

One Pager – Actionable Points for Accra and Beyond

1. Capacity Development or Capacity Enhancement - It is always a big flaw to start from a point of view that there is total lack of capacity on the ground – this is where fundamental mistakes are made. Let us change our approach – from looking at the challenge as ‘capacity development’ to ‘capacity enhancement’. Start from a point of building on existing capacities. Institute a mechanism of tapping and enhancing existing capacity. Accra should come up with specific action points for tapping into existing capacities e.g. through proper needs assessments, taking an inventory of local skills – within the country and locals working abroad, involving locals in project design and implementation.
2. Harmonization of incentive schemes – current incentives where expatriate staff are paid a zillion times more than local staff with comparable (sometimes more) skills and qualifications – is counter to the spirit of capacity enhancement. Local staff with comparable skills are not motivated to take on jobs with project for development partners. Accra 2008, ought to work to remove these disparities, so local staff can be taken on comparable terms to those of expatriate staff. Also Accra needs to come out strongly on reduced the per-capita presence of expatriate staff at the high levels of program/project implementation. Improving incentives and deliberately targeting locals at line management levels is the sure way to sustainable capacity enhancement;
3. Work-based Attachment and Employment in the West - Development partners need to look at capacity enhancement differently i.e. by deliberately promoting 1 to 2 year employment of locals in the west so the people trained can return and enhance capacity in their own countries. Actual working experience, in priority fields would offer the best learning experience to the local staff. Yes, this approach has risks of defection and going head on with the advocates of ‘brain drain’ but by and large the recipient countries would benefit from such a program;
4. Capacity Mismanagement and Working outside Government- There is also a school of thought that it is not the lack of capacity in the recipient countries but the fact that the available capacity is mismanaged, sometimes deliberately. Development partners need to consider options of working outside Government e.g. with institutions such as mainstream cultural institutions and faith based institutions. This applies more to development partners working under bi-lateral arrangements. Governments, in Africa, have put politics and short-term interests ahead of long-term development. In essence, Governments have become a constraint to long-term capacity enhancement. Care, however, should be exercised to identify and work with institutions that are progressive and accountable to their communities.
5. Capacity Enhancement Audits - One of the hottest areas in microfinance today is Social Performance Measurement and indeed a lot of donor funds have gone into financing social missions of MFIs. There is a strong proposition of developing a standardized approach for conducting social audits. While impact assessments are done, year in year out, many projects have been assessed very successful - though the recipients may not feel the same way. We need to move forward to the level of developing guidelines for conducting CE Audits (by eminent members of the various capacity building networks);
6. Accountability – there is need to localize management of all project budgets. The current practice of splitting budgets between local and foreign administered components does not promote transparency especially to the recipients of funds.