

Some thoughts on capacity development (without jargon, abbreviations, acronyms...)

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My life is complex, but so is the world in which I live. I choose to get along by focusing on just a piece of the complicated puzzle at any one time. Fortunately, the other people with whom I live and work have also deliberately or unconsciously devised various arrangements to deal with our complex circumstances.

I'm glad that these arrangements exist because I don't usually find time to think about the bigger picture. That is because, everyday it takes more effort to meet my requirements for food, shelter and many other things that keep me relatively healthy, happy and secure. This work is not easy and, on a day-to-day basis, I can't be sure that my efforts will lead to the results that I want. Occasionally, when things don't work out as I expected, I wonder whether I should pay more attention to the bigger picture. Maybe I am missing something important.

I also know that this complex picture is constantly changing. Among the changes that I've witnessed there have been some disappointments, but I've also noticed a lot of successes. So, being an optimist, I believe that there can be better ways of being and doing. I know that there exist within this world the things we can use to work in ways that can bring better, longer-lasting benefits for more people.

That's why I listen keenly when I hear others speak about 'capacity development'. The notion that we can find new ways to work together, support each other, and draw on more of our knowledge, skills, customs, relationships and other things to achieve even better results is fascinating. I want to be part of these processes. In fact, I don't think anyone should expect me to be a 'bystander' when such activities are intended to have positive and far-reaching effects on my life.

I'm enthusiastic, but uncertain how to get involved. Most of what I know about development comes from my experiences at home. I know enough about myself, family members, neighbours, local business owners and our extended family to understand how my choices and actions may advance or hinder our fortunes. I understand how decisions affecting the entire household are reached, and who to speak to (and how) whenever I want to influence decisions. However, I don't know enough about the plans that other people or households have come up with to improve their status, and whether they have found ways to do this fairly, honestly and efficiently. I'm not very sure who has the ability and influence to make decisions elsewhere. I also wonder to what extent I'm answerable to these other people for my own decisions and actions.

Many of my friends feel the same way. We try to show our commitment and contribute to local development by regularly taking part in activities organised by the neighbourhood association, school board, various government officials, our member of parliament and many non-government organisations. Yes, we have seen some positive results but we can tell that we are not making enough progress. We recognise that, although we share and receive a lot of information, there are critical gaps in our knowledge about the way things are organised beyond the boundaries of our homesteads, workplaces and neighbourhoods—and that these have an effect on the success, or otherwise, of our efforts.

So, although sceptical, we listen more keenly when we hear about 'local governance'. **We believe that if we knew more about the structures and processes that exist to share our abilities and influence; increase and protect our collective wealth; and make decisions about how we'd like to live in future, we'd contribute better to development in our neighbourhoods, communities and country.**

The reality is that this type of information is not easy to come by. Leaders at local meetings aren't comfortable when we question their ability and influence to address our concerns. When we interact with staff of the district authority, government ministries and the many religious and other non-government organisations that are active in our area, they also can't adequately explain how their work fits into the big picture. Although we have access to radio, television and daily newspapers, the reporters and writers don't provide the type of information that can fill these gaps in our knowledge.

Since I'm here, and ready to learn and play my part in development, I think that everyone else should as well.

I want to see all those who claim to contribute to local and national development take on this responsibility: to ensure that we understand their roles and abilities; who they report to and how; who reports to them; and why they think the choices they are making will improve our circumstances.

If this is done, then I will also have fewer excuses not to pay attention to the bigger picture, and avoid contributing actively to development activities. I'll certainly be more answerable—to myself and my community—for my choices and actions. I believe that, when I have better knowledge of current arrangements for current governance and development, I'll be more creative in coming up with new ways of being and doing. And I will also have more courage and determination to demand the same standards from my brothers, sisters, children, neighbours, friends and workmates. Yes, my life will remain complex, but now I'll be clearer about my purpose and potential.