CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

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Contents

Summary

Capacity development for sustainable human development will become the main developmental challenge of the twenty-first century. People everywhere need to create or get access to the resources and opportunities that can enable them to work meaningfully and productively in society. And we are talking here about more than simply employment creation. Capacity development also implies the construction of a collective social spirit as well as individual health, freedoms, and skills. Most of the energy and resources needed to meet these objectives will come from countries themselves. But international development agencies can play a key role in fostering

capacity development provided they can adjust their own structures and behaviors to focus on this important task.

1. Introduction

I can imagine the scene about one hundred years ago. Groups of people, nervous, uncertain but engaged, huddled together in homes or beside rivers, in cafes or on boardwalks trying to decipher the meaning of the past one hundred years and speculating about events in the century to come. Now, a hundred years later, we are at it again, this time facing the approach of a new millennium. We are still looking at the night sky or perhaps this time, a computer screen, trying to understand the meaning of the past and making predictions for the future. It is likely, however, that our predictions will say much more about our own era than it will about the one to follow.

The following are my views about capacity development and sustainable human development. (The term capacity "development" is used here rather than capacity "building" to emphasize the idea of improving and developing those capacities that already exist.) I welcome the chance both to distill some of the United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP's) experiences and also to rethink some of my own assumptions about international cooperation in the years ahead. In many respects, such complex topics contain within themselves many of the themes and questions that preoccupy us all at such a hinge point of history. Can we hope for better things in the future than in the past? Should our assumptions about human nature change? Will our achievements of this century survive in the next? How can we improve our abilities to help ourselves? Who is "ourselves"?

This article is based on two key assumptions which will be stated but not argued in great detail. The first is that over the long term, collaboration and cooperation among people, be they members of a local community or citizens of a country or simply part of global humanity, are both operational and ethical imperatives. We need ideas, values, and patterns of behavior at all levels that can nurture our global store of social capital and mediate the conflicts that still characterize our world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. In my mind, international development cooperation remains a key part of that broader human impulse for human collaboration and justice. We in the international development community need to stand clearly for these values and principles if we wish to retain our credibility and legitimacy.

The second assumption is a more unsettling one. We are beginning to realize the relative political and social placidity of the last four development decades. In retrospect, it may have been an aberrant period. Conflicts, particularly in the form of ethnic and civil strife, have been gathering momentum now for about a decade and show no signs of abating. We may be returning to more normal patterns of disorder and upheaval that have always been a part of the human experience. If this is true, then capacity development for sustainable human development may involve much more than helping well-intentioned people to improve their technical and organizational abilities. It may also consist of creating safety and security for people that wish to make progress. Certainly, capacity development will be a much more intractable activity than the kind of conventional development activities that we have known since the 1960s.

First some definitions are needed to guide the discussion that follows. Most of us still seek a clear understanding of the terms "capacity" and "capacity development" despite the obvious fact that we see plenty of evidence of them in our daily lives—private firms that build extraordinary marketing and sales systems, governments that manage huge defense, judicial, and taxation systems, universities that produce world class research and learning, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that mobilize the efforts of millions of citizens, community groups that revitalize neighborhoods, families that produce generation after generation of committed sons and daughters, people that improve their confidence and abilities.

"Capacity" in this paper simply refers to the abilities, understandings, attitudes, values, relationships, and behaviors that enable groups and individuals and organizations in a society to achieve their objectives over time. It means people at all levels of a society taking on new roles and responsibilities, building new relationships and doing things differently. But it is not just about building the capacities of particular groups or organizations. Capacity development also involves the promotion of changes in the political, social, and cultural contexts that shape people's actions. Perhaps the most important is that of citizen engagement.

"Capacity development" refers to the processes—the activities, the strategies, the methodologies, the things that people do—to bring about this growth in capacity. We are talking here about the way people and organizations interact, learn, manage conflict, assess information, solve problems, collaborate, and make decisions.

The idea of sustainable human development also needs clarification. It has been explicitly at the center of UNDP's work since 1993. It makes the central purpose of development the creation of an enabling environment in which all people can enjoy long, healthy, productive, and creative lives. I see sustainable human development in the sense of expanding and enlarging the choices of people. It is about human empowerment, gender equality, equitable growth, participation, and poverty reduction. People expand their choices by gaining greater access to economic resources and improving their ability to acquire knowledge. This enhancement must be for both present and future generations without sacrificing one for the other.

There are five aspects to sustainable human development from the UNDP perspective, all of which affect the lives of the poor and the vulnerable—empowerment, cooperation, equity, sustainability, and security. UNDP focuses its work on four critical elements of sustainable human development: eliminating poverty, creating jobs and sustaining livelihoods, protecting and regenerating the environment, and promoting the advancement of women. Capacity development underpins all of these objectives. Sustainable human development is linked to capacity development in that it is accomplished by expanding human capabilities and perspectives.

This article is not primarily concerned with a technical or ecological analysis of sustainable human development, nor does it deal directly with health or education or other social issues. Much has been written on these topics and more will be forthcoming in this Encyclopedia (see Peter Morgan (1992). *A Framework for Capacity Building— What, Why and How*; M. E. Hildebrand and M. S. Grindle (1994). *Building Sustainable*

Capacity: Challenges for the Public Sector. Harvard Institute for International Development). Rather, it will focus on the interconnections between capacity development and sustainable human development and the things that outside actors such as international development agencies must do in the years ahead to help push these ideas through to implementation.

2. What are the Forces Shaping Capacity Development for Sustainable HumanDevelopment?

Capacity development is not a disconnected activity. It takes place in contexts—global, national, regional, local—that shape its effectiveness. What are some of these contextual forces and how should we think about them?

2.1 The Drive for Progress

One point bears repeating. Looking at the record on human development over the past thirty years, we have reason to be optimistic. Never before in history have so many progressed so far so fast. The average life expectancy in the developing world has increased by one-third in the last thirty years. More than 70% of people in developing countries now have access to health services. Primary school enrollment has increased by 80% during this period. The developing world has made more social and economic advances in thirty years than the industrial world made in a hundred years at a comparable stage of its development. Most important of all, we know for certain that human abilities and capacities exist in abundance in all societies, albeit in many cases, in suppressed, untapped, and unrewarded forms. The pattern of wealth and opportunity may be skewed but intelligence and spirit are broadly distributed. Indeed, one of the main outcomes of the shift to greater participation in the 1980s and 1990s was the validation of local, indigenous knowledge and insight as a critical form of developmental expertise. Progress, even that which is rapid and broad-based, is possible. People everywhere and in every situation can learn to adapt and innovate. Despite their bleak prospects in many cases, the hope and energy of people remains the greatest resource for progress. The real challenge facing efforts at capacity development in many cases is helping to create an enabling or at least a safe environment within which the natural tendency of people to organize and progress can come to the fore.

2.2 Threats to Sustainability

We are all aware of the other side of the equation and this Encyclopedia will no doubt contain much analysis on the decline of our global life support systems. Even before the tumultuous global shocks of 1997 and 1998, over one billion of the world's population existed on less than the equivalent of US$1 per day. One billion, nearly a sixth of humanity, will enter the new millennium doomed to poverty. Three billion will have no sanitation. Two billion will have no power. In terms of ecosystems, fertile agricultural land, tropical forests, and wetlands are all likely to decrease substantially in the years ahead. Where the poorest one billion live in abject poverty, the richest billion command sixty times as much. Thirty years ago, it was only thirty times as much. Progress has been made but not enough to provide the human security for sustainable development. When we extrapolate out many of the trends in urbanization, land degradation, water

and housing shortages, food security, and population, we see huge challenges in reconciling the needs and legitimate aspirations of the world's population with our capacity to meet them.

Illiteracy is an issue of particular concern. In developing countries, an estimated 130 million children, about 40% of the elementary school population, either never enter school or drop out before receiving a basic education. In developed countries, 15–20% are functionally illiterate, unable to understand a job application, much less operate a computer or develop the advanced skills necessary to survive in a global competitive economy. Without rising levels of literacy, we cannot make the progress on health, nutrition, safe childbirth and rearing, conflict resolution, and democratization that is required to achieve sustainable human development.

2.3 The Rise of Integration and Globalization

Much has been written about the trend to a globalized, integrated marketplace but we are still unclear about its impact on both capacity development and sustainable human development. Previous surges in globalization, before the First World War and after the Second, were built largely around falling transportation costs both for people and for goods. The current surge at the end of the twentieth century is being driven to a large degree by falling telecommunications costs based on the spreading use of microchips, satellites, fiber optics and above all, the Internet. We can see the spread of liberal market principles and the increasing integration of financial, commercial, and technological systems. Such a process, in many countries, seems to encourage the spread of democratic governance and a huge range of new ideas and innovations, most of which seem supportive of capacity development. The planet, for example, now has the outlines of a global university, a global library, a global shopping center, a global postal service. The inevitable upsurges in growth and prosperity around the world over the long term may eventually benefit broader numbers of people in all countries and regions. And yet we are all aware of the downsides of rapid globalization. The process of spread and diffusion also applies to afflictions such as HIV/AIDS and ecological deterioration. The relationships among nation-states, governments, global markets, and individuals are rapidly shifting to the detriment of many groups and states that are not in a position to take advantage of the benefits of globalization. Rapid currency and investment shifts can devastate whole countries and make them vulnerable, as has been seen over the last couple of years. And we do not yet know how countries, even the richer ones, can simultaneously compete in the global economy and at the same time preserve their cultural identity.

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Biographical Sketch

James Gustave Speth is dean and professor in the Practice of Environmental Policy and Sustainable Development at Yale University. He was previously administrator of the United Nations Development Programme and Chair of the UN Development Group. Prior to his service at the UN, he was: founder and president of the World Resources Institute; professor of law at Georgetown University; chairman of the Council on Environmental Quality, and senior attorney and co-founder of the Natural Resources Defense Council. Throughout his career he provided leadership and entrepreneurial initiatives to many task forces and committees whose roles have been to combat environmental degradation, including the President's Task Force on Global Resources and Environment; the Western Hemisphere Dialogue on Environment and Development, and the National Commission on the Environment. Among his awards are the National Wildlife Federation's Resources Defense Award, the Natural Resources Council of America's Barbara Swain Award for Honor, the Keystone Center's National Leadership Award, a 1997 Special Recognition Award from the Society for International Development, the 1998 Leadership Award of the Alliance for United Nations Development Programmes, and the Ordre National du Lion of Senegal.