CAPACITY BUILDING: A SOLUTION TO WEST AFRICAN UNDERDEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This study undertook a theoretical review of the concept of Capacity Building as a Solution to West African Underdevelopment. In its findings, it aligned itself with previous studies and assertions that it is important to understand that capacity building are not a choice in regional and sub-regional development. It is one of the requirements of development especially for West African nations. It therefore concluded that in different economic sectors like technology, medication including educational sectors, capacity building plays decisive role, the development of West African socio-economy including human resource development and regional economic integration would be motivated, attained and sustained through capacity building. This paper haven surveyed contributions of many authorities recommends that; to eradicate underdevelopment in critical sectors, west African countries must institutionalize capacity building, there is need to improve on community based capacity building in order to attain an all inclusive development, governments in West Africa should invest in and leverage on existing educational institutions to advance and reduce the cost of development enhancement capacity building programmes and that there is need to invest massively on innovation biased capacity building programmes if West African countries must find a sustainable route to solving their technology and infrastructure deficit problems.

Keywords: Capacity Building, West African, And Underdevelopment.

A. Introduction

Globally, the failure of governments resulting from interdependence of nations has made it expedient for a shift in the strategy for attaining development. Countries in the third world nations especially Africa have always looked upon developed countries for “aids and grants” in order to meet their national needs. However, over time and due to global economic recession that has affected the budget of first world countries and their budget in aids and grants to third world countries, there is a call by development experts for the leadership of third world countries to look inwards and drive her developmental initiatives on the unique competencies they enjoy

This call for the exploration and exploitation of internal strength therefore requires that there is strategic need to begin to develop the unique and strategic competencies of the third world nations. In Africa and indeed in West Africa, questions of development are common; the need to turn to internal competencies through a reengineered leadership process is often discussed.

Capacity building has different meanings and interpretations depending on who uses it and in what context it is used. It is generally accepted that capacity building as a concept is closely related to education, training and human resource development. This conventional concept has changed in recent years towards a broader and more holistic view, covering both institutional and country specific initiatives (Williamson, et al, 2003).

Groot and Molen (2000) defined capacity building as the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes in individuals and groups of people relevant in design, development, management and maintenance of institutional and operational infrastructures and processes that are locally meaningful. This is a broader approach while still focusing mainly on education, training and human resource development. Therefore, based on this definition, capacity building for employees in a broad sense may refer to improvements in the ability of all
employees to perform appropriate tasks within the broader set of performance standards of the organization.

According to United Nations Committee of Experts on Public Administration (2006), capacity building takes place at three levels, that is, at the individual level, an institutional level and the societal level. Capacity building on an individual level means the development of conditions that enable individuals to build and enhance existing knowledge and skills. Additionally, it requires the conditions that will allow individuals to engage in the process of learning and adapting to change (UNCEPA, 2006). It becomes apt as provided by this paper to establish a relationship between capacity developments as a solution to West African underdevelopment.

B. Review of Related Literatures

Conceptual Review

Capacity: The literature related on capacity, capacity building, capacity development and organizational capacity development is vast and has interrelated definition and concept. Before defining the theoretical concept of capacity, capacity building, capacity development and organizational capacity development it is necessary to understand the meaning of the words “capacity” and “capabilities”.

Capability is defined as the knowledge, skills and attitudes of individuals. In contrast, capacity is defined as the general ability of individuals or organizations to carry out the responsibilities required to achieve their goals. Baser and Morgan (2008) referred to capacity as the collective skill and ability of organizations to achieve a particular process either inside or outside the organization.

According to the Morgan, (1998) Capacity is defined as the organizational and technical abilities, relationships and values that enable countries, organizations, groups, and individuals at any level of society to carry out functions and achieve their development objectives over time. Capacity refers not only to skills and knowledge but also to relationships, values and attitudes, and many others such as behavior and attitude.

All existing forms of capacity are task-driven and mission-oriented, referring to perform certain functions. Therefore it serves both as an objective and an approach, with an accent on participatory processes that are particularly valuable to play more active and productive roles in social and community development. In this broader view, capacity incorporates to the social capital concerns, which deals to an effort to change a society’s rules, situations and standards of behavior. Capacity in this sense is about the self-organization of a society and the will, the vision, cohesion and values to make progress over time (Morgan and Qualman 1996). Whatever is the meaning of the concept, the essence of capacity has clearly emerged as an organizing principle for all rounded development of individual, organization and community as a whole.

The subject of capacity, as a body of knowledge has a weak intellectual standing in the wider development world. It comes with no accepted and tested body of theory that people can use with any confidence. In wider sense the concept of capacity has not developed as a well defined area of development practice with an established body of knowledge.

Capacity in human system is a continuous process. There is no end for capacity development it is everlasting process generates influence over the development of human knowledge (technology), structure of the system and human power(resource) as French and Bell (1992) suggests that capacity of organizations could be developed or changed by altering one or more of three major variables-- people, structure and technology. Due to these factors in modern contemporary world the strategic capacity development is becoming as one of the driving force for country, organizations and individual. In the field of social development the term capacity is relatively new, emerging in the1980s. Despite its newness, capacity has become the central purpose of technical cooperation in the 1990s (UNDP 1996). Therefore, capacity is seen as complementary to other ideas that dominated development thinking (and still play an important role) over the past four decades. This concept of capacity includes institutional building, institutional development, human resource development, development management/administration and institutional strengthening. These and other concepts related
to development work such as organizational development, community development, integrated rural development and sustainable development have been subsumed as an umbrella for the general concept of capacity.

From the general concepts capacity one can understand that capacity influenced by many variables both inside and outside of the organization. Internal variables include work structures, decision making processes, information system, HRM system and practices. External variables include societal needs, politics, local, national and international lows, donor’s interest, and so on. So, what we can learn is that capacity as the ability to perform is influenced by different human systems that govern developments.

The Essence of Capacity Building

According to (Cohen 1993), public sector capacity building seeks to strengthen targeted human resources (managerial, professional and technical), in particular institutions, and to provide those institutions with the means whereby these resources can be marshaled and sustained effectively to perform planning, policy formulation, and implementation tasks throughout government on any priority topic. The (Berg 1993), capacity building is characterized by three main activities: ‘skill upgrading – both general and job-specific; procedural improvements; and organizational strengthening’. Skill enhancement refers to general education, on-the-job training and professional strengthening of skills such as policy analysis. A procedural improvement refers to context changes or system reforms. Organization strengthening covers the process of institutional development. He concludes that capacity building is broader than organizational development in that it includes all types of skill enhancement and also procedural reforms that extend beyond the boundaries of a single organization.

The core capacity building is wider and more holistic: there is a close relationship between human resource development and capacity development; there is an evolving relationship between training and capacity development; effective capacity development requires sustained attention over a longer period of time; capacity development attempts to move beyond administrative techniques and beyond projects; and capacity development attempts to accelerate interaction between organizations and their environment.

Reports of (UNESCO 2006) underline that capacity building focuses on increasing an individual and organization’s abilities to perform core functions, solve problems, and objectively deal with developmental needs. This is supported by Horton (2002) who referred to capacity building as improving or upgrading the ability of the person, team and institutions to implement their functions and achieve goals over time. Capacity building is important for all levels, from individuals to national organizations (Horton 2002). Capacity building also alludes to building the organizational capacities of communities, and supports the formation of non-profit organizations (Paul and Thomas 2000). Self-dependence and a sense of ownership are real capacity building, and these are very important factors in the development process (McKechnie, 2003).

Some authors argue that there are four common approaches to capacity building; top-down organizational (e.g. policy); bottom-up organizational (e.g. staff training); partnership organizational and community organizing approaches (Hartwig et al., 2008). It can be understood from the above statements that capacity building as instrument of development, it functions at all levels from individual to national organizations. The development of individual and national organizations depends on correct implementation of human resource as well as financial and material potential. Therefore, to enhance the effectiveness of the Individual and organization the researcher believes that training and development as strategy of development must be introduce in all sphere of capacity building activities.

Basic Principle of Capacity Building

Capacity building is fundamentally about change and transformation – at individual, organizational, sector-wide and societal levels. To ensure sustainability of results, capacity building efforts for CSOs involved in using research-based evidence in policy processes therefore the principles include broad-based participation and a locally driven agenda, interventions build on already existing local capacities, organizations must be open to learning.
and adaptation and activities must be integrated at different levels to address complex problems (UNDP, 2008).

Capacity building is not just about building the capacity of researchers to do research. It is also about building researcher capacity to carry out policy-relevant research and to communicate the findings effectively to policy and decision makers. It is important to build communication and dissemination strategies during the design phase to increase the effectiveness of these activities.

Building the capacity of researchers provides new opportunities for policy and decision makers, and other practitioners and research users, to use the research and research results produced from within their own countries or regions – that is to say, to use their own evidence for policymaking. This is based on demand from within, and encourages the influence of policy from within (UN, 2005).

The researcher understood capacity building is law governed process. Every step and measure taken to enhance the organizational development needs to study the principle of capacity which is appropriate to a given situations. We can conclude in order to introduce new development appropriate principles should be selected as development guidelines.

**Basic Working Areas of Capacity Building**

Each of the nine capacity areas are broken down into components, and each component contains a series of observable statements. The observable statements are the indicators against which an organization assesses its capacity. Each observable statement is ranked according to the organization’s level of achievement and the level of importance of the organization attaches to the area or function. (Morgan 1998), Therefore, the following are defined working area of capacity.

Identity and Governance, Governance, mission, and culture are the basis for the reputation of organization. It must have clearly defined identities, regulatory frameworks, values, mission statements, and governance structures that establish its identity and a mutually shared understanding of its objectives. Governance of the organization provides legitimacy, leadership, and direction to the organization.

Strategy and Planning, Strategy defines how an organization will achieve its mission. Strategic planning is an ongoing process that occurs at many levels within the organization for setting objectives and identifying the actions and resources needed to achieve those objectives. Staff and constituents need to be involved systematically in these planning processes and leadership should initiate regular review and modifications of the strategic plan and the operational plan to ensure organizational growth and health.

General Management, General management includes those components that keep the organization cohesive and on track with its mission. The organization should apply management processes and systems that ensure it uses its resources effectively to achieve its vision and goals and evaluate results (Morgan 1998).

External Relations and Partnerships, Building external relations and maintaining healthy and productive partnerships enhances the ability of an organization to achieve its mission by effectively linking with important and influential groups in the broader environment. Effective relationships enable the organization to leverage resource and to network with likeminded groups to influence the policy and regulatory environment (Morgan 1998).Sustainability Organizations are sustained through ongoing attention to decisions that affect their short and long-term viability – program, management, financial and political.

Organizational Learning Organizational learning is a process whereby an organization develops, captures, retains, and applies the knowledge and learning of individuals within that organization. Processes for collaboration through knowledge communities are institutionalized and aid the creation, sharing, adaptation, and use of knowledge.

Human Resource Management, Human resource management promotes and administers policies and procedures that ensure that staff has the skills, motivation, and opportunity to make their best contribution to the mission of the organization. Human resource management is also concerned with hiring, compensation, performance management, safety, well-being and other components of caring for staff (Morgan 1998).
Financial and Physical Resource Management, Financial and physical resources are the tangible assets of the organization. It has the responsibility to exercise good stewardship of those resources accomplishing programmatic objectives in a cost efficient manner, ensuring that there are effective internal control systems, and maximizing the benefits derived from use of those assets.

Programming, Services and Results, The programming, services, and results section comprises the programs, services, and products that organizations provide to their constituents. An organization must utilize its resources to deliver quality services to its constituency and measure the impact of those services.

Specific Nature of Capacity Building

The total concept of capacity building is build-up of new capabilities (Kuhl, 2009). Capacity building is a concept that has different meanings for different people, but in general relates to enhancing or strengthening a person’s or organization’s capacity to achieve their goals. According to Kuhl, capacity building focuses on at least three interrelated activities: (1) building infrastructure to deliver promotion of programs, (2) building partnerships and organizational environments so that programs are sustained; and (3) building problem-solving capability. Virtually every capacity building issue turns out to be a complex situation involving individual, group, organizational and institutional behavior at a variety of different levels over both the short and long-term.

Every capacity building and its specific nature include “hard” attributes (e.g. personal skills, functions, structures, infrastructure and resources) and “soft” attributes (e.g. motivations, beliefs) (Hunt, 2005). These attributes are pillars for promoting planned activities of capacity at every level of capacity building. The general nature of capacity building is creating ground for interrelated activities like infrastructure, organizational environments and problem solving capability to all levels of capacity. So, it is possible to say that capacity building promotes development and it shows the ways of solving problems in order to achieve the goal of organizational objectives.

Capacity Building and West African Development

Many authors have described the emergence of the field of capacity building in development from the early 1960s to the 1990s. There have been at least four periods of capacity building. Initially, in the 1950s and 60s, capacity building focused on institution building. Secondly, in the 1970s it changed to a focus on development management. Thirdly, in the 1980s there was more emphasis on private sector development and by the early 1990s, capacity building became embedded within development organizations (Wubneh 2003).

Today, capacity building is recognized as a must for grass-roots organizations globally, in order to achieve sustainable development. Capacity building is becoming an increasingly popular activity in many socio-economic sectors including education. For example, the World Bank has endorsed mainstreaming of capacity building activities into all of its operations. Since 1996, capacity building has remained high on the agenda of the World Bank, particularly with the vision of institutional building and development of a partnership framework (World Bank 1997).

Capacity building requires a variety of sources of technology development, dissemination and integration of institutional networks. In the last ten years capacity building has also related to the strengthening of different sectors including technology, agricultural and educational institutions (Crowder, 1996). Historical evidences shows that capacity development passed different phases to reach current full concept, blow the table indicates the period 1950s up to now.

Capacity building for rural development: Capacity building at local, regional and national levels has become central to the goals of development organizations working in developing countries (OECD 2000). This is due to past failures of rural development programs to reduce poverty and empower local people to improve their livelihoods. Development organizations tended to transfer only funding and modern technology to farmers or provide formal education to rural communities (Horton, 2002). These activities were conducted by government or non-
government organization researchers and extension officers, with little involvement of local people. After the project finished, local people could not continue to improve themselves and develop their communities.

**Need to help the poor:** Many countries and communities have remained poor and still have weaknesses in their development. Rural communities often become dependent, waiting for donors and government sectors to continue to support them, because the development projects did not maintain activities and facilities (Horton, 2002). Projects are often expensive, donor-driven, depend on outside experts and don’t follow the national priorities of the country (Fukuda-Parr, Lopes and Malik, 2002). Eade (2007) concluded that “The sad reality is that most development aid has precious little to do with building the capacities of „The Poor“ to transform their societies.”

Therefore, improving the capacity building of individuals, groups, organizations and communities is necessary for rural development, poverty alleviation and environment protection (Degnbol-Martinussen, 2002). Eade (2007) pointed out that “We have heard a thousand times that if you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day, and if you teach him to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.” Horton (1999) added that “investment alone cannot lead to the desired level of development.” Therefore, building the capacity of local people, groups and organizations is vital because they must have the ability and responsibility to resolve their problems and develop their communities. Many international studies indicate that smallholder and poorer farmers could make a major contribution to national economic growth if they received opportunities to become more productive (NAFES, 2006). Poor rural people are a high priority for donors and international NGOs focused on building capacity. For example, in the Lao PDR, target groups are upland people, particular minority ethnic groups and district, provincial and national government staff (Stephen et al. 2006). The basis of development is strengthening people’s capacity to determine their own goals (Ku, Yeung and Sung-Chan, 2005). The focus has been on encouraging participation and giving opportunities for participation by the poor. There has been somewhat less attention to the other side of the equation- helping the poor to build capacities that enable them to participate effectively.

**Need to support women and ethnic minorities:** Along with men, women play an important role in contributing to all activities in rural development, particularly in agriculture areas such as livestock production, fisheries, cropping, forestry, irrigation and horticulture. Women who are living in remote areas, especially ethnic group minorities work hard in the field. Their products are low in quantity and quality because they use traditional methods. Women are faced with selling raw materials for low prices and experience food shortages, particularly of rice for consumption. Mwangi, (2003) explained that smallholder farmers particularly women have little access to farm inputs. Lack of marketing information, products of low standard and difficulties in transporting goods to market are other constraints. In addition, women farmers lack technical knowledge and skills to produce their products (e.g. technical skills in harvesting or value adding). Paying particular attention to women is needed to improve their knowledge and skills and increase their role in decision-making at local, regional, national and international levels. According to Squire, (2003) upgrading women’s knowledge and skill by providing extension training and advanced formal education improves their overall socio-economic status and in particular contributes to agricultural and rural development. Squire explained that by providing women farmers with suitable resources such as information, credit, and land to empower them to invest in agricultural production, women can achieve goals and participate in agricultural development and environment conservation.

**Need to ensure development impacts are sustainable:** According to UNDP reviews, development organizations have been effective in getting the job done, however not effective at improving local people, institutions or building local capacities. Projects are criticized as being expensive, donor-driven, dependent on outside experts and unclear about national priorities (Fukuda-Parr, Lopes and Malik, 2002). One author pointed out that after projects ended the results were often not sustained because local capacity had not been established. In order to expand the good results or impact of each project, all organizational levels concerned about rural development need to support funds, energy and ideas to meeting the farmer’s needs. Building the capacity of individuals, farmer groups and district extension staff is one way to
upgrade farmer’s knowledge and skills. To do this, project designers need to focus where the impact is likely to be greatest on participant’s social and economic environment (Mwangi, Agunga and Garforth, 2003).

**Enabling Participation and Empowerment:** Capacity building also has to do with providing poor and disadvantaged groups with the political influence necessary to achieve representation in question of resource use and allocation (Honadle, 1986). However in reality, there are controversy and hurdles in empowerment of the disadvantaged. Generally, in developing countries, local power structures prevent participation of poor from resource management decisions (Zaman, 1984). The poor in remote areas have many problems and they have difficult challenges in organizing themselves. They have fewer resources for making themselves heard. A system of governance that enables their participation will probably require clear effort to build the mechanisms and channels through which it can happen. Therefore, development within the political system to encourage participation of the citizens, and their ability to be responsive to that participation is important.

**Organizational change to support rural poor:** Capacity building also involves organizational change, for example, by the addition of new staff members, administrative units or equipment, by giving new responsibilities to staff members, or by the reallocation of existing organizational resources (Jacobs & Weiner, 1986). The purpose of these changes in organizations is meant to aid in the process of implementation. However, the building of capacity is not an easy task as there are many deficiencies associated with agencies or organizations. These deficiencies are mainly in terms of finding knowledge and expertise. For organizational change, strategies include raising funds, providing information about appropriate capacity building activities and enhancing the level of expertise (particularly through the provision of technical assistance to an institution). However, they emphasized that “capacity development is usually slow and incremental, shaped by history and a country’s social, political and cultural roots. Organizational and institutional change is a political process: it creates winners and losers and challenges vested interests. Martinez (2007) suggested that working with partnerships can allow an organization to share its resources with other organizations and to coordinate collective efforts for maximum impacts. According to Dugan (1993), participation of a wide range of stakeholders or interest groups in rural development is instrumental for two main reasons:

- Helping the persons or communities involved to obtain information and knowledge required for diagnosing an issue or situation; Ensuring or encouraging involvement of the appropriate persons or groups in the planning and implementation of activities to deal with a particular situation. According to Schacter (2000) nowadays capacity building is as much an approach for development assistance organizations to conceptualize and conduct their mandate as it is about new field level techniques. Therefore, a capacity building strategy for poverty alleviation will need to take into account the most critical capacity needs at all levels from national to lower levels.

### C. Models/Theoretical Review

Latent Capacity Release Model/Theory: There is an argument to say that the traditional view of capacity building is problematic and largely meaningless. At the very least it is a contested concept, particularly by communities themselves (Taylor, 1995). As noted above the traditional view is based largely on the “deficit” model of democracy that is predicated on the basis that there is something missing within communities i.e. skills and competences. Communities are seen as “empty vessels waiting to be filled” (Taylor, 1995). It is our contention that this view of capacity building is fundamentally misconceived. It is our view that capacity is already there in communities, it just needs to be recognized, acknowledged and released. In the main, communities are awash with skills and abilities, so the task is not about building capacity, but rather devising mechanisms that can unleash or release this latent talent. An alternative model might more usefully be termed the “latent capacity release” model. The number and variety of community organizations and initiatives often found in so called marginalized or deprived areas is testament to the depth of skills and talents that lie within communities.

The “deficit” model assumes that the problems facing communities are due in large part to their own lack of skills or abilities. It is very much based on a social pathology understanding of
communities that implies they lack the necessary qualities and ingredients to become “good citizens”. Such a view is reminiscent of 1960s thinking on communities and arguably has never been too far away. For those in power this model of capacity building is useful. It poses no threat. It is top down, paternalistic and deflects attention away from the need to change the existing institutional and economic structures. It is a view that serves and supports the status quo. The focus and responsibility of change rests on the shoulders of the communities – it is their duty to become better informed and therefore engage more effectively in civic life. The focus of attention is that the capacity of the community needs to be enhanced in order for them to participate more effectively in existing structures. It is not about changing the existing structures to be more sensitive and responsive to the needs of communities, it is about making communities fit the demands and needs of the structures. It is a one-way street – that places little pressure on existing institutions to review how they act and engage with communities.

The alternative approach, the “latent capacity release” model is based on a more positive view of communities, which helps to conceptualize a new and more progressive view of capacity building. Instead of treating people as “empty vessels” in often top-down and patronizing ways, communities will be seen as essential partners whose skills and knowledge are vital. Such a view of capacity building acknowledges that communities already have skills that need to be harnessed, not built. It sees communities as active and equal partners that need to be engaged in new ways of working. This view provides a significant challenge to the system to build new and positive relationships with communities based on trust and mutual benefit. Until we see capacity building in this way it could be argued that communities are unlikely to be engaged in the decision-making processes in any meaningful way.

D. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to understand that capacity building is not a choice in regional and sub-regional development. It is one of the requirements of development especially for West African nations. In different economic sectors like technology, medication and including educational sectors plays decisive role, from this point of view it is possible to conclude that the development of socio-economy including human resource development and regional economic integration would be motivated through capacity building.

Recommendations

This paper haven surveyed many contributions of many authorities recommends that;

• To eradicate underdevelopment in critical sectors, west African countries must institutionalize capacity building
• There is need to improve on community based capacity building in order to attain an all inclusive development
• Governments in West Africa should invest in and leverage on existing educational institutions to advance and reduce the cost of development enhancement capacity building programmes
• There is need to invest massively on innovation biased capacity building programmes if West African countries must find a sustainable route to solving their technology and infrastructure deficit problems

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