



SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVES ON CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

“TIME TO ACT AND LEARN”

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Capacity development (CD) is strongly embedded in the agenda of the South. It is an ambitious and challenging agenda that aims to harness broad political leadership, get beyond fragmented and piecemeal approaches, address systemic issues related to state reform and incentives, and make increased use of South-South co-operation and regional/local resources. To deliver on this agenda, CD champions from the South and the North now have to get beyond the level of intentions and turn to action, both jointly and individually. This was the broad consensus emerging from the meeting hosted by the CD Alliance and the OECD/DAC on 30 November 2009, attended by Southern champions and donor representatives.

A SOUTHERN PERSPECTIVE ON CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

According to the CD champions present in the meeting (see box), a southern perspective on CD includes the following highlights:

Capacity development goes far beyond stand-alone, ad hoc interventions. Capacity constraints are critical obstacles to sustainable development in developing countries. Capacity development is, however, much more than ad hoc activities and training, and it should not be perceived as simply an add-on to donor funded interventions. It must be integrated into sector and thematic development plans, it has to address political and institutional issues, systems with institutions, as well as the internal and external environment for performance. This adds to the complexity and sensitivity of CD, but it does not detract from its importance.

Capacity development is a country responsibility. Developing countries must exercise a leadership that can engage their citizens as well as representative bodies nationally and locally. Public policy processes around CD as well as its implementation must be open and flexible. Donors come second, and they need to play a helpful role that supports rather than undermines broad domestic ownership. Supply-driven donor assistance to CD does not work.

Capacity development demands political buy-in. CD is a political as much as a technical process and it requires a sound understanding of the importance of capacity issues at the political level. In addition to senior-level policy makers, this includes the important role of players outside the government, both at the central and local levels. In a sector such as agriculture, for example, there is no way that CD can be achieved without the involvement of farmer associations.

A holistic approach without losing context specificity. Capacity development needs to be mainstreamed in all sectors, and requires a multidisciplinary approach. It must selectively target regional, national and local levels, relevant. Approaches which work in one setting may not work in others. For example, in fragile situations CD processes may look very different from processes under more robust and stable conditions.

Balancing short and long term perspectives. Politicians – and supporting donors – often have a short term perspective and CD processes need to accommodate a balance between delivering quick wins and not losing the essential long haul perspective that is necessary to sustain and consolidate capacity gains.

SOUTHERN CD VOICES

The meeting “Southern Perspectives on Capacity Development” was led by **Talaat Abdel Malek**, Egypt, Co-chair of the CD Alliance and Co-chair of the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness. It included presentations by **Ibrahim Assane Mayaki**, CEO of the NEPAD Secretariat, **Enrique Maruri**, Director of International Co-operation in Colombia and **Apollinaire Ndurukwira**, Operations Director of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF).

The challenge of incentives. How to get incentives to performance right, especially in the public sector, is a particular challenge. It goes beyond financial incentives and touches motivation, career perspectives, leadership and work ethos. Addressing public sector incentives often implies a more comprehensive civil service reform, an area where there is still a lot to learn about promises and pitfalls.

Avoiding parallel structures. Both politicians and donors may be tempted to create temporary arrangements (special advisers or units) to perform critical functions or implement what in effect are often donor-driven activities. Such capacity substitution may solve problems in the short run, but at the same time risk undermining the capacity of the regular institutions which should perform the tasks in question.

As an example of a Southern approach to CD, Dr. Mayaki from the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) referred to the recent CD strategic framework that NEPAD has prepared (see box).

NEPAD CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

NEPAD recognizes the centrality of capacity development, with a view to empowering Africans to embark on the setting of development agendas, and for them to fulfil their creative potential. Much of Africa's inability to implement programmes with far reaching impact stems from systemic weaknesses at the levels of the state, the region, and the continent, as well as the institutional and individual level. The inter-relationship amongst these levels of governance has created vicious cycles in which poverty, limited capacity, and bad governance are mutually supportive. NEPAD will seek to join forces with the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) in implementing this mandate.

The NEPAD Framework is built on seven strategic cornerstones:

- Leadership Transformation;
- Citizen Transformation;
- Utilizing African Potential,
- Skills and Resources for Development;
- Capacity of Capacity Builders;
- Integrated Approaches and Continuous Improvement Processes;
- Knowledge-based and innovation-driven processes.

SOUTH-SOUTH CO-OPERATION AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

A strong agenda for South-South Co-operation. The Accra Agenda for Action includes a commitment to use local and regional resources in support for CD, including through South-South co-operation. The potential of South-South co-operation will be explored at a High Level Event in Bogota, Colombia (see box). The Bogota meeting was highlighted as an important opportunity to better define the South-South agenda.

HIGH LEVEL EVENT IN BOGOTA: "SOUTH-SOUTH CO-OPERATION AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT"

The Bogota HLE, planned for 24-26 March 2010, is a major stepping stone on the way to the next aid effectiveness Forum in Seoul in 2011, which itself is the follow up on the 2005 Paris Declaration and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action. The Bogota meeting is still under preparation, but is likely to focus on (i) providing and sharing evidence about what partner countries and international organizations are doing regarding SSC and what have they learned; (ii) strengthening southern voices in the aid effectiveness context, as both providers and recipients, within the global aid architecture, showing their practical contributions to an inclusive global development agenda; and (iii) defining major actions to be followed to implement the agreements enshrined in the Accra Agenda for Action and accelerating the exchange and peer learning processes between partner countries and international/regional organizations.

Potential alternatives to traditional technical assistance: Local and regional resources may offer higher affinity to, and understanding of, the local context. This is often a prerequisite for effective support to CD processes given their politically and culturally sensitive character. South-South co-operation may also enable mutual learning and peer exchange processes, breaking the "expert-counterpart" paradigm which has not proven effective as support to CD. Citizen-to-citizen exchanges could be explored as part of the rich variety of means that would not only narrowly support CD processes in a technical sense, but also enable a broader transmission of experiences and viewpoints to mobilize energy and innovation in public sector institutions, in public-private partnerships and among non-state actors.

Middle-income countries are ready and able to contribute: Countries which have recently moved from the low- to the middle income category have passed through transformation and transitions which may be more relevant to low-income countries than the experience of OECD countries. Middle-income countries already have a capacity to provide assistance.

A JOINT PERSPECTIVE TO BRIDGE THE GAPS BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE

In the debate following the presentations, participants from the North all welcomed the Southern engagement in capacity development and stressed that their own thinking tracked the Southern perspective. There seems thus little reason to talk about a Southern perspective as opposed to, or different from, a Northern perspective. Both recognize the importance of local demand, ownership and leadership, both see CD as a political process as much as a technical one, and both agree that opportunities for South-South co-operation and use of local and regional resources should be considered.

However, issues were raised on HOW to shape a joint perspective on CD - including concerns on how it could and should be approached. There is a considerable gap between theory and practice and, though there was neither the time nor opportunity for a more detailed brainstorming of concrete actions, the following important entry points were identified.

- *Develop capacity to support capacity development – a joint agenda:* Both development partners and partner countries need to increase their ability to work with capacity issues and capacity development. This includes addressing the incentive issues – on both sides – which permit the longer term and more comprehensive CD approaches to be sustained in the face of short term pressures and priorities. It also includes getting ambitions and priorities right – not the least in “fragile” settings where the starting point for capacity is low and where a supply- and donor-driven agenda may easily do more harm than good by diverting scarce local capacity to donor activities.
- *Don't start from scratch:* A Southern perspective on capacity development reminds external actors that there is always something to build on. Progress can be made, even if modest, and experiences and lessons learnt can highlight both what seems to work and what definitely does not. Building on what is there, and finding the path of least resistance which appropriately addresses political sensitivities, requires strong and transparent local leadership (including in donor country offices) and generates the insight and mandate needed to adapt their support flexibly to the local context. Furthermore, capacity development interventions should be integrated and aligned with the design and implementation of partner countries' strategies and priorities.
- *Untie CD support:* Development partners should, until they can provide support for CD through country systems, untie their CD support and revise their procedures so that countries can get the requisite co-operation and support locally, regionally, or from other southern sources when this provides the best value for money.
- *Get evidence and learn from it:* There is a rich array of evaluations, methodologies and cross-cutting reviews already available, built on multiple case studies and professional experience. However, this information seems to circulate narrowly and may also be at a level of generalisation where it no longer serves concrete, in-country and in-sector learning processes. Country and development partners need to integrate joint, evidence based learning into their collaboration at the sector, thematic and local level. The issue of incentives, linked to broader civil service reforms, seems a particularly important topic, where both local and up-scaled knowledge is direly needed.
- *Take CD to the political level:* The rhetoric of capacity development is built largely on the international donor agenda, and seems poised to stay there for the moment. To bridge the gap between the theory of CD and practice at country, sector and local level, champions on both sides need to mainstream capacity on the political agendas in their respective systems. This demands convincing stories and clear messages confirming that a Southern perspective on capacity development is workable and practical. It also requires stories convincing development partners to leave their comfort zone of apparent control so that they can better follow and support when inclusive country leadership attempts to address the real and thorny issues that are part and parcel of any holistic agenda of capacity development.

The meeting on *Southern Perspectives on Capacity Development* was co-organised by the CD Alliance and the DAC Secretariat in Paris on 30 November 2009. This brief was developed with the assistance of Nils Boesen. For further information, please contact James.HRADSKY@oecd.org or Silvia.GUIZZARDI@oecd.org



