

**USAID/Center for Human Capacity Development (HCD)  
International Conference**

***Human Capacity Development for the 21st Century***  
**August 16-18, 1999**

**Planning and program assistance provided by  
The Academy for Educational Development**

**SUMMARY REPORT**

**BACKGROUND**

The Center for Human Capacity Development (HCD), of USAID's Global Bureau, initiated the planning and commencement of an international conference for human capacity development (HCD) specialists. The purpose of the conference was to develop new HCD concepts, tools, and plans to both guide and respond to the dramatic education, training and information technology changes that will take place in the coming decades.

The HCD Center collaborated with the International Education and Training Coalition (IETC) to plan and organize the conference. The collaboration was an extension of ongoing IETC private sector assistance to the HCD Center in accomplishing its mission and objectives. The HCD Director and staff played leadership and coordinating roles throughout the conference process. In addition to a contract awarded by USAID to the Academy for Educational Development (AED) for organizational and logistical support, members of the IETC provided significant resources for the planning of the conference and the delivery of the sessions. Most significant of these resources were extensive senior staff time and the registration fees that were applied to conference costs. The three-day Conference was held August 16-18, 1999 at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Natcher Conference Center (please see Attachment 1 for program). The themes for the conference are listed below. More than 300 participants attended (please see Attachment 2).

Conference Themes

- Policy Governance: State, Private and Community Partnerships
- New Participatory Systems: Teaching and Learning
- Education and Training for Life and Work Skills
- Performance Improvement: Training and Evaluation in Development Organizations
- HCD in Crisis and Transition Societies
- Financing for Change
- Technology, Communication and Learning

## ASSUMPTIONS AND ACTIONS

**Assumptions about the Conference.** The need for the Conference, and the selection of its themes and its format, were based on the following assumptions:

- Bold innovations are needed to meet the HCD challenges of the 21st century.
- The capacity for guiding successful education and training reform exists in our collective knowledge and skills.
- Specific HCD policies, programs and tools have been shown to be effective in several nations.
- Educational change processes are embedded in cultural contexts and must be culturally appropriate.
- Each country has to make difficult choices to maximize its HCD investments.
- To ensure sustainability and empowerment, individuals, families, and communities must participate actively in making choices about HCD investments.
- As a community of HCD professionals, our ability to contribute will be strengthened through collaboration and sharing of our experiences.

**Conference Planning and Delivery: Assumptions and Actions.** The assumptions listed below provided the basis for planning and organizing the Conference, and for engaging HCD staff and volunteer senior HCD professionals from a number of cooperating agencies and development contractors. Nearly all of the assumptions were confirmed by the productivity of the planning process and the high quality of the Conference. Comments about the validity of these assumptions and subsequent actions follow each assumption statement.

1. *The HCD professional community is cognizant of learning processes and can be expected to develop activities that maximize participation and learning outcomes.* The pedagogy of adult learning was an explicit part of many of the planning discussions. The desire to not deliver a “conference-as-usual,” but to model what we know about HCD principles and methods, was evident from the start. The support from HCD for this approach, to create a learning environment, was key to the success of the Conference sessions and to maintaining the commitment of the HCD staff and volunteer professionals who otherwise would have found less time for a more perfunctory approach.
2. *The common values and mission shared by the HCD Center and the IETC, and their representatives and colleagues, would provide the basis for creating effective planning teams and ensure fair representation of the many stakeholders’ interests.* This assumption is fundamental to successful organizational development, especially when it involves multiple stakeholders who often are in client-contractor relationships or are contractors in competition for limited client resources. The HCD and IETC leaders were attentive and proactive in monitoring any actual or perceived imbalances

in position or agenda that could favor one participating group over another. The monitoring of a balanced agenda and program also was reflected by their representatives on the Steering Committee, who were sensitive at the micro planning level to any shifts in balance.

As an example, “training” was underrepresented as a theme in the early designs of the Conference and basic education issues were becoming more predominant. This reflected an under representation of training organizations on the planning committee. The issue was raised by individuals with the Steering Committee Chair and at the IETC level. It was quickly corrected with representatives of two major training organizations playing key roles in planning, theme development and session preparation. The result was a richer process for all themes and the emergence of two major themes related to training and organizational development.

3. *Process and technical “facilitation”, rather than “direction”, was critical to achieving a high quality product, given the seniority of those participating. A facilitative style also was critical to ensuring the continued participation of the volunteer professionals, given the opportunity cost of their time.* “Process and technical facilitation” best describes the role played by the coordinators for the conference. Three characteristics of the conference activity made “facilitation” a clear choice over “direction” as a process management style: (a) there were multiple stakeholders represented in planning and conducting the conference; (b) the organizers and participants were senior, experienced professionals; and (c) there was a lack of any binding authority over the volunteer professionals to enforce any directives.

While a more directive approach could provide more certainty over timelines and details, it was likely to have produced a smaller and less creative result. The facilitative approach required greater attention to monitoring progress, regular references to the common goal of, and benefits to, the larger professional community, and general technical monitoring of work done by others in order to meet the requirements and expectations within the general timelines established. But the result was a robust agenda with a large number and a high percentage of quality and participatory sessions.

4. *A process of setting common agendas, then supporting work done by smaller units and individuals, within (a) the HCD and the IETC, (b) the Conference Steering Committee, and (c) the individual theme teams, would increase the participation in, and quality of the Conference and its sessions.* Two general approaches to the task of setting themes and sessions are (a) a deductive workshop-type approach (set the objectives and outcomes, then specify the sessions) or (b) an inductive professional conference-type approach (identify or invite presenters, they identify their own presentations, then describe the themes represented by the presentations). Given the

overriding concern that the conference be fresh in its format and information, the planning process was alternately deductive and inductive in its formulation.

The Conference purpose focused on generating forward-looking HCD thinking and getting this and other conceptual and analytic information into the hands of HCD professionals. The initial focus, then, was on identifying (a) the audience, (b) the likely issues they will face in the next 10 years, (c) what activities could facilitate their learning and using the information (concepts, tools, etc.), and (d) what information should be generated and shared. The planning committee spent considerable time throughout the planning process iterating between purpose and sessions, then again on themes and sessions. When the themes were finally agreed to reflect the HCD dimensions most relevant to the next ten years' issues, then the sessions were delegated to the themes' leaders.

5. *The use of theme teams would allow for (a) a common theme vision to be set, (b) broader and more diversified presentations and presenters, and (c) a summary or concluding statement for that theme.* Each of the seven themes was represented by a team of three theme leaders: one from HCD staff, one from the Steering Committee with expertise in the theme, and one from the larger professional community with acknowledged expertise. The theme leaders then were responsible for developing a theme paper. The theme papers, taken together, provided the content overview of the conference. The theme papers, individually, served as reference for the theme session organizers and presenters, so that the theme sessions would hang together as an overall learning track. The theme papers were posted on the conference web site for public access.

The theme sessions were organized so that, over the three days, each theme represented a learning activity. However, each session could stand alone so that participants could move across themes according to particular interests. The session handouts and presentations were collected and delivered to HCD following the conference. The post-Conference summary theme paper has been written for only one theme. Based on informal and anecdotal feedback, it is concluded that the volunteer theme leaders, having dedicated so much of their time in the planning and delivery of the conference, have necessarily shifted their attention to other professional demands, many of which were demands they had put off prior to or during the conference.

6. *A conference web-site would be an important planning tool, provide a virtual conference for HCD professional not able to attend the conference, and a forum for post-conference networking and dialogue.* The conference web site was conceived early in the planning process, with support from a contractor experienced with HCD and information technologies. The web site was developed as a tool for (a) planning the conference, (b) conducting a parallel, virtual conference to reach a wider

audience, (c) posting Conference proceedings, and (d) supporting dialogue and debate following the conference.

a. The technical support for the web site was excellent, even exceptional given that it was in-kind support to the conference. The web site served generally well as a planning tool, for posting objectives, theme papers, and other references. The work rooms, chat rooms and threaded discussion areas set up for the site were not used. We noted that they were not used by the Steering Committee (busy people resisting unfamiliar technology interaction) so they were not actively promoted for external use.

b. Conducting a parallel, virtual conference to reach a wider audience was not pursued because the actual conference, the process of organizing a more participatory conference, was too demanding on the organizers to dedicate sufficient time to support a virtual conference. It is concluded that the normal expectations of conference time and resources will support an actual or a virtual conference, but not both simultaneously with the same resources.

c. Using the conference for posting Conference proceedings has not realized its potential. This is due primarily for two reasons. First, the volunteer basis of much or most of the technical support for the conference meant that writing and posting pieces on the web was dependent on the theme writers' dedication to the task. Their dedication during the planning and conduct of the conference was unquestionably high. After the conference, as noted above, most have diverted their attention to other pressing and competing professional and contractual demands.

Second, many session presentations came in the form of printed papers and overheads. An additional allocation of time and resources would be required to make them suitable for web posting. The AED organizers have made several contacts to the theme leaders for their concluding papers and to the keynote speakers for the presentations, without success. As noted above, there is no binding authority over them and these persons' contributions prior to and during the conference already have exceeded expectations. Follow-up with these persons from HCD may be necessary, at this stage, if those pieces are to be included in the post-conference web site.

d. Use of the web site for dialogue and debate following the conference is not as expected. It does serve as a reference for HCD professionals, given the contents posted to date and the links that have been set-up. As with the virtual conference, generating and supporting dialogue and debate on the site will require time and resources dedicated to that purpose.

## **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

The two factors that contributed most to the success of the conference are: (1) the leadership of the HCD Center and IETC in setting a climate of importance, support, and balance for the planning and delivery of the conference; and (2) the professional dedication of the Steering Committee, the theme teams, and the session presenters that resulted in achieving the desired results, including innovativeness of process and the generation and dissemination of high quality technical and program information. Future conferences will be befitted if these two factors are acknowledged and attended to in the organization and planning processes.