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“Capacity Building in Urban Management and Planning:
the role of international education”¹
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Training approaches, curricula and target groups

The changes in the information technology, the changes in the demand for international education and the developments in the supply side of international education certainly require differentiation in the training approach, the curricula and the target groups. First, the range of target groups has increased. While earlier groups of students from Africa, Asia and Latin America and to a lesser extent the Arab Region were part of the clientele, in recent years groups from Central and Eastern Europe have changed the dynamics of education. Not only the nationalities have diversified but also the issues and complexities which they have to deal with at home diversified. It is no longer possible to provide meaningful education without further differentiating the target groups and providing specialized and tailor-made programs that address local specificity and diversity. Problem-solving education becomes the dominant approach in international education so as to bring real problems and contexts to classroom work via group dynamic sessions and practical exercises. This trend is automatically influencing curriculum development. There is an increasing awareness that programs must be more focussed, practical and problem-solving if international education is to make a difference or bring changes in attitude towards problems of real life. Thus, building knowledge with skills that can be applied in real world problems. It is also becoming evident that educational programs must take into account training needs of differentiated target groups according to their position and levels of responsibilities e.g. policy, program and project levels; national, regional, city and neighborhood levels; technical, management, policy making and decision making levels. The advocated ‘new’ training approach must be adequately tested and assessed with regard to their suitability to training needs and efficacy to bring changes where they are most needed.

The new mission of the international education institutions

¹ This paper is based on a position paper prepared by IHS for its 40th anniversary international seminar on capacity building, held in Rotterdam in December 1998. Harry Mengers, Forbes Davidson, Hans Teerlink and others contributed to this paper.

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The evolution of international education - from transplant to retailing knowledge through national education institutions - and the susceptible needs for indigenous knowledge and the emergence of international education institutions in developing countries should help rethinking the current mission of the international education institutions in more developed and industrialized countries. Currently, these institutions are confronted with the dilemma as to continue focussing their work on building knowledge and individual skills of professionals from developing and transitional countries or to focus on building up indigenous knowledge and capacities of national/local institutions. The scarcity of resources to continue educational programs at their headquarters and the implicit uncertainties about the commercial viability of new programs make the first option a difficult one. The second option simply requires the establishment of institutional collaboration and the availability of financial resources to support long-term collaboration and joint educational and research activities that aim at the strengthening of counterpart institutions in developing and transition countries. Programs of institutional collaboration become feasible when undertaken as part of development cooperation agreements between donor and recipient countries. Most of the long-term institutional development programs that IHS has implemented in several developing and transitional countries were inserted in the broad agenda of development cooperation of The Netherlands.

Building indigenous knowledge and local capacities in the urban sector

National and local institutions which support urban development and training in the urban sector need to adapt to the rapidly changing environments within their respective countries. For the last three decades IHS has constantly been involved in supporting the establishment and/or development of existing institutions, advising on re-orientations, re-organizations, new roles, responsibilities, and on processes to bring about changes in these institutions. This activity has built up a large body of experience in analyzing training needs and options for staff-training; in the setting up and implementation of training programs; and in organizing policy-relevant research programs. The IHS has been able to combine advisory services, training, and research in a flexible and successful approach to institutional development. One of its long-term counterpart has been the Human Settlements Management Institute-HSMI which is the in-house training institute for the Housing and Urban Development Corporation (HUDCO) of India. Supported by the Netherlands Government during the last 15 years, IHS has assisted this institute from the beginning, advising on the institutional role, developing curricula, programming the research, training the trainers and supporting the dissemination of the courses to other institutions elsewhere in the country. Follow-up surveys and training impact assessment has helped IHS and HSMI to carefully monitor the changes derived from capacity building and training programs. Similar programs are or have been carried out in China, Colombia, Ecuador, Indonesia, Poland, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Thailand, Belarus, Egypt, Ghana and Peru. In this paper, we will look at in more detail the experience in Egypt.

Developing and Strengthening Local Capacities in Egypt

During the last 30 years nearly 70 professionals from Egypt came to The Netherlands to attend short international courses on housing, planning and building addressed to

professionals from developing countries whose works is directly linked to urban policies, program and project implementation. Among these professionals many were staff from the Housing Building and Research Center-HBRC from the Ministry of Housing, Utilities and New Urban Communities attended these programs. In 1994, HBRC and IHS embarked into an institutional collaboration that resulted in the Training & Research in Housing and Urban Development Project-TRHUD. The project falls under the development cooperation agreement between the Governments of the Netherlands and Egypt and has an initial phase of 3 years. Its long-term goal is to develop institutional capacity in housing and urban development planning and management at the central and local levels of the government – and their partners from the private and community sectors – through implementation of training and human resources development activities. One of its targets is to strengthen the capacity of HBRC so that HBRC staff will be in a condition to offer tailor-made training to professionals from Egypt and the Arab region. This should lead to the establishment of a training center of excellence that is in fact the ultimate result of this project. TRHUD responds to the present decentralization policy of the Egyptian Government, which aims at strengthening the capacity of local governments to implement urban development programs.

The following are specific objectives of the project:

- Develop and conduct specialized training in the fields of housing and urban development and carry out specialized research within the general framework of the training;
- Enhance HBRC capacity in training and research for addressing urban management including local economic development, housing finance, shelter upgrading, and environmental issues in order to establish a self-reliant and sustainable training and research facility; and
- Establish a basis for regional training in the field of housing and urban development.

The reality and complexity of urban problems in Egypt

Most of the Egyptian cities are situated in a land strip along the river Nile where nearly the totality of 62.5 million inhabitants are concentrated. The remaining 95% comprises of desert land. High density urban environments is common; informal roof top constructions and informal land subdivision on agricultural land has been the usual way of human settlement. In some cases informal urbanization is accountable to nearly 90% of urban growth. Poverty, environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure and overcrowding are common features in the informal settlements. The problem is worsened by the weak capacity of local governments that do not have the sufficient means, resources, autonomy and adequate policy, planning and management instruments to cope with these problems adequately.

Informal housing and real estate owned by the poor in Egypt represents a surprisingly large proportion of assets. An estimate of Egyptian real state alone indicates that 92 percent of dwellings in the urban sector and 87 percent of the holdings in the rural sector are informal (De Soto, 1998). This roughly translates into over US \$ 2 billion in resources that are not articulated in the formal market via bank collateral and formal real

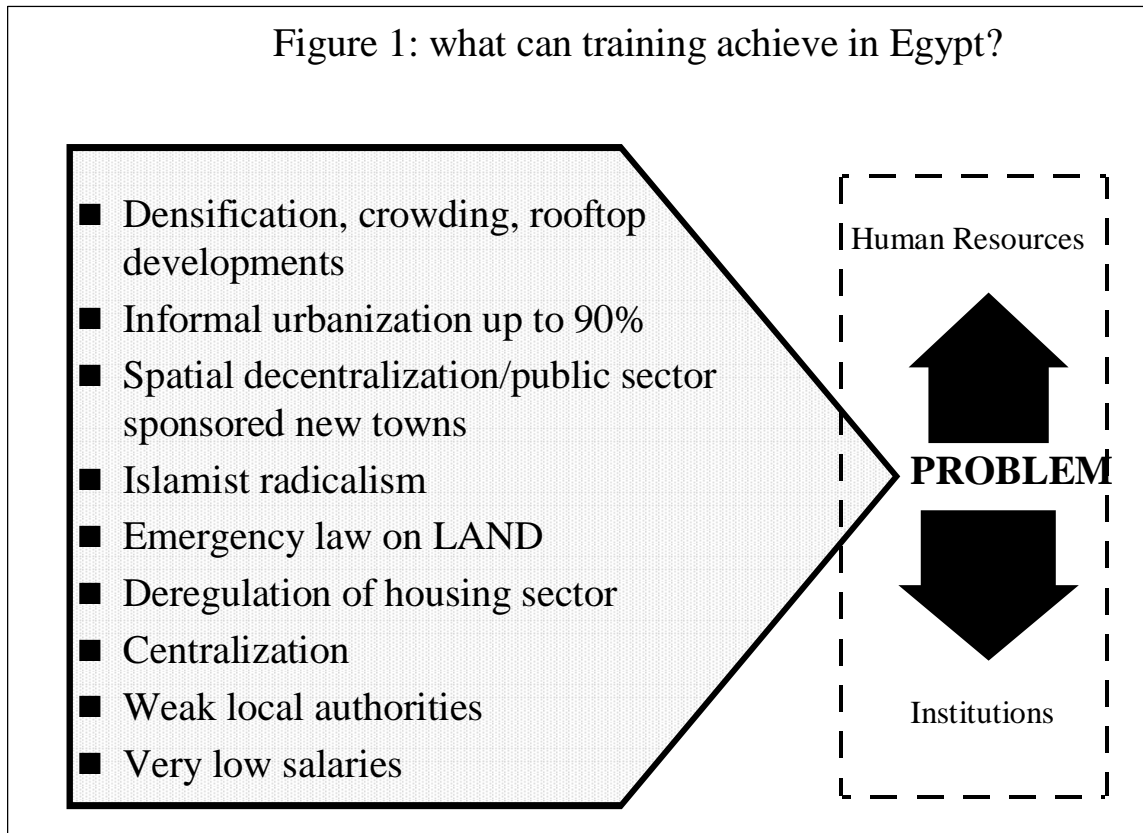
estate transactions. Thus, the informal housing sector, especially its social and economic effects on the poor, present serious problems of urban management in Egypt. The majority of urban centers have large number of informal settlements where essential services and basic infrastructure are not sufficiently available and where one finds serious environmental and health problems. Therefore, the Government of Egypt, being aware of the social, economic, legal and political problems related to informal settlements, is concerned with the planning and management of informal settlements. It has selected around 465 informal areas nation-wide, set priorities and allocated resources to undertake upgrading projects.

The Government of Egypt has also embarked on a policy of decentralization. At present, this policy is limited to delegation of responsibility for implementation of urban infrastructure and services to local government agencies. Simultaneously, the policy involves the provision of liberal conditions and incentives to the private sector for development of infrastructure at local levels. Participation of the private sector in infrastructure development is mainly limited to housing, resort and real estate developments which do not benefit low income groups. The participation of residents and target groups is a policy objective as well but CBO's and NGO's do face institutional constraints to get directly involved in planning and implementation of programs as elsewhere in the world. Furthermore, local governments are not sufficiently equipped with financial resources, institutional capacity and management and administrative authority, to implement programs of such complexities and that involve the participation of so many actors and interests. The requisite actions for devolving power and fiscal authority to local governments have not yet been taken by the central government. In the absence of sufficiently formed institutional structures of local government, capacity building efforts undertaken by TRHUD is limited to development of technical and professional skills of local government personnel.

Post graduation training as an approach to capacity building

A major rationale of TRHUD has been to assist in building professional and technical capacity at local level, especially with respect to informal housing sector. Building capacity of local government, in the present context, implies to work with not only the government institutions but also with non- government and private sector institutions. Therefore, TRHUD research and training is meant for the benefit of professional working in local institutions and who are directly engaged in urban services projects and work with local communities. Nevertheless, TRHUD is sufficiently aware that the urban and environmental problems of Egyptian cities have different causes and dimensions. One must look at the existing human resource in place and the institutional capacity to handle the magnitude and complexity of the problems (see Figure 1). If training and capacity building approaches are to have meaningful impacts and bring about changes it must link training programs with institutional restructuring and technical assistance. That implies that the training programs will have to be tailored to organizational needs and tackle both institutional and individual performance gaps. This is a long-term process and must involve different layers of local governments and have the total commitment and back-up from higher levels of decision making.

Figure 1: what can training achieve in Egypt?



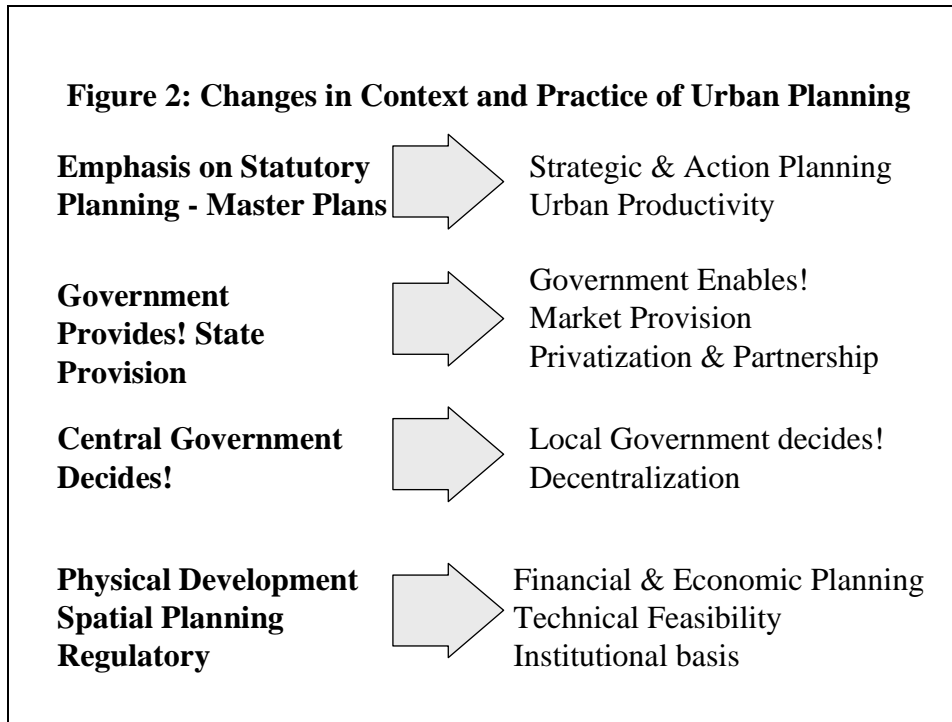
The training program currently being implemented by TRHUD is focused on individual skill development and is geared to the development of appropriate tools and techniques in program and project planning and management and greater awareness about the multi-sector and multi-agency character of urban development. Only at a later stage, it may be possible for TRHUD to address organizational performance and institutional responsiveness through the design of tailor-made programs that can respond more effectively to the needs of specific local organizations.

Furthermore, the recent experience with training activities carried out under the TRHUD project shows that training can make a difference in forging network, exchange of experience and foster knowledge building which are essential to build the required capacities to cope with the scope, scale and pace of increasing urban problems in Egypt. It is not easy to tackle urban poverty, institutional deficiencies, environmental deterioration and inadequate infrastructure services through training. That is exactly the challenge of this project. Until the date of this conference, nine different types of training programs have been designed and implemented with nearly 150 professionals already trained. The results accomplished by the series of orientation workshops and the national training programs implemented during the last 12 months provide us with concrete evidences that TRHUD is on the right track.

Training needs vis-à-vis the changes in the context & practice of planning in Egypt

The process of change that is undergoing the planning profession during the last 20 years is remarkable. The trend detected in several countries show that there is an increasing demand for more flexibility in urban planning and less rigid land use planning and zoning regulations. In fact, it is already recognized that conventional planning and its common outcome – master plans – do not provide answers to the rapidly changing environments of cities. Rather than statutory planning we are now working with strategic and action planning concepts and getting increasingly concerned with city-wide productivity and effectiveness of the built-up environment of cities. It is also remarkable to notice the withdrawal of governments from its traditional role as provider towards a more strategic and enabling role, allowing other actors, the market and private sector agents to play a role in urban development processes (see Figure 2). This implies that rather than purely physical planning, more and more professionals must work with financial and economic variables and develop suitable physical, institutional, financial and economic scenario for their cities. Consequently, there is a demand for more generalist planners capable to work within multidisciplinary teams and attuned to the general trend of participatory planning. But what is the situation in Egypt?

Preliminary training needs assessment undertaken by TRHUD revealed that Egyptian cities still rely on the plans and technical assistance provided by the General Organization of Physical Planning-GOPP via their regional centers or locally contracted consultants. The approach is excessively product oriented and with too much emphasis given to physical planning rather than process oriented through which arrangements for making the plan and secure its proper implementation could be forged among the different actors. A vision of urban management is not in place. It is also noticeable that the lack of a culture of participation hinders the broadening of the institutional basis of the planning process and the involvement of lay residents and their grassroots organizations in the solution of “technical” problems. Not mentioning the private sector. It becomes evident that the initiatives of the government are still guided by sectoral views in detriment of an integrated approach. Specially when one looks at the upgrading initiatives.



Local governments are still lacking the necessary autonomy to deal effectively with its problems and resources. But one must bear in mind that there is a noticeable lack of well trained staff to undertake the basic urban management tasks on expects from a local government authority. Finally, there is rooted culture of hierarchy and top-down decision making that severely inhibits technical staff and civil servants from lower layers of local governments to initiate actions in a proactive manner.

So, the changes identified elsewhere are gradually being introduced in Egypt but with a handicap that the institutions and the legal and institutional frameworks are not yet prepared for such a change. Enabling the market and allowing greater roles for stakeholders from the private and community sectors imply the enabling of local governments. That means providing it with the basic tools, instruments and resources to act and undertake preventive actions. The training of its personnel and the introduction of innovative approaches in urban management, action planning and strategic planning will not be sufficient but will help to trigger a process of strengthening local governments. The result – more equitable, efficient and functioning cities – is still far of reach but TRHUD is at the beginning of a long road that requires the participation of all capacity building, training and educational institutions in the country.