

Interdisciplinary Education for Sustainable Development: The Harvard Global Development Practice (GDP) Model

Hadiza Hamma, JD, Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Law, Abuja University
Thomas Gloria, PhD, Director Sustainability and Global Development Practice Programs, Harvard University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Division of Continuing Education*
Will O'Brien, JD, Field Study Capstone Advisor, Harvard University, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Division of Continuing Education

*Author contact: tgloria@fas.harvard.edu

Abstract

Achieving global sustainability necessitates the adoption of well-organized educational methods. Indeed, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reiterate the need and provide a framework for educational programs that equip students with capabilities for fostering sustainable development. Adopting interdisciplinary educational models in institutions of higher learning is therefore key to ensuring that teaching and learning are tailored in line with the goals of global sustainability. This is underscored by the fact that not only does sustainable development (SD) intersect several disciplines, but also because it requires acquisition of relevant knowledge and skills that could be applied to provide solutions to the numerous challenges related to our shared humanity and environment. Hence, this study sets out to analyze the interdisciplinary educational model of the Master of Global Development Practice (GDP) program at Harvard University Division of Continuing Education (DCE) with a view to demonstrating how it serves as an effective means of developing and enabling leaders in sustainability. It examines the relationship between interdisciplinary education and sustainable development and how the former is crucial to attaining the latter.

In this regard, the study traces the origin and discusses the nature of the Harvard University GDP program, including the key role of the Global Association of Master's in Development Practice. It analyzes the interdisciplinary nature of the Harvard GDP program course offerings and how these prepare students to better tackle the challenges of communities in developing countries as well as in developed countries. The study establishes that the Harvard GDP program effectively facilitates the acquisition of knowledge and practical skills, as well as provides a means of implementing sustainable development at a global level. This is achieved through an educational structure that creates sustainability leaders and empowers them to function as change agents with requisite capabilities to formulate practical solutions to real-life problems. The field training component, carried out through a capstone course, achieves deep experiential learning and its resulting community development project plans are powerful tools utilized in this regard. To demonstrate this, the study analyzes a few development plans that graduates of the program have prepared, including their impacts on community sustainability. Therefore, the study recommends that institutions of higher learning consider adoption of the Harvard GDP model. This is particularly important for institutions in developing countries where the challenges of sustainable development such as environmental degradation, extreme poverty, gender inequality, human rights abuses, corporate unsustainability and poor access to clean water and sanitation are widespread.

o Introduction

This paper examines Harvard University's Master of Global Development Practice program as a model for interdisciplinary SD education. The value of interdisciplinary education has long been recognized;¹ so also, the need to utilize education for achieving SD.² The intricate nature of issues surrounding SD necessitate an interdisciplinary educational model that makes it possible to educate students who will be able to engage with professionals in various fields and solve problems competently. There is no better time than now – the era of SDGs – to develop efficient educational systems that will facilitate achieving global sustainability by 2030 and beyond.

The Harvard GDP program is part of the network of higher institutions that make up the Global Association's Master's of Development Practice.³ The program seeks to fulfill the aspirations of the United Nations Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) drive.⁴ Its curriculum, grounded on the Report of the International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development Practice,⁵ delivers an understanding and application of cross-cutting knowledge and skills to issues relating to sustainability. This is achieved through delivering a robust set of courses that cumulate in a field training component where what has been learnt is applied to finding lasting solutions to real-life sustainability problems. This paper therefore analyzes the program and how it has become a realistic pathway to fostering sustainable development.

o Conceptual Analysis: Sustainable Development and Interdisciplinary Education

➤ Sustainable Development:

Sustainable development as a concept is often traced to the 1987 report of the World Commission on environment and development (WCED).⁶ The report defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Although this report is the most widely cited as a point of reference, the evolution of sustainable development predates it and has indeed outlived it. For example, it has long been appreciated that there was need for humans to take cognizance of the scarcity of the

¹ P. Eagan, T. Cook, and E. Joeres, “Teaching the importance of culture and interdisciplinary education for sustainable development.” *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education* 3 no 1, (2002): 48–66, <https://doi.org/10.1108/14676370210414173>.

² E. Boeren, “Understanding Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on “quality education” from micro, meso and macro perspectives” *International Review of Education* 65 no. 2 (2019): 277–294, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-019-09772-7>

³ “Partner MDP Institutions”, Global Association Master's in Development Practice, accessed July 23, 2020, <http://mdpglobal.org/>.

⁴ “Education for Sustainable Development,” United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), accessed June 10, 2020, <https://en.unesco.org/themes/education-sustainable-development>

⁵ International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development Practice, *Report from the International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development Practice* (2008).

⁶ World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our common future*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press 1987). See also D. Mebratu *Sustainability and Sustainable Development: Historic and Conceptual Review*, (New York, Elsevier Science Inc., 1998), 501.

earth's resources they exploited.⁷ The most important message of the report is that economic development must be pursued with due regard to environmental protection and social justice.⁸ These three aspects are recognized as the three pillars of sustainable development.⁹ The Convention for Cooperation in the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Northeast Pacific¹⁰ defines sustainable development as:

...the process of progressive change in the quality of life of human beings, which places them as the centre and primary subjects of development, by means of economic growth with social equity and transformation of production methods and consumption patterns, sustained by the ecological balance and life support systems of the region. This process implies respect for regional, national and local ethnic and cultural diversity, and full public participation, peaceful coexistence in harmony with nature, without prejudice to and ensuring the quality of life of future generations.

Starting with the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, the international community has, since after the Brundtland Report, launched initiatives aimed at fostering global cooperation to promote sustainable development. The United Nations Agenda 2030 contains the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)- a set of 17 aspirations and their targets, adopted in 2015, to serve as a plan of action for achieving global economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability.¹¹ The SDGs cover various aspects of sustainability from eradication of poverty, ensuring food security, promoting quality health care and education, ensuring access to clean water and energy, gender empowerment, to sustainable infrastructure, etc.

➤ **Interdisciplinary Education:**

The Cambridge English dictionary defines the word “interdisciplinary” as something “involving two or more different subjects or areas of knowledge”¹² UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education defines interdisciplinary education as:

An approach to curriculum integration that generates an understanding of themes and ideas that cut across disciplines and of the connections between different disciplines and their relationship to the real world. It normally emphasizes process and meaning rather than product and content by combining contents, theories, methodologies and perspectives from two or more disciplines.¹³

⁷ M.C. Cordonier Segger, Ashfaq Khalfan and Salim Nakjavani, *Weaving the Rules for Our Common Future: Principles, Practices and Prospects for International Sustainable Development Law*, (Canada, Center for International Sustainable Development Law, 2002), 14.

⁸ Brundtland, G. H. *Sir Peter Scott Lecture*, 8th Oct 1986. Quoted in Zakia Afrin, “Foreign Direct Investments and Sustainable Development in the Least-Developed Countries”, *Annual Survey of International and Comparative Law*, 10, (2004): 215

⁹ “Promoting sustainable development”, United Nations Economic and Social Council, accessed July 23, 2020, <https://www.un.org/ecosoc/en/content/promoting-sustainable-development>.

¹⁰ United Nations Environment Programme. *Convention for the Cooperation in the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Northeast Pacific (Antigua Convention)*, (2002, February), https://papersmart.unon.org/resolution/uploads/2002-antigua_convention.pdf.

¹¹ United Nations, *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1).

¹² “Interdisciplinary”, Cambridge Dictionary, accessed June 10, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/interdisciplinary>

¹³ “Interdisciplinary Education,” International Bureau of Education, accessed June 10, 2020, <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology/i/interdisciplinary-approach>

Interdisciplinary education touches different aspects of knowledge by exposing students to various learning experiences. This way, it promotes complete training that is not only positively diverse but also holistic.

o **Integration of Sustainable Development Goals into Education and Community Service**

The SDGs represent the current blueprint for achieving global sustainability. An effective way to achieve them is through education for sustainable development (ESD). Goal 4 of the SDGs recognizes the value of quality education when it called for acquisition of knowledge and skills required to foster sustainable development including “through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles”.¹⁴ The United Nations had, even before the emergence of the SDGs always reiterated the significance of education for sustainable development. For example, Agenda 21 identifies the role of education for achieving sustainable development by creating competence in individuals who will then be able to tackle problems related to environment and development.¹⁵ This process involves: (1) reorientation of education towards sustainable development, (2) improving public awareness and (3) providing training support.¹⁶ As part of its initiatives to strengthen ESD, the United Nations adopted The Decade of action for Education in Sustainable Development (DESD) 2005-2014.¹⁷ UNESCO, which became the principal UN agency responsible for the DESD, identified its main aim as the incorporation of sustainability principles into all areas of knowledge acquisition and produced an international implementation scheme to provide guidance.¹⁸

By integrating the SDGs into educational systems, ESD provides a solid platform for achieving sustainable development because it is a “dynamic concept that encompasses a new vision of education that seeks to empower people of all ages to assume responsibility for creating a sustainable future.”¹⁹ It is about learning for life that allows students to make choices based on proper understanding of the environmental, economic, social and cultural needs of society. ESD helps to produce global citizens who engage in finding and implementing lasting solutions to challenges of global sustainability. The core features of successful ESD have been highlighted as follows:²⁰

- It should be part and parcel of the program of study and be taught from an interdisciplinary perspective.
- It should be based upon the tenets of sustainable development
- It should encourage analytical reasoning and adoption of solution-based measures
- It should make use of different teaching formats
- Give students a chance to take part in decision-making
- Concentrate on finding solutions to both local and global issues
- Should address issues in the short, medium and long terms.

Different methods have been adopted by institutions of higher learning to inculcate sustainability into educational systems. High impact educational practices (HIEP) are

¹⁴ Agenda 2030, Goal 4, target 4.7

¹⁵ Chapter 36 of Agenda 21

¹⁶ *Ibid*

¹⁷ In December 2002, by General Assembly Resolution 57/254.

¹⁸ UNESCO, “Draft international implementation scheme for the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development”, 2005, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000139023>

¹⁹ UNESCO quoted in Bishnu B. Bhandari and Osamu Abe, “Education for Sustainable Education: An Emerging Paradigm”, Paper presented at the Seminar on Education for Sustainable Development in Nepal, Kathmandu, 27-28 August 2003.

²⁰ Elaine Nevin, “Education for Sustainable Development”, *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, 6, (Spring, 2008): 49-62.

<https://www.developmenteducationreview.com/sites/default/files/article-pdfs/nevin%20focus%204.pdf>

fast becoming the preferred means of integrating sustainable development into learning.²¹ It involves the use of active training methods that develop the academic and skills capabilities of learners, thereby fostering deep learning.²² The use of community development projects is one way that HIEP have been used as a means of integrating the SDGs into education and community development. Utilizing this approach in higher education is certain to result in successful outcomes towards achieving the SDGs by 2030 and beyond. This is what the Harvard GDP aims to accomplish.

- o **Evolution of Master's in Development Practice (MDP) Program and the Role of the Global Association**

The MDP program came into existence following the work of the International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development Practice.²³ The Commission was convened by the Earth Institute in 2007 to look into initiatives and make recommendations for an interdisciplinary sustainable development practice education. In its final report,²⁴ the Commission asserted that there were no other ways to address the problems facing sustainable development than by pulling together the expertise obtainable from diverse knowledge areas.²⁵ This expertise was to be developed by training “generalist practitioners”, defined as those “who understands the complex interactions among fields and is able to coordinate and implement effectively among the insights offered by subject-specific specialists.”²⁶ The Commission recommended that a Global Network of Master's in Development Practice be established and run in higher institutions in order to provide training of relevant knowledge and skills necessary for a generalist development practitioner. This led to the establishment of the Global Association of Master's in Development Practice Secretariat at the Earth Institute, Columbia University, to supervise all MDP programs and activities around the world. There are currently 37 partner institutions of the Global Association offering the MDP program.²⁷

The MDP program is divided into three main segments namely: the core curriculum, the global classroom and the field training. The core curriculum provides knowledge and skills in four major areas of health sciences, natural sciences, social sciences and management. The global classroom, as the name implies, brings together students from all over the world to meet and learn from experts from various disciplines in a live-web-based setting. The classroom is open to students taking the course titled Foundations of Sustainable Development at the Global Association's partner institutions. Speakers are usually professionals in a variety of fields such as economics, agriculture, health, policy, education, etc. The field training component of the program gives student an opportunity to gain practical experience by applying the knowledge gained in the classroom to real life situations related to sustainable development.

- o **The Harvard Global Development Practice (GDP) Program**

²¹ Will O'Brien and Joseph Sarkis, “The Potential of Community-Based Sustainability Projects for Deep Learning Initiatives,” *Journal of Cleaner Production* (2013), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2013.07.001>

²² O'Brien and Sarkis *Ibid*.

²³ International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development Practice, *Report from the International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development Practice* (2008).

²⁴ *Ibid*

²⁵ *Ibid*

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ “Partner MDP Institutions”, Global Association Master's in Development Practice, accessed July 23, 2020, <http://mdpglobal.org/>

Harvard University became a partner institution of the Global Association of MDP in 2018 and simultaneously launched the program the same year.²⁸ The Division of Continuing Education (DCE) of Harvard's Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS) administers the program. The courses for the program are offered through the Harvard Extension School (HES) and the Harvard Summer School (HSS). Initially, students who completed the program were conferred with the degree of Master of Liberal Arts in Development Practice (ALM DP).²⁹ This has now changed to Master of Liberal Arts in Global Development Practice (ALM GDP). The amendment to the field of study name became necessary to bring out the international world view that the degree represents.

The Harvard GDP is founded upon three existing programs of the DCE namely Sustainability, Management and Information Management Systems. This is an indication of the interdisciplinary nature of the GDP. The overall objective of the program is to train students by imparting specialized knowledge and hands-on skills needed to properly examine and proffer solutions to the multi-faceted challenges that sustainable development encounters.³⁰ These include climate change, poverty, gender issues, access to clean water, sanitation, health care and education, etc. The program utilizes a "learner-centered approach" to prepare students to be able to analyze challenges, interact with stakeholders, decide on appropriate steps and come up with a plan of action to address them.³¹ Graduates of the Harvard GDP program benefit from the key learning outcomes that enable them to:³²

- Develop a holistic understanding of policy instruments, social complexities, human health risks, ecological system dynamics, technological innovations, and financial models to advance sustainable development.
- Identify and challenge assumptions, seeking alternatives, determining solutions and engaging the client organization(s) to accept recommendations for implementation.
- Engage with the global network of development professionals.
- Employ state of the art project management techniques.
- Leverage local knowledge through global practice.

It is for these reasons that the program is designed for and useful to people from a wide range of professional backgrounds including but not limited to generalist and specialist development practitioners, policy-makers, private sector professionals and educators.

Students are required to take and pass 12 courses together with a capstone project at the end. The part-time nature of the program allows for flexibility and gives convenient and affordable options to students, who are usually mid-career practitioners and professionals in various fields, the opportunity to effectively manage their career, financial and family life without disruptions. Students have up to five years to complete the program. For international students, the nature of the course formats allows them

²⁸ Cindy H. Zhang, "Harvard Extension School Adds New Fields of Study, Joint Degree Program", *The Harvard Crimson*, September 7, 2018, <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2018/9/7/extension-school-adds-new-fields-degree-programs/>

²⁹ "Development Practice (DP) Degree Program," Harvard Extension School, Harvard Division of Continuing Education (HDCE), accessed July 20, 2020, <https://wayback.archive-it.org/3671/20190308074923/https://www.extension.harvard.edu/academics/graduate-degrees/development-practice-degree>

³⁰ Thomas P. Gloria, *Proposal for Membership into the Global Network of Master's in Development Practice Programs*, Harvard University, Division of Continuing Education, (2018)

³¹ *Ibid*

³² *Ibid*

to participate without undue stress occasioned by distance from campus and time differences.

- **Pre-Admission, Admission and Course Requirements**

Before admission, prospective students are required to complete 2 mandatory courses to demonstrate their ability and willingness to succeed at Harvard.³³ Enrolment for both courses does not require registration and both are offered online,³⁴ thereby making it accessible to interested candidates around the world. The two courses are:

- ENVR E-101: Introduction to Sustainability and Environmental Management
- DEVP E-102: Proseminar: Critical Analysis of Global Development Systems

Although the two courses need not be taken in the same term or in any preferred order, it is mandatory that the students complete them with grades of B or higher.³⁵ Thereafter, students apply for admission during one of the three admission cycles of the HES and complete the remaining 10 courses that include a capstone.³⁶ A major requirement for admission in the program is evidence of completion of undergraduate degree.³⁷

Another avenue for prospective candidates to gain admission into the GDP program is the MITx MicroMasters program³⁸ pathway. Through this medium, the HES credits candidates who have earned the credential in Data, Economics, and Development Policy, from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), with four courses out of the 12 required for the GDP, leaving them to complete only 8 courses.³⁹

The Harvard GDP is based on a curriculum that covers four main disciplines namely health sciences, natural sciences, social sciences and management sciences. These “four pillars” of the GDP are embedded in the various course offerings and delivered in such a way as to enable students to be conversant with them professionally and to relate with experts in those areas. Courses equip students with practical skills such as program/project management, oral/written communications, research skills, participatory techniques, collaboration/partnering; and, cross-cultural, technological, entrepreneurial, and human resource skills.⁴⁰ Upon admission into the program, students complete 10 more courses from a course list of about 170 in number.⁴¹ Those who followed the MITx MicroMasters program pathway complete 8 courses.

Table 1: Summary of courses by each of the four pillars

³³ “Degree Requirements” Harvard Extension School, Harvard Division of Continuing Education (HDCE), accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.extension.harvard.edu/academics/graduate-degrees/global-development-practice-degree/degree-requirements>.

³⁴ *Ibid*

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ *Ibid*

³⁷ *Ibid*

³⁸ “MicroMasters Program in Data, Economics, and Development Policy,” MIT, accessed July 21, 2020, <https://micromasters.mit.edu/dedp/>

³⁹ “MITx MicroMasters® Program Pathway to the Global Development Practice Degree”, Harvard Extension School, Harvard Division of Continuing Education (HDCE), accessed July 21, 2020, <https://www.extension.harvard.edu/academics/graduate-degrees/development-practice-degree/mitx-micromasters-program-pathway>

⁴⁰ Thomas P. Gloria, *Proposal for Membership into the Global Network of Master's in Development Practice Programs*, Harvard University, Division of Continuing Education, (2018): 1.

⁴¹ “Global Development Practice Course Catalogue” Harvard Extension School, Harvard Division of Continuing Education (HDCE), accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.extension.harvard.edu/course-catalog/courses-by-degree/Global-Development-Practice>

Health Sciences (Choose 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENVR E-165: Human Health and Global Environmental Change • ENVR S-171: Water, Health and Sustainable Development • SSCI E-122: Who Lives, Who Dies: An Introduction to Global Health and Social Medicine • SSCI E-125: Case Studies in Global Health: Biosocial Perspectives
Natural Sciences and Engineering (Both are mandatory and required for admissions)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENVR E-101: Introduction to Sustainability and Environmental Management • DEVP E-102: Proseminar: Critical Analysis of Global Development Systems
Social Sciences – (Choose 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENVR E-129: From Farm to Fork: Food, Sustainability, and the Global Environment • ENVR S-129B: Assessing the Food-Water-Energy Nexus: Foundations of Global Security • ENVR S-147: International Environmental Governance, Policy, and Social Justice • ENVR E-170: Environmental and Health Impact Assessment of International Programs • ENVR E-173: Introduction to Sustainable Development and Technology
Social Sciences – Economics (Choose 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECON E-1005 Foundations of Real-World Economics • ENVR E-161 or ECON S-1661: Environmental Economics • ECON S-1390 Development Economics
Management (Choose 1)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENVR E-117: Sustainability Leadership for the Twenty-First Century • MGMT E-5030: Project Management • MGMT E-5310: Leading and Managing Nonprofit Organizations • MGMT E-5335: Strategic Planning and Fundraising
Integrative (Both are Mandatory)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ENVR E-112: Global Classroom: Foundations of Sustainable Development Practice • DEVP E-599: Global Development Practice Capstone (Field Training Component)
Electives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four electives selected with guidance from the student's Research and Academic Advisors.

Source: Gloria, *Proposal for Membership into the Global Network of Master's in Development Practice Programs*

As regards academic standing, students must pass each course with a grade of B- or higher and must maintain a cumulative GPA of 3.0 throughout the duration of their study. All courses are delivered in either or in a combination of the following formats:

- Face to face, physical presence classroom sessions
- Online only (usually with options to watch recorded lectures thereafter)
- Online (live or on demand) web conference
- Online (live) web conference (compulsory live online attendance)
- Hybrid (online live plus face to face classroom sessions at Harvard or other locations)

This method of delivering courses in different formats allows for great flexibility as students get to select courses that suit the demands of other commitments. In other words, the Harvard GDP curriculum ensures that no one is left behind when it comes to acquiring relevant knowledge and skills without compromising the standards required of a graduate of sustainable development education.

- **Interdisciplinarity of Course Options**

The Harvard GDP program incorporates the core idea behind ESD. As recommended by the Commission, the nature of courses that constitute Harvard's GDP program are interdisciplinary in nature. They span various knowledge areas from anthropology, biology, economics, environmental studies, management, history, law, political science, information technology, sociology, to philosophy and much more.⁴² This creates sustainable development practitioners who are knowledgeable in multiple subject areas and are able design solutions from multi-dimensional viewpoints. The courses also provide an opportunity for students to earn one or more graduate certificates along the way as they meet degree requirements.⁴³ These certificates cover a wide range of disciplines that are useful for the development practitioner's professional work. This means, for example that at the end of his/her studies, a GDP student acquires both the ALM GDP and one or more graduate certificates in the following related knowledge areas:

- Environmental Policy and International Development
- Social Justice
- Sustainable Cities and Communities
- Sustainable Food Systems
- International Relations

- **Field Training Component: Global Development Practice Capstone (DEVP E-599)**

The capstone course provides the field training component of the GDP. It is the final course that enables students to apply knowledge and skills acquired throughout their study period to produce worthy academic research projects.⁴⁴ For students completing their GDP degree, the capstone course (DEVP E-599) allows them to acquire real-life experience through investigation, design and preparation of sustainable development plans applicable to existing situations.⁴⁵ The main objectives of the course are:⁴⁶

- To develop a good grasp of the principles and best practices regarding focus areas such as Community Development, Human Rights, Labor Practices, Education, Environmental Sustainability and Fair Operating Practices.
- To learn how to engage stakeholders, appreciate the needs of clients and apply knowledge and skills acquired to develop a project plan that meets those requirements.
- To improve analytical, consulting, project management and collaborative skills of students.

The deliverables, at the end of the course, are an actionable/measurable development plan and two presentations (one each to the class and to client stakeholders)⁴⁷ Clients, for the purpose of the capstone, is a term that refers to a variety of parties such as communities, corporations, nongovernment organizations (NGOs), governmental agencies, schools, universities, hospitals, etc.⁴⁸ Conditions precedent to registering for

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ "Global Development Practice (GDP) Degree Program," Harvard Extension School, Harvard Division of Continuing Education (HDCE), accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.extension.harvard.edu/academics/graduate-degrees/global-development-practice-degree>

⁴⁴ "Guide to the ALM Capstone Project:Global Development Practice", Harvard Extension School, accessed July 23,2020, <https://capstone.extension.harvard.edu/global-development-practice>

⁴⁵ *Ibid*.

⁴⁶ "Global Development Practice Capstone Course Description", accessed July, 23, 2020, <https://www.extension.harvard.edu/course-catalog/courses-by-degree/Global-Development-Practice/global-development-practice-capstone/25972>

⁴⁷ *Ibid*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

DEVP E-599 are first, students must have completed all other courses (11 of them with acceptable grades) and be in good academic standing (minimum cumulative GPA of 3.0). Secondly, they must have taken the non-credit Precapstone Tutorial course (DEVP E-598).⁴⁹ While other courses may be conducted online, the capstone course is required to be attended on-campus at Cambridge, Massachusetts.

- **Course Methodology**

The course lasts an entire term and students are required to be physically present to attend all class meetings on Harvard campus at Cambridge, MA.⁵⁰ They must have completed the precapstone tutorial and submitted a draft statement of work (SOW). The SOW provides preliminary information on the nature of clients, their requirements, key stakeholders and an understanding of possible risks and opportunities involved in executing the proposed project.

Table 2: Sample Statement of Work (SOW)⁵¹

Background	Since this document is for the client, provide a brief description of the organization, reasons for creation of the Development Plan (DP), etc.
Client Requirements	Articulate the client's requirements in a bullet format.
Opportunities & Risks	Outline opportunities for the client regarding this community development project; describe risks to the organization of not moving forward.
Description of Project	Describe the work that you are going to do to address the client's requirements and customize attachment A, as appropriate. This is to clearly set expectations for both the client and enable the consultant/student to organize for the development of the DP.
Key Stakeholders	List the names and positions of the key people in the organizations involved in the project; i.e., the sponsoring organization (s), leaders of the community, and how each will be impacted by implementation of the DP.
Information provided by Client	Describe data and other information required from the client. It may be necessary to conduct interviews with key stakeholders, etc.

Source: <https://canvas.harvard.edu/courses/72411>

The class itself operates as a consulting “firm” with the students acting as “Consultants” while the instructor functions as a “Managing Partner”.⁵² The “firm” expends considerable time analyzing each “consultant’s” research in the light of the client’s needs. Working sessions are conducted, where each consultant discusses his/her research and its application to the client through a PowerPoint presentation. The Managing Partner and other consultants respond by offering comments, views and suggestions to assist with the final deliverable. All consultants are mandated to adhere to certain standard behaviors such as proper preparation and timely attendance, as well as full participation in deliberations at “meetings”. This helps to instill values and habits of professional conduct that are useful to students in their real-life work places. Cases and topics are assigned to every student (consultant) who then leads class discussions on them according to schedules specified by the instructor. Together with a rich collection of course materials on canvas, this experience enhances the students’ intellectual and skill capabilities in a number of ways including:⁵³

⁴⁹ This is a tutorial to the capstone course that enables students to identify clients and establish practical knowledge of development projects.

⁵⁰ This has however been modified as the class meetings now take place through an online (live web) conference medium due to COVID-19 pandemic policies.

⁵¹ The SOW has a section that contains further information such as the name of the client, the executive sponsor of the project within the client’s organization and the name of the student (consultant).

⁵² DEVP E-599 Course Syllabus,

⁵³ Consulting for Sustainability and Development Practice Capstone (599A): Course Introduction slides prepared by Will O’Brien (June 24, 2019)

- Complex Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking
- Creativity
- People (Stakeholder) Management
- Collaboration
- Project Management
- Emotional Intelligence
- Judgement and Decision Making
- Service Orientation (including Client Education)
- Negotiation
- Cognitive Flexibility
- Change Agency

○ **Capstone Projects: Development Project Plans**

For the capstone course to be considered completed, students must prepare an implementable development plan. The plan is produced after a long process of consultations with clients and stakeholders, discussions with course instructor and fellow students, as well as diligent research. This plan is then presented to the instructor and then to the client and stakeholders on site at their organization or other agreed venue. The plan covers a wide range of issues give a comprehensive view of the intended project, its sponsors and the communities affected. The clients then fill the “client satisfaction survey” expressing their views about the student (consultant), his professionalism, ability to meet their requirements, etc. and send to the instructor.

Table 3: Contents of a Development Plan

<p>1. Sponsoring Organization(s)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission & values • Business Model & Goals: (Financial, Community, Environmental)
<p>2. Community Description</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Characteristics • Challenges & Requirements
<p>3. Development Project Objectives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline the objectives, scale and scope of the Development Project.
<p>4. Stakeholder (Partner) Engagement & Management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and describe key stakeholders who will support and/or impact the project.
<p>5. Opportunities & Risks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe specific opportunities related to the sponsoring organization implementing the plan as well as possible risks of not doing so.
<p>6. Recommended Initiatives, Risks & Mitigation Strategies</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recommend actionable initiatives that will enable the sponsoring organization to achieve the project objectives. • Describe project risks and mitigation strategies.
<p>7. Vision, Governance and Staffing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vision – describe the future when the plan is implemented. • Describe how leadership and staff will be engaged in support of the project. • Governance – describe the organization; e.g., project team, which will be responsible for implementation of the plan. • Staffing – outline staffing requirements for on-going management of the project.
<p>8. Funding Required, Sources and Processes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify funding requirements, sources and funding management processes.
<p>9. Performance Management, Reporting and Verify Progress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define Key Performance Indicators (KPI) to enable measurement of results vs. project objectives. • Outline a simple reporting process as well as the position responsible for reporting.
<p>10. Milestones and Timeline Define milestones/timeline and deliverables for launching and on-going management of the project.</p>

Source: Course syllabus and sample project plans

- o **Significance of the Project for Implementing Sustainable Development Goals**

It is expected that the client, for whom the development plan was prepared, will implement it by executing the project for the community. This provides a means of achieving the SDGs since community development projects are geared towards improving different aspects of socio-economic life including education, health, economic empowerment, infrastructural facilities, etc. They are focused not only on physical infrastructure but also on facilitating human development through opportunities for interactions, sharing of ideas and information and developing initiatives for societal wellbeing.⁵⁴ In this sense, community development projects promote sustainable development through proper application of existing resources to safeguard the environment and to develop the peoples' ability to lead meaningful socio-economic lives.⁵⁵

- **Specific Project Plans and their Impacts**

The Harvard GDP program took off about 2 years ago and within this short time, students have been able to produce impactful development plans whose implementation is expected to mirror the overall philosophy behind sustainable development generally and the SDGs in particular. Two projects are presented below, one completed and one ongoing. Additional project plans can be found on the HES capstone website.⁵⁶

- **Aflac-Afaka Community Road Project Plan⁵⁷**

This project plan was developed by a student acting as Consultant to a private company called Aflac Plastics Limited, located in northern Nigeria.⁵⁸ It is for a road construction project to be executed in Afaka, the community where the company is located. The low-income characteristics of the community coupled with poor infrastructure (especially poor road network) made life difficult for members. After discussions with stakeholders, the Consultant came to the conclusion and advised the company that building the road leading to the community was advantageous not only for the people but also the company whose operations have been substantially impeded. That way, the company will enjoy the competitive advantage that comes with corporate social responsibility (CSR).⁵⁹ By determining the needs of the community and addressing those needs in such a way that it benefits both the people and the community, the company stands to reap the "competitive advantage of corporate philanthropy".⁶⁰ Conversely, failure to go ahead with the project will expose the

⁵⁴ M.A. Oyebamiji and O.N. Kajuru, "Achieving Sustainable Community Development Project through Community Education in Nigeria" *International Journal of Education and Evaluation*, 2 no. 5 (2016): 9-16, <https://iiedpub.org/get/IJEE/VOL.%202%20NO.%205%202016/ACHIEVING%20SUSTAINABLE.pdf>

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ "Guide to the ALM Capstone Project:Global Development Practice", Harvard Extension School, accessed July 28,2020, <https://capstone.extension.harvard.edu/devp-examples>

⁵⁷ Community Development Project Plan for Aflac Plastics Ltd. Prepared by Hadiza Hamma, For the Course: Consulting for Sustainability and Development Practice Capstone (ENVR 599A) (In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Liberal Arts. Field: Global Development Practice), Harvard Extension School (August, 2019), https://capstone.extension.harvard.edu/files/capstone/files/hadiza_hamma_community_project_plan.pdf

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ M.E. Porter and M.R. Kramer, "Strategy and Society: The Link Between Competitive Advantage and Corporate Social Responsibility," *Harvard Business Review*, 84 no. 12, (2006): 78–92.

⁶⁰ M.E. Porter and M.R. Kramer, "The competitive advantage of corporate philanthrop,," *Harvard Business Review*, 80 no. 12, (2002): 56-68, 133. For example, a company that improves the educational system within the society it operates is not only benefitting the people but also creating a means of improving the quality of its potential staff.

company to risks inimical to its interests.⁶¹ Although the project is yet to be executed, the company has expressed its intention to do so in the nearest future and there is evidence of strong commitment in that regard.

The benefits of implementing the plan will include:

- Aflac's company operations will improve, as movement of staff and materials will become far easier.
- The company will enjoy increased consumer patronage due to the ease of traveling to and from its premises
- The company will save on the amount previously needed for vehicle maintenance
- Incidences of accidents on the road will be significantly minimized, if not eliminated
- Electricity blackouts induced by fallen electric poles or damaged cables will be eliminated
- It will also open up avenues for other sustainability initiatives thereby having a positive impact on the reputation of the company in the society

For Afaka Community:

- There will be ease of movement to and from the community
- The road will help to boost economic activities within the community
- Significant reduction or elimination of road accidents will give the people a sense of security
- There is likely to be more people riding bicycles to ease transportation difficulties since majority of the people cannot afford cars. This is good for the environment, as fewer vehicles will ply the road.
- It is likely to draw people from outside the community to come and invest in profitable enterprises that will benefit the community

➤ **Nigerian Development Plan for Poverty Alleviation⁶²**

This plan is still a work in progress. It is being developed to outline a 3-year plan to utilize educational and developmental initiatives to contribute to the achievement of Nigeria's goal of moving 100 million people out of poverty within 10 years. Implementation of the plan will result in:

- 90 students successfully completing Harvard University Global Development Program (GDP).
- Dozens of Development Plans implemented in support of poverty alleviation.
- Establishment and empowerment of Nigerian faculty expertise to co-teach (with a Harvard faculty) the GDP Capstone Course in-country.
- Creating a cohort of graduates for possible future employment by corporate sponsors and the Nigerian government

While the plan is being prepared for consideration by Nigeria's Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, other stakeholders that are expected to play key roles include:

- Nigeria's Ministry of Education
- Harvard University Division of Continuing Education (DCE)

⁶¹ Risks could be in various forms such as loss of profits, road accidents, poor access to company premises and poor relationship with community members that could breed other unwanted consequences.

⁶² Capstone project plan currently being prepared by a Harvard GDP program student.

- Nigeria's National Youth Service Corps
- University of Abuja, Nigeria
- Corporations

As mentioned earlier, the capstone course (DEVP E-599) is required to be taken on-campus at Harvard. With this plan however, it is expected that students will be allowed to take the course in Nigeria by integrating it as part of HSS's Study Abroad Program.⁶³ In the long run, options will be extended to foreigners and non-Nigerian residents to take the course in the country. Although the initial plan is to co-opt 90 people, this number could eventually increase considerably. Upon successful completion, graduates are expected to be employed by one of the corporate sponsors on full-time basis.

Some opportunities identified include youth development and employment, poverty alleviation, improving the quality of potential staff of corporate sponsors and the government, capacity building for Nigerian Faculty who will co-teach the program, etc. On the other hand, the risks associated with not implementing the plan are loss opportunity for youth employment and development, youth idleness that breeds crimes, increase in poverty rate with wider implications for society and other consequences.

o **Benefits of the Program for Advancing Sustainability through Experiential Learning**

ESD has become an effective means of integrating sustainable development into learning. The Harvard GDP is structured in such a way as to fulfill the goal of learning while advancing sustainability. In particular, the field training component inculcates experiential learning by exposing students to real life sustainable development issues and providing them with guidance to develop solutions. The experience empowers students to be sustainability change agents in various areas of activities. It fosters a deep understanding of the nature of the corporate world and how best to engage them to ensure sustainability. For example, there is need to harmonize client requirements with community needs because organizations are more likely to promote activities that will serve the community and at the same time support their overall business objectives.⁶⁴ Students learn this through an application of shared value⁶⁵ – a concept learnt in the course of the program. Students also learn collaborative skills and how to organize community participation initiatives. These experiences further enhance deep learning.

o **Conclusion**

The foregoing analysis considered the Harvard GDP program and how it has become an avenue for promoting sustainable development globally. The paper traced the origins of the program and how it has become a means of training global development practitioners who are properly equipped – in terms of knowledge, skill and experience – to envision and plan actionable strategies for managing the various challenges of sustainable development.

⁶³ "Study Abroad Programs", Harvard Summer School, Harvard Division of Continuing Education, accessed July 28, 2020, <https://www.summer.harvard.edu/study-abroad-programs>

⁶⁴ O'Brien and Sarkis, *supra*, 6

⁶⁵ M.E. Porter and M.R. Kramer, "Creating Shared Value," *Harvard Business Review*, 89 no. 1-2, (2011): 62–77. The Authors view shared value as the pursuit of economic gains with advancing the needs of society. "Shared value creation focuses on identifying and expanding the connections between societal and economic progress."

Preparation of community development plans for clients is used as an effective training method for students. The significance of community development projects is not dependent on the size or other physical characteristics of the infrastructure. Rather, it is determined by the economic, social and environmental values it adds to society. By leveraging local knowledge through global practice, the program provides a unique platform for achieving the SDGs. This makes the Harvard GDP program a worthy interdisciplinary educational model not only for realizing the SDGs, but also for advancing and implementing worldwide sustainability.