

Chapter 64

The Heifer International Model of Sustainable Adult Education

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ABSTRACT

Heifer International, an organization devoted to ending hunger and poverty through sustainable development, has worked throughout the world by giving “living loans” of gifts of livestock and training while empowering individuals and communities to turn lives of hunger and poverty into self-reliance and hope. To train a country’s population is to increase that country’s “human capital,” and educating the population while expanding the human capital is a necessity in order for developing countries to benefit from globalization. The Heifer model of adult sustainable education demonstrates the importance of education and training for people of the developing world, and not only can this model be adopted in developing countries for emerging “learning societies,” but it may be used to inform policies and practices in the developed world as well.

INTRODUCTION

The Heifer model of sustainable adult education offers a promising paradigm for human capital development for the 21st century. This chapter begins with an overview of the Heifer International organization and proceeds to discuss the Heifer model of adult education, particularly as

it relates to the organizational focus on initiatives to help end hunger and poverty and to care for the earth. Within the Heifer organization, the model of sustainable adult education includes delineations between formal programming and informal and non-formal educational ventures. Within the organization, this distinction is often differentiated by what are called “E” and “e” pursuits. The Capital “E” programs encompass formal,

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standards-based education while the lowercase “e” refers to informal and non-formal education, including field-based training programs. The culture of the Heifer organization is one that values extensive assessment and strives for constant adaptation and continuous improvement. These commitments ensure that both the formal and informal/non-formal programming Heifer offers remain relevant and effective. The Heifer model of sustainable adult education is presented in this chapter with the hope that it may be adopted in other contexts by a variety of individuals, organizations, and institutions. Further, readers will be able to develop an understanding of how the Heifer model of sustainable adult education values formal and informal/non-formal approaches to learning, and that evaluation and feedback creates opportunities for progress and change. More specifically, readers will also consider how utilizing a cycle of continuous adaptation and improvement is beneficial for both the organization and for “E” and “e” participants worldwide.

BACKGROUND

Heifer International was founded by Dan West, a Midwestern farmer and Church of the Brethren relief worker during the Spanish Civil War. During his service, West was forced to decide who would receive rations and who would not—literally, who would live and who would die. He concluded, “these children don’t need a cup, they need a cow” (Our History, 2010). When West returned home, he formed Heifers for Relief, an organization that provided families with livestock and training so they “could be spared the indignity of depending on others to feed their children” (Our History, 2010). The first shipment of 17 heifers arrived in Puerto Rico in 1944; these animals provided nourishment to malnourished children who had never before tasted milk. West chose heifers because the young cows who had not yet given

birth could be used for a source of milk and their offspring could be donated to another family in need. The organization, now known as Heifer International, has continued with the simple idea of giving families a source of food rather than short-term relief.

Heifer International is devoted to eliminating hunger and poverty through sustainable development. Hunger and poverty occur worldwide because of a multitude of unfavorable economic and environmental conditions, and as a result, food and resources are scarce among many communities. The concept of sustainable development implies that, unless effective measures are taken to prevent deterioration of our communities (Mammino, 2011) and the larger world, it may be difficult for future generations to survive. The primary goal of Heifer International is to work with communities to become self-reliant and to end poverty and hunger around the world. The crux of Heifer’s mission is working in partnership with community groups (T. Montgomery, personal communication, November 8, 2011), and since it began the organization has helped 15.5 million families in more than 125 countries move toward greater self-reliance (Heifer International, 2011). Honoring its core values, Heifer International is continually evolving into a stronger, more coherent and unified organization committed to providing a deep and profound sustainable impact through all of its programs and projects (Heifer International, 2011).

Perhaps one of the most distinguishing facets of Heifer International is that the organization has worked throughout the world by giving “living loans” of gifts of livestock and training. Occasionally, this includes families borrowing tools and implements and even monetary loans” (T. Montgomery, personal communication, November 8, 2011). “In exchange for a gift of livestock and training, families agree to give one of the animal’s offspring to another family in need. It’s called “Passing the Gift”—a cornerstone of our

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