

Managing the Unintended

A call for honest reflection on practice

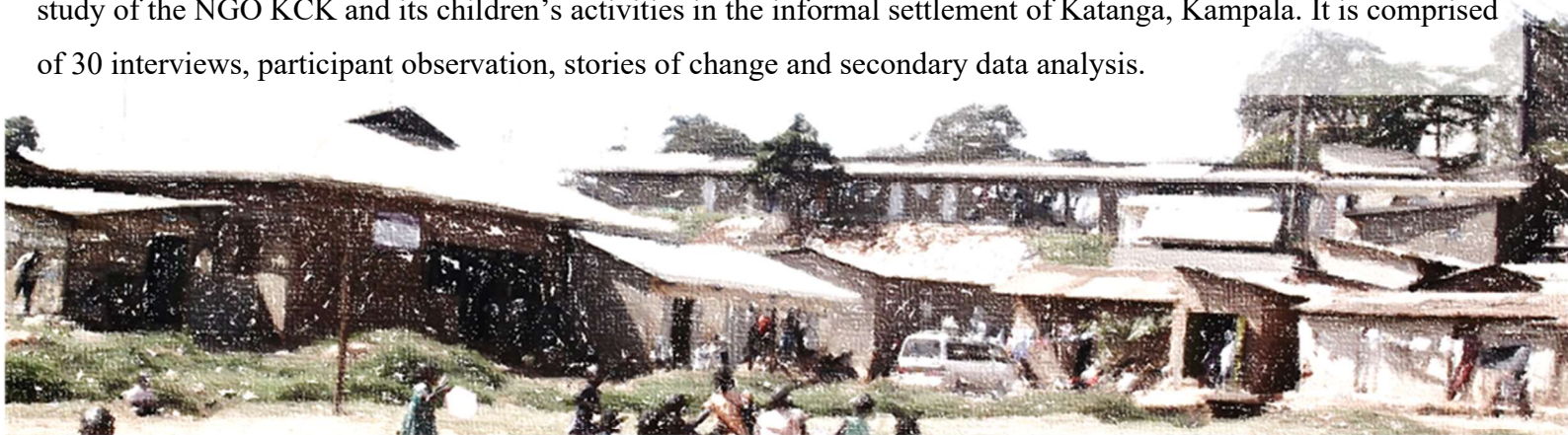
Unforeseen outcomes and circumstances are a common occurrence from the implementation of development programmes but practical examples of their management remain absent. Commitment to set organisational values, context appropriateness and reorientation of management to the grassroots can offer a fruitful alternative.

Unintended change has caused anxiety for practitioners yet their appearance can offer prolific insights to project progression (Leach, 2000). For appropriate project development it is vital to look beyond their set aims and objectives and instead understand the encompassing social contexts they are situated within (Li, 2007). We must return to the contextual and political to understand the emergence and appropriate management of these changes (Mowles, 2010). This study aimed to track the occurrence of unintended outcomes and seek to understand how they are managed and accounted for in line with context and organisational values. Its purpose is to bridge academia and practice; to learn directly from the experiences of organisations and urge others to do the same.

Commitment to set organisational values, context appropriateness and a deeper discussion of the change itself frame the way Kid Club Kampala (KCK) deal with the occurrence of unforeseen outcomes and circumstances. Open reflection on the actual occurring outcomes and circumstances is vital to draw grounded conclusions and informed improvements from real-life occurrences. Projects must be evaluated through what is happening rather than what we want to happen. Project implementation is never a singular endeavour. This qualitative study is a case study of the NGO KCK and its children's activities in the informal settlement of Katanga, Kampala. It is comprised of 30 interviews, participant observation, stories of change and secondary data analysis.

Key Points

1. A response to a recent call to critically reflect on the process and management of change in the practice of development (Mowles, 2010)
2. KCK's strength is their total commitment to a community-led practice; they recognise its complexity and challenges.
3. Unintended changes need to be tracked from their emergence and their effects recognised and documented.
4. Changes should be categorised in terms of tangibility, emphasis is needed on the actual change itself in order for it to be managed appropriately.



Context and project implementation have influenced the way in which KCK recognise and manage the occurrence of unintended change. Their loyalty to community-led development has decentralised their practice and ensured that projects are run in correspondence to context-specific means and in an attempt to empower those at the grassroots. Their local volunteer model is key to this, dissipating responsibility and project ownership to the ground in order for projects to be run through local knowledge.

Unintended outcomes should not be assumed as negative; for KCK their activities have formed strong communal relationships and they have become a support platform for wider project beneficiaries. KCK have been responsible for transformative change in child behaviour. Yet despite a loyalty to community-led development, certain expectations and dependency on the western volunteer can confound the encouragement of project users to develop themselves. With governmental pressure on slum demolition, **uncertain circumstances** threaten the sustainability of projects. In response KCK has become politicised representing the rights of these citizens.

Informal reporting from verbal communication is the main documentation of unintended outcomes. KCK's uniqueness can be found in its encouragement of **grassroots resolution**; the active encouragement of issues to be solved by users.

Changes should be understood in isolation of their intentionality; KCK manages change in distinctive ways. Change should be referred to in regards to its **tangibility**. Tangible outcomes such as a lack of resources are dealt with through **prioritisation**, declared from a needs assessment. Whereas intangible outcomes such as governmental threats are dealt with through a softer means, through **relationship building**. For appropriate management changes should be understood as particular occurrences and their emergence should be tracked.

KCK offer pragmatic guidance for the management of unintended outcomes; it is through the recognition of specific changes in isolation, their emergence and their context appropriate solutions that they can be adequately dealt with. It is KCK's commitment to community-led development which frames the operation of its work. An uncertain future lies ahead due to governmental threats of slum demolition. Managing and adequately accounting for unintended outcomes has never been so vital. The study urges other organisations to reflect on their recognition and management of unintended changes to lessen the anxiety of their appearance and highlight their ability to define project success.

Recommendations

1. **To explicitly track the emergence of unintended change through specific documentation and continuous assessment of their effects-** To recognise unintended changes, current progress reports should document the emergence of these outcomes and circumstances. Once documented their typology should be declared and their effects tracked through follow up interviews and observation.
2. **To run training in Monitoring and Evaluation with field level staff and local volunteers** – All KCK staff should be involved in M&E activity in order to gain a fuller picture of what is happening on the ground.
3. **To run quarterly progress meetings with children centre staff** – Staff from the 17 communities responsible for running kids clubs should meet regularly to verbally discuss the challenges faced and unintended changes. Working collectively context-informed and appropriate solutions can be gained.
4. **To use alternative methods for Monitoring and Evaluation to ensure inclusivity-** To adhere to the community-led principles of the organisation, Annual Participatory Reviews should be undertaken. All stakeholders should be encouraged to meet and collectively to discuss strengths, challenges and future improvements for the programmes.