Journal of Social Development in Africa (1986), 1, 7-26

Catching Fish Or Liberating Man: Social Development In Zimbabwe*

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Introduction

There was a time in the sixties when talks and articles about development always started with quoting the Chinese saying about the man and the fish. I believe the source is Mao Tze Tung, so what could be wrong with it? I think enough to make it instructive to look at the logic of the story and to analyse it as a clear sample of what I would call top-down planning for development. So I propose to use this Chinese saying as a starting point, to disprove it and to replace it with a conceptual framework that might help us to understand better how to support social development that really strengthens people's ability to help themselves. The expression, as it was told in those years, runs like this: "Give a man a fish, and he will be hungry the next day. But teach a man how to fish and he will be able to feed himself his whole life." In the late sixties I heard a slight variation suggesting you should give the man a fishing rod and omit the teaching. This could have been indicative of a more materialistic (and possibly realistic) approach in development strategies. What is wrong with this expression? Everything. Leaving the sexist bias aside, I find the approach to the supposed problems of the so-called beneficiary extremely dubious and, in the end, non-productive. The approach is typical as we find it in top-down development planning. First of all, an outsider comes in, looks at the situation of other people and defines what their problem is. He then determines what the specific, technical solution to that particular problem should be. Finally he hands out the means to solve that problem, possibly instructing the needy person how to use those means and leaves again. What is left is a person, still a bit dazed about those foreigners handing out fishing rods and teaching him, and no more capable of solving his (other) problems than before. The capability of the person concerned to use his or her own resources, intelligence and influence to control his or her own life has not been increased, and possibly has even decreased. Any other problem the man might have had (and some might have been more important to him than his lack of fish) is not closer to being solved by himself. His needs for shelter, health, security and recognition have

*A paper presented at a seminar on 'Social Work and Social Development', School of Social Work, Harare, October, 1984.

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not even been acknowledged. But even his need for food is not really solved, for as soon as his fishing rod or nets are damaged, he is in trouble again. His capability to deal with his problems in a more general sense has not been increased at all. He did not get more control over his environment and his political power has not expanded. Only the presumptious 'developer' who has passed by with his quick definition of the situation and his standard solutions to what *he* perceived to be the problem is better off, not the man who remains hungry...

I would like to contrast the approach summarised in the Chinese saying with another one that stresses capacity building as the crucial element in all development. We can compare the two approaches schematically (fig. 1).

The flow of the diagram 'About People and Development' allows us to distinguish the following steps (although there is not really any starting point in this continuous process and the various stages are mutually determined):

Social needs comprising the variety of needs people have in the usually harsh and increasingly unstable environment in underdeveloped countries – economic, political, social, cultural, psychological and biological needs.

Participation as the essential first, last and intermediate step in all approaches towards real development; the involvement of the people concerned in the more precise definition of their needs, the resources as *they* perceive and control them, *their* choice regarding their own 'development' and the change of their environment.

The root cause of underdevelopment needs identification, as opposed to a compartmentalized technical view that ignores the fact that technical solutions always exist within and depend upon a political and social environment, and vice versa. The root cause as seen here is the limited capability of people to control and use the resources in their environment.

A strategy that would tackle that cause by attempting to build capacity, starting at (and emphasising) the lowest possible level of family, community, village and groups of people in comparable circumstances. 'Such capacity building is seen as an effort to increase the self-sustaining ability of people to recognise, analyse and solve their own problems by more effectively controlling and using their own and external resources.

A methodology needed to training that abstract strategy into something practical and tangible: steps that can be taken by institutions and people who want to contribute to the process of capacity building.

Social action as the action of the people concerned – they themselves, not as the so-called beneficiaries of some development agency or some government, but as the subjects and masters of their own efforts controlling and utilizing the support that others might offer.

This perspective is centred around two main points: the crucial role of participation because without real, decisive and continued involvement of the people concerned no development programme will ever succeed, and the stress

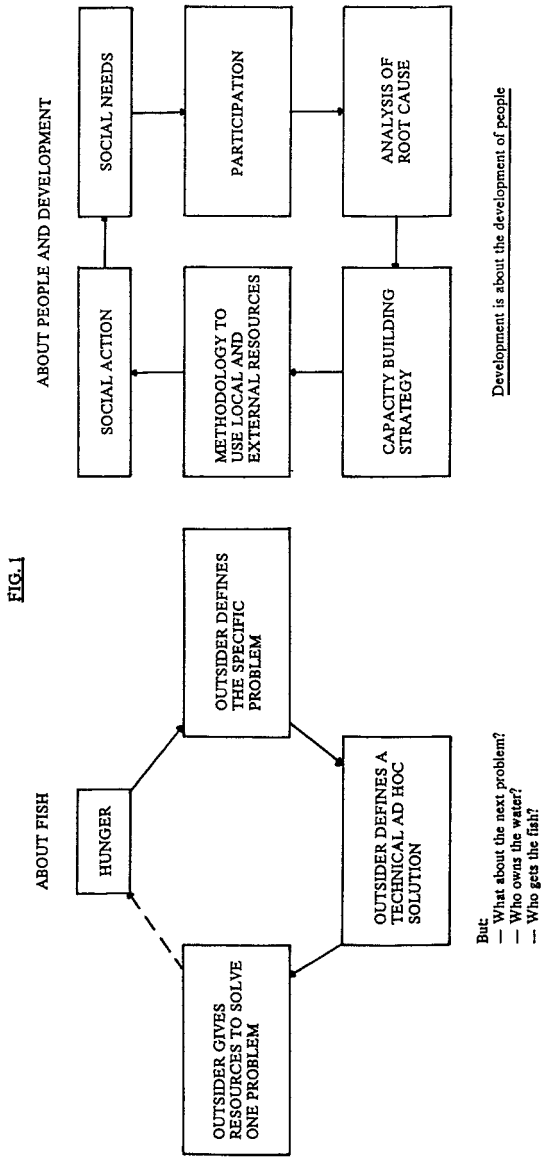

ABOUT FISH
HUNGER
OUTSIDER DEFINES THE SPECIFIC PROBLEM
OUTSIDER DEFINES A TECHNICAL AD HOC SOLUTION
OUTSIDER GIVES RESOURCES TO SOLVE ONE PROBLEM
But:
— What about the next problem?
— Who owns the water?
— Who gets the fish?
ABOUT PEOPLE AND DEVELOPMENT
SOCIAL NEEDS
PARTICIPATION
ANALYSIS OF ROOT CAUSE
SOCIAL ACTION
METHODOLOGY TO USE LOCAL AND EXTERNAL RESOURCES
CAPACITY BUILDING STRATEGY
Development is about the development of people

FIG. 1

on capacity building. Although technical solutions for specific problems (like infra-structure, health, agriculture, communication and so on) are needed, such solutions are not development as such although in the best cases these are supportive of development. In the worst case, however, these technical solutions make development of people impossible because of the side-effects they have. Real development, in my perspective, is the development of people by the lasting increase of their capabilities to solve their problems.

I propose to start my paper with a discussion of the context in which social needs in the communal areas of Zimbabwe exist; then an elaboration of participation; then a discussion of the root cause and the concept of capacity building development strategies; such strategies are followed by a contrast with dependency-creating development approaches; a discussion of some implications of the choice for capacity building as the ultimate goal in development; then an examination of the kinds of institutions that are the most suitable for supporting capacity building; finally a brief consideration of the ways the process of capacity and building can be controlled.

Social Needs In Their Context

It would be presumptuous and pointless to present a description of the needs of people living in the communal areas of Zimbabwe. Only they themselves can express these needs. Furthermore a summary of how they perceive and express their needs would require more space than is available here. But to avoid presenting an analysis in a void, I would like to mention a number of characteristics of the environment in which people in the rural areas find themselves. This might serve as a sketch of the context in which needs exist and evolve. Inevitably this can only be an extremely simplified summary of some of the main features, not taking into account the many different manifestations of rural life as it really exists. Accepting this simplification we can distinguish as increasingly important the following aspects of life in Zimbabwe's rural areas:

Physical: a very fragile environment with rapid degradation of the soil, steadily increasing erosion, silting-up of rivers, destruction of ecological balances, disappearance of wild-life and impoverishment of the biological and genetical life in general. The physical environment in many of the communal areas is less and less capable of sustaining the rapidly growing population living there.

Economic: the rural areas of Zimbabwe have been by and large self-sufficient (at least in terms of basic needs) and in fact they have even created surpluses that were diverted into the urban areas or into the exploitative white-dominated economy. This is changing now – many individuals, families and communities in the communal areas are increasingly dependent on constant material and

financial support from the urban areas and from the commercial farming sector. The resource base of communal areas is becoming narrower and narrower, without any major successful attempt to create new productive systems. Men in particular are being pushed out of the rural areas, moving to towns and remitting part of their salaries. But also at a higher level we can note how government and Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) have to assume more and more responsibilities to maintain rural society.

Social: hitherto relatively autonomous social systems, usually centred upon family and clan-relations, are breaking down as the economic and cultural factors do not support such systems any more. Orientation towards other sources of support, other ideas, other dependencies undermine the traditional social ties and values without replacing these by an adequate, 'affordable' and consistent set of values, relationships and customs. Communities in rural areas, although isolated in many aspects, are becoming more and more dependent on larger entities, like the State, centralised education, health, delivery systems run from a far-away centre, political decision-making elsewhere, etc. Not only communities suffer from the disintegrating results from such change, but also the clan, families and individuals who form the constituent parts. The effect or rather symptoms are an increasingly visible separation between the generations, contradictions between urban and rural lifestyles, confusion and conflict about roles and rights of the two sexes, erosion of traditional social support systems which leads to baby-dumping, isolation of the aged, marital breakdown, increased violence, insecurity and competition.

Political: Zimbabwe has known an active, centralised and strong government for many years imposed by the colonial powers and the white settlers. Independence, however, has only reinforced the tendency towards a strong and centralised government system, without truly creating participatory structures. While the new government has taken it upon itself to induce changes in many different aspects of life under the assumption of having a popular mandate, there are no adequate provisions for real control by people and their organisations at lower levels. Thus we see the strangely contradictory situation whereby bureaucracy and political control (sometimes jointly, sometimes separately) expand and increasingly set the parameters for the life of Zimbabweans, without these Zimbabweans having real control over the decision-making process. The vastly expanded state system has as yet failed to create, sustain or even just allow mobilisation on a large scale. A complex and top-heavy political structure imposes procedures, systems and rules for the sake of 'transformation of society', but by doing this it makes a truly participatory process difficult.

In addition to the above it should also be noted how traditional systems of chieftainship and other leadership were undermined or compromised by the white regime and how the rapid social, political and economic changes in the

last few years have also contributed to the de facto disappearance of such systems. One important but rarely acknowledged aspect of this on-going process is the emergence of new social divisions based upon differential access to economic resources and to political power that are not openly reflected in the officially sanctioned political structures. Although class divisions are rapidly evolving in an as yet unclear process, the government and the official manifestations of Public Opinion only talk about "the Povo" as if it were an homogeneous mass with consistent interests.

Summarising, we can see the growing contradiction, if not tension, between a subsistence economy for which the physical, social and economic base is rapidly disappearing, leaving people extremely vulnerable and exposed to economic and political realities in which they have little or no control. 'Traditional' Africa is vanishing, if it has not already disappeared, and the only substitute that seems to be emerging is a situation where atomized individuals, without traditional control over the means of power and the means of production, live and work with false or unrealistically high expectations regarding rewards for their individual efforts.

The Central Importance Of Participation

Before we turn to a discussion of any strategy to assist people in their development, I want briefly to mention some of the reasons why any strategy has to start and end with meaningful involvement of the people concerned. Participation seems to be the crucial ingredient that explains the difference between the many failed progammes and the few successful ones. This observation is particularly true if we look at development as an ongoing process, not just the immediate result of some programme as long as it happens, but the lasting improvement of people's capability to improve their own lives. The many multi-million dollar schemes that were so popular in the '50s and '60s and early '70s have often been disasters or – in the long run – proportionally ineffective. Analysing those failures we will see again and again the importance of people's involvement, not as the patient object of some programme, nor as the (captive?) audience at some politician's speech, nor even mainly as the beneficiaries of some project, but rather as real participants which can only take place if the people affected by some strategy have direct access to decision-making at the inception, the selection of priorities, the choice of means, the implementation of the programme, monitoring and evaluation. But why is it that participation seems so crucial? Let me mention some reasons:

1. People will only commit their own resources (like labour, land, energy, information, social relationships) if they have the impression that the activity to which they are contributing a considerable extent is theirs, i.e., controlled by

them. Non-participatory programmes can take place as long as external resources are available, but will not tap the wealth or resources local people have. So the total of available means will increase with participation.

2. Development programmes that are centrally planned, or planned without real participation of the people concerned will, inevitably, be based upon very fragmented information, guesses and assumptions. Only local people know the unique details of the physical environment, the intricacies of their own social relationships, the results of previous attempts towards change, the political balance in a community. All that essential information will only become available through involving people.

3. Participation increases the control level over a programme. This seemingly contradictory statement can be explained by pointing out that involving people does not necessarily reduce the level of control of central planning authorities: taking people seriously, taking their opinions and expressed needs seriously and accepting their choices only adds to the influence and control the decision-makers will have. The other option is centrally planning a programme and then, again and again, being confronted by inexplicable sabotage, lack of collaboration and the unexpected impact of measures.

4. Participation counters the existing pattern of paternalism and helps to fight the new patterns of patronage that we can see in so many developing countries. The choices concerning resource distribution that have to be present in a development programme of any size obviously creates very tempting opportunities for the abuse of power and the rise of new dependencies. Participation as a process of public control over such resources will make such paternalism hard to sustain. Dependencies are inherently counter-productive to change, and likewise participation will create a more conducive climate for change.

5. Participation in decision-making about resource allocation will help to redistribute benefits horizontally and socially. In this way it helps to fight the usually highly skewed patterns of change and resource distribution that we see in developing societies. Bureaucracies and politics being what they are, these appear to have an almost universal tendency to concentrate resources and power at some centres, and only pervading participation at all levels can help to prevent or fight this.

6. Participation allows the expression of a number of social, political and humanitarian values that will give development the credibility and lasting attraction that is needed to overcome many painful experiences. In other words, participation can help solve the conflicts that will naturally exist in a situation where resources are so much scarcer than the needs. Any government or development agency operating in this inevitably stressful, often disappointing and conflict-ridden process needs to acquire and maintain a legitimacy to sustain public support. Only when people have the idea that they have considerable control over that process and the action taken by institutions (be

they governmental or private) will they remain committed to it and will they accept delays, problems and failures.

7. Meaningful participation in programme implementation forces any programme to be flexible, relatively small-scale and tailored to the locally existing capacity to deal with it. If an agency really allows local participants to plan and decide about the various stages of the programme, that programme has to be open to adjustment, responsive to what people learn while they go on and, most important, of a size and complexity that can be handled and controlled by those people themselves. By being so the programme will avoid those costly failures that we can discern in so many centrally conceived schemes that were not appropriate when it came to implementation, but by then had an in-built momentum such that they were impossible to cancel or alter. Only that which can be integrated into an already existing social and economic situation will last beyond the life of the programme. Participatory schemes have a built-in check on this requirement.

8. When people participate they will acquire, practice and improve a number of social and organisational skills that have a kind of 'spill-over' effect into other areas beneficial to the participants. Planning, deciding and organising activities teaches people skills and attitudes and creates social networks which are extremely useful in any kind of change or problem situation in life, and not merely the specific project situations where these skills initially were developed. Most of all this applies to the organisational structures that participants develop among themselves and in relation to the outside world. These structures are social tools that will make participants' lives and world more 'manageable' in a very real sense, far outweighing the particular advantages such structures may have had for the specific projects.

9. And this brings us to the most central aspect of development (and the aspect that is most often absent), that of self-sustaining development. As long as a development programme only creates changes during the duration of the programme, nothing is gained except a temporary relief from some hardship (often at the high cost of increased dependency). The ultimate test for success is what happens next. Participation, if really grown and effective in all stages of a programme, makes that programme a local event, rooted in what people locally want, choose, learn and do. The more the programme reflects their choices, action and involvement the less it depends on outside support. And so, the better the chances that there will be a lasting change, a self-perpetuating process of changes for which people need less interference from government, NGOs or development agencies. They might need continued material support in a situation of scarcity and poverty, but it will be their demand and decision that will channel such support, not the design, resources and choices from outside.

10. Finally participation offers an easy test to policy makers on the relevance of the programme they want to implement. Bryant and White present an amusing

formula that helps to clarify the relationship between Participation (P) and the way people involved perceive the Benefits (B) following out of some development programme in relation to the Costs (C) that they will incur if they join that programme. But those benefits will not automatically become available, so there is the Probability (Pr) that these actually will be achieved. In formula:

$$P = (B \times Pr) - C.$$

This relation will alert us to the people's perception of taking that seriously; people will actually participate in a programme if they expect the benefits will outweigh the costs. So a programme that does not somehow lead to real participation fails in a certain area: either the benefits are not convincing to the people, or they are doubtful about ever getting those benefits, or the costs they have to pay (in whatever sense) are too high for them.

Capacity Building

As stated above, in my conception, development is in the end and in the final test, the development of people. However, this should not be understood in a narrow, individualistic sense: I am not talking about individual improvement, enrichment, education or influence. In fact such individualised changes are very often obstacles to sustained development as it leads to increased inequality, waste of social resources, conflict and competition. No, realising that society is the way people express themselves in a particular physical environment at some point in time and that the way society is structured will determine the success or failure of any attempt towards change. We have to look at *social* development and the means to achieve this. In my view this points towards the capability of people to control, utilise and increase their resources. Resources can be manifold: from land to labour, from human intelligence to capital, from information to organisation, from infra-structure to energy.

Only if people have access to and control over existing resources will they be able to shape their lives according to their needs. This is quite obvious when we think of land, money, and labour. A farmer who does not control the use of his land will not be able to improve his livelihood. A community which does not control its infrastructural arrangements can be the victim of external factors. A village that does not control the services of government personnel that are supposed to serve them will be dependant and cannot adjust its own situation to its needs.

Without wanting to get into any philosophical argument it seems obvious to me that man, in the end, lives in a socially constructed reality; he will not ultimately be able to control nature, the conditions of his own life or access to any external resources by individual interaction with others. Only through

sustained social organisation can we ever acquire the means to improve our lives, whether we think of using natural resources, expanding our individual talents or influencing the external social and political environment. So the ability to develop oneself and to improve one's life is directly related to the lasting capacity to plan, work and learn with others.

We should not only think in the limited terms of formal organisation; in fact most of what we do and think is related to the informal patterns of our interactions with others. We should not only think of strictly economic collaboration or organisation — for much of our life does not have a directly economic value while still being very important to us. The values, beliefs and views we have are part of the social structure in which we live. Consequently they contribute to or detract from our capability to improve our lives, which is why some authors prefer to speak about local institutional development, emphasising the social and cultural aspects of that capacity to develop.

It is understandable that people, especially people in Third World countries, are subject to many extremely strong and often destructive forces that originate outside their lives, that can be nature (as we experienced in this third year of drought in Zimbabwe), international economic structures of exploitation, political aggression (as we can see in South Africa's efforts to destabilise the region) and so on. But I want to stress that the essential element in attempts to support people in their coping with these and other threats or problems should be one of assisting in building their capacity to deal with such factors and in increasing their strengths and skills to solve their problems with the resources they have or gain access to. No building of roads, clinics or schools and no training, mobilisation or instruction of people will result in lasting changes if it is not based upon and carried by people's organised and self-determined capability to introduce, control and change such resources. Development is not identical to these resources for if it was we would only have a situation where assets are transferred (like in a relief operation), which will never lead to self-perpetuating change. Only when the people involved themselves (not the engineers, teachers or extensionists) will be able more effectively to make their choices, balance their priorities, mobilise their own resources and control outside resources, plan their own action and judge the impact of that action against their own needs, only then we will observe real changes.

Such increase in the effectiveness of people's action stresses the importance of their willingness and collective skills, their control over resources and their ability to learn and to adjust their action to changing situations. Later I will examine the ways this might be supported and the consequences of such approach for development planning by government agencies. At this stage I just want to emphasise the crucial importance of what has been defined as 'capacity building' and to stress that this should start from the lowest possible level, not the highest level. This concept thus directs our attention to the level of communities (groups of people with common social and economic interests),

FIG. 2

DEPENDENCY CREATING VERSUS EMPOWERING DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

	DEPENDENCY CREATING	EMPOWERING
INITIATED	In capital city	In village
BEGIN WITH	A formal plan	Problem solving action
PROGRAMME DESIGN PROCESS	Static – expert dominated	evolving – collaborative
PRIMARY RESOURCE BASE	Central funds and technicians	Local people and resources
SUPPORTING ORGANISATION	Existing or built top-down	Built from bottom-up
SOCIAL ANALYSIS	To justify plan and meet eval. requirements	For problem definition and programme improvement
ORGANISED BY	Technical speciality	Interdisciplinary teams
LEADERSHIP	Limited, changing positional	Strong, sustained individual
STAFF DEVELOPMENT	Preservice, formal, classroom, didactic	continuous, process orientated, action learning
ERROR	Ignored or buried	Embraced
GROWTH	Rapid, mechanistic	Gradual, organic
MANAGEMENT FOCUS	On-time completion of projects	Sustained performance of institutions.
EVALUATION	External, intermittent, activities orientated	Self, continuous, process orientated.

and associations of people (like co-operatives). It does not deny the importance of central government action, but perceives this mainly in its contribution towards lower level demands and capabilities. This concept alerts us to the very serious risks of centralised development planning, which may in fact result in deterioration of the situation and in loss of lasting capacity for people to improve their lives.

Different Strategies

In this context it is not possible to spell out in detail how one could support the process of capacity building in rural areas; I would need much more space and would need to be more specific in time, place and social categories than I can be here. Still, it might be useful to mention a number of basic characteristics for any development strategy that aims at empowering people to deal with their own problems. It might help to contrast such strategy with the more traditional and unfortunately much more common strategies that in fact increase the dependency of people. The last twenty years have seen many applications of this approach, usually announced with lots of rhetoric about change and development and often resulting in the strengthening of central organisations (be it government or international development agencies) to the detriment of the so-called beneficiaries. They might have received some specific benefit (frequently not of their choice and not matching their needs), but at high costs: they become increasingly dependent on systems of decision-making and resource control which in fact made them less able to deal with (new) problems and more subject to external control and manipulation. This end result has often been created by large-scale, centrally planned, costly programmes such as infra-structural works, massive health and education programmes, standardized agricultural programmes, the introduction of co-operatives by government, and similar 'solutions' exported from the capital (or even international centres) into rural areas.

Using distinctions made by Korten at a workshop in New York, we can contrast the so-called 'dependency creating' versus 'empowering' development strategies as in fig. 2.

In my view the most essential differences between the two approaches lie in the following three ways:

(a) the way plans are made: do they start with a technical definition of a narrowly defined problem and do they focus on the use of external resources? Or do plans follow a usually much vaguer and more diversified analysis of the situation as experienced by people themselves and build upon what people are already doing, know and have?

(b) the role of errors: in the classic approach errors and failures to meet targets in development programmes are often ignored or denied: the involved officials would suffer in their careers if they became known. This is especially true of government services where it is not possible to acknowledge mistakes. Politically such mistakes are often seen as unacceptable and the illusion that action can be planned and executed in a top-down fashion usually does not encourage people to acknowledge errors. If a programme does not meet its objectives it would imply that either the civil servant involved fails, and so loses his job, or his superiors made mistakes, and if he said so he would still lose his job. In the other approach errors are taken as instructive experiences that

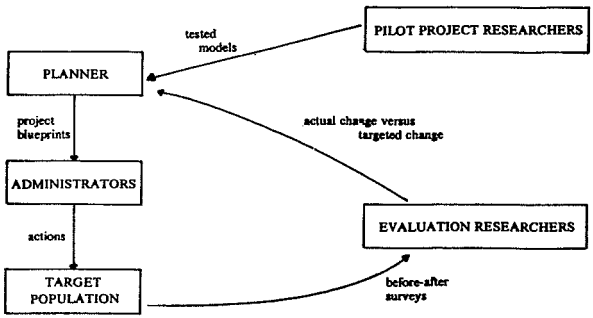
call for fresh analysis, experiment and adjustment to changing circumstances. The failure of a programme can be seen as a challenge to understand better and an incentive to reorganise action, so that one is more effective next time.

(c) the place of the organisation: many development programmes are carried out either by existing government bodies or by specialised agencies. So it is either a Ministry that was never created to carry out development work and that indeed is not capable of dealing with the very special demands that capacity building, participation and reduced planning will impose, or there is a specially created 'development agency' which will never be rooted in the social, economic and political reality that should sustain and feed the organisational and institutional structures. In other words, a technical capacity is created that does not derive its strength and chances of survival from the people involved, but from outside resources and stimuli, while in an empowering approach organisations start with and build upon existing patterns of local collaboration and group-formulation, and slowly and sometimes erratically evolve with and through the efforts of the people involved. In a formalised sense organisation is an end-result, as it can help to consolidate the acquired capacity of a community or group to carry out complex tasks. In an informal sense organisation can be seen as the changing expression of ongoing interaction and the learning process of people while they are trying to cope with their environment. This brings us to the next step.

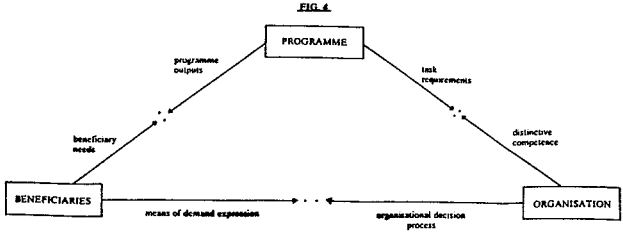
Organisation and Development

Trying to make these ideas about capacity building a bit more practical it seems appropriate to look at the kind of organisational set-up one needs to support that process. If we have an idea about the general objectives, the leading concepts and the broad strategy, the next step, at least for people and institutions who want to do something about development, seems to be to create an organisational structure or at least judging the organisation one has at hand from the point of view of capacity building. The most common situation in development planning and implementation can be sketched as in fig. 3.

FIG. 3
THE BLUEPRINT APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT PLANNING



Some authority decides a development programme should be designed and carried out and consequently instructs *researchers* to come up with ideas, a design and model. They, after having done feasibility studies and possibly a 'pilot project', present a model to the next set of functionaries ie, *planners*. It is the planners' job to indicate what steps, funds, expertise, material support and so on should be arranged to carry out the project successfully. So their involvement results in a set of detailed instructions, a budget, an organisational chart, procedures and criteria. This set is in turn handed over to *administrators* who will carry out the action: extension, training, education, giving credit, or some specialised task. These activities in turn somehow affect the *target population* in one or more aspects – hopefully in the desired direction. *Evaluators*, another set of researchers, come in and compare the situation before and after the intervention by the development programme and present their information to the planners to enable them to correct some measures, revise the intervention and re-allocate funds, to produce end results that are closer to the desired ones. It will be clear that in such a situation the organisational set-up in which planners, researchers, administrators and even the target population operate is not in any deliberate and explicit way affected by what is taking place. The structure of a department, the organisation of the co-operative, the relationship between the evaluation section and financial people, all these are taken as given variables. Changes within the development project can possibly take place, but not to the extent that these would alter any of the institutional structures around it. In fact it could well be those structures that are the biggest obstacle to effective change and development. It may be the way a Ministry is set up that hinders any flow of information to the planning level or that the extension people are being constrained by the policies of their department in regard to vehicle use, reporting or proposal submission, or that in fact different agencies interfere with each other's programmes and make it impossible for the 'target population' to control the programme. This observation might lead to emphasising the need to consider organisational structures as part of the whole development exercise and to try to make such structures responsive to the changing needs of the people involved and the equally changing demands that implementation of any project might impose. Korten has introduced a concise model which neatly describes the relationship between an organisation, its programme and beneficiaries (fig. 4).



The diagram directs our attention to the relationship between an organisation and the beneficiaries. To be effective, there needs to be what Korten calls a 'fit' between the way the organisation makes decisions on the one hand and the way beneficiaries express themselves. Only when that decision-making really takes into account what the people concerned feel, want and say will there be an effective response, instead of organisations that are totally isolated from how their target group thinks and speaks. Many of the government institutions under the Smith regime in Zimbabwe were striking examples of not having that kind of 'fit', but having a black government is in no way a guarantee for having a bureaucracy at national or lower levels that is aware of and responsive to what non-bureaucrats think and express.

The organisation and the programme

For an organisation to be effective it should be competent to carry out the programme it has adopted. This might seem rather obvious, but we can see too many examples of organisations perhaps being good in one thing, but not at all in the many other things that they are being charged with. This lack of 'fit' can happen especially when there is a lot of political or social pressure to meet: expectations of people, without taking the time to build the institutional competence to do so. Ministries and departments are suddenly faced with tasks for which they have never been prepared and for which they are not suitable. An organisation is not neutral and cannot be used for all the tasks that are necessary: just as an army is geared towards organised violence and not towards political pacification, so an agricultural extension agency can train people but not necessarily mobilise and organise them, and an educational institution can offer teaching but not automatically organise production.

The programme and beneficiaries

In the end this relation and the 'fit' we can observe here is the final test: does the programme as carried out offer those services, incentives, goods and support that relate to the specific needs of the beneficiaries? Are the health needs of beneficiaries met by the curative services of the rural hospital? Are the needs for credit and better marketing arrangements met by the extension work of agricultural experts? Are the problems of leadership and motivation of emerging co-operatives adequately met by the output of procedures, sophisticated systems, legislation, etc., as produced by a co-operative department?

The point about organisation that is important in this context is that the nature and level of organisation in a development programme should be treated as something flexible depending on the fluctuating needs of the programme which in turn will reflect the changing needs and capacities of the people

involved. No given organisational structure will be adequate for all kinds of development programmes or even for all stages within any given kind. When we discussed the 'empowering strategy', we emphasised the process-like nature of development; at one stage specific goals and operational requirements will be quite different from those at another stage. An emerging co-operative has different problems to one that was established long ago and that has reached a certain level of technical sophistication. A women's organisation that is still small and largely based upon direct, personal contact between the members (and the leaders) has problems and strengths different to those of a large scale organisation with standardised procedures, professional staff and intricate links to government. These differences are not the problem but not acknowledging them or not allowing them to be acknowledged is the problem. This expresses itself above all in the creation of fixed organisational structures that do not change with the process of development but only change because of some external factor.

In my view any effective development organisation is an organisation that maintains flexibility and that has the openness and competence to respond to the changing demands and skills of the people it is working with. It must also be able to respond to the ever changing constraints and opportunities of the material and social environment. If lasting development really is the development of people, then that process is most of all expressed in the growing competence of the organisational means that people have. This applies both to the organisations as run and used by those people themselves and the agencies that try to serve those organisations, be they government or NGO.

Methodology and Development

The scope of this presentation does not allow me to go into detail on the next set of issues: how to design and carry out development programmes that contribute to capacity building? This is a question of methodology and it can only be answered by practice and the learning that will result. Still, it is somewhat frustrating to avoid any reference to practical steps and I would like to present a number of general guidelines or comments that could provide at least a minimal idea of the kind of practical approaches that I have in mind. Of course this is not anything like a clear-cut, fool-proof or tested methodology; it is only some suggestions that might provide useful ideas. In any real-life attempt to implement a development programme such suggestions need to be elaborated, tested, expanded and tailored to the task at hand. But here I can only give this general list:

Follow a process-approach (as opposed to a blueprint).
Define action as incremental.
Keep organisational structures flexible and simple.

Beneficiaries should make a resource commitment.
Priority should be given to work with existing, indigenous organisations.
Programmes should start with simple activities that give quick results.
Conflicts in the environment should be acknowledged and dealt with.
Results should be demonstrated.
There should be a two-way information system between implementors and beneficiaries established.
Organisational incentives should directly relate to programme goals.
An inspiring 'learning climate' should be established by learning from success and error.
Building organisational capacity should be emphasised.
There should be work at different levels.
Use evaluation for learning while proceeding, not afterwards.
Relate monitoring to programme impact, not merely to activities.
Trust good leaders.
Appreciate and utilise people's existing skills.
Distinguish between different stages in organisational development.
Organisations should not be formalised unless necessary.
Accept temporary organisational arrangements.

Who will do it?

Although it has been stated strongly that people can only help themselves, this does not solve the problem that people need to be assisted in getting better at helping themselves. The capacity collectively to control and utilise resources does not exist automatically nor will it improve automatically. This will be true particularly in the kind of situation that was described earlier under social needs, that of an increasingly unstable, harsh environment where external factors continue to disturb the fragile social and material balance that people in communal areas had established. To overcome these adverse factors people need assistance in improving existing capacity and to develop new kinds of capacity in a changing environment. I am fully aware of the inevitable contradiction of outside help that claims to strengthen people but might create new dependencies. But I am also aware of the destructive impact of modernisation, the intrusion of international capitalism and the breakdown of local resources. So suggesting that people should solve their problems entirely on their own sounds good but ignores the fact that people are not 'on their own'; they are under attack and need all the help that can be generated as long as it will improve their capability to respond to that attack.

Who should arrange for such support and who should, in the end, plan and implement development programmes of the kind that have been sketched here? This is a sensitive issue in Zimbabwe, where we not only have a highly

developed private sector controlling a large part of the economy (and more than that), but also a strong government and an ambitious ruling party. Without going into the debate about who should be doing what, I only want to present an argument for more involvement and more latitude for another sector: the non-Government Organisations (NGOs). By NGOs I refer here to the non-commercial, locally-based participatory organisations that somehow serve as a medium for groups of people publicly to present their interests and organise the efforts of their members to improve and shape their lives. I am thinking of organisations such as the Zimbabwe Women's Bureau, ORAP, OCCZIM, Zimbabwe Project, but also of many church-affiliated organisations and groups in the rural areas: co-operatives, women's clubs, youth groups, farmers' clubs, work-parties, even family and clan structures aimed at mutual support. Although it is hardly possible to offer any generalisations, I would like to mention a few advantages that such NGOs can have when it comes to development. I think that the seven features of NGOs listed below can combine to prove their effectiveness in participatory development strategies, especially so in the African context. Some of those features directly relate to what has been said before about capacity building.

(1) NGOs are often very close to the so-called grass-roots level and maintain the best contact with so-called beneficiaries. This makes them responsive to the needs and views of beneficiaries, usually much more so than any complex government system.

2) Personnel and leadership in NGOs often have a high level of dedication and commitment. They have to have that as their position does not offer many other incentives or remunerations (unlike the financial incentives in the private sector, the career perspectives in government and the political status and power in the ruling party). As decision making and control within NGOs often is a rather public process, members can indeed screen their leaders on their dedication and remove dishonest or incompetent leaders somewhat more easily.

3) NGOs have a consistent record, especially in Africa, of operating at a much lower cost-level and being much more alert to respond to new or changing needs and circumstances. It is quite clear for example that in the many disaster situations and refugee situations in Africa NGOs have responded quickly and more adequately.

4) NGOs have an excellent track-record of being able to generate very high contributions from their members. In other words, NGOs somehow seem to invite or convince members to commit their resources to the joint activity, much more so than government action which usually depends on central and expensive resources or on forcing people to contribute. Without force NGOs make people contribute their land, labour, money, time and emotions.

5) NGOs are, almost by definition, smaller and much more flexible. They do not have the burden of large-scale bureaucracy, political strife, needs for

standardisation as government structures have. This makes NGOs a more appropriate medium for the process-like approach to development that was advocated here and for the learning process that need to take place. Their small size, proximity to the people, dedicated staff and flexibility often release much more creativity within NGOs than is the case within government structures. The bottom-up flow of information and decision making that characterizes NGOs much more than most government structures, makes them more appropriate for experiments, trying out new ideas, adjusting to the specifics of smaller groups of people, coping with unique environments and building on what a particular set of people can and want to do.

6) NGOs seem to possess that special quality that appears to be essential for creating and carrying out self-sustaining development programmes, downward accountability. This means that the way plans are prepared, decided and carried out are really and directly affected by what members or beneficiaries feel and want. Personnel in NGOs have to take into account the needs and satisfaction of members to maintain and carry out their jobs. However, in governmental bodies personnel are usually primarily or even only accountable to their superiors. In such a situation nobody can blame public servants who respond to the criteria their superiors present instead of organising their activities around beneficiaries' wishes. The result of such upward accountability can result in officials being more concerned with timely reporting, following procedures, applying rules and administrative procedures than with effectively serving the target group. It is not the target group that will pay their salary if their superiors dismiss them. In NGOs this situation might be reserved, especially in truly decentralised organisations.

7) NGOs have less of a tendency to expand and maintain themselves at all costs, while governments have an in-built mechanism indefinitely to perpetuate themselves and to grow, even if there is no external reason to do so. The reasons are of a political as well as an organisational nature but do not apply to the smaller NGOs that usually have more circumscribed functions, more of a tenuous financial base and, an almost in-built tendency to disappear (which might be a problem at another level). But the point here is that a development approach that aims at handing over responsibility to beneficiaries, without creating long-term dependencies on outside institutions, might have a better chance with NGOs.

Conclusions

In this brief presentation I introduced more problems and questions than answers or solutions. And although it is unsatisfactory this might underline my suggestion that only in real life situations can the people concerned find their answers – instead of merely applying any blueprint for development. But more

research and exchange is still needed in Zimbabwe on practical approaches to participatory development. Now that people in this country have finally gained the opportunity to enter into open debate about the way society at the various levels should be structured, time has come to experiment, learn, evaluate and try again. The role of government in this process is crucial. The government of Zimbabwe is in a position to set the tone for the development debate in the country, to create the conditions for open experimentation and to offer the minimum support to people trying to build their capacity to deal with problems. It remains to be seen how able and willing the government bodies at the various levels are in supporting that process. There might be a temptation to restrict government action to introduction of technical solutions or to perceive the demands and behaviour of NGOs and members of communities as threatening to the political and administrative prerogatives of government. This perception has come up in too many African countries. Let us hope government has the maturity and self-control to understand and accept that development never happens from the top, or from the centre.

If development is indeed the development of people the focus of government action must be on building capacity at lower levels. And this might imply that people are not only being asked what their problems are, but also what solutions they have in mind. A hungry man might still choose to give higher priority to other problems. And the fact that he is hungry does not mean he is not capable of thinking and deciding about his life and possible ways to improve that. So he might choose not to receive nets or rods for fishing, he might prefer to be assisted in running his own affairs more adequately through acquiring general skills, improving his collaboration with his equals or through getting access and control over external resources. The government of Zimbabwe has to find an answer to the apparently contradictory situation that the truly effective government is the one that enables people at lower levels to be successful in controlling their lives and their development.