

Jan Ubels, Noa-Aku Acquaye-Baddao, Alan Fowler (Eds.).
Capacity Development in Practice
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In 1974, in his analysis of the rise of the Global Civil Society, Aurelio Peccei, founder of the Club of Rome, wrote “I see a huge popular army that slowly rises and moves on scattered and fragmented fronts all over the world. It is an army of citizens, who believe that the time has come to change things. Like in the tradition, this popular army has strong motivations but is very badly equipped, it wins skirmishes but loses battles; this notwithstanding, as history marches with it, sooner or later, it will prevail.”

In an effort to have better equipped units in this popular force, especially those working in ecologically-sound development or conflict resolution projects, the editors have brought together useful chapters on the multiple dimensions of increasing the effectiveness of non-governmental organizations and their power to mobilize people at the local level. As the editors state “If capacity exists and grows, it makes a difference. It expresses itself in the ability of people concerned to (collectively) perform and deliver results in a chosen area, to sustain the activities required and adopt them over time.” Much of the vocabulary and some of the concepts of capacity building arise from Organization Development (OD to its friends) as Ingrid Richter points out in her chapter “The History of OD and its Relation to CD.” She provides a good bibliography of OD books. What struck me was that all the books in a “recommended readings section” were published after 2000 and only two items in the bibliography date from the 1960s. For those of us who were involved in community development and popular participation efforts in the late 1950s, early 1960s, much of the advice seems to be reinventing the wheel with rather heavy management-oriented vocabulary. Nevertheless, the capacity development approach gives useful tools and can be adapted to improving the effectiveness of social change organizations.

There are four steps to effective social change and so the capacity to carry out effectively each step will determine in part the impact of the effort:

- 1) Step one is analysis. On the quality of the analysis, much of the rest will depend. In every situation there are different individuals and groups with interests, values and power, formal and informal and those who are excluded. These groups are called in OD literature “stakeholders”. As Jim Woodkill notes in his chapter “What is important in analysing stakeholders is not just knowing who the players are but understanding how they relate and where commonalities and differences lie...In any given setting, different stakeholders will have very different criteria by which they assess results and progress.”

Groups do not have equal power, and power can express itself in different ways. One must try to draw a map of power and inequality: Who gets what, when, where, and how? Drawing a power map requires a certain historical knowledge — how long have these patterns of power been in place? Are there signs of change? This skill of mapping changes in power over time is a skill akin to that of a geologist who must analyse a mountainside by looking at the visible strata. How old is this conflict? What have been the periods when much silt was deposited? When were the periods when little happened? By looking at these strata, where would one start to dig? How far can one dig before the whole section of the mountain falls? What is the best level of entry if one is to build a shelter in which all the parties can find a

place to talk? What would be needed to modify the power position of the currently weaker? What means are those in positions of power willing to use to prevent a modification of power relations?

- 2) Step two is strategy making, setting out proposals for change, discussing points of entry for change. Part of step two is selective communications, getting the idea out to a number of people to see how they react. This step is also a test on the analysis: are some more favourable than first thought, or more opposed? Are the proposals clear and easily understood?
- 3) Step three is the mobilization of resources in terms of people, knowledge, money and other resources depending on the project. The prime resource is people. Capacity development involves unleashing the potential within people and improving relations among people. Leadership for initiating change and guiding innovation is important. Much capacity development concerns training for leadership especially through workshops with the aim of sharpening skills so that individuals can take on a leadership role. Training is often the most vital means of supporting effective organization by multiplying the number of people with the awareness and skills required to act judiciously and have an impact.
- 4) The fourth step (or stage since it comes later when the project is underway) is evaluation, correction and possible expansion. This is always a delicate stage, and one needs to develop trusting environments in which people can give and receive open and honest feedback. Evaluation is also needed to see what skills are needed to improve the effort.

The book is a useful guide for those with experience and who have already read some of the organization development – capacity development literature. In the bibliography, useful guides are listed as well as websites. Basically, one needs to develop one's own guide drawing on those ideas and techniques which are most appropriate to the challenges on hand. This book stresses some aspects such as the importance of dialogue for fostering a deeper understanding of interdependence and the need for collaboration. Earthscan continues its publications of help to the global civil society.

Rene Wadlow

