



Photo: N. McKee

OPENING THE DOORS

Is learning the key to development? More and more people are beginning to realize that the training of individuals is a vital component. Without the skills, energies and knowledge of human beings, development is impossible. Human resource development (HRD), has recently become an acknowledged and official strategy for Canadian agencies such as IDRC and CIDA.

This issue of IDRC REPORTS looks at how the meaning of human resource development has changed in the past two decades and what it means today. It describes how funding Third World researchers to pursue graduate programs can lead to measurable progress. It tracks down a Peruvian who received a Canadian graduate degree almost ten years ago and is now the leader of a thriving Lima shantytown that serves as a model for urban organization in developing countries. It also looks at the harrowing adventures of a Young Canadian Researcher, an IDRC scholarship winner, in Papua New Guinea. And it reports on the increasing scientific cooperation between developing countries by looking at an aquaculture research and training project begun by China and Canada and now spreading to other countries in the South.



Photo: D. Sing

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THE LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

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“Give a man a fish and he will eat one day. Teach him how to raise fish and he will be able to eat every day.” Ancient Chinese saying.

In recent years, human resource development has become the underlying concept driving Canadian foreign aid. The Winegard Commission, a 1987 Canadian Parliamentary Task Force established to review Canada's overseas assistance policies, reported Canada should focus on human rights and human resource development as the centre of its development assistance programs.

There has always been an emphasis on education and training in development programs but the reasons and the methods have continuously changed. In the 1960s, most development aid shifted from education and training to capital assistance for strengthening physical infrastructures. This occurred partly because the management of training programs was very labour-intensive but also because development priorities were changing. At the same time, “human capital theory”, the notion of investing in people was presented as an economic alternative to investing in infrastructure.

In the late 1970s attention focused on food and basic aid to help the health and welfare of “the poorest of the poor”. But development agencies discovered it wasn't easy to find starting points for these types of development projects because of a lack of trained people. So, in the 1980s the emphasis moved from infrastructure back to people as the world became aware of the complexities and interdependence of economic growth, and the limitations of knowledge to tackle new development problems. However, the definition of human resource development also changed — it was no longer seen as a sector standing by itself but as an integral part of the entire development process.

Today, HRD is defined as “the development of individual, group and institutional capacities for self-sustained learning, generation of technology, or implementation of development activities”. Human resource development can be seen as a prism through which all aid activities can be viewed.

What one sees is that in today's world over one-third of humanity is living in poverty. Famine is still a fact of life for millions of people. One out of four inhabitants of the globe is illiterate. Over 400 million are underemployed or unemployed. These are the indicators which measure a country's state of development, along with health, housing and access to education.

Although the industrialized world has only 20 percent of the world's population, it accounts for 85 percent of world-wide expenditure on education and 95 percent of expenditure on research. These proportions are even more glaring when

one takes into account the fact that over one-third of the world's population is under 15 years of age, and 90 percent of them live in the Third World.

Human resource development is the process of improving human capabilities to raise the standard of living to an acceptable level. Human resource development is no longer restricted to the school system, and formal and informal training programs — it also includes technological inputs, material support, and on-the-job training to develop skills and increase productivity.

It involves direct assistance to education and training institutions, and to social development activities such as training for better health and nutrition. As HRD consultant Donald Simpson writes: “It is no longer simply enough to build a school, pay for a teacher or offer a fellowship.” Developing human potential also means developing relationships over the long-term, as well as institution-building. And it means working in new areas besides agriculture, education and health — such as energy, trade, marketing, industrialization, financial management and monetary policy, informatics and computerization, small-scale private enterprise and the environment.

Even though it is now widely recognized that the human element is at the core of all development efforts, governments may have a difficult time putting human resource development into practice.

Sylvain Lourie, a past director of the International Institute of Educational Planning, notes that “experience has taught us that while most governments pay lip-service to the *human element*, their simultaneous obligation to meet military, production trade and financial objectives leads them to take actions which do not necessarily reflect social and cultural imperatives.”

A quick glance at expenditure statistics confirms Lourie's observation. China spent 6.7 percent of its total expenditures in 1979 on its military. During the same year, only 3.3 percent of expenditures went towards education. In Pakistan there are 429 military men for every 265 teachers. And for every 12 doctors in Indonesia there are 239 soldiers.

No matter what the statistics reveal the reality is that when governments have to apply structural adjustment policies, the sectors first cut are those dealing with social services, of which education and training are a part.

How are development agencies responding? With a growth in fellowships, scholarships and most importantly training components for projects. At IDRC, 20 percent of all projects in 1971 had a training component; in 1982, 42 percent of projects had training components.

IDRC's support of HRD is deeply rooted in the philosophy of a learning partnership. IDRC staff and recipients acquire

knowledge through training and experience, *generate* knowledge through research, *share* knowledge through information dissemination, and *apply* knowledge in the utilization of research results. In the past many development agencies have focused on training individuals as individuals, a high-risk approach benefitting the individual and making him or her more upwardly mobile and perhaps less inclined to stay in their home country and work in development. The approach being used now is one of “capacity building” or of training researchers who are attached to institutions and thus strengthening the research capacity of the institution or community. This wider training effort provides research skills to a broader community, one capable of constituting a critical mass that can accumulate, reproduce and create new knowledge for institutional development purposes. The ultimate purpose of capacity building is to ensure “sustainable development”.

These types of training activities may range from scholarships to pursue Masters and Doctoral degrees, to support for group training activities, to curriculum development, to research on needs assessments, training methodologies, and manpower requirements, and under certain circumstances to scholarly exchanges.

Learning is an integral part of human development, and culture and learning are inextricably linked. Each society and culture has different and distinct ways of learning. Emphasis must be placed on the design of learning experiences. Both individual and group training activities must be tailored to the participants needs. The role of development agents is to catalyze and facilitate “learning partnerships” where knowledge is shared equally.

As well, mechanisms to transfer and reproduce newly acquired knowledge and skills must be developed. Training activities should take place primarily within local, national and regional boundaries to benefit those directly concerned with the results of the training and research. The ultimate goal of human resource development is to strengthen indigenous capabilities to do development work and development-related research.

Human resource development has evolved a great deal since the Chinese coined their proverb. “Teach him how to raise fish” was the human resource development answer to raise standards of living and quality of life centuries ago. Today, the situation is more complex. In most cases those who learned to raise modern-day fish have achieved a decent standard of life, but those who haven't remain poor and illiterate and underappreciated. ■

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