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Mobilizing Human Energy

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Niger was all but given a death sentence in the 1970s when drought-propelled desertification, rapid population growth, and unsustainable farming practices threatened ecological collapse and mass human suffering. Women on average each gave birth to more than seven children, and the population was expected to double in the next two decades. Families who had worked their land for generations could see the tell-tale signs: it was taking longer and longer to get to trees and fresh water, and the Sahara desert was getting closer and closer.¹

Thirty years later there is startling evidence of a turnaround, thanks to changes undertaken beginning in the mid-1980s. (See Figure 12-1.) At that time, farmers in several villages were taught to carefully plow around tree saplings when sowing crops of millet, sorghum, peanuts, and beans. Careful nurturing, along with other simple soil and water conservation practices, saplings became trees,

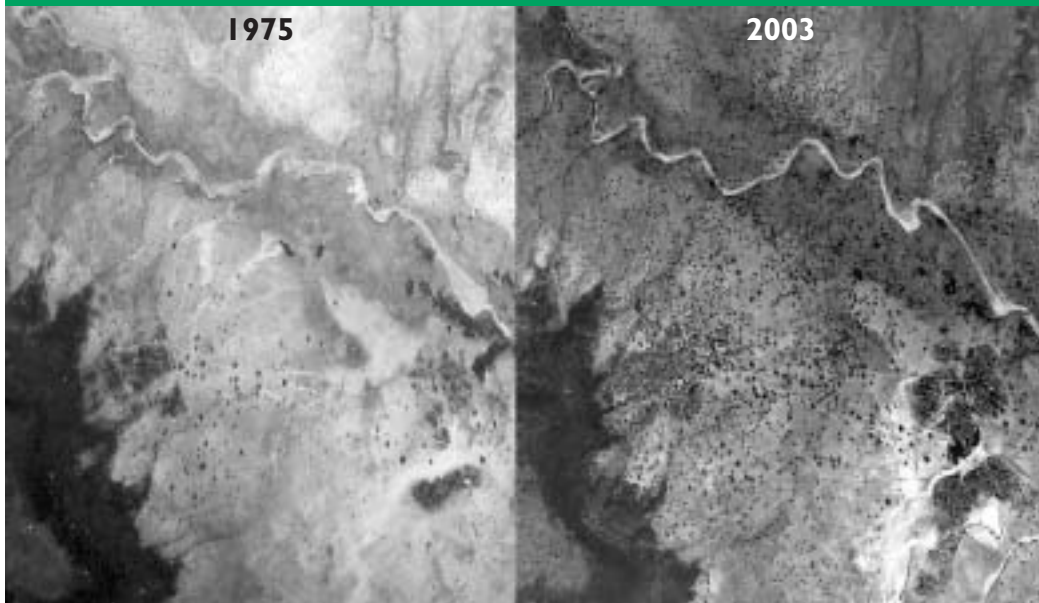
putting down roots and a buffer against topsoil erosion and crop loss.²

The quick-growing native trees became assets that families used to supplement incomes, provide insurance against crop failure, and meet their own needs. The trees provided wood for charcoal, foliage for animal fodder, and fruit for food. News spread through social networks and marketplaces in the more densely populated regions of the country until an area of 7 million hectares, about the size of the state of West Virginia, was re-greening with trees.³

Did farmers do this alone? Hardly. Better rains helped, and so did the government. But the standard anti-desertification strategy of massive tree planting projects was not what made the difference. The forest law previously stated that both land and trees were the property of the state. Recognizing that farmers had de facto ownership of the trees and were investing in their regeneration, the govern-

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Figure 12–1. Farmer-managed Tree Regeneration in Galma Village, Niger, 1975 and 2003



USGS and Institut Géographique National du Niger

ment wisely amended the forest code, giving farmers formal property rights. This additional security helped reinforce a trend and add momentum. The forest service began to change from policing tree cutting and levying fines to partnering with communities to assist regeneration. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), the Peace Corps, and donors helped promote the new practices through training programs and farmer-to-farmer visits.⁴

Notwithstanding this support, it was the energy invested by the farmers of Niger that fueled this massive transformation of land and livelihoods. The result is a more complex agricultural system and a more diverse economy that is helping farmers invest in regenerating once-infertile lands. Today farmers credit their efforts with lowering poverty, improving nutrition, and reducing vulnerability to hunger. The average distance a

woman must walk for firewood in the Zinder region has declined from 2.5 hours in 1984 to half an hour today. When a regional drought and massive locust invasion hit in 2005, many of the villages in the “green belt” reported no child deaths from malnutrition because they were able to sell wood in local markets to purchase expensive cereals that normally would have been beyond reach.⁵

This success story from Niger demonstrates that the greatest untapped resource in solving the problem of global poverty and environmental decline is the poor themselves. They have the most unambiguous incentive to change their condition, yet this simple fact is all too rarely embraced by governments, aid workers, and the market. In the face of deprivation, discrimination, and oppression, the poor are all too often offered charity, manipulation, and condescension.

But there are signs that this is beginning to

change. Over three decades of grassroots community development experiences that began as a search for an alternative to mainstream economic development have coalesced into new approaches to citizen and community empowerment that embrace partnerships with governments and markets while maintaining an emphasis on self-reliance and self-help.

As with traditional community-based development, this newer community-driven development recognizes that the poor must be the active authors of their own destiny and that development cannot be sustainable if it dislocates people from their communities and resources. Recognizing poverty as much more than a lack of income, the new approaches emphasize building assets, expanding freedoms, and mobilizing the poor to overcome the voicelessness and powerlessness that are defining characteristics of poverty.⁶

Informed by an emphasis on incentives and client knowledge, community-driven approaches are being implemented by NGOs, businesses, and large organizations like the World Bank. Perhaps most promising is that practitioners are tackling the question of how to scale up community-driven change over wide geographic areas involving significant numbers of people.

While the international community sets ambitious development targets like the Millennium Development Goals, it is not clear how to achieve them. So far, the debate is polarized between mobilizing massive financial resources for technical fixes and piecemeal responses sought by entrepreneurs. But financial resources and technology, although important, are not the binding constraints. Experimentation and local solutions are also important, yet the scale of the challenge demands a more ambitious response. As the hopeful case of Niger demonstrates, what is required are ways of tapping into the ultimate resource: human energy.⁷

Grounding Action in Local Realities

Thanks to several encouraging developments in the 1990s (see Box 12-1), there are signs that thinking in international development policy circles is converging around several sensible propositions that could reorient the global poverty fight. The first is that no one-size-fits-all model of development can be applied anywhere. The generally poor record of various western-inspired plans for development has been well documented. Even the World Bank draws this conclusion in its reading of the development experience of recent decades: “The central message...is that there is no unique universal set of rules...we need to get away from formulae and the search for elusive ‘best practices.’”⁸

Referring to the standard set of free market reforms promoted by western development institutions since the 1980s, in 2006 development economist Dani Rodrik noted that “the question now is not whether the Washington Consensus is dead or alive; it is what will replace it.” It is increasingly accepted that each country’s path to success will be different, based on the particular obstacles and opportunities set forth by their histories, cultures, social institutions, political climates, and geographies.⁹

The second sensible proposition is that poverty is about much more than lack of income. The U.N. Development Programme has been publishing annual *Human Development Reports* since the early 1990s; its Human Development Index combines health, education, and income as an alternative measure of national progress. (See Chapter 2.) Informed by the role of social capital and institutions, this is also about more than investing in the “social side” of development. A much broader view is emerging: development is about the expansion of freedoms that

Box 12–1. Reshaping the Development Agenda in the 1990s

The 1990s were a period of momentous change in global affairs, with significant consequences for international development and, in particular, the environment for more holistic, less prescriptive, more locally driven development.

First, with the end of proxy wars between East and West and the historic “third wave” of democracy resulting in greater political openness, it was no longer defensible for rich nations to prop up and defend corrupt and authoritarian regimes with aid dollars (although by no means has that practice ended). This opened discussions about issues of good governance—democracy, accountability, transparency, rule of law, and clean government—that had long been swept under the carpet in official international development. Evidence emerged over the decade that donors slowly but surely were becoming more selective in who received their aid.

As it became more difficult to tolerate unaccountable behavior on the part of aid recipients, the tables were turned on the providers. Developing countries and social activists argued for greater “ownership” of development by those who ultimately lived with the consequences of aid. Society-wide attempts to transform economies from the top down through “structural adjustment” were deeply resented. In an era of political opening and concern for good governance, it became clear that development policies should be the result of public dialogue between citizens and their governments at all levels, and not principally the result of conditions imposed on cash-strapped governments.

The World Bank instituted sweeping changes in the late 1990s requiring governments to consult with citizens on strategies and policies for poverty reduction. There is still plenty of debate on whether governments yet really “own” their development programs, particularly in the macroeconomic arena, but reform of development assistance and “aid effectiveness” are major topics of reform.

Second, it became undeniably clear that the countries that had made the most progress with sustained growth and poverty reduction were following their own unique paths. The good news

was that the absolute number of people living on less than \$1 a day worldwide had decreased by 500 million between 1981 and 2001, mainly as a result of growth in China and India. Yet the former had done so without democracy and traditional private property rights, while the latter had a significant government role in the economy.

In addition to these and the well-known East Asian “miracle” economies, countries such as Bangladesh, Botswana, Egypt, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Tunisia, Viet Nam, and others also achieved progress with “unorthodox” strategies. Meanwhile, countries that had supposedly gotten their macroeconomic fundamentals in order—Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, Philippines, and Venezuela, for example—had very mixed records. This experience argued for much more humility among policy reformers and international institutions, and much greater attention to the specific conditions within countries.

Third, globalization of trade, investment, technology, and communications accelerated human contacts and shrank the psychological distance between people. Private capital flows outstripped official development assistance by wide margins, although only small amounts went to Africa. Global threats such as climate change, terrorism, and disease, with their various connections to human deprivation, made it increasingly clear that a more robust global engagement on poverty was imperative.

Fourth, the United Nations sponsored a succession of international conferences on the environment, population, food security, social development, women, and housing that shaped a broad international consensus on fighting poverty. These culminated in the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals by the U.N. General Assembly in September 2000, followed by the International Conference on Financing for Development in Monterrey, Mexico, to consider how to fund the goals’ achievement through public and private financial flows. This agenda helped establish new norms for international development cooperation.

Source: See endnote 8.

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people experience, requiring the interactive engagement of citizens and communities with state and markets.¹⁰

By the early 1980s, there was growing frustration about the top-down, expert-driven nature of prevailing development models. Many commentators saw that the key to reversing this was to value and build on local knowledge and respond to the “felt needs” of communities, an idea articulated by Brazilian educator and activist Paolo Freire. Later, Robert Chambers helped popularize a series of participatory or community-based development techniques that were effective in stimulating greater community awareness, identifying local needs, highlighting local assets, and mobilizing community action around projects of their own conception that fit with their cultures, ecologies, and

local economies.¹¹

Use of these techniques exploded in the 1980s and 1990s in NGO projects and began to be adopted by institutions such as the U.S. Agency for International Development, the United Nations, and the World Bank. Much has been learned and accomplished by community-based approaches, but most have not succeeded in igniting fundamental transformation of societies in an age of globalization. (See Box 12–2.)¹²

Several pitfalls have been common. In some cases the use of participatory techniques by donors and NGOs was nothing more than an attempt to co-opt communities into development schemes that had already been fully formulated elsewhere. After all, British and French colonial administrations in Africa and elsewhere had used involvement of “tradi-

Box 12–2. Common Critiques of Community-based Development

Scope. Many projects were conceived on a narrow basis, such as helping communities build schools or increase food production. These may respond well to an NGO’s particular expertise, a congressional earmark, a bureaucratic priority, or the demand for straightforward quantifiable “results,” but they do not reflect the real world of individuals and communities whose problems and challenges are complex and interrelated. Integrated rural development programs in the 1970s and 1980s attempted to combine social and economic needs, but they proved unsustainable and gave little room for local voice. More recent area development programs have had greater success.

Scale. Community-based projects were too small and localized to make much of a difference, given the scale of the problems faced. Despite success, replication “a village at a time” was not feasible. In addition, many supporters of these projects assumed that eventually someone else—the government, a donor agency—would do the work of replication.

Sustainability. Community-based projects too often failed the “walk-away test” and essentially collapsed or were abandoned by communities when the funding ran out and a sponsoring NGO or aid agency left. There may have been community involvement, but not true community ownership. Communities learned to use outside resources for a one-time effort, not how to seek out, create, and manage partnerships.

Structural change. The obstacle to resolving many community problems lies outside the community in institutions and political and social structures. Community-based projects that dealt exclusively with the local, no matter how participatory, would never achieve fundamental transformation. Until development is understood as an inherently political process of people claiming basic rights, people will never ultimately reshape the structural forces in society that are responsible for the deprivation, discrimination, exclusion, vulnerability, and violence that mark the lives of the poor.

Sources: See endnote 12.

tional leaders” and “community participation” as a means of exerting social control. In a reprise of this role, NGOs and private contractors, who were increasingly the conduits of official foreign aid, were driven by donor-mandated results and timetables rather than community needs, capabilities, agency, and vision. Many of these “participatory development” projects weren’t all that participatory from the perspective of the poor. Captured by elite interests or simply involving information sharing or consultation but no real control or influence, these were a far cry from the liberating process of local initiative and social movement that their advocates claimed.¹³

Many of these projects also idealized communities in ways that undermined their potential. First, they imagined communities as homogenous and harmonious entities when often they were far more complex units within which needs and interests were mediated by power, caste, ethnicity, age, religion, or gender. Second, many NGOs who supported these projects were ideologically or otherwise antagonistic toward working with government or the private sector. Their efforts at times isolated communities or promoted the naive notion that bottom-up mobilization alone would overcome the powerful and entrenched forces arrayed against them. As a result, many community activities remained essentially local projects and failed to affect or engage wider social and political structures that were driving poverty, environmental degradation, and social injustice.¹⁴

These criticisms were one helpful reminder of the inherently political nature of poverty. The poor are poor because the rich and powerful have created institutions to serve their interests. The landmark *Voices of the Poor* study, which gathered the views of 60,000 poor men and women from 60 countries, confirmed that the poor saw their humanity

devalued by the world around them. Sustainable routes out of poverty would have to involve the poor not only by building their assets and capabilities but by engaging with the institutions and structures of governance and markets. Engaging this governance agenda involves communities participating in public budgeting decisions, scrutinizing public and private development projects, giving “report cards” to government ministries, and campaigning for greater access to public information.¹⁵

The Unlimited Resource

Increasing poor people’s freedom of choice and action to shape their own lives is critical to achieving development outcomes because it taps into their natural energy and incentive. World Bank research on this topic has dramatically expanded theoretical and practical approaches to understanding and measuring empowerment. It requires the poor to build their individual assets (material, financial) as well as their capabilities (human, social, psychological, political). The poor also require greater collective assets and capabilities, as these provide security, preserve culture, provide meaning, protect the local environment, and expand voice and power. Particularly critical is the role of collective organizations and social movements. Informed by these concepts, efforts to stimulate community-driven development are showing promise in overcoming some key shortcomings of early efforts at community-based development.¹⁶

A leading example is the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA), a 30-year-old grassroots movement that has empowered some of the most marginalized of India’s poor women. Where economic growth has outpaced employment growth, many Indian women take up casual labor or self-employment in the informal sector, including load

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pulling, street vending, and home-based work. In addition to poverty and insecurity, these women are regularly cheated by employers, charged exorbitant interest by money-lenders, and forced to pay bribes to police and public officials to ply their trades. Despite their varied and dispersed occupations, labor activist and SEWA founder Ela Bhatt believed these women could be organized and helped to become more self-reliant.¹⁷

SEWA today has over 700,000 rural and urban members in seven states. It has organized women to fight for their rights to fair treatment, ranging from better prices for their goods and services to influencing the formation of India's first National Policy on Street Vendors. To secure income and assets, SEWA has formed 76 cooperatives in a variety of fields—from tree growing and handicrafts to milk production and salt farming. It gives women skills training and marketing assistance, helping them to avoid exploitative go-betweens.¹⁸

The organization helps its members gain access to state-provided services (where they exist) and lobby for improvements of inadequate services. If these approaches do not work, SEWA helps members organize the services for themselves. SEWA today maintains a network of services to meet basic needs such as child care, health care, insurance, and housing. More than 300,000 women have used its primary health services and 110,000 are covered by its insurance program.¹⁹

The movement has grown and sustained a wide scope of activities and services involving hundreds of thousands because of its organization, values, leadership, and flexibility. SEWA's decentralized structure and strong value system have kept the movement responsive to the women's needs. Bhatt emphasizes the fundamental difference between running an organization and sustaining a movement like SEWA: "The movement flows at times

faster and at other times slower, and may occasionally be deflected around an obstacle, but it always moves in the same direction."²⁰

Daniel Taylor and others at the development NGO Future Generations consider community-driven solutions the basis for redirecting globalization, reducing inequality, and preserving and restoring the environment. They maintain that most development projects fail because they seek to control and manage communities rather than unleash energies and potential. Instead of building confidence and resourcefulness, such projects teach dependence on outside actors and funding. When funding runs out and the project ends, communities are left waiting for the next project.²¹

Taylor has developed a simple system of community-driven learning and adaptation called Seed-Scale—a process that helps communities to marshal and direct their energy in ways that fit their economy, ecology, and culture at a pace that is natural and organic. Seed-Scale is based on four simple principles embedded in a seven-step community dialogue and planning process. (See Box 12–3.) These are so intuitive that communities, no matter how daunting their situation, can quickly and easily absorb and use them to mobilize and channel their efforts.²²

The idea of building purposeful human and social energy is at the center of Seed-Scale. To catalyze it, the poor must believe that a better future is possible and that they can bring about positive change. Arjun Appadurai of The New School has developed the idea of the "capacity to aspire" to understand this aspect of empowerment. It is a cultural capacity based on how the poor learn and understand their "place" in society based on wider cultural norms. It is an ability to navigate the wider world that is developed through experimentation and learning in a way that helps to expand the horizons of

Box 12–3. Basic Principles of Seed-Scale

Build from success. Every community has a recent or distant success that can be the basis for inspiration and insight as to how the community can work together.

Engage in three-way partnerships. Partnerships require that communities, state and market actors, and outside individuals (as facilitators, knowledge brokers, and change agents) all work together.

Make decisions based on evidence. Objective data can inform decisions and help measure progress. Learning simple survey techniques gives villagers a deeper understanding of their environment and power over information collection.

Measure results through behavior change in individuals and communities. Behavior change happens when people perceive something works and is in their self-interest to continue.

Source: See endnote 22.

the possible.²³

In the beginning, anything can be the spark that nurtures this capacity, whether it is a mother learning to treat her baby's diarrhea with homemade oral rehydration solution, a farmer learning better farming techniques, or a group effectively confronting a polluting industry in its community. The critical insight is that the ownership of the success and its deeper meaning resonates within the community, which outsiders need to accept and build from.

In Seed-Scale, the initial emphasis of outside assistance is on guidance with the methodology and facilitation of community access to knowledge that responds to local priorities in areas such as health and hygiene, literacy, natural resource management, and income generation. This happens by teaching

simple techniques or by taking individuals to see successes in other places. People adopt something new when they see others doing it in circumstances similar to their own.

Since 1997 Future Generations has applied Seed-Scale in the northeast Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, which shares a border with Bhutan, China, and Burma. Arunachal is home to 125 tribal groups and the center of biological diversity for all the bananas and citrus fruit in the world. In this isolated area of India, communities have persisted for centuries in very basic conditions. While the British Empire never successfully penetrated this area during colonial rule, outside interests are encroaching on the state today, eyeing its vast potential for hydropower and timber. The government has promised the people of Arunachal a great deal since independence, but little has been delivered. Social conditions are harsh, particularly for women. Polygamy and child marriage are entrenched traditions, and forced labor is still practiced by some ethnic groups.²⁴

Today, from four core sites radiating across more than 100 villages, communities in Arunachal Pradesh are actively and creatively solving their own problems. Small successes are keeping communities motivated and moving forward. Village Welfare Workers take the lead—gathering data on health, economic, and environmental issues; delivering home-based services; and mobilizing the community to action on a wide scope of issues and advocating for change. Work started with women's groups but later expanded to include men. Health improvements came from communities learning how to treat diarrhea and pneumonia, improve maternal care, have safer child births, immunize children, and monitor child growth.²⁵

Husbands who were initially unsupportive of their wives' involvement quickly changed their minds when their families' health and

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welfare improved. They have gained access to microcredit and have started small businesses. They also have improved farming techniques and learned how to improve food security and nutrition. Impressed with the success in Arunachal, the state government asked that each new village council be trained in the Seed-Scale methodology so that the 6,000 villages in the state could be equipped to organize a process of local change.²⁶

Perhaps the most impressive indicator of community empowerment is demonstrated by what the women have done to change some deep-seated social norms and institutions. Indian law exempts tribal areas from laws banning polygamy and child marriage, so the practices flourish. Some of the women in community action groups were from the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy, as one-time child brides and the third or fourth wives in a household. Once their value to their families and communities was enhanced through new knowledge and practices brought back from village health trainings, they found the voice to argue against child marriage and became part of a gathering community pressure to end the practice voluntarily.

Dialogue started within a few women's groups spread and then percolated up into village council meetings. A petition was drawn up and endorsed by men and women at a series of public meetings and given effect by tribal leaders. When rumors surfaced of an old man planning to take a child bride (his fourth), he was confronted and stopped by the community and reminded that this practice was no longer acceptable. This new attitude has held up throughout an area equivalent to 10 percent of the state. It is noteworthy that this change was the result of an organic process that was directed by the community. For this reason it is likely to be sustained because it reflects changed roles and behaviors.²⁷

What has transpired in these cases represents a different way of achieving the Millennium Development Goals. An empowerment approach sees citizens as the authors of their own destiny, not passive vessels awaiting government programs, services, or educational campaigns to catch up with them. While financial resources are an important component of any community development plan, the first question addressed by empowerment approaches is whether the plan can be mobilized from within by using existing assets differently or through partnerships with others. What is perhaps a greater challenge is the fact that this approach requires outside experts and agencies to relinquish control and agree to an iterative effort that starts modestly and will take unexpected directions as well as its own time.

Scaling Up Local Successes

One of the greatest challenges for development organizations is taking a success that is working locally and translating it to the regional or national level. This principally involves understanding why something worked in a particular place and time and then determining how those lessons can be applied elsewhere. In some cases, expansion depends on a quantum leap of investment; in others, it may depend more on removing barriers to entrepreneurial activity or making government agencies more transparent and accountable. Numerous approaches to scaling up successful programs exist. (See Box 12-4.)²⁸

Each approach has its place. The biological approach would not be appropriate, of course, to respond to a natural disaster or build a transnational highway system. But the explosion or campaign approach is not appropriate for community-driven development. Yet too often such top-down, expert-

Box 12–4. Common Ways to Scale Up Successful Programs

Blueprint approach. A technical solution that has worked under a set of generally widespread circumstances is codified into a plan for replication on a large scale. Attempts are sometimes made to tailor to local conditions during implementation, but to communities this is essentially a process that operates down from the top or in from the outside. Local actors might comment on proposed implementation but not on the basic plan. Examples include many nature preserves, appropriate technology projects, large-scale micro-credit programs, and infrastructure expansion.

Explosion or campaign approach. This involves a large-scale, concentrated effort to marshal resources to deliver commodities or services in response to a generally narrow need. Food, humanitarian aid, and reconstruction assistance after a natural disaster are typical examples. Campaigns focused on disease eradication, such as the global smallpox campaign in the 1970s, are another example. While intensive and generally effective in achieving results, this method is not well suited for systemic change, local variation, or sustainability in terms of local ownership. In fact, some of the favorite disease-specific programs of donors are accused of undermining national health systems, and donated food aid's deleterious impact on local agricultural economies has long been known.

Additive approach. Typical “bottom-up” pro-

jects engage in site-specific activity (a community or cluster of villages) for an extended period of time, developing local leaders and change from within. Often implemented by NGOs or religious mission groups, these projects get to know the local circumstances and adapt to local conditions. Replication is additive as success spreads village by village, community by community. Given that these are often pioneering initiatives or demonstration projects, proponents of this approach argue that governments or others with larger budgets have an obligation to adopt and expand these projects. Going to scale with this approach is very slow and dependent on outside resources.

Biological approach. Drawing comparisons to the way species evolve in nature, this approach supports local experimentation and adaptation (“evolutionary adjustments”) and then sets an enabling environment for rapid expansion. It combines the local focus of the additive model with the growth potential of the explosion and blueprint approaches, but unlike the latter the impetus comes from within adapting communities. Government plays an important role in removing obstacles and facilitating expansion. The potential for exponential growth, healthy relationships, and balanced and organic growth make this approach more self-sustaining.

Source: See endnote 28.

driven approaches are the favorite of aid agencies and politicians because they deliver tangible goods quickly: school buildings, hospitals, large dams, airports, and the like. These are not undesirable per se, but this approach is not good at engaging the human element. For example, the spread of micro-credit programs in Bangladesh used the blueprint approach for expansion initially but was forced to adopt the biological approach when the limitations of the initial model were reached and it became clear that site-specific solutions were needed to ensure that the

poor were reached. The Millennium Village Project of the Earth Institute combines a blueprint approach offering villages choices from a list of over 40 poverty reduction interventions with a campaign approach for the distribution of commodities like bednets, but here again it is not clear how much local adaptation, ownership, and integration with local institutions will develop.²⁹

Some promising programs to stimulate community-driven development reaching millions of people are being supported by the World Bank using essentially a blueprint

approach but still managing to support local collective action and give discretion to communities in the selection of projects to fund. They are designed to institutionalize community participation in decisionmaking. Funding is transferred directly into village bank accounts to be used for the projects selected by elected local committees following extensive public dialogue. The program supports various NGOs to help facilitate community participation and the inclusion of marginalized people. Critical to their effectiveness are built-in systems to promote transparency and control corruption. The Kecamatan Development Program (KDP) of Indonesia and the National Solidarity Program (NSP) of Afghanistan are two examples of the Bank's new approach to scaling up successes.

access to information needed to investigate and publicize incidents of corruption. Rigorous evaluations of KDP have shown that it has made important contributions to behavior change and social norms in project areas compared with control sites, even taking into consideration the broader democratic trends in the country during the period. More people are participating in local decisionmaking forums, including more women. In East Java, 67 percent of survey respondents in KDP villages say decisionmaking is more democratic now, compared with 46 percent in non-KDP villages.³¹

The NSP in Afghanistan is implemented through a partnership between the government and NGOs and is the only program to have reached all 34 provinces, affecting 13 million Afghans—two out of every three rural individuals. In rural Afghanistan, where no form of local election has taken place in decades and where some traditional leaders have lost credibility because of their role in 20 years of civil conflict, the NSP organizes elections for community development councils and the key leadership positions. Women's participation in the elections and as candidates is supported by program facilitators. Communities have used NSP resources to build community centers, health posts, and schools, to resurface roads, and to construct run-of-the-river hydropower projects. Community members are learning important civic skills, and community cohesion is being rebuilt.³²

Innovative blueprint programs such as these, with the backing of government and World Bank resources, are not available to all communities. In addition, their focus has been on providing block grants for small-scale infrastructure, which, combined with the weak coordination within government, has placed limits on community choice.³³

A biological approach appears most promising for stimulating solutions that

Governments can institute changes in laws, policies, and practices that reshape institutions and remove obstacles to change.

Between 1998 and 2006 KDP covered 34,233 of the poorest villages in Indonesia—about half the villages in the country. The program is significant for the World Bank, representing almost half its lending portfolio to the country. KDP provides grants in the range of \$60,000 to \$110,000 to districts for use in projects chosen by the community. Open public meetings are held at the hamlet, village, and *kecamatan* (district) levels to determine priorities; independent facilitators ensure the participation of women and the disadvantaged. Projects are carried out by villages with local labor and materials.³⁰

The KDP promotes transparency by using the local media and billboards to publish the amount of funding provided to each community and the details of the contracts. In addition, the media are given unhindered

evolve to fit a variety of local possibilities rather than being adjusted after the fact. According to Seed-Scale, the process ideally unfolds simultaneously along three dimensions: community, regional, and national. The first dimension is reached when communities have mastered how to build upon their local success. Initial interventions in one area such as community health have stimulated a wider scope of action in other areas such as food security, environmental protection, education, and income generation. Through partnerships with NGOs and government officials, communities gain access to the knowledge and resources necessary to sustain momentum.

The second dimension is pursued when successful communities share their experiences formally and informally with other communities in the same region. As the farmers in Niger showed, this can happen when NGOs facilitate farmer-to-farmer site visits and when farmers meet and share knowledge in markets and social settings. Specifically, the idea is to help transform clusters of communities that have already mastered a series of interventions into formal Action Learning and Experimentation Centers, where experimentation takes place to adapt these interventions to each local area. Visitors from other communities are welcomed to this group of villages to learn and take part in workshops and formal training. The contrast between traditional development—where outside experts design the solution—and truly home-grown approaches could not be stronger.

The third dimension happens at the level of systemic enabling conditions over which governments most often have the greatest influence. They can institute changes in laws, policies, and practices that reshape formal and informal institutions and remove obstacles to change, encouraging people and institutions

to respond to new incentives. In Niger, the change in the forest code that gave farmers secure rights to the trees on their land had this effect. It stimulated investments by farmers throughout the country and further experiments that the forest service could support. Alternatively, structural change can happen at the local level and be scaled up to other levels, as when the women of Arunachal brought about the end to child marriage.

Each of these dimensions is an entry point to the other, and all are necessary to see change operate on a regional or society-wide level. Recent developments in Tibet are a good illustration of this. In the early 1980s Tibet faced growing environmental pressures from population growth, increasing fuelwood consumption, and resource pressures from China's economic expansion. One national policy response was the creation of the Qomolangma National Nature Preserve (QNNP), where local people were encouraged to continue living in the preserve and attention was focused on promoting their economic and social development—action that, in the traditional view, would have been seen as antithetical to environmental protection. The regional government provided budgets and staffing for the conservation area—not to police the region but to engage people through education and incentives. Outside partners brought in knowledge and partnered with communities and townships to focus on improving livelihoods rather than expecting people only to protect nature. A participatory model of conservation management emerged reflecting the Seed-Scale principles.³⁴

Today the duality of development and conservation success can be seen in the QNNP. In the late 1980s the area had only one bank; by 2006 there were 10. Initially none of the 320 villages had protected water supplies; now 64 villages have them. The

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number of schools has grown from 5 to 38. The population of the area has swelled, partly from immigration due to the growth of several towns but also because better health means more children are surviving. The conservation side of the ledger is just as impressive. Now 42 percent of the land area is protected under conservation management. Wild animal population numbers are increasing for every species, including the endangered snow leopard, the Tibetan antelope, red ghoral, and argali sheep. Deforestation rates have decreased by over 80 percent, and large-scale tree plantations are being started in fragile river drainages. The use of environmentally friendly solar, geothermal, and hydroelectric generated energy is expanding across Tibet.³⁵

Overcoming Obstacles

When considering Earth's potential to sustain growth, the case is often made that the rich and affluent need to reduce their consumption of resources in order to make room for increased consumption by the world's poor as they climb out of poverty. (See Chapter 4.) This proposition stands on its own merits, but it also suggests international action is a zero-sum proposition. Yet poor countries need not repeat the mistakes of the rich or emulate their overconsumptive lifestyles. Sustainable progress on global poverty need not rest on economic growth and resource consumption alone. Attacking poverty as it is conceived by the poor themselves opens up a wider range of possibilities for action.

But for globalization to allow these possibilities to be pursued, the rules of the game need to change at all levels. Needed reforms of the global development architecture of trade, aid, investment, migration, security, and rich-country environmental policies are well documented. For example, international

trade rules are not designed to enhance opportunities for the poorest countries. (See Chapter 14.) In fact, many rich-country policies do just the opposite. U.S. and European Union agricultural barriers and subsidies deny market opportunities to poor countries. Not only do such impediments need to be removed, but Paul Collier, former head of research at the World Bank, argues that the most destitute nations actually require some trade protection (from Asia) to get their economies started.³⁶

International aid, held up as a symbol of rich-country concern and generosity to the less fortunate, is hardly accountable to those who receive it. Many rich countries recycle a large percentage of their aid back to influential constituencies of NGOs, consulting firms, and universities. Current estimates are that as much as 57 percent of U.S. development assistance comes back to the United States to pay for good and services. This "tying" of aid reduces its value by up to 25 percent and closes off opportunities to support businesses in poor countries.³⁷

A good deal of donor assistance bypasses governments in the name of avoiding corruption and bureaucratic inefficiency, targeting beneficiaries, and supporting civil society. While these goals and concerns are worthy and often legitimate, it means that donors miss the opportunity to build state capacity to deliver services effectively. In an age when the international community is trying to build democratic states that are accountable to their people, the persistent channeling of aid through scattered projects of myriad donors breaks the link between citizen and government. Donors recognize this, and in countries that are reasonably well governed they are attempting to channel more of their aid into budget support rather than stand-alone projects.

If donor nations are to make this invest-

ment, developing countries need to make changes too. In return for investments in government capacities, there must be strong efforts toward decentralized and open governance. Deepa Narayan, lead author of the World Bank's *Voices of the Poor*, highlights four priorities: enabling citizen access to public information, promoting policies of participation and inclusion, ensuring democratic and client accountability, and enhancing local organizational capacity. These will help provide the enabling environment.³⁸

These and many other systemic changes are critical for unlocking the potential for home-grown development. Development economist Bill Easterly describes it as the need for more “searchers” and fewer “planners.” Empowerment frameworks such as Seed-Scale argue for a change in mindset

from control held by experts and officials to one of learning and experimentation among partners. This is often antithetical to the “results-based” mindset that insists on getting things right the first time.³⁹

Yet around the world there are many who will be left behind because even the basic conditions for change are absent. Collier argues that the growth engine in many of the more advanced developing countries will eventually pull the poor out of poverty, but it is the weakest states—many caught in conflict and bad governance, where growth is not happening—that need attention and support. The “bottom billion” of the world’s poor live in such countries. Perhaps it is here where empowerment-based approaches hold the most promise. Why? Because little more is required to start than a little capacity to aspire.⁴⁰

Notes

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