



Top Down and Bottom Up Leadership in Development Assistance: *Excerpts from the Seminar*¹

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Leaders in projects become linking persons—bridge builders between people and resources. The leader helps focus the aspects of the projects that should be tackled. Top down projects tend to be large scale, requiring lots of resources. Bottom up projects tend to be small with few resources.

Bottom up development assistance, in the main, (1) continues to focus on the people in the projects; (2) ensures that a project can be replicated elsewhere; and (3) helps people in other situations do the same thing. Planning is part of the learning process in development activity.

The development leader is, first, a relational specialist and, second, a content specialist. Development leaders are proficient as seminar leaders, group facilitators, and listeners. Development leaders are good stewards of resources.

In top down projects, the development leader (DL) is a buffer between the schedule makers and the people. She or he protects the people from the top managers and gives them time to grow. In bottom up leadership, there is often no sequenced schedule and the DL has to help move the project along. Top down projects are prone to financial corruption at high levels. The leadership task in this case is to confront. Bottom up projects are equally prone to corruption at low levels. The leadership task is to confront downward; but it can't be a bureaucratic confrontation. In this case, confrontation is more humane; a confrontation, with people development as a value. If the DL confronts wrongly at low levels, he or she will be isolated. At low levels, corruption may not be seen as corruption. It may be seen as a matter of integrity. In some cultures, the value of providing for one's family overrides all other considerations.

Top-down projects may welcome few suggestions from the *target people*. In bottom up projects the community deals with *target problems*. People don't like being seen as targets. In bottom up projects the task is to help people clarify and articulate the task and problem. Dialogue is critical. When people are viewed as the target, the DL becomes an advocate for both sides—the one who plays the conciliatory role between the people and the top energy and resources. Top down projects will have a large impact for a short time. Bottom up projects will have a small effect for a longer time. In relief projects, for example, you want to have a large effect in short time; in development projects, you want a steady effect over time.

Nonformal education is a key factor in development projects. One aspect of nonformal education is technological know-how that is applied to the task or problem. A second aspect is defining problems, creating conscientization. There are several tasks in conscientization: (1) becoming more alert and aware, (2) learning to talk about the realities of life, (3) seeing cause and effect relationships, (4)

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learning to believe in the importance of change, (6) learning the power of the community, (7) seeing the possibility of self-help, (8) becoming aware of one's own worth, and (9) learning to identify the sources of oppression.

What qualities are important in a DL who is stimulating conscientization? (1) Love and humility which leads to trust. (2) Helping people become free and to respect the freedom of other people. (3) Confident and consistent behavior. (4) Learning to ask the effective questions. (5) Helping people deal with cause and effect, without over-simplifying the cause. (Religion can be used to simplify causes. "God wills it," can hinder people from looking for causes.) (6) Unrelenting trust and hope in other people. (7) Being flexible to change and open to other perspectives.