UNITED NATIONS

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ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL

Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA)

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH AS A TOOL FOR FORMULATING SOCIAL POLICY AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Summary

This paper seeks to emphasize that community development is a participatory process whereby consensus-building, open dialogue and the promotion of an active civil society are all key ingredients to spur the transformation that can result in long-term sustainable development. Given the importance of forming consensus, there is a strong need to create and build the capacity of those within a community to forge their own development strategies and to have an active debate regarding the central tenets. This issue is especially relevant in the age of globalization, which provides new challenges for sustainable development. Globalization offers new opportunities, albeit within the framework of open, participatory and transparent processes that are essential for long-term growth.

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I. THE LINK BETWEEN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

A. INTRODUCTION

In the past decades, ESCWA member countries have been implementing social policies based on sectoral issues that are directly related to various line ministries. Most priorities have focused on urban or highly populated regions, while neglecting other, less developed or remote areas where development is needed most.

While some ESCWA member countries are applying the local community development approach to develop marginalized areas by assigning temporary committees for such tasks, good practices that can be applied elsewhere are not well documented. Moreover, conventional public service delivery systems, whether sectoral or local, are not sufficiently rapid, flexible, accountable or innovative. There are cases where the public sector has proved ineffective in providing basic services owing to institutional collapse, unresponsive governance, unaccountable resource use or ineffective management. In these troubled settings, direct community support can provide the foundation for reconstituting public sector arrangements for service provision based on the principles of good governance and sound management.

On the other hand, using the community development approach can enable the Government to channel assistance, including funding and capacity-building investments, directly to communities in order to increase empowerment, improve responsiveness to citizen demands and priorities, accelerate service delivery, and improve the quality of life of poor and marginalized social groups. It can equally be used to respond to short-term demands for urgent assistance to communities in conflict-stricken areas, for post-conflict reconstruction or resettlement schemes, or in such crises as natural disasters that require a large-scale, rapid and multifaceted response. This approach emphasizes the primacy of civil society as the source of demand for public services. By building the capacity of communities to organize the expression of their demand and to contribute to their development, this approach often results in the prioritization of investments and services that are more locally appropriate than those of supply-driven public sector systems.

This technical report seeks to be of direct benefit to Government officials involved in designing and formulating social policies and in local administrations, as well as other governmental bodies concerned with issues related to social development. The underlying concept is that for social policy to be properly formulated at the national level, it needs to take into consideration practices and procedures adopted by the community development approach. This owes to the fact that formulating integrated social policy requires proper identification of causes of inequity that are usually spread at the local level. Specifically, monitoring and evaluating social policy can be facilitated once the capability and knowledge base of the local community is mature.

Additionally, this report is designed to benefit non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and civil society institutions, international agencies and Arab organizations involved in community development, and researchers involved in the study and analysis of the community development approach.

B. DEFINING LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL POLICY

Community development is broadly defined as an approach that gives control over planning decisions and investment resources to community groups and local governments. It operates on the principles of local empowerment, participatory governance, demand responsiveness, administrative autonomy, greater downward accountability and enhanced local capacity.[1] The concept of community development implies that it is a process whereby local communities can improve their capacities to use their social capital and, through collective action, to enhance their level of participation in the development process.[2] Ultimately, such a process leads to the empowerment of poor communities; that is to the delegation of the decision-

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[1] For more details, see ESCWA, "Manual on local community development" (in Arabic) (1999).

[2] V. Rao and G. Mansuri, "Evaluating community driven development: a review of the evidence" (Development Research Group, the World Bank, 2003).

making process to local communities and, subsequently, its communication to central authorities for budgetary allocation. Accordingly, community development deals with the national dynamics of social development at the local level. However, owing to the lack of documented data on experiences in the ESCWA region, researchers often face difficulties in identifying the causes for the poor delegation of the decision-making process and proposing appropriate policy options.

A local community development framework is intended to help policymakers and programme managers analyse the approaches used to support local development in their regions, to determine the types and forms of assistance to local actors associated with these approaches, and to face challenges arising from each. However, the approach cannot provide a blueprint for promoting local development in any specific community given the different social and political set-ups. Nevertheless, such an analysis can be used to identify strategies and methods aimed at filling the gaps, solving the coordination problems, and improving the performance of weak elements that diminish the effectiveness of local development in any region. By providing a common set of concepts and analytic tools, a local development framework can guide the selection of the most appropriate strategies and methods for a specific context and their orderly, positive integration.

Such an integrated approach involves organizing interventions around such local territorial units as districts, municipalities or communes. It builds on strengthening existing organizations and capacities within the local space defined by local government boundaries to develop more integrated institutional arrangements and processes.[3] Community-based organizations, local governments, and decentralized sectoral agencies, as well as such private organizations as NGOs and firms become more coherently linked in supporting empowerment, governance and service provision. Such an approach that links local organizations through their respective roles and relationships at local government and community levels promises to improve coordination, synergy, efficiency and responsiveness in the local development processes.

With regard to social policy, there is no universal definition; rather, its function depends on the stage of development of the country or region under consideration. Generally, social policy deals with equity in the distribution of gains, and pains associated with macroeconomic growth. For the ESCWA region, social policy is mainly concerned with the prevalence of poverty and polarization in income distribution; the persistently high rates of unemployment and underemployment; increases in the cost of living vis-à-vis income for the majority of population; deteriorating living conditions; and issues related to corruption, lack of democracy and participation in decision-making for poor communities.

A central objective in this regard is intervening with the cycle of poverty and alleviating its consequences. In effect, all of the weaknesses in implementing social policy contribute directly or indirectly to the prevalence and intensity of poverty and to poor governance. There is a broad consensus that an egalitarian approach in community development leads to wide encouragement and participation in shouldering development responsibilities. Similarly, strategies aimed at strengthening the institutional capacities of central Governments to address social problems can be viewed as measures for poverty alleviation and improved participation in socio-economic responsibilities.[4]

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[3] According to the World Bank, the local level is the lowest level that permits integration of the different logics by which the Government, society and economy are organized. These include the spatial logics of public service and infrastructure hierarchies, governance, social capital and economic geography. S. de Silva, "Communities taking the lead: A handbook on direct financing of community subprojects" (the World Bank, 2005).

[4] See ESCWA, "Central issues related to social policies: Comparative study and guidelines for the formulation of social policies in the ESCWA region" (in Arabic) (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/2).

C. LIMITATIONS OF FORMULATING SOCIAL POLICIES IN THE ESCWA REGION

One of the bottlenecks associated with social policies in the ESCWA region is the lack of an integrated social vision. Social policies are largely formulated and implemented without due reference to a comprehensive and strategic development framework. Moreover, social policies in the region have tended to be limited to human welfare and social protection programmes whereby citizens are merely recipients or beneficiaries of such programmes, rather than active participants.

Such an approach towards social policy has been translated into highly centralized and rigid policy formulation processes with little coordination and orientation vis-à-vis development goals. In many ESCWA member countries, this state of affairs is clearly reflected in the following: (a) excessively large central administrations; (b) lack or limited autonomy of local authorities in terms of identifying and providing basic social services; (c) poor allocation of resources and coordination among ministries and public bodies involved in the planning process of social policies; (d) poor allocations given to non-urban and remote areas; and (e) adoption of economic policies without clear consideration of their social impacts and consequences, especially in remote areas.

This lack of integration is especially reflected in the institutional framework and in the delivery mechanisms of social services that leads to duplications of tasks and responsibilities among governmental agencies, waste of financial resources, poor targeting of beneficiaries, low efficiency and overlapping of jurisdictions.[5]

Social policy is a by-product of a public policy process determined by ideology, political orientations and the broader institutional environment within which political choices are made and implemented. Given that open and democratic political environments are endowed with multiple political and institutional channels that encourage public participation, such environments tend to be significantly more responsive towards the needs of the people at the centre of development.

Equally, a political system that considers accountability and the rule of law as intrinsic values of a public policy can provide further institutional mechanisms that are conducive to a more responsive public administration. The political environment in the region, particularly instabilities caused by the Israeli occupation of Arab territories, the occupation of Iraq by coalition forces and the emergence of Islamic extremist groups, has had a profoundly destabilizing effect on the overall capacity of the Government to improve the social state of affairs, thereby impeding the emergence of the institutions of good governance in many parts of the region.

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[5] Ibid.

Furthermore, economic globalization can contribute to the circumstances of social confusion. Countries that become less competitive in the globalized world can experience political tension and religious fundamentalism owing to their political marginalization. In the ESCWA region, few countries have been able to resist the increasing globalization over the past two decades, which has resulted in growing social polarization.

Additionally, people whose lives have been disrupted by rapid economic transformation have become especially susceptible to extremist ideologies.[6] When traditional norms, social patterns and identities are threatened, people become ripe for conversion to new radical ideologies based on religious or conservative feelings. Ideologies that are derived from Islamic principles are especially powerful given that religion covers all aspects of life for traditional people in Arab societies and that it can give meaning, counsel and justification for dissention. As a result, this political instability continues to divert limited resources away from essential social programmes to military and security apparatuses with detrimental consequences for the scope and quality of social programmes aimed at promoting human development goals.

For this reason, specific efforts must be devoted to clarify the role of the various actors involved in defining and implementing social policy, as well as the tools required to implement them in a reasonable period of time. In this respect, the role of the State as a regulator of social activities needs to be reinforced, while its role as a direct provider of social services must be reviewed circumspectly in the light of the availability of such services in the private sector and civil society. Equally, the role of the different stakeholders needs to be strengthened considerably.[7]

Box 2. Advantages of investing in social policy for developing countries

According to the Harvard economist, B. Friedman, progressive social policies have usually been associated with rapid economic growth and rising incomes at all levels of society, rather than with the uneven growth or economic stagnation. He argues that economic growth, if based on broad social policy, can advance such fundamental aims as tolerance, democracy and equality. He also addresses the current debate about economic growth in poor and developing countries by quoting the prominent developmental economist, A. Lewis, who wrote half a century ago that "the case for economic growth is that it gives man greater control over his environment, and thereby increases his freedom".[a/] Moreover, Friedman acknowledges the contribution of the philosopher and Noble Prize winning economist, A. Sen, that development is not guaranteed simply because of a nation's increases in GDP, rather that people need specific "capabilities" in order to lead a full life, and these often require direct investment in social parameters as health-care, education, democracy and other social programmes. Growth itself is often not sufficient.

Poverty has remained entrenched in developing countries, despite many years of conventional development policies. While economic growth could remain the best cure for deep poverty, social expenditures on education and health are integral to comprehensive development. Government spending, if properly carried out, can often be beneficial for both social equity and growth.

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Source: B. Friedman, *The moral consequences of economic growth* (Knoff, 2005).

a/ Quoted in R. Douthwaite, *The growth illusion* (New Society Publishers, 1999).

D. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AS A CORNERSTONE FOR FORMULATING SOCIAL POLICY

By definition, community development is a process whereby the local community improves its capacity to use social capital and its participation in the development process.[8] Consequently, it is a process

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[6] For example, oil wealth has transformed some societies in the region from tribal to high-tech.

[7] Chapter II investigates the role that each stakeholder can play to maximize the impact of the community development approach.

[8] Social capital is commonly defined as the ability of individuals to build bonds within their own group and create bridges that link them with other groups on the assumption that such networks are a source of strength to improve current social conditions and economic opportunities. Social capital also includes bonding ties that connects family members, neighbours, and groups sharing a common identity. For more details, see F. Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (Penguin Books, 1995).

that gives local communities control of decisions and resources as well as power to exert influence over Government for service delivery. Ultimately, such a process can pave the way for the empowerment of marginalized communities, the reduction of poverty and the achievement of other goals of social development. As such, this approach follows the bottom-up approach whereby the demands of local communities are translated into policies for their development.

Box 3. Who are the stakeholders in local communities?

The criteria used by major development organizations to recognize stakeholders consist of the following steps:

(a)   Identifying various stakeholders, including those that are normally excluded or underrepresented in the policymaking process;

(b)   Determining which issues have the greatest impacts on the various groups, including, among others employment, poverty, water, violence and security;

(c)   Recommending topics that various stakeholders could address and the specific formats, namely, workshops, focus groups, surveys or interviews.

Examples of key stakeholder groups include the following:

(a)   The general public, especially the poor and such vulnerable groups as youth, children and the disabled;

(b)   The Government, including, among others, civil servants, elected representatives and local governmental bodies;

(c)   Civil society organizations, including networks, local and international NGOs, and community-based organizations; trade unions; and academic institutions and research centres;

(d)   Private sector and professional associations;

(e)   Donors participating in community development projects.

The participatory process involves creating a network of organizations and mechanisms that promote collective action at the local level. Such a network implies the existence of its own structure of authority and bureaucratic process that, in some cases, can result in parallel structures of power with the State, and can generate some of the institutional failures it was supposed to overcome. Such a process is often the result of a difficult tradeoff between the failure of the State to deliver adequate and effective public goods and services, and the need to devise independent mechanisms that are more participatory, efficient and faster than available public services. Moreover, the community development participatory process leads to a broader and more contextualized understanding of local problems, including unemployment and poverty, by emphasizing dimensions that go beyond income or other quantifiable indicators to identify their roots.

Despite methodological problems that still need to be addressed, available data and impact evaluation of ongoing projects in the ESCWA region show that, in most cases, the participatory approach of community development has had positive impacts on the capacity of poor and marginalized communities to create networks for collective actions.[9] In the informal sector, for example, a more integrated approach to local development could empower local people by increasing opportunities to invest in, produce and sell goods and services, thereby increasing their capabilities to profit from these opportunities. Reducing regulatory barriers and providing such targeted support as microfinance services and technical assistance to household and very small-scale producers and traders can help to extend the benefits of local economic development to the poor and other marginalized social groups. Such a process can result in increasing the responsiveness and accountability of public sector decision-making, and in reducing corruption and other rent-seeking behaviour that often suffocate private initiatives.

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[9] This evaluation is based on periodic reports on the implemented ESCWA community development projects/activities that are submitted to relevant donors.

Box 4. Consequences of ignoring marginalized communities

In most ESCWA member countries, formal methods of social protection do not usually extend to rural populations. Public social services, including, among others, schooling, hospitals, infrastructure facilities, electricity, telecommunications, drinking water and sanitation are of inferior quality to those available in urban areas. Furthermore, most employment opportunities in rural areas tend to be seasonal, thereby increasing the vulnerability of the local population. In times of hardships, people tend to rely on informal means of support from NGOs, charities and relatives or from migration to urban areas or to neighbouring countries.

In the Syrian Arab Republic, for example, during the period 1995 to 2005, 2.3 million people migrated to urban areas within the country and constituted some 14.2 per cent of the population in 2000; while in Yemen, migration to Sana'a resulted in a population growth rate of 7 per cent, instead of the natural growth rate of 3.5 per cent.[a] According to the World Bank, rural-urban migrations has often resulted in migration from rural to urban poverty as migrants face inferior employment opportunities and have limited access to social services, even as they lose the safety nets provided by kinship networks in their areas of origin.[b]

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[a] ESCWA, "Social policies in the Syrian Arab Republic" (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WP.8); and ESCWA, "Social policies in Yemen" (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/WP.3).

[b] The World Bank, "Reducing vulnerability and increasing opportunity: Social protection in the Middle East and North Africa" (the World Bank, 2002).

According to the World Bank, local government service delivery systems typically follow the sectoral model of functional organization, namely: specialized organization units assume responsibility for such particular functions as roads, water supply, land-use regulation and sanitation. Despite different lines of accountability, many local governments employ the same service delivery mechanisms. However, given that local governments are motivated to respond to citizen demands, they frequently offer services that are far beyond those assigned to them by law, even when these responsibilities formally fall to ministries of health and education, including organizing schools and clinics on their own initiative. Local governments also serve as advocates for their constituencies, lobbying ministerial departments to increase the coverage and improve the quality of the services they provide to local communities.[10]

E. LIMITATIONS OF THE USE OF THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT APPROACH
TO IMPLEMENT SOCIAL POLICIES[11]

As mentioned above, this paper deals with the hypothesis that community development needs to be the main viable and innovative framework for formulating integrated social policy in terms of improving the level of access to and quality of public service in the ESCWA region. On the implementation side, however, the absence of accurate data severely limits any reliable evaluation that could endorse community development as an effective and sustainable means for providing public services, rather than the prevailing centralized administrative methods. Perhaps more importantly, qualitative evidence shows that enhanced success and sustainability of the community development process depend crucially on an enabling institutional environment.

Additionally, community development projects and processes do not occur in vacuum. Rather, they require a specific context based on both formal and informal structures of authority. Community development projects have generally encountered significant problems in terms of sustainability without a clear understanding of the targeted community or an active desire to involve existing public-sector institutions.

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[10] The World Bank, *World Development Report 2004: Making services work for poor people* (the World Bank, 2004).

[11] This section is based partly on ESCWA, "Community-driven development as an integrated social policy at the local level" (unpublished).

Despite these empirical shortcomings, a number of general points and observations can be highlighted as follows:

(a) Social infrastructure facilities constructed with participatory methods and community involvement tend to be comparatively effective in improving access to public services;

(b) A higher level of decentralized authority and community involvement in the daily operation of public facilities represent a greater incentive for public participation and greater accountability, and community management of such social infrastructures. Such an approach can lead to more efficient use of available resources;

(c) Small infrastructure projects, as opposed to larger and more technically complex ones, performed markedly better in communities where households were able to make informed decisions concerning the type of system and the level of service they require. By contrast, projects that were constructed without community participation and supervision and where project management was not accountable to the community tended to be poorly constructed by private contractors. This is a crucial element of the rationale of community development, namely, that local or indigenous knowledge must be incorporated into the decision-making process concerning productive infrastructure;

(d) Community development projects have the potential of becoming more sustainable than top-down initiatives if they are provided with a minimum albeit continuous institutional support, particularly for value-added inputs and training.[12] This underscores a positive linkage between participation, continuous involvement of public institutions and increased potential for sustainability;

(e) Cultural and social heterogeneity in the community can have adverse impacts on the expected project outcomes, whereby a higher level of social homogeneity can facilitate the formation of social capital and be conducive to collective action. One of the aims of community development is to develop capacity for collective action, and such capacity is often more pressing in those communities with greater social diversities and where internal divisions and even conflicts are widespread;

(f) Targeting poor communities is generally more effective when it is achieved through the participatory process as indicated by the community development methodology. The combination of qualitative and quantitative methods can increase the understanding of what constitutes poverty in any given community and help to tackle the causes and conditions of the poor. Such methods can help project managers to target poverty as a complex phenomenon and move beyond the limited sectoral approach and its shortfalls.

While more research and impact evaluations need to be undertaken regarding the rates of and reasons for success, community development projects in the ESCWA region have to date achieved positive development outcomes and have met some of their stated goals and expectations. However, as highlighted above, the potential of community development methods have often been constrained by the following two factors: (a) problematic connections between community development projects and prevailing public sector institutions, which result either from relations of power within the targeted community or from an arcane set of rules, procedures and organizations; and (b) a lack of technical and organizational capacity at the local community and municipal levels, particularly in rural areas.

For these reasons, there is a strong need to institutionalize community development methods for integrated social policy while concurrently tackling some of the common community development limitations. This can be achieved by carefully promoting decentralization, fostering good governance reform, and strengthening the levels of human resources and human capital.

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[12] Such support can come from line ministries.

F. THE EXPERIENCE OF ESCWA IN PROMOTING COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DURING THE PAST DECADE

The objective of ESCWA in promoting local community development approach is to raise the awareness of member countries on the importance of active participation of local communities; to guarantee successful formulation of social policy; and to increase capacity of member countries to ensure adequate local capacities in the design and implementation of social development programmes and projects.

Additionally, ESCWA continues to work on improving networking mechanisms among partners and actors in the social development process by expanding capacity-building work in cooperation with governmental institutions, local and regional NGOs, and international organizations. The number of regional and local NGOs participating in ESCWA community development work has more than doubled during the past two years to reach a total of 46 organizations. Moreover, ESCWA has contributed to building the capacities of actors in the field of community development through its operational work, as evidenced by the use of the ESCWA model for community development in the Syrian Arab Republic, where the Government has applied this model to 40 per cent of rural areas; and in Lebanon, where the model was applied in assessing the needs of 17 underprivileged communities in the Akkar district. At its twenty-fourth session, the Arab Council of Ministers of Social Affairs adopted resolution 475 of 5 December 2004 on community development projects and policies, where ESCWA policies and programmes on local community development are considered as policy framework to encourage the replication of such activities/initiatives in other member countries.[13]

1. *Need for local community development in the ESCWA region*

Local community development experiences in the ESCWA region during the past decade have highlighted the need to enhance the economic and social capacities of local communities in order to enable them to meet their basic needs and face problems related to poverty, unemployment, inflation and marginalization. Despite the positive impact of the development strategies at the national level and the success of some social policy and programmes in reaching specific sectors and groups within local communities, the general impact of these policies and programmes remains limited in terms of alleviating poverty, creating job opportunities and achieving social cohesion.

While basic principles of development are present in local communities, there is a wide gap between these communities and others within the same country. The main problems encountered by these communities are as follows:

(a) Economic growth in local communities depends on the availability of exogenous resources, both technical and financial;

(b) Rural human resources are characterized by a lack of skills as well as by limited access to education, health, and environmental and other basic services;

(c) Increasing disparity in the distribution of wealth and poverty, with fewer job opportunities;

(d) Lack of institutional frameworks aimed at mobilizing resources, coordinating efforts, ensuring popular participation and preserving the environment within these communities.

The feasibility of implementing community development approaches is largely linked to the actual knowledge of a variety of community needs that take into consideration the moral aspects. The knowledge of these needs is essential for the evaluation of the effectiveness of intervention in applying community

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[13] Among others, the resolution praised the programmes and role of ESCWA in developing local community development projects; and stressed the need for continuing coordination between the League of Arab States (LAS) and its specialized Ministerial Councils, and with ESCWA, particularly in implementing local community development projects.

development approaches and its ability to create local capacities, mobilize resources and provide the foundations for consensus.

While the involvement of these parties focuses on training and rehabilitating individuals in the community in order to create local leaders, the attainment of a higher level of popular participation requires stronger ties between the leadership and their sub-communities, whether professional, vocational or family groups, and with local government authorities in order to strengthen the role of these sub-communities in laying the foundations for social consensus. Furthermore, there are a number of obstacles hampering the success of implementing community development approaches, including, among others, the following:

(a) Disparities between various stakeholders in the implementation of these experiments in terms of the concept of local community development and its basic components;

(b) Acute shortage of literature, especially Arabic reference and booklets on practical applications;

(c) Shortage in ESCWA members, with the exception of Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine, of qualified and competent personnel capable of managing local development projects;

(d) Limited availability of expertise in the local community development approach, training techniques and development research.

The impact of local community development experiences on people, governmental bodies and civil society institutions is still limited in terms of improving mobilization, techniques, knowledge and expertise necessary for decision-making and follow-up on local community development projects. This has prompted the secretariat of ESCWA to cooperate with the Arab Gulf Programme for United Nations Development Organizations (AGFUND) in publishing the training material on local community development, which provides a technical and methodological summary of the most important topics and issues faced in the application of the local development approach and in the management of its various activities.

Within that context, ESCWA has designed an integrated training programme that covers the subjects addressed in the training manual and that provides access to a collection of documents on local community development experiences. Furthermore, ESCWA has undertaken field studies on activities designed to generate income, enhance the role of civil society organizations and promote methods to support popular participation and the role of the informal sector, as well as documents on other matters related to loans, case studies and practical exercises.

2. *The ESCWA project on training human resources in local community development*

The ESCWA project on training human resources in local community development aims to increase the application of local development approaches by providing comprehensive training and capacity-building programmes, which are the two pressing needs for stakeholders involved in implementing these approaches and for those concerned in the field of development work, namely, governmental bodies and departments, NGOs and regional and international agencies. The implementation of this project, both at the regional and local level, aims to achieve the following:

(a) To implement a comprehensive training programme on the various community development phases aimed at the following: (i) promoting an integrated local community development approach, according to a tested training manual and based upon feedback from beneficiaries; (ii) developing work capacities and skills of stakeholders in the local community development approach; (iii) promoting the training of trainers according to a tested training and based upon feedback from beneficiaries; and (iv) developing work capacities and skills of trainers, thereby enabling them to execute training workshops;

(b) To prepare a manual for the rehabilitation of researchers in local community development and applying it through a training programme aimed at the following: (i) promoting an integrated approach on participatory development research, and testing the manual according to the perspectives of beneficiaries;

and (ii) developing work capacities and skills of researchers, thereby enabling them to undertake field research in local community development;

(c) To create a network of qualified individuals aimed at coordinating community development projects and at exchanging experiences in this respect;

(d) To provide a training package, including references, documents and training material, for training and technical assistance in local community development.

3. *Project implementation approach and training methods*

Measures for the implementation of the project are based on the application of the integrated training programme derived from a memorandum of understanding regulating cooperation and coordination between ESCWA and working parties at the regional level, namely, the Regional Centre on Agrarian Reform and Rural Development for the Near East (CARDNE); AGFUND; Mercy Corps International; Islamic Development Bank (IDB); International Labour Organization (ILO); governmental parties, including, among others, ministries of social affairs, labour and agriculture; such NGOs as Safadi Foundation, Fares Foundation, and Azm and Saade Association; and with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in order to organize training workshops at the national level in accordance with special agreements on the allocation of duties and responsibilities.

Bringing together these various parties within the framework of training workshops provides an ample opportunity for exchanging experiences and expertise, and for clarifying a collective vision to confront the problems of involvement in formulating social policy. Additionally, the project on training human resources in local community development provides a tested approach for coordinating and promoting complementarities between the approaches and various literatures developed by official sources, civil society organizations, United Nations agencies, and other regional and international organizations. These opportunities are reflected in the implementation mechanism of training workshops, in an evaluation adopted in the revision of the benefits of both training manuals as well as in the training materials in accordance with the comments of its beneficiaries and the follow-up of these beneficiaries in future workshops.

Box 5. ESCWA training package under the community development project

ESCWA, CARDNE and Mercy Corps International, with the support of AGFUND, coordinated their efforts to work as partners for the implementation of the first phase of the project on training human resources in local community development. In addition to the technical and organizational experiences gained from the implementation of the first phase, this joint effort has led to the publication of a series of reference documents in training human resources, managing training and mobilizing programmes, namely:

    (a)   "Manual on local community development";
    (b)   "Training programme on building the capacities of local community development workers";
    (c)   "Manual on training local community development trainers";
    (d)   "Training programme on building the capacities of local community development trainers";
    (e)   "Trainer's manual on how to design, manage and evaluate local community development training programmes";
    (f)   "Training programme on building the capacities of local community development researchers".

II. REQUIREMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

A. INTRODUCTION

Empowering communities in the context of local development requires increasing the chances and quality of their opportunities to participate in local governance and local service delivery. The capability to participate depends on more than individual resource endowments and correlates directly with social capital and trust that enables people to act collectively. With the opening of the economies to globalization, adequate linkages between poverty reduction and a rights-based approach to development are needed in order to ensure that the underprivileged segments of society have greater access to jobs and other opportunities.[14]

Stakeholders outside Governments, particularly civil society organizations that include representatives of the poor, women's NGOs, rural communities and groups that are out of favour with the State, have always played limited roles in decision-making and related public policy dialogue. Government consultation with such groups can contribute to a better understanding of their social problems, causes and solutions and, consequently, can result in the inclusion of more pro-poor social policy. For example, advocates of community support approaches focus on participatory processes and building capacities, especially social capital within the community. They call for providing resources and technical assistance at the community level to enable people to address their needs. Direct community support also promises to improve the performance of local governments by enabling communities to better express their demand and hold local governments accountable. Community support programmes can build community capacity through collective problem-solving and collective action.

This section discusses the necessary requirements for using the community development approach as a tool for formulating social policy suitable for the development of the various communities. Such an approach is essential given that community development focuses on strengthening decentralized institutional arrangements for empowering governance and service provisions as the building block of sustainable capacity-building in marginalized and underprivileged areas.

Empowerment depends strongly on the standing of individuals, voluntary associations and communities in relation to national constitutions and laws. Opportunities for local action are influenced by political and civic rights and by the property rights regime under which local actors operate. Moreover, norms grounded in culture and local values promote or constrain the opportunities available to women, children, poor people, people with disabilities and other vulnerable groups to participate and influence local development processes. While empowerment efforts at the local level alone is not enough to overcome these broader constraints, the support of local national leadership is required to change discriminatory attitudes and provide a stable foundation for equitable empowerment.[15]

Local governance that corresponds to the variety of civil society institutions whereby people organize to act collectively is conditioned by prevailing laws and traditional social practices. National legislation provides the framework that legitimizes such forms of local collective decision-making as voluntary associations, community organizations and local governments. Moreover, legislation grants local organizations the legal standing, rights and relations to the State that are fundamental to effective local governance processes. Broad societal norms, including the propensity for unity, the acceptance of social hierarchy, and relations to authority and leadership, also influence the quality of local governance.[16]

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[14] See ESCWA, "Manual on training local development trainers" (in Arabic) (E/ESCWA/SD/2002/3).

[15] Ibid., p. 6.

[16] For more details on the requirements for good governance, refer to the websites of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank on governance and local development.

Box 6. Participation: definition and relation to development

Participation is the process through which stakeholders influence and share control over priority setting, policymaking, resource allocations and access to public goods and services. There is no ready blueprint for participation given that it plays a role in many different contests, diverse projects and for various purposes. However, in whatever context they are used, participatory processes or civic engagement in the formulation of social policy allows communities to begin exchanging information with other stakeholders, thereby increasing the transparency of their decision-making. This in turn can improve Government accountability to the communities and, as a result, increase the overall governance and economic efficiency of the development process.

To date, most participatory processes have taken place at the micro level and have become increasingly innovative as methods become more established among communities. However, in order to achieve participatory outcomes at the macro level, it is important to use participatory approaches at the micro and macro levels in a complementary manner. Both approaches require the following elements: a well-established public information strategy and multi-stakeholder institutional arrangements for governance, including civil society groups; and Government representatives from all branches and levels.

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Source: S. Hickey and G. Mohan (eds.), *Participation from tyranny to transformation: Exploring new approaches to participation in development* (Zed Books, 2004).

Local service provision, on the other hand, depends on a variety of exogenous factors. While national policies set standards for public services and define the institutional arrangements through which they are provided, including the roles of communities, local governments, sectoral agencies, NGOs and private firms, national Governments and NGOs that are funded externally provide access to many resources supporting local service provision. Both formal and informal institutions that affect the functioning of the private sector can also influence the availability and quality of public services. Moreover, while "community" implies a homogenous lot, in most cases it comprises different groups with varying capacities, power and networks. Any discussion revolving around social capital and collective action within a given community must first recognize the conceptual and practical limitations of these terms.

In some countries of the ESCWA region, poor governance compromises all development efforts through corruption, the capture of public organizations and resources by powerful elites, and the exercise of Government authority without accountability. In others, public organizations perform poorly as a result of inadequate systems and under-trained, under-equipped, poorly supervised and weakly-motivated personnel. Where public sector dysfunction is pervasive, national institutions can constitute a disabling environment for local development. In these cases and in the short term, a viable local development process depends on measures aimed at promoting greater empowerment and at improving local governance and local service provision, rather than basing it on the broader institutional context. With regard to the long term, effective and sustainable promotion of local development requires a favourable enabling environment for local actors.

This section discusses the main elements that enable the community development approach to take root and benefit the societies under consideration, while being used as a tool for more effective planning for formulating social policy. These elements can be classified as follows: (a) role of the enabling environment for the participation of local communities in the decision-making process; (b) role of the civil society in raising awareness among the population aimed at identifying and meeting their basic needs; (c) role of central Governments in terms of encouraging and financing the above; and (d) role of social capital among the rural communities that can guarantee positive change.

B. ROLE OF THE ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Local development requires an institutional environment that is favourable to local initiative. Both the formal institutions of governance and the informal institutions of the wider society and economy can contribute to this enabling environment through the rules, norms and resource endowments that support

(or constrain) actions and accountability by local people and organizations.[17] An enabling environment can be fostered in most contexts by disseminating information and fostering a dialogue between the local population and the Government.

Information sharing is a key component of the participatory process that can be used throughout the planning, implementation and monitoring stages of local community development strategies. Specifically, sharing information allows transparency in governance, accountability in public actions and expenditure, and meaningful consultations for policy implementation. On the other hand, decentralization empowers local communities to reciprocate dynamically and be responsive for their needs and ensure that they are accountable to their actions. Types of decentralization include political, administrative and fiscal decentralization. Local governments are generally more responsive where these three forms exist as they are complementary to each other and are important for creating an enabling environment for community development.

At the political level, the rationale for decentralization is that it allows for the increased participation of citizens and their elected public representatives in the decision-making process of the central Government. From this perspective, decentralization enhances Government accountability and transparency through a system of power sharing that is in line with good governance. Indeed, decentralization is one of the most important means of implementing and exercising checks and balances within a society. It serves to create civic space, which in turn provides the opportunity for the emergence of opposition political groups and, in many cases, of proactive civil society organizations. Operating independently from Government control, such organizations can play pivotal roles in holding the State accountable to its citizens.[18]

Decentralization therefore enhances public participation by involving different social actors of diverse political, religious, ethnic and cultural affiliations in negotiations over the use, allocation and management of local resources. Such processes foster a culture of democracy and prepare the ground for participation and accountability to be extended beyond the level of the locality. In the ESCWA region, despite some positive pilot experiences and repeated attempts at decentralization, initiatives have tended to take the form of cosmetic rather than structural changes, and have actually demonstrated a tendency to reinforce centralization through non-transparent monitoring techniques or intergovernmental transfers. Most municipalities in the ESCWA region, for example, are fully occupied by such routine responsibilities as granting building permits, undertaking maintenance work and following up on violations. While these tasks are necessary and represent a good source of municipal income, they divert attention from other more important functions, including power sharing and good governance.[19]

Moreover, decentralization measures have been largely restricted to the administrative aspects of governance, rather than political or financial aspects. Far from involving real devolution of power, the ESCWA region is going through a mixed de-concentration and delegation process whereby the political elite remains responsible for most administrative, financial and political decisions. Local authorities have generally leaned towards specific projects, including housing and poverty alleviation, and have transposed such systemic social problems as youth unemployment rather than addressing them. Decentralization trends have not achieved the type of responsibilities and roles that make local authorities and the central Government partners in sustainable development.[20]

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[17] The enabling environment for local development includes such formal institutions as laws, policies and organizational systems; in addition to such informal institutions as values, norms and social practices that support empowerment, governance and service delivery at the local level.

[18] UNDP and the Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), "Responding to citizens' needs: local governance and social services for all" (2000).

[19] ESCWA, "Decentralization and the emerging role of municipalities in the ESCWA region" (E/ESCWA/HS/2001/3).

[20] ESCWA, "Sustainable urban development: a regional perspective on good urban governance" (E/ESCWA/HS/2001/7), p. 23.

Participatory decentralization can indeed represent the nexus between the community development approach and social policy. Despite the methodological limitations highlighted in chapter I, including limited community development experiences in most countries of the ESCWA region, there is sufficient substantive evidence to support a circular relationship between community-driven initiatives, decentralization and better delivery of social services. In this regard, improving accountability is considered an essential part of decentralization. Successful decentralization processes in other regions have been able to establish clear institutional mechanisms that allow for an accountability flow among all parties involved, namely, local officers, central ministries, technical staff, political parties and the electorate (see annex II).

Empirical evidence reveals that these accountability flows pose a particular challenge for most developing countries, including those in the ESCWA region. In most cases, this can be attributed to the inertia of over-centralized systems against change, or to the capacity of powerful elite and political forces at both central and local levels that override any accountability mechanisms. The decentralization process can suffer an irrevocable consequence.

Social development requires strong institutions aimed at supporting inclusion, cohesion and accountability; while capacities that sustain development include people's knowledge and skills, social capital, organizational capacity and the institutional environment for good governance.[21] The enabling environment for local community development framework needs to provide a conceptual basis for strengthening institutions and capacities for empowerment, governance and service provision at the local level, thereby contributing to increased human, social and economic development. In order to obtain maximum results and increase efficiency and responsiveness, local citizens need to be engaged in oversight bodies and NGOs must be encouraged to enhance local capacities through partnership arrangements. In this respect, Government recognition of community-based institutions within a country's governance system is critical to the way communities are linked to the public sector as a legitimate venue for the expression of demand, for resource management and for collective action.

C. ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY

The importance of the role played by civil society organizations in designing, monitoring and ensuring the success of implementing social policy cannot be overstated. In a vibrant civil society, such organizations countervail the power of Government and can become part of a system of checks and balances. On the other hand, unregulated civil organizations have the potential to cause harm to the society as a whole. Societal values, norms, institutions and capacities are also important contributors to the enabling environment for local development. Empowerment is greatly facilitated in societies where principles of equity and social justice are widely accepted. Local development depends on an understanding within the broader society that governance and development are not merely the responsibilities of the Government, rather that these require the active participation of individuals, communities and voluntary associations. An equitable local development requires the inclusion of marginalized social groups as contributors to governance and service provision.[22]

NGOs are commonly contracted to deliver capacity-building services, mostly to communities, but also to local governments. Capacity-building at the community level involves helping them to conduct participatory needs assessments; to identify, prioritize and plan projects; to organize democratically-elected community development committees; and to manage funded sub-projects. For those projects where funds are directly transferred down to the community level, NGOs also help communities learn to manage and account for project funds and to lead social mobilization campaigns in the targeted communities. NGOs have played

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[21] For more details, see the World Bank, "Better governance for development in the Middle East and North Africa: Enhancing inclusiveness and accountability", *MENA Development Report* (the World Bank, 2003).

[22] Individuals who act as agents of local development, including community members and leaders, association officeholders, staff of NGOs, local government officials, civil servants and entrepreneurs, require better knowledge and skills to be fully effective. Local organizations need people who are capable of planning, managing and monitoring public initiatives; and of designing and implementing the improvements to infrastructure, public service delivery, productive activities and commerce demanded by communities and households.

an important role in projects serving the disabled and ethnic minority communities by serving as an outreach mechanism to the targeted beneficiaries. In some cases, they were contracted to provide monitoring and supervisory services to ensure that funded sub-projects received ongoing oversight.

All these competencies require training to increase the capacities of participants in community development. Capacity enhancement goes well beyond technical and professional training. Local development requires more effective collaboration between the public sector and NGOs, more responsive and legitimate forms of social capital, better performing organizations, and individuals who are more capable of working together to solve problems.

In ESCWA member countries, the absence of rule of law and the lack of transparency both weaken the economy and undermine the participatory process. In some countries, while there are rules designed to ensure fair treatment for all, the rich and powerful have special access to political power and use that influence to obtain special favours and exemptions from those rules. Moreover, there is a strong tendency to resist change or to sustain the status quo from both the higher and local authorities. In such circumstances, a strong civil society that uses checks and balances on abuses of power is an important element in curtailing such undemocratic behaviour. In Lebanon, for example, the main obstacles to transparency in social expenditures and their monitoring are the fragmentation of social expenses that are scattered among the various ministries and public entities. Another obstacle is the poor itemization of expenditures in the State budget where the categorization by nature is not adapted to the functions and tasks performed by each ministry and, furthermore, where the geographical location of spending is not specified.[23]

Box 7. The role of local governance in improving accountability and decision-making

Local governance describes the way authority is organized, legitimated and employed within the local space. It includes how plans and policies are formulated, how decisions are made, and how those who make and implement decisions are held accountable for their actions and results through both governmental and non-governmental forms of public or collective decision and action. All institutions of decision and action in a local space contribute to local governance, namely: village committees, community organizations, water user groups, parents organizations linked to schools and voluntary associations, as well as local governments.

Local decision-making, on the other hand, organizes the way groups of people determine their priorities and how they satisfy them. An important part of local decision-making is how individuals (politicians, administrators and community leaders) and collective bodies (village committees and municipal councils) are selected and authorized to set priorities and to mobilize, allocate and oversee the use of resources in their trust. Local decision-making institutions frequently orient and oversee action by executive or administrative organizations.

The quality of local governance is affected by the transparency of decision-making, involvement of local people and communities in decision-making, and compliance by officials and citizens to rules on the scope and exercise of authority. Village committees, service users groups and natural resource management groups can promote greater responsiveness and fairness in decision-making by local governments through increased transparency, inclusiveness and consistency. Better governance will contribute to more equitable and dynamic local development.

In the ESCWA region and according to the findings of the World Bank, it is in accountability that governance is weakest and where client voice and choice over service provision are lacking if not absent, and where client feedback mechanisms are limited and often restricted.

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Source: The World Bank, "Better governance for development in the Middle East and North Africa: Enhancing inclusiveness and accountability", *MENA Development Report* (the World Bank, 2003).

Consequently, civil service reform must be accorded one of the highest priorities. A meaningful reform requires fundamental, bold and creative change, which only political institutions that are secure in public support could be capable of undertaking. Given the prevailing public attitudes with regard to Government bureaucracies, genuine reform can gather wide support. The needs, objectives and means need to be explained publicly to the communities in a credible manner in order to mobilize a national consensus in this regard. The objectives are to build a lean civil service without unnecessary redundancies, clean of corruption, efficient in managing public affairs, oriented to service and problem-solving rather than to bureaucratic control and complications, and respectful of citizens and responsive to their needs.

D. ROLE OF CENTRAL GOVERNMENTS

As mentioned above, local governance requires an institutional environment that is favourable to local initiatives. The onus is on Governments to enhance such enabling environment by formulating laws, policies and procedures that make national governance more supportive to local development. Such laws must clarify the rights of individuals for equitable access to opportunities; and strengthen the legal standing of voluntary associations in governance and service delivery. Moreover, Governments need to foster a vibrant civil society by creating initiatives aimed at promoting democratic norms and civic institutions that support the two pillars of good governance, namely, inclusiveness and accountability; and at promoting such societal values as equity, social justice and local responsibility. Naturally, this is in addition to providing financial and technical support in order to assist local communities in developing decentralized development projects.

Moreover, the participation of local communities in decision-making can be enhanced by creating opportunities for community members and their representatives to engage in dialogue with Government officials, including politicians, administrators and technicians, aimed at identifying, prioritizing and resolving local problems. Such effective participatory approach requires processes of consultation among the planning, decision-making and accountability elements of local governance. While many local planning processes are internally well organized, they remain marginalized by weak connections to the central Government that is authorized to make decisions and manage resources.[24]

Local government approaches demand a reorientation of public finance and sectoral policy to accommodating intergovernmental relations. They also require organizations in the central Government to interact with multiple local government units often mediated by such regional-scale governance institutions as provinces and states. If direct community support approaches are to achieve coverage in all parts of the national territory, the public sector needs the capacity to interact with communities organized as units of decision-making and action.[25] The public sector has to be prepared to build community capacity, process community requests for funding and support, and monitor community use of resources and achievement of results in this multitude of dispersed small-scale units. According to the World Bank, even well-funded and well-managed national fund agencies with years of operational experience are rarely able to satisfy this level of demand.[26] As a result, when direct community support programmes move towards universal coverage, they often opt to work through local governments as intermediaries between their specialized agencies and their large population.[27]

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[24] Ibid. Chapter six of that paper underscores the bureaucratic routines and the cumbersome administrative procedures in Lebanon that create bottlenecks and represent hurdles in the adoption of the bottom-up approach to formulating social policy.

[25] National coverage is a requirement of any institutionalized feature of a country's governance and service delivery system. When some communities operate in a direct community support mode and others operate under a different mode, this is a clear indicator that direct community support remains a project modality and has not been fully institutionalized as an organizing principle for governance and public management.

[26] The World Bank, "Better governance for development in the Middle East and North Africa: Enhancing inclusiveness and accountability", *MENA Development Report* (the World Bank, 2003).

[27] Ibid.

Box 8. Community development in Malaysia

Malaysia is a country that pioneered the application of social policy as a cornerstone for its development. This approach enabled the country to be transformed from a least developed country prior to 1970, to a developed nation by the end of the century. Transforming rural communities is seen as essential in raising the quality of life in rural areas. Specific strategies included, among others, modernizing rural areas to encourage local populations to remain in these areas, improving the quality of life in rural areas through the provision of modern facilities, and increasing rural productivity by developing rural small-scale industries. The major focus of rural development activities centres on providing better housing, improving the physical infrastructure and utilities, promoting development of rural tourism, and increasing training and income generating opportunities for the youth. Various programmes have been implemented to encourage and guide rural communities to venture into rural industrial activities, with special attention given to upgrading the skills of rural women.

With regard to the future, the creation of a rural community that is resilient, proactive and knowledgeable and with noble ethical values is the main objective of Malaysia Vision 2020. Besides the physical and economic dimension of rural areas, emphasis is also given to human resource development of rural communities through the implementation of various community development programmes, including *Gerakan Daya Wawasan* that aims to empower rural people to be self-resilient, independent and knowledgeable.

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Sources: The Ministry of Rural and Regional Development in Malaysia, "Rural development in Malaysia: Achievements and challenges", which was presented to the Seminar on Rural Development: Policies, Strategies and Institutions (Beirut, 20-22 December 2004); and ESCWA, "Central issues related to social policies: Comparative study and guidelines for the formulation of social policies in the ESCWA region" (in Arabic) (E/ESCWA/SDD/2004/2).

E. ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Community organizations and other voluntary associations are instruments for local people to engage in participatory planning and oversight of public decision-making, in service delivery, and in other local governance processes. They provide venues for collective mobilization to solve specific problems through such direct action as infrastructure improvement or maintenance, community-based regulation of natural resource use, and cost-sharing for social or economic support services that are not provided by the public sector. However, the capability of people to participate in local governance and local service delivery is not only determined by such resource endowments as money and skills, but also by the social capital that provides the basis for collective action aimed at addressing common concerns. Within that context, the capacity to organize, decide collectively, mobilize resources, communicate through representatives with external organizations, and ensure compliance with mutually agreed decisions requires relationships of trust and leadership among the concerned group members.

Social capital that supports this trust, leadership and legitimacy is a key factor for local development and represents an important dimension of capacity enhancement. Social capital underpins community-based development initiatives to improve the quality of governance at the local level. Investments in social capital that strengthen both voluntary associations and informal institutions of collective action are fundamental to promoting a local development process that balances governmental and non-governmental initiatives.

Legitimating various forms of social capital in the political and social marketplace creates a favourable environment for the local initiative required for dynamic local development. Governments, religious leaders, organizations, NGOs and scholars can all contribute to an environment that broadly recognizes the importance of the social networks through which people meet many of their needs. As such, the recognition of informal institutions is an important basis for developing their capacities in order to assume a greater role in community and public affairs. Widespread acceptance within civil society of such principles as the transparency and accountability of public organizations also enforces the norms and rules governing the behaviour of public officials.

According to the Noble Prize economist, J. Stiglitz, open, transparent and participatory processes play an important role in preserving social capital.[28] Participation can help create a sense of community, a sine qua non for a higher level of social capital. Consequently, when individuals believe that they have meaningful participation in the decisions that are affecting them, they will be more willing to accept change than when they feel that the changes are imposed on them by the Government. This is especially relevant for the most disadvantaged groups.[29]

F. CONCLUSIONS

In terms of implementing national social policy, Governments in the ESCWA region have followed a partial and sectoral approach, which constitutes a set of often uncoordinated programmes implemented by a variety of institutions. There is a lack of a comprehensive, integrated social vision at the national level that leads to shortcomings in the fulfilment of the needs and expectations of people at the community level, especially in areas away from the urban centres. This situation that has persisted over the past two decades has led to a waste of human and financial resources, the exacerbation of poverty and unemployment, and the creation of an environment of social tension that threatens the well-being of societies as a whole.

Currently, the challenge lies in transforming social policy into a series of coordinated actions intended to widen the participation of people in the development process, especially those marginalized and away from the centres of power. Empowerment and participation are becoming the prominent themes in the development agenda of most ESCWA member countries. Within that context, the local community development approach adopted by ESCWA can be forwarded as a main tool for including the marginalized and rural communities in the decision-making process through participation in mechanisms used in the formulation and evaluation of the social policy process. The experiences of past and current community development projects implemented in the ESCWA region have demonstrated that the potential of this approach for improving social policy formulation, especially at the micro level, depends on a set of enabling conditions, among which are the broad institutional environment and the level of human resources.

Development requires a change in mindset and, in particular, an acceptance of change. This is especially relevant in an era of globalization where change is the main catalyst for development. Participation, on the other hand, is necessary for a fully effective and society-wide development transformation. Moreover, recent research has provided evidence for this point at the grassroots level, thereby demonstrating the benefits of participation in local community development projects. In addition to bringing to the community relevant information that central Governments are not necessarily aware of, such participation brings with it commitment, which translates into greater efforts.

Participatory decentralization could represent the political and institutional space where the methodologies of community development are institutionalized, and provide the necessary enabling environment for communities to empower themselves and participate in the development process. Moreover, it can provide a framework within which social policy is identified and implemented in a more integrated manner. However, while decentralization can remove some of the distortions in the institutional and bureaucratic process of social service delivery, it cannot alone bring about effective social policy, which depends on a broader set of enabling conditions.

Similarly, while community development can improve the quality and the level of integration of social services by providing a reference framework for wider and deeper public participation, it cannot reach its full developmental potential unless a clear political vision is articulated into a long-term development strategy that encompasses both social and economic policies.

Qualitative evidence shows that enhanced success and sustainability of the community development process depend crucially on an enabling institutional environment. Indeed, community development projects

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[28] J. Stiglitz, "Participation and development: perspectives from the comprehensive development paradigm", *Review of Development Economics*, vol. 6, No. 2 (2002).

[29] Ibid., pp. 163-182.

and processes do not occur in a vacuum; rather they require a specific context constructed from both formal and informal structures of authority, and out of the prevailing rules and mechanisms of social and cultural control. Without a clear understanding of the targeted community or an active desire to involve existing public sector institutions, community development projects have generally encountered significant problems in terms of sustainability. Among the most important general conclusions that can be drawn from the above is that a participatory process that unfolds in ways that takes into account existing cultural and social contexts, and that includes the prevailing institutional environment is likely to be more successful and more sustainable than other forms of development assistance.

Adopting a more integrated approach to community development is not a simple task. In order to integrate effectively local development processes and to promote systematically greater empowerment and more effective service provision at the local level, several significant challenges are likely to be confronted, including the following:

(a) Changing the attitudes and practices in both public and private sectors organizations to adapt to new values of equity, responsiveness, transparency, accountability and responsibility;

(b) Surmounting institutional boundaries that separate sectoral, local government and community-based actors and organizations owing to divergent interests and values (according to political, religious or even ethnic affiliation);

(c) Managing complex processes involving organizational actors at both governmental and non-governmental levels;

(d) Realigning relations of power to favour local actors rather than national actors, and to favour communities and civil society rather than public officials.

CASE OF LEBANON

Lebanon offers a key laboratory to examine the link between local community development and the formulation of social policy given that it enjoys a large and complex network of social institutions that need to be rationalized and optimized. The country is also marked by severe regional disparities, high vulnerability among a large portion of the population and major population displacements caused by the civil war.

According to a study by the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), the elaboration of clear partnerships between the different actors and stakeholders of social development, including defining adequate goals and targets, is the key to successful social reform in Lebanon. However, specific efforts must be devoted to clarifying the role of the various actors involved in defining and implementing social policy, and to identify the tools through which goals and targets could be reached in a reasonable period of time. In this case, the role of the State as a regulator of social activities needs to be reinforced, while its role as a direct provider of social services must be carefully reviewed in the light of the availability of such services in the civil society. The role of local bodies must also be considerably reinforced.

According to the survey undertaken under the Economic and Social Fund for Development (ESFD) Project, social development in Lebanon "consists of coordinated efforts by the public sector, the business sector and the civil society to eliminate poverty, provide access to affordable and adequate social services, decrease exposure to risks, reduce unemployment and emigration of valuable human resources in the context of a balanced, comprehensive, equitable and sustainable economic growth in all regions".[30]

The survey concludes that the strategy for social development, upon which social policy is built, needs to include the bottom-up approach as one of its elements. National strategy for social development would have to rely on a holistic and participatory approach. The mobilization of the local population and their active participation in the creation of a better future is a condition for success. Such an approach can give new thrust to the ongoing decentralization efforts of the Government, thereby building on the involvement of local actors. Local public institutions, including the Ministry of Social Affairs, active local NGOs and other stakeholders could support the process. Such an approach could also be an important step towards the development of poverty pockets.

ESFD could take the lead in implementing this part of the social development strategy. Its community development component has devised an integrated and participatory mechanism for local development planning and for the implementation of demand-driven local projects. However, the poor institutional framework that governs such procedures hinders the promotion of this approach.[31]

The section below provides an in-depth look at a selected field project in north Lebanon aimed at ensuring local participation in the design of development social policy for the community under consideration.

PROJECT ON LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT IN ARAB RURAL AREAS:
BEBNINE, LEBANON

1. *Project overview*

The Project focuses on the participation of all segments of the local rural communities, namely, women, youth, the elderly and local leaders, and is based on the principle that advancement can be achieved by mobilizing capacities and resources that are available locally in order to achieve self-reliance and by

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[30] Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR), "Formulation of a strategy for social development in Lebanon", Economic and Social Fund for Development Project (ESFD) (Community Development Unit, October 2005), para. 1.1.

[31] Ibid.

adopting a bottom-up approach for rural development in poor communities. The Project, which was initiated in late 1999 with an initial duration of three years, was not closed until December 2005.

(a) *Overall goal*: To improve the quality of life in the small rural community by strengthening productive capacity and income generation of the local population, and by encouraging community participation in the development process;

(b) *Project purpose*: To strengthen the skills of the community through training in various key development fields. Subsequent to the identification of needs and priorities in the selected village, the Project organized various activities to build the necessary skills, and established a "revolving" fund;

(c) *Outputs/results*: The Project tested a community development approach introduced by ESCWA through previous projects. It was successful in building on the efforts already carried out in the village by Mercy Corps International and in completing all its planned activities as follows:

(i) Identifying the needs of local households based on a comprehensive field study that was undertaken at the beginning of the Project;

(ii) Strengthening the capacity of more than 1,000 people through training geared to promote economic, human, institutional and environmental development in the village. The topics addressed were, among others, hospitality management, public health, computer and literacy trainings, plumbing and environmental preservation;

(iii) Creating a "revolving" financing fund aimed at granting small loans amounting to approximately $10,000 to local beneficiaries in order to increase local investment.

2. *Evaluation of results*

(a) *Relevance*: While the initial Project document was signed in 1999, predating the Millennium Declaration, it contributed to the achievement of Goal 1 of the Millennium Development Goals on eradication of extreme poverty by diversifying the local economy and promoting income-generating activities. The Project was also directly relevant to Goal 3 on promoting gender equality given that most of the beneficiaries were women;

(b) *Efficacy*: The completion report mentioned various success stories, which can be largely attributed to the "revolving fund" that allowed the local population to invest in necessary capital goods. Additionally, the Project was effective in achieving the following:

(i) A total of 1,133 women in the village were trained in civic literacy, basic health issues and productive activities. A women's cooperative was created, which currently sells processed food items;

(ii) Almost all revolving fund loans contributed to an increase in income and productivity for the beneficiaries. Savings (interest earnings) from the revolving fund were used for a workshop on training researchers in local community development, which was convened one year after completion of the official Project activities;

(iii) Methods of improving agricultural production and compiling feasibility studies were introduced to villagers. Furthermore, a specialized training programme on conducting research took place as a follow-up activity. It is not yet clear, however, whether any of the above methods and skills are being applied.

(c) *Efficiency*: The funds of the project were provided by AGFUND. Additional amounts were contributed in cash and kind from Mercy Corps International, and in kind from ESCWA and the Government of Lebanon. While the use of the funds was largely efficient, some savings from the revolving fund, amounting to approximately $25,000, were not re-injected in the fund as a result of local political issues.

Consequently, the Project was extended by almost two years in order to plan the abovementioned workshop on research in local community development. This delay emphasizes the need for better budgeting and planning of field projects;

(d) *Sustainability*: The Project built on previous efforts made by Mercy Corps International in the village of Bebnine, thereby ensuring the continuation of a development initiative. The revolving fund has provided various opportunities for local men and women to undertake profit-making activities. Specifically, a women's cooperative and a fishermen's cooperative were founded and resulted in increased village solidarity and community pride. A few village families are now benefiting from biogas technology through small units installed by the Project. Finally, the existence of a trained and reliable focal point in the village has enabled the Project team to follow up regularly on the community concerning the use of the new infrastructure and skills;

(e) *Impacts*: This Project was successful in terms of creating long-term effects in Bebnine. Some good indicators of this success are the creation of two cooperatives, a new school for girls and an increase in literacy rates.

3. *Conclusions*

The Project provided a window of opportunity for active individuals to develop and use their skills. The impact on the daily life of the local population is evident and must not be underestimated. However, from an administrator's perspective, experience from such projects is often mixed. Unless significant financial resources and time are available, it is difficult to complete all planned activities in time and to use the funds efficiently.

4. *Recommendations*

Future project documents and reports need to follow a results-based management framework approach in order to facilitate their implementation and evaluation. Moreover, there needs to be a focus on training of trainers, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the results and impact of field projects, and creating multiplier effects.

5. *Lessons learned*

Cooperation with locally active NGOs plays a crucial role in facilitating the implementation of field projects. Equally, the existence of a well-trained and reliable local focal point facilitates follow-up after project completion and better evaluation of its sustainability.

SUCCESS STORIES FROM OTHER REGIONS[32]

Direct community support approaches have evolved considerably in recent years. Many have increased the decision-making role of communities in allocating and managing resources. Some have enhanced upstream links to sectoral systems by promoting policies and procedures that explicitly acknowledge community roles; while others have introduced local governments into their management systems as intermediaries between community organizations and central Government agencies.

In other regions of the world, there is evidence to suggest that the application of participatory methodologies supported by adequate funds is becoming an important instrument to support decentralized local government. By involving local authorities and transferring responsibilities in the context of community development projects and funds, local authorities are strengthened and become leading players in the mechanisms and processes of the projects. However, in most cases, local municipalities or authorities have not progressed into reliable partners. This can be attributed to a number of factors, including poor technical capacities, predatory behaviour of local administrators, corruption, lack of accountability, and lack of well-established and monitored institutional procedures for the implementation of projects. In Bolivia, Honduras and Zimbabwe, for example, where both the decentralization process and community development initiatives, particularly in the form of social funds, have been in place for a consistent period of time, local and district councils are progressively being involved in planning designing and implementing social policy.

While there are different approaches and institutional arrangements underlying community development projects, which are largely linked to the prevailing level of decentralization and local environment, overall, the community-driven experience has facilitated and strengthened both the capacity and the level of involvement of local institutional authorities. Most community development projects and social funds show a gradual albeit deliberate approach to transferring function to local governments. In Honduras, the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank collaborated to develop a pilot programme, namely, the Honduras Social Investment Fund aimed at supporting the long-term strategy of transferring all social funds to local governments throughout that country. In order to proceed in a methodical and transparent way, a set of objective indicators were created to identify the existing capacity of local governments before adopting the most appropriate strategy, based both on strengthening specific technical deficiencies and on transferring responsibilities and powers. Social funds in Zambia have adopted a similar approach.

Consequently, there is significant emphasis on the need to improve the capacities of local authorities before they can assume these new responsibilities. Generally, there are three main support mechanisms, namely: (a) providing direct technical assistance to local governments at local, regional and national levels either by the technical staff of social funds or through NGOs, the private sector and academic centres; (b) establishing and supporting associations of municipalities that can collaborate for specific purposes, share costs for activities of common interest and share knowledge on technical and administrative issues, as in cases of Honduras and Nicaragua; and (c) training and employing a municipal technical officer on the community development project who can be assigned to the local government and whose salary can gradually be transferred onto municipal budgets, as is the case of Zimbabwe.

Additionally, community development projects have proved valuable in sustaining such decentralization goals as improving the accountability of local institutions, improving responsiveness to local needs and strengthening project-related capacities at the local level. While community development projects and social funds are taking an instrumental approach to capacity-building, it must be stressed that their focus is limited given that the allocated funds are not specifically strengthening local governance or improving the technical capacity of local governments. The transfer of power to local municipalities and authorities remains limited in scope; and the impact and effectiveness on local governance tend to depend more on the general decentralization policies adopted by the national polity.

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[32] Annex II is based on ESCWA, "Community-driven development as an integrated social policy at the local level" (unpublished).

With respect to local governance, community development projects place a lot of emphasis on institutional arrangements that improve or guarantee a system of accountability. While there is no single or unique approach to such arrangements, there are many examples where projects have helped strengthen accountability by devolving decision-making powers and resources to local communities and local governments.[33] Such examples are recurrent in most countries in Latin America where community development projects have been implemented over the past decade.

In Bolivia, Honduras and Nicaragua, the respective social investment funds have all established mechanisms that involve local governments and make them commit to participatory practices and methodologies, including the preparation of local development plans, budgets, project procurement and contracting. These procedures and practices were seen to enhance the public view of institutions and created more access and pressure points, which in turn leads to better accountability mechanisms.

Additionally, community development projects can promote the decentralization process by encouraging a closer cooperation and communication mechanism between central and local authorities that arise from sharing the experiences of donor-supported programmes. Traditionally, donor-supported programmes, particularly large projects contracted through a development bank loan, are controlled and implemented directly by central line ministries. However, given the nature of their focus on local communities and the application of decentralized participatory methods, community development projects have provided a window of opportunity to involve local government and devolve some project responsibilities to it. This, in turn, creates and improves accountability between central and local government.

Overall, experiences indicate that community development projects have promoted a culture of responsiveness to community needs, particularly from local governments. Several case studies from different countries indicate that both local administrators and communities appreciate the benefits that can be reaped from the application of participatory methods for the selection and implementation of projects.[34] Moreover, the adoption of these methods has facilitated the allocation and transfer of resources that were earmarked for technical capacity-building, which represents one of the most positive and most sustainable achievements of community development projects across the world.

However, within the context of local governance, the impact of community development projects are maximized when key decentralization policy reforms are in place and when projects are aligned with them. In the absence of a decentralization framework, community development projects are unlikely to reach their full potential even if they contribute to starting a broader decentralization process. In countries with little experience of local governance and with limited exposure to community-based approaches, community development projects can act as an important catalyst for change by demonstrating the potential for local institutions to play a larger role in local development.[35]

Indeed, community development projects have generally proved to be positive exercises in empowering poor communities, improving project targeting of beneficiaries, assessing real needs and improving the efficiency of project implementation. In particular, spill-over benefits of such projects and their participatory nature have strengthened the capacities of both local governments and their communities to deal with social policy. This supports the notion that institutionalized community development methods and practices can satisfy social needs at the local level through a system of participatory decentralization.

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[33] Some community development projects assign important responsibilities to local governments as agents to manage resources, while others tend to focus more on an internal system of accountability.

[34] These case studies include the Local Development Plan in Cambodia, the Social Fund in Malawi, the FONCODES Project in Peru, and the Social Fund in Zimbabwe. A. Parker and R. Serrano, "Promoting good governance through social funds and decentralization" (the World Bank, September 2000).

[35] In Bolivia, for example, the *Fondo de Inversione Sociale* influenced the emergence of the decentralization law in 1994 by demonstrating to the central Government that a demand-based policy was feasible.