

## Exploring Capacity Issues “On the Road to Seoul”: Quality Training for Capacity Development Discussion Note – August 2009

Since the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and its 2006 guidance *Working Towards Good Practice*<sup>1</sup>, the DAC has considered capacity development to be a key development co-operation priority. It has sought to help the donor community to identify and apply increasingly operational forms of good practice and to support the voice of partner countries in the on-going debate on capacity development.

Together with key partners such as the Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD) and a core group of the Southern-led CD Alliance, the DAC helped raise the visibility of capacity development at the Accra Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness (HLF3) in September 2008. The resulting *Accra Agenda for Action* (AAA) refers to the importance of capacity in at least 16 different passages, relating broadly to six themes: enabling environment constraints; capacity of country systems; technical and South-South co-operation; integrating capacity into sector/thematic strategies; the capacity development role of civil society and the private sector; state building in fragile situations.

Post Accra, the DAC and its key partners collaborated to gather information and to highlight the emerging South-North consensus on good practice for capacity development, a first key step of which was the completion of an inventory of donor policies and practices (March 2009)<sup>2</sup>. By the time of the Seoul High Level Forum (HLF4) in late 2011 we will produce a joint synthesis statement on good practice in the capacity development priority areas of the AAA. This discussion note is intended to frame one aspect – training – of the overall DAC effort to promote joint debate on the issues of capacity development on the road to Seoul.

### 1. Context/background

One of the priority areas that emerged from Accra relates to more demand-driven and locally owned **technical co-operation** – defined by the DAC as “the provision of know-how in the form of personnel, training, research, and associated costs”. It is growingly recognized today that technical cooperation does not equate to capacity development; donors are increasingly seeking to integrate technical cooperation into a broader framework of capacity development vision and support, often affiliated with the political will for change (OECD, 2009). Still, technical cooperation remains the most common practice used by donors to support capacity development. DAC statistics indicate that since 1961 DAC members devoted some 400 billion USD – at current prices – to technical co-operation, of which training and other learning-oriented programmes (i.e. fellowship programmes) constitute a prominent part. Training and learning-related issues are therefore necessarily a central aspect of DAC policy discussion on technical co-operation and, more broadly, on capacity development.

Recent evaluations and other assessments conducted by donors and key multilateral agencies on the effectiveness of technical cooperation – and training in particular – have revealed important inefficiencies in the current approaches to training<sup>3</sup>. Evidence gathered suggests that training programmes have often been less effective than expected in addressing a variety of institutional, organizational, and individual capacity needs. Training has been found to be rarely the optimal tool for sustainable capacity development (Nelson, 2006). A list of major shortcomings identified is presented in Box 1 below.

The various voices and contributions to the training for capacity development debate point to an emerging consensus on key principles and critical issues – which is the subject of this discussion note. Such a consensus can help to guide the design, management and assessment of training programmes, and more fundamentally assist in choosing alternative approaches to support learning. This is an opportunity to join up available information and to advance discussion and joint effort in this area.

<sup>1</sup> OECD (2006). *The Challenge of Capacity Development – Working Towards Good Practice*.

<sup>2</sup> OECD (2009). *Inventory of Donor Approaches to Capacity Development: What we are Learning*.

<sup>3</sup> See – among others – IEG (2005); DFID (2006); Nelson (2006); IEG (2008)

**Box 1 - Training Shortcomings**  
**A non-exhaustive list from existing assessments and evaluations**

- ✓ *Supply-driven, donor-managed, and often “one-time effort” nature of traditional forms of training*, in contrast with the key principles of country ownership and leadership of capacity development interventions;
- ✓ *Isolation* from broader development objectives and capacity development strategies;
- ✓ *Failure to reach beyond individual learning needs*, due to the insufficient consideration of the organizational, institutional and contextual issues that must be addressed for training to be effective – including incentives, working conditions, and availability of resources to implement change;
- ✓ *Poor training design* – in terms of: i) lack of flexibility and adaptability; ii) poor definition of expected learning results – especially at the level of outcomes and impact; iii) lack of quality standards; iv) donor-driven design; and v) inadequate consideration of the social, political, and economic contexts.
- ✓ *Deficiencies in measuring and evaluating training results*, which have limited the ability to assess training effectiveness, comparison with alternative approaches and the identification of lessons learnt and good practices.
- ✓ *Lack of collaboration and experience sharing* among DTIs and other learning partners in the South and the North.

## **2. Directions in Current Thinking on Training for Capacity Development**

Current discussions on learning support for capacity development largely converge around key themes that relate to (i) to the broader context within which training programmes take place and (ii) more specific design and management issues. Highlights of this emerging consensus follow.

**Training and learning programmes must be country-owned and demand-driven.** Traditional, donor-driven training programmes are characterized by a lack of partner country ownership and a limited participation by them in the project design and management. As noted by Nelson (2006), lack of ownership and leadership means that new skills and trained personnel are not systematically integrated into the workings of their own organizations. Development partners increasingly highlight the need to promote partner country ownership and leadership in the design, implementation, and management of training and other programmes to support the acquisition of knowledge. Key features of country-owned and demand-driven training and learning programmes are summarize in Box 2.

**Box 2 - Key features of country-owned and demand-driven training and learning programmes**

- ✓ *Partner countries should take the lead* in formulating capacity development strategies – which might entail training. Donors should support and align with partner country development objectives, priorities, and strategies;
- ✓ As much as possible, *training management and provision should be channelled through partner country systems and procedures* – including procurement, monitoring and evaluation, and public financial management systems;
- ✓ *Use of local resources for training*. The *Berlin Statement on International Development Training* (2008) emphasises the “need to strengthen national and regional training institutes engaged in learning for capacity building”. Development training and learning partners in the North are now looking at ways to actively engage partners in the South. This might lead to possible trade-offs between the need to enhance and support the role of local resources for training and learning versus the interests of donor country DTIs to continue their business. Some have therefore suggested to develop some sort of “code of conducts” to frame the relationships between North and South training partners.

**Anchor training within an integrated and comprehensive approach to capacity development.**

Evidence assembled in the various evaluations conducted so far indicate that stand-alone training programmes are rarely conducive to sustainable capacity development<sup>4</sup>. Training needs to be a possible component of a broader strategy and change management process. It should be used selectively to complement other interventions – including, for example, support to national reforms or to state-building in situations of instability. Training institutes and other learning-focused partners increasingly recognise that in some cases training is not the best option, especially when dealing with capacity development constraints. Similarly, the reviews of a number of donor fellowship programmes demonstrate their weak linkages with partner country development priorities and their minimal integration into either host government educational and human resource policies, as well as the aid programmes of donors themselves.

**Harmonization, co-ordination and joint efforts.** Development training Institutes (DTIs) are increasingly seeking opportunities for networking, peer learning, resource sharing, and joint work with partners in the North and the South. This will reduce duplication, the fragmentation of training interventions and foster synergy. At the level of learning support in partner countries, consensus is growing on the need for country-level co-ordination mechanisms around donor initiatives across education and training projects, and programmes that fit with and promote country human resources strategies and national or sector plans and priorities<sup>5</sup>. It is understood that such shift will require great efforts and significant adjustments from DTIs and other training partners.

**Enhance quality of design.** The IEG Evaluation on “*Using Training to Build Capacity for Development*” (2008) points out that good design is a key determinant of training success – particularly in terms of targeting training content. The evaluation highlights the importance of anchoring good design to a correct diagnosis of organizational and institutional capacity gaps, and a proper assessment of specific training needs and strategic participant selection. Flexibility and adaptability to the specific contexts and learning needs are seen as crucial elements for a good training design. Key features of the emerging consensus on good training design are summarized in Box 3 below.

**Use a results management approach to improve learning results.** DTIs and other learning agencies have acknowledged the need for improving their own approaches to define and assess results – whether in terms of outcomes and impact on capacities, or changes at the individual, organizational, and institutional levels. Various institutions (WBI, InWent, and UNDP<sup>6</sup>) have developed or are developing capacity development results frameworks to guide the design, management, and monitoring and evaluation of their programmes – including training and other learning programmes.

Benefits of framing training and other learning programmes within the framework of a results-based approach might include: enhance accountability; improve design by focusing on desired outcomes rather than inputs and outputs only; permit the identification of lessons learnt and good practices; support “making the case” for training and other learning programmes through the evidence of results; and determine when training is not the best approach to achieve targeted capacity development results. Challenges in developing results frameworks for training and learning results have also been identified: risk of rigidity and inadaptability to local contexts; limitations in the possibility to predict the results of training and learning processes; limited comparability and harmonization and risk of over-burdening partner countries with divergent results frameworks.

**Enhance Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of training programmes.** Within the framework of results-based management, the need to improve M&E is also well acknowledged. The management of

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, IEG (2008). *Using Training to Build Capacity for Development – An Evaluation of the World Bank’s Project-Based and WBI Training*.

<sup>5</sup> See UNDP, 2006

<sup>6</sup> See WBI (2009); InWent (2006); UNDP (2006).

training and other learning programmes has so far been undermined by difficulties in measuring and assessing results beyond the number of people trained. Most evaluations stop well short of attributing benefits to training, mainly going only so far as to claim that a significant contribution was made to achieving objectives (ACIAR 2007). Training and learning institutes are currently trying to define adequate indicators and measurement approaches for outcomes and impact. They increasingly seek for experience sharing and joint efforts in defining, measuring, and assessing training and learning results together with partner countries, to reduce divergences in approaches. DTIs and other partners have promoted the use of joint evaluations<sup>7</sup>. Furthermore, evaluation findings should be fed into the design and management of future programmes, in a culture of learning from results.

### Box 3. Key Features of Good Training Design –an Emerging Consensus

- ✓ **Take the context into account.** One of the strongest factors affecting training effectiveness is the organizational and institutional context in which training is done (IEG, 2008). Training can be effective if formulated for organizations that operate within a favourable institutional, legal, economic, and political environment with demonstrable demand for the organization’s outputs (UNDP, 2006). Where resources and incentives to apply acquired skills and knowledge are not in place, training must be accompanied - or preceded - by properly sequenced interventions in order to address organizational and institutional constraints. Country –led, comprehensive assessments are essential to understand existing capacities, capacity needs and the broader context – beyond a merely training needs perspective. In certain cases, the analysis of contextual factors might indeed lead to the conclusions that money spent on training could perhaps be better invested in other instruments, such as policy reform, technical assistance, or diagnostic work, focused on helping establish a more favorable environment for individual training efforts (Nelson, 2006).
- ✓ **Moving focus from individual skills to organizational and institutional learning needs.** Training and learning programmes should be focused on specific organizational and institutional outputs, and outcomes that are being sought as part of a change process towards clearly articulated goals. The impact of training on development capacity depends not only on individual learning but also on participants’ ability and possibility to implement learning in the workplace - which is closely related to the relevance of that learning to development goals of the organizations and institutions they are embedded in.
- ✓ **Choose training participants strategically,** to ensure that the participants trained are those whose capacities must be built up in order to foster change in their organizations to meet development objectives. This includes assessing their motivation to attend the training, their level of competences, their function and responsibilities within their organizations<sup>8</sup>. Coordination among different initiatives will be necessary to avoid over-exposure to training. The efficacy of participant selection should increase as training programmes became more demand-driven and owned by partner country targeted organizations – as the incentives to send the most valuable individuals would be much higher than in donor-driven training programmes (Nelson, 2006).
- ✓ **Ensure adequate follow up with trainees after the training,** to assist them in applying skills and knowledge acquired within their organizations and working environments, and to monitor the impact of training in term of organizational learning and change. Possible approaches for follow-up support to trainees include on-the-job technical assistance, mentoring programmes, internet forum for experience sharing among trainees and expert moderators, and refresher or follow up courses<sup>9</sup>. This apply to short-term training as well as fellowship programmes - maintaining contact with returned trainees can help those who encounter difficulties in introducing changes in their workplaces (USAID 2004).

“**Brain-drain** constitutes another concern – especially in relation to training and fellowship programmes supporting tertiary education in donor countries. Available data are incomplete but suggest that brain-drain and other diaspora issues especially affect African and Caribbean countries (OECD and the World Bank, 2007). This calls for a careful consideration of issues such as incentives to return and regulatory frameworks on cross-border tertiary education. Traditional scholarship schemes or study tours should be

<sup>7</sup> Train4Dev (2009)

<sup>8</sup>See Train4Dev (2009); IEG (2008).

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.worldbank.org/ieg/training/learning.html>

reviewed to assess their impact in terms of benefits to partner countries, and to take into consideration the probability that recipients will provide tangible public returns on the investment. The problem of brain-drain is particularly relevant since migration rates tend to be higher for highly educated individuals, with the highest rates for those with tertiary education. Given the critical importance of the issue, steps are being taken to reverse the trend – for example promoting distance education modalities (UNDP, 2006).

### **3. Next Steps**

Recent international discussions on the strengths and shortcomings of development training, including the *High Level Retreat on the Effectiveness of International Development Training* (Berlin, June 2008<sup>10</sup>), the annual meeting of Train4Dev (Oslo, June 2009<sup>11</sup>) and the forum on *Improving the Results of Learning for Capacity Building* (Washington, June 2009<sup>12</sup>) has helped frame the growing international consensus in this area. Importantly, in this sense, a first *Learning Link* week is now being organized to be held in Turin on 7-11 December 2009. The event will bring together DTIs and other learning institutes from North and South to foster discussion on key challenges identified in Berlin and Washington and to define an action oriented approach to promote effective support to learning and knowledge management for capacity development.

The DAC and LenCD intend to participate actively in the preparation of the Turin event, in partnership with other key contributors such as the International Training Centre of the ILO, The World Bank Institute, InWent and Train4Dev. This discussion note seeks to help frame the content of that event. Within the next months, LenCD and the DAC will assemble initial good practice guidance on “*Training and Alternative Approaches to Support Learning for Capacity Development*”, which can serve as an input for LenCD and DAC engagement in the event. The guidance note will address key concerns, such as identifying situations in which training is the right approach and situations in which it is not and more suitable learning approaches should be pursued; it will seek to define systemic issues that cannot be addressed by support to learning but require other types of interventions. The guidance will try to consolidate existing good practice on how to improve the effectiveness of learning support and suggest innovative approaches to supporting learning for capacity development. Furthermore, changes that must take place in the skill sets, approaches, attitudes and roles played by DTIs and other learning partners – in the North as well as in the South – will also be discussed.

In general, the DAC, LenCD and the CD Alliance will continue to gather and consolidate collective lessons on training and alternative approaches to learning for capacity development. They can be derived from past and current experience and practice across training and other learning-oriented institutes in donor and partner countries. In particular, linkages with the CD Alliance and other key actors from partner countries – including NEPAD and the ACBF - will bring a stronger Southern perspective in the debate and help to shape a more joint, South-North consensus that can be presented and discussed at the 2011 HLF4.

Experience sharing, networking, and joint efforts among training and learning partners in the South and the North remain essential to further advance the current debate on supporting learning for capacity development on the road to Seoul. In particular, a joint effort is needed to seek empirical learning around specific priority themes related to training, as the ones described above. Lessons learnt should then be translated into joint operational messages on good practices to support learning, to be disseminated to the broader development community and policy makers in donor and partner countries. Selected elements of the empirical information that underpins that collaborative effort are assembled in the bibliography attached to this note.

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<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.inwent.org/veranstaltungen/079265/index.php.en>

<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.train4dev.net/index.php?id=6>

<sup>12</sup> See [www.capacity-development.org](http://www.capacity-development.org)

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