

Empowering Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) through education and training for sustainable community development: An Academic Institution/GEF Small Grants Program Partnership

John N, Telesford
Lecturer/Associate Dean
School of Continuing Education
T. A. Marryshow Community College
Grenada
Tele: 1 473 405 5981
Email: john.telesford@yahoo.com

Abstract

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) are vitally important for local sustainable development. However, there is an apparent deficit in the skills, knowledge, abilities and attitudes (SKAs) required by CSO members, especially in Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS), to plan and implement sustainable development solutions for the communities they serve. There is a 'skills gap' between the SKAs needed for sustainable community development and the existing SKAs of CSO members and individuals desiring to create and launch a CSO. This gap is further exacerbated by the essential SKAs needed to implement the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), 2030 and drive the call to the Decade of Action. The United Nations called for global, local and people action, the latter appealing to civil society, youth and academia among others, to galvanize actions that will achieve the intended transformations from implementing the SDGs. This case study explores the genesis and development of a program titled: 'Sustainable Community Development Practices for Civil Society Organizations', that should fill the identified skills gap. This inter-disciplinary program targets grass-roots individuals, youth and civil society and is based on the academic disciplines vis-à-vis: social sciences, natural sciences/technology and management and the pillars of sustainable development: people, planet and prosperity. The collaborative effort between the T. A. Marryshow Community College (TAMCC), Grenada and the Global Environment Facility, Small Grants Program (GEF SGP) drew on the competency-based approach to education and training (CBET) for program design. One of the main outcomes of the program was to build capacity, leading to post-secondary/tertiary level qualification and certification. Key SKAs addressed competencies, including: designing and establishing a CSO; writing project proposals; implementing, monitoring and evaluating projects and engaging communities. Additionally, technical skills to deal with community issues such as energy, green spaces, solid waste, water and waste water, were also developed. Meeting the SDGs was also embedded within the program design. The processes and technical details of the program design are discussed, with the hope that CSOs especially in LDCs and SIDS can replicate, to address the skills gaps that may exist within their local communities and support the 'decade of action' from the ground-up.

Civil society organizations (CSOs), GEF small grants program (GEF SGP), sustainable development goals (SDGs), sustainable community development, decade of action; small island developing states (SIDS)

Introduction

Civil society organizations (CSOs) have a critical role to play in local sustainable development, and especially with localizing the sustainable development goals (SDGs) in small island development states (SIDS) and least developed countries (LDCs). The African Civil Society Circle (ACSC, 2016) identified four key roles for CSOs in implementing the (sustainable development) SDGs, they: give a voice to the people- the poorest and marginalized; serve as agents of accountability; act as service delivery provider and monitor progress through data collection and reporting. However, many CSOs and potential CSOs, lack institutional and individual capacity or the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes or SKAs, to work with stakeholder communities on the ground to achieve these roles. Moreover, planning, creating and launching an organization that can deliver on these roles and engage with communities in general, are gravely lacking. In this regard, the Global Environmental Facility, Small Grants Program (GEF SGP) in Grenada, identified the “strengthening of the capacity of CSOs” as an important cross-cutting strategy for implementing the Grenada Country Program Strategy for 2015-2018 (GEF SGP, 2017). Additionally, the implementation of the SDGs on the ground will require tremendous support from these CSOs, and as the United Nations call for a decade of action to implement these goals, the roles of CSOs will become even more important.

This paper, explores and analyzes the development of a two-year Associate degree program titled: ‘Sustainable community development for CSO’s’ or the ‘CSO’s program’, on the small island of Grenada, a SIDS in the Caribbean. The program was created through a partnership between the local GEF SGP and the lone indigenous tertiary education institution on the island- T. A. Marryshow Community College (TAMCC). The overarching aim of the program was to address the gap in SKAs or in-short the ‘skills-gap’ identified through comprehensive ‘capacity assessment workshops’ held with existing CSOs and individuals. Both individual and institutional capacity needs were determined. The partnership involved the award of a strategic grant to the TAMCC, that funded the planning of the program and provided scholarships to members of CSOs and potential members to pursue the program. The program was designed using an adjusted job-analysis-workshop (JAW) method proposed by competency-based education and training (CBET) and was previously used to develop another related program, through partnerships (see e.g. Gagnon and Telesford, 2017a; 2017b). In the main, the method draws on the experience of established CSOs to provide ‘tasks and operations’ and the requisite SKAs that should be taught to new and existing CSO members. In this case however, capacity needs were determined and then aligned to the necessary competencies (see for example Stephen and Triraganon, 2009), that were used to develop training modules/courses that formed the program for the degree

The paper first considers the literature and motivations for creating the program and the methods applied to develop the program. The capacity needs gleaned from the ‘capacity assessment workshops’, the competencies and related courses/modules that were designed to deliver them are presented in the results section. A discussion on how the program aligns to the roles of CSOs and how CSOs can be equipped to deal with the challenges of sustainable development and the SDGs in the community follows. The section also includes a discussion on the applicability of this program to higher education institutions globally and in SIDS and LDCs. The main outcomes of the paper are summarized in the conclusion.

Literature review and motivations for the program

SIDS and LDCs may have challenges with operationalizing or localizing sustainable development and especially in recent times, as global sustainable development is driven by the SDGs. The United Nations has long recognized SIDS as "... a special case for sustainable development in view of their unique and particular vulnerabilities and they remain constrained in meeting their goals in the three dimensions of sustainable development" (UN, 2014). Moreover, these multi-scalar challenges (Connell, 2018) are exacerbated by the inherent vulnerabilities of SIDS- small size, lack of resources, isolation and also to external shocks such as climate related hazards, economic recessions and social unrest. Lack of data, policy cohesion and adequate financing also conspire to worsen the operationalization of sustainable development and the SDGs. However, the challenges of sustainable development can be addressed in higher education institutions' curricula through the three pillars of sustainable development- economy, society and environment (Lozano, 2010) and can be linked to requisite competencies (Lozano et al., 2019).

The competencies or SKAs needed for individual capacity building are therefore aligned to the three pillars of sustainable development. From this perspective, the International Society of Sustainability Practitioners (ISSP), created a Sustainability Practitioner Body of Knowledge, as a base of the required SKAs for sustainability practitioners (see ISSP, 2013). The Body of Knowledge is divided into five categories of competencies:

- Core sustainability concepts
- Stakeholder engagement
- Plan sustainability strategies
- Implement sustainability strategies
- Evaluate sustainability efforts
- Adjust plans

The design of the CSOs program drew on the Body of Knowledge to some extent. Although the competencies in the body of knowledge were more business oriented, they form a good basis for the requisite competencies for CSOs. For example, CSOs need to understand the core concepts of sustainability; engage stakeholders in communities, government and other entities and plan, implement, evaluate and adjust sustainability efforts and strategies within their own organizations. Additionally, the SKAs are 'action-oriented' and are associated with Blooms Taxonomy (see ISSP, 2013). The SKAs therefore, within the body of knowledge, provided a guide for the design of program. The SKAs are also embedded within academic disciplines, akin to those identified in the International Commission on Education for Sustainable Development (2008), vis-a-vis: management, social and natural sciences, thus creating an inter-disciplinary program.

The 'skills gap' or 'deficient capacity' within existing Civil Society Organizations to address the challenges of sustainable development, including the implementation of the SDGs and to deliver on their roles, was identified by the GEF SGP in Grenada. The global GEF SGP program was established in 1992, with a mission that:

"... embodies the very essence of sustainable development by "thinking globally acting locally". By providing financial and technical support to projects that conserve and restore the environment while enhancing people's well-being and livelihoods, SGP demonstrates that

community action can maintain the fine balance between human needs and environmental imperatives” (see <https://sgp.undp.org/about-us-157/mission-and-history.html>).

The (Grenada) National Steering Committee (NSC) of SGP GEF, approved its Country Program Strategy for the sixth operational cycle, 2015 to 2018, which included a number of cross-cutting and supporting strategies, foremost among them was ‘strengthen of capacities of CSO’. In this regard, the NSC agreed to approach the only community college on the island- the T. A. Marryshow Community College (TAMCC), to design and develop a program to address this critically needed strategy. (Note the author is the academic representative of the NSC, representing TAMCC).

The program was therefore designed to address institutional and individual capacity building of CSOs and their members, therefore attempting to fill the SKAs gap. To achieve this, the concept of competency-based education and training was applied. The idea of CBET is normally associated with technical education and training or concrete skills (Ayonmike, Chijoke and Okeke, 2014, 291), but many of its principles can be applied to the development and delivery of programs that are focused on other non-technical skills. In this regard, Sullivan and McIntosh (1996, 95) noted: CBET can also be applied in the teaching and learning of “Some skills, such as counseling [which] are knowledge- and attitude-based”, skills which are referred to in this paper as ‘soft skills’. The CBET approach therefore, lends itself to the creation of this CSOs program, since many of the skills are ‘soft’ in nature although some ‘concrete skills’ are also addressed. CBET focuses on what the individual can do in the workplace and is applied in nature. In this regard, Ayonmike, Chijoke and Okeke (2014, 291) concluded that:

“CBET programs focus on what the participant is expected to be able to do in the workplace as opposed to just having theoretical knowledge. It is therefore a training program which ensures that learners gain the necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes or values to be successful in the working environment”.

To develop these application skills the program must be appropriately designed. From this perspective, it is envisioned that the key characteristics of the concept provides a more comprehensive understanding of the intent of the approach, especially in the context of program design. Sullivan and McIntosh (1996, 96), presented some important characteristics of CBET and those of importance to this paper and that are focused on program design and development include:

- Competencies are carefully selected.
- Supporting theory is integrated with skill practice. Essential knowledge is learned to support the performance of skills.

Competency and/or competence is at the core of CBET, and is intricately linked to the term skill. In this regard, a skill is described as “A task or group of tasks performed to a specific level of competency or proficiency...”, while, “competency is “A skill performed to a specific standard under specific conditions” (Sullivan and Mc Intosh, 1996, 95). The key to a successful program design therefore, is founded on the ‘careful selection of competencies’, which may be ‘concrete’ and ‘soft’ skills, supported by relevant knowledge and attitudes for the workplace and communities.

Methods

One approach to the selection of competencies, is the use of a job-analysis workshop (JAW), "... which focuses on identifying task and operations", (see e.g. Gagnon and Telesford, 2017b). This approach also aligns with the proposed SKAs of the sustainability practitioner (see ISSP, 2013). However, an amended approach to the JAW was applied, where a number of 'capacity needs assessment workshops' were conducted with existing CSO's and persons with extensive knowledge and experience in community work, which is the core idea of the JAW. "A need is considered as a gap between "what is" and "what should be", and is an essential element required for change" (Stephen and Triaganon, 2009, 2). Therefore, the main aim of the adjusted JAW or capacity assessment workshops, was to identify institutional and individual capacity needs gaps that forms the basis of a program that will build the capacity of CSOs to deal with the challenges of sustainable development, the SDGs and to effectively execute their roles in this context

Sponsored/funded by the GEF SGP, the TAMCC conducted three (3) capacity needs workshops on 21, 23 and 29 March, 2017. A trained Facilitator was employed to facilitate all the workshops, which were held at strategic locations to ensure that the majority of stakeholders could attend. Approximately forty (40) individuals attended all the workshops. Each workshop consisted of presentations by GEF SGP and TAMCC representatives, with the latter explaining the intended use of the data gathered. The facilitator then conducted the workshop, commencing with a presentation of the process. The majority of time in the workshop was used to gather the relevant data, vis-à-vis, gaps in capacity as envisioned by the stakeholders. Copious notes were recorded by TAMCC representative and a dedicated note taker. The facilitator, TAMCC and GEF SGP representatives compiled forty-one (41) phases/themes that described or expressed the 'capacity needs' of the stakeholders.

The phases/themes were then groped and translated into what the team felt, by consensus, was a reflective competency that will address the capacity needs. For example, in table 1 of the results, the competency 'create an organization' will adequately address the 'capacity needs' obtained from the capacity assessment works and recorded in the second column. The competencies were then aligned to the sustainability practitioner book of knowledge, see table 2. Initial course outlines were designed by a GEF SGP sponsored consultant. The courses address the SKA skills gap and fill the capacity needs gaps. The competencies, course names and general leaning outcomes of all the courses are shown in table 3. In table 4, the entire program and suggested delivery schedule are shown. An example of one of the courses, showing specific learning outcomes or specific SKAs is reported in table 5. A cohort of students commenced the program in 2020, which will serve as a practical validation of the selected SKAs. Since the program is intended to be inter-disciplinary, the disciplines that each course is aligned to are summarized in table 6.

The key steps of the program design are summarized as:

1. Identify key competencies from the capacity needs assessment data gathered at the workshop;
2. Categorize these competencies into the six categories in the ISSP book of knowledge;
3. Create courses that align with the competencies and the requisite SKAs that will address the skills gaps.

4. Develop an entire two-year program using the courses/modules-which can also be used as stand-alone certificate courses
5. Align the courses with the disciplines that they belong to, highlighting the interdisciplinary nature of the program.

Results

Key competencies from workshop data

Table 1: Competencies aligned to capacity needs identified in workshops

Competencies	Capacity needs identified in workshops
Create an organization	Developing missions, vision and organizational goals; developing constitution and membership responsibility; group registration process; networking and creating networks; roles and responsibilities of Group Executives; rules and dynamics of cooperatives;
Lead and manage an organization	Conflict resolution; customer service and care; group dynamics and team-building; identification and recognition for group members; leadership training and motivating others; monitoring and evaluation of groups' progress; negotiation skills, transition and succession planning; time management; volunteerism: returns and rewards
Budget for and manage the finances of an organization	Budgeting; financial management
Develop projects and write project proposals	Project planning and implementation; proposal writing;
Monitor, evaluate and report on projects	Monitoring and evaluation of projects; report writing;
Market the organization	Lobbying and advocacy;
Engage the local community	Education and training through drama; lobbying and advocacy; negotiating skills; networking and creating networks;
Manage organizational knowledge	Knowledge management;
Improve the quality of performance of the organization	Customer service care; protocol and basic business etiquette; quality assurance;
Manage change in the organization	Change management and evolving organizations
Practice climate smart agriculture	Climate smart agriculture; mariculture: sea moss and lobsters;
Plan, design, create and conserve green (sustainable) spaces	Environment-based livelihoods; impact of the environment on everyday life; recycling business opportunities;
Plan and implement a green event in the community	
Plan strategically	Strategic planning (fore-sighting/back-casting)

Source: Data from workshops and Autor's conceptualization of specific competencies

Table 1 provides the competencies that were derived from the raw data gathered from the workshops. It is shown in the table that capacity needs identified in the workshop may be

addressed by more than one competency and that some skills, knowledge and attitudes can be built upon as the learner progresses through the program.

Categories of competencies

Table 2 shows how the competencies in table 1 aligned with the six core competencies required for a sustainability practitioner, and which also forms the basis for a competent sustainable community development practitioner. As the table reveals, many of the competencies of the program are aligned to more than one competency of the body of knowledge. For example, 'strategic planning' and 'leading and managing an organization', will require SKAs embedded in the body of knowledge competencies on: planning, implementing, evaluating and adjusting sustainability efforts and strategies in the CSO.

Table 2: CSOs competencies aligned to competencies in sustainability practitioner body of knowledge

Competencies in sustainability practitioner body of knowledge	CSOs program competencies
Core sustainability concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Plan, design, create and conserve green (sustainable) spaces ➤ Practice climate smart agriculture ➤ Green event planning
Stakeholder engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Market the organization ➤ Engage the local community ➤ Develop projects and write proposals
Plan sustainability strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create an organization ➤ Lead and manage an organization ➤ Manage organizational knowledge ➤ Budget and manage the finances of the organizations ➤ Plan strategically
Implement sustainability strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lead and manage an organization ➤ Plan strategically
Evaluate sustainability efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Monitor, evaluate and report on projects ➤ Lead and manage an organization ➤ Improve the quality of performance of the organization ➤ Plan strategically
Adjust plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Lead and manage an organization ➤ Improve the quality of performance of the organization ➤ Manage change in the organization ➤ Plan strategically

Sources: Author's alignment of the CSOs program competencies to the ISSP body of knowledge competencies

CSOs program competencies, courses and learning outcomes

The competencies were used to develop specific courses for each, which include the general learning outcomes/aims or SKA; the specific objectives or specific SKAs; content; assessment criteria and other relevant information for the students and teachers. Table 3 shows the CSOs

program competencies, the courses that will be used to develop the competency and the general learning outcomes or SKAs.

Table 3: Competencies, translated to courses and the general learning outcomes

Competencies	Courses	General learning outcomes
Create an organization	Organization design for CSOs	Apply the principles of organization design to the creation of a new CSO
Lead and manage an organization	Organizational leadership & management	Apply the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to lead and manage a CSO
Budget for and manage the finances of an organization	Financial management	Apply the principles of financial management in a CSO
Develop projects and write project proposals	Project proposals development	Write a project proposal with specific parameters
Monitor, evaluate and report on projects	Project implementation, monitoring and evaluation	Apply the skills, knowledge and attitudes to monitor and evaluate the implementation of a project
Market the organization	Marketing for CSOs	Apply marketing principles to promote a CSO
Engage the local community	Community engagement	Apply the principles of stakeholder engagement in a CSO
Manage organizational knowledge	Knowledge management	Apply the principles of knowledge management in a CSO
Improve the quality of performance of the organization	Quality systems and management	Apply the principles of quality management to the operations of a CSO
Manage change in the organization	Change management	Apply the principles of change management in a CSO
Practice climate smart agriculture	Climate smart agriculture	Apply the principles of sustainable development to implement climate smart agricultural practices
Plan, design, create and conserve green (sustainable) spaces	Green space design and management	Apply the principles of sustainable development to create green spaces
Plan and implement a green event in the community	Green events planning	Apply the principles of green events planning for a community-based event
Plan strategically	Strategies for CSOs	Apply the principles of strategic planning and management to CSOs

Source: Author's creation of course names and learning outcomes.

CSOs program and proposed schedule of delivery

The indicative programming of the CSOs program shown in table 4, attempts to ensure an effective sequence of acquiring the SKAs. For example, the courses 'Organization design for CSOs' and 'Project proposal development' are pre-requisites for the courses on 'Organizational leadership and management' and 'Project implementation, monitoring and evaluation', respectively. Secondly, the organizational 'set-up' SKAs are recommended to be completed in

the first year, while other courses such as 'Quality systems and management', 'Change management' are offered in the second year after the organization has been established. Finally, in the second year, a capstone community project is also embarked upon. The project takes the form of a solutions-based project relative to the participant's community (see for example Gagnon and Telesford, (2017b)). The general learning outcomes for the course are:

1. Analyze a problem relating to the sustainable development of the community
2. Synthesize a solution to an identified problem relating to the sustainable development of the community

Table 4: Suggested full-time sustainable community development practices for CSOs

Year 1: Semester 1		
Course codes	Course names	Credits/hours
CSD	Organization design for CSOs	3
CSD	Project proposals development	3
CSI	Introduction to computers	3
CSD	Marketing for CSOs	3
	General Education	3
	Total semester credits and hours/week	15
Year 1: Semester 2		
CSD	Organizational leadership and management	3
CSD	Financial management	3
CSD	Project implementation, monitoring and evaluation	3
	General education	3
	General education	3
	Total semester credits and hours/week	15
Summer internship		
Year 2: semester 1		
CSD	Quality systems and management	3
CSD	Change management	3
CSD	Green events planning and management	3
	General education	3
	General education	3
	Total semester credits and hours/week	15
Year 2: semester 2		
CSD	Knowledge management	3
CSD	Community engagement	3
CSD	Strategies for CSOs	3
	Capstone community project/Applied research	3
	General Education	3
	Total semester credits and hours/week	15
	Total credits for program	60

Source: Programming design by Author

Additionally, the program does not include all the courses identified in table 3, since some of these programs are envisioned to be a part of a proposed bachelor's degree. However, as all the courses in the program, they can be taken as stand-alone courses by experienced CSO members and/or practitioners wishing to up-skill or re-skill.

Sample course

An example of a course is presented to demonstrate the specific learning outcomes identified as a 'skill', 'knowledge' or 'attitude' to be developed.

Table 5: Example of the course on 'Organizational leadership and management'

Course name	Organizational leadership and management
General learning outcomes	Apply the skills, knowledge and attitude to lead and manage a CSO
Specific learning outcomes (LOs)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Describe at least three foundational principles of leadership (Knowledge) 2. Formulate a working definition of leadership that is applicable to the CSO (Skill) 3. Describe the levels of power that can be use by leaders to influence followers (Knowledge) 4. Differentiate between the leadership styles (skill) 5. Explain key factors that are used to select a style (Knowledge) 6. Differentiate between leader and manager in a CSO setting (Skill) 7. Describe the key roles of a manager in a CSO setting (knowledge) 8. Appraise one's own ability to lead using the principle of 'leading form above the line' (skill) 9. Instill key principles of ethics, honesty, open-mindedness (attitudes) 10. Formulate visionary and goals-based policy for the CSO (skill) 11. Appraise the role of the CSO within governance structures (social and environmental) (skill)

Source: Author

An interdisciplinary program

Finally, table 6 demonstrates the interdisciplinary nature of the CSOs program. Using the approach of the global masters in development practice, three out of the four disciples were identified as been addressed by the program. Although some of the courses can fit exactly into a discipline, others may not be so obvious. For example, the course on 'Organizational leadership and management' is aligned to both social sciences and management, as the course includes content on 'governance', which is within the realms of social sciences. Additionally, how the CSO leader and manager has to treat with 'Knowledge management' and 'green event planning' also includes principles in social sciences and management. More importantly the capstone project is intended to be inter-disciplinary in nature and will assist the student

participant to integrate all the skills, knowledge and attitudes learned from the previous courses into a solutions-based sustainable development project in the community.

Table 6: Interdisciplinary nature of the program

Disciplines	Courses
Management	Organization design for CSOs Organizational leadership and management Project proposal development Marketing for CSOs Financial management Project implementation, monitoring and evaluation Knowledge management Quality systems and management Change management Capstone project
Natural Sciences	Climate Smart Agriculture Green space design and management Capstone project
Social Sciences	Community engagement Organizational leadership and management Knowledge management Capstone project

Source: Author

Discussion- empowering CSOs through higher education

Empowering CSOs through education and training to deliver their roles regarding the challenges of sustainable development and implementation of the SDGs, especially within SIDS and LDCs, requires partnerships that can carefully plan and adequately fund such education and training program design. Moreover, such training programs are even more critical in the final decade of the SDGs, 2020 to 2030, as the United Nations called for global, local and people action, the latter appealing to civil society, youth and academia among others, to galvanize actions that will achieve the intended transformations from implementing the SDGs. Sachs et al. (2019, 805) noted: “The sustainable development goals (SDGs)... call for deep transformation in every country that will require complementary actions by governments, civil society, science and business”; and reiterated that transformation in education, through interventions in vocational training and higher education was extremely important for moving towards sustainability. This effort in designing the CSOs program, demonstrated the complementary actions of civil society and academia in general to create a program that will provide and enhance the necessary SKAs for CSOs working on the ground to deal with sustainable community development, especially in the SIDS, like Grenada.

Sustainable community development therefore, in the era of sustainable development (see e.g. Sachs, 2015), calls for CSOs that can give a voice to the people- the poorest and marginalized; serve as agents of accountability; act as service delivery provider and monitor progress through data collection and reporting (ACSC, 2016). The new program can help CSOs to meet some of these roles for localizing sustainable development, now led by the SDGs. In this regard, a few illustrative examples are discussed. The courses on ‘knowledge management and ‘community engagement’ are geared towards training CSOs in the application of principles on knowledge

management and community engagement, respectively. In this regard, the role of CSOs in providing citizens with a 'voice; can be enhanced. For example, ACSC (2016, 5) noted, that in order "To listen to people and be aware of what is happening in their respective areas of operations" ... "requires CSOs to be proactive in gathering information and interacting with communities". Key SKAs that are addressed in the 'Community engagement' course, which are aligned to supporting this role are: 1) conduct needs assessment for communities and 3) formulate training and other programs to address these needs. Another aspect of this role that the program targets, and specifically the 'Community engagement' course, is that CSOs "Play a critical role as transformers in society by being involved in training and advocacy processes, which build the capacities and knowledge of the general populace towards achieving the SDGs" (ACSC, 2019).

In addition to being able to fulfil their roles, the main aim of SGP GEP was to ensure that the capacity needs gaps of CSOs was adequately, efficiently and effectively met. In this regard, the program design drew on some of the concepts of CBET, which were to 'carefully select competencies' and to ensure that the knowledge and attitudes are integrated to support the required 'soft' and 'hard' skills. The program designers attempted an approach by integrating 'capacity needs assessment' into the selection of relevant competencies or SKAs (see table 1); and aligning these with the requisite competencies of a 'sustainability practitioner' (table 2). Moreover, the courses that emanated from the process, also addressed some disciplinary areas, which were identified as key to training and educating sustainable development practitioners (see table 6). But at the crux of the design are the carefully selected SKAs, translated into overall and specific learning outcomes, as shown in tables 3 and 5; and the capstone course that seeks to bring all SKAs to bear on a problem-solving, community based sustainable development problem/challenge. Through this process, a two-year program leading to an Associate degree was created, although each of the courses in the program can be taken as stand-alone courses for continuing professional development of CSO members.

The selected SKAs, translated into learning outcomes, are the foundation of the program and they address the institutional, including community and individual capacities needs, with some courses focused on one or both, although it is extremely difficult to separate the individual from the institution. For example, the course on 'Organizational design' has an institutional focus, the course on 'Climate smart agriculture' has an institutional/community focus; while the course on 'Organizational leadership and management' focuses more on building individual capacity. In this regard therefore, the overall and specific learning outcomes of the courses, will reflect the aspects of capacity that are addressed. For example, the latter course which is provided as an example in table 5, demonstrates. The overall learning outcome seeks to build skills, knowledge and attitudes of the individual in the CSO; and the majority of the specific learning outcomes capture that approach. There are four- knowledge, six-skills and one- attitudinal SKAs, forming eleven specific learning outcomes. It is proffered that learning outcomes 10 and 11 (table 5) are attempting to build both individual and institutional/community capacities. For example, the individual must have the necessary tools to formulate visionary and goals based (SDGs) based policy for the CSO, which is intended to strengthen institutional capacity of the CSO in the community. Similarly, individuals in the CSO must be adequately equipped to understand and position the CSO and communities as institutions within governance structure of the nation in which they exist.

Finally, it is hoped that higher education institutions globally, but especially in SIDS and LDCs where the challenges of sustainable development may be exacerbated in scale and time, can see the merits of this program, especially as community groups attempt to build capacities for sustainable community development. According to Wood (2017, 221): “As people seek new and innovative ways of building sustainability and resilience into their lives and within their communities, they will encounter a widening variety of educational choices”. Higher education institutions may therefore wish to replicate, the collaborative approach between the GEF SGP, which functions globally, including in SIDS and LDCs, and higher education institutions, to design and implement similar and other programs, thus ‘widening the variety of educational choices’. Moreover, the CBET and capacity needs assessment integration, provides an excellent platform for the design of such programs by higher education institutions. CBET emphasizes the need for the careful selection of competencies, and promotes how these competencies can be selected through facilitated workshops. CBET also focuses on what the learner can do, which is critically needed for sustainable community development and implementing the SDGs. In this regard, higher education institutions wishing to design similar programs, should ensure that the competencies are addressing in whole and/or in part the requisite competencies of a sustainability practitioner and the fundamental pillars and academic disciplines of a sustainable community development practitioner.

Conclusion

The paper demonstrated the creation of a new program designed collaboratively between a higher education institution and the national GEF SGP. The CSOs program sought to address the ‘capacity needs of CSOs’, which was one of the strategic goals for the GEF SGP program plan for 2015 to 2018. To achieve this aim, the higher education institution applied the CBET approach to carefully select competencies, which were used to create a clutch of courses that could be taken by CSOs as a full 2-year Associate degree or as stand-alone professional development courses, to build institutional and individual capacities. The fundamental outputs of the program were the SKAs that are firstly aligned to the competencies of sustainability practitioners and translated into general and specific learning outcomes of the courses. It is hoped that as the individual and institutional/community capacities are built by this program that CSOs are equipped to fulfill roles to address the challenges of sustainable development and the implementation of the SDGs in the decade of action, 2020-2030.

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