

Sustainable Human Development is the Enhancement of Social Resources

An Interview with Mrs. Anna Mansour, Advisor for Sustainable Human Development, UNDP-Beirut

Irene Lorfing: Could you briefly define the concept of sustainable human development ?

Anna Mansour: Before giving a definition it is important to review the evolution of the concept of development in relation to changing political and economic contexts throughout the world. Since 1990, scholars, activists, policy-makers and the UN have been questioning conventional models of development based upon classical economic theory. The proposed new perspective is embodied in the sustainable approach to development. The perspective of the conventional model was linear, uniform, imitative, anti-traditional, short-term, and invested in physical capital to achieve progress. The new approach provides alternatives because it is non-linear, recognizes diversity, encourages innovation, considers tradition an asset and focuses on existing social capital. Thus, sustainable human development implies the dynamic integration of economic or material capital, physical capital (the environment), human capital and social capital. In other words, the basis of this approach is the individual, who must be encouraged to work with others in order to promote mechanisms for change, improvement and control. According to this model, development should stem from individuals' own priorities and initiatives.

The UNDP defines sustainable human development as "the enlargement of people's choices and capabilities through the formation of social capital so as to meet, as equitably as possible, the needs of current generations without compromising the needs of future ones". The core of this concept is the issue of democracy.

I.L.: On the basis of the National Report (1995) on the situation of women in Lebanon, what kinds of projects, in your opinion, best promote sustainable human development ?

A.M.: The National Report gives general trends and aggregate statistics, showing women's comparative status and development over a ten-year period. It also calls attention to women's lack of participation in political affairs and their virtual absence from decision-making positions in the economic and public spheres. The U.N.'s Human Development Report for Lebanon has used the same indicators, *i.e.*, health, education employment, *etc.*, and again has highlighted the key issue of women's participation. However, if any effective developmental project is to be initiated, these statistics cannot serve as a sufficient basis for action and implementation. There are great disparities between Lebanese women, due to age, religion, social class, urbanization, education, and exposure to other cultures. These disparities are manifested in women's everyday behaviors and in their relationships with men, children, other women, and the authority structure (whether familial or societal). All of these relationships affect women's self-perception, and hence, her sense of her own power and potential.

Appropriate development projects should be based on qualitative research, which documents all of the constraints, as perceived by women in the context of the reality of their daily lives. Women themselves should tell us what their options are, and pinpoint the factors they perceive as obstructing their choices. It is only through the assessments of their own needs and priorities that projects oriented toward

sustainable human development can be designed and implemented.

I.L.: During the last decade, international agencies have invested considerable efforts and resources in many development projects in Lebanon. However, little is known of the impact of these projects. Why ?

A.M.: I would like to start by saying that we have not done much. I undertook a comprehensive study of the development efforts undertaken during the last ten years in Lebanon by international organizations, the U.N. and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in order to classify aid by type and scope.

I discovered that very little resources were allotted to women's projects, and no particular project could fit completely into the sustainable human development perspective. Programs were generally sectorial and not integrated. I do not think we can measure impact, because the majority of the projects surveyed were not based upon situation analyses, and few had any inbuilt criteria for evaluation. Their aim was strictly immediate crisis intervention, and we must not forget that social change is a complicated and slow process.

True sustainable human development projects should demonstrate the following characteristics:

- Affordability, *i.e.*, an awareness of the project's cost-effectiveness in terms of money and human power, so that time, money and skills will not be wasted.
- Sustainability, *i.e.*, the potential of the project to continue after the departure of the initiators.
- Relevance to the actual needs of people.

These are the reasons why qualitative situational analysis is needed before starting a pilot project.

I.L.: Does the UNDP have a public communication strategy ? Do you cooperate with the Lebanese media for purposes of advocacy and the dissemination of information ?

A.M.: As UNDP employees, we have a new mandate. We consider ourselves as catalysts and advocates for social change as well as mobilizers of change. We support potential partners at the national and local levels. Our work consists of advocacy, networking and capacity building. Our policy is to share information. At the Beirut UNDP office, a "think tank" was formed which grouped Lebanese experts from different sectors and disciplines to work on a developmental profile for Lebanon. The report being prepared is an integrated, qualitative situational analysis.

This profile is intended to be used as a tool for advocacy. During the process of completing the report, every time a diagnosis is made, we communicate it to the general public in order to receive constructive "feed-back". Thus, we have made our contacts with the media, in an effort to make them our allies in advocacy. The overall response of media professionals, however, was reserved, due to economic considerations related to the cost effectiveness of non-commercial programming. Another difficulty we have confronted in strengthening our partnership with the media is the scarcity of capable young professionals. Beginning journalists often lack appropriate knowledge about development, as well as appropriate attitudes, creativity and skills.