Abstract

Development of communities is not possible if it does not include the development of the people and implemented by the people themselves. In the context of Africa and from many years ago, in the aftermath of colonialism, the former Tanzanian president and one of the most important figures in the African struggle for independence, Julius Nyerere stated that rural development is the participation of people in a mutual learning experience involving themselves, their local resources, external agents and outside resources. Nyerere insisted that people cannot be developed; they can only develop themselves by participation in decisions and cooperative activities which affect their wellbeing.

From the last two to three decades, many social capital researchers (Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, Robert Putnam and their proponents) and the development stakeholders (the governments and NGOs) have claimed that participation of the people in their development is of paramount importance. Different techniques to facilitate the participation of people are always stipulated in their plans and policies. The good thing is that all actors of development agree that rural communities have strong social ties in their neighbourhoods as one of their local resources and therefore they can work together for the purpose of their own development. In fact, one of the core characteristics of rural people in Africa is their social ties. It is in this perspective that the present research intends to discover how community-based associations are used in Rwanda, by the people themselves, as a tool of development in rural areas with reference to their collective capabilities and in a participatory fashion towards development. How do associations constitute an opportunity to members in their development process? How are their doings and beings affected? Who is included and who is excluded? What are the power relations
from within and outside of these associations? What are the challenges faced by these associations in the processes and practices of development and how can they be solved? The research approach used is qualitative, with a focus on Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT). Intensive semi-structured interviews as well as informal conversation, ethnographic and participant observation, and associations’ documents constitute the major sources of primary data from participants of all the 7 villagers of the Gakamba cell in the Mayange sector of the Bugesera district in the Eastern Province of Rwanda, mainly those making up rural community-based associations. The collected qualitative data is analysed and interpreted using an analytical computer software known as “Atlas.ti”.