**Development Planning: Nature and Scope**

**What is Development?**

Development is a complex issue, with many different and sometimes contentious definitions. A basic perspective equates development with economic growth. The United Nations Development Program uses a more detailed definition- according to them development is “to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to the resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community”.

Achieving human development is linked to a perspective of development which views it as freeing people from obstacles that affect their ability to develop their own lives and communities. Development, therefore, is empowerment: it is about local people taking control of their own lives, expressing their own demands and finding their own solutions to their problems.

**What is Development Planning?**

Development planning happens in many different contexts so to define it briefly is tricky. Basically development planning refers to the strategic measurable goals that a person, organization or community plans to meet within a certain amount of time. Usually the development plan includes time-based benchmarks. It generally also includes the criteria that will be used to evaluate whether or not the goals were actually met.

Development planning typically follows a set of distinct phases:

a) Situation analysis, both internal to the area, and the forces which are shaping the area.

This may involve a range of tools to assess the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT) facing an area;

b) Prioritizing key issues, problems or outcomes;

c) Developing objectives;

d) Developing plans to address the objectives, including strategies, activities and projects;

e) Developing a longitudinal picture of the situation as well as plans;

f) Developing budgets to achieve the plans.

**What is National Development Plan?**

A National Development Plan is a large scale investment project to develop the infrastructure of a country. It requires central planning and monitoring on a national level and implementation on a micro, local level. Adequate funding from government agencies as well as support from citizens, will allow short, medium and long term goals to be met.

**a) Goals**

Goals should focus on the micro and macro strategy for national growth. This can include development of the economic infrastructure, education, social welfare, science, and innovation. Before setting goals, a government should review the current strengths of each sector and articulate room for growth (both in the long and short term). The scope of goals will depend upon whether a country is a developed or developing nation and should be tailored to the cultural, economic and social needs of a specific country. Goals should avoid being politically motivated and have sustainability regardless of what is politically popular at the time. Nations should consider advice from outside consultants to review current national conditions and proposed strategies to ensure that they are sustainable and not just politically expedient.

**b) Monitoring/Overseeing**

The scope involved with a national project requires a large scale project manager, like a Central Monitoring Committee. Depending on the government structure, it will usually be chaired by a top level official in the office of finance or treasury. Since the funding of a program is integral to its implementation, the financial perspective will be crucial in setting and meeting goals. The Monitoring Committee will ultimately report to the executive/cabinet level of the government and the work of the overseeing committee can be audited by a government accounting/accountability office.

**c) Communication**

A communication strategy for a development plan is important so taxpayers and citizens understand what investments and initiatives are being addressed. Typically the committee overseeing a national development plan will develop an Information Office that will market and publicize the plan and also can field questions/suggestions from concerned citizens.

**d) Timeline**

It's important that a national plan address short, medium and long terms goals. The purpose of the plan is to prioritize for national immediate needs (food, water, housing, and health-care) that should be met but also to predict in the medium and long run, what are larger goals that should be achieved.

**e) Implementation**

The key to any national plan is actually accomplishing goals. A central planning body typically oversees the national plan and acts as a project manager of sorts to oversee the execution of goals on the micro level. This will involve liaising with government agencies that regulate various sectors (transportation, education, health & human services, etc.). It will also need to coordinate with local and municipal governments.

**f) Funding**

Funding can come from a variety of sources. Depending on qualifications, certain projects of a national development plan can be financed by foreign donors, international organizations or even corporate/non-profit partners. It also can liaise with various government agencies responsible for an area or industry included in a development plan. The funding issue will most likely be the most politically sensitive and will require support from taxpayers and elected officials to advocate for funding in the budgeting process. Realistic resource forecasts should be considered before establishing a project because if funding dries up, cynicism may arise from voters.

**g) Publicizing accomplishments**

Once development goals have been met, it's appropriate to publicize infrastructure and national improvements to other foreign countries. Such improvements can encourage foreign direct investment, international commerce and tourism that will further promote economic productivity. The buzz and excitement of meeting national goals will also improve morale among citizens since it demonstrates involvement and action by the national government.