ROUTLEDGE STUDIES IN THE MODERN WORLD ECONOMY

Human Development and Capacity Building

Asia Pacific trends, challenges and prospects for the future

Edited by
Maria Fay Rola-Rubzen
and John Burgess

ROUTLEDGE

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Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2016
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-1-138-84370-7 (hbk)
ISBN: 978-1-315-63748-8 (ebk)

Typeset in Galliard
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY

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1 Capacity building in the Asia Pacific

An introduction

Maria Fay Rola-Rubzen and John Burgess

Introduction

The scale of global development and relief challenges is monumental. Natural disasters are apparent on a weekly basis and devastate the poorest communities who have few resources to either prepare for or recover from floods, fires, cyclones or earthquakes. Even in the developed world, there are major economic challenges linked to the aftermath of the global financial crisis (GFC) as many economies in Europe struggle with high rates of unemployment, growing poverty, large flows of (legal and illegal) migrants in search of a better life and increasing civil unrest. In Africa, Europe and the Middle East many countries are being devastated by ongoing civil and international conflicts. There also remains the global challenge of climate change and its consequences for communities and well-being worldwide.

The news, however, is not all doom and gloom. Many parts of the developing world, in Africa, Asia and South America, are prospering. The last decade has seen many countries sustain high growth rates, improve living standards and upgrade community infrastructure. Success stories include India, China, Vietnam, Brazil and Ghana. Trade and investment has expanded in the third world, and foreign direct investment has increased into Africa, Asia and South America, especially in response to opportunities for resource development (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development [UNCTAD] 2007). Moreover, there is an emergence of multinational enterprises from developing economies, especially the BRIC economies (Brazil, Russia, India and China), and the trade and investment flows are no longer dominated by OECD economies and multinationals (UNCTAD 2012).

The Asia Pacific region has been an area of strong economic growth for the past two decades, it contains two of the largest economies in the globe (China and India), several emerging and growing economies (Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam), and it is home to many global corporations based in Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. High standards of living can be found in Japan, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. It is vibrant and cosmopolitan and contains a spread of culture, religions, living standards and lifestyles. Compared to Europe and the United States, the impact of the GFC on

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the region was minimal (Burgess and Connell 2013). Alongside development and material success, however, there remains poverty, deprivation and significant challenges within the region, such as the large numbers of poor people, especially in rural areas of Indonesia, Thailand, India, China, Papua New Guinea, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Laos. Many countries are regularly devastated by natural disasters (e.g. the Philippines, Nepal, Bangladesh, India and Vanuatu). There are also countries that have a short history of recent engagement with the international community (Myanmar, Timor Leste). In other nations, there is ongoing political instability and uncertainty (Myanmar, Pakistan, Thailand), and there remains ethnic and religious divisions across the region (China, Pakistan, Myanmar, India). Overall, it is a region of opportunities, challenges and diversity.

This volume explores capacity building in the Asia Pacific region. The context is on capacity building and development; we are examining situations where the process of capacity development is linked to local economic development and towards improving living standards. Invariably, the challenges of capacity building are greater in remote regions and in rural regions that lack infrastructure and resources; so these dominate the cases included in this volume. The purpose of the book is to demonstrate the many different processes and programmes linked to capacity development and examine how these programmes contribute to improving and sustaining local living standards. This is not a 'how to' collection, rather it is about indicating the range of capacity-building challenges and the responses to these challenges and about reflecting on the conditions under which capacity-building programmes can be effective in improving lives.

There are limitations in the scope of the book. It cannot represent the full range of capacity development challenges and case studies that are operating in the region. It does not include many important nations in the region such as China, Thailand and Malaysia. It is not a 'how to' book; rather, it is reflective about different challenges and a range of programmes across countries. In the introduction, the following issues are explored: What is capacity building? What are the origins of and assumptions behind capacity building? What are the examples of capacity building in action? How is a capacity-building programme developed? How is it evaluated? What then follows is an outline of the structure of the volume together with a discussion of the context and capacity programmes that are presented.

What is capacity building?

Capacity building is difficult to define since it is not a single process nor is it the same in different contexts. There are many definitions and conceptualisations of capacity building. The UK Department for International Development (Department for International Development [DFID] 2008: 3) suggests that:

> Capacity building is a complex notion – it involves individual and organisational learning which builds social capital and trust, develops knowledge, skills and attitudes and when successful creates an organisational culture

> which enables organisations to set objectives, achieve results, solve problems and create adaptive procedures which enable it to survive in the long term.

The United Nations Environmental Program (United Nations Environmental Program 2006: 2) suggests that capacity building is about:

> building abilities, relationships and values that will enable organizations, groups and individuals to improve their performance and achieve their development objectives. Capacity building was also described as initiating and sustaining a process of individual and organizational change that can equally refer to change within a state, civil society or the private sector, as well as a change in processes that enhance cooperation between different groups of society. This definition puts emphasis on three aspects: (a) capacity building as the catalyst and constant fuel for a process of change, (b) the importance of building institutional capacity, and the (c) involvement of a wide range of different groups in society.

Australian Volunteers International (Australian Volunteers International [AVI] 2006: 1) suggests that:

> Capacity building is essentially about change. Change that enables individuals, organisations, networks/sectors and broader social systems, to improve their competencies and capabilities to carry out functions, and more effectively manage the development processes over time.

The report goes on to state that:

> Capacity building facilitates people and institutions to realise *their own* development objectives and recognises that recipients of aid must be empowered to manage their own development agenda. This change in paradigm from donor-driven to recipient-led agendas acknowledges that top-down approaches focusing on only the quantity rather than the quality of assistance have failed. The goals of capacity building should not result in an attempt to impose a foreign model or way of doing things, but strive to identify and use local expertise and develop a grassroots domestic model. There are a number of general principles underpinning capacity building that hold the process of *change and learning over time* as core values and need to be considered when developing initiatives and strategies.
>
> (AVI 2006: 5)

The Asian Development Bank (Asian Development Bank 2011: 1) supports this notion that capacity development is a 'change process internal to organizations and people'; hence, one cannot 'do' or impose capacity development on an organisation or an individual – it has to be internally driven and the capacity development (CD) must be desired by the entity undergoing development for it to be successful.

Capacity building is critical for growth and sustainable development in all sectors. For instance, according to Alaerts, Blair and Hartvelt (1991), capacity building is necessary for sustainable growth in the water sector. Similarly, capacity building plays an important role in the health sector and community services sector (Airhihenbuwa et al. 2011; NSW Department of Health 2001) and can be a catalyst for redressing social exclusion.

Capacity development has resonance with community development. Indeed, capacity development and community capacity development have been used for local development initiatives in developing and developed countries (Craig 2005). In cities and regions globally, there are local communities that, to different degrees, are being left behind in realising national and international standards of living. In developed economies, there is a long history of deprivation in inner city regions and rural areas, characterised by poverty, crime, high unemployment and health problems and, in general, being left behind by the rest of the economy in terms of opportunities and living standards. The discourse on community development mirrors that of capacity development, only the context differs. Chaskin (1999: 3) comments that:

> Capacity denotes both the idea of containing (holding, storing) and the notion of ability (of mind, of action). Applied to communities, the notion implies the existence within them of particular capabilities, faculties, or powers to do certain things. These capabilities may have an impact on a number of aspects of community functioning, but in the context of community building are all concerned with ways to help promote or sustain the well-being of the community and its components (individuals, informal groups, organizations, social interactions, the physical environment). Community capacity defines, in a general way, communities that 'work'; it is what makes well-functioning communities function well.

From this quotation, there are a number of key foundations and processes linked to capacity building. First, and as suggested, capacity building involves a paradigm change to development from a top-down to a bottom-up process. Communities are encouraged and supported to develop strategies and programmes that suit local conditions and capabilities. Local communities have input into and ownership of the development process. External assistance and support is required, from capital to knowledge, but the process is driven locally. Second, and following, the process is participatory; it should reach out to the community and encompass those who may previously have been marginalised in terms of participation and decision making. Third, the process supports developing local capacity that takes many forms from physical and infrastructural assets (roads, power, communications) through to human capability (training, education, skill development). Fourth, capability development is ongoing and dynamic, it is not about a one off change; rather, it is about a cumulative process of change whereby external support is assimilated into an ongoing community development process. Finally, sustainability and local ownership is inherent to the

process and with it comes community building, information sharing and community learning. Effective capacity building is ongoing and cumulative; there are strong elements of not only participation but of learning and adaptation so that the 'building' process can move forward.

While the principles and intent of capacity building are appealing for their community, and for participatory and developmental foundations, the process is not straightforward or direct. Where do you start? What is the catalyst to get the process moving? Who should get it started? What resources and support does the community require? What is the role of external stakeholders? How do you evaluate capacity building? What works? Is there is a process of dissemination and evaluation that can improve the outcomes of capacity development? These are some of the basic questions linked to capacity building that will be addressed in this volume.

Capacity building represents a holistic and dynamic process of development

Capacity building embraces a framework of holistic development in that local development encompasses attitudes, opportunities, ambitions, physical and human capital, organisation and collaboration. As suggested, it is more than infrastructure and human capital improvements. The United Nations Development Programme (United Nations Development Programme 2014: 1), in its report on human development, stated that:

> Real progress on human development, then, is not only a matter of enlarging people's critical choices and their ability to be educated, be healthy, have a reasonable standard of living and feel safe. It is also a matter of how secure these achievements are and whether conditions are sufficient for sustained human development. An account of progress in human development is incomplete without exploring and assessing vulnerability.

Sources of vulnerability include natural disasters, social exclusion, corruption, political insecurity, wars and discrimination. Addressing vulnerability is linked to generating capacity to ameliorate vulnerability in its many different forms.

The ideas from knowledge development and knowledge sharing, social capital, strategic human resource development, diversity management and learning organisations extend the understanding of the development process to include ideas, processes, opportunities, technology, mentoring, leadership and management as all playing strategic roles in the development process. Moreover, the process is dynamic and sustainable. Various catalysts and support mechanisms can set in chain a process of learning and development. Through support, and trial and error, there is an ongoing process of community improvement. Sustainability is important in two senses: first in the environmental context, it suggests that local communities have to be aware of resource constraints and development must not be at the expense of water availability and quality, soil depletion or air

quality. The second aspect of sustainability is that the process must provide for momentum so that communities can independently manage and monitor the development process. Recognition must be given to the fact that outside assistance, whether finance or know-how, will not be continuous and may be contingent on events and circumstances that are difficult to control. Local communities will have to manage and sustain the process.

Many of the examples in this volume demonstrate how small changes and one-off local development programmes have a cumulative and ongoing positive impact on local development and well-being. These events could include access to improved seed varieties, access to expertise in crop management, access to reliable market data, access to micro capital sources, access to a reliable water supply, access to training and skill development opportunities and improved infrastructure such as roads and satellite communications. The United Nations Environmental Program (2006: 2) emphasised that sustainable capacity development encompasses

> initiating and sustaining a process of individual and organizational change that can equally refer to change within a state, civil society or the private sector, as well as a change in processes that enhance cooperation between different groups of society. This definition puts emphasis on three aspects: (a) capacity building as the catalyst and constant fuel for a process of change, (b) the importance of building institutional capacity, and the (c) involvement of a wide range of different groups in society.

Within this holistic and cumulative process, there are a number of features that stand out. First, development processes are often hindered by small obstacles that can often be overcome with limited outside assistance, for example access to a safe water supply or to sustainable energy, such as solar panels. Second, attitudes and culture may limit development opportunities; these could include not placing children in education or limiting the participation of women in the labour market. In many cases, attitudes may limit potential development by limiting access and opportunity. There are untapped resources that are being held back by attitudes that restrict participation and access to skills, training and leadership opportunities. The third important issue is that capacity building requires embedded local institutions to sustain the development process. It has to start somewhere, and it has to be driven by local stakeholders. These institutions include leadership, ownership and inclusion. A bottom-up process requires considerable skill development around key attributes such as leadership, management, advocacy and coordination. These essential soft skills may be latent, and they may require nurturing and support in the initial stages of the process. Knowing what to do and when to do it, and having leaders to do it, is equally important as having the equipment, roads and schools.

Capacity-building programmes

Capacity building can take many forms, involve different investment and partners, be local or national and have different time horizons. The DFID (2008)

plan outlined many of its capacity-building programmes. The South East Asia Community Access Programme (SEACAP) is linked to organisational learning and institutional development in supporting local infrastructure investments. The programme supports accessible research in rural communities to integrate the experience; opportunities learned are integrated into professional engineering programmes so that graduates have the knowledge to develop infrastructure programmes that are suitable for local conditions and financial capacity. Another program, based in Africa, is to support the National Research Councils of Malawi and Kenya to develop their capacity to organise and distribute health research to support improved health conditions in both countries. Another aim of the programme is to support the research infrastructure and to assist local health researchers to stay within the region. The United Nations (United Nations [UN] 2011) has a capacity-building programme for the Palestinian State that encompasses a number of distinct elements:

- Governance-Administrative development: improving public policy management process, coordination structures and mechanisms and promoting a culture of service, professionalism and efficiency in the public sector
- Health: improving access, quality, efficiency and equity of health care services
- Education: enhancing quality of education services provided to all Palestinians
- Social Protection: developing legislation and institutional capacities toward achieving social protection
- Infrastructure Outcome: improving environmental health conditions of the community
- Food Security, Livelihood and Employment: increasing sustainable food security

The UN report (2011) details specific programmes linked to these objectives. Each programme incorporates a number of partners, has specific objectives and a timeline. This highlights that despite capacity building being a broad concept that encompasses material and non-material objectives, it still requires systematic evaluation.

Measurement, evaluation and learning in capacity building

Monitoring and evaluating capacity building is also an ongoing process. How do you measure progress and success? This is difficult if the processes are linked to long-term transformation and if the changes are around non-material developments such as access to information and the development of soft skills. Nevertheless, external donors and agencies are under an obligation to monitor programmes and track outcomes against goals. From this, it follows that within these processes there is trial and error and learning through doing; some programmes will not be successful, but the experience and insights gained can be applied to other programmes and processes. Systematic valuation suggests

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