher Association meetings at your child's school?" Areas of interest were broken down into education, healthcare, occupation, community involvement, and water and sanitation. Our goal was to identify challenges within these areas and possible solutions to these problems. My second objective with this survey was to gauge the cohesiveness between villagers and assess their willingness and ability to work together. I asked questions regarding their current, past, or desired level of involvement with

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community groups, such as rotating lending circles. I also asked the respondents about their perception of government and transparency among elected officials. Ultimately, I sought to answer the question, What role could deliberative democracy play in addressing issues that villagers of Nnindyie identify as important to their economic wellbeing?

My hypothesis is that policies that are science-based and that are subject to public scrutiny and open dialogue will be more widely accepted and long lasting. In other words, a democratic approach to economic development will lead to sound, sustainable solutions. Proponents of this method argue that only through open dialogue and individual empowerment can foreign aid effectively target those who have the most need.<sup>1</sup> Others go further to say that open dialogue produces the most effective outcomes.<sup>2</sup> However, participatory politics has its critics. Opponents to deliberative democracy contend that opening up decision-making to the public increases the risk of faulty decisions and makes governance vulnerable to dangerous power politics.<sup>3</sup>

Preliminary analysis of my research shows that both sides of this argument are valid in the villages of Nnindyie. Many villagers had favorable opinions of their village council members and would, if possible, participate in community based self-help groups. Respondents identified community lending groups, farming cooperatives, and collaborative animal husbandry groups as some of the entities they would like to see formed. When asked what they liked most about their village, many people responded positively about the people's ability to work together. Yet, tensions do exist. Some

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<sup>1</sup> Macartan Humphreys, William A. Masters, and Martin E. Sandbu, "The Role of Leaders in Democratic Deliberations: Results from a Field Experiment in São Tomé and Príncipe," *World Politics* 58 (July 2006), 586.

<sup>2</sup> Humphreys, Masters, and Sandbu, 586.

<sup>3</sup> Darrin Hicks, "The Promise(s) of Deliberative Democracy," *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 5, no. 2 (2002), 225.

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villagers suggested a lack of transparency in community groups and among elected officials. Often times when a villager left a group it was because someone was being “dishonest” or “self-serving.” When respondents identified a divide in the village it was most often along the lines of social class.

I learned from the people I met that participatory politics is at play in Nnindye, though not always effectively. Through more extensive analysis of my data I aim to determine how participatory politics might lead to effective, long lasting policies in the villages of Nnindye. I believe that my findings will be helpful for UMU Outreach staff, local leaders, and the villagers of Nnindye. More important than my own thesis work, I think, is being able to contribute to the development of this community. Using resources from the Kellogg Institute for International Studies, I was able to provide a service that the UMU Outreach Staff might not otherwise have been able to provide. After sharing some feedback with the Outreach coordinator, Gelvan Lule, it was clear that my findings would be helpful in expanding the pool of information on Nnindye. I am also greatly indebted to the people that welcomed me into their homes and shared their stories with me. It is my hope that the information I return to the community will repay the villagers for their hospitality.

After six weeks in Uganda, I can only begin to understand the challenges that the people of Nnindye face. Their lives are difficult, more difficult than I can imagine. Yet there is some characteristic about the people that I met that is even more elusive. I am not really sure what to call it- hope, perseverance, bliss? Perhaps all three. It is a seemingly indescribable quality, but you can see it everywhere. You can see it in the

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children's smiles. You can see it in everyone's eyes. You can see it in the nearly blind woman that tills her fields and does her best. You can see it in Uganda.