NETWORKING DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS TO FOSTER GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Achieving sustainable development has been a challenge to social scientists interested in the development field. This paper suggests a network development process that links all development organizations policy stakeholders for the purpose of sharing the information and resources. To effectively deal with multifaceted development issues, the author recommends networking these organizations at the local, national, and global levels, and taking advantage of the current information and communication technologies to devise policies that foster sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Lindbolm (1990:p.167) questioned the extent to which social scientists have been successful in shaping society reach the challenging goal of solving social problem and improving people's lives. He remarked that:

> Whether one is concerned with stabilizing the economy, improving schools, or effecting other societal ends, the troubling prospect persists that with no or only a few exceptions, societies could perhaps continue to go about these and other activities if social scientists vanished, along with their historical documents, findings, hypotheses, and all human memory of them… The value of social science to social problem solving remains clouded to a degree that should shake any social scientist's complacency.

The above quotation makes sense when one realizes how achieving sustainable development has been a challenge to the international

development community for the last four decades. For instance, the technical and financial assistance to poor countries has not resulted in substantive social and economic development. While traditional economic development focused upon the roles of government and private business, traditional social development concentrated upon the role of government and voluntary organizations. Development strategists paid more attention to technical solutions such as better planning, better trade and pricing policies, and better macroeconomic frameworks (Stiglitz, 1998).

Furthermore, driven by the desire to promote rapid economic growth, development economists suggested development policies that overlooked other key development dimensions such as social, political, cultural and ecological. Overlooking these dimensions not only is imposing exorbitant costs on government and private agencies, but also is threatening human lives. As Lyonette (1999) puts it, such costs are now coming back to haunt governments with a vengeance and will cost much more in compensatory expenditure than if they had been factored into the equation from the start.

This paper looks at networking, an organizational approach that can create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long and healthy lives while solving complex development issues. This approach rests on the premise that active collaboration among organizations engaged in furthering development can take advantage of creative synergies to achieve outcomes that are impossible for anyone to achieve alone.

The first part of the paper provides a general overview of development issues, stressing their interconnectedness as one major characteristic that makes these problems impossible to solve by simple means. The second part highlights networking as the underlying concept applied to a wide variety of inter-linked organizations that share resources and information striving to reach a common ultimate goal. Emphasis is also put on the creative tension that must exist between network members who are like-minded enough to share a vision, but who are also diverse enough to truly develop new ideas that can work in solving complex problems. The third section presents the technical details of the network development process, broken into four stages: problem identification, planning, envisioning the future, and organizing for action.

The discussion before the concluding remarks centers on the practical application of this organizational approach. The author suggests the key functions and members of the network of development organizations at local, national and global levels. Bringing together all interested policy stakeholders to identify development issues, design, and implement development policies that fit the needs of the local, national, and global community may be the best organizational strategic approach that would foster sustainable development.

GENERAL OVERVIEW OF DEVELOPMENT ISSUES

Poor countries are confronted with a series of complex development problems. The latter include, but are not limited to, building strong local democratic institutions, developing effective educational and health care systems, building social capital, fighting corruption, increasing food production, and struggling to compete in the global economy while living under the unbearable weight of foreign debt. Chisholm (1997) identified four common features of these high level complex problems:

1) The interconnectivity and dynamic nature of these problems make them impossible to solve by simple solution. Any attempt to solve one aspect of the problem that fails to account for impacts on other organizations and groups that are interconnected most likely fails. For instance, striving to increase food production without considering farmers' training, the availability of agricultural inputs (selected seeds, fertilizers), use of adequate farming systems (soil conservation, crop rotation), food producers' associations, availability of food storage, food market prices, food distribution systems, to name a few, would not solve the food production issue.

2) The complex, inter-linked character of these problems mandates an inter-organization action. Searching for concrete, absolute solutions for these meta-problems is impossible. Only progress toward a more desirable future that requires many different organizations become involved in designing implementing ways of improving the situation. Lack of coordination to improve the situation may often cause the action of one organization to create problems for other organizations involved. Focusing again on the food production example, consider government agencies, local and international Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) involved

in promoting farming systems, initiating farmers' associations, training agricultural extension agents, coordinating food product marketing associations, promoting rural development banks along with small scale food processing industries. Could food production increase if these agencies fail to coordinate their activities?

3) Multiple sector and organizational levels that involve active participation and collaboration by a broad range of actors in different sectors of society to add to the complexity of dealing with large-scale socioeconomic and environmental problems. Bringing together institutions of democratic governance, business, and civil society actors at the local, national and global levels may lead to a better coordination of activities.

The above characteristics of development issues are calling for a different organizational approach to effectively deal with them. Networking all development organizations could be the correct and timely organizational approach leading to progressive search of solutions to complex development issues for the following reasons:

- The current trend toward globalization offers a golden opportunity for all individuals interested in development to join efforts through a network organization to fairly assess the multiple dimensions of development and collectively work toward adequate and relevant policies.

- Active collaboration among organizations engaged in furthering development can take advantage of creative synergies to achieve outcomes that are impossible for anyone to achieve alone.

- The interconnectivity, multi-dimensionality and dynamic nature of development problems make them impossible to solve by simple solutions. Only by joining efforts through a network organization can development strategists devise multiple development solutions.

- Multiple sector and organizational levels involve active participation and collaboration by a broad range of actors in different sectors of society. Networking institutions of democratic governance, business, and civil society actors at the local, national, and global levels, can lead to democratic governance and the progressive eradication of poverty

and civil wars, the major development constraints in many developing countries.

The World Bank, for more than half a century, has dealt with developing countries' development issues. Focusing on the region of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), the World Bank statistics reveal the following facts:

- 47% of the population in SSA (280 million) lives on less than $1 a day.
- 15 countries (out of 48) enroll less than half of their children in primary school
- 25 countries have adult literacy rates below 40% i.e.. 60% or more adults are illiterate.
- 4% of the relevant group has access to higher education.
- More than 50% of all African women are illiterate.

Source: World Bank Annual Report, 1998.

The above statistics convey a clear message that the global community has not created an environment conductive to enjoyable, long, healthy and creative lives. The 1999 HDR highlights the increasing inequality between the "haves" and the "have-nots." In 1960, the income gap between the fifth of the world's people living in the richest countries and the fifth in the poorest was 30 to 1. In 1997, it increased to 74 to 1. The rich have become richer and the poor have become poorer. The same report (HDR) reveals that the assets of the top three billionaires are more than combined GNP of the 48 least developed countries and their 600 million people. Thirty-three of those countries with their total population of 357 million are in SSA.

Networking all development organizations can enhance stronger global cooperation and action needed to address growing development problem that are beyond the scope of local and national governments. The World Bank's comprehensive development framework calls for a partnership among the government, the international development community, civil society, and the private sector to prepare and implement each country's own development strategy (Wolfensohn, 1999). Although timely and indispensable, bringing together the key players in the development arena should be considered carefully because government, business, and civil society sectors are organized around very different interests and concerns (Brown et al., 1997).

The worldwide recognition that government acting on its own cannot solve political, social, economic and environmental problems is well overdue when one considers the failures of government-led development programs. Such failures have highlighted the need to scale back the scope and reach of government in the face of excessive state dominance coupled with crippling public sector incapacity and resource shortages (World Bank, 1997).

The democratization process in most developing countries is changing the relationships between government and the governed leading to democratic governance which combines inter-organizational action with an expanded set of linkages outside of government, such as private companies and civil society organization. From an administrative perspective, Brinkerhoff (1999) suggests that attention should be focused on the involved actors as a connected and interdependent whole, looking at democratic governance as taking place through networks.

Unlike networks where people are only loosely linked to each other, poor countries should focus on building network structure in which people work together to solve crucial development problems. Such network structure materializes when involved people realize that they (and the organizations that they represent) are only one small piece of the total picture. It is a recognition that only by coming together to actively work on accomplishing a broad, common mission will something be accomplished (Agranoff et al., 1998; Mandel, 1994). The following section elaborates on the networking process.

NETWORKING PROCESS

Brown and Waddell (1997) and Chisholm (1998) conceive networking, as the organizational arrangements required to foster support, and manage sustainable development process. While the structures and processes used to manage development activities affect the types and quality of outcomes, Chisholm (1997) contends that little attention has been paid to designing and building organizations that are appropriate for dealing with multidimensional development issues. Moreover, one may argue that development scholars have not internalized Schotter's (1981) point that every evolutionary economic problem requires a social institution to solve it.

Networking is further viewed as the underlying concept applied to a wide variety of inter-linked organizations that share and exchange resources

and information, striving to reach an ultimate goal that one organization working alone could not achieve. Similarly, Mandell (1999) emphasizes the creative tension that must exist between network members who are like-minded enough to share a vision, but who are also diverse enough to truly develop new ideas that can work in solving complex problems. In the same vein, networking offers the potential for rapid adaptation to changing conditions, flexibility of adjustment, and the capacity for innovation (Agranoff et al., 1998).

Moreover, general diffusion of information among the organized entities, increasing cultures of trust as diverse organizational representatives learn to work together, dispersed power and leadership among autonomous organizations are other underlying key features of networks (Alter et al., 1993; Chisholm, 1998). Trust underlies the norm of horizontal communication, and is the true nutrient soil of beneficial relationships.   Mutual trust in a relationship reduces the development of opportunistic intentions and thus may eliminate the need for structural mechanism of control (Granovetter, 1985).

When relationships among the network members are established, goals are agreed-upon, and operations are fruitful for all concerned. The wide spectrum of expertise and perspectives that comprise a network offer great potential for flexibility and adaptation. Baker (1992) views the mere presence of a network of ties as not a distinguishing feature of the network organization. Rather, the quality of the relationships and the shared values that govern them differentiate and define the boundaries of the network organization. Non-hierarchical, long term commitments, multiple roles and responsibilities and mutuality are some of the characteristics of such relationships (Baker, 1992).

In this era that organizational scholars call the "Age of Network," the network construct is viewed as the cornerstone of flexible, intelligent organizations, for the 21st century (Lipnack et al, 1994; Achrol, 1997; Snow, 1992). Network organizations, and the global networks they form, have been heralded as progressive model for contemporary organizations (Houghton, 1989). Achrol (1997) contends that if networking organizations are going to proliferate and become the dominant type on the emerging economic landscape, they must exhibit unique features that are particularly well adapted to the new environment exigencies.

With the current trend toward globalization, successful organizations in the 21st century will require both global knowledge and local knowledge, a clear understanding of the big picture and the specific details. This global knowledge is becoming reality. Lipnack and Stamps (1994) have observed network groups of people working across boundaries of all kinds as knowledge replaces resources as the new source of wealth. Shared leadership is one characteristic of organizations arising in the Age of the Network.

Networking all development organizations requires representatives of different entities to make long-term commitment to learn new skills and build new organizational structures that will enable them to translate there differing needs and goals into shared development objectives, striving for a common outcome. The ultimate goal for such organizational arrangements is to encourage collaborations for natural benefit. Brown and Wadell's observations in Asia and Africa network organizations reveal that without an openness to learning about each others' views, needs, and operating cultures, mutual trust and lasting relationships are less likely (Brown et al., 1997). The technical details of network development stages namely problem identification, planning, envisioning the future, and organizing for action are discussed next.

NETWORK DEVELOPMENT STAGES

Experience and research on developing networks reveal that coalitions, multi-organization partnerships or similar systems help multiple parties deal with complex common issues (Chisholm, 1998). To tackle the latter effectively, organizations dedicated for the development of specific community join efforts in problem solving through inter-organizational networks. Stephan Baas (1997) rationalizes group networking as a way of tackling bigger community problems. Strengthening negotiation power of the poor and building inter-group solidarity. Building a network further implies changes in organizational cultures. Networking cultures emphasize strong loyalty process along vertical relations and strong dialogue processes along horizontal relations.

Culture is a combination of management's values, expectations, and preferences about how the organization should behave. It influences how an organization is designed and how it functions. Organizations that are less formal and more flexible will probably be more successful in alliance relationships (Cravens, 1994). The issue of organizational culture is

particularly relevant in global networks in which the potential for cultures to clash because of language barriers is high. Paying attention to organizational culture has become critical when considering that networking entails learning new frames of reference, listening to people who see the world differently and whose nearer term goals are different (Bush et al., 1991). In light of these cultural challenges, the glue that binds the entire network together is an elaborate pattern of interdependence and reciprocity. When the parties share goals, values, and an effective attachment, acting instinctively for the benefit of one another can be expected (O'Reilly et al., 1986).

The diverse development agencies have different organizational approaches. The relatively under-bounded nature of those agencies is the greatest challenge for change agents committed to network building. Networking these agencies becomes more challenging when change agents strive to factor in the unifying purpose, member's independence, voluntary linkages, multiple leaders, and integrated levels (Lipnack et al., 1994). Throughout the network building process, change agents keep in focus how the system should function and key characteristics that will enable it to engage the task at hand, i.e. fostering sustainable development.

The system in which development organizations work individually is not conducive to sustainable development. Bringing organizations together through a network helps the system to move its current state to a more ideal one. To achieve this, Chisholm (1998) suggests analyzing the present, identifying outcomes of the system as it currently functions, developing shared visions, and using this information to assist the system as it develops greater capacity to engage the complexities of change. Problem identification, the first step in network development, is discussed next.

Problem identification

People, the ultimate source of an organization's raison d'etre, play a crucial role in the identification of community's main problems. To ensure successful cooperation, potential network members must strive to assess the real problems that touch all members. What appears to be the problem may, in reality, be a symptom of a more fundamental problem. Food shortages, for instance, may result from a combination of different factors such as lack of seeds, poor farming techniques, inadequate or changing climatic conditions, limited number of efficient extension agents, or inappropriate ways of

organizing local farmers. Consequently, recognizing the problem requires tracing the symptoms back to root causes to determine the broader and deeper factors that are operating.

Furthermore, identifying the problem also requires broadening the spectrum of community participants, providing openness to new perceptions of the problem from various perspectives thus allowing a deep, complex and shared understanding to emerge. Such understanding is a pre-requisite for grounding network development in work that can make a real difference in changing a community. The interaction of community members through both formal and informal discussions is the underlying strategy during the initial phase of network building (Chisholm, 1998).

Several sources including but not limited to elected leaders, public administrators, educators and citizens, can initiate interest in mounting a network development effort. It may take just one community member or sponsoring agency to spot the need for change and to share with members, testing the extent to which these members will support a general vision of the future. Brown and Aschman's (1996) experience with development organizations in Africa and Asia suggests that failing to mobilize the information and resources of the correct set of actors may result in identifying symptoms rather than causes, and even worse, treating the symptoms rather than causes. Since the real causes of development problems are hard to pinpoint due to their multifaceted nature, to maximize the chances of reaching sound decisions, potential network participants meet and exchange views about the present situation and the need for change.

In this Information Age, it makes sense to take advantage of the electronic information and communication technologies to provide opportunity for these organizations to share views through e-mails and where possible through Internet. Network organizations cannot operate effectively unless their members have the ability to communicate quickly, accurately, and over great distances (Snow et al., 1992). Advances in fiber optics, satellite communications, and facsimile machines can make it much easier for the development organization managers to communicate within global network organizations.

Moreover, considering network organization as highly decentralized and densely integrated social system that maximizes mutual influence and

communication (Bovasso, 1992), the more participants exchange ideas and meet for discussions the more they become comfortable with each other and ready to begin reaching out to involve others. Informal discussions and well-planned meetings help assure a more comprehensive, in-depth understanding of problems experienced, interests involved, motivation levels of various parties, and potential support for change (Chisholm, 1998).

<u>Planning Network Development</u>

Designing and implementing significant short and long-term change require joint action by many different actors such as civil society organizations, private corporations, government agencies, who together have the knowledge and resource required. Gray (1989) observed that interaction among other actors from different institutional sectors, unequal in power, with diverse interests and perspectives often produces misunderstanding, conflict, and power struggles rather than effective collaboration in policy/program design and implementation that addresses critical development problems.

Informal discussions among interested parties who are concerned about the problem may provide answers to questions such as which organizations and individuals have critical involvement in current development issues, whose support is absolutely essential to bring about change, and what organizations and groups will be affected by the outcomes. From these discussions may originate a general shared definition of the problem and the willingness of individuals/organizations to begin working on it.

Chisholm's (1998) experience has shown that the initial group of interested parties should not exceed 10-12 key persons. Starting with a small but coherent group of leaders facilitates interactions as the group of individuals gradually expands and takes on the functions of a steering committee. Exploring the nature of the development in the community, finding the right people and getting them involved, assessing knowledge, skills, and resources required to deal with the broad problems, and searching for organizations with those skills and resources are some of the concerns of the steering committee. The committee must also identify the most appropriate person to voice the need for change; to communicate the tentative network vision; and devise a strategy and action steps necessary for designing, implementing and managing the change process while strengthening motivation of critical participants over time (Chisholm, 1998). These challenging tasks require careful attention in the

early planning stage of developing a network as individuals committed to join efforts resolve to focus their vision for the future.

Envisioning the future

Network members must have skills such as intense listening, perceptive questioning, building trust, integrating multiple perspectives to inform actions, negotiating power and resource differences, discovering common ground and creating shared vision to build strong networks. Network members must have a clear vision of a better future that they hope to shape for their community. The vision takes its right shape as network members demonstrate a concern for the well being of others, and do what they can do to advance the common good.

High levels of conflict may arise as the representatives of different organizations learn about each other and struggle to define goals that are complementary rather than conflicting (Brown et al., 1997). Keeping these representatives focused upon the unique win-win situations that networking can produce is one useful rule of thumb. Developing a vision for the future requires the identified potential network members to meet with the ultimate goal to:

- ❖ Obtain increased understanding of trends in the environment;
- ❖ Share views of the existing situation;
- ❖ Develop a shared vision of a desirable future;
- ❖ Test and build increased motivation and commitment of participants to engage in a development process; and
- ❖ Develop general change goals and several broad next steps for action (Chisholm, 1997).

Holding a search conference represents one adequate approach that allows members from organizations to clearly assess their future vision. A search conference rests on the assumption that individuals, organizations, and groups that have direct stake in the community development must provide the energy for change by becoming deeply involved in the development process. Moreover, Senge (1990) considers the goal of the search conference as to helping people restructure their views of reality to see beyond the superficial conditions and events into the underlying causes of problems and new possibilities for shaping the future. This provides an opportunity for

interdisciplinary policy stakeholders to voice their views. For instance, local representatives form government, international development agencies, civil society, and the private sector, in close collaboration with change agents rooted in action research, can during a search conference, come up with a clear vision of the community's problems and strategic policies to deal with them.

Traditional search conferences require a substantial amount of time ranging from 2 to 4 days. If participants consider taking advantage of current information and communications technologies the time can be tremendously reduced. For instance, electronic mail facilitates more horizontal linkages across geographical distances thus linking a diversity of people who would otherwise not communicate (Fulk et al., 1986). Furthermore, relatively affordable and widely distributed global telecommunications capabilities allow decision-makers to participate in remote discussions through teleconferencing, thereby increasing interconnectedness and interdependence. These technologies permit the development of virtual communities and participation by remote participants (Roberts et al., 1996). One would recall that technologies that provide new media for interaction have been leading-edge drivers of change throughout the ages. New technologies provide new opportunities for new interactions that, over time, enable new relationships and organizations (Lipnack et al., 1994).

<u>Organization for Action</u>

Experiences in the community economic development indicate the importance of bringing about changed perceptions of community residents. Chisholm 1996) correctly contends that network development rests on a process approach to large-scale change that requires individuals to be educated about the approach and its requirements. It is crucially important to gain understanding of the need for active participation of individuals, groups, and organizations in the network development process.

Contrary to the bureaucratic form of organization that assumes top-down direction of activities and tight centralized coordination and control of activities at lower level, the network development approach requires a quite different form of organization. Network organizations involve horizontal linkages. Massive linking allows decentralized, individual access to centralized, shared information. This increases decentralized decision making, giving the network its basic benefits, namely flexibility, speed, and power, thus

providing the ability to accommodate different organizational viewpoints in a timely manner, and reach the objective one organization could not achieve alone (Chisholm, 1996).

Reaching the intended objective implies trust, the soil in which networks grow connections and relationships. Trust has been shown to be a determinant of more open exchanges of relevant ideas and feelings, greater clarification of goals and problems, more extensive search for alternative course of action, greater satisfaction with efforts, and greater motivation to implement decision (Trist, 1983; Zand, 1972). Moreover, there is a linear relationship between trust and social capital. As trust accumulates, people build up social capital (Lipnack et al., 1994).

As highlighted earlier, envisioning the future usually results in identifying several general action steps or fairly specific areas that require detailed study. Action steps lead to forming task forces mandated to explore the areas and gather information on potential alternatives. The task forces present the collected information to the steering committee or total group for discussion, development, and planning of the next steps. As the task forces develop projects and plans for specific sets of activities, the need for communicating and coordinating grows.

Similarly, designing and facilitating meetings and workshops require help from professionals in Organization Development (OD) or Action Research (AR). These professionals provide guidance on working effectively on identified problem areas and developing the capacity of the created system to continue to draw support form the larger community or region. Maintaining the motivation of members to continue to participate and work on issues remains critical. In the same vein, attention to maintaining and developing the network must continue.

Dealing with multi-dimensional development issues requires an experimental frame of mind supported by an emerging network organization that is a learning system. The learning occurs when a system processes information that results in increasing its range of potential (Huber, 1991). Thus, learning systems are able to reach conclusions from the decision making process, not from observing the outcomes of earlier decisions (March et al., 1991), and to distill deep, complex lessons from ongoing and previews work while applying these lessons effectively to new circumstances (Chisholm, 1997).

Participatory Action Research (PAR) makes it possible for network organizations to develop and maintain themselves as learning systems. PAR involves applying a dual focus on planning, taking action, and examining outcomes of these actions in every aspect of developing and managing the network. Recognizing the uncertainty surrounding development issues, applying PAR enables an emerging network organization to continually collect valid information that is critical for decision-making. This research technique ensures that network organizations' members will be less concerned with making correct decisions than with making correctable ones, less obsessed with avoiding error than with detecting and correcting for error (Reich, 1983).

Participatory action researchers can help devise ways of determining outcomes automatically as a natural part of conducting work and managing the network development process. This implies to constantly ask what needs to be done to reach the defined goals, how to evaluate the real effects of plans and actions, what changes must be made upon feedback about actual outcomes, and what was learned form previous cycles of goal setting, planning, implementation. Making PAR an integral part of the network development process is the best strategy to ensure its maintenance.

With this background on network development, the next section focuses on practical application of this organizational approach. As stated earlier, networking all development organizations provides opportunity to identify relevant development issues, design, and implement development policies that fit the needs of the local, national, and global community.

The authors of the 1999 HDR recommended an agenda for action: reform of global governance to ensure greater equity, new regional approaches to collective action and negotiation and national and local policies to capture opportunities in the global marketplace and translate them more equitably into human advance. The authors emphasized the growing interdependence of people in today's globalizing world, reminding that the distinctive features of the present era, shrinking space, and disappearance of borders, are linking people's lives more deeply, more intensely, more immediately than before.

This interdependence will have a meaningful impact on people's lives only when systematic changes in organizational arrangements lead to decentralization of the decision-making processes. Such decentralization may

allow those close to the population to collaborate with policy beneficiaries in design, implementation and evaluation of development policies. Such process provides local communities with an opportunity to define, drive, and own local development strategies.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

The willingness of the global community to firmly make a commitment for more actions than words constitutes a preliminary step toward building solid networks. As stated above, changes in decision-making must be decentralized, allowing those close to the population at the local level to make adequate policies that are irreversible. Below are suggestions to build a network of development organizations while broadening the policy-making bodies. My focus is on three decision-making levels that will ultimately bring about sustainable development: local, national and global.

The network at the local level should comprise representatives of civil society organizations; representatives of international NGOs; local elected officials; and representatives of public/private agencies operating at the local level. Issues debated by this lower level network should reflect the real problems confronting the community and should carry a lot of weight when assessed by upper level network.

To make appropriate decisions, the network at the local level will rely on information provided by an interdisciplinary team of scholars, practitioners, think-tanks and all local and international agencies interested in development. This broad-based policy-making through network will advise policies with built-in mechanisms reflecting two guiding principles: transparency and accountability. Such principles will minimize the risk of political, economic, environment, cultural, ethnic, religious, and social crises, ensuring that all policies are geared towards building sustainable and healthy communities in which all resources are equitably shared.

At the national level, the network should include elected representatives of the civil society, members of the local network: government representatives; representatives of the United Nations agencies, the World Bank and IMF representatives, and representatives of bi-lateral development agencies in the country; national religious leaders; national NGOs

representatives; and private sector representatives. The network at the national level concentrates its efforts on funding development programs, approving and ratifying the local level's proposal development policies, and coordinating their implementation and evaluation.

At the global level, the key network members include representatives of the civil society; countries' leaders; United Nations Secretary; World Bank and International Monetary Fund's representatives; World religious leaders; and global corporations' leaders. This global network would have the prime responsibility of ensuring equitable distribution of global resources. In the beginning of a new millennium, it is of great historical significance for the global network members to initiate the global development agenda, providing opportunity to global participants to voice their views across cyber-communication to allow responses. Human participation surging at a global scale is indispensable to carefully assess and evaluate the initiated development agenda. The global network may ponder over the following quotation from the Preamble to the Charter of the United Nations and make this dream become a reality:

WE THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED
…To reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women of nations large and small, … to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom, and for these ends…to employ intentional machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples, have resolved to combine our efforts to accomplish these aims.

Global network members will have the greatest challenge to go beyond mere promises and seriously use intentional machinery to strengthen national and local networks of development organizations, ensuring that the general welfare of humanity and of environment system are not at risk.

Networking all development organizations at the local, national and global levels further provides opportunity for global consultations of all stakeholders whose primary responsibilities will be to promote an environment conducive to innovative and action-oriented frameworks necessary for the implementation of the global development agenda. Global networks of government, civil society, and private sector researchers specialized in data collection, analyses, and dissemination, are also needed to provide global

development policy stakeholders with cutting edge information. Once initiated, the interactions among global stakeholders will set in motion on-going global dynamics necessary to define and refine global sustainable development goals that take into consideration social, economic, political, environmental and other dimensions of development.

Structural reform of the multi-literal development agencies, in particular, the World Bank, IMF, and the United Nations development agencies can enhance the effectiveness of the networks at all levels. Such reform may bring about a closer cooperation with the international development community. Religious organizations committed to spiritual and eventually physical needs of their members can play a crucial role in strengthening the networks at local, national and global levels.

CONCLUSION

This paper focused on networking development organizations, a current approach to organizing disparate parties around a shared vision, mission, and goals. Networks are based on horizontal relationships among relatively equal partners who join efforts toward a shared vision of some desired future and broad goals and strategies for bringing about the shared vision. Managing the process of developing the network organization requires careful consideration, planning, feedback, and a constant openness to learning from previous experiences.

Multi-dimensional development issues call for multiple strategic approaches to deal with them. Networking development organizations represents an attempt to match the multiple facets and inter-dependent development problems. Focusing on a shared vision of the future elevates thinking and interaction what is good for the community. The global community has the noble obligation to truly turn its primary attention to the poor, dispossessed and voiceless, to avoid the ubiquitous practice of promoting pet solutions, and to replace the words with effective actions. This requires a change of heart and mind, an attitude of commitment of all individuals dedicated to further sustainable development. All must manifest a willingness to collectively set the local, national, and global development agenda, and jointly assume responsibility to achieve agreed outcomes.

Government, international development agencies, civil society organizations, and businesses can not afford to continue their blind allegiance to individual action even when it clearly results in increasing the misery of people. The global community had a golden opportunity to take advantage of this organizational approach and resolve to make a difference. Networking development organizations at the local, national and global levels, ensuring a constant information exchange between these levels, and promoting an open forum for constructive debates can lead to devising sustainable development policies consistent with the needs of the local, national and global community members. With current breakthroughs in information and communications technologies, a willingness to embrace broad-based policy-making process, and a firm commitment to more actions than words, the global community can determine to improve the well being of all people.

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