

## Part 9

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# Capacity-building, Coordination and Networking



Putting a shoulder to the recovery effort

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### Introduction

I wish to give some thought to the concept of capacity-building in depth because it relates to coordination and networking.

#### *What is Capacity-building?*

It is concerned with social and political relationships. Implicit in this is the fact that it must be viewed within the wider social, economic and political environment. For example governments, markets, private sector, CBOs, NGOs and so on.

Capacity-building is an approach or a response to development, which in turn has to do with the multidimensional processes of change. This means that the most appropriate intervention would reflect group/organisational diversities within some specific settings. At the end of the day people are able to organise, communicate, strategise and question. Sometimes capacity-building is perceived as simply enabling institutions be more effective in implementing development projects. Here organisations are either strengthened to perform specified activities or primary stakeholders are strengthened to implement defined activities.

Another view about capacity-building stresses the democratisation role of CBOs and NGOs in civil society. Hence the emphasis on support for organisations wherein capacity building could be referred to as a means to an end. This implies focus on improving links between structures, processes and activities in the organisation so that there is a level of concentration on impact/effectiveness at the local level. An NGO would therefore need to be strengthened in order to survive and fulfil its mission as defined by the organisation's structure.

Capacity-building is also an end in itself because the quality of representation and decision-making in different civil society organisations is strengthened and involvement in sociopolitical processes improved. In this vein the purpose and contextual analysis must be void of ambiguity in terms of appropriateness, coherence and fulfilment of the organisation's mission. Consequently there must be processes that relate to reflection, leadership, inspiration, adaptation and search for greater coherence between NGO mission, structure and activities.

In view of the above, one would be tempted to ask the following questions:

Should capacity building focus on strengthening primary stakeholders for implementing activities alone? Or fostering communication through processes of debate, relationship-building, conflict resolution or enhancing ability to deal with differences? Or should it be geared towards strengthening the capacity of stakeholders to participate in the political and socio-economic arena according to defined objectives?

It must be noted that capacity-building goes beyond financial sustainability and does not in any way mean weakening the state and is not a separate activity.

Capacity-building demands making links or networks or partnerships because composite responses are sometimes needed. Being multifaceted, a range of inputs would be required. For example, one single organisation may require a whole range of interventions, demanding resources from several sources when the context of the environment changes. Hence agencies should be flexible with their capacity-building initiatives because it could mean taking several steps behind what should obtain as a way of avoiding resistance to change. Sustainability in capacity-building therefore needs patience and flexibility, as it is not a short cut to development.

Capacity-building should be a continuous process because growth and learning have been found to be intrinsic to development. Hence Rawlands (1977) argued:

These people have become sufficiently confident and equipped to do things that they could not have done before; but that does not mean that they could not become even more empowered or capacitated nor does it mean that people's sense of empowerment is diminished if they are unable to achieve their goals.

Donors and development agencies must see this as their challenge even as they are seeking concrete outcomes within predetermined time frames. For effectiveness in capacity-building it is very critical to do some self-appraisal and self-monitoring, because:

[It] does not help to train individuals when the organisational vision is unclear, organisational culture is unhelpful, and structure confusing or obtuse. It does not help to secure resources when the organisation is not equipped to carry out its tasks. It does not help to develop information management systems when the basic organisational attitude is one which rejects learning through monitoring and evaluation in favour of frantic activity (CDRA, 1995: 9) ... development practitioners and funders need to pay close attention to the process and understand

what they are seeing. If capacity-building occurs through the development of long-term relationships which are marked by shifts in strategy and attitudes, those wishing to build capacity need to continually be observing, reflecting, changing and improving those relationships (CDRA, 1995: 15).

## **Models of Capacity-building**

There are seven models in use generally based on the NGOs' analysis of the macro-policy environment, nature of the state, economic and production systems, role and nature of domestic market relations, society and social relations. A combination of the seven models of capacity-building could effect favourable change for the poorest sectors of society.

### ***Model 1: Working through intermediaries***

Local NGOs or CBOs work with some international organisations as implementing partners. The relationship is mediated through the provision of grant funds for a specific purpose. It involves campaigning, lobbying and networking.

### ***Model 2: Generating synergies***

An NGO works in combination of partnerships to effect change at various levels. The essence here is to create impact and become a strategic player using informed planning and flexibility approach rather than a high quantum of resources.

### ***Model 3: Promoting representative organisations***

Facilitating the emergence into organisations of federated CBOs, such as farmers, unions, NGO alliances, trade union federations and so on. They are founded on support for capacity-building processes and organisational development alongside technical assistance in special areas such as credit, training, etc., e.g., SLANGO.

### ***Model 4: Generating independent organisations***

Projects—originally NGO projects—which transform into independent organisations.

### ***Model 5: Government and non-government structures in parallel***

Working through state structures such as the government line ministries. Funding government run programmes which could be linked with influencing polity through provision for training and exchange visits.

### ***Model 6: Non-operational emergency programmes***

Using strong local organisations to implement programmes.

### **Model 7: Operational emergency relief programmes**

If local organisations are weak, NGOs can implement operational programmes coordinated by an international body such as UNHCR.

The above issues about capacity building are a pointer to the fact that the context/environment can be very complex. Such complexity connotes that individual organisations cannot necessarily cope even with no problems at hand. Hence the need for partnerships based on equality, mutuality and trust. It is worth noting that some of these partnership relationships, especially between northern funders and southern recipients, are often lacking in terms of sincerity because there is lack of trust and plenty of inequality, so that southern partners are subjected to rigid reporting methods, and continuously seeking approval for projects which will only come if the needs of the northern partner are met.

Cooperating in such circumstances is often difficult but southern counterparts are indispensable because of their networks, indigenous knowledge and their experience on the ground, which capacitate them in providing the needed opinion for the context within which the northern counterpart would be operating. This is a problem that is common, and even in Sierra Leone it has not been easy trying to facilitate mutuality between national NGOs and their international counterparts—the excuse is always lack of capacity. But who lacks capacity? In what area? The relationship between the two should not be fudged because there needs to be honest negotiation, and such should not be compromised—otherwise the essence of capacity-building would be lost.

### **Why Capacity-building?**

The right to live is a fundamental right and living implies participation in a process within a context. People therefore need capacity to mobilise, to influence social, economic and political change. This can be most effectively done if people are strengthened so they would be able to create or maintain organisations that can represent and be accountable to them—the NGOs in Sierra Leone created SLANGO in 1994 for this purpose. There are other forms of organisations concerned with varied issues at micro-level ranging from the shaping of public policy (for example, Campaign for Good Governance) on tackling the direct issues of vulnerability. Hence there are many NGOs in relief, rehabilitation and resettlement, poverty reduction strategies, conflict resolution and peace-building, all with a culture, mission and peer support. We therefore have groups/organisations that serve as a channel for action—the advocacy groups on issues such as domestic violence, human rights and so on. Others are concerned with awareness-raising and have more fluid terms of membership, such as some civil society organisations, while others have traditional bases that hinge on

religion or sex where membership is largely part of social identity than voluntary—the church/mosque NGOs. There is a tendency to exclude here, but such exclusion is indirect, as it is based on things like upbringing or religious faith. It is therefore in this vein that Goetz (1996) argued that these forms of exclusion are embedded in and reflect the context of the societies' constitutions. NGOs tend to reproduce these prejudices in the norms and practices that they seek to challenge. NGOs therefore need to understand their own roles and objectives as organisations before deciding on whether to build capacity, how to build capacity and for what purpose.

In the past, northern donors have had problems channelling funds through states/government, so they changed to non-political actors (NGOs and CBOs). This arrangement came at a time when the trend in the economic performance of states was also declining, indicated by high levels of unemployment, an increase in poverty and the incidence of conflict. The result was an increase in non-political actors with incapacities in good practical, analytical and managerial skills to function effectively and democratically. With a war at hand in Sierra Leone, the problem was compounded, leading to the emergence of all types of organisations. The number of NGOs registered with government was over 400; a situation that posed problems of transparency, accountability and effectiveness. The need to coordinate gave rise to the creation of SLANGO in 1994 by the NGOs themselves to complement the efforts of government in that area. In that vein SLANGO has always engaged in training as a capacity-building measure to enable organisations understand their structure and assess their participation in monitoring and evaluation.

Coordination therefore connotes capacity-building, which in turn cannot be done in isolation. Different mechanisms should be employed to foster organisational development that would make for effectiveness. Hence the need for shared learning from field experience networking. Networks are important in capacity-building and coordination for two reasons:

- ◆ to share new ideas and information;
- ◆ to pool experiences and energy for individual and collective impact creation.

By the creation of linkages locally and globally, networks help in facilitating the practical actions of people and organisations through the provision of hope for securing rights enhancing development and ending poverty.

Networks such as SLANGO do not necessarily bring tangible gains for members at all times, but making information links build capacity, depending on how members make use of the network. In this regard, networks can build confidence, strengthen NGOs and CBOs, give weight to advocacy and lobbying, reduce duplication and increase

cooperation among other things if their objectives are clear, and if they are not dominated by certain groups competing or duplicating what other networks are doing.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the following measures are being take to enhance capacity-building, coordination and networking:

- ◆ At the level of government a new policy has been put in place as a measure of assessing organisations and helping them to understand their structures and cultures for better accountability and transparency. This measure should build the capacity of organisations making them credible partners in development.
- ◆ A Gender, Social Welfare and Children's Affairs Ministry has been set up to foster effective gender mainstreaming in policy matters. This kind of capacity building measure helps in overcoming discriminatory practices that limit people's life chances. Secondly, a Women's Forum has been set up to complement government's efforts in this area.
- ◆ Efforts are being made to develop inclusive policies and actions for marginalised groups such as young people—the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports is in the process of setting up a National Education for All Forum with all stakeholders represented.
- ◆ For coordinating emergency issues, the National Commission for Reconstruction, Resettlement and Rehabilitation (NCRRR) was created and works in partnership with NGOs in responding to vulnerability, peace-building, rehabilitation, reconstruction and reintegration.
- ◆ At the UN level, the UNOCHA office was opened in Sierra Leone to coordinate humanitarian aid. This organ also works with other UN organs, government and NGOs.
- ◆ The Ministry of Development and Economic Planning (MODEP) now has a capacity-building project that focuses on institutions.
- ◆ NGO networks/coalitions provide channels for dialogue, participation and negotiation in a bid to meet basic needs, leading to a more peaceful coexistence.

Networks provide services and information to members, for example, through the various newsletters. Activities include workshops and conferences that take people's capacities into account so as not to undermine the process and enhance dependency.

## **How these Arrangements would Impact on Sustainable Peace in Post-war Sierra Leone**

Issues concerned with incapacities emerged as the root causes of the conflict among others. Those who were not empowered became easy prey for involvement in the conflict as fighters because they lacked the capacity to question. People nurtured a culture of silence with serious consequences during the war due to lack of capacity and networking.

Sierra Leone was and still is one of the poorest countries in the world in terms of parallel indicators such as high illiteracy, high infertility, and short life expectancy, especially among women. Capacity-building should empower people and enhance development, while increasing people's ability to participate in their own improvement. In this vein, efforts must be made to improve the living standards of people by providing education for life in the form of literacy programmes and training of varying types. No single organisation can do this, so a multifaceted approach is crucial, using a well coordinated capacity-building approach with effective networks.

### **References**

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Commonwealth countries are assisting in post-conflict reconstruction

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