

# Perspectives on Capacity Development for Accra and Beyond

## Working Document for the Bonn Workshop

### How this document came about

This document makes no pretence of being definitive or of coming out of a well defined process of new research. It is not a consensus paper, but rather the result of a collective brainstorming by people who have worked, researched and reflected on capacity development (CD) over many years. Contributions have been made by members of the reference group for the Bonn Workshop and have also been drawn from queries posted to the Learning Network on Capacity Development and the UNDP Capacity Development Network. It has benefited from a process of vetting by the members of the workshop steering group.

### The purpose of this document

Our key points are summarized in table form to provide a limited number of actionable items to inform discussions at the workshop. The document provides raw material for discussion. The points may be critiqued, questioned, sharpened, added to or subtracted from. Structure and emphasis may change with the deliberations. On day two of the workshop, we should arrive at a more solid collection of key messages and propositions. From this, we would hope to define a set of recommendations that can usefully inform the Accra Action Agenda and a work programme on capacity development for the years to come.

### Perspectives on CD

The table below is structured around the logic and focus of the workshop objectives that all working sessions will pursue (What? Why? How?). As such, they are similar to conclusions that have been reached by a large number of donor reviews and evaluations of capacity development support. This evidence has pointed out that capacity development is among the most difficult, and least successful, of all international aid efforts. The workshop in Bonn and the upcoming Conference in Accra offer the international community the next opportunity to examine ways to improve on this record and improve the outcomes of collective efforts on capacity development. The box below recalls some fundamental messages on capacity development. The DAC paper *“The Challenge of Capacity Development: Working Towards Good Practice”* reflects the emerging consensus.

#### Some fundamental messages

- CD is an endogenous change process. Any meaningful CD support needs to start from existing capacities and work with the assets that any country brings to the table. It should support and engage with processes that ensure local ownership and that, as much as possible, are driven by country-level initiative.
- Technical cooperation (TC) and CD are not the same thing. While carefully designed TC can support country driven CD efforts, there are other ways that development partners can support CD. It may be helpful to distinguish CD as a process and TC as one of several possible ways to support it.
- While attention often focuses on developing “missing” capacity, or attending to capacity “gaps”, the first order of business must be to recognise, safeguard and build on existing capacity.
- Capacities grow over time and evolve in different ways. It follows that CD approaches need to be highly contextual, iterative and flexible for “good fit”.
- Just as all learning is voluntary, ownership is not an option but a fundamental condition for capacity development. It follows that leadership for change is equally critical.
- Accountability is a critical driver for CD, and an important link in translating an increase in capacity to improvements in performance or in service delivery. This means that tax-payers and civil society need to have a voice and a right to receive answers.
- The country level is the epicentre of CD. Multi-partner arrangements to support CD need to be shaped at the country level in the context of wider initiatives to promote harmonisation and alignment.
- CD efforts can rarely if ever be limited to technical dimensions. Because CD is about change, it is also about the political economy and the realities of interest and power.
- Capacity can be considered an end—a development outcome—in itself (for example, a capable state). Capacity provides the basis for making development policy choices, not only a means for achieving certain goals.

What? Development partners agree to:	Why? Rational	How? Recommendations
<b>Professionalization and quality management of support to capacity development (CD)</b>		
<p>1. <b>Concrete measures to ensure “good fit” approaches at the country level and better deployment of existing capacity assets</b></p>	<p>Failure to take into account existing capacities, previous initiatives, or to consider culture and context, has been a persistent weakness in support for CD. Partners need to focus more on finding, inducing, igniting, and unleashing endogenous human energy and commitment. What works in one context may not necessarily work in another, and “best practice” approaches have often resulted in supplanting more viable local solutions. Engaging for “good fit” requires specific tools and skills (change management, process facilitation, action learning, for example), iterative inquiry and response to what actors want to learn, as well as a longer time frame to allow changes to take hold. Some situations may be better served by working with societal actors, such as mainstream cultural institutions which have a real stake in their stakeholders, Not only governmental organizations but equally CSOs require CD support.</p>	<p><b>Actions at the country level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Agree on a joint process of identifying existing assets, entitlements, activities and knowledge, as a basis for defining sensible CD support.</li> <li>b. Strengthen local and regional institutions to support CD and promote South-South cooperation.</li> <li>c. Motivate donor agents to engage in learning processes with country counterparts and stakeholders.</li> <li>d. Agree on arrangements that allow supporting CD efforts in CSOs and, if pertinent, to work with nongovernmental players..</li> </ol> <p><b>Actions at the international level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Agree on options for reforming existing results and logical frameworks to make them more suitable to long-term, systemic CD approaches.</li> <li>b. Agree on standards for focusing CD support on facilitation of learning and change management rather than importing technical inputs from external sources.</li> </ol>
<p>2. <b>Ensure more open choice of suppliers for CD services, including through South-South cooperation</b></p>	<p>Just as all learning is voluntary, ownership is not an option but a fundamental condition for capacity development. Strengthening country-level capacities requires that country stakeholders take the lead in deciding what serves their needs and thus in choosing the supply of CD support services. Support to think tanks, universities and research would enable countries to develop appropriate development models that suit their endowments as well as aspirations. South-South or North-South-South cooperation should become an increasingly viable option. Northern suppliers of CD support services should team up with local or South-South suppliers in delivering services.</p>	<p><b>Actions at the country level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Partners and donors negotiate collectively binding rules that guide the use of TC funds in the respective country.</li> <li>b. As a rule, the choice of CD support should include options for local or South-South supply of required services.</li> <li>c. Pool TC supply in mechanisms that are impartially managed and enable choice of services by partners.</li> </ol> <p><b>Actions at the international level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>d. Donors should untie their support to CD to allow partner countries to have choice. Where donors continue contracting they should simplify contractual relationships to allow Southern suppliers to compete.</li> </ol>
<p>3. <b>Establish professional standards and strengthen accountability to pursue CD</b></p>	<p>Capacity development has for decades been declared “everybody’s business but nobody’s responsibility”. Today “CD” is used as label for many support efforts that do not actually serve that purpose, and poor performance is often ignored or even rewarded. Effective support to CD needs</p>	<p><b>Actions at the country level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Establish binding rules for TC that ensure maximum use is made of local institutions and consultants, as well as change management and highly adaptive approaches to supporting CD.</li> <li>b. Put mechanisms in place to regularly</li> </ol>

<p><b>support and technical cooperation with technical rigor and applying state-of-the-art approaches.</b></p>	<p>to integrate state-of-the-art approaches including change management, process facilitation, coaching, training and expert services that combine technical, contextual and stakeholder engagement competencies. CD practice should not only be tailor-made to context, but practitioners should be held to the highest standards of professional rigour. On country level development partners need to open up their performance in supporting CD to regular independent review. It may be possible to apply relevant international standards to CD support including TC. The feasibility of a system of accreditation should also be explored.</p>	<p>evaluate CD support and aid relations independently, compare quality of services across providers at the country level and globally.</p> <p>c. Consider the function of an ombudsman to channel complaints and present an annual report.</p> <p><b>Actions at the international level:</b></p> <p>a. Examine carefully the rewards and incentive systems for CD providers and practitioners and realign these to ensure that development of capacity is rewarded while poor performance is sanctioned.</p> <p>b. Explore by 2010 the application of international norms, the possibility of developing a mechanism of accreditation for CD service providers, and guidance on CD audits.</p>
<p><b>4. Assess capacity and measure progress in CD at country level with locally agreed measures</b></p>	<p>Empirically-based diagnostic processes are increasingly used to measure baseline capacities and look systematically at ways to build stronger country-level institutions engaged in CD. Concerted efforts among partners are required to establish an evolving framework that is agreed and owned on country level, rather than only at agency headquarters. This would not only create stronger awareness and identify adapted approaches but also generate evidence tailored primarily to domestic analysis and decision making. Horizontal diagnostic processes catering for country needs should have priority over vertical processes serving donor accountability. Improvements of approaches for country purposes would also lead to more sound international measures of progress on CD.</p>	<p><b>Actions at the country level:</b></p> <p>a. Country stakeholders agree on a <b>methodology for assessment and indicators of capacity</b> to be collectively used at the country level.</p> <p>b. Reinforce national statistical systems which increase the quality of relevant statistics for decision making and enable data to be disaggregated by gender, district and socio-economic status.</p> <p><b>Actions at the international level:</b></p> <p>c. Convene an international process to establish <b>by 2010 standards for adapting donor systems to using country-lead, horizontal diagnostics.</b></p> <p>d. <b>Develop as pertinent a selective set of potential indicators as collective reference</b> for country level capacity assessment and M&amp;E.</p>
<p><b>Mainstreaming CD into sector operations and addressing systemic constraints</b></p>		
<p><b>5. Address capacity development within the mainstream of sector development</b></p>	<p>Capacity development should be addressed as a cross-cutting issue at country-level but equally as a technical issue at sector or thematic level. In effect, most development resources are budgeted, planned and delivered at the sector level. It is at sector level where stakeholder involvement is most concrete, in sector working groups and where collective evaluations are focused. More explicit CD approaches and their integration into mainstream sector planning and dialogue are critical to sustainable sector-level development. At the same time, sector strategies need to be conceived within a comprehensive</p>	<p><b>Actions at the country level:</b></p> <p>a. Articulate clear and actionable CD objectives and targets within national sector plans and concrete thematic strategies.</p> <p>b. Establish a mechanism to ensure that in the focus on sectoral aspects of CD nothing important is getting lost in the broader system.</p> <p>c. Allocate adequate funding for CD in implementing sectoral assessments, sector plans, and SWAPS.</p> <p><b>Actions at the international level:</b></p> <p>d. Take concrete measures to integrate</p>

	development strategy that recognizes the cross-cutting capacity issues that require more generalized attention.	capacity development support within sectoral, thematic and technical support services.
<b>6. Identify the pervasive systemic issues that undermine capacity development and agree on joint action to address incentive systems, governance weaknesses and accountability mechanisms.</b>	<p>Many sector-specific and results-focused efforts seem to fail or to lack sustainability because of broad, cross-cutting governance failures. These constitute collective action problems that undermine many CD efforts. Successful efforts are usually associated with strong ownership, charismatic champions, demand-side pressures and incentives that are conducive to change. Reinforcing participatory approaches and involvement of a broad range of development partners may be critical to progress on CD. Strengthening the role of parliaments, building social accountability protocols and tools such as score cards, and fostering transparency in the use of development resources are key to getting sustained, widely supported results. In many countries salaries and working conditions need to be adjusted to permit country institutions to effectively use and retain skilled labour and mitigate brain drain. Sectors often function in “silos” and the capacity of the different components within the whole system to relate to and communicate with each other is fundamental.</p>	<p><b>Actions at the country level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify the systemic factors that enable or undermine CD efforts within sectors and collectively agree on strategies to directly address these.</li> <li>Agree on <b>policy and regulation of salary supplementation</b> by donors that is effectively linked to long-term salary reform.</li> <li><b>Define approaches and allocate resources to empower citizens</b>, civil society and the private sector to claim their rights, take initiative and effectively shape development outcomes.</li> <li>Agree on clear benchmarks and performance criteria for all partners to collectively overcome systemic constraints.</li> </ol> <p><b>Actions at the international level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Invest in research to effectively support systemic change commensurate with efforts undertaken on a sectoral basis.</li> <li>Review and agree on coherent management of <b>skilled labour migration</b> and measures to support brain retention and “brain-gain” strategies for developing countries</li> </ol>
<b>7. Strengthen overall management of aid and aid relationships as a means of capacity development</b>	<p>The Paris Declaration outlines a set of critical issues in aid effectiveness that are particularly important for capacity development. These include strengthening country ownership and leadership, managing multiple aid relationships, developing country systems, and avoiding parallel implementation structures, among others. These practices are particularly important in the implementation of projects, which can drain local capacity by importing short-term, external fixes that fail to take hold.</p>	<p><b>Actions at the country level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Allocate adequate resources to strengthen country-level capacity to align donors and manage aid relationships and processes.</li> <li>Permit the use of project implementation units (PIUs) only in exceptional cases where this can be justified and where stakeholders agree that this is the most appropriate option.</li> </ol> <p><b>Actions at the international level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Maintain pressure to discourage the reliance on parallel PIUs by continuing to track use of such structures and setting clear targets for reductions.</li> </ol>
<b>Sustaining a collective change process for effective CD support</b>		
<b>8. Engage at the country level in a concerted effort to translate</b>	<p>Any agenda for change needs agents for change. At the country level, attention to CD also requires a bundling of energies around a common vision and agenda and an orchestration of change within mainstream processes. An alliance of champions across constituencies, civil society, government and donor agents</p>	<p><b>Actions at the country level:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>CD champions should establish a partnership to foster common vision, and an agreed agenda and promote change within the mainstream of country development.</li> <li>Invest in broadening a common</li> </ol>

<b>what is known about effective support to CD into practice.</b>	can identify a country -level agenda for change and sensibly promote implementation. This may include learning about how to bring together key constituencies (government, donor experts, practitioners ...), defining quality criteria, or establishing accountability mechanisms. A concerted effort to promote regulatory norms that define, structure and validate CD institutions and develop an adapted and stable set of mechanisms for CD.	understanding on CD at the country level among decision makers, experts and CD practitioners. c. Agree on a series of learning and planning events on CD before 2010 with broad stakeholder involvement. d. Invest in local knowledge architecture, applied research, curricula development, and professional learning opportunities on state-of-the-art approaches.
<b>9. Agree on a concerted international effort to apply CD knowledge and to change operational practice in development cooperation</b>	Learning on how to support CD will require a sustained and concerted effort to translate changing policy into practice throughout agencies. Further mechanisms are needed to take forward a specific work programme after the Accra conference to deepen CD knowledge, strengthen networks and communities of practice of experts working on CD. While much has been learned in recent years, further expansion of the global CD knowledge base requires efforts to capture and make widely accessible experiences, methodologies and tools, and ways of improving outcomes from CD initiatives. This effort would facilitate South-South interactions on CD, support research and learning programs undertaken by Southern universities and research institutes and promote joint donor and partner country learning programs on CD.	<b>Actions at the international level:</b> a. Establish a DAC joint venture and/or global partnership mandated to lead a concerted effort in moving CD knowledge into concrete operational changes for effective CD support. b. Strengthen complementarity and synergies between global CD initiatives, including the DAC, UN initiatives, LenCD, ACBF, Capacity.org, CDNet, Capacity Collective, ECDPM, and Train4Dev. c. Broaden and deepen the knowledge base on CD in priority areas that require a sophistication of understanding and research. d. Support open access to CD knowledge by internet and promote mutual learning opportunities on CD on regional and sub-regional levels
<b>10. Instigate a major training effort among donor agents for effective CD support and reform TC to be more closely aligned to country systems.</b>	Donors tend to use the “lack of capacity” in developing countries as an excuse for not aligning with partner systems. Donor agencies themselves often lack capacity, especially in field offices, in critical areas such as public financial management, procurement, but also managing partnerships and effective engagement in multi-stakeholder processes. Donors should revisit all aspects of their TC, including policy aspects, review of procedures, delivery systems and communications. Translating CD knowledge and policies into improved operational practice and implementation requires a major effort among donors to educate and support their staff on aid effectiveness and CD and to align incentives and performance measures accordingly.	<b>Actions at the country level:</b> a. Donors should devolve powers to engage and take decisions to their country offices or delegate authority to country level agents. <b>Actions at the international level:</b> b. Explore whether agreed <b>international standards</b> can be adopted, for example, in public financial management and procurement. c. Development agencies should engage in an extensive, joint, CD training effort involving country counterparts that effectively reaches 80% of their field staff by 2010. d. <b>Agree by 2010 on a strategy and reforms</b> that are aimed at increasing donor use of country systems, consistent with the targets agreed in the Paris Declaration.