

CHAPTER 5

COMMUNITY FOCUS

Community is the best focus for development ... this is where people live and where quality of life matters. Community centric metrics show how effectively resources are being used, not only those from external sources, but also local resources.

Focus on Community

Community is probably the best organizational structure to facilitate development. It is more effective than a single person, and has a scale that is perhaps optimum for progress. Resources that are available can be used in the best possible way. How can resources be used for best results? What incremental resources are needed and where are they going to come from. How to ensure that the community gets to use resources for its priority works. How are community resources going to be used to achieve maximum economic value adding and progress towards the goal of success in development. Is community the key to success? Local people often know what they need, but don't have all the resources to do what needs to be done.

Community centric development

This chapter puts community at the center of development. The community is close to people who need to be the ultimate beneficiaries, and the definers of priorities, as well as the funders of development, the implementers, the managers, and the decision makers. A community makes it possible for people to be in every facet of the development process.

It expands on the ideas that when people have opportunity they can make better use of their abilities for good benefit. But it also recognizes that people are only as good as the team they are part of. So it takes up the question of how people can be organized to get things done. And how people need to be motivated for success. It addresses how to organize for success at every level, while keeping the priorities of people, and the enthusiasm of people so often lost in the humdrum of a typical large organization. It takes up the importance of having people well informed so that they are able to participate in priority setting and decision making and making accountability a factor in development performance.

Community is for ever

People live somewhere. That somewhere is the community. The place where one lives, where one has been born, where the ancestors are buried has a unique character in human history. While it is not anymore in the forefront of thinking in the “north” it is still very important in the “south”.

One of the questions asked in accounting exams is to identify the reasons for adopting the corporate form of organization. One of the reasons is that the corporation has perpetual existence. But it is not as permanent as a geographic community.

Maps that are hundreds of years old, in fact thousands of years old make reference to the same communities that exist today. And historians ask what it is that has changed over the years. My home town in the UK is a good example. When I was growing up it had a population of around 4,000 ... 50

years before it had had a population of around 3,800 ... and 900 years before the community was written up in the Domesday Book compiled by William the Conqueror shortly after 1066. Places really do have a continuity that can be used to track progress.

And if we apply the same thinking to places in Iraq we go back to Biblical times. Each and every community has a past, and this can be used to support a positive future.

Development

People centric development holds the hope that development will result in people being both the source of development energy and ideas and as well the beneficiaries.

Development is about people. It always has been. But along the way the idea of process, and a whole set of thematic issues has overtaken the people focus of development.

For development to succeed it has to get back to people. Everyone who has worked at the “grassroots” level of development understands the importance of this. They know that failed development ends up with people who are poor and hungry and lack the basics for a decent quality of life and with little or no opportunity.

Modern development needs to move from a paradigm where the NORTH funds the SOUTH and the SOUTH does what it is told, to an era where the people of the SOUTH set the priorities in everything that affects them. The organizational model for development where decision makers are “on top” and the beneficiaries are on the bottom has to change.

The change has to happen not only at the level of the UN and the World Bank and the donor organizations, but also at the level of the developing country or beneficiary governments and other intermediary organizations.

Changing the culture of academic, corporate, government and political leadership is not going to be an easy thing, but it is vital.

Paying Attention to the Past

At one time I worked with Winston Prattley, one of the elder statesmen of UNDP. He recounted that he had been a junior officer in Iraq in the 1950s working on an FAO/UNDP irrigation project. During this work they discovered some archaeological remains, and suspended the project so that the archaeologists could study what had been found. It turned out to be the remains of an old irrigation project ... that apparently had fallen into disuse because of salinity some several thousand years before. What goes around ... comes around. Salinity remains a problem with irrigation in the present day.

Community Centric Planning

Planning with a community focus

A community focus results in a very different dynamic for development than what has prevailed in the past. When planning is community centric, the priorities are much more likely to be of socio-economic value to the community. Plans that originate in the community have the possibility of “ownership” by the community, and there is a strong correlation between what is priority and what is done. Plans with community focus can be simple and understandable, and at the same time can be totally suitable for the

community. Small is efficient and allows for the optimization of plans within a community without the compromise inherent in super-scale projects intended to satisfy everyone, and ending up satisfying no-one.

Gosplan does not work

Central planning ... Gosplan, as it was known in the Soviet Union ... is a system that makes decisions and allocates resources based on what the government thinks. A community focus for planning puts the community first, and it is the community that drives the allocation of resources and the priorities for socio-economic development.

In Iraq since the fall of Baghdad, most relief and development resources have been sourced and controlled within government ... and mainly the within the US government and its military. All the planning is essentially at a high level with little input from the communities where people live.

Community goal - quality of life

Quality of life is something that is determined as much as anything by what goes on in our own community. What goes on at any distance from my community may be interesting, and may have an indirect impact, but is nowhere near as important as what goes on in my community.

And within the community, my family is the most important. To the extent that people are interested in far away places, it is often because a family member is there.

What is quality of life is very subjective ... it is what an individual and the family wants.

Components of community planning

The components of community centric planning are the same as for any other planning. That is: (1) Get facts; (2) Analyze and optimize; (3) Organize; (4) Implement; (5) Measure; (6) Feedback; and, (7) Analyze and adjust.

People in the community may not be well educated or academic. Most will not speak an international language. Some who know the most may not be literate, but that does not mean they do not know their community. In practical terms, they will know a lot more about the facts of their community than outsiders. They may have plans to make things better but not the resources, and they may have a rather limited appreciation of what is truly possible.

By making community the focal point of development, organizations in the community can benefit from assistance in ways that translate into tangible help for people and value adding for the community.

Types of resources

The critical resources for development are people, physical resources such as materials and equipment and infrastructure, financial resources and knowhow. The performance of development depends on how these resources are organized and used. The information and management dimension of development facilitates effective organization. This section deals with mobilizing enough of these resources.

People

People are the first critical resource. There are a lot of people in developing countries, and most are poor and many are hungry. Sadly, many are also uneducated and untrained and therefore ill-equipped to handle modern jobs. This is the community that should benefit from development excellence, but it will not show so much in this generation but in the next.

For someone of my age it is possible to think in generational terms because there have been very profound changes in the human condition over the past fifty years. While the truly poor have not progressed, the number of people in developing countries with education, and some of it very good education, is very large now compared to (say) two generations ago. The experience of the older people in this group is also substantial. The critical key element that is missing is opportunity so that this group can be the agents for development progress.

All initiatives in development in order to have the essential sustainable economic value adding characteristic must involve local people as an integral part of the initiative.

In the analytical framework that become feasible with a good development information system, the economic value adding analysis incorporates a people dimension so that human factors and quality of life are taken into consideration

Organizational infrastructure

People can have more power when they are organized in some way. There are a variety of organizational forms, all of which have some history that defines them and ways of operating that gives them strength.

Physical infrastructure

In most of the SOUTH the physical infrastructure is poor and dilapidated. It should be possible for the abundance of labor and natural resources to be used in an effective way to facilitate the upgrading of the infrastructure.

Natural resources

In most of the SOUTH the physical infrastructure is poor and dilapidated. It should be possible for the abundance of labor and natural resources to be used in an effective way to facilitate the upgrading of the infrastructure.

Materials and production equipment

Some physical resources are available in developing countries and some are not. There are many types of natural resources in developing countries while there is a shortage of business materials and equipment and the physical infrastructure is poor and dilapidated. It should be possible for the abundance of natural resources to be used in an effective way to facilitate the upgrading of business materials and equipment and the upgrading of the infrastructure.

There are big questions about the manner in which natural resources are used in support of development. The history of natural resource exploitation is that local communities have suffered while outsiders have benefited. The history of exploitive behavior was supposed to end with the end of empire, but the last fifty years suggests that there are other factors at play that go beyond the issues of European colonialism.

There are enough valuable resources in developing countries, and enough business material and equipment available around th world for this not to be a constraint on development.

In the analytical framework for economic value adding, most large scale export oriented foreign financed resource exploitation projects have a low performance rating in terms of economic value adding for the host community and host country. This should not be and need not be.

On the other hand these local resources should be developed so that they serve to create and support sustainable development and economic progress.

Financial resources

Africa and the SOUTH needs investors that are looking for a high return on a small investment, and want their investment to be earning well for a long time. Africa and the SOUTH needs to get away

from the international investors that are looking for a big return on a big investment and an early and easy exit strategy.

And there are enough financial resources in the modern world to finance anything that is low risk and economic value adding. The challenge is to create financing vehicles and the financial intermediaries that will make it possible for the capital markets to operate for the benefit of their investors and development at the same time.

It was said of the Rothschild Bank in the Victorian era that they had the best information in the financial community, and that this was the secret of their success. It is still true in modern times that information is key to financial performance. It can be manipulated information that created wealth and scandal in recent years in the financial community, or it can be the reliable sound basic financial information being proposed in this work to support development investment

Financial resources are available in both the institutional capital market and among private investors and philanthropic organizations. The challenge is to organize so that these sources see a good return and a low risk from investing in development and the economic value adding of developing communities.

Know-how

And there is also enough technical know how for development success to be achieved anywhere modern people with resources choose to work. Good management of limited development resources will not encourage do anything anywhere development, but will aim to focus the use of development resources where there can be the most economic value adding, and the most benefit to the host community and the local people.

Africa and developing countries need technical support as well as investment. In most cases it is preferable to have investment and technical support to be from different sources

Importance of Trust

Nothing works very well unless there is of trust. Trust is about knowing people and respecting people. It is an ethical or moral concept more than it is a legal construct. Trust facilitates progress in a very important way.

Most poor, small or remote communities do not have an incorporated structure and any global visibility that is “trustable” by the “north” ... and in due time this has to be addressed. But a lot can be done when trust is established with a community, initially on a personal level, and then on a bigger level.

Though it may not be possible to get major external funding assistance into a community without a formal legal structure of “trust”, a lot can be done with a combination of information, organization and personal relationships.

Framework for Community Analytics

The Corporate Model

Corporate financial reports

The corporate model for financial reporting is well understood. It is (1) the balance sheet; (2) the profit and loss account; (3) the cash flow statement; and (4) any explanatory notes and supporting schedules.

CA community reports

The CA community reports comprise a report on the State of the Community and a report on the Productivity of the Community. These reports are analogous to the Balance Sheet and the Profit and Loss Account in the corporate setting.

State of Community

As in a financial balance sheet, the CA State of the Community is based on the assets of the community, that is, their value, and the liabilities of the community ... the constraints and what it is that stops the community from being better than it is ... the negative value that this represents.

Assets ... resources

Resources are not just money and financial resources. They also include human and natural resources which are often abundant and valuable when used well.

- ◆ People. What is the human potential? What is needed so that people can do the maximum that they are capable of?
- ◆ Natural resources. What natural resources are there? How can local resources be used as an economic driver for the area? What is the natural economic potential of the area? What can agriculture do? Are there other local resources that have economic potential?
- ◆ Organization. What are the capabilities of existing organizations? What is needed so that they can do the maximum that they can do? What professional organizations are there and what can they do?
- ◆ Infrastructure. What is there? What is the best way to improve the infrastructure so that it can support the highest level of activity? What is the status of the roads, the communications, the clinics and hospitals, the transport systems, etc, etc?
- ◆ Production capability. What production capacity is there? Does business have what is needed?
- ◆ Working capital. Does business have access to the working capital and liquidity it needs. What needs to be done to satisfy working capital needs?
- ◆ Money. What money and financial services are available? How can salaries and suppliers be paid? What is the business model to generate positive cash flow? What are revenues? Is it market driven? Is it government budget? Is it grant based? Is it fee based? Is it mixed?
- ◆ Knowledge. What knowledge is there? Is everything known that needs to be known. How to stay up to date. How to train new people. How to update knowledge and be in the global knowledge community.

Liabilities ... constraints

What might be possible?

It is not easy to identify what might be possible ... but this is the value that must be ascertained about any community.

For any enterprise to be profitable in any specific situation the basic cost structure must be favorable relative to the market situation ... price and demand. This will reflect the enabling environment in its most broad interpretation.

A lot depends on the ability of an entrepreneur to take on a challenge and go into business in competition with other locals and with the world.

EXPAND

There might be possibilities in the agro-production area using processing animal products ... processed meats and skins.

There might be possibilities in the petro-chemical area using the feedstocks that are available from the oil and gas sector. This could be very big business and profitable if done in cooperation with organizations that have access or control international markets.

Productivity of Community

Good place to optimize performance

I have always enjoyed visiting new places. Within a very short time it is possible to get an impression of what sort of a place it is. This is a function of geography, of people, of history, of culture ... it is a big mix, and almost every place has a different feel to it. This seems to suggest that “progress” is going to be optimized by different approaches and priorities in different places. It suggests that a universal standard “silver bullet” approach is never going to work, and it also suggests that this is a good place to do performance and progress measurements.

The community has many benefits that make it an ideal entity for planning and tracking development progress. Every community has a unique combination of resources and potentials and constraints. Each community has reached a unique place in the process of development and has a certain unique standard of living and social structure. A community can benefit the most when the planning and development actions are optimized for the specific community and its unique conditions.

And we also know that there is some corporate operating information in remote communities in the “south” that is better not easily accessible to the general public and those who want to monitor and assist in community progress.

So while community information should be easy ... it is not as easy as all that.

People

Communities ... Where People Live

People live in communities. If the community is working, being successful and progressing, then people are going to be progressing as well. The community appears to be the best place to put the main focus for development.

The idea of community being the center of anything has all but disappeared in the analysis of the modern economy. Everything but community seems to be of importance ... national politics ... national economics ... national security ... the global organization ... all sorts of macro-information ... but nothing much about the community.

Community focused development is probably the best modality to facilitate development. It is more practical than a single person. A community has a scale that is perhaps optimum for progress. Resources that are available can be used in the best possible way. Local people often know what they need, but don't have all the resources to do what needs to be done. It is up to the community to lead development and use outside support to facilitate its priority works.

Linkages

Modern economics

Modern economics seems to embrace the idea that there are a lot of linkages within an economy, and throughout the international economy. However, the study of econometrics is largely the study of models to simulate the actions that take place in the economy at the national and sector levels rather than from the community perspective

I have argued for a long time that these models were inefficient because they were usually studying the wrong things. The statistics is sophisticated, but the social equivalent of industrial engineering is absent, and most of the decisions arising from this econometric analysis tends to ignore the dynamic of the community

When the linkages in a community are analyzed it becomes apparent what it is that is constraining the community, and what there is that might be opportunities for the community.

Linkages and community

The importance of linkages between the various sectors was recognized in the earlier work. But what was not taken enough into consideration was the importance of value chain. There are more or less important linkages between people, communities, organizations, projects, sectors and functions ... but they remain theoretical constructs until there is an understanding of the value chain, and structures that can take advantage of the value chain.

It is said that “All politics is local” and I like to say the “All life is local”. Quality of life is something that is determined as much as anything by what goes on in our own community. What goes on at any distance from my community may be interesting, and may have an indirect impact, but is nowhere as near as important as what goes on in my community.

And within my community, my family is far and away the most important. To the extent that people are interested in far away places, it is often because a family member is there.

Linkages ... chaotic multi-sector dynamics

There are more or less important linkages between people, communities, organizations, projects, sectors and functions.

By moving from donor centric development to community centric development, the performance of the relief and development sector can be improved substantially. A community centric development focus is a better way to approach development. It puts community needs as the priority and power into the hands of local people.

In a community there are usually a number of different sectors at various stages of development. Some sectors have potential, others do not. Some sectors are needed to support other sectors ... development of one sector is a prerequisite to success in another sector. It is not rocket science, but simply advanced common sense. Planning should take into consideration the considerable interplay and linkages between the sectors. A key sector that is non-performing can be a severe constraint on the overall success of the community.

Success with a multi-sector focus

Most community development “projects” do not have much thoughtfulness about how best to use scarce resources. I have helped evaluate hundreds of projects, and almost all of them failed because they were limited to a single sector, and though well designed with respect to the sector, ignored the realities of failure in the other sectors.

One great success was an FAO fisheries community development project in Shenge, Sierra Leone. It was multi-sector and implemented with continuous performance improvement for the community. It would have created an amazing level of durable value for the community if the country itself had been sustainable. This project took resources and made the best possible use of them. It was wonderfully successful ... so much so that the two expatriate CTOs were honored with chieftaincies by the local community. This project worked on the basis of doing what is best for the community ... using scarce resources in the best possible way, and the results were remarkable.

The FAO Project in Shenge, Sierra Leone

I had the good fortune to do the evaluation of a wonderful FAO project in Shenge, Sierra Leone some years ago (around 1989 I think). This project used its rather limited resources and created community benefit that was perhaps as much as 100 times more than was anticipated for the project. How was this achieved? Two very competent Chief Technical Officers (CTOs) controlled the money and used it to do what would deliver a lot of value in the community ... and people paid for it. Economics 101 says, if I remember well, that price is determined by supply and demand. If you offer something that has a good value, people will pay for it, if they possibly can. So everything done by the project had a price, and to the extent that it was valuable people paid for it. The project had a valuable inventory of spare parts for fishing boats and outboard motors, and fishing gear. These were not given away, but sold at the local market prices with the money flowing back into the project. The project bought more inventory, and expanded to have a fuel store with a substantial inventory. The fisherfolk went fishing much more rather than having to spend valuable time hunting for fuel, gear and spare parts. The project trained a mechanic to fix outboard motors, and in turn this mechanic started to train other young men to be mechanics. His salary was paid for by small fees paid by the students, and all of them (teacher and students) made money being paid to service the outboard motors in the community.

The same dynamic took place in the fish smoking area. The project was meant to teach six local women about fish smoking, but an initial six had expanded into a group of 60 who were learning new skills and applying them in the market, and prospering. More fish were being caught. More fish were being processed for the market. The community was on its way.

But the community needed to expand its horizon. The road was impassable in the wet season, and the government was not maintaining the road. The government had a road crew in the area, but not paid all the time and never with any material for repairs. Courtesy of the project resources, some modest amount of gravel and cement was obtained, culverts were installed and the road was made functional. The fisherfolk and traders later paid back the project.

What else could the project do? The IDA school built some years before and idle for years because of government budget constraints had great facilities, but no operating funds. The project started to run evening courses at the school using the facilities

including electric generators, carpentry and metal working shops, sewing equipment, etc. with people in the village learning and earning at the same time, and the project being paid so that the project could pay ... and never have to stop.

Sectors

There are many sectors involved in a successful community development, these include the public and the private sectors, the formal and the informal sectors, the production, infrastructure, service and social sectors, governance and so on. In the production sector there are, inter alia: agriculture, manufacturing, construction and more. In the infrastructure sector there are roads, seaports, telecom, airports, water, etc.. In the services sector there is banking, transport, trade, religion, tourism and more. In the social sector there is education and health.

Sectors are a somewhat artificial construct, but they do serve to help organize thinking and the specialized expertise needed in that area of socio-economic activity.

Much more information about sectors is set out later in the book.

Functions

Within a community, an organization and a sector there are a number of common functions. Functions are the activities that are needed in a community, organization or sector that have common characteristics. Accounting for example is a function that exists in communities, organizations and sectors. Marketing is a function. Transport is a function, as well as being a sector. Thus, an ambulance is part of the transport function in the health sector. The success of relief and development and socio-economic progress depends on how all of this comes together.

Within a community, an organization and a sector there are a number of common functions. Functions are the activities that are needed in a community, organization or sector that have common characteristics. Accounting for example is a function that exists in communities, organizations and sectors. Marketing is a function. Transport is a function, as well as being a sector. Thus, an ambulance is part of the transport function in the health sector. The success of relief and development and socio-economic progress depends on how all of this comes together.

Organizations

What is an organization?

More than anything else any organization is people ... the human resource element of an organization is its most important component. An organization is really not much more than a container that makes it possible for people to function as a team and to have access to tools and resources that make it possible to do things that cannot be done individually.

When people stop being involved with an organization, it loses a lot ... most of all it loses a lot of its energy. Organizations need people ... either the staff of the clients in order to be meaningful.

Helping organizations to have staff come to work, and clients come ... students to school, patients to clinics ... is very important.

All sorts of organizations

There may be thousands of communities, but there are a lot more organizations. Every community has a few ... formal and informal. There are organizations, big and small, that help to do everything.

There are all sorts of organizations. In rural areas the dominant form of business is the family business where almost everyone is trying to make ends meet in agriculture on a small amount of land with not enough water. In urban areas, a lot of people are engaged in informal petty trade and service work.

I have had the good fortune to visit and spend time in a lot of remote communities ... mainly in Africa, but also in Latin America and in South Asia. I was in these communities in connection with refugee movements, drought, attempts at community planning, assessment of project performance ... all sorts of reasons.

One thing I learned was that what appears at first sight to be a simple small community has all sorts of organizations and activities that are critical to its present situation and future performance. Development that ignores this, does so at its peril.

Community Governance

Community governance is organization

A community, no matter how small, is likely to have an organization of some sort that is the governing body. It might be quite informal, or quite organized. In many communities, the organizing body in some ways represents the community, and holds office with the assent of the people. Some of the traditions of these governing units go back a very long time.

In some places there may be local organizations that are affiliated in some ways with national organizations. Local political organizations can have this characteristic. In some places there may be a revenue department that arranges for taxes to be levied. Taxes can be raised in many different ways, often on trade and the movement of goods. The amounts can be sufficient to provide for many local needs.

Business organizations

While most economic activity is likely to be in the informal sector, it is possible that there will be activity undertaken by a larger business organization. A larger business organization should be engaged with development activities in the community. The contribution of a larger business entity to the community should be the subject of value analysis so that there is some equity between the value created and the value shared with the community.

Religious organizations

Religious organizations of some sort exist in communities. They are one of the stronger links between

local organization and organization that spreads nationally and internationally. Local religious groups can be a valuable resources for local activities. I have been impressed how religion has a role in all communities, even those in the direst poverty. Religion ought to be a force for good, and in broad terms I argue that religion has an important role in society as part of the foundation for ethics. But the history of religion being used to foment trouble also is a reality. Religion and freedom together work well and need to be encouraged. Most people who practice their religion are good people with values that are universally common.

Self Help Groups (SHGs)

The community probably has organized itself to have Self Help Groups (SHGs) that do collectively what individuals cannot do on their own. This applies in the area of microfinance, and also many other informal economic activities.

Health - hospitals and clinics

Some health organizations are likely to be in the area ... perhaps a health clinic, but perhaps some distance from the community ... perhaps just a nurse who lives in the community.

Education - schools

Perhaps there are schools in the community ... perhaps there are schools in the area, but some distance from the community. Perhaps the only education is provided by parents.

Telecenters

A growing number of communities are finding ways to have some organization build a telecenter in the community so that there is access to the Internet and all the services now being made available with Internet access.

Water committees

Perhaps there is water committee to manage and maintain the water supply for the community ... maybe this is done by the community as a whole. Maybe the water is just for household use, or maybe it is also used for irrigation.

People to people networks

It is difficult to have constructive connections with people unless there is some organization, network or community to serve as a focus. The idea of “people to people” contact is good, but difficult to organize and manage. But it becomes more practical when there is community, network or organization also involved. There is considerable experience with networks and organizations, but rather less with communities, yet it is communities that are likely to be the most effective.

Organizations for community security

Organizations for community security are needed. The local police ought to be such an organization, and good police can be. But it is likely that more is needed than just the police. Local people have to be a part of the solution as well. Some security activities can reasonably be provided by civilian security companies, but they should be very limited in their mandate, and should be working within strict guidelines prescribed by law and the community authorities. People working through local committees can be very powerful in gaining control of communities and making them peaceful ... especially women and respected family people.

Courts and a justice system

A functioning justice system helps to maintain security and a civil society. Small criminal activity is wrong, and should be punished in an appropriate way before it leads to bigger and badder things. Experience shows that taking care of little things helps prevent more anti-social behavior later.

Issues in the Community

Hundreds of issues

If there are people ... there are issues. But at the community level, issues are more tangible than in a bigger setting. Issues can be addressed in modest and practical ways, and issues need not get out of hand. There are hundreds of issues, but at the community level, those that are important are more obvious and can be addressed as a priority.

Do powerful people want community focus?

Though many local people might be delighted to be part of a strategy that embraces community knowledge ... there are some that do not want community information to be a freely accessible good but something that is tightly controlled.

Powerful people in the “south” and the “north” may not benefit as much with community focus ... or at any rate universal application of community focus. Political people the world over favor their own communities rather than ALL communities. Community focus is a big shift in the balance of power in society, good for a majority of the people, but perhaps not as good for the incumbent elites. Confronting a powerful elite and prevailing is not easy.

Establishing priorities ... addressing the key issues

In a community, it is easier to have a consensus about priorities than in the larger area of the country as a whole. Some of the same issues will appear in many communities ... but the solution to the issue might be different because of the underlying conditions.

What is the best pace?

In most communities, slow is usually better than fast. The US is perhaps the only place in the world where haste is revered ... in most other communities the culture works best on a slower time scale.

Problems can be solved in many cases with a deliberate use of time ... time to discuss, and consider ... over a period of weeks and months and not hours and days.

What is the language?

The best language is one that people in the community understand ... and in most communities that is not English or French or Spanish. In many places the language is the spoken language and not the written language ... but ideas can be expressed very well without having them written down.

Record keeping is best done in a written language ... and I will argue that a lot of the record keeping should be in money terms and in numbers.

Information can flow from a community that does not read or write into a modern database system as long as there is a clerk who can do the recording ... and if there are two clerks there can be a system of validation right from the start.

What is the culture?

The culture of the community should be a major determinant of what priorities should be ... people should be free to determine their own set of what they want. Planners tend to ignore the role of culture ... but success is usually heavily determined by things that are important locally.

What is the religion?

Religion can be considered part of culture but is might well be more than that. Religions have a

history of being of tremendous importance, and history has been very much shaped by religion. Religion should not be taken lightly either by planners at a geo-political level or by people engaged in helping at the community level. Religion is, as much as anything, an omni-present force.

But religion can be a great force for good ... it is a great determinant of values, and it behooves everyone concerned to take an interest in religion and try as well as possible to understand.

What determines what?

Great care needs to be taken in understanding priority ... even in the most homogeneous of communities there will be differences, and it is a tremendous art to build consensus so that everyone can move forward in the most appropriate way so that there is progress that will be appreciated by everyone.

Community Information

Community information ... meta-data

It is vital to get to know a lot more about communities. In order to be of value, however, these data need to be compiled in a useful way that can be used for meaningful analysis. Data are most valuable when they can be used in some form of numerical analysis. Information that comes from accounting systems is denominated in money terms, and this is the conventional way of getting both financial and economic information.

In order to be supportive of community activities, information about local community and country organizations needs to be valid ... accurate and meaningful. But information also needs to be accessible, and current.

Modern technology allows community information to be updated easily, and can have considerable depth. It can document what is happening today in the community, and how the community can do better?

Good information starts to give answers that make sense, and can be the basis for some sustainable progress. Up to now remote rural communities that are also poor do not have access to much information, but perhaps more important, planners at the top of the pyramid rarely plan in ways that will get desirable socio-economic development at the bottom of the pyramid.

Metrics of community progress

The community is a good place to see socio-economic progress ... or regression. It is very obvious what is happening, and how it is happening. Sometimes it is less obvious why it is happening. The community is where the measurement of relief and development progress should be taking place, and where incremental resources should be used. The metrics of community progress can be quite simple ... or very detailed and complicated.

Accounting gives a simple construct for measuring progress. If the corporate idea of balance sheet is applied to a community, then the change in the balance sheet is a measure of progress.

If the resources and situation in a community are documented at a point in time, and then the same documentation is done a some time later, for example the beginning and the end of a year, then the difference shows what has happened over this time.

There is "progress" if a year later the same set of information shows there has been an "improvement". There is regression if the information shows that there has been a "deterioration".

What is a Profit?

Around 1960, Sir Henry Benson (later Lord Benson), at the time one of the Senior Managing Partners at Coopers and Lybrand in London, was asked by a Judge of the High Court "What is a Profit?"

After a moment of deliberation, Sir Henry replied "My Lord, a profit is the difference

between two balance sheets”.

This is, in my view, one of the most powerful concepts in all of accounting ... it is totally principled ... and allows for all of the issues that serve to confuse in modern legalistic accounting.

In most communities to stay the same requires a year of hard work from everyone. If the rains are good, and the harvest is plentiful, then the work for the year may show a situation that is improved over the prior year situation. If the rains do not come, and there is a drought, then the crops fail and the situation deteriorates over the prior year situation.

Progress can be measured looking at the change in the status of the community over time, and without having to know very much about the activities of the community in the time. But if there is also some measurement of the activities, it then becomes possible to see why the community has performed in the way it has. When this is understood it is possible to design development interventions that are the least cost way of improving the communities performance.

Much is possible, but it requires a new framework for the management of information. Such a framework is technically feasible. Maybe because powerful people do not want management information that shows performance ... or lack of it ... socio-economic performance at the community level has never been implemented on a broad scale

Getting to know about a community

There is nothing particularly difficult about getting to know about a community. Basic information about any community in the world should be reasonably easy to find. But the fact that information about communities is very difficult to find suggests that there are some important constraints.

Village People Know About Their Communities

I learned a long time ago that village people, and especially some of the old people in the village had amazing knowledge about the community, its history, its people, its problems and its opportunities.

I made visits to villages over several years and in many countries, and often with a female colleague from Ethiopia. Together, we learned a lot more than I would have on my own, especially about women and the community from their perspective. One thing that became clear was the need to design development initiatives so that they were what the village needed, and not merely to do things that would satisfy our own, the donors', prejudices. Almost everywhere we went there were some modest and very tangible things identified that would have improved the village situation significantly

After one visit to a village ... it was in Mali in the late 1980s ... I was able to learn an enormous amount about the history of rainfall in the area, going back to the 1930s. I started saying to myself after this experience that “the fact that I do not know something does not mean that it is not known”.

I learned from this that one of the big opportunities to improve the process of relief and development is to incorporate community information into the planning process, and use community priorities to drive the decisions.

The relief and development sector data collectors ... mainly project staff ... have done a lot of data collection, but almost none of it is about community nor organized in a useful way for continuing relief and development performance analysis. Sometimes there is a

focus on individuals and households, or some aspect of sector activity, such as health, but nothing very much about the performance of the community and the impact therefore on people and families. The leaders of the community probably know what to do to make the socio-economic conditions better, and they also know the constraints they have to face.

Collecting community information

A lot of information about communities is known, but it is often in forms that are difficult or impossible to access using any form of modern technology. Old people know lots about their communities, but it is in their heads. It needs to be collected and put into some sort of record. And some of the information then needs to be put into some sort of electronic record. This is easier said than done, but I believe it is both worthwhile and quite possible.

Probably the best way to do this is to encourage it to be done by community people for their own information and guidance ... and to get it put into a form that can also be used as a component of a universal system of public information.

It is worth noting that some of the best information about communities is contained in travel books. The information included in travel books is information that the authors consider will be useful for people who are visiting, mainly for their own amusement and pleasure. Much of this information is also of considerable value for understanding the socio-economic status of the community and what the community should be doing as a priority to improve its socio-economic situation. Travel books are often improved by feedback from travelers. Community socio-economic information can be improved by feedback from anyone with better or more information.

Sometimes there is a lot of interesting information compiled in political party data systems. This information is not usually easily accessible, but it is sometimes of considerable value.

There may also be valuable information about communities in military information systems. This information is not usually easily accessible by the public at large, and much is geared to destruction rather than construction. Sadly, in our modern world, more is probably known about communities so that they can be bombed than is known so that they can be helped ... something that ought to be changed.

Community information to support a development process is needed. The technology to do it is quite easy, but it is not yet organized to be used in this manner.

Allocating Resources

Important Caveat

A community focus for development should be for all communities and not just for a select few. Over the years there have been a number of initiatives where a lot of money has been deployed in limited areas ... in my view a very bad idea. The idea of outsiders selecting communities to support seems to me to be totally inappropriate. I have seen UN experts trying to do this in the past, and it goes on today, but it is just plain wrong.

Focal Point for Development – A Wrong Idea

I am reminded of a discussion in Ethiopia some years ago (around 1990) with (I think) one of the UNDP's Deputy Resident Representatives who was explaining that because of a shortage of development resources that the UNDP was recommending that there be focal points of development. What UNDP had in mind was that scarce development resources would be concentrated in just a few locations in the country, leaving the rest of the country unserved by the international relief and development community. I was horrified by the idea ... development experts essentially choosing to play God in terms of who deserved assistance.

In a place of chronic resource scarcity, this was a potential death sentence for people in the unserved areas ... but a convenient rationalization for a failure of the international system to be effective.

Making community development a “reward” is not a good strategy ... such a strategy does more to set the stage for future conflict than it helps to move to a peaceful future.

A new coalition

Development has to be implemented in a different way. The resources flowing to developing countries in the SOUTH under the present arrangements are insufficient and badly used.

A new coalition is needed to stop the deterioration of the world's quality of life. People have the possibility for a much better standard of living, but the present leadership group and decision makers are ignoring the SOUTH.

The global financial community needs to be a part of a new coalition. They should be in the coalition because they will benefit from a new era of development success.

The people of the NORTH need to be part of the new coalition. They have a key role because it is people who make decisions. The people of the NORTH will leverage their possibilities through advocacy groups and affinity groups and networks.

The people of the SOUTH need to be part of the new coalition. Their efforts in combination with other resources will bring reward to themselves and a satisfactory return for the funding investors.

Business is a critical part of the new coalition. Business in the NORTH can be of great assistance to business in the SOUTH, but the terms must be fair to both and the economic value adding shared between NORTH and SOUTH

Standard of Living and Quality of Life

Socioeconomic progress is all about people and improving their standard of living and the quality of life. This is not just about economics and money, it is about relationships and the environment and hopes and possibilities, not to mention the spiritual dimension.

Progress is not simply improving the indicators that the NORTH thinks are important. Progress is different for different people, and depends on the current priorities of the individuals, the families and the communities.

- ◆ For people who are hungry and thirsty, progress is more food and water
- ◆ For people with “everything” progress may be a slower and more tranquil life
- ◆ For people faced with insecurity and war and violence, progress might be peace and security
- ◆ For people faced with the crisis of the health and HIV-AIDs pandemic progress might be more spiritual and material and financial support
- ◆ And for parents with children it might be easier access to good education and health care services
- ◆ For business people progress might be a better economy and a better market and easier regulations
- ◆ For families where there is spousal abuse or child abuse, progress might be psychiatric counseling and treatment

Economic Security

The oil resource

There should be no issue of economic security in Iraq. The oil revenues for the next few decades should be sufficient to ensure that all Iraqis are well taken care of, to the extent that they do not individually accumulate substantial wealth.

The commercial economy

The large scale commercial economy has economic security in the form of savings, some in the form of overseas holdings. The small scale trader also may have savings, but small. The latter group needs the economy to succeed in order to have economic security.

Employees

The formal employment sector is not the only economic sector in Iraq. The current rules about employment and wage levels do not provide much economic security. Employees need the economy to succeed in order to have jobs in order to have economic security.

Vulnerable groups

Vulnerable groups, particularly female headed families, disabled and aged are a particular problem. These groups have traditionally been cared for within the community as a whole, and this is the best way for this problem to be addressed for the long term. The community will do a good job caring for these groups if the community itself is stable and reasonably economically secure. For these groups, the value of caring and belonging is important, just as getting money or getting food.

From emergency to development

Analysis of the development process suggests there must be a very strong commitment to ending emergency interventions and putting the available resources to work in a development mode to build economic growth. In an emergency intervention, the assumption is that the beneficiaries have no economic security, and must rely totally on the provision of emergency goods and services. Sustainable economic growth will not result in an end to the “need” for emergency assistance as long as there is the possibility of emergency assistance.

Income generation and employment

The foundation for economic security is a solid base of income generating activities and employment. Almost all the initiatives proposed for the sustainable development of the area and the reintegration of refugees, returnees and displaced persons are based on the concept that the economic base must be strengthened. To this end, the various proposals for upgrading of physical infrastructure are seen not only as long term investments for the improvement of the economy, but also as critical short term stimulus to employment in the economy.

Vulnerable groups

Vulnerable groups make up a special case. Many people in this group have lost the community links that would have helped them in more ordinary times. This is a problem that must be solved in a manner that is compatible with the social structure and community structure. Money and assistance may continue to be given to this group during a transition period, but must be taken over by a community based initiative within a limited time frame. Funding for the community initiative should be systematically transferred from official international aid to becoming a local responsibility together with other forms of aid and charity.

