
DEVTECH phere

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SUSTAINING THE “NEW DEMOCRACIES”

Instituting free elections in a formerly non-democratic nation is an extraordinarily large step. However, it is not the only requirement for a true democracy. Leaders and reformers must ensure the full participation of citizens — at the local and national levels — to ensure the existence of full democracy.

The U.S. Agency for International Development and other international organizations have long recognized the crucial importance of citizen participation in successful political, economic, and social reform, but individuals within the institutions have not always maintained that focus. Without it, it is no wonder that many reform efforts fail to take root.

— *Jorge A. Sanguinety*
President and CEO
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ECONOMIC REFORM IN A DEMOCRATIC CONTEXT

From Russia and most of the former members of the socialist bloc to Dominican Republic, Brazil, Guatemala, and El Salvador, the same pattern is repeated when it comes to economic reform in a more or less democratic society: The main obstacle is the lack of consensus among the general public and among the decision makers in the different branches of government, especially between legislative and executive bodies when they are dominated by opposing political parties.

A pure technocrat (they do exist) may recommend that economic reform be designed and implemented à la Pinochet or Deng Xiaoping, under a dictatorial rule against which there is very little room for effective dissent. The fact is that when it comes to introducing profound economic and institutional reforms in a democracy, the typical approach has been to design the process as if everybody understands and agrees to the reforms or as if the reformers can impose the program against the will of their constituents.

Despite the many difficulties that reform movements have encountered over the last several years, the approach does not seem to change; the reformers seem incapable of learning from recent experience. Some of the questions that arise are:

- ♦ Why aren't reform plans explained to the public as they should be in a democracy?
- ♦ Why don't implementation plans start with activities designed to create consensus among the different branches of government?
- ♦ Why are reform programs generally explicit in definition of targets but devoid of detailed implementation plans and management concepts?

There is a hard-to-explain reluctance on the part of the technicians of reform to explain to the public in simple terms the nature, the costs, and the benefits of a reform program. They almost seem to believe that talking to the public in common words will diminish their professional stature. They give the impression that not using the baroque terminology of all technical language

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CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STATE AND SOCIETY

Over the past 15 years, countries in Latin America, Europe, and around the world have undergone a striking change. Economies that were once highly protected are being opened to outside competition, and countries once controlled by the military or small oligarchies are now holding free and open elections. Democracy as a governing principle is increasingly being recognized.

However, a democratic country is not defined solely by elections. Civil society — the harmonious interaction between the three sectors of government, business, and the nonprofit sector — requires the active participation of private citizens to ensure sustainable development. This is most evident at the municipi-

pal level, where local governments must become efficient, effective, transparent, responsible, and responsive means to fulfill the needs of the people.

Whereas the role of the state is clear in a new democratic climate, the relationship between the state — particularly at the municipal level — and the society often is not. There is an enormous political and social potential in citizens that needs to be harnessed into civic action and sound decision making. This in turn will increase the ability of local governments to represent the true interests of the people they serve. In short, the “culture” of democracy must be strengthened.

Citizens in a new democracy, as well as in more established ones, want to understand the changes that are tak-

ing place in the governance of their countries and want to play active roles in shaping the future of their governing systems and society as a whole. Citizen participation focuses on educating the public about their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities as citizens and motivating them to participate actively and to enforce mechanisms that will strengthen their local governments.

Citizens in a democracy must:

- ◆ Have full access to educational opportunities and to the means of maximizing the use of their capacities.
- ◆ Establish the right to preserve their cultural and ethnic heritage and to bar gender exclusion.
- ◆ Share political power and decision making at all levels of government.
- ◆ Gain equality of economic and employment opportunities.
- ◆ Demand transparent fiscal management.
- ◆ Receive the full protection of the law if they choose to dissent publicly from elected government officials.

Until these objectives are realized, citizens in democratic countries will not fully participate in the decision-making process that will give them an effective voice in implementing change. ◆

— Julieta Valls-Bretos

RELATED INTERNET SITES

These sites provide information related to democracy and governance worldwide.

ISSUES OF DEMOCRACY

<http://www.usis.usemb.se/journals/itdhr/ijdmnu.htm> — *electronic journal of the U.S. Information Agency*

CENTER FOR CIVIL SOCIETY INTERNATIONAL

<http://solar.rtd.utk.edu/~ccsi/ccsihome.html> — *international clearing-house for linking local organizations to civil society organizations in the Newly Independent States and Central and Eastern Europe*

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR DEMOCRACY

<http://www.ned.org> — *organization focused on promoting democracy worldwide, with links to democracy websites*

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT: PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

Lessons learned from American public-private partnerships have great potential for adaptation to meet the needs of nations with developing and transitional economies.

The following elements have been critical in improving workforce competitiveness in Egypt, where DevTech recently provided technical assistance on a USAID-sponsored project on workforce development.

Job Fairs: Employers conduct a one-day information sharing program for technical school students.

Job Clearinghouse: Business associations serve as job referral services, matching job openings and skills to job applicants.

Teachers in Business: Small teams of educators visit companies to observe the required skills for employment in a modern economy.

Summer Internships: Students (and possibly teachers) are employed by a company during school vacations.

Job Shadowing: Students observe a master worker in a private-sector company.

School-Based Enterprises: Student-run businesses enable students to learn occupational and business management skills.

Apprenticeships: Employers provide paid work experience while schools adapt curricula to accommodate vocational skills development.

Business Resource Directory: Business associations compile directories of company profiles.

Technology Volunteers: High-technology workers visit schools to explain their jobs and the skills required.

A detailed discussion of partnerships in support of workforce development will appear in the next issue of *Sphere*.

ECONOMIC REFORM

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would be tantamount to abandoning some sort of professional security blanket. Experience shows that explaining complex concepts to the general public in plain terms is highly appreciated by those who listen — and they are not few — and facilitates the support necessary to achieve consensus or the critical mass that will make reform processes successful.

An economic reform program generally requires a length of time that goes beyond the tenure of most government administrations. Besides, the executive branch might be the leading entity of the reform program, but it requires the simultaneous commitment of the legislative branch to dismantle the laws and institutions and to create the new ones that the reforms demand.

Economic reforms that include a radical transformation of government administrations and the legal system, yet must take place in a democratic society or at least in a society where political power is shared by different factions, ought to be formulated and put into action following a game plan that involves a great number of activities and participants. The coordination of all of the activities and participants is no small task, but it has been grossly underestimated by reform proponents and agents.

The reasons for this systematic lack of adequate implementation plans are several. Possibly the most important one is sheer lack of understanding of all of the institutional, legal, and political factors that in some cases facilitate and in others impede the reform process. Another is the improvisation that results from a usually artificial sense of urgency to start the reforms without further delay, as if the window of opportunity is very small.

These arguments on behalf of a good management approach to economic reform are frequently dismissed as irrelevant by the economic advisor

WHY ARE REFORM PROGRAMS GENERALLY DEVOID OF DETAILED IMPLEMENTATION PLANS AND MANAGEMENT CONCEPTS?

who comes from academia or from an international institution, both with generally little knowledge of the idiosyncracies of the countries where they happen to be offering their services. This is not to imply that they are completely incompetent. With few exceptions, we find them solid when it comes to general principles, but definitely weak when it comes to tailoring their advice to the specific circumstances.

Reformers must realize that successful implementation requires the consistent support of the principals, the cooperation of all branches of the government, and, perhaps most important, a management concept and an implementation plan that guarantee the practical execution of the changes proposed according to the theoretical objectives of the reform. ♦

— Jorge A. Sanguinety

TRAVELERS' TIPS: INFO PLEASE

The U.S. Department of State Bureau of Consular Services maintains a website that provides a wealth of information for international travelers, no matter their destination.

The site covers such issues as passport and visa requirements, travel advisories and warnings, and resources for Americans abroad, and includes a series of generally useful publications. It also provides information on specific topics such as in-

ternational adoption and parental child abduction. In addition, the Consular Affairs page links to related sites, including the U.S. Customs, the Centers for Disease Control, and U.S. embassies and consulates worldwide.

Visit the Consular Affairs home page at <http://travel.state.gov>. ♦

Correction: Tourists are permitted to take photographs in Slovenia except where noted on signs.

DEVTECH is always interested in new ideas and new people. If you would like to comment on this publication, or if you would like more information about the firm, career opportunities, consulting positions, or our summer internship program, please contact our Washington office.

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