

Gender Equality & Public Sector Capacity Development

Tipsheet #9: Support to NWMs – project design questions

This tipsheet highlights a number of concerns to address at the planning stage of initiatives that aim to support capacity development by national machineries for women's advancement (NWMs). The tipsheet is organized in the form of questions and is intended to stimulate further thinking by CIDA about aspects of project design.

The formulation of questions draws on the experience gained through CIDA projects with NWMs in Asia as well the observations in the growing literature on capacity development that draws on a much wider range of country and sectoral experience. However, these sources continue to provide more guidance on the questions to be asked than firm guidance on the strategies to follow. This is not only because of the complexity of the task of capacity development, but because effective approaches depend very much on the particular institutional environment and characteristics. The quality of analysis is therefore particularly important!

This tipsheet complements Tipsheet #8 on lessons learned. Tipsheet #8 raises a range of issues related to support for capacity development, Tipsheet #9 provides a set of reminders of issues to be addressed to strengthen project design and conditions for results achievement.

Good candidate for support?

- ▶ To what extent is the NWM already engaged in a real effort to increase its capacity and performance? Has it identified the need for improvements? Has it begun a change management process to which external support can contribute? Is there commitment to this at the top?
- ▶ Does the potential partner have a real desire to collaborate toward the objectives CIDA envisages? How have they made this evident?
- ▶ Is there a common understanding of the key terms used in discussions – including “gender mainstreaming,” “capacity,” and “capacity development”? Is there a shared understanding

about capacity development as process that goes beyond the individual and beyond training to include changes in institutional processes, mechanisms, linkages, and other factors related to the agency's performance?

- ▶ How stable is the leadership and the commitment to change? What would be the implications of a change in leadership?
- ▶ Given all the considerations above, what is the potential for achieving sustainable increases in capacity and performance?
- ▶ Have these questions also been considered in relation to all potential sub-partners?

Current capacities well analysed?

- ▶ Is the analysis of capacities based on a coherent analytic framework (i.e., more than just a list of desired attributes)? Does this analysis grapple with the various types of capacity (e.g., at the individual level, in processes and mechanisms, in the wider institutional environment)? And the relation between capacity and performance?
- ▶ Does the analysis identify existing capacities and strengths as well as capacity gaps?
- ▶ Does the analysis provide guidance on possible priorities with respect to capacity development? Does the identification of priorities take account of current strengths and gaps in relation to the institutional mandate, and the scope for action given the organizational culture, institutional environment and other factors?
- ▶ Does the analysis outline how the initiative could recognize and build on existing institutional capacities? If this is the second phase of support to gender mainstreaming with this government or NWM, do the design analyses identify the capacities targeted and the specific areas of progress achieved (including, e.g., tools, structures, linkages, individuals with specific experience, etc.) in previous collaboration and how the new phase would recognize and build on them?

Design assumptions explicit & appropriate?

- ▶ Are proposed project objectives and priorities based on a realistic assessment of the *partner's vision* of what the NWM should do and how it should do it? Has the NWM participated in identifying objectives and expected results?
- ▶ Does the proposed project methodology provide a clear statement of the basic concepts on which it is based, particularly “institutional capacity,” “capacity development,” “gender mainstreaming,” “gender equality”?
- ▶ Is there a clear “theory of the project” – that is, is a clear and plausible link evident between project inputs and activities and increased institutional capacity and performance?
- ▶ Can the project’s strategic vision be easily explained by the NWM to its partners? Would it be clear to an executing agency and advisors?
- ▶ If this is the second phase of support to this government or partner, does the design consider whether, and why continuity would be important, and if so, how it would be maintained? (And if not, why not?)
- ▶ Does the design take account of the structure of the bureaucracy, how the NWM is located within it, how this affects its ways of operating, and what it means for the types of decisions that are under its control and those that are not?
- ▶ Has there been sufficient analysis of the institutional environment and organizational culture to ensure that no unrealistic assumptions are made about staff turnover, possible changes in staff selection and assignments, decision-making processes, organizational restructuring, inter-agency linkages, accountability mechanisms, etc.
- ▶ Does the design take account of the political environment in which the NWM operates? Has consideration been given to the implications of the electoral cycle (e.g., possible increases in workloads of partners in the pre-election period, changes in leadership and policy orientation post election) for the project?
- ▶ Does the design allow for flexibility to respond to challenges that arise?

Outcomes reasonable & achievable?

- ▶ Is there a consensus with the NWM partner (and within that agency) about expected outcomes? Is it reasonable to expect that proposed outcomes would be achieved by project end?
- ▶ Do expectations of results take sufficient account of the *organizational culture* – of the pace of progress likely, given the organizations’ flexibility and openness to change?
- ▶ Do expectations of results take sufficient account of the *public sector institutional environment* – of any constraints on change that may be associated with government processes out of the control of the partner organizations, such as those related to staffing, restructuring, decision-making, etc.?
- ▶ Do expectations of results take account of the *political context*? Of possible interruptions and adjustments that will be required due to the normal political cycle (elections and changes in political leadership)?
- ▶ Given all the above, is there a reasonable match between expected results and timeframes? Should there be an adjustment to either expectations or timeframe or both to bring them into better alignment?

Expectations of the executing agency realistic?

- ▶ Is a Canadian executing agency (CEA) required? Has consideration been given to the potential for local execution?
- ▶ Has the project design been analysed for the attributes and skills that the CEA would need? (e.g., with respect to management approaches, technical advisory approaches, specific technical skills and knowledge, language skills of managers and technical advisors, linkages in Canada and locally, etc.) Are there likely to be many Canadian candidates with this combination of attributes and skills?
- ▶ Could the design be implemented effectively if the CEA was short on any of these attributes or skills? Which qualities are critical and should be made mandatory in the RFP? If trade-offs are to be made, which should be given priority in rating candidates?