

## Ownership and Capacity Development: key issues

By Philippe Besson

***“The cornerstone of contemporary thinking about aid and development effectiveness is country ownership. Yet country ownership of policies and programmes is premised on the capacity to exercise it. Ownership will not begin to emerge in the absence of sufficient local capacity. The relevant capacities include those that allow mediation among the plurality of interests and constituents within the country, so that compromises and shared commitments can be arrived at”<sup>1</sup>***

***“Aid is inherently political and the development process is one which draws together the interests of donors, recipient governments and citizens north and south. In seeking to navigate through this range of interests, the needs and rights of those living in poverty must remain centre-stage and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals by 2015 must remain the measure by which we judge our success and failures.”<sup>2</sup>***

### **So:**

- There is no democratic ownership without information, knowledge, and ability: capacity.
- There is no real leadership that is not rooted in legitimacy based on a political vision for the whole of a society – including those with least voice and power - combined with capacity.
- The kind of ownership we must contemplate towards achieving the MDGs is one that serves the interests of the poor, ownership that makes development people-owned, -managed and -controlled.

### **But:**

- So far, we have not performed very well according to the above criteria, because, amongst many other things:
  - Donors need quick fixes, rapidly visible results; they often tend to end up doing things themselves, instead of the “partner”
  - Donors have not always developed the necessary skills within their own ranks: organisational and institutional development, coaching,...
  - Donors often have inconsistent agenda and do not always deal well with the contradiction
  - The ownership question is also a matter of power relations and balance/imbalance, including about who possesses information and skills

### **There is scope for changing our practice:**

- And foster local knowledge more and better, through endogenous processes
- And promote broad-based knowledge, as well as the capacity to use it
- And give room to a broader range of voices, minds, opinions, stakeholders
- And strengthen the “partner’s” systems, with the necessary patience
- And find ways to capture and monitor the Partner Countries’ real effective progress and effort with respect to ownership as defined in the Paris Declaration

**Moreover:** one size doesn’t fit all, each context is specific and calls for specific interventions.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Challenge of Capacity Development”, OECD, 2006, p.13

<sup>2</sup> “Fostering Democratic Ownership”, an Alliance2015 Report, April 2008