Sustainable development and community mobilization - moving through failure towards success. Experiences and revelations from three years in Zambia

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Abstract: In the context of sustainable development, aid, and their intersection in project planning, management, and implementation, the author seeks to share his experience, lessons learned, and thoughts on the recent history of sustainability, and the current state of sustainable developmental policy implementation in the development assistance field. These findings are based on his three years of experience working on the front lines of a grassroots-focused development organization in Zambia, where he learned five core principles that are necessary for a clear understanding of processes which affect sustainable development implementation. The paper finds that a macro framework from the political and social actors at the national and supranational level, combined with comprehensive project design, contextualization, stronger monitoring, reporting, and evaluation mechanisms are necessary, and that emerging technologies may hold part of the answer. It also calls to attention the challenge that long term vs. short term planning cycles pose to sustainability.

1. Introduction

After returning from three years of field service with the United States Peace Corps, the author seeks to share best practices, and to better understand the processes, challenges, and real world solutions which affect the implementation of sustainable development assistance programs. In order to share these reflections, the author will examine a brief overview of sustainable

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development, aid, and their intersection in project planning, management, and implementation. This background will provide the foundation which will allow for the presentation of five core principles that guide sustainable project development. The author seeks to share his experience, lessons learned, and thoughts on the recent history of sustainability, and the current state of sustainable developmental policy implementation in the development assistance field. The challenges of long term versus short term planning cycles, and the politicalisation of aid will be addressed, in an effort to better understand the macro processes that are affecting policy design and implementation. Methodology used were direct observation, interview, literature review and primary source analysis. The issue of sustainability raises questions about the nature of aid, the macro framework's effect on the micro via the interaction of political and social actors at the national and supranational level, on nations and localized institutions, and the role of comprehensive project design, contextualization, and stronger monitoring, reporting, and evaluation mechanisms in ensuring sustainability. This final component will be addressed though emerging technologies, and a call for an ontological shift which support sustainability and self-determination.

2. Defining sustainability vs. long-term sustainable development

One of the most important questions in development policy today is whether efforts and actions aimed at sustainable development really lead to long-term sustainability.[1] The author seeks to share his experiences, lessons learned, and thoughts on the recent history of sustainability and the current state of sustainable developmental policy implementation in the development assistance field. In terms of practical implementation, he defines the process used to ensure community mobilization and participation, in order to build sustainable practices. His contributions are based on three years of experience working in villages on the front lines of a grassroots-focused international development organization in Zambia.

Sustainable development was defined in 1987 as, "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987). It contains a mixture of ideology and ideational structures that have worked to

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[1] Opole International Sustainability Conference's primary topic. April, 2016.

shape the focus of development and aid models throughout the last thirty years of development practice (Riddell 2007: 17-38).[2] Fortunately, despite a focus on short-term economic profit at the expense of environmental sustainability (Platje 2011), the recognition and action being taken in regard to sustainable development today speaks to the needs of people, of social, economic, and environmental concerns, and meeting those needs today, without consuming or destroying existing resources for future generations. This working definition of sustainable development clearly builds from a combination of the 1987 definition and the popularized definition first introduced to the public and for political consideration at the 1992 World Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro (Morazán et al. 2013). Since that pivotal conference, and through the changing development assistance landscape, sustainable development has remained committed to those core economic, social and environmental needs.

Unfortunately, these development models are grounded in an understanding of the world where infinite growth is not only possible, but should be enshrined as the foundation of project and intervention design (Rao 2000). It is only recently that the idea of stabilizing growth through higher efficiencies and sustainable practices and, in the last decade, that the idea of degrowth[3] (D'Alisa et al. 2014) have entered into computations on development assistance.

Sustained infinite growth through the utilization of new technologies[4] is a utopian fantasy. It is widely argued that sustaining current levels of consumption is already putting more demand on the system than is possible to maintain.[5] In realistic terms, given technological and political limitations, the ideas of degrowth or of bringing developing nations to the existing level of development and quality of life and then maintaining that quality seems the only appropriate model in relation to sustainability. As a result, the degrowth movement is gaining traction (D'Alisa et al. 2014). It has already contributed to a more robust and realistic discussion on the nature of sustainable development.

However, despite the efforts of the last 24 years at a huge number of conferences, summits, and negotiations by a vast number of different institutions including development

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[2] Particularly chapters two and three on the history of Foreign Aid, pages 17 to 38.

[3] Degrowth is a political, economic, and social movement which advocates for the downscaling of production and consumption. Degrowth has a strongly post materialistic ideational structure, which seeks to maximize quality of life, happiness and well-being through non-consumptive means—sharing work, consuming less, while devoting more time to art, music, family, culture and community (D'Alisa et al. 2014).

[4] See the discourse posited by Rao (2000) versus Meadows et al. (1992) concerning longevity of sustainable development versus infinite utilization of resources through improved efficiencies and capabilities.

[5] See the discussions and results of the COP21 Paris Climate talks, where current levels of growth and development have been criticized as disastrous.

organizations, political bodies, and social institutions, the international community has failed to achieve anything more than minimal change (Morazán et al. 2013). Further, despite this focus on sustainability, and a healthy discussion throughout the last two decades, sustainable development as we know it today, continues to rely on that flawed assumption of an infinite world, where growth can occur without end, and where pursuing sustained growth is the goal.

Sustainable growth is often discussed as a synonymous concept to sustainable development. However, this author strongly disagrees. Sustainable growth relies on the perception of the world as infinite. Sustainable development calls instead for wise utilization of limited, exhaustible resources (Boulding 1966), to affect large-scale improvements in the quality of life of those receiving assistance.[6] In the discussion on environmental sustainability, of particular interest in the last year (2015) was the COP21 climate summit in France where the changes of climate and environment globally brought about consensus and major attention to the challenges that lie ahead. The focus of the summit was on the environment, but the politicians, scientists, and academics engaged in it, encompassed and included a holistic view, which addressed many of the political, economic, and societal difficulties facing sustainable development today. This mixture of not only environmental, but of all sustainable development practices, showcased the penetration of the sustainability discourse. Despite this continued attention however, the contemporary discourse has continued to highlight how sustainable initiatives over the last 30 years of development assistance and aid have struggled or outright failed (Riddell 2007: 355-385). These failures give the impression that sustainability remains a guideline, which is given lip service or limited recognition, but is rarely implemented to its intentioned extent.[7] As a result, progress has remained severely limited on the sustainability front and sustainable development continues to be a guiding and core discussion point in today's development agenda, as something that should be strived for.

This limited action is clearly represented by the conversation around sustainable development between field agents today. Some development agents even joke about ensuring

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[6] Note that the term development when it and refers to those receiving aid should be referred to as receiving assistance, not being "developed." This is part of a movement to use language and behavior that positons stakeholders on an equal footing, instead of in a hierarchical and often patronizing light.

[7] The author often witnessed projects including, "sustainability" not for true sustainable programs, but to meet the donor's structural demands in grant application forms – very seldom was any monitoring, reporting, and evaluation followed through with to determine if the projects were actually sustainable.

sustainability in their projects.[8] This issue is not unknown, and within the development community it is not subtle. Major news outlets, including the Guardian, have written satirical articles on the topic, with a serious bite. These discussions touch upon the realization that in practice, sustainability must be a vital component even though it presents a major challenge and a hurdle that many development agents still are not sure how to address. This brings to the fore the discussion on the nature of sustainable development that is focused around whether sustainable development, in its current iteration, is an exogenous principle forced on development assistance, or if it is an organic evolution of the understanding of resource utilization[9] and the challenges facing nations who are fighting for their right to industrialize. Although this behavior could be represented as an indicator that the sustainability movement has failed, the author does not think this is the case. As Oscar Wilde wrote in the first chapter of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Wilde 1991), "There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about." This now common notion has taken many forms including the American saying that "No press is bad press." This idea strongly reiterates the mentality that if people are reading about, joking about, and thinking about sustainability, they are becoming familiar with it. That it is trickling down into their project identification and planning process, and they are becoming more aware of longer-term needs. The common usage of sustainability in these contexts, and in satire means that more people are thinking about it and although the progress that is hoped for is not being realized, there is a contributing and guiding effect on many assistance projects.

This fits well within the idea of the trans-theoretical model of behavior change[10] (Prochaska and Velicer 1997) where actors introduced to sustainable development may be at the contemplation, preparation, or action phase, whereas others, including directors and program managers, may still be at the pre-contemplation stage. As a result, those who are at earlier stages are benefitting from the exposure and sensitization to discussion around sustainable development, without actively contemplating integration of the idea. Behavior change can take multiple

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[8] See the Guardian's satirical article on the topic at http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/dec/29/10-tricks-to-appear-smart-during-development-meetings.

[9] Although it should be an obvious organic evolution, often times in the authors experience projects were poorly designed, and focused on completing quantitative indicators within a short term timeframe. As a result, often the sustainability component was a checkbox, which project managers would work around, or minimally address in order to get to the "core" of their project.

[10] The transtheoretical model of behavior change assesses an individual's readiness to act on a new behavior. It includes the stages of Precontemplation, Contemplation, Preparation, Action, Maintenance, and Termination. (Prochaska and Velicer 1997).

generations to become permanent, and as a biological generation[11] is generally defined as 25 years (OECD 2014). Thus donors and assisted countries are just on the edge of their first generation which has grown up and been exposed to sustainable development as a development assistance target. This consistent exposure to the idea of sustainable development, coupled with international pressure and strategic requirements in funding regulations that measure the sustainability of projects (Riddell 2007:357-379; Birdsall 2004), leads the author to believe that the idea of sustainability and of integrating sustainable practices as the essential foundation of project framework is catching hold. In particular, the trickle down of sustainable development in grant proposals and mass community sensitization is creating a growing body of awareness about sustainability, and causing a grassroots mobilization to address community issues in a more sustainable way.[12]

In the development assistance sphere, sustainable development is of particular interest to those who are focused on guiding low and middle-income countries toward new policies and programs. The key participants in the field of macro sustainable development, as identified by the U.N., are:

"1) Governments and heads of state [...] 2) Non-Governmental Organisations […] and 3) Citizens and organisations of civil society (Morazán et al. 2013: 22)."

They are the key stakeholders that have the power to direct and implement large-scale, policy-focused sustainability requirements. When it comes to small-scale project development and management, the key stakeholders shift in focus from the macro to the micro. Here the key

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[11] Note that there are many ways to define a generation, including social generations defined by the sociopolitical events which they encountered together.

[12] During his three years in Zambia, the author witnessed community groups and local leadership approaching the topic of sustainability independently. When encouraged, he observed that these groups shared their ideas and concerns regarding sustainability, and the conversation around projects started shifting toward sustainability without prompting from the development agent (the author) during later projects. This was particularly evident in a caterpillar-harvesting dispute, where the chief independently brought forward the argument of sustainability to curve the exhaustive harvesting that was occurring and affecting his chiefdom (Food security workshop and community mobilization program, 2012 in Luapula Province, Zambia).

Another example was in traditional leadership's action (Headmen) when the dangers and damage of fishing with insecticide treated malaria nets was discussed. As soon as the net was demonstrated in a bowl of water with a few tree seeds (representing fish of various sizes), and how a mosquito net took every size of fish (seed), and wiped out the breeding population, he was quick to note that he must act to provide his people with better ways to fish. He continued to speak to his fellow headmen and elders (traditional leadership) and share the example, asking them to discuss ways to ensures continued meet their food needs, and ensure fish propagation (Mass insecticide treated net distribution in Spoon village, Northern Province, Zambia).

stakeholders are expressed through decentralized representatives. These representatives take the form of small cooperatives, faith-based organizations, community groups, traditional hierarchies, and local government extension agents.

3. Overview of development policies 1960 – present

Sustainable development within the development assistance context requires a very broad and general understanding of the nature of development assistance over the last 60 years. A brief understanding of the general history and major themes of western-based foreign assistance and aid is important. Through the 1960s and early 1970s the focus of aid was on technical assistance and large-scale material interventions. In the 1970s development's focus began to shift to Asia based on the successes of the Marshall Plan in Europe. Projects on the African continent were continuing and developing, but did not seem to be as important to western powers as those in the Asian and South American theaters (Riddell 2007). Many of the projects pursued in Africa during this time relied on post-colonial ties, as western countries attempted to strengthen their influence in these regions in the face of changing socio-political factors, revolution, and independence (Meredith 2005). As countries fought for and became independent, the nature of investment and aid shifted to match these changing realities along not only economic but also political lines (Riddell 2007). Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, Cold War politics saw aid used more for political gains then for actual development (Riddell 2007; Brautigam 2010; Meredith 2005). In the 1980s there was a turn toward stronger liberalization. The reduction of poverty was finally introduced as a goal by the late 1980s and implemented in the 1990s. The 1980s saw a strong desire to open up economies and markets to private interests. The liberalization of countries' economies was strongly encouraged by lending and developmental institutions. By the end of the 1990s there was mass privatization and intense pressure from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fud (IMF) to lessen the structure and influence of the state government (Fraser and Larmer 2010). Liberalism and privatization were heralded as the only solution for development and the state was seen as an obstacle to development as private interests took the

lead.[13] In the early 1990s the feeling shifted again and the western world began to see aid in a critical light. Recognizing many of the failures from the previous decade, the 1990s were characterized by discussions on aid dependency, a reduction in aid flows, and a focus on humanitarian and emergency aid programs (Riddell 2007). This decade saw the introduction of sustainable development in mainstream development discourse, and as the world began to re-evaluate aid practices, thoughtful introspection began to lead toward the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In the early and mid-2000s there is a feeling that aid is being rediscovered, that the failures of the last 40 years are surmountable, and that there is a new path, and a new way to implement aid successfully.

In the 2000s with the strong focus on eliminating poverty, the MDGs have been publically developed and set in place. There is a strong call across all of development aid for accountability, partnership, and coordination. These calls however, while closely related to sustainable goals and practices, are based on a top-down, post-materialist set of interventions.[14] Key events which served to derail the sustainability call, but bolstered aid funding and commitment from major western governments,[15] and changed the focus of aid back toward the social and political goals, were the September 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S. These led to a focus on security and stabilization of "risky" countries. These security-focused interventions and directives within the aid structure were in part reminiscent of cold war strategies and their focus included different indicators other than those agreed upon by the international community. On the positive side, the late 2000s included a major focus on poverty reduction strategies and the encouragement of civil society and activism in the interests of securitizing different regions (Novelli and Robertson 2007; Nye 2003).

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[13] The fallout of these policies can still be seen today as recent estimates suggest that over 50 billion USD is pilfered from the African continent alone by private business related to donor countries. Additionally tax evasion on profits reaped on the continent are estimated in the hundreds of billions of dollars. (The report, "Honest Accounts: the true story of Africa's billion dollar losses" was authored by 13 UK and Africa-based NGOs, including: Health Poverty Action, Jubilee Debt Campaign, World Development Movement, African Forum and Network on Debt and Development, Friends of the Earth Africa, Tax Justice Network, People's Health Movement Kenya, Zimbabwe and UK, War on Want, Community Working Group on Health Zimbabwe, Medact, Healthworkers4All, Friends of the Earth South Africa, and JA!Justiça Ambiental/Friends of the Earth Mozambique.)

[14] Particularly the Millennium Development Goals. William Easterly in his research, and more specifically in his scathing book on aid failure, "The White Man's Burden," addresses this issue comprehensively.

[15] The United States particularly.

4. Sustainable development design and practicalities of implementation

With this general understanding of sustainable development, its working definition, key stakeholders, and trends in aid over the last sixty years of development, a return to practical implementation of sustainability and sustainable development today is in order. In the author's experience and within the context of project management and development, a project is sustainable when the community and primary stakeholders are able to continue the project on their own without outside support.[16] This type of independence-focused sustainability requires a comprehensive integration of sustainability themes, including the economic, social, and environmental. Using sustainability as a foundation and as the primary goal post[17] requires a more in-depth delineation between sustainability from an institutional perspective versus sustainability from a resource utilization perspective.

Sustainable development as a process is a system of policies and guidelines that govern the implementation of a project, whereby people learn to build on their individual and collective strengths in order to take charge of their lives and to address their expressed needs. This sense of ownership and the problem identification process are essential components of sustainable development. As a result, when discussing project identification, planning, and implementation in development assistance, sustainable development takes into consideration the factors of culture, politics, economics, management, and environment. Without Each of these factors, the community will resist mobilization, and the project will fail to attain sustainability.

The project must be **culturally sustainable.** Does the project's basic assumptions and its approach fit within, strengthen, or address local beliefs and traditions? Alternatively, if the project has not been adapted, and consideration has not been taken of the local context, will it be seen as an 'outsider's idea' and not be acceptable or continued when the development agent leaves? Cultural contextualization is especially important, because many aid projects have failed as a result of copy and paste project design.[18]

The project must be **politically sustainable.** This is particularly concerning when there is no longer outside support. Many aid projects have built-in expiration dates and funding levels are

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[16] Working definition of sustainability from Peace Corps: Zambia field manual.

[17] Target or indicator to be achieved.

[18] Copy and paste design is when a project that worked in Ecuador to reduce maternal mortality is implemented in Zambia and is a complete failure, despite addressing the same indicators and reaching the same income bracket.

often short term. Many funding cycles often coincide with political terms in the donor countries etc., making them unrealistic, or shortening their scope.[19] Although the short-term focus of development assistance is another barrier to sustainable development, in this context it can be used as an impetus for a stronger focus on community strengthening and ownership. Although the needs of the community are often longer-term issues, the short-term nature of aid creates major continuity issues regarding the successful implementation of behavior and social change models. As a result, in the political evaluation of a project, the possible removal or discontinuation of external support must be considered. Will the project remain viable within its specific sociopolitical context? Often, since the 1950s through the early 2000s, the answer has been no (Moyo 2007; Easterly 2006; Riddell 2007). Today with the introduction of the "Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations 2016)[20]" as a follow-up and augmentation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (United Nations 2016), we see a more focused and sustained drive from political and legislative entities at the transnational level pushing for more political domestic[21] support at the national and sub-national levels.

The project must be **economically sustainable.** As the project is planned, consideration must be given to local resources and the carrying capacity of the local systems.[22] In particular, before a project is considered or introduced to a community, a determination should be made on whether sufficient local resources or the capacity to generate resources within an acceptable timeframe for the project is possible. In addition, the political consideration must also be carried over, when exogenous sources of funding and support are removed. In terms of capital, will the project be able to stand on its own from the initial starting investment? Generally, this factor has been well considered and historically economic viability has been one of the primary factors in consideration of a project. However, economic sustainability does not stand alone. There have been many cases where the economic viability of a project has been forecasted as negative, yet the project was still carried out to serve political goals.

A prime example from Zambia is the construction of the TAZARA railway and the corresponding highway (which was and remains profitable) built by western interests to combat

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[19] Development researcher Jeffery Sachs speaks on this issue often.
[20] The United Nations SDG's have been criticized for being too general in indicators, and too broad in scope to be realistic, whereas the MDGs were too narrow in scope, and too general in indicators. Without enough specific targets
[21] Domestic here refers to the receiving country, not to the donor countries
[22] The number of people, other living organisms, or crops that a region can support without environmental/ecological degradation.

the socialist eastern investment. Zambia's economic and trade policies have been strongly influenced by the political atmosphere of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). It joined forces with its neighbors and created strong informal regional ties as it sought to combat the apartheid system to the south (Jacobs 1993). It expanded its trade networks north and to the east during the 70s, inviting Chinese investment in the creation of the TAZARA railway that would allow it access to the deep-water port in Dar Es Salaam. The railway was built to circumvent Rhodesia and South Africa that were ruled by oppressive white governments (Austin 1996). TAZARA created a route from the Copperbelt in northern Zambia to the sea without having to transit white-ruled territories. Although politically advantageous, this was not in the economic interests of Zambia and was not economically sustainable. In the period around 1952, before independence, Sir Alexander Gibb & Partners conducted an evaluation of a similar project, the Northern Rhodesia-Tanganyika railway. They concluded that it would not be feasible. This conclusion was primarily related to low agricultural export, and to the fact that existing railways through Mozambique and Angola were adequate for carrying the vital copper export (Hall et al. 1976: 31-32). Two further reports, including a World Bank report in 1964 also concluded that the rail line was infeasible (Wolfe 1970).

The railway was started in 1970 and began operation in 1975 (Altorfer-Ong 2009). During the same period, Zambia welcomed the Tan-Zam highway, an alternative project funded by the west to counter and compete with the communist intervention of the railway project (Altorfer-Ong 2009: 26). TAZARA operated in 2013 at a loss of 1 million dollars monthly (Fallon 2013) and it has never achieved its goal of 2 million tons of cargo moved annually. Without question the railway has been a failure. Failed projects of this nature are part of the history of development assistance that demonstrates the need to consider each of these factors in project design, management, and proposition. Sometimes sustainability is not the goal of the funding partners, or of receiving parties, and a better project will be passed over for a politically advantageous one. The answer is to find a balance between political needs and the four other categories of sustainability; to design projects that are the best fit for the context.

The project must be **managerially sustainable.** This is key, as a major argument for technical assistance and a generator of some ill will in public opinion (Guardian 2016),[23] is the

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[23] A search of articles in The Guardian, The New York Times and Huffington Post regarding pay disparities and expatriate management disparities demonstrates this issue.

dominance of managerial technical assistance from ex-patriot foreigners. There is often limited to no capacity transfer, as the advisors often take control of the projects themselves in the name of efficiency or timeliness, and do not sufficiently transfer skills to their host country national (HCN) counterparts (Birdsall 2004; Riddell 2007). Those HCNs then, even when capacity has been transferred, rarely make their way into management or directorship positions. In addition, many short-term focused aid agencies utilize foreign management, and even foreign implementing and design teams, creating projects that are not only unsustainable from a managerial stance, but also in the other categories described previously. When the project is implemented, and it nears its' handover target, will there be the local management capacity to carry on? If a project is properly designed, the answer should be yes. This is not always the case, and this is a complex issue that relates not only to project design and implementation, but also to the issues of mission creep and development agency/NGO longevity (Birdsall 2004). Perhaps planned projects, which are managerially sustainable, may in implementation cut corners or encounter issues in capacity transfer[24] that result in implemented projects which have failed to meet their planned indicators.

Finally, the project must be **environmentally sustainable.** As the project is implemented, and as communities/groups recognize its success in the local area and expand the scope of the project[25], will the environment be able to sustain the use of resources? Once again this refers to the carrying capacity of the region. In Zambia, for example, mosquito nets distributed to protect against malaria were re-purposed as fishing nets to generate income, or used to keep baby chickens safe and contained. The vast majority of nets were used properly to prevent malaria and as a result were extremely successful as an intervention, however, as witnessed by the author, even a small percentage of misuse can have disastrous consequences. The issue with the nets is that they catch all sizes and maturities of fish, thus destroying the fish stock, often to a point where the fish population cannot recover. In his visit to Zambia and Tanzania in 2015, journalist Jeffery Gettleman (2015) also recorded these effects and the dangerous choice Zambians are forced to make: to starve and avoid malaria, or to eat and risk not only the disease but massive environmental degradation. Another example witnessed by the author in Zambia is the slash and

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[24] Often the "wildcard" here is human to human capacity exchange and behavior change. People are not parts in a machine, although in our planning we expect them to behave like them, and be predictable. This component of sustainability is extremely difficult to plan and properly implement.

[25] This is the phenomenon of mimicry, when a project is a success, others try to copy it, often without the necessary planning or evaluation to contextualize it to their circumstance.

burn techniques utilized by many to create charcoal to sell as an income generating activity. In both situations, the environmental damage is catastrophic and the impact can take decades to regenerate, if it is at all possible. How does that weigh against the alternatives for these people of starvation and death. Finding the solution that allows for environmental sustainability and meeting these people's needs is key. Also, considering the larger impact of selected interventions when other needs are not met is an essential part of sustainable project development.

By utilizing these approaches in project design it is possible to create a project that is approachable by the community, and that allows for buy-in, ownership and mobilization within each individual context. This project approach is clearly represented in well-respected field texts including Hesperian's *Where There is No Doctor*, and *Helping Health Workers Learn* (Werner et al. 2009; Werner, Bower 2005). The practices are also enshrined in the *Peace Corps Participatory*[26] *Analysis for Community Action Manuals* (Peace Corps 2007), which when combined with a sustainable framework, allow for problem identification that leads to project identification in a grassroots focused, non-formal, adult-education context with an appropriate self-discovery focused design process.

5. Long-term vs. short-term development practices

Having understood these five approaches to creating sustainable projects, there remain two additional issues of sustainability in development to consider: long-term versus short-term development practices. As introduced in the political and managerial sustainability heading, human capacity building is a long-term process. Social and behavioral change (see Prochaska and Velicer 1997), particularly long-term permanent change, is complex and extremely difficult to predict or to properly generate. It is, however, fundamental to sustainability. Short-term goals, which primarily focus on immediate material needs, such as constructing a well, a pit-latrine or a school/clinic building in an area in need, is exceptionally appealing to the aid worker on the front line, to the community as a whole, and to the media team at the headquarters. It is, however, the longer process of capacity building, independence, and civil society strengthening that provides

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[26] Participatory here is misleading, as the goal of the suite of tools is to actually have the community do more than participate but to actually lead the project identification process.

for a sustainable structure that results in lasting change.[27] The long-term approach concentrates on building the capacity within the community to identify the changes that they want to make and develop the skills necessary to complete projects internally. In order to do that, a community must first identify its strengths, find consensus on need, plan the project, and then build and maintain those changes themselves.

A major consideration here is the focus of "western vs. eastern" aid models. Particularly the different foci of aid over the last 2 decades in which western aid has tended to focus more on post-materialistic goals (health, education, civil society, and activism), whereas eastern aid has continued to focus on material gains (Pritchett 2015). In his essay "Can rich countries be reliable partners for national development," Pritchett discusses a variety of factors affecting western aid. In particular, however, Pritchett (2015) discusses the materialist and post-materialist ideologies behind aid. Developing countries need a healthy balance of both priorities. Health and civil society must be developed, but without the material foundation to allow basic needs to be met, they cannot be considered a primary priority. Here China's aid model seems to be filling a gap left in the evolution and development of western aid. Despite the fluidity and relatively volatile nature of western donors, China has committed and has stayed active in Africa for a long period. Regardless of political back and forth, their policy of non-interference, although worrying from a human rights perspective, is exceptional from a development and longevity perspective (Brautigam 2010). The West has taken note. In President Obama's announcement for the Power Africa Initiative he described Africa as an investment destination. The language in the initiative and in the press surrounding it was one of partnership, mutual benefit, lasting influence and presence on the continent and a general interest in Africa (White House Press Office 2013; 2015).

The types of aid that eastern powers are providing[28] are more materialistic, tangible, and provide a stronger foundation for African countries to build upon. China's focus on partnership, mutual benefit, and economic growth is precisely the kind of development that Easterly calls for in the *White Man's Burden* (Easterly 2006), and the investment in infrastructure including major prestige projects ameliorates some of the patronizing development traps that Collier addresses in the *Bottom Billion*. Moreover, these investments take into consideration cultural and traditional histories and anthropological differences that affect the political and social hierarchies and power

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[27] See Platje, 2010; Ch. 4 for a thorough discussion why focus is often on short term successes at the cost of longevity.
[28] Particularly China.

structures on the continent. As a result, it can be argued that their impact is more sustainable than many western-focused projects that have failed to contextualize.

The question remains unanswered: Are these materialistic focused projects sustainable? In some sense, they may be more sustainable than the post-materialistic projects implemented by western aid, although hard data is difficult to collect. In particular, the movement towards strengthening independence, self-sufficiency, and economic security of the state in contrast to dependency on financial transfers from the developed core, links clearly with the necessary economic development that would allow for stronger social contracts and better governance to emerge, strengthening independence and sustainability across the board. These ideals seem to be in line with modern development goals which emerged from the conferences in the 2000s, leading to the Millennium Development Goals (Riddell 2007), and now the Sustainable Development Goals.

However, caution must be used when considering material versus post-materialistic aid. Historically, those metrics that have primarily measured development in material terms, have led to an over-emphasis on material assistance. This is a particular drawback to metrics focused on quantitative results as well, as these strategies and metrics have created a bias to the detriment of strategies which emphasize the direct benefit to, and the involvement of, people (more qualitative). In Zambia, as throughout the developing world, the orange-red oxidizing skeletons of decaying heavy machinery on the hills surrounding villages stand out as a clear testament to the problems inherent within reliance on strictly material assistance (Riddell 2007; Easterly 2006; Meredeth 2005), without sustainable guidelines. Benevolent and altruistic foreign donors have all too often sent machinery that could not function, was not necessary, or served a political interest tied to aid funding. These machines, which could not be repaired due to lack of trained mechanics, or were without access to the logistical supply chain that could provide parts, fuel, or the longer-term education to utilize them, stand as a warning. When considering development assistance today, we must take each situation in context and focus on an approach that takes self-reliance, independence, and community linkages to heart. These are key elements that avoid these historic pitfalls while helping people acquire the skills to improve their circumstances in ways they themselves can sustain.

6. Development assistance and the politics of aid

Development assistance is by no means a simple tool. It is varied, contextualized, and extremely complex. It is often more of a test and re-assess model than a treat and cure model.[29] As alluded to, international organizations have repeatedly provided assistance/development to developing countries in ways that cause recipients to become increasingly dependent on the source of that assistance, undermining the sustainability that they are nominally encouraging (Riddell 2007; Easterly 2006; Birdsall 2004).

Although there are many examples, including the provision of large amounts of food or material goods without first establishing a longer-term, locally anchored development plan, it should be noted here that humanitarian assistance falls within its own category, and is not considered in the evaluations of sustainable development within the context of development assistance. Often non-emergency or humanitarian aid does not serve to increase the capacity of local individuals or institutions. It is a stop-gap measure to respond to a crisis. On the contrary, it may even result in the neglect of already acquired skills, thus violating the managerial sustainable development clause. This issue is gaining in significance and awareness is building within local communities.

As more local talent speaks out, and as assistance agencies become more transparent and their administrative costs are released, there is a stronger call within the development community to recognize the abilities and qualifications of local agents and to treat them with equity. This includes research on the difference in skills and in hiring practice relating to ex-patriots (Hailey 1996). To this end, there is also a new project called Project-Fair,[30] which is seeking to identify and address these managerial and social gaps. In either case, ignoring these opportunities and sustaining a pay gap of up to 900% (Carr and McWha-Hermann 2016) between local and foreign hiring is not only dangerous, but is disastrous to community mobilization and participation aspects of sustainable development. Without question, paying local talent exponentially less than their similarly qualified ex-patriate counterparts is not sustainable practice. If the need can be filled by local talent, then there is no justification for these practices. In fact, sustaining them has

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[29] Implement a program/intervention, see if it worked, try again instead of identifying a specific issue, design an intervention to address it, and cure the issue at its foundation.

[30] http://project-fair.org/

been referred to as "economic apartheid."[31] Other than the resentment and cost-ballooning that these practices create, more importantly in terms of sustainability, they lead to greater dependency and reduced sustainability of projects and communities. The organization the author worked with is careful to ensure that field agents are paid an allowance that is commensurate to their local counterparts, and in some cases, of lesser value than the officers and community agents that they are interacting with. This results in a stronger bond of trust and allows/forces the field agent to live at the same level as community members which enhances their understanding of daily needs from personal and direct experience.

Along the lines of ex-patriate human capital, and the institutional reliance on ex-patriates for managerial positions at a much higher rate than local talent,[32] it is important to note that too large a portion of economic external assistance is 'tied aid'. Although great progress has occurred in its reduction, tied aid remains up to 20% of major donor nations' aid allocations (OECD 2016). Tied aid is particularly notorious for discouraging sustainability and independence, as it usually serves the donor nation's self-interest more than a recipient country's development programs, increasing costs by 20-30% (Jepma 1991). It creates a circular loop, which cycles assistance money through the receiving country and back out to the donor's economy. The discussion on tied aid isn't a new phenomenon and has been well studied and argued, from Jepma's work in 1991, to featuring in aid discussions through the 2000s, including the OECD's DAC resolution in 2001 to untie all aid to least developed countries (LDCs). Again, in the Paris declaration there is a call to further reduce and untie aid. However, it is interesting to note that the 2005 agreement failed to set a deadline for untying aid, whereas the other 11 agreements have implementation deadlines and schedules. This omission demonstrates that it remains a sensitive political topic that countries do not want to address. From 2013, with the discussion on SDGs and the next step in aid intensifying, the EU commissions wrote again of the importance of untying of aid (Morazán et al. 2013). Today, it features in many discussions, but little further action has been taken to reduce its' proliferation. Untying aid in terms of long-term sustainability is important as tied aid assistance can create a crippling dependence of one nation on another. It also stagnates community participation as local businesses, suppliers, and talent are ignored.

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[31] See the Guardian's article: (Carr and McWha-Hermann, 2016).
[32] There are some notable exceptions to this rule, including policies for some US mission posts that limit the number of expatriate hires in comparison to local hires (Peace Corps).

7. Making sustainable development sustainable

Looking forward, to achieve sustainable development, the development community must take into consideration the five ideals enshrined in the working process of sustainable development design referenced herein. Taken as a foundation, these concepts can help guide further sustainable practices and strongly encourage community mobilization and participation in a development process that yield sustainable projects. But, they cannot stand alone. They require a macro framework from the political and social actors at the national and supranational level to contribute, support, and do their part to ensure that assistance flows are less politically motivated, and more altruistically designed. This calls for a reduction of political interests in assistance and for the complete removal of tied aid from the development assistance tool chest. It also calls for more comprehensive project design, contextualization, stronger monitoring, reporting, and evaluation tools. In addition, greater transparency through the use of emerging technologies, such as mobile phone networks and grassroots organizational tools should be captured and used to increase the level and quality of data reporting.[33] This data should be made freely available and higher levels of accountability for actors participating in sustainable development must be put in place.

Sustainability is progressing. In the recent past and present its' importance is rising. It is being included in discussions, project design, and implementation. Although it is struggling to keep up, it is finding a more permanent seat at the table. Lessons are being learned from the failures of development assistance in the past 50 years to be integrated and sustained. Communities are sharing data and best practices at a rate never seen before. However, to see the implementation of true sustainable development practices, there must not only be a change in the ontological assumption of the world to one of finite resources, but there must also be a methodological change in the design of interventions. There must be greater respect for the contributions and human potential of the developing nation. This change must account for the industrialization needs of developing nations, the contextualization required for each and every case, and a balance between material and post-material needs with the needs of the planet and

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[33] Known as Mtech, mobile technologies and reporting are being rapidly deployed across the African continent, particularly in health (see Akros Global Health in Zambia, USAID, and CDC projects). (Talbot's article (2016) provides a good summary of some of the benefits already being seen in Mtech).

global community. Only if this is achieved can community mobilization and long term sustainability be activated.

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Zrównoważony rozwój i mobilizacja społeczności – od porażki do sukcesu, doświadczenia i odkrycia z trzech lat w Zambii

Streszczenie:

Autor niniejszego artykułu podejmuje próbę prezentacji swoich przemyśleń dotyczących historycznego ujęcia trwałości oraz stanu obecnego realizacji polityki zrównoważonego rozwoju w perspektywie pomocy rozwojowej. Przemyślenia te oparte są na trzyletnim doświadczeniu autora artykułu, które zdobył w organizacji wspierającej rozwój w Zambii, gdzie zdobył wiedzę o podstawowych zasadach, które są niezbędne dla pełnego zrozumienia procesów mających wpływ na wdrożenie polityki zrównoważonego rozwoju. Na tej podstawie w artykule wskazano na kilka istotnych warunków prowadzących do uzyskania trwałego rozwoju, m.in. wskazano na konieczność stworzenia ram dla skutecznego funkcjonowania aktorów sceny politycznej oraz społecznej w skali krajowej oraz na arenie międzynarodowej, oraz na konieczność efektywnego monitorowania oraz raportowania zachodzących w gospodarce procesów.

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważony rozwój, mobilizacja społeczności, Zambia, uczenie się poprzez praktykę, rozwój gospodarczy, pomoc rozwojowa
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