



A Comprehensive Framework for Community-Based Development Planning

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Abstract

The pursuit and promotion of development through National Development Plans, as the most important policy documents for the development of societies, has not been a breakthrough success in many cases. Investigating the causes of this failure has been the subject of many studies. Due to the large and growing volume of research in the field of development planning, summarizing, combining, and analyzing research results, can contribute in strengthening development planning. In addition, drawing on successful experiences can provide valuable criteria for evaluation. The scope of this study is limited to the reports, documents, papers and opinions written on exploring experiences of successful plans and identification of the weakness areas of unsuccessful development programs. Based on the findings of the study, the reasons for failure of development plans could be identified in four areas, namely, weakness in the system of development planning, ineligibility and inefficiency of development agents, the weakness areas in civil society as the realization grounds of development plans and finally inefficient management. At the end of the paper, on the basis of these drawbacks, key strategies are presented and categorized in four areas.

Keywords: cohesion, development, education, participation, planning, stakeholders

1. Introduction

Societies' efforts towards development have historically been associated with many challenges. Many communities have resorted to National Development Plans (NDPs) to achieve progress. Development planning is a process to determine national goals and to formulate policies. In a period of 30 years, relying on thoughtful planning and making efforts in three aspects of scientific growth, state support from seven emerging strategic industries and creating transport and energy infrastructures, China changed from a poor, backward and impoverished country to the second largest economy in the world (Casey & Koleski, 2011).

There is a widely held belief that the main purpose of development planning is economic growth. On this basis, it is said that development planning implies the measured control and guidance of economy by a central authority in order to achieve certain objectives in a certain timeframe (Jhingan, 2005:489). In fact, in developing countries, the progress of economic

aspect is considered as the basis for the promotion of legitimacy. Therefore, the success of development-oriented states is seen in terms of their rising growth rates (Leftwich, 2008:4). According to this definition, development planning has become, theoretically and operationally, synonymous with economic planning (Ibezim, 1999). Despite this prevailing approach, focusing solely on economic elements had even failed to achieve economic development (Diejomaoh, 2008). In fact, economic policies and programs would never be realized without considering other aspects relevant to development (Moti, 2009). Achieving sustainable development requires promoting economic progress which supports the poor, reforming financial policies, deep structural changes and new working methods at all economic, social and political levels (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2001).

It is also important to take note of the fact that determining the goals in development plans is not a purely technical job, rather, it should reflect the aspirations of the watchful people and the vigilant civil society in order to enjoy social and political support (Government of India, 2013). Development planning should be participatory and transparent; this is subject to public awareness activities, implementation of capacity-building programs and media broadcasts in order to make the actual results publicly accessible (OECD, 2001). Besides, creating a sense of belonging within the society towards the plan has to be placed on the agenda, so that national commitment and full participation of the society for the achievement of development could be achieved.

If there is not enough thought and attention in the phase of strategic planning, there would be lots of problems in the implementation of those plans particularly at national level (Pereira, 2011). Many communities, despite their adopted programs, do not possess the requirements of growth and development. Less efficient structure of government, inability to attract international investments and non-competitive domestic economy cannot provide the required conditions for development. A review of the lessons learned and an evaluation of development programs suggests that successful approaches have certain common features. They set priorities and draw up a long-term perspective. There are also some development strategies that did not manage to succeed because of their failure to take note of the economic, social and institutional changes required for sustainable development. Although many countries have strategic planning processes for development, most of them often lack the mechanism or system to effectively coordinate them (OECD, 2001). The failure to realize development goals despite the efforts made, underlines the need for structural changes in the ways adopted by societies for development planning. Having this introduction, the present study explores a collection of studies and evaluations conducted on national development programs, and tries to identify and propose the main elements of a model for constructive national development plans.

2. Research Methodology

Many researches have been carried out on the assessment of development plans. Considering the high volume of such studies on the one hand, and the inconsistency and contradictions of the findings on the other hand, the method of meta-analysis has been adopted by the researcher as an efficient method for systematically summarizing and analyzing a wide range of research results. Using the method of qualitative meta-analysis, the present study collects scattered individual researches, and via combining and integrating their findings tries to develop a conceptual model for improving development planning system.

Accumulation and expansion of knowledge and collating the findings along with using the outcome of various research findings is one of the most important factors that increase the

importance of meta-analysis studies. This method focuses on the previously-conducted studies on the research subject, through which the finding of various studies are described, summarized and analyzed in a systematic way (Wolf, 1986). In meta-analysis studies, the results of the initial studies are combined in order to respond the research question, then they are linked and organized as components of a whole system. Finally having adapted the reported results to previous studies, a comprehensive theory, inclusive of the findings of the past studies is formulated (Hunter & Schmid, 2004). Meta-analysis considerably helps the researchers to identify the research areas that have not been touched before (Rosenthal, 1987; Rosenthal, 1991). Due to larger size of the sample, the degree of reliability of the meta-analysis studies is always greater than the initial studies and this method has been one of the most efficient methods for summing up various studies in an accurate and precise way. In this method, the emphasis on independent variable is similar to the emphasis on the dependent variable.

This method allowed the researcher to explore the reasons for the failure of development planning experiences while identifying the main elements of successful programs. In other words, the possibility of combination and integration of strategies and suggestions for improvement of the development planning system, is provided. The statistical population and domain of study are the development-oriented documents, scientific papers and assessment reports on the national development programs. In the present meta-analysis study, efforts have been made to examine the main discussed topics as well as the most important works published in the area of development planning, with an emphasis on successful and unsuccessful experiences.

Along with the aforementioned method, the content analysis was also used in this study. Content analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting existent patterns in the qualitative data. In this method, textual data as well as scattered and discrepant data are turned to rich and detailed data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In content analysis all data are examined and their content and themes are analyzed and interpreted. Theme is a recurring and distinctive feature in a text that reflects an understanding and a specific experience in relation to the research question (King & Horrocks, 2010).

3. Research Findings

The subject of the present study is confined to reports, papers and opinions presented based on the experiences of successful development plans and weaknesses of the failed ones. All analyzed works have been in the area of planning and development, and had addressed the reasons for success or failure of national development plans in various societies. Finally, having analyzed a large volume of complex and detailed data, a conceptual model for designing alternative strategies to improve development planning system, was drawn. With this introduction, the thematic categories of findings, analysis of the strengths and weaknesses and an outline of the recommendations on the suggested conceptual model is followed.

3.1. Convergence and cohesion in the light of development programs

Fostering development through national development plans is subject to high political and social commitment towards it. In addition, there is a need for a common approach towards the process of a national plan among government, local authorities, political parties, private sector, labor unions, civil groups and citizens (Vordzorgbe, 2001). Nonetheless, making such a commitment to the plan and preserving cohesion in the process of development faces a lot of threats and therefore, facilitating development is contingent upon adoption of measures for confronting such imbalances and creating mechanisms to evoke a feeling of belonging and keeping harmonization around the development plans. One of the issues impeding development

is the plurality of different local development programs in a society. Simultaneously tracking multiple plans poses the risk of duplication and waste of scarce resources. So it's necessary to have convergence around the principles of the national strategic plan, and to ensure the effective communication between local and national programs (OECD, 2001). Meanwhile, it is the responsibility of national development plans to conform and adapt various local programs and policies (Government of India, 2013). In other words, convergence should be strengthened by the government through creating a matrix to keep track of all processes and strategic programs. Preparing such a matrix with the participation of key stakeholders from among the private sector and civil society can help to strengthen connections and ultimately direct focuses towards what should be done to fulfil the development process in the country (OECD, 2001).

From another point of view, the conditions of developing countries are often sensitive and very apt to speedy changes, therefore in order to realize consistency and adherence in sustainable development, it is recommended to emphasize on management of progress towards development goals in an interactive and cyclic way, instead of designing a specific program (United Nations Division for Sustainable Development [UNDESA], 2002). In this regard, it is necessary to create mechanisms for developing coherence and coordination between sectors and the adopted strategies. The performance of Germany and France are good examples of this issue. In Germany, the Committee of Ministers for Sustainable Development is a political institution that facilitates and strengthens the integration of sustainable development plan in all sectors and state organizations. It ensures the incorporating and intertwining of the development strategy in the political process. Also in France, the cohesion of the actions of all ministries is controlled through the Inter-ministerial Committee on Sustainable Development, which is responsible for defining, coordinating and pursuing the goals of sustainable development plan (United Nations Office for Sustainable Development [UNOSD], 2012; Gjoksi, Sedlacko & Berger, 2010).

On the basis of the above-mentioned, establishment of a new organization to track the processes of inclusive national development plans is recommended. However, the problem is that establishment of new institutions may lead to further structural separation, rather than creating cohesion. The responsibilities of the new entity should not be defined apart from the ministries and existent agencies, rather certain cooperation processes as well as incentives to promote cohesion should be established through a variety of methods, such as financial and tax mechanisms or information exchange mechanisms. Setting up mechanisms for arbitration and management of conflicts and problems between different institutions and sectors, is another necessity (UNDESA, 2011:63). The quality and quantity of information flow between and within state and non-state agencies is a determining factor in shaping the cohesion of policy and cooperation (Kaltenborn-Stachau, 2008). In addition, executives in different levels, have to provide sufficient reasons for the future success of such programs, otherwise, people would not support such programs nor actively participate in their implementation (Suchman, 1974).

Ensuring the cohesion of policy does not simply mean raising the top-down control over various sectors, but it requires certain criteria and framework to enhance the cooperation (Obser, 2003:2). Meanwhile, cooperation becomes possible only when the intended actors, have an interest in cooperation, thus, understanding the interests of various institutions is a prerequisite for creating and guiding appropriate incentives (UNDESA, 2011:62) Although, in the top-down visions, all benefits may not be considered, in many communities, the top-down strategies are still prevalent in development planning. Such visions, being tagged with political labels, often are not agreed by all stakeholders and finally end up in implementation failure (UNDESA, 2009:11). A clear example of this problem was the National Development Plan of Czech Republic which was considered by experts as more of a political statement than a national development plan of action. In other words, no practical measure to implement this

plan, like preparing a specific action plan with specific objectives, timescales or responsibilities, was carried out (United Nations Environment Program [UNEP], 2005).

Finally, creating a participatory public space and a platform of national dialogue is considered as a requirement for the realization of development plans (Kaltenborn-Stachau, 2008). Through creating a structure composed of all cultural, social and economic units, in order to allow unity and mobilization of various stakeholders with their distinctive identities, development priorities in all sectors and demographic groups could be defined and developed (De Miranda & Adib, 2007). Thus, with setting the focus of development plans on the community and defining a chain of responsibilities for all actors in different capacities, missions, roles and positions, a sense of ownership and responsibility could be promoted (World Bank, 2010).

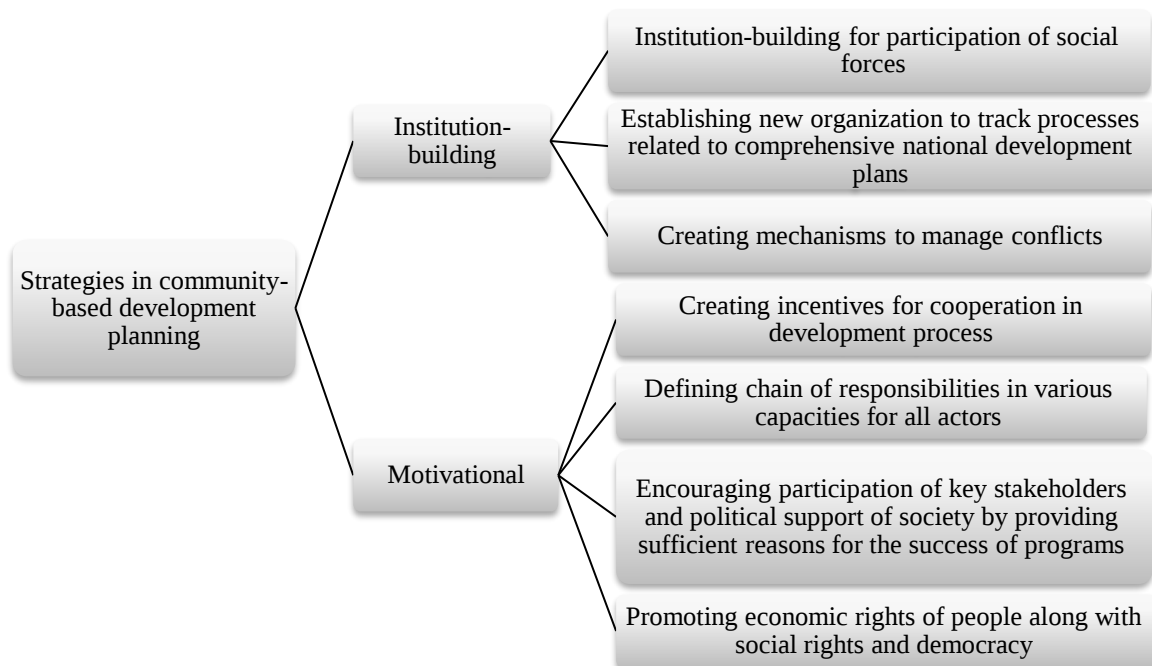


Figure 1. Strategies in community-based development model

3.2. The position of civil society in development plans

Civil society is consisted of a large group of informal organizations, networks and citizen groups that play various roles in collaboration for development. Civil society has always had a considerable impact in reducing poverty and vulnerability, monitoring the development policies, contributing in raising public awareness, supporting democracy and good governance. Engaging civil society in the cooperation for development, not only leads to further communications and social cohesion, but also makes government more responsible. Therefore, assigning a specific role for civil society should be included as part of the overall strategy of development cooperation (OECD, 2013). Finland provides a good example in this regard; this country has a National Council for Sustainable Development which includes representatives from all major stakeholder groups who lead the process of strategy progress (UNOSD, 2012; Gjoksi, Sedlacko & Berger, 2010). The role of civil society in the formulation and implementation of development programs, is largely considered as an adequate response to the need for consistency in the implementation of development programs.

A major problem of the growth initiatives which are developed and implemented on the basis of centralization, is the lack of a sense of belonging and commitment from the side of private sector and civil society stakeholders. In some cases, even the dissatisfaction with the processes

of national development, has directed stakeholders to initiate and pursue their own parallel activities. According to the Assessment Report of Sustainable Development Plan of Fiji (Dumar, 2006), the main limitation of the governance system is the lack of a consultative mechanism for civil society. This is while, broad public participation in the decision-making process is one of the preconditions for sustainable development. More importantly, with the participation of civil society and social forces, a sense of belonging to development plans, as a critical need for creating social cohesion, will be fostered (OECD, 2001).

Today, with the expansion of non-governmental organizations and strengthening of civil society, the accountability and transparency of government performance is increased. In this situation, reduction of monopolies in all fields could be expected. Therefore, setting up a legal framework that gives a legal status to civil society for contributing in dissemination of the policies and discussions, and also developing a mechanism for formal consultation for preparing national strategic plans and implementation of policies, is strongly suggested (Dumar, 2006).

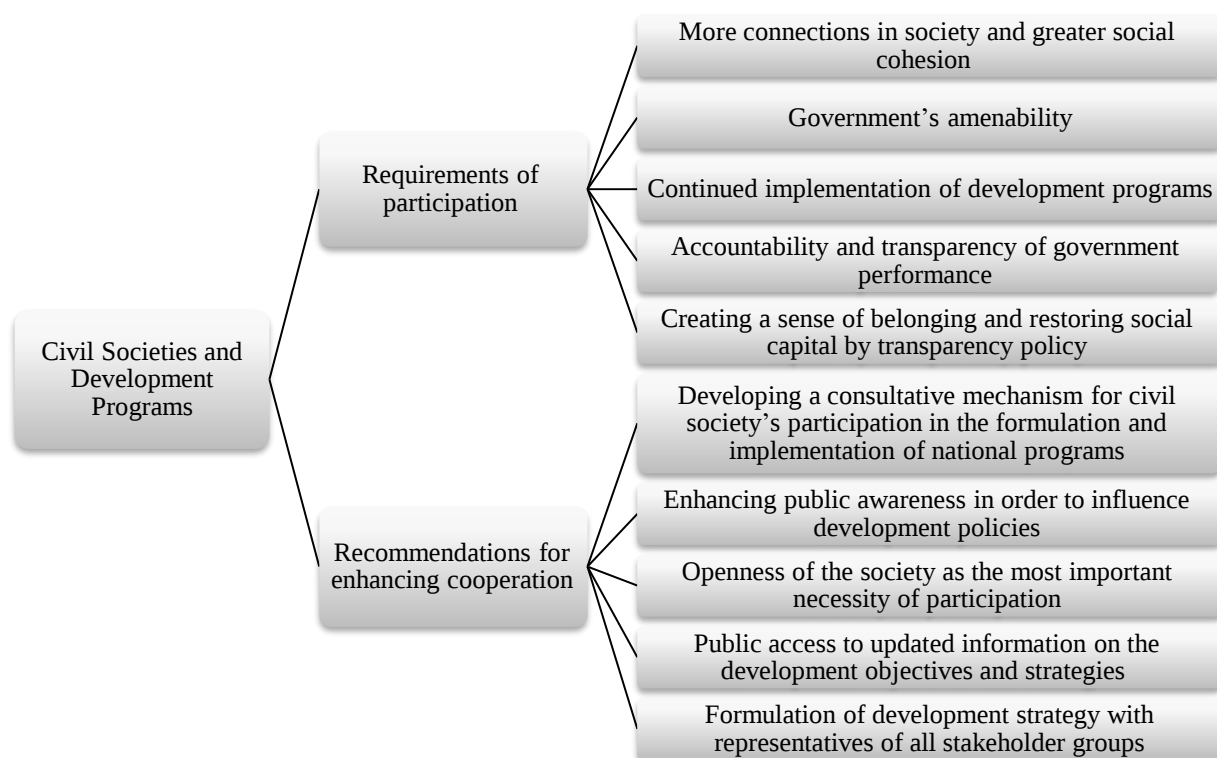


Figure 2. Civil societies and development programs

3.3. Development-oriented state and participation

There are considerable changes in the approaches of development-oriented states towards people and their capacities, moving social and political aspects to the core of the attention of such states (Sandbrook et al., 2007). Through public participation and democracy, governments can fully perceive the services or infrastructure needed to enhance their capacities. Therefore, organizing civil society towards achieving socio-economic development, has been one of the serious priorities of the agenda of developmental states (Evans, 2010). Participation is defined as a process through which stakeholders play a significant role in determining policy priorities and allocating resources and meanwhile have an active presence in ensuring access to goods and services (World Bank 2005). The 'Strategy and Tactics' (2007) document of the African National Congress defines developmental state based on people's effective role in achieving

changes. Evans (2010) argues that the developmental state of the 21st century, contrary to its version of 20th century, requires close connection and involvement with wide range of the society, since the developmental state of the 21st century is essentially a state of capacity-building that looks for promoting the competencies of its citizens.

Failure of the development plans of the post-colonial African state is mainly associated to the undemocratic nature, weak domestic institutions, repression and lack of public participation in the governance processes (Mengisteab, 1995). In particular, the problem was that there was not enough commitment from the side of governments for implementing their self-devised programs. Furthermore, stakeholders' participation in development plans was not either anticipated by then or has been largely understated (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, 1990). It needs to be added that excessive concentration of power along with impeding the effective participation of people in economic, political and social development, reduced the incentives of the majority of the African people for participation and devalued their individual and collective creativity. In other words, in the heavily state-centered development programs, the participation of civil society and the private sector would be weak (DalalClayton & Bass, 2002).

Therefore, nowadays, some development programs have changed their approach in adopting the philosophy of having one central plan of action for planning, in order to engage the constructive participation of civil society (DalalClayton & Bass, 2002). In addition, setting goals is not a purely technical job and it should reflect the aspirations of informed people and vigilant civil society, in order to ultimately enjoy social and political support (Government of India, 2013). In recognition of this necessity, Robinson and White (1998) introduced the notion of democratic developmental state, where the developmental state forges a broader coalition with society, and guarantees public participation in governance and transformations. Edigheji (2005) suggests that full participation of society at all development processes should be designed in advance. In this sense, participation is described as a process through which stakeholders affect or cooperate in the control of established priorities in policy-making, allocation of resource and ensuring access to goods and services (World Bank, 2005).

Any plan, project or development-oriented program often has beneficiaries, therefore, it is recommended that planning has to be carried out with the participation of the interested parties. The beneficiaries are the people who enjoy the benefits of development-related activity or whose interests will be affected by such an activity (United Nations Development Program [UNDP], 2009). In the design and implementation of Ghana's development plan, all responsibilities have been delegated to ministries and state organizations and agencies, while other stakeholders had no direct participation, and thus did not feel any sense of belonging or commitment towards its progress (Vordzorgbe, 2001). Strengthening public participation could be achieved through dissemination of information, education and communication campaigns about the process, objectives and the expected results, otherwise the implementation of plan in the entire process will be completely a governmental job. For participation to be effective, the results should be operational in order to ultimately strengthen commitment, or for instance, when the advices of the private sector are not used, the optimal space for private sector engagement would not be formed (Vordzorgbe, 2001). Stakeholders' participation throughout the planning cycle can guarantee learning, ownership and stability of the outcomes as well. Therefore, special measures should be adopted in processes of the plans in order to ensure the continued and effective engagement of stakeholders (UNDP, 2009).

3.4. Managing expectations

Social forces' participation in the process of development programs in the developing countries is not without risk. Unnecessary direct public participation can lead to the undermining of the consolidated political institutions such as parliaments and political parties or even deepen divisions and trigger social tensions by creating an atmosphere of unresolved complaints (Dudwick & Nelsson, 2008:4). Thus, despite the importance of participating in implementation of the programs, creation of unrealistic expectations should be prevented because it would end in fragility due to lack of confidence and despair (International Development Research Centre, 2003). Managing expectations constitutes an essential component of any collaborative process. To manage expectations primarily all key stakeholders have to be engaged from the beginning. It should be identified that what is the expected offer of the plan for each of them. It should be ensured that all stakeholders clearly know the role of the government, themselves and what they need to do, and ultimately they have all understood the related information (UNDESA, 2011).

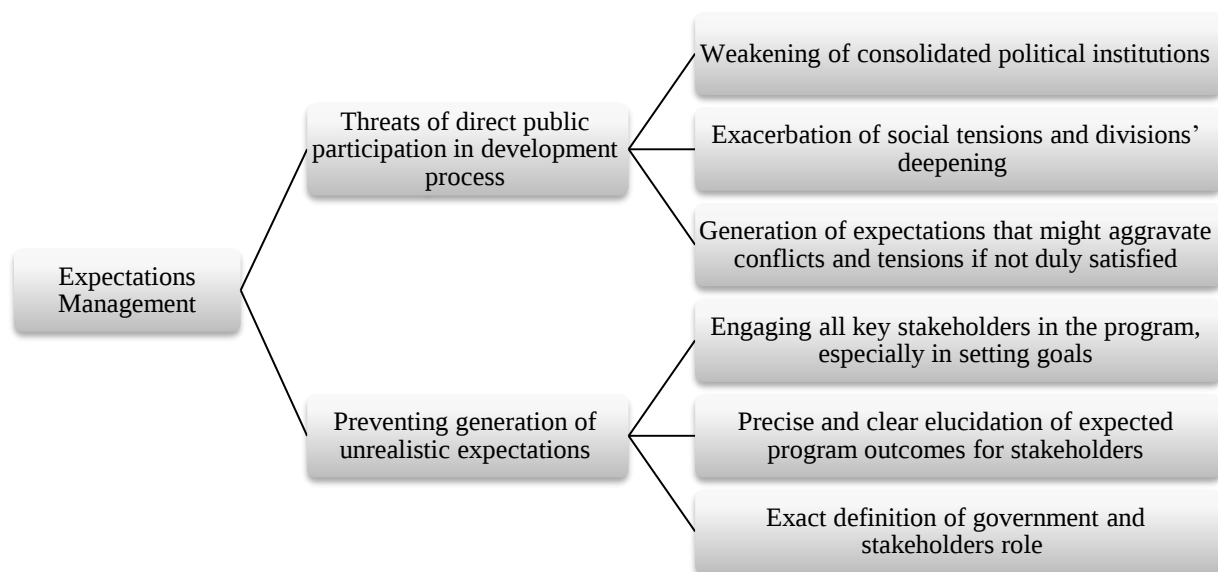


Figure 3. Expectations management

3.5. Community-based monitoring programs

Monitoring and evaluation is an increasingly important area in respect with developing societies which not only allows the possibility of using experiences and achieving better outcomes, but also leads to more responsiveness (World Bank, 2002). Planning could be considered to be constructive when it is carried out on the basis of a realistic assessment of what can be done. Detailed suggestions for improving the program implementation capacity should also be part of the program (Government of India, 2013). Basically, without a scientific evaluation, it is unclear if the program can fulfill its main objectives. For this reason, the implementation of an important and costly social program, without assessment of its outcomes, is not justified at all (Alkin & Soloman, 1983). In this regard not only surveillance systems are essential, but local communities can play an active role. For example, local communities and NGOs in Nepal strongly participated in the process of data collection needed to design development programs (OECD, 2001). An NGO in Bangladesh has also established a broad joint process to monitor government program on reducing poverty and adjusting budgets (OECD, 2001).

Objectives and policies have to be monitored and evaluated in order to be tested in terms of their effectiveness. For this purpose, appropriate measures like objectives of the performance have to be included in the program and expressed explicitly (Government of Ireland, 2007). The ideal is that the objectives determined in the planning process, to be completely detailed and clear in order to allow their measurement or assessment in the due time. As the relationship between indicators and policy targets of programs become more consolidated, measuring the results of the strategy would be more feasible (UNOSD, 2012; Gjoksi, Sedlacko & Berger, 2010). Result-oriented monitoring and evaluation systems can be powerful management tools to achieve the goals (Kusek & Rist, 2004), particularly that in majority of the programs there are not formal mechanisms for data collection, redesigning, improving and adapting policies based on feedbacks (Swanson et al., 2004:25). In addition, in the process of strategy planning, from the beginning, flexible options which could be adaptable and applicable in dynamic and changing situations, have to be predicted (World Bank, 2005:13). Policies and goals will remain effective and persistent as long as the regular monitoring of the relationship between program and changes in the wider policy-development context, development problems and local priorities, all are structurally considered to be important (Government of Ireland, 2007). Realization of this issue, necessitates cooperation with scientific centers, trade unions and non-governmental organizations. These partnerships can provide needed advice and support (Swanson et al., 2004:26).

There is an increasing awareness about the need to strengthen the statistical capacity to support the design, monitoring and evaluation of national development programs (Paris21 Secretariat, 2004). Accurate statistics and numbers are vital for effective monitoring of the plans and development strategies and ultimately for supporting evidence-based policies. But many developing countries lack the institutional capacity or effective systems to collect data. Most of the statistical systems are designed primarily to meet the urgent statistical requirements and cannot handle the long-term data, hence, become inconsistent with the programs (Paris21 Secretariat, 2004). Designing an information network which is capable of providing and submitting necessary information in a timely manner, to officials, regulatory bodies and the civil society in general, is essential in monitoring. It should also be a consensus on an "action plan" which clearly determines what needs to be monitored and this monitoring has to be done when and by whom. Meanwhile, leadership and management must ensure the transparency (OECD, 2001).

3.6. Education and employment in national development plans

Investment in education is one of the key elements of growth and development (Wade, 2010:155). The issue of education constitutes an important part of the concerns of development-oriented governments, in particular, access to education and investment in educating and training has always been one of the main aspects of the egalitarian nature of developmental states (Pempel, 1999:169). Upgrading the skill level of the labor force, concurrent with efforts to minimize the impact of economic growth on disadvantaged groups, is one of the main objectives of national development plans (UNEP 2005). Therefore, it is said that if a country fails to develop the skills and knowledge of its people and to effectively exploit it in the national economy, it will not be able to develop anything (Harbison, 1973:3). Moreover, higher education has a key role in the growth and progress of the development-oriented elites as well (Brannelly et al., 2011:10). As Leftwich (2010:108) emphasizes, successful coalition-builders, as a contextual factor for development, has mostly been those who had high-quality education and simultaneously were relied on networking via their educational institutes.

Not only investment in human resources training for career purposes is important, but also the issue of employment has to be specifically taken into account in this regard. One of the areas that is often called as part of the effective Weberian Civil Services is hiring the most capable people from among the best institutions of higher education (Johnson, 1982; Evans, 1995). Actually, the lack of educated personnel in the bureaucracy often causes problems in other sectors (Hayashi 2010:55). Nonetheless, in most national development plans there is not any reference to the need for creating jobs for highly educated people and to attract them in public institutions and government agencies (European Commission, 2010).

Employment challenge has got a very wide scale in developing countries, on the one hand, less developed countries have to face the challenge of employment in an open economy, and on the other hand employment plays an important role in reducing poverty (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development/Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programs [UNCTAD/ALDC], 2010). Consequently, in order to simultaneously promote education and raise the level of employment, the national development programs of the developing countries have to, on the one hand, focus on the modernization of the education system based on the new requirements of the labor market and on the other hand, pursue the promotion of the professional competency of individuals through continuous learning. For realizing this goal, along with planning for quality improvement and development of higher education, public administration for strengthening the links between educational institutions and labor market, research and society, would be of outmost significance (UNEP, 2005). European Union is an exemplary of combating unemployment. European Union has launched a program entitled Youth Guarantee (European Commission, 2014), that acknowledging the potential of all young people as a prerequisite for achieving economic growth and social cohesion in the future, stresses on urgent measures in the field of educational policy and the labor market in order to promote and increase the youth participation in the society (European Commission, 2007).

3.7. Decentralization and globalization

Globalization has accelerated through factors such as trade liberalization, increased foreign investment, cheap and quick communication, technological innovation, emergence of new actors, expansion of the economic reform programs and development of multilateral institutions and agreements. These developments have had a powerful influence on the development of the countries as well. One of the main weaknesses of development programs including the Europe 2020 Strategy for Sustainable Development, referred to by international partners is the highly inwards content and structure of this strategy, which prevents its potential extension and connection to the globalized world (Pereira, 2011).

In this situation, governments must be more flexible and create an atmosphere of trust for NGOs to play role in their specialized fields. The key thing for governments is to ensure that the systems are transparent and strengthen the trust of others (Moti, 2009). Decentralization can accelerate the realization of development policies that are relevant to local environmental and socio-economic conditions. Decentralization requires a clear definition of the role of authorities in local, regional and national levels, as well as the establishment of effective local institutions for planning and decision-making (OECD, 2001). Development plans should be adaptable to changing circumstances in the course of the implementation of NDPs. For example, the Brazil 2022 Development Strategy Map, primarily examines and scrutinizes the question that what would be like the world and the area where Brazil is located, in 2022, and then presents its strategy on the basis of such an analysis (Pereira, 2011). Accordingly, the

effectiveness of development programs requires knowledge and effective interaction of its constituents with environmental factors.

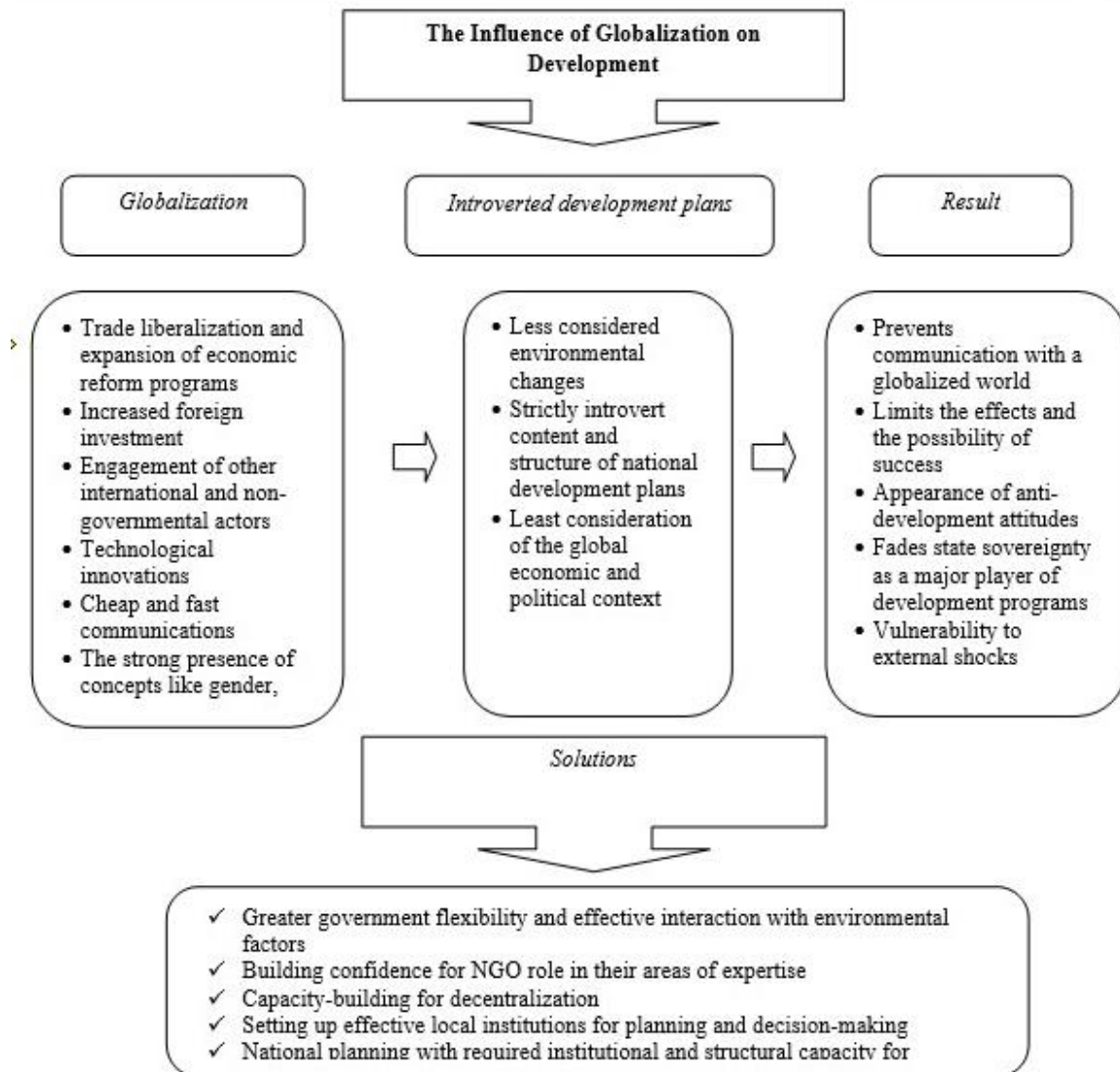


Figure 4. Influence of globalization on development and the relevant solutions

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Weakness of local civil institutions and limited participation of civil society, on the one hand, and lack of a sense of belonging and commitment of stakeholders, private sector and civil society towards national development programs in developing countries, on the other hand, have led development researchers to attribute the failures of the development plans to the lack of public participation in the formulation and implementation of these programs. That's why an overwhelming majority of scholars, reject the top-down strategies and support participation and participatory methods as one of the essential aspects of development. To achieve the development goals, participation of stakeholders is not only essential throughout the planning cycle but also it is vital in organizing civil society for socio-economic development. Publicizing the initial positive results of the plans and the primary evaluations, play an important role in raising community support and engaging the people who are not still involved. From another point of view, pursuing development via democratic development-oriented state, on the one

hand, creates a wider coalition and on the other hand, promotes the government capacities through promotion of democracy. Finally, it would lead to the accountability and performance transparency of the government's development agents.

Due to rapid social and economic changes, transitional societies are faced with constant threat of instability which moves development towards a different path, far away from balance. Conflicts are mainly over resources and strategies that different groups demand for. These conflicts sometimes arise in the form of social riots or regional, local or ethnic confrontations. Another serious concern is that creating an atmosphere of direct public participation in the development process, has not been without challenges. Sometimes it even deepens divisions, provokes social tensions and ultimately creates anti-development attitudes.

This is while the realization of national development plans requires a high political commitment, and mainly depends on a common approach among major stakeholders of development. To achieve a common understanding and agreement, first of all, a formal consultative mechanism has to be designed for engaging civil society in the formulation and implementation of national policies and programs. In this way, the objectives of development programs could be determined on the basis of the aspirations of the informed public and vigil civil society. Creating information sharing mechanisms and establishing a new organization for arbitration and management of conflicts and problems between different institutions and sectors as well as keeping track of all processes pertinent to the comprehensive national development program, are recommended. Promoting public awareness about NDP-related issues, presenting tangible development outcomes, effective communication between local and national programs for strengthening commitment, effective participation as well as creating social cohesion and trust in the government, are the main factors emphasized in order to restore social balance and push development forward in the society.

Meanwhile, low commitment of the government to implement its self-planned programs, limited public participation and low motivation of civil society and the private sector, and ultimately weakness of the formal mechanism for participation, are the three basic problems against facilitating development. Confronting this problem, strengthening public participation and in particular engaging all key stakeholders is suggested to be carried out in two levels: in the first level, creating motivation for cooperating in development process, promoting feeling of belonging, increasing an open atmosphere in the society and responsiveness via transparency in policies, are emphasized as the fundamental concepts of participation. In addition, promoting professional competency of individuals with continuous learning and hiring the most capable people from among the best institutions of higher education would provide the required capacity to promote development via society. In the next level, creating effective local institutions for planning and decision-making, and defining a chain of responsibilities in various capacities, missions, roles and positions for all activists from various local, regional and national levels are underlined. In the light of the two aforementioned steps, the needed capacity for decentralization would be created.



Figure 5. Failure model of development plans



Figure 6. Community-based model of development planning

Adopting generalized development plans for the developing societies which enjoy diversification of social strata has proved to be failed in creating solidarity and organic relationship with the society. The failure also results from unbalanced policies for economic growth and social modernization of the development plans and the top-down approach in the formulation of development strategies. Another drawback is that the highly concentration-oriented identity of development programs leaves less room for stakeholders' participation in implementation of development programs. Moreover, most of the national programs have paid the least attention to the global economic and political context, and holding a strongly introverted view, prevented the integration and connection of their relevant societies with globalized world. Another major problem is the simultaneous pursuit of different development programs in one area, and doing parallel activities that end up in wasting resources and inefficiency of development plans.

Formulation and pursuit of the process of national sustainable development strategy should be based on involvement and participation of all sectors of society. In other words, the main focus of planning for development has to be the participation of civil society. In the meantime, on the one hand, effective strategies for raising the capacities for implementation of the program has to be an integral part of the plan, and on the other hand, the prediction of drawbacks has to be thoroughly considered. Besides, the agreed objectives have to be specific and precise in order to allow their due measurement and evaluation.

Considering major problems of development planning in terms of lack of systemic mechanisms for coordinating the segments of program, their static approach, lack of transparency and responsiveness, formulation of development plans on the basis of the holistic approach of system theory could be helpful. Setting up systems or formal mechanisms for collecting and analyzing data, redesigning, improvements and policy adaptations based on feedback is also important for effective interaction with environmental factors. Result-oriented monitoring and evaluation systems can serve as powerful management tools for obliging governments and organizations to be accountable and transparent. Designing an information network with the ability to provide required information for monitoring officials and entities and in general for the civil society, and also obliging different entities of the government to annually submit performance reports in order to provide the public with sets of social indicators, is recommended.

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