



Master's in Development Practice (MDP) Core Competencies

The following are underlying assumptions of the Global Association of MDP Programs:

- (1) MDP Core Competencies.** The four pillars of health, natural, social and management sciences are at the center of the MDP curriculum. A degree of competency in each of these pillars is required of all MDP students since they lay the foundation for a cross-disciplinary approach to, and understanding of, the challenges of sustainable development. Core competency in these four pillars is the distinguishing component of this unique and innovative graduate degree program in sustainable development.
- (2) MDP Programs Promote Lifelong Learning:** The knowledge and skills needed to be an effective practitioner and contributor to the field of sustainable development will change over time. In order to be effective contributors to the field, practitioners must stay current with changing issues, research, thinking, and practice—achievable through lifelong learning.
- (3) MDP Teaching Should Emphasize a Learner-Centered Approach.** Techniques of knowledge transfer and acquisition in the individual MDP programs will take full advantage of interactive, experiential, and case- and problem-based learning. The MDP programs and the Association, as a whole, will use innovative technology-assisted e-learning opportunities, and will promote the development of online curricular resources to share through its Repository and various platforms on the MDP Web site.
- (4) MDP Virtual Repository.** In addition to its unique nature, the MDP curriculum and syllabi are shared throughout the Association of member schools; and an ever-growing online repository of curricular ideas and methods—syllabi, e-courses, case studies, research papers, exercises, etc.—is being built *by* all members and *for* all member programs to share.
- (5) MDP KSAs (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) are essential components of the Core Competencies.**
 - a. **Knowledge:** there are specific core content areas that MDP students are expected to master, including a broad holistic understanding that incorporates crucial aspects of the four MDP “pillars”—health science, natural science, social science, and management. It is not expected that all students will master all competency areas in this list; rather the MDP program fosters the ability to “speak the language” of each of these specialty areas, enabling graduates to know when to bring in a specialist,

converse appropriately with such a specialist, and work effectively in teams that include specialists. (The content areas are described in the section immediately following this list of assumptions.)

- b. **Skills:** MDP graduates must also master and be able to demonstrate and readily employ certain technical, organizational, social, and cultural skills. *These skills are identified in a separate section, following the “content areas” section.*
 - c. **Attitudes:** The Global Association of MDP Programs reflects a commitment to the promotion of social equity—the wellbeing and capabilities of all world citizens—enabling them to reach their potential, irrespective of class, gender, ethnic origin, religion, or race.
- (6) **Integration of the Four Pillars.** It is not expected that there will be a one-to-one correlation of a separate course for each “competency area.” Rather it is expected that many competency areas will be covered through courses that integrate knowledge and skills in more than one “pillar”; also that competencies in content areas and in skills will be attained through workshops, shared projects, short- and long-term field placements, capstone papers, etc., that reflect an integrated, holistic, inter-disciplinary approach as well as single-subject courses.
- (7) **Importance of Field Training Program.** Another aspect of the MDP program that is essential and contributes to its unique nature is the requirement that all students engage in a field site placement (field training) for 2-3 months. It is during and through this field site placement that the MDP students are able to put their knowledge and skills into practice.
- (8) **Complementarity of Theory and Practice.** The MDP programs are grounded in both theory and practice, recognizing that appropriate and effective development practice must be based on workable, suitable, and timely theory.
- (9) **MDP Program Quality Assurance.** The Global Association of Master’s in Development Practice Programs—collectively and individually—should maintain high standards and should require that its students meet a minimum proficiency, as set by the Global Association of MDP programs by each individual MDP program’s home institution.
- (10) **MDP Program Diversity.** Diversity between and among the programs—regional and institutional diversity—will not only be permitted, but will be encouraged and celebrated.
- (11) **MDP Timeliness.** It is expected that MDP programs will implement curricular changes, over time, in response to changes in the local, regional, national, and international development conditions and priorities. These changes will be made in accordance with the mission, vision and strategic plan of the Global Association of MDP Programs and in accord with each program’s institutional processes.

CORE COMPETENCIES: CONTENT AREAS

HEALTH SCIENCES: since the inclusion of a Health Sciences requirement is one of the hallmarks of the MDP program, it will be assumed that each program will offer at least one course that covers at least 3 of the 4 following areas in an integrated, cohesive fashion. Essential to a mastery of Global Health Sciences is an ability to see how Health impacts the other three pillars, and how the other three pillars have an impact on Global Health.

- **Nutrition and Food Security**—Hunger, protein-nutrient malnutrition, and even “over-nutrition” are major threats to any development effort. There are multiple reasons for a lack of food, lack of nutrition, and a surfeit of nutrition—among them limited agricultural potential, ineffective application of available/appropriate technology, deficits in rural, urban, peri-urban, and indigenous community infrastructure, lack of access to markets, and weaknesses in economics, social organization, and governance. Development practitioners need to be able to identify the causes and health-related results of food insecurity, nutrition insecurity, and over-nutrition. These practitioners also need the knowledge and skills necessary to recognize, measure, and evaluate these problems of food and nutrition and respond programmatically to the different resulting conditions across the age and health spectrum.
- **Determinants of Health and Epidemiology**— Development practitioners need to have knowledge of the leading causes of major health threats and of the important interventions, strategies, and programs available (many of which use basic and proven technologies) to address them. Development interventions are ineffective if they fail to address the basic life-and-death issues pertaining to control of infectious diseases (such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other diseases), control of accidents and non-communicable diseases (such as heart disease, diabetes, respiratory diseases, and cancers), and mental health issues. As just one example, child mortality rates in the poorest countries are often 30 to 50 times higher than in industrialized countries.
- **Health Systems Strengthening**—Strong, well-functioning health systems are necessary to provide affordable, high-quality, and universal health care and to design and implement interventions to address health threats. Understanding the components of universal health care coverage—access to care, affordability and ability to pay for health care, and health financing—is essential to designing strategies for health system strengthening. Development practitioners need to be aware of the current impediments to strong health systems and to know how to address health system strengthening—necessary for the widespread and scaled-up roll out of these interventions.
- **Population Sciences and Reproductive Health**—Population dynamics must be a key consideration in any long-or short-term development strategy. Development practitioners need to understand the history of the “demographic transition”; the structure and composition of a population at a cross-section and also over time; and have the ability to use population projection methods. Development practitioners will need an historical and current working knowledge of adolescent health, male and female health, reproductive health—including STIs, consequences of early and/or frequent pregnancies—and voluntary child spacing strategies, as well as interventions to promote gender equality and health education to enable women and men to make informed sexual and reproductive health decisions.

NATURAL SCIENCES & ENGINEERING: It is expected that each MDP Program will prioritize competencies within this content area according to their region, program strengths, and emphases, choosing at least 4 out of the 5 identified areas to cover in an integrated and holistic manner.

- **Global Food Systems: food production and access**— The majority of people living in extreme poverty throughout the world depend on agriculture, fisheries and forests for their food supplies. Even if they, themselves, are living in urban areas, rather than rural areas, they are all heavily dependent on ecosystem services generated in forests and rural areas. Food production and rural economic transformation often hinge on animal productivity, crop yields and forest production, which in turn depend on soil fertility, availability of inputs and land management. It is necessary to broaden the study of food production and access to include both rural and urban settings, inter- and intra-state transport, and the multitude of factors that influence access to food of sufficient quantity and quality for both urban and rural populations.
- **Energy**—Essential to all aspects of development—including agricultural productivity, access to water, health, education and transportation—is a safe and consistent supply of energy. Well-designed interventions must consider how renewable or non-renewable energy sources will be harnessed and distributed, and the associated economic, social, environmental and health impacts.
- **Urban and Rural Planning**— Currently, the world is undergoing the largest wave of urban growth in history. Since 2008, for the first time, more than half of the world's population lives in towns and cities. By 2030 this number will swell to almost 5 billion, with urban growth concentrated in Africa and Asia. While mega-cities have captured much public attention, most of the new growth will occur in smaller towns and cities—with fewer resources with which to respond to this huge change. This new kind of urbanization (the development of medium-sized towns and villages) as well as the formation of megacities are changing the notion of “rural areas”. Development, which previously focused primarily on “rural development,” now includes the study of the interaction and intersection between and among these various types of newly “urbanized” areas and their interaction with traditionally rural areas. Relevant also are the presence or absence of water supply systems, waste management systems, clean air systems, irrigation systems, energy-efficient designs, roads and transportation systems and telecommunication systems and the use of non-conventional building materials—all of which are needed for poverty reduction and economic growth. The strategic design of such systems must also take into account the environmental, economic and social impacts and include appropriate adaptations for predicted (and unpredicted) changes in climate.
- **Climate Science**—Large numbers of the world's population live in fragile environments, and many countries are experiencing severe environmental degradation as human settlement expands and natural resources are mined—both by rural and increasingly numerous and growing urban and peri-urban centers. Evolving environments typically define patterns of disease transmission affecting human, animal and plant health. All of these dynamics are affected by climate patterns, which are shown to be shifting due to anthropogenic climate change. Policy analysis and recommendations depend on a sound understanding of basic climate science.
- **Ecosystems (social-ecological systems)**—Development practitioners need to understand and use ecosystem (or landscape) approaches to natural resource management (including, for example, water management) that takes into account a holistic view of man, habitat, environment and local flora and fauna. Included in this approach will be concepts such as resilience, vulnerability, and adaptation. This understanding, jointly with integrated, multi-disciplinary, and multi-sectoral choices

and full participation in local processes and programs are essential components of good development practice.

SOCIAL SCIENCES: It is expected that each MDP Program will prioritize competencies within this content area according to their region, program strengths, and emphases, choosing at least 4 out of the 5 identified areas to cover in an integrated and holistic manner.

- **Economics**—Both micro- and macro-economics are considered essential for the development practitioner’s preparation. Microeconomics is essential for understanding the ground-level incentives and practicalities of economic policy design. Macroeconomics is crucial for understanding how programs interact with large-scale government decision-making and budgets, and the movement of goods, resources and services across countries.
- **Governance and Politics**—Effective governance and transparent, well-functioning institutions are important for effecting long-term structural change and for implementing development interventions. Institutions reflect the local history, local and regional politics, and political and institutional structures of a given location, as well as the cultural context. Effective, democratic governance encompasses free and transparent elections, design of civic and governmental institutions, decentralization of decision-making, transparency, and accountability. Addressing issues of corruption and fostering a culture of transparency and accountability can reduce costs and distortions that inhibit economic growth, foster political participation, and promote development.
- **Technology and Innovation Systems**—Understanding the intricate network of actors involved in the research, design, development and diffusion of technology is essential in order to contribute to the creation of supportive policies and mechanisms for the transfer and flow of knowledge and innovation.
- **Anthropology, Gender, and Culture**—It is necessary to acquire an understanding of how the *local* context and history, in the form of power relations, affects the outcome of development interventions. Implicated in understanding local context are factors such as gender, race, class, language, religion, history, law, the interaction of institutions and policies, and environmental attributes of the locality and the way these forces are expressed in the form of contested socio-cultural patterns and norms. “Gender” refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society or community considers appropriate for men and women. Gender attitudes and norms, such as those around the roles and responsibilities of women and men, girls and boys, are learned at a young age. Development programs may impact men and women and girls and boys differently, and should be designed with sensitivity to, and awareness of, these issues.
- **Education**—A critical component of any long-term development strategy, formal education systems must ensure students acquire the knowledge and skills that will bring them improved quality of life, appropriate competencies to prepare them for the work force and creative problem solving skills to pave the way for future innovations. Non-formal and community-based education programs are also vital as they catalyze the adoption of improved agricultural, health and sanitation, nutritional and vocational practices, and can play a vital role in peace-building and conflict resolution.

MANAGEMENT--It is expected that each MDP Program will prioritize competencies within this content area according to their region, program strengths, and emphases, choosing at least 4 out of the 7 identified areas to cover in an integrated and holistic manner (with some coverage of Project Design and Management; Statistics; and Budget Planning, Financial and Logistical Management required in all programs).

- **Project Design and Management**—Practitioners need to be able to design and manage projects, monitoring and evaluation efforts, and work flow. They need skills in project, strategic, and operational planning and the ability to measure progress against clear benchmarks. They need to learn techniques of adaptive management—the ability to adjust development interventions on the basis of results obtained. They also need to develop cross-cultural, team-building, and empathic means of personal interaction, and leadership and conflict resolution skills that can be used with community members, local and regional staff, and representatives of collaborating partners in both the public and private sector. They also should develop strong report and proposal-writing skills—with the ability to apply analytical thinking to “lessons learned” and “best practices”.
- **Statistics**—The collection and analysis of critical data and information is essential for project design, management, and monitoring and evaluation. In addition, key decision-makers must be able to understand and interpret statistical findings in order to make informed policy decisions and to design appropriate development strategies.
- **Social Entrepreneurship**—Effective practitioners may be called upon to learn and hone skills in social entrepreneurship such that they can work with individuals, businesses, and communities on poverty alleviation strategies that include the design, implementation and marketing of innovative and successful business initiatives, including the values chain approach. Ideally, these business initiatives are sustainable and able to meet the demands of a targeted market.
- **Budget Planning, Financial and Logistical Management**—Sustainable development practitioners must be able to design and manage program and project budgets with transparency and efficiency; prepare for internal and external audits and independent evaluations; and provide timely financial reports, including financial and in-kind contributions from donors and partners. Knowledge of financial markets, credit and microfinance is required as well as the procurement, supply chain, production management and distribution of essential goods and services—all aspects of office and computer skills (such as Excel, Gantt and pie charts, PowerPoint, etc.), and program and project logistics.
- **Communication and Negotiation**—Project implementation and policy design at the local-, regional- or national-level require keen understanding of power relations and cultural interactions. Practitioners must be able to interact with local community leaders, colleagues, partners and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds and disciplines; be able to interact with people from different socio-economic and employment levels; as well as develop documentation and communication strategies and coordinate participatory planning processes with their partners to implement sustainable development programs. In addition, practitioners need to be able to reflect on their own attitudes, perceptions and biases in terms of how they are formed, and how they affect their choices and performance.
- **Institutional and Human Resources Management**—As professionals advance in their careers, they must be able to lead, mentor and inspire ever-larger numbers of staff to achieve successful

outcomes. Practitioners must also be able to mitigate security risks of project personnel and institute measures to address problems of corruption. Institutional development is a key element in building long-lasting programs that achieve valuable, measurable results.

- **Information Systems Design and Management**—The rapidly evolving use of information management systems in the field of sustainable development provides growing opportunities for professionals to quickly transmit vital information and key indicators, to share best practices, and to engage in virtual mentorship. Practitioners must be able to collect, monitor and evaluate relevant information to inform and update policy and project implementation.

CORE COMPETENCIES: SKILLS

The Master's in Development Practice (MDP) is a combined academic and field-based degree program designed to educate and train a new generation of development practitioners who will be responsible stewards of the Earth's resources and will lead by example, fostering attitudes of social equity to all, as they master and use certain specific knowledge areas and skills.

Working closely with their colleagues—other skilled practitioners and technical specialists—in both small and large, public and private, community-based and global *teams*, MDP graduates must display mastery of **skills** (that complement the content areas). **These skills can be grouped in certain “skill areas,” as identified below. This list is not intended to be exhaustive; nor is it intended to describe every MDP program. It is meant as a guide and a suggested framework. The framework, also, should be viewed as somewhat flexible. Certain skills may fit under more than one category; for example, ‘problem identification’ or ‘program evaluation’ might fit in more than one place. Individual MDP programs can modify the specific lists of skills to fit the local needs and the context of the local program.**

- Program and Project Design and Management: skills include, but are not limited to:
 - identifying local, regional, national or international problems and opportunities
 - planning, designing, implementing, monitoring & evaluating programs/projects
 - fund-raising to secure donor, investor, and stakeholder support
 - executing evidence-based interventions
 - implementing interventions that take into account risk assessment, management, mitigation, etc.
 - developing monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess programs
 - applying appropriate technologies and implementation strategies
 - developing and implementing ‘scale-up’ strategies
- Communication skills, including, but not limited to:
 - Written communication skills, as applied to memos, emails, letters, reports, presentations, case studies

- Oral communication skills, as applied to meetings (one-on-one and larger), conference participation, oral presentations
- Information technology, including computer, mobile telephone and web-based skills
- Research skills, including, but not limited to:
 - Conducting qualitative research within an ethical framework
 - Conducting interviews and focus groups
 - Conducting quantitative research within an ethical framework
 - Developing surveys
 - Gathering, synthesizing, and managing research results (data)
 - Analyzing and presenting research results
- Participatory techniques, including, but not limited to:
 - Planning and carrying out community needs assessments
 - Conducting work preparatory to project design, such as “stakeholder analysis,” historical timeline construction, visioning, scenario planning and building
 - Conducting strategic planning, using SWOT analysis and other techniques
 - Using the principles of appreciative inquiry in group participatory activities
 - Engaging in participatory mapping
 - Facilitating local events (meetings, workshops, etc.)
 - Involving local schools, governments, NGOs, and Civil society organizations
 - Participating in community organization events
 - Designing and implementing public information and education campaigns
- Collaborating and partnering: skills include, but are not limited to:
 - self-reflection: analyses of one’s own attitudes, perceptions, and biases
 - empathy
 - leadership
 - team-building
 - conflict resolution
 - sharing ‘lessons learned’ with relevant partners
- Cross-cultural and intercultural skills, including, but not limited to:
 - Ability to assess local history, language, culture, traditions, and perspectives
 - Ability to design projects and programs that take into account local history, language, culture, traditions, perspectives, etc.
 - Ability to use culturally sensitive written and verbal communication skills to further cross-cultural awareness and understanding

- Technological and media skills
 - Familiarity with—and basic ability to use—available and appropriate techniques and technology, in an ethical way, for the purposes of development
 - Willingness to experiment with available formats and interest in developing and sharing further skills in the area of technology and media
- Entrepreneurial and innovative business and marketing skills, including, but not limited to:
 - Familiarity with—and basic ability to use—techniques of cost benefit analysis, value chain analysis, micro-finance
 - Awareness of skills needed for enterprise development and basic ability to implement them
 - Familiarity with—and basic ability to use—Social Enterprise organization and management
- Human Resource management skills, including, but not limited to:
 - Ability to recruit, train, and lead teams
 - Ability to create job descriptions, conduct hiring interviews and performance appraisals, make staffing decisions and implement them
- Others as identified as appropriate for local program (or area of field assignment)