

On knowledge and processes in development cooperation ^{1/}

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The debate in Dagens Næringsliv in June 2000 on Norwegian development cooperation is both interesting and instructive. It is interesting because a lot of important things are going on in the area of development strategies. It is instructive because the debate, in spite of this, to a large degree has been premised on traditional issues, and has followed old trajectories. Quite dramatic changes are currently taking place in the overall framework that structures international aid. These changes are evident on both macro- and micro-levels, and they are taking place very fast. NORAD has given emphasis to these structural changes in its strategy for the long-term development cooperation. The very same changes should also underlie and inform this debate.

These changes are in many ways a result and a corollary of the much talked about globalization. At the same time the emphasis is often different, with increasing weight given to production and flow of ideas and knowledge. The driving forces are changes in the overall aid framework and the changes in the opportunities and constraints existing on all levels throughout the world system, and have to do with stakeholders and their roles.

Stakeholders and roles

It is still common to view recipients of aid as only recipients, as 'the others.' Given this it may not be so strange that politicians and bureaucrats in Norway's main cooperation countries are also lagging behind? There is, however, an increasing understanding that we are all in the same boat. 'They' turn into 'us.' Development is increasingly understood as a joint endeavor and responsibility. Important new stakeholders are non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society, and the private (commercial) sector.

As a direct consequence of this development, the stakeholders' roles are also changing. New stakeholders take over the roles of existing stakeholders, existing roles are being redefined, and new functions and roles are being defined.

As the traditional separation between donors and recipients – between 'us' and 'them' – is giving way, it gradually becomes clear that also donors are stakeholders. Understood as stakeholders, it is becoming evident that, for example, Norad and the World Bank cannot be understood as simply convenient ways of channeling resources from the North to the South. Such resource transfer is taking place based on a set of explicit values, through the use specific means, and with clearly expressed goals.

At the same time the situation is becoming increasingly complex. More stakeholders lead to an increasing differentiation as regards means and aims. Changes in the assignment of roles invariably lead to uncertainties regarding who has responsibility for specific tasks.

The World Bank is, to a large extent, the originator – as well as moderator, as it were – of the ongoing changes in this global development process, and in two different ways. First, through a steady stream of analytical reports. The most recent report, "A Better World for All," prepared in cooperation with UN, IMF and OECD, was published in June. Second, through making a number of changes internally in, among others, the areas of organization and aid priorities, as well as in the delivery of projects and other services. The World Bank aims to increase the emphasis on gathering and making available relevant knowledge to all categories of stakeholders. In order to achieve this, the situation in borrower countries will increasingly have to be taken into consideration. This is, in particular, the case in the area of natural resource management.

^{1/} Translated from the Norwegian. Written as a commentary on a debate in the Norwegian daily 'Dagens Næringsliv' in June 2000. A slightly abbreviated version was published in that paper on July 25, 2000. The original and larger Norwegian version is available at: www.cbnrm.no.

Community-based natural resource management

New stakeholders, new roles and increasing differentiation points towards two new determining and mutually supportive trends in borrower countries: the central role of the nation state in the development process is increasingly receiving attention, and NGOs and civil society are getting more responsibility and influence. Lately many important things are taking place locally around the world that not easily catches the attention of the World Bank's data gathering and analytical machinery/tools. As a consequence the traditional belief in the World Bank as an oracle when it comes to global development trends should be complemented with increasing the contact and interaction with other stakeholders, in particular NGOs.

In 1998 I was involved in organizing an international workshop on Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM).^{2/} An invitation to submit proposals for case studies to be presented at the workshop resulted in almost 400 submissions from around the world. The World Bank or its partners did not know the majority of the activities reported on in these submissions. At the same time it was clear that most of these activities had resulted in very interesting experiences and results. The workshop participants, to a large extent representatives of locally based groups and NGOs in developing countries, understood CBNRM to be a sum total of three parallel and connected processes: (1) organization of effective community-based groups, based on clearly defined property rights to natural resources, (2) effective operational linkages between the public sector, community-based groups and the private sector in the management of natural resources, and (3) establishing an enabling policy and institutional environment. In a situation characterized by increasing complexity when it comes to stakeholders, means and aims, CBNRM was understood to be a suitable model because it is a process more than anything else. Following the conference, work on preparing various Internet websites in order to make the material produced at the workshop available, as well as to continue the work, has been going on.

The need for cooperation and exchange of information between stakeholders on the local level is increasing. Community-based groups and NGOs in developing countries, often in cooperation with likeminded organizations and groups in developed countries, are increasingly taking part in informal, more or less local, decentralized and flat network structures, based on email and the Internet. These networks aim to exchange CBNRM knowledge and information, in order to produce *new* knowledge.

There is a lot here that Norad can contribute to. The IT report that Norad recently published presents a framework for future work in this area.^{3/} CBNRM activities are, to a large extent, taking place without the knowledge of outsiders. We have a responsibility to help to make all this experimentation and experience known and available. The best way to do this would be to give opportunities for local practitioners to create suitable networks and networking tools that they themselves can manage.

Tove Strand, Norad's Director, in a comment published in *Dagens Næringsliv* on June 23, 2000, argues that donors need to cooperate more. But also *recipients* need to cooperate more. Not as recipients, both as *producers* and *managers* of an increasing amount of practical knowledge on how to do CBNRM, within the context of the modern nation state.

As stakeholders we need to understand better other stakeholders' point of departure, means and aims, constraints and opportunities. This implies that increased emphasis be given to production and flow of relevant knowledge and ideas, horizontally and vertically, between all stakeholders. This is what the emerging networking capability of the international CBNRM community of practice promises to be able to contribute to in a decisive way.

^{2/} The workshop took place in Washington D.C. in May 1998. The World Bank was one of the organizers, and also the host. More information about the workshop is available on www.cbnrm.net, including a link to a dedicated website

^{3/} The report is available on Norad's website www.norad.no.