



Geneva2000 Forum Workshops for World Summit on Social Development

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: PRACTITIONERS' REPORTS & CRITICAL REFLECTIONS

The theme of the sessions was "What are the critical success factors to guarantee sustainable social development through international cooperation?"

A. Context

Sustainable social development requires local initiative, individual participation, ownership, and partnership amongst various social actors. As partners in social development, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, as well as NGO groups, play a central role in "supporting and helping to building the capacity of each country in implementing programmes based on *agreed* (italic added) social principles" (World Bank, 1999).

However, this international partnership unfortunately seems to have achieved limited success. Substantive resources, financial, technical and human, have been provided by the international community to support developing and newly emerging countries for their successful transformation process. But the implementation has often failed and left donor and recipient countries dissatisfied. Issues of poverty, illiteracy, infant mortality, access to public services and relatively short life expectancies continue to plague more than three-quarters of the humanity do. It begs the question --"What went astray?" " How can we improve the engineering of successful complex social change?" " How could the international community become more effective in facilitating capacity building and institutional development?"

B. Objective - Calling for theory building

The relevant fields of knowledge offer little guidance with regard to change projects in complex and highly politicised contexts. Recent developments in the field of large system change (Mohrmann, Mohrmann, Ledford, Cummings, et al, 1991; Petigrew, Ferlie, McKee, 1992) are helpful but not sufficient, since most of their theoretical concepts apply to large sized private sector companies which certainly also face complex challenges, but not nearly to the same extent, when compared to the challenges confronting the developing countries.

Also, literature in the field of development management and international cooperation offers insufficient insights into the complexity of the social-political-economic re-engineering processes in planned, transitional and/or under-developed economies. Efforts have been made to build theories in regard to institutional development, capacity building and the management of strategic policy reform (White, 1987; Brinkerhoff, 1994; Crosby, 1991; Brown & Ashman, 1996) -- all central

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topics in the field of development management. Yet by and large, the field is developing in an inductive and experiential fashion (Bryant, 1996) leaving many critical questions unanswered.

One critical question remains to be answered: how could we design, structure and implement a "sensible" project (Bryant, 1996) which would obtain the support of constituencies and stakeholders and achieve the desired multiplier effect in the context of international cooperation?

Collaborative success in this international context requires more than just a transfer of resources and know-how. What is needed is the building of internal learning capacities which can positively impact, in a sustainable manner, the change of rules (policies, norms), roles (learned behaviours), structures (formal and informal organisations) and strategic reorientations (long term goals) through partnership, cultural sensitivity, and action oriented intervention. This task of changing the rules of the game, roles and structures, according to Williamson (1985), Israel (1987), North (1990) and Eggertsson (1990) is the essence of successful institutional development.

Successful collaboration in this international context also requires a better understanding of the negotiation dynamics between the donor agencies; the recipient governments, the local communities and the experts/consultants involved in social change projects. How to best manage this dynamic multi-polar relationship remains an open question but needs to be addressed as well.

C. Format

Two workshops were organised by the Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development (CSEND), a Geneva-based knowledge organisation. Dr. Lichia Yiu chaired the sessions.

Six practitioners presented case examples from El Salvador, Nepal, India, China, Slovenia, Mozambique, Kirgystan, and Guatemala:

- ? Dr Gilles Carbonnier, International Committee of Red Cross, Geneva.
" Dealing with complexity: Economic and political challenges in the fragile transition from war to peace".
- ? Mr. Daniel Kaeser, Adviser to the President of Kirgystan, former Swiss Executive Director to IMF, Epesse-VD.
"Economic Transition in Central Asia: the lack of common sense".
- ? Mr. Rolf Wilhem, Rolf. Swiss Development Institute; Former Deputy Director of Operations, Swiss Development Cooperation, Berne.
" Why poverty alleviation takes so much time -Success depends on every link in the chain. Case examples from El Salvador and Nepal".
- ? Mr. James Mascarenhas, Outreach, Bangalore, India.
"Mainstreaming Rural Women: A Grassroots View of International Cooperation in Poverty Alleviation".
- ? Mrs Anne Gloor & Mr. Thomas Greminger, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Berne. *"Integrating Macro and Micro Approaches: The Case of Swiss-Mozambican Cooperation".*
- ? Dr Raymond Saner, Director, Centre for Socio-Eco-nomic Development, Geneva.
"Large system change & development cooperation: creating the right mix between control and adaptability.

D. Findings and Conclusions

The speakers described the complexities involved in large system change projects and the concomitant competencies required to bring an international cooperation project to a successful completion. Each situation described by the speakers consisted of unique challenges. However some common success factors emerged from the insights shared by the six speakers independent of type of project, country involved, project design and nature of consultancy applied. The common themes or success criteria mentioned were:

1. *Long-term commitment of donors and continuity of the project are needed to guarantee the inevitable changes in recipient, donor and consultancy organisation during the life time of a large system project (e.g. change of government, policy, staff etc.);*
2. *Trust and common vision should be shared by the joint project teams representing donor & recipient country and consultancy organisation (e.g. model of government, change strategy, project management practice, design and evaluation criteria);*
3. *Meaningful participation of the local communities, key actors, and counterparts should be guaranteed in the identification of the problems and generation of locally sustainable solutions;*
4. *Capacity building can be best achieved through active know-how transfer by means of Action Learning and Action Research methods and theory;*
5. *Institution development should focus on "trigger institutions" for sustainable change and development within the public sector and civil society to obtain critical mass and multiplier effects despite limited resources at disposal.*
6. *Learning has to take place within donor, recipient and consultancy organisations also including un-learning of cherished assumptions, ideological dogmas and ethnocentric myopia.*

For more information, please consult: (www.csend.org)