

The Potential Value Of Country-Level CD Strategies

By Anthony M. Land

While there seems to be an emerging understanding about capacity development among development thinkers and policy makers, especially in the international arena, difficulties continue to arise in translating good ideas and conceptual frameworks into operational plans at country level.

There is still need to shift the discourse on capacity development from the international level to country and sector levels. It is here where policy prescription meets operational reality.

What indeed should a CD strategy look like? How can the ideas of development partners on capacity development match up with the thinking of country stakeholders? How can partners exchange constructively on the “what” (capacity for x,y, z is needed etc) and “how” (how to facilitate change, how to encourage learning etc in different organisational/cultural contexts etc) of capacity development.

While the idea of drafting yet more strategies may be received with well-founded scepticism a case can be made to promote CD strategies at the sector and sub-sector levels if not at the national level. Why?

- **Theory meets practice.** The sector level seems to be an appropriate level at which to bring together conceptual ideas from the top with operational realities and dilemmas that emerge from the bottom.
- **Encouraging a country-owned agenda.** The sector level offers the opportunity for CD strategies to become an integral part of a sector development strategy. It can help country partners take ownership of capacity development, no longer treated as something separate that donors do to help, but something that is an integral part of the sector development process for which local stakeholders need to take charge.
- **Helping to harmonise and align external support.** It provides a potential framework around which the role of development partners in supporting a country-led CD strategy can be discussed in more concrete terms both in relation to “what” and “how” questions, and especially in relation to the possible contribution of TC.
- **Promoting Dialogue and Learning.** The process of preparing a CD strategy is as important as the product that emerges. This is because it encourages stakeholders to engage in discussion about capacity issues and in the process to confront sometimes divergent notions and views on what is important. It can help generate a common language that makes the shift away from sometimes symbolic reference to CD.

In some situations, a case may be made to develop a national CD strategy that provides an umbrella (common language, terminology, concepts etc) around which sector strategies can then evolve. The development of principles to guide and monitor how external partners engage to support country CD processes, especially through the use of technical cooperation, could also prove valuable.