# Human Security and Decentralized Planning: The Training Experiences of UNCRD

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Introduction
The United Nations Centre for Regional Development (UNCRD) was established in 1971 to assist and promote regional (sub-national) development in developing countries. Over the last three decades, research and training activities at UNCRD have seen a paradigm shift from regional economic planning to human security in accordance with concurrent changes in concepts and practices related to regional development and decentralized planning. The current focus on human security responds to the negative fall out of globalization being experienced as increased vulnerability of individuals and communities to financial crisis and widening gaps between the rich and poor as well as social breakdown and cultural erosion caused by resettlement, conflict, migration, and rapidly changing lifestyles.

This paper reviews the recent experience of UNCRD in providing training for human security and decentralized planning, and identifies some key lessons. The paper is divided into three sections. The first provides the scope of discussion on human security and decentralized planning in UNCRD's ongoing training activities and includes the working definitions of terms, interrelationships between decentralization and human security, and identification of training needs. In the second section, the basic elements of UNCRD's training strategies are presented, and the third section offers a description of three projects to illustrate the design and implementation of training strategies for human security and decentralization.

The three projects discussed in the paper demonstrate UNCRD’s active contribution to the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, and the agendas of the Social Summit held in Copenhagen in 1995 and the more recent World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) held in Johannesburg in September 2002. By addressing the need to enhance human security, these projects respond to the central concern raised at the United Nations Millennium Summit. The focus is on strengthening capacity in the least developed transitional countries of Indochina, which is identified on the agendas of the Social Summit and the WSSD. These projects are built around mechanisms recommended in the Plan of Implementation of the WSSD such as South-South cooperation to share knowledge and best practices, forming collaborations between government, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the private sector, and increasing uses of information and communications technologies (ICTs) for development.

Decentralization and Human Security: Scope of UNCRD’s Projects

Definitions

Decentralization
Decentralization is understood as the

Restructuring of authority so that there is a system of co-responsibility between institutions of governance at the central, regional, and local levels according to the principles of subsidiarity thus increasing the overall quality and effectiveness of the system of governance, while increasing the authority and capabilities of sub-national levels.\[1\]
Three types of decentralization -- political, administrative, and fiscal; and four forms - devolution, delegation, deconcentration, and divestment are commonly identified.

Political decentralization is concerned with transfer of political power and authority to sub-national levels of government often seen as election and empowerment of lower levels of government. Devolution, which involves full transfer of responsibility, decision-making, resources, and revenue generation to an independent and autonomous local level public agency, is considered a form of political decentralization. This form of decentralization necessitates the provision of appropriate legal and regulatory frameworks to ensure accountability and transparency while also demanding links with civil society and community institutions.

Administrative decentralization involves transfer of decision-making authority, resources, and responsibility for some public services from central to lower levels of government. This often takes place in conjunction with civil-service reform and is implemented as deconcentration, where authority and responsibility is transferred from once level of central government to another, or delegation where the authority and responsibility are transferred to a local unit of government that may not be a branch of the delegating authority.2/

Fiscal decentralization is resource reallocation to sub-national levels of government and may include revenue raising and expenditure. Divestment can be seen as a form of decentralization where planning and administrative authority are transferred from government to voluntary, private, or nongovernmental institutions. The World Bank refers to this as “market decentralization” that “allows functions that had been primarily or exclusively the responsibility of government to be carried out by businesses, community groups, cooperatives, private voluntary associations, and other non-government organizations.”

3/

The sequence of the various types of decentralization and the forms in which they may be implemented vary according to the need for decentralization, existing institutional structures, and capacity at lower levels of government. Some demands for decentralization include:

1. The call for greater regional political freedom, participation, and conflict resolution to resolve latent or manifest ethnic conflicts, or marginalization of minority groups;
2. Pressures of global competition as countries or regions within countries make economic progress resulting in pronounced development of certain regions over others;
3. Demands for stabilization and “opening up” of economies such as those exposed to exogenous shocks and transitional economies; and
4. Demands for greater equity and efficiency in local service delivery.4/

UNCRD’s training activities are concerned with political and administrative decentralization according to all four forms depending on the specific context where a project is implemented. Building capacity for fiscal decentralization falls beyond the organization’s purview, as this may be best achieved with the injection of funds for local government, as is being implemented by the United Nations Capital
Human Security

UNDP launched human security as an “integrative” rather than a “defensive” concept in the Human Development Report 1994. Seven interrelated dimensions were identified as economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security. The Commission on Human Security (CHS) has further clarified the concept as one that focuses on the individual and seeks protection from threats to human life, livelihood, and dignity, and the realization of full potential of each individual. Human security addresses both conflict and developmental aspects including displacement, discrimination and persecution of vulnerable communities as well as insecurities related to poverty, health, education, gender disparities, and other types of inequality.

Therefore, human security is understood as the ability to withstand threats such as disease, hunger, unemployment, crime, social conflict, political repression, and environmental hazards. Threats to human security can be economic, ecological, social, and political, and they can occur as sudden shocks, long-term trends, or seasonal cycles. The working definition of human security at UNCRD is the removal or reduction of vulnerability to economic, environmental, social, and cultural threats that undermine sustainable development of communities.

This concept is integrated into local development strategies through a two-pronged approach that entails: (i) a vulnerability analysis to identify vulnerable communities as well as the economic, environmental, social, and cultural threats experienced at the household and village levels, and the corresponding coping strategies of the community; and (ii) assessments of capacity at the village and district levels for integrating the coping strategies of households and villages into planning and project formulation within their jurisdictions. This is in line with the recent report on human security by the CHS that states “human security focuses on shielding people from critical and pervasive threats and empowering them to take charge of their lives.”

Decentralization and Human Security: Interrelationships

While, the impacts of decentralization on human security are not sufficiently explored in the literature, there is discussion on the impacts of decentralization on poverty alleviation, which offers us some valuable insights. These are briefly reviewed here followed by UNCRD’s training need assessment (TNA) for achieving human security in the context of decentralized planning.

Decentralization is assumed to have a role in reducing poverty through increased participation of pro-poor groups in local government to influence policy and decisions regarding pro-poor programmes, and improved services for the poor. It is believed that participatory local governments are in a better position to assess needs at the local level, monitor and control development of local communities, and provide more responsive services. Elected local governments may also be more accountable to the community and inclusive of the poor in decision and policymaking. When given greater autonomy, local governments can stimulate economic development that makes best use of local resources.
The Asian experience reveals mixed results. The impact of decentralization varies according to the type of decentralization -- political, administrative, or fiscal; the characteristics of a country such as size, geography, population density, natural resource endowments, cultural and political set-up, inter-regional solidarity, institutional and managerial capacities; and the causes and patterns of poverty.

Political decentralization is found to have a positive impact on poverty alleviation by virtue of the involvement of civil society in planning, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of poverty reduction strategies and basic service delivery. The poor in some countries are experiencing benefits. The case of the Philippines stands out where decentralization has:

- Encouraged local governments to be entrepreneurial;
- Resulted in transfers of financial resources to local governments helping strengthen devolution;
- Encouraged citizen’s participation in local governance;
- Increased cooperation between local governments and other government agencies;
- Provided national governments the opportunity to reorient their relationship with local governments; and
- Helped local governments recognize and address the impacts of globalization.

The problems that have arisen with devolution are elite capture of resources, insufficient accountability, and graft and corruption at the local level. To counter these, local governments are being encouraged to develop performance standards and indicators to measure their productivity and the quality of services and use ICTs for management and development operations.

Administrative decentralization does not demonstrate positive impacts on poverty. Traditionally poor regions, even when given greater resources and autonomy, are unable to attract investment and talented personnel. They tend to remain poor and have low human resources development even after decentralization. Decentralization of specific services such as health and education has been attempted in some countries through administrative decentralization. In Indonesia and the Philippines, this has increased coverage and improved service delivery but the process has been bumpy with resistance in relocating central staff to local levels through deconcentration, and poor capacity to undertake greater responsibilities at the local levels.

Fiscal decentralization when not linked to capacity improvement or revenue generation has found limited success. In Cambodia, the SEILA programme is assisting local government and villagers to develop their capacity to organize and execute local, decentralized development planning—a key component of UNCDF’s Local Development Funds (LDFs). Emphasis is laid on village level community planning in the “communes,” within which the participation of groups and individuals who do not traditionally have a role in their community’s decision-making processes is encouraged. In Thailand, fiscal decentralization in the form of guaranteed transfers from central to local governments without local governments assuming increased responsibility for providing public services has resulted in irresponsible spending at the local level and increased risk of macroeconomic stability.
In general, it is recommended that political and administrative decentralization precede fiscal decentralization to ensure participation and accountability.

Creation of adequate capacity in local governments to undertake larger responsibilities and collaborate with other governmental and nongovernmental agencies is essential to the success of decentralization in alleviating poverty. The poor need to have a minimum level of education, awareness of their rights, access to information, and the power to participate. Decentralization can result in elite capture of local planning and policymaking.

This can be countered by organizing and mobilizing poor communities as in the case of the Philippines where NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) have collaborated with the local government and even joined hands to support political candidates with an endorsed commitment to a pro-poor agenda. In Cebu City, a new mayor was elected with the support of the urban poor and was committed to establishing a “Urban Poor Affairs” section in the local government to address issues of land tenure security, access to housing finance, service delivery, and livelihood improvement. There has been a significant decline in urban poverty in the city as a result of this effort. Improved service delivery by lower levels of government that are in a better position to determine needs and target the poor is possible only when systems of accountability are well established and sufficient capacity exists in the local governments to undertake these tasks.

Human security is concerned with reducing the threats to development in general and to vulnerable groups in particular. Often, vulnerable groups are also economically and socially marginalized, and are composed of ethnic minorities. Central governments have traditionally attempted to control power ceded to regions populated by minority groups to minimize or control attempts at secession. However, since the last decade this trend has been reversed for equity reasons and to draw minorities into the mainstream, as it is being realized that when minorities are given greater autonomy and opportunities for development, they are less likely to be involved in violent conflict.

To ensure human security, there is a need to identify the vulnerable, the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural threats they face, the strategies they use to cope when under duress, and the mechanisms used for conflict management. This is best done at the local level through governments that represent the interests of all groups or through coalitions between government and civil society that allow for wide representation. An example often cited by Amartya Sen is that fewer starvation deaths occur during famine in a democratic versus autocratic regime. Sufficient capacity and access to timely and correct information is integral to this process.

UNCRD’s human security assessments in Lao PDR found that higher levels of human security are observed when local governments at the province and district levels have sufficient technical capacity to identify the threats faced by the populations within their jurisdictions and define programmes specific to local needs and inclusive of the traditional and innovative means that communities adopt to cope when under threat of hunger, disease, environmental degradation, or conflict. Where the local governments are poorly staffed and have low technical capacity, they are unable to translate central
policy directives for poverty alleviation and local development into programmes suitable for the region.13

Training Implications
In this section, training needs for decentralized planning and human security are discussed based on the literature and TNA conducted by UNCRD for Lao PDR.

To ensure that gains from decentralization are realized, extensive capacity building is recommended for lower levels of government. Decentralization calls for transfer of power and resources from central to local levels and from bureaucrats to communities and households. This requires willingness on the part of the centre to hand over power and resources as well as the capacity at the local level to use the newly acquired resources for local development and poverty alleviation. Devolution of power and resources needs to be matched with concurrent increases in capacity at lower levels.

Decentralized planning is often compromised by willingness to give up control at higher levels and poor coordination among various agencies at the local level concerned with similar development tasks. Other constraints fall under the categories of institutional structures, financial arrangements, and personnel management. Related to the first two categories, common problems are poor inter-agency coordination and information sharing, and low capacity and inadequate mandate for resource generation and allocation. There are several problems related to personnel management. Many developing countries have long histories of centralized planning and governance. This has resulted in a situation where central governments attract the best-qualified human resources while local governments function with less qualified personnel.

More recently, the private sector, and multilateral and bilateral agencies engaged in development attract skilled staff away from government by offering higher salaries. Motivation of staff is low because of frequent transfers and low salaries. In terms of skills, local government personnel tend to have poorer qualifications and experience in generation and disbursement of resources for development. They lack sufficient skills in collaborative planning with NGOs and CBOs as well as for participatory planning with communities.

With regard to the additional skills required for planning for human security at lower levels of government, the issues are: receiving inadequate policy directives from central government; lack of capacity to identify threats to development and target vulnerable populations; and limited mandate and capacity for conflict resolution. In culturally diverse populations local government officials often belong to the dominant majority and are not sympathetic to the needs of minority groups. Higher participation of women in government is required for greater gender sensitivity. Local government officials often wield power with the local community and use this to manipulate information and development for the benefit of the particular group they belong to. Unfair access to information plays a key role in increasing inequities and disempowerment.

It is found that local elites tend to capture local government agencies for their benefit when devolution takes place resulting in limited opportunities for poor and vulnerable
groups. Even with legal mechanisms in place for wider representation of economically and socially excluded groups, weaker groups need to be organized and provided with sufficient information to demand their rights and participate in the governance process.

Of particular interest is the increasing trend towards e-government which offers the possibility of standardizing information needs and wide sharing of information between different government agencies, improved service delivery to users and greater transparency and accountability. While this provides several options for improved planning and management of development projects in a decentralized context, a resistance to change is also observed, where government officials do not want to be open about decision making under all circumstances. In addition to this is the call for e-governance and participatory planning using new ICTs. In areas where ICTs are being used for empowerment and mobilization of communities, it is found that relationships between the government and the community are changing with greater demands for accountability from the people and diminished power of local bureaucrats. Adequate training is required to cope with technical aspects related to the new technologies as well as non-technical issues such as acceptance of the technology, openness of information, and willingness to cede power.

**Key Elements of UNCRD Training Strategies for Decentralization and Human Security**

Training strategies at UNCRD are developed based on TNAs conducted jointly with target countries for country-specific training course and through training course assessments during international training courses. Both technical issues related to knowledge and skills, and non-technical issues concerned with attitudes and support from higher levels of government are addressed in the training. These include the new issues arising as a result of introduction of ICTs for e-government, e-governance, and empowerment of local communities.

From the experience of UNCRD’s projects, key elements for training for decentralized planning to enhance human security are summarized as follows:

**Training Needs Assessment and Demand-Oriented Customized Training**

Beginning with a sound TNA and the creation of an evolving training strategy that meets the demand at provincial and district levels for planning and implementation of human security oriented programmes. At UNCRD, this is done jointly with the concerned planning authority in the target country for country-specific training, and from training evaluations of international training courses held in Nagoya as well as the African and Latin American branch offices.

**Joint Participatory Action Research**

Joint participatory action research strengthens capacity in local government to identify the vulnerable, threats to development, and generate strategies that incorporate the coping mechanisms of communities for self-help and self-reliance. While implementing Phase II of UNCRD’s Human Security and Regional Development Project, it was found that the target countries of Cambodia and Lao PDR had sophisticated Poverty Assessments. However, central government officials and external consultants had prepared these with few inputs from provincial and district planners. It was decided to undertake human security assessments using joint
participatory action research with provincial and district planners to enhance their capacity as well as benefit from their understanding of local conditions.

This required provision of training on the human security concept and the conduct of vulnerability analysis as well as preparation of detailed guidelines on data collection and analysis. It was found that the exercise substantially strengthened the capacity at provincial and district levels in the locations where the surveys where conducted in Cambodia and Lao PDR in identifying the vulnerable, the threats to human security, the coping strategies of vulnerable communities, and the shortcomings in implementing programmes for poverty alleviation and reduction of insecurity.

**Recognizing the Role of Information**

Empowerment with information is integral to improving the planning efforts of local governments, and increasing awareness and access to rights and entitlements within communities to enhance human security and demand accountability in local government. Studies on the effectiveness of decentralization in India through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1991 have found that although power has been devolved to the panchayats (local governments) at district, sub-district (block), and village levels, and effort has been made for the social and political inclusion of women and backward groups through creation of quotas in local government, it does not necessarily follow that local governments become inclusive. Panchayats continue to be dominated by the local elite -- the weak while having representation, do not yet have the voice to demand their rights.

The key factor in strengthening weaker and socially excluded groups is education and information on entitlements, and the power to complain against intractable local governments. Movements that have encouraged wider sharing of information have succeeded in bringing socially and politically excluded groups into the mainstream.

With the idea that information is a very important factor in empowering the poor and providing them with opportunities for development, projects have been launched in India that use ICTs in rural areas to provide market information on agricultural produce, advice on agriculture and livestock, information on state poverty alleviation programmes and entitlements, rapid dissemination of documents such as land records and caste certificates to enable access to entitlements, and a window to demand greater efficiency and accountability from local governments through enforced complaint redressal. UNCRD has documented five best practices in India to demonstrate issues in using ICTs for local development in its training programmes for decentralized planning.

**Soliciting Support from Policymakers**

Engaging policymakers provides support for dissemination of training to the lowest levels of government. In November 2001, a thematic training course was held on human security and regional development. This course was organized in two parts as a training course for mid-career professionals and a policy workshop on designing a programme for human security. The combination of technical personnel and policymakers ensured that identification of needs for human security are matched with corresponding policy authority and resource support within an institution or country. This methodology was welcomed and promoted greater interaction, learning, and sharing of ideas and experience among participants. A significant
outcome of this training was the commitment from higher levels of government in implementing the action plans of the training participants, and an action framework and proposal for South-South cooperation between Cambodia and the Philippines in designing and implementing human security programmes.

**Engaging Stakeholders from Governmental and Nongovernmental Agencies**

It is believed at UNCRD that to incorporate human security into planning at the local levels, it is essential to engage policymakers at higher levels of government as well as local government and members of civil society. Enhancing collaboration between governmental and nongovernmental agencies enables a mutually supportive learning approach and the opportunity to move from confrontation to consolidation of joint development efforts through proper identification of roles and responsibilities, and increases in accountability, particularly downward accountability to target communities.

The first phase of the Human Security and Regional Development Project culminated in a workshop (December 2000) attended by policymakers from the sub-national level, members of NGOs, CBOs, and local government. During this workshop, human security concerns in the three regions of Bicol (Philippines), Nakhon Ratchasima (Thailand), and Yogyakarta (Indonesia) were discussed to arrive at a common understanding of the constraints, the agenda for the future, and the roles and responsibilities of each agency. All three countries were then recovering from the impacts of the Asian financial crisis of 1997 and found the human security approach relevant and useful.

It was found essential to address human security in terms of cultural security, gender and development, social capital, and resilience of vulnerable groups along with poverty alleviation and deprivation. Current approaches to poverty alleviation and reducing vulnerability were deficient due to sectoral and fragmented approaches. Convergence integrating partnerships among government, the private sector, and civil society were considered crucial to planning and implementation of policies and programmes. Commitment was made to continue and enhance existing partnerships and give particular attention to good governance, social capital and community empowerment, environmental rights and justice, training on human security, networking for information exchange, and taking specific actions to address the vulnerable in each region. Subsequently, the Philippines and Thailand have launched human security programmes.

**South-South Cooperation**

South-South collaboration encourages sharing of experience in poverty alleviation and increasing human security through exposure visits and special training sessions by local experts. In the course of the international training courses on regional development held in Nagoya, it is observed that much is gained by the interactions between participants. Over the years, UNCRD has accumulated a rich network of professionals in developing countries who have stimulated or been active proponents of best practices in local development and poverty alleviation. Such partnerships are proving valuable in transferring of experience on:

- Urban poverty alleviation through community mobilization, political inclusion of the poor, creation of appropriate legal instruments at the local levels, and
consolidating partnerships between local government and civil society in the Philippines to Cambodia; and

- National strategies and best practices demonstrating the use of ICTs for development such as policies, technology parks, and e-government applications. Concerned government officials from countries of Sub-Saharan Africa are exposed to experiences of Malaysia and Thailand in Asia, which have relatively advanced policies and projects incorporating the uses of ICT for development (For details, contact UNCRD Africa Office in Nairobi).

**Team Building, and Strengthening Vertical and Horizontal Linkages**

Strengthening vertical and horizontal linkages, and team building between the various government agencies allows for sharing of information and minimizing overlaps and duplication of efforts. Decentralization requires that linkages between higher and lower levels of government be strengthened and function according to the principle of subsidiarity. However, institutional memories take time and effort to overcome. UNCRD makes effort to strengthen linkages between different levels of government in its training programmes. In the thematic training courses conducted in Nagoya as well as the country-specific training courses in Cambodia and Lao PDR, conscious effort has been made to create teams between central and provincial, and between provincial and district staff to encourage greater communication in the planning and programme implementation processes.

In addition to vertical linkages, horizontal linkages among the various sectoral and other governmental agencies operating at the provincial and district levels is essential for better coordination of mutually supportive development activities. It is often observed that provincial/district sectoral agencies report to their ministries at the central level but have little contact with other agencies at their level. In UNCRD’s country-specific training course in Lao PDR, planners from different agencies are brought together. In transitional countries and those emerging from conflict, institution building and decentralization are being undertaken simultaneously. In such instances, the importance of building teams for planning and development needs to be stressed to generate appropriate strategies for poverty alleviation and judicious use of limited resources.

**Linking Training with the Planning Process and Output-Oriented Training**

This ensures that off-the-job and on-the-job training are linked and the time used for training produces results that can be used immediately in time- and resource-constrained environments. These links are being established in some of UNCRD’s in-country training programmes in Africa (Kenya), Asia (Lao PDR), and Latin America (Bogotá-Cundinamarca).

**UNCRD Project Examples**

Three examples of UNCRD’s ongoing projects are described here to illustrate the manner in which the above elements are being integrated to provide training at the provincial and district levels to enhance capacity to address human security. These are the national training programme in Lao PDR, the human security assessments in Lao PDR, and the use of ICTs for human security in local development.
1. National Training Programme in Lao PDR

Lao PDR moved from a centrally planned to a market economy with the introduction of the New Economic Mechanism (NEM) in 1986. In conjunction with NEM, increased economic and financial autonomy was conferred on the provincial authorities. As a result, the central government lost control over local management and spending of public resources and decentralization was declared a failure. This occurred largely due to the lack of professional planning and management capacity and preparedness for decentralization at the provincial levels.\(^1\)

In 1997, the Government of Lao PDR made a policy decision to promote decentralization with a view to accelerating the pace of market-oriented development while addressing poverty issues. The decentralization policy has now been expedited through the *Prime Minister Instruction (No. 1/PM)* adopted in March 2000, which aims at building up the province as the strategic unit, the district as the planning and budgeting unit, and the village as the implementing unit. In line with the decentralization policy, priority has been directed to capacity development of administrators and planning personnel tasked to undertake development planning and management at the provincial and district levels. Capacity development in this field is considered to be the key to institution building for effective implementation of the decentralized system of development planning and management under the overall reform policy of the Government of Lao PDR.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) encouraged the re-initiation of decentralization in Lao PDR in 1997 to:

- (a) Train and equip staff at provincial and district levels;
- (b) Clarify the role and mandates of institutions at the provincial level;
- (c) Improve coordination among sectors;
- (d) Increase capacity to identify and analyze trade opportunities and export-led investment options; and
- (e) Improve capacity to integrate social issues in policy formulation and budgeting.\(^1\)

The Department of General Planning of the Committee for Planning and Cooperation (DGP/CPC) identified challenges to decentralized planning as the temporary recruitment of staff or activities at the grassroots without appropriate qualifications, capability, adequate incentives, promotion opportunities, or opportunities to upgrade existing knowledge and skills.\(^1\) To increase technical capacity at the provincial and district levels, CPC prepared a *Planning and Reporting Reference Manual for Provincial Authorities* that provides definitions of terms as well as guidelines to standardize data collection and processing for planning and development management tasks.\(^1\) UNCRD’s assistance was sought in design and implementation of a national training programme for provincial and district planners. To initiate the activity, a TNA was undertaken that indicated:\(^1\)

- (a) Development opportunities and challenges emerging from the ongoing institutional reforms, including the decentralization policy, are not adequately perceived and addressed owing to the lack of a long-term vision for provincial development and an in-depth situational analysis.
(b) Donor assistance is not fully made use of due to the inability of the provincial and district personnel to work out project plans that meet the donor agency requirements.

(c) Project plans are not properly translated into action due to the lack of management skills and knowledge particularly among the district officers.

(d) Private investments are not sufficiently attracted due to the lack of an appropriate support mechanism.

(e) Training is considered the key to improved performance in provincial development planning and management, yet there are no regular training programmes for provincial and district planning personnel. Subject-specific, short-term training (e.g., project planning) is conducted occasionally, depending on budget availability.

(f) Senior provincial planning officials are granted opportunities to take part in overseas training courses but the knowledge and skills acquired by them are not effectively transferred to their staff members. Effective ways and means should be explored to link off-the-job training with on-the-job training.²²

A training strategy was proposed with emphasis on the following:

1. **Multiplier-effect through training of trainers.** This involves training of selected planning personnel at the central and provincial levels who will in turn impart training to the planning personnel in the provincial planning departments, sectoral departments, and the districts.

2. **Practice-oriented training.** Training for provinces and districts should include planning techniques and project management. These techniques will not involve sophisticated data analysis but rather emphasize planning and project management with communities under data and resource constraints.

3. **Linking “off-the-job” and “on-the-job” training.** It is important to provide incentives and an office environment that will encourage the planning staff to share their knowledge and skills acquired from off-the-job training with their colleagues and other staff members.²³

Priority areas for training were identified as:

(a) Understanding the implications of the decentralized system of development administration on local development planning and management;

(b) Local development and community participation in project planning and management;

(c) Understanding the project cycle and its management implications;

(d) Methods and techniques of project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation;

(e) Data collection, analysis, and statistical skills;

(f) Training strategies; and

(g) Best practices and case studies of local development projects in Lao PDR as well as other countries in Asia.²⁴
Six training workshops have been conducted at the provincial level since 1999 as part of the country-specific training programme in Lao PDR (www.uncrd.or.jp/laos/). The first three workshops were attended by mid-career to senior planning officials from CPC, line ministries, and provincial planning departments and were tasked to serve as trainers in future training for provincial development planning and management. Teams of provincial and district planners have attended the next three courses— the training is principally managed by DGP/CPC and the former trainees serve as the resource persons. In view of the capacity enhanced at the CPC to run and manage training programmes, coupled with the availability of relevant training materials in the Lao language and Lao trainers, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) decided in 2001 to support the CPC’s training initiative under its In-country Training Programme.

Each training workshop lasts for two weeks and is structured around:

(a) **Lecture-discussion sessions** on topics related to: (i) challenges and opportunities for local development in the context of decentralization; (ii) participatory approaches to local development planning and management; (iii) methods and techniques of project design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation;

(b) **Participation paper presentations** for exchange of experiences and ideas on: (i) local development project planning and management; and (ii) training for provincial and district planning personnel;

(c) **Planning exercise on participatory project design and management** for local development, involving tasks of (i) initiating dialogue with community members and local authority representatives; (ii) analyzing problems and setting development objectives; (iii) identifying alternative actions and selecting a desirable course of action; (iv) preparing project proposals; and (v) planning for project implementation and monitoring and evaluation;

(d) **Field visits to local development project sites** to learn more about practices and lessons on project design, implementation, and management;

(e) **Group work on designing a training course for district planners** with special focus on training contents, trainers and trainees, training methods, and training evaluation; and

(f) **Training workshop evaluation** by participants to generate information necessary to guide the organizers in designing and implementing future workshops. The post-training workshop questionnaire was designed with questions on: (i) the satisfaction level concerning the learning content and the value of the workshop programme; and (b) the participant’s plan for using what was learned to improve his/her work performance.
The training provides capacity building at the provincial and district levels for improved planning and project management, poverty alleviation, and increased human security. Concerted efforts are made to address environmental and socio-cultural concerns along with economic development in all the training-related activities. This is in line with the policy of the Government of Lao PDR and the recommendations of the UN mission in the country.25

The Planning Exercise
A significant component of the training course is a planning exercise on participatory project design and management for local development, poverty reduction, and human security. The fieldwork is organized in three parts. In the first part, training participants talk to the community members in a general meeting called by the village chief. They listen to the community members to draw out information, including the present situation in the village, the villagers’ major problems, needs, priorities, their coping mechanisms for dealing with these problems and needs, the efficacy of government support measures in responding to these problems, and people’s capacities for solving their own problems. The villagers are divided into three groups of men, women, and senior citizens to collect specific information on vulnerabilities and development needs of each group. A historic timeline of important events in the village that positively or negatively influenced its development and a seasonal calendar of activities are recorded to comprehend the needs and potentials of the villages.

In the second part, participants identify development priorities of the villages and match them with those raised by the villages. This process of consultation provides an opportunity for the participants to learn from the villagers and raise awareness of the villagers’ own situation. In the third part of the exercise, the participants prepare project proposals for jointly identified development priorities and mobilize villagers to participate in implementing the project as well as seek the commitment and support from participating district planners and sector agency officials. In the Keo Oudom district in Vientiane Province where three training courses have been conducted, the district planning office has incorporated the results of these planning exercises into the district plan and mobilized several villages to implement the projects identified jointly.

Demand-Oriented, Customized Training
The Lao training workshops are an attempt to support economic and administrative reforms by training of trainers in project planning and management. The CPC has scaled up the powers of planning at the local level, since it introduced a decentralized planning process. It continues to facilitate the training process and the effectiveness of training is dependent on its commitment, which is a key element of the UNCRD-CPC partnership. The training workshops are demand-oriented and the needs of planners shape the training objectives, structure, and content. After six training courses, it is felt that some capacity has been created at the provincial level and there is a need to further enhance the district level. Based on discussion with DGP/CPC, the new structure of the course will focus on the needs for district planning and will be linked directly to the planning cycle and be output oriented. The participants will be organized into teams at the district level and will include planners from sectoral ministries along with the CPC’s planning departments to ensure improved plan making at the district level.
Applying Learning Back at Work

Given the importance of the training content and process in learning design, future training workshops must take into account not only their direct influence on learning but, in addition, how the workplace can be improved to foster transfer of learning.25 The institutional environment has an immediate and direct bearing upon the application of what the trainees have learned. Indeed, the ability of trainees to introduce new methods, techniques, and technology in their organizations depends upon the support of management and the acceptance of change by their supervisors and colleagues. Thus, management support and employee acceptance are good indicators of the extent to which the transfer of learning is succeeding. The need, then, is to ensure compatibility between the training programme and the cultural values (or attitudes and behavior) of the trainees’ organizations.27

2. Human Security Assessments in Lao PDR

Three premises underlie UNCRD’s project on Human Security and Regional Development in Lao PDR:

1. Integrating human security into local development strategies ensures that vulnerabilities to economic threats, environmental degradation, social breakdown, and cultural erosion are addressed;
2. Decentralization provides local governments with an increased opportunity to become actively involved in planning and implementing programmes that enhance human security; and
3. Developing the capacity of local governments (the provincial and district authorities in Lao PDR) is an important instrument for integrating human security in local development.

The DGP/CPC and UNCRD have been collaborating on training for provincial planners since July 1998. It was decided to integrate these ongoing efforts with Phase II of the Human Security and Regional Development Project, and involve DGP/CPC and the departments of planning at the provincial and district levels in conducting the fieldwork as part of the capacity building effort.

Survey on Vulnerability and Capacity Assessment

DGP/CPC and UNCRD jointly undertook a survey during 2001 to identify human security concerns and determine the existing capacity to deal with them in the three provinces of Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, and Vientiane. The working definition of human security for this project is understood as the removal or reduction of vulnerability to economic, environmental, social, and cultural threats that undermine sustainable development of communities in Lao PDR.

In order to assess prevailing human security concerns, it was decided to adopt a two-pronged approach:

1. A vulnerability analysis that identifies vulnerable communities as well as the economic, environmental, social, and cultural threats experienced at the household and village levels, and the corresponding coping strategies; and
2. **Capacity assessments** at the village and district levels to integrate the coping strategies of households and villages into planning and project formulation within their jurisdictions.

Prior to conducting the survey, pilot survey guides were tested in the field and a training workshop was held on vulnerability analysis during April 2001 to prepare the provincial teams to undertake the survey. The provincial teams, the DGP/CPC, and UNCRD jointly reviewed the findings upon completion of the survey during a follow-up workshop in August 2001. The provincial teams prepared draft proposals on integrating human security into planning efforts.

It was observed that the exercise of conducting the survey and the findings collected were valuable inputs for enhancing staff capacity at provincial and district levels and provide information for ongoing planning exercises. The provincial and district planners were provided with a framework to analyze and interpret the findings collected and use them as inputs into planning activities focusing on enhancing human security.

**Report on Human Security Concerns in Three Provinces**

A report was prepared on the human security survey jointly conducted by DGP/CPC and UNCRD, which includes the methodology undertaken for the survey and analysis of the findings, the findings and analysis, and recommendations ([www.uncrd.or.jp/laos/](http://www.uncrd.or.jp/laos/)). The area-, community-, and gender-specific nature of vulnerabilities are highlighted along with recommendations on increasing capacity at the provincial, district, and village levels to address human security concerns.

The study of coping strategies used by the twelve villages reveals that most strategies are concerned with economic threats, particularly shortages of food and income. There is low emphasis on coping strategies to deal with environmental threats such as poor soil quality, flooding, and drought, social threats of low community organization and diffidence in leadership, and cultural threats such as loss of traditions and means of social organization for mutual help.

Programmes addressing poverty alleviation in all provinces focus on agriculture, provision of infrastructure such as roads and irrigation, and provision of basic services of education and health. In some areas, such as Vientiane Province, engagement in textile weaving is encouraged as an alternative source of income. While these are essential activities, more efforts need to be made to reduce vulnerability at the local level and the coping strategies offer valuable starting points towards this.

Four areas are critical to strengthen positive coping strategies and reduce negative coping strategies:

1. **Human resources development** through provision of a wide range of skills related to economic activities, community organization, and environmental protection and management.

2. **Environmental management** of land, water, and forests resources. Indigenous means need to be documented and studied as well as techniques for improvement of land quality, management of water during floods and
droughts, and protection and replenishment of forest resources have to be imparted at the village level. Dependence on the vast but rapidly dwindling environmental resources is a primary coping strategy with dangerous implications in the long term if the resources are depleted and degraded.

3. **Access to credit** seems to be the key to initiating alternative means of livelihoods to reduce vulnerability and food shortages.

4. **Community mobilization** for participation in planning and implementation of projects for livelihoods, infrastructure, environmental resource management, and cultural preservation.

While applying strategies to achieve the above, the peculiarities of each district have to be taken into account such as the geographic location, natural resources endowment, asset ownership and management patterns of local communities, and their cultural and lifestyle patterns.

Factors that influence the ability for joint planning and project implementation by the village and district authorities are:

1. The levels of community organization;
2. Strength of village leadership;
3. Sensitivity of district officials to local vulnerabilities and coping strategies;
4. The skills of district planners in adjusting their plans and programmes to reflect local potentials and constraints; and
5. The capacity for project implementation.

The findings and survey analysis complement the Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPA), Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (IPRSP), and household surveys being implemented under the Prime Minister’s Decree No. 1. Emphasis is laid on the importance of community organization at the village level, the integration of the people’s coping strategies into planning for local development, addressing vulnerabilities in ongoing programmes and projects, and developing an appropriate strategy for training district authorities to address human security.

**Capacity Building Workshop on Human Security**

A capacity building workshop on human security and regional development was jointly undertaken by DGP/CPC and UNCRD in May 2001 to:

1. Present the report on the CPC-UNCRD human security survey undertaken in three provinces of Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, and Vientiane;
2. Formulate strategies to address human security by integrating the concerns identified in the report in ongoing programmes and projects in the three selected provinces of Luang Prabang, Savannakhet, and Vientiane, and propose training to increase capacity; and
3. Expose three additional provinces of Xayaboury, Champasack, and Vientiane Municipality to the overall procedure of conducting the human security survey.
The workshop was attended by staff of CPC, ministries of construction, transport, post and communication, education, agriculture and forestry, health, finance, industry and handicraft, labor, information and culture, human resources development, and foreign affairs, national mass organizations such as the National Front for Reconstruction, Lao Women’s Union, and Lao Youth Union, and provincial planning departments and line agencies.

The conclusions of the report were discussed and endorsed during the presentations made by each provincial team on their use of the findings to evolve mechanisms to address human security in ongoing programmes and propose a training agenda for strengthening district administration. Officials from the central ministries and the mass organizations offered several valuable suggestions to the provincial teams to improve their strategies and ensure their successful implementation.

Particular emphasis was laid on the role of community organization and mobilization, mobilization of women, provision of access to credit, and human resources development for alternative livelihoods. Natural resources management was also mentioned as an important element of the strategies. It was found that the strategies of each province were insufficiently gender sensitive, as there were no women in any of the teams. It was decided to document best practices under the four categories of economic, environmental, social, and cultural security to ensure that undue emphasis is not laid on economic concerns while neglecting the rest. This would result in the generation of training materials and strategies that are uniquely Lao in character and suitable for the local context. Guidelines on documentation of cases as best practices have been provided by UNCRD along with technical assistance on using the guidelines in the field.

Key elements of the human security assessments have been integrated into the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NPEP) for Lao PDR.

3. Using ICTs for Integrating Human Security in Local Development

Access to information is one of the most important elements of decentralized planning and includes two aspects: local government agencies having sufficient information about communities within their jurisdiction and their development needs; and communities, particularly the economically, socially, and politically marginalized being given sufficient information to participate in the planning and development processes.

With regard to human security, ICTs are being introduced to: (i) increase opportunities for poor communities through improved access to their entitlements, creation of new skills, and networking with government agencies, aid agencies, and NGOs; (ii) empower oppressed and exploited groups through increased voice and global support for people’s movements; and (iii) create opportunities to mobilize and empower communities through better communication between groups, entertainment, and increased public participation in political, administrative, and institutional activities.

An obvious solution to bridging the digital divide is increasing access to ICTs to the underprivileged communities and providing them with the requisite skills to operate and maintain the new technologies for their development. Emphasis is therefore laid
on increasing access and provision of technical training along with dispersion of ICTs. However, observations of attempts to bring ICTs to poor and underprivileged communities indicate the need to go beyond supply of the requisite technology and the skills to operate the same.

It is essential to address: (i) the development of relevant policy and regulatory frameworks to ensure that projects target the weakest groups; (ii) the use of information for knowledge generation, documentation, and exchange; (iii) the need to prepare for changes in the government-citizen interface and shifting power relations; (iv) the importance of offering locally demanded services and creating content that is relevant to all users, particularly women and youth;29 (v) the interface with the community; and (vi) the training of intermediaries at the local level with technical as well as participatory planning, entrepreneurship, and leadership skills.30

A training need assessment undertaken from study of five projects in India using ICTs for development (www.uncrd.or.jp/ict/), revealed the need to target the intermediaries between the technology supplier and the community to ensure that ICTs will be used for socioeconomic development targeting the weakest groups. These intermediaries include the local government, NGOs, and private agencies preparing the community for use of ICTs, and the entrepreneurs from within the community who also serve as the local information agents for the community. Training is essential for them in the following areas to equip them to perform their role in enhancing human security:

Local government. ICTs are used as tools for enhancing economic development through increase market information and inputs to increase local productivity, providing basic services such as health and education, and improving governance through computerization and electronic delivery of government related services and entitlements. Training on uses of ICTs for development must target policymakers, bureaucrats, and technical personnel.

For policymakers, training is required on issues related to envisioning the use of ICTs for development tasks, implementation of ICT projects, and the implications of ICT use on local development as well as local governance. It is observed that motivated policymakers have been able to introduce ICTs for development by moving to e-governance and the electronic delivery of government services, encouraging investment in high-tech industry, and applying ICTs for development of rural and remote areas.

Bureaucrats form the interface between the government and community and command influence and respect locally. With the introduction of ICTs, high-level bureaucrats have much to gain but those at the middle or lower levels face substantial changes in the work environment and in their relations with the community. Use of ICTs requires acquisition of new skills and changes in procedures. As information becomes easier to access and process, the influence of the bureaucrats reduces. In some cases, opportunities for corruption have reduced or taken another form. Therefore, there could be resistance to the use of ICTs. Training needs to be provided on technical matters related to uses of ICTs as well as on required changes in interactions with the community.31/
The third category of staff in the local government is the ICT technicians. While these persons are skilled in the uses of ICT such as programming, they tend to have limited experiences in interacting with the community, discerning their development and service needs, and transforming these into relevant mechanisms using ICTs. An example of this is the design of rural intranets for service delivery, information on agricultural extension services, and market-related information.

Creation of appropriate content can best be done with participation from the community and to do this effectively the technical personnel need, in addition to the appropriate technical skills, training in engaging the local community through participatory rural appraisals and workshops to address their needs, and design the rural intranet interface to maximize benefits to the local community and all the groups within. In the Warana Wired Village (www.uncrd.or.jp/ict/warana.html) and the Gyandoot Project (www.uncrd.or.jp/ict/gyandoot_project.html) in India, it is found that while the rural intranets have been designed keeping several needs of the local community in mind, they do not address the needs of women sufficiently and are inaccessible to the illiterate without an intermediary.

**NGOs and private agencies.** These agencies are at the forefront of providing ICTs for poverty alleviation through innovative projects. Their initiatives are often challenged by the inadequacy of the financial mechanism to support these projects and weak links with the local government for replication. Technical skills in designing the correct ICT intervention may also be low and the dependence on ICTs received from abroad as donations or grants may also become constraints in the future.

Training for these agencies needs to address appropriate technical skills as well as the creation of viable financial mechanisms to ensure sustainability of projects. The case that stands out is the Village Knowledge Centres -- the project is well conceived in terms of creating applications required by the community and the targeting women as primary agents for service delivery (www.uncrd.or.jp/ict/pondicherry.html). However, all the apparatus is received through donations and no fees have yet been charged for the services resulting in concern for the long-term financial viability of the initiative. NGOs and private agencies installing such projects carry the responsibility of training the receiving community. Therefore, they have to be trained on preparing the receiving community to accept the ICTs, use them effectively for their development, and ensure accessibility to all groups.

**Entrepreneurs and local information kiosk managers.** These are the most critical of all intermediaries as they form the direct interface with the community. They need training in technical skills in operating ICTs, entrepreneurship skills in running small businesses, and training in communication with the community to increase their use of ICTs, understand the communities’ needs and use the ICTs to reach them, and reaching the weakest members of the community. They also require training on leadership and community mobilization. These will become the key agents in the community with access to information. They could be challenged by other information networks that have long been established in the form of middlemen or village elders who have been traditional information sources. In the worst scenario, this could result in conflict or a new hierarchy of information brokers and in the best, a synergy of interests and wider provision of information services to the community.
Evolving a Training Strategy

Given the identification of tasks to be undertaken by the intermediaries bridging the digital divide and the concerns, any training strategy has to cover a long period of time and be composed of several elements. A combination of training workshops and on-the-job training would have to be established. While some training workshops could target specific groups of intermediaries, there must also be workshops that bring all three together. For example, training to the kiosk managers and intermediaries on technical training and entrepreneurship may be provided through a series of workshops and then to ensure a common understanding, there could be a joint workshop with the local government and NGOs active in the area to share information and interests and exchange skills on the services provided, content creation, and working with the community.

Much of the training can take place online provided sufficient information is available on the subject and opportunities are created for role-playing among the stakeholders. UNCRD has a strong commitment to enhancing the use of ICTs for development and playing a major role in assisting in provision of the appropriate training to all levels of intermediaries bridging the digital divide. Bringing project proponents together and pooling the experience to prepare the appropriate training materials can achieve this. UNCRD conducted an e-workshop during November-December 2002 (www.uncrd.or.jp/ict/eworkspace/) to initiate this process and the material generated is being compiled to create an online training course, which will be uploaded by July 2003 as part of the training activities in this area.

The Way Ahead

The above discussion has identified the background of the projects being implemented by UNCRD for human security and decentralized planning in terms of definitions and scope of the terms, and identification of the training needs. Key elements of ongoing training activities are identified as: conducting TNA for demand oriented customized training; joint participatory action research with local counterparts to identify needs while building capacity; recognizing the importance of information and the potentials of the use of ICTs for decentralized planning and human security; soliciting support from policymakers; engaging stakeholders from government and NGOs for collaborative approaches for human security and local development; South-South cooperation for transfer of knowledge and experiences on best practices; building teams and strengthening horizontal and vertical linkages at the provincial and district levels to ensure consistency and an inter-sectoral approach as well as receive support from higher levels; and linking training with planning processes and outputs.

While the approaches introduced in this paper have succeeded in creating sound training strategies for decentralized planning and human security, further efforts are required to ensure that the impacts of the training are realized in strengthening local governments and reducing vulnerability. Some of these are:

Wider Dissemination of Local Knowledge and Best Practices

It is found that in the LDCs, knowledge and successful experience in local development exists in select provinces and areas. Opportunities need to be created to document and transfer such experiences within the country. In the case of Lao PDR,
UNCRD has launched a parallel effort to identify and document best practices in local development that would be disseminated during the training courses.

**Creation of Local Teams for Planning and Development**
While this has been mentioned earlier, efforts need to be made to ensure that the teams created between members of local government, sector agencies, and NGOs continue to work as team even after their participation in training workshops. This is a long process that requires considerable skills in collaborative planning and management.

**On-the-job Training**
All of UNCRD’s training efforts are through workshops and courses are off-the-job. Participants are encouraged to transfer their experiences to other staff members in their offices. Commitment to this is being requested during preparation of action plans and reentry plans at the closure of the training courses/workshops. Links must be maintained with key agencies in the field to ensure that this is taking place and to study the impacts. On-the-job training is compromised by frequent transfers of staff or even by frequent training of staff who keep moving from one training programme to another, leaving them no time to transfer the skills gained. UNCRD must assist the key agencies in delineating means to ensure that transfer of skills takes place for larger benefit from the training.

**Implementing Action Plans**
During ongoing training activities, participants are found to prepare very good action plans for further dissemination of the training and incorporation of the ideas into ongoing development programmes and projects. While some effort is being made to follow-up on the action plans, this needs to be done in collaboration with other bilateral and multilateral agencies in the field and with greater commitment from the local counterparts in implementing agendas for decentralization and human security.

**Online Training and Distance Learning**
As the time and resources for attending training workshops reduce and large strides are being made to increase access to ICTs, efforts to conduct online training and provide distance learning need to be further enhanced. UNCRD made a beginning in this direction through an e-workshop on ICTs and Development in November-December 2002. These activities need to be expanded further for wider dissemination of knowledge and increased networking among development practitioners concerned with decentralized planning and human security.

**Notes**

2/ Ibid.


5 See www.uncdf.org.


16 “Social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” or the quantity and quality of associational life and the related social norms including participation in social organizations such as households, community organizations, specialized voluntary organizations, credit groups, and others based on clan, ethnicity, religion, or any common characteristics. See Deepa Narayan and Lant Pritchett, “Cents and Sociability: Household Income and Social Capital in Rural Tanzania,” Economic Development and Cultural Change 47 (July 1999): 871-98.


23. UNCRD-SPC, Training Needs, pp. 5-6.


25. This training programme adheres to the Plan of Implementation drawn up during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), Johannesburg, September 2002 as follows:
- Article 6 (c) by incorporating human security for the weakest groups into planning at the provincial and district levels and through strengthening of national and local programmes that reflect the priorities of the local communities; and
- Article 45 (c) by enhancing of the capacity of a least developed country to benefit from community-based development; and
- Articles 118, 119, and 119.bis by increasing institutional capacity in a transitional country by responding to the specific needs of the country for sustainable development.


