

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES:

FIELD EXPERIENCE IN PAID -WA

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Background

Authors, researchers, and development experts have suggested a number of strategies over time which are considered critical for development. This to a large extent is an attempt to find solution to the problems of poverty particularly in grassroot communities and to lack of growth at national level. However, some of these strategies have been known to fail because they did not bridge the identified gap. In his book on the Elusive Quest for Growth (2001), William Easterly listed such failed remedies to include “foreign aid, foreign investment, education, big infrastructural projects, conditional aid” and concluded that for development to be possible, policies relating to issues of rule of law and corruption free governance are necessary. Experience in governance, particularly in less developed countries provide some justification for this point of view. The issue of failed remedies might not only be due to wrong strategies, but also for the fact that they leave gaps between the provider and the beneficiaries; and also in implementation. The polarization of the very rich and the poor gives the impression of uneven distribution of available wealth; and added to this is the lavish expenditure on projects of secondary need, and problems in the use of foreign aids. Some of the interventions may be relevant in themselves, but the problem of lack of participation and inclusion of stakeholders in the process could result in the benefits not reaching the target group and for other inherent reasons might not be a priority acceptable to the group.

In the African context, the evolvement of alternative strategies to touch the poor are seen through the activities of local organizations such as the non-governmental organizations, common initiative groups, community based organizations and educational intitutions to create capacity at local level to enable them help themselves. They help facilitate participatory development in which they involve the community through direct practical intervention to achieve their development priorities. It is a process whereby these beneficiaries are part of the problems identification, planning, implementation, and management of the development project or action.

The concern for continuous growth in a community or nation makes it necessary for those for whom it is meant to be part of the process. Development leads to growth, but to have the desired impact, it must

be sustainable; involve the ultimate beneficiaries, and the outcome as well as the impact should justify the resources expended on it. Harry Truman's inaugural speech of 20th January 1949 touched on the importance of development action reaching its goal. According to him, he acknowledged that, as humanity acquire and use the knowledge and skill to relieve the suffering of the poor, the outcome, raise substantially, their standards of living. One of the expected results of development is that it must elevate the standard of living of the affected people.

Community involvement in development engender learning, which facilitates sustainability. Such development action in the grassroots is a channel for working with the communities to find a solution to their problems. It becomes sustainable if the project continues to function actively after the withdrawal of the sponsors, and to provide benefits through their own intervention. A sponsored project on fruit processing in a community using special technical skills, for example, must ensure that a trained group within the community is able to master this technology and develop the capacity to continue production for the market to generate income. This is an element of sustainability. It goes a step further if the community continues to improve on the standard of production to add value to the benefits received and make a difference in the life of the people. The focus of PAID-WA is to promote community participation in its development to improve their living standard and enhance their capacity in this regard.

Field Action in PAID-WA

Pan African Institute for Development – West Africa has its focus on the field on issues of development. It believes that development is not active if it is not sustainable; that the field is the primary source of events that ultimately culminates in development actions and policies; and that participation of stakeholders is necessary to determine development needs and the strategies for achieving the solution. This therefore underlies the basis for its community field work activities.

Field work in PAID-WA is categorized into two streams:

- Research actions and studies undertaken to address the needs of organizations that require this intervention;
- Studies undertaken by the students as part of their course curriculum. This is an annual activity undertaken to acquire practical knowledge about community work, and to generate in communities the skill of mastering the process of participatory development to identify,

towards implementation, their priority development needs. This learning is done in multi disciplinary groups using integrated approach. The other field study undertaken by the students is on individual basis leading to a case study report of a maximum of thirty typed pages on a topic selected from a current topical issue as the theme for the year.

These two sources bring in vital information that contribute to knowledge in the development realm, possibly engender new trends that could lead to more positive result; and guide the target population towards development efforts.

The field series presented on this site will focus on studies undertaken for learning purpose but yielding benefits to the communities. They will concentrate on key findings and lessons learnt.

Enjoy your reading.

References:

1. D+C Development and Cooperation: New Development Strategies, March 2003, Vol.30, No.3
2. Fernand Vicent: The PAID Story (1963-1981), Pan African Institute for Development, Dec. 1982