

Key Messages on Capacity Development Priorities

By BT Costantinos

Highly sensitive and sometimes satirical observers have not been oblivious to the limits of these acknowledged paragons of democracy, hence the notion of naïve realism. This naiveté refers to certain conceptual shortcomings in current perspectives relating to CD reforms in Africa. These can be seen as outcomes of more or less conscious attempts to quickly get their hands on 'urgent' or 'practical' matters without worrying much about the 'abstracts' of developing rules of the game and institutions.

Manifestations of this are the pre-emptive 'socialisation' of CD ideas and practices and the simple equation of partisan elaboration of CD principles. Here, our attention and thought are diverted from the critical destination between, a system of abstract categories as a construct of an explicit rationalisation, a formal conceptualisation and design, on the one hand, to a broad and diverse domain of purposefulness in the plenitude of social experience, on the other. We are discouraged from acknowledging the distance and tension between these two spheres of CD. Instead, one is led to believe that dogmatic construction in one sphere is reducible to another doctrinaire construction in the other. Effective states and engaged societies need to augur on constitutional principles and practices. However, as the statements such as: 'constitutions must be a creation of the citizenry ...' and '... laws should come from the populace rather than the palace' suggests, and assumes the form of a putative attribution of authorial agency in the making of a democratic constitution to an organisationally underdeveloped, democratically inexperienced and, largely, to a civil society that has been deliberately rendered ineffective.

In sum, current CD thinking in official circles emphasises the immediacies of institutional and political activity to the neglect of the constitutive and regulative concepts and norms that define, structure and validate CD institutions and practices. It attempts to establish a direct relation to social experience, largely bypassing the intangible, yet no less significant, terrain of critical ideas and thought. Its immediate turn to the practical tasks of inducing people to participate in ostensibly rapid capacitation such as democratisation, elections, meeting the MDGs... the full meaning of which is often beyond the grasp of the participants, in itself tends to become a substitute for the making of transparent and open rules of engagement. Hence CD must augur on the emergence of supportive set of institutions that are recurrent and valued patterns of social, economic and political behaviour that give shape and regularity to CD and would appear to offer considerable explanatory power.

The widespread incidence of social conflict and political instability in Africa is directly attributable to basic weaknesses of institutions. While African states have greatly expanded since independence, this growth has not usually been accompanied by a concomitant improvement in the capacity and effectiveness of the state to extend legitimate authority and to deliver public services. With few exceptions, African state institutions have failed to win popular legitimacy. Civil society institutions also remain generally underdeveloped; possessing relatively few authentic, large-scale organisations that can articulate and aggregate social interests. On the other hand, CD can be attained only if legal texts are applied to ensure full accountability, transparency and predictability of executive authority. Invariably, this means that we need to build the capacity for political culture development even before we go to the polls for elections that are harbingers of more violent protests.

- re-contextualise the policy interface between economic efficiency, ecological stability, political and social equitability confines of "citizen participation" within the context of the livelihood construct; grounding the value added dimensions in a major paradigmatic shift that such interfaces and integration bring to light;
- define the process and strategic dimensions to policy *interfacing* and the distinctive roles of organisations and their vested interests and the extent to which these two independently and collectively influence policy analysis, formulation and management;
- evolve a concrete understanding of the policy nuances of the Livelihood Construct as a multi-track, multi-stakeholder holistic approach strategic planning and management process to mainstream the interface between and within economic, social, ecological dimensions of integration and sustainability in all facets of capital development and accumulation at national, sub-national and local community levels;

CD is a process of institutional learning, in which state and societal organisations develop a new and stable set of mechanisms. The generic characteristics of institutions that apply to state and CSOs in any country setting are organisational autonomy, capacity, complexity, and cohesion. In combination, these characteristics determine the relative strength or weakness of and state or non-state organisations.