A gateway for capacity development

Capacity.ORG

A *tour d'horizon* of capacity development trends and challenges

From local empowerment to aid harmonisation

Although there are many different interpretations of what capacity is and how it develops, recent trends point to an emerging consensus on the challenges that professionals need to address. This article traces the evolution of the debate on capacity development, and outlines the ambitions for Capacity.org as a forum for discussion and a gateway to information. _ **Page 3**

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New ambitions, new style

Welcome to Capacity.org. This is not the first issue of Capacity.org – it was launched some six years ago by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) – but it marks a new phase in the life of this publication. The 25 issues published since 1999 have made a major contribution to the understanding of capacity development. This summer, ECDPM was joined by two new partners: SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and UNDP. Together, we wish to enhance the range, depth and scope of Capacity.org so that it appeals to a wider audience, and offers access to a broad range information – in English, French and Spanish – for everyone concerned with capacity development.

Our aims are ambitious. As well as providing a forum for information exchange, we hope that Capacity.org becomes a platform where practitioners and policy makers can get involved in the development of the field. The members of this growing community of practice will be able to share their experience and draw from the knowledge of others for more effective capacity development practice on the ground.

For these reasons, both the print version of Capacity.org and its website have been redesigned and expanded. The website now includes a number of additional interactive features so that readers can more easily provide feedback and contribute their knowledge and share experiences. Over time, as content is gradually added, the website will develop into a gateway to the wealth of available information on the topic of capacity development. Readers can sign up to receive regular email newsletters at www.capacity.org.

The printed journal now has twice as many pages, and is more easily accessible in terms of design and content. This 'new style' Capacity.org features a guest column, interviews and conference reports, as well as case material and articles on both the policy and practice of capacity development. Each issue will also contain many pointers to ongoing debates, as well as links to relevant

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There is a desperate need to build not just individual, but organisational resilience to HIV/AIDS. Read about it on page 8.

resources, publications and upcoming events. Subscriptions to the journal are free of charge and can be requested at www.capacity.org.

In this first issue we provide a *tour d'horizon* of the field of capacity development as we see it. It features contributions from key players in both the NGO and the donor communities, including INTRAC and PRIA, as well as OECD DAC and LENPA/CIDA. In future issues of Capacity.org we intend go deeper into a number of the fields that are merely outlined here. But to do so we need to learn about your experiences. Please feel free to use the 'Letters to the Editor' section of the website to share your thoughts, to comment on articles, to suggest relevant links, publications or events, or to submit your own contribution. Together we can shape future progress in the policy and practice of capacity development. We look forward to hearing from you. <

Evelijne Bruning Editor-in-Chief, editor@capacity.org
Volker Hauck (ECDPM), **Jan Ubels** (SNV) and **Thomas Theisohn** (UNDP), Editorial Committee

A *tour d'horizon* of capacity development trends and challenges

From local empowerment to aid harmonisation

Although there are many different interpretations of capacity and how it develops, recent trends point to an emerging consensus on the challenges that professionals need to address. This introductory article traces the evolution of the debate on capacity development, and outlines our ambitions for Capacity.org as a forum for discussion and a gateway to relevant information. By Jan Ubels, Thomas Theisohn, Volker Hauck, Tony Land

The term capacity development became popular during the 1990s as a result of the limited success with technical and externally induced development efforts. It focused attention on the abilities required to organise and sustain development efforts, and the necessity of 'ownership' by local actors. More recently, capacity has returned to the centre of the international debate on development. It was one of the key notions discussed at the Paris High Level Forum of the OECD-DAC in February 2005 on aid effectiveness. And the UN Millennium Project report, *Investing in Development,*[1] convincingly made the case that with real effort it is possible to help countries to escape from poverty, so that capacity is also likely to be prominent at the Millennium +5 summit to be held in New York in September. We know more or less *what* should be done. But, contrary to what the report seems to claim, we have no experience to guide decisions on *how* it should be done. Local communities, developing countries, the international community – none of us have a successful track record in achieving effective development results at such a scale. Realising the Millennium Development Goals presents a daunting capacity challenge for us all. >

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Capacity development ambitions apply equally in fragile contexts, but may require unorthodox operational responses.

Trend 1: There is a clear move away from focusing on individual organisations to look at capacity in networks and larger systems.

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Different approaches

It sometimes seems that capacity development is regarded as a panacea for almost everything in the development sector. The term is used in many, often conflicting ways. It can refer to anything from the training of individuals to large-scale institutional reform. Donors often use the term in the same breath as donor harmonisation and sector-wide approaches, and as the reason for introducing the 'right' policies and institutional frameworks. Civil society equates it with empowerment of local actors, bottom-up development of local organisations and networks, and societal transformation. To some capacity development is a philosophy and attitude, and is almost synonymous with development itself. To others it is a professional practice underpinned by specific methodologies rooted in organisational development and process facilitation.

It is clear that the different definitions are influenced by the different types of organisations and settings within which people work. But they also reflect differences in perspective. In any discussion of capacity development, it is therefore important always to ask: capacity for what? and for whom? and with what underlying view or purpose? That is what we will continue to do in Capacity.org, in order to move away from general prescriptions, and to foster real debate, progress and deeper understanding.

Advances in understanding capacity development

Notwithstanding the different approaches and definitions discussed above, important shared lessons and trends are emerging from more than a decade of efforts to give substance to capacity development in practice. In reviewing these many efforts, we believe that at least five major trends are shaping today's understanding of capacity.

Trend 1: There is a clear move away from focusing on individual organisations to look at capacity in *networks and larger systems* (such as sectors, whole-of-government approaches, societal transformation). Capacity often only comes about through an interplay among the capabilities of individuals, organisations, networks and larger institutions or systems.

Trend 2: Greater recognition is now being given to the *'soft' and less tangible aspects* of capacity development, as reflected in some of the definitions above. Case studies of successful capacity development have highlighted the importance of factors such as leadership, values, incentives and motivation, legitimacy, power relations and organisational culture.[2]

Trend 3: It is generally accepted that capacity development is a *dynamic process that is context and situation specific*. It requires continuous strategic planning, interaction, negotiation and action-learning. Capacity development can not be pre-designed and 'implemented', but requires 'strategic incrementalism'.[3]

Trend 4: There is growing recognition that large-scale change can not be simply rolled out from the top; rather, it should be seen as a process of *'decentralised social learning'*.[4] Good policies may

create better conditions, but they do not produce development. Experimentation at the work floor and related horizontal and vertical learning are required (micro-macro linkages).

Trend 5: Capacity development is *not neutral*; it changes social, political, cultural and economic relations. Supporting capacity development requires 'external parties' to maintain a delicate balance between non-partisanship and helping to clarify directions of development. It also requires an understanding of the ongoing processes of change within a society (including the 'drivers of change'[5]).

An emerging agenda of challenges and debate

The above trends in thinking are not uncontested, and readers may wish to respond with criticisms and alternative views. But trying to put these insights into practice certainly brings out a broad array of challenges, dilemmas and debates. In the guest column on page 16, Richard Manning, chair of the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, points to the important advances in harmonising aid and in reforms to change donor behaviour on the ground, including introducing more flexible time horizons, more rounded approaches to state building, greater policy coherence and incentive systems. By way of contrast, in an interview on page 10 of this issue, Rajesh Tandon, one of India's leading capacity development practitioners, argues that the harmonisation of donor agendas (in an effort to deal more comprehensively with larger systems – trend 1) is working against the need for decentralised social learning and innovation (trend 4).

Capacity.org will seek to stimulate debates and discussions of methodological progress. For that purpose, in the following paragraphs we identify a number of key topics that we hope will resonate with readers and encourage them to share their experiences and opinions with the broader community of professionals.

Understanding and supporting capacity in networks and partnerships

Many development efforts require capacities that go beyond the boundaries of individual organisations. In practice, however, the single organisation is still used (often unconsciously) as a frame of reference when we talk and practice capacity development. Analytical tools as well as the intervention repertoire for nurturing networks and partnerships are still weak. Capacity.org will welcome exchanges about interventions that have led to successful networks and partnerships, and about tested concepts and intervention approaches that may be of use to practitioners in other contexts. To open this exchange, on page 7 we present the case of a successful inter-communal partnership in Mali, together with a brief article by Jan Ubels exploring its conceptual dimensions. Readers are invited to contribute to this topic, which will be the theme of an upcoming issue of Capacity.org.

Capacity development in fragile contexts

Capacity development ambitions apply equally in fragile contexts, but may require unorthodox operational responses. The challenges include ensuring basic service delivery in failed states, protecting social capital in areas of conflict, and engaging in contexts where there are insufficient human resources or little commitment to change. Capacity development responses in areas affected by HIV/AIDS present a particular challenge, as highlighted by Rick James and Rebecca Wrigley on page 8 of this issue.

Improving aid relationships

The locus of decision making and collective responsibility in international development cooperation is moving to the country level. Country or local ownership, harmonisation and alignment are to define aid partnerships. But the aid relationship is inherently unequal, with financial, decision-making and professional power unevenly distributed. Making the transition from vicious to virtuous dynamics in aid relations and development partnerships is >

Some definitions
- Capacity development is the process by which individuals, organisations, institutions and societies develop abilities (individually and collectively) to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives' (UNDP).[6]
- Capacity is 'the ability of an organisation to function as a resilient, strategic and autonomous entity' (Allan Kaplan).[7]
- ... the ultimate goal of capacity development programs is to support the development of better skilled and oriented individuals, more responsive and effective institutions and a better policy environment for pursuing development objectives. A key message is the importance of going beyond mere skills transfer towards supporting country leadership and strategic decision-making, accountability systems, and a culture of learning and innovation. ... Capacity development is as much about skills and systems as it is about incentives and behavior; much more than a technical exercise, capacity development is rooted in the political economy of a country ...' (World Bank).[8]
- Capacity 'has four dimensions' (Liebler and Ferri):[9]
  - *External capacity areas* – needed for effective interactions with the wider institutional and societal contexts;
  - *Internal capacity areas* – relevant for the internal functioning of the system;
  - *Technical capacity areas* – essential to the work, area of specialisation, profession, etc., of the organisation or network;
  - *Generative, or 'soft', capacities* – needed to enable the organisation or network continuously to develop, adapt and innovate.

[5] DFID (2004) Public Information Note: Drivers of Change. DFID, UK. www.grc-exchange.org/docs/doc59.pdf

[6] UNDP (1997) 'Capacity development', Technical Advisory Paper II. In: Capacity Development Resource Book. http://magnet.undp.org/cdrb/Default.htm

[7] Kaplan, A. (1999) The Developing of Capacity. Cape Town: CDRA. www.cdra.org.za/

[8] World Bank (2005) Effective States and Engaged Societies. Operational Task Force on Capacity Development in Africa, Progress Report, April 2005. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/intafrica/resources/progress_report_0405_en.pdf

[9] Liebler, C. and Ferri, M. (2004) NGO Networks: Building Capacity in a Changing World. USAID, p.38. www.usaid.gov/our_work/cross-cutting_programs/private_voluntary_cooperation/conf_leibler.pdf

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Systems thinking challenges many assumptions, like the ability of external agents to influence local change processes. Read more on page 12.

difficult, but both donors and NGOs are engaged in important experiments to try to achieve this. Readers are invited to share their experiences in creating more balanced partnerships, in levelling the playing field between local stakeholders and external partners, and in building openness, trust, mutual accountability and commitment. As a first contribution, on page 9 Philip Courtnadge describes how independent monitoring has benefited the aid relationship in Tanzania.

Realising effective micro-macro linkages
It is at the local level that essential innovations and learning about 'what really works' take place and improvements in livelihoods are realised. At the same time, an enabling environment, good policies and effective institutional frameworks are essential for systemic improvements. In practice, these two sides of development do not easily come together. Many donors and national governments work from the perspective of macro systems and centrally guided development, whereas NGOs and local actors seek local solutions but are often unable to share and scale-up important insights and successes. Through the exchange of practical examples, we hope to encourage more systematic methodological learning on how local innovation can be effectively related to central policy and institutional development: what upward and downward linkages, what processes of negotiation, what spaces for learning and intermediary roles actually work in practice in various contexts. Rajesh Tandon refers to these issues in the interview on page 10.

Capacity development diagnostics, planning, monitoring and evaluation
With the emergence of more advanced notions of capacity development (as under the topics above), questions related to diagnosis, planning, monitoring and measuring results also require a new generation of answers. The issues of diagnosis, planning and M&E will be addressed in future issues of Capacity. org. As a first contribution, on page 12, Volker Hauck considers the renewed interest in systems thinking, and explores new diagnostic approaches and their implications for planning, monitoring and learning.

Getting to grips with the soft or intangible aspects of capacity development
Leadership, incentives, motivation, attitude, legitimacy, values, power and culture have been identified as key ingredients of successful capacity development. But mainstream thinking still focuses on the formal, more tangible aspects of capacity such as structures, systems, skills, finance, ICTs, etc. For future issues of Capacity.org, practitioners are invited to provide practical examples of how they are integrating such soft factors in their work (and the lessons learned), and how they are making the more formal aspects visible and open to discussion and change.

Postscript
Capacity.org will build on the work carried out over the past six years to demystify what capacity development means, and to develop the practical aspects of how to support it effectively. Capacity. org is part of a stream of ongoing efforts to link bilateral and multilateral development organisations, including the Impact Alliance, the INTRAC Praxis programme, the Learning Networks on Capacity Development and on Programme-based Approaches (LenCD/Govnet and LENPA), a growing number of Southern actors and practitioners, and many more initiatives at regional and local levels. In this sense there is a community of practice around capacity development that is committed to learning from practice, analysis and exchange, building up specialised knowledge and support, and reaching out to and support practitioners and policy makers. As long as Capacity.org can continue to contribute to this ambitious undertaking in the years to come it will have accomplished its prime objective. <

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A methodological frontier in capacity development

Networks and partnerships offer a perspective that may help us in understanding organisations, both large and small, and in shaping our efforts to improve their performance. By Jan Ubels

Many development efforts require forms of capacity that extend beyond the boundaries of individual organisations. 'Jekabaara' (see below) offers an interesting example of inter-communal cooperation in Mali. This case also suggests that practitioners have little methodological support for dealing with capacity across organisational boundaries. In extending this professional frontier, a number of key aspects will need to be addressed.

A better distinction between the *different forms of networks or partnerships* needs to be developed. Some have concrete objectives, a limited number of participants and a formal organisation, while others are much looser, with shifting priorities, a fluid or diffuse membership and an informal structure. Some authors distinguish between service delivery networks, social change and advocacy networks, sectoral networks, knowledge networks and communities of practice.[1] Developing an understanding of the different forms will help in discussions of differences in ways of working, leadership, degrees of formality, etc.

Networks and partnerships often perform *multiple functions for the participants*. They may provide information and opportunities for learning, and allow members to exert joint influence and manage their interests. They may also offer access to resources and allow for joint action. Networks seem to gain in strength and importance from the flexible combination of such functions and the ability to adjust them over time. But pursuing networks deliberately is also notoriously difficult, precisely because of their flexibility, fluidity and informality.

Networks and partnerships can not only be regarded as another scale of organisation, beyond the individual entities. They also offer a *perspective on organisations* that can help us to comprehend the openness and interconnectedness of what we usually regard as individual organisations. This may help us in understanding organisations, both large and small, and in shaping our efforts to improve their performance.[2]

A future issue of Capacity.org will focus on understanding and supporting networks and partnerships. Readers are invited to contribute to the discussion by submitting cases, typologies, methodologies, etc., as well as experiences and lessons learned, to Jan Ubels at **editor@capacity.org.** <

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[1] Liebler, C. and Ferri, M. (2004) NGO Networks: Building Capacity in a Changing World. Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation, USAID, p.38
[2] Mintzberg, H. (1979) The Structuring of Organizations, Prentice Hall.

Further reading
Evans, B. et al. (2004) The Partnership Paperchase. www.bpdws.org.

Saxby, J. (2004) COEP: Mobilising against Hunger and for Life. ECDPM Discussion Paper 57C. www.ecdpm.org/dp57c.

Partnering Initiative (2004) The Partnering Toolbook. http://thepartnering initiative.org

An intercommunal partnership in Mali

In Mali, the process of decentralisation began in 1999 with the formation of communes, with democratically elected mayors and councillors who are now responsible for local development. In implementing their plans, however, many communes are hampered by their lack of financial and human resources – many projects to improve land, infrastructure or services are simply beyond the means of individual communes.

To address these problems, in 2003 the communal councils of Méguétan and Dinandougou decided to form a partnership, which they called 'Jekabaara' ('working together' in the local language). Through a learning-by-doing approach, and with some assistance from SNV, the communes resolved several challenges, including mobilising community members, establishing the legitimacy of the partnership, and creating an effective management structure.

As a result, the Jekabaara partners can now access regional funds, which they are using to rebuild a road and a bridge, to reorganise the fisheries sector, and other jointly owned development projects. For SNV's advisers the Jekabaara experience has led to a better understanding of inter-communal cooperation, and they are now compiling a manual to guide the formation of similar partnerships elsewhere. They have also used the experience to influence a new national law on communal cooperation, which now proposes a less rigid organisational structure, based on the Jekabaara example.

The full version of this case story, describing the process and outcomes, and highlighting success factors such as the mobilisation of stakeholders and the legitimacy of the partnership, can be found at **www.snvworld.org**.

HIV/AIDS and civil society organisations

HIV/AIDS: organisational impacts and painful realities

HIV/AIDS is having an immense impact on the internal capacities of many civil society organisations in sub-Saharan Africa. INTRAC's Praxis programme is supporting the documentation of emerging experiences and discussion of appropriate responses.

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Further reading
The following documents can be downloaded from www.intrac.org/pages/praxisseries_publications.html:

Praxis Paper 4, Building Organisational Resilience to HIV/AIDS, Rick James, March 2005.

Praxis Note 10, The Crushing Impact of HIV/AIDS on Leadership in Malawi, Rick James, April 2005.

Praxis Note 11, Capacity Building in an AIDS-Affected Health Care Institution, Hans Rode, April 2005.

Praxis Note 12, Robbed of Dorothy, Betsy Mboizi (CDRN) with Rick James, June 2005.

Praxis Note 13, Building Capacity to Mainstream HIV/AIDS Internally, Rick James and CABUNGO, July 2005.

With three million people dying each year, the economic and social costs of HIV/AIDS are escalating, particularly in Africa. In many places this is reversing progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. HIV/AIDS is also having an immense impact on the internal organisation of civil society organisations (CSOs) as staff themselves become both infected and affected. The loss of staff time due to sickness, family care and funerals, depressed morale, combined with the rising medical, recruitment and training costs mean that many CSOs are struggling with increasing overheads and declining output. As the director of a CSO in Malawi explains:

'One of my most experienced fieldworkers has asked me to let her work mornings only. Having endured the trauma of watching her three young children die in the last four years, her husband is now critically sick in hospital and she needs to look after him. Our terms and conditions limit compassionate leave to five days, but she will need to care for him much longer than that. But if I give her more the organisation will suffer and it will set a precedent ... *How would you respond?'*

There is a desperate need to build not just individual, but organisational resilience to HIV/AIDS. This can be developed through a combination of interventions – the most common ones being staff awareness programmes and creating HIV/AIDS organisational policies. But CSOs need to go further and analyse the long-term human resource implications, ensuring that the costs of responding to the organisational impacts are built into their financial budgeting, planning, monitoring and evaluation processes. Responding effectively also requires CSOs to address wider issues such as the organisational culture, how decisions are made, gender roles and organisational boundaries with employees' private lives.

Capacity building providers have a vital role to play in ensuring that organisational resilience to HIV/AIDS is brought onto their clients' agendas. This is especially important because many CSOs may feel overwhelmed by the possible impacts of HIV/AIDS on their own organisation. Capacity builders need to be aware of the issues and have the competencies to support clients in addressing HIV/ AIDS mainstreaming in their external programmes and relationships, as well as in their internal organisation. It will require HIV/AIDS specialists to develop organisational development (OD) skills, and OD practitioners to acquire knowledge and skills to deal with HIV/AIDS. Capacity building practitioners will need to adapt both the content of their services and methods of delivery.

While some international NGOs and donors have been at the forefront in assisting partners to see and respond to the challenges of HIV/AIDS, others have lagged behind. To remain relevant and effective, donors need to decide how they can help raise their partners' awareness of the issues, how they can help them access capacity building support; what extra funding this will require; and how they can adjust their partnership strategies to assist CSOs to adapt to an HIV-infected world.

While policies are helpful, it has to be remembered that no amount of preparation, and no policy can insulate us from the painful realities of HIV/AIDS. As one member of staff of the Community Development Resource Network (CDRN) in Uganda has reflected on being robbed of Dorothy, a valued colleague and friend:

'Dorothy's experience showed us both the value and limitations of having a health policy covering HIV/AIDS. The policy was a necessary, but not sufficient, response, and implementation proved traumatic. Our feminine caring culture came to the fore at a time of internal crisis. Because Dorothy was a friend and colleague, not just a human resource, we went far beyond our stated policy to help her. We felt we had to live out our stated values of standing with the poor and marginalised – an HIV+ woman abandoned by her partner with three children to support. If we had followed the policy to the letter, we would have compromised the core values that made CDRN what it was.'

Clearly there are no easy ways to build organisational resilience to HIV/AIDS, but there is an urgent need to find practical ways forward. INTRAC's Praxis programme is therefore prioritising learning in this field, and is supporting the documentation of experiences and discussion of appropriate responses. <

Independent monitoring

Promoting mutual accountability

Country-based monitoring instruments can promote mutual accountability between government and development partners. In Tanzania, independent monitoring has contributed to a 'levelling of the playing field', resulting in improved national leadership, greater trust and increased aid effectiveness. By Philip Courtnadge

Tanzania remains heavily dependent on aid and is a priority country for many donors. A strong partnership is critical if external cooperation is to provide effective support for national development objectives. In the early 1990s, however, the partnership was jeopardised by growing donor concerns about corruption, budget mismanagement and the lack of commitment to reform. For their part, the government viewed donors as inappropriately intrusive and demanding, and unable or unwilling to deliver on promises. Relations became strained and levels of development assistance declined sharply.

Fortunately, both the government and donors recognised the importance of effective relations and, moreover, remained committed to the principles of effective partnership. The proposal to engage an 'honest broker' was therefore endorsed by all sides. A high-level independent working group, composed of international and national experts with a mandate to place donors and government under the same degree of scrutiny, was appointed to consider aid relations.

The findings highlighted dissatisfaction and a significant degree of misunderstanding on both sides. The situation was well summarised by one donor, who believed that 'ownership exists when they do what we want them to do, but they do so voluntarily'. A number of recommendations for improvements on both sides were proposed, including establishing more effective structures for dialogue in the context of government-led reforms. These recommendations then formed the basis for dialogue and a set of 'agreed principles' to guide relations in the future.

A follow-up report in 1999 found that progress had been made on both sides. To keep this progress on track, it was agreed at the 2000 consultative group meeting that institutionalised and regular monitoring take place. This would both review progress and provide an 'early warning system' to identify any emerging concerns related to the development partnership.

The 2002 Independent Monitoring Group report noted that, in comparison with 1995, relations were much improved. There had been a pendulum swing in aid relations, characterised by stronger country ownership, more responsiveness by international partners to the need to improve their policies and practices, greater transparency in the dialogue process and, ultimately, more effective use of aid.

In contrast to the views on ownership identified in the 1995 report, a key recommendation was that 'the government must learn to say no'. This recommendation neatly highlights how independent monitoring can represent views the government may not feel comfortable expressing itself, thereby creating space for a more authentic ownership.

Independent monitoring seems to be a most useful instrument in mature partnerships like in Tanzania today. It recognises the inherent inequalities in aid relations and provides a concrete mechanism for holding all partners to account, with regular recommendations based on impartial and transparent assessments. Independent monitoring also offers a great potential both for mature partnerships and for more fragile contexts. The process of establishing more objectivity in aid relations can take many forms. It can evolve into an institutionalised mechanism, as in Tanzania, but it might also be more subtle. For example, a process consultant may be able to examine how the relationship functions, in order to correct misperceptions and encourage genuine dialogue. Finally, the lessons are relevant not only in the context of inter-governmental partnerships, but equally for NGO partnerships. <

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Independent monitoring also offers a great potential both for mature partnerships and for more fragile contexts.

Further reading
Tanzania online: www.tzdac.or.tz/IMG/IMG-main.html

Helleiner, G.K. (2000) Towards balance in aid relationships, Cooperation South, 2: 21-35. www.sti.ch/pdfs/swap143.pdf

Helleiner, G.K. et al. (1995) Report of the Group of Independent Advisers on Development Cooperation Issues between Tanzania and its Aid Donors. Copenhagen, Royal Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

IMG (2001) Local Ownership and Donor Performance Monitoring: New Aid Relationships in Tanzania? Dar es Salaam, Independent Monitoring Group. www.sti.ch/pdfs/swap143.pdf

IMG (2002) Enhancing Aid Relationships in Tanzania. Dar es Salaam, Independent Monitoring Group.

IMG (2002) Report of the IMG, presented to the Tanzania Consultative Group. Dar es Salaam, Independent Monitoring Group. www.tzdac.or.tz/IMG/IMG-main.html

Wangwe, S. (2002) NEPAD at Country Level: Changing Aid Relationships in Tanzania. Dar es Salaam, Mkukina Nyota Publishers.

'Donor harmonisation is just a pretext for rationalisation'

Maintaining effective micro-macro linkages

Rajesh Tandon claims that donor harmonisation is making his work more difficult. For his organisation, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), it means fewer resources and less influence internationally. Tandon has therefore reassessed his priorities and has decided to take his ideas elsewhere. As he explains to Evelijne Bruning, he is now focusing on those people he can reach – and there are millions of them.

Dr Tandon, you and your organisation have worked on capacity development for more than 20 years. What has been your motivation?

There really are two Indias – the one that deals on the New York stock exchange, and the one that has remained largely unchanged for centuries. For the latter, PRIA is working to develop the capacities of millions of people to meet their own needs, and of the government institutions that can provide for them. We do that by building local collective leadership, so that communities can articulate their own needs and possibilities. We work at two levels: within the community, and with other development institutions. We aim to make the village councils and municipalities more accountable to their constituents. In India, many public officials are elected each year – some 3 million in 2005 alone – at least one-third of whom, by law, are women. For many of these women, it is often their first time they have held public office, so we help them. If you help people to find their voice, and to get it amplified, you must also help to sensitise the ears of those who need to hear them. If no one can hear them, nothing will happen.

What needs to change to make your work easier?

I am satisfied with our experiences and innovations on the ground. Our efforts to take the lessons learned up to the macro level are also going well. But I am much less satisfied with the level of influence we have to achieve results. We do not have enough weight, it would seem, to push for real change at the national level. The international donor community is not helping at all. Both donors and northern NGOs have changed. They used to focus much more on real partnerships, but now they just give us money and we have to do things their way. Some of them really think they know better, even pretending to be local NGOs. But how can that be, if their roots are not

Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)

In 14 states across India, PRIA is working to improve the lives of marginalised and excluded sections of society, through initiatives that address governance, people's participation, empowerment and local level development. In each state, we gradually build up a platform of some 300 to 400 NGOs, and provide hands-on support, materials and encouragement. Then, through publications, workshops and meetings, we take the lessons learned to provincial and national officials, politicians, academic institutions and the media. What we are really doing is building multi-stakeholder alliances, so that the agenda is jointly owned, rather than just ours alone.

Over the past year, for example, we have worked with an alliance of over 700 civil society organisations in Uttar Pradesh to prepare for the council (*panchayat*) elections. We want these elections to be fair. We have launched a number of campaigns using all kinds of media, including radio, television, advertisements and leaflets. So far we have reached about half the total eligible voters – that's some 40 million people. One of our campaigns is a voter registration drive to encourage the many people in remote communities, particularly women, to register to vote. We help people to identify good candidates, and encourage discussions. We provide practical support, such as helping candidates fill out forms, so they won't have to bribe officials just to get registered. We also work with the state election committee, which gives us both information and legitimacy.

PRIA publishes books, journals, manuals, research reports, and learning materials on a wide range of topics, and organises a number of training courses and post-graduate programmes.
For more information, visit www.pria.org

Rajesh Tandon is the founder and director of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA). He has held many national and international positions on government task forces and committees, chaired a number of NGO boards, and serves on the governing boards of many national civil society organisations. These include the Citizens and Governance Programme of the Commonwealth Foundation (programme director, 2000–03), the World Alliance for Citizen Participation (CIVICUS, founder and chair, 1997–99), the International Forum on Capacity Building of Southern NGOs (chair, 1998–2001) and the Montreal International Forum (current chair). Dr Tandon has written extensively on participatory research, participatory training, NGO–government relations, NGO management, and the role of civil society and voluntary organisations in development.

here! India is not a banana republic. We have enough capacity to do things ourselves, but our ability to influence international donors is just not sufficient.

What do you think is the reason for this shift in donor attitudes?

Policy shifts, like the war on terrorism, and new strategies. But perhaps the biggest factor is the currently pervasive call for donor harmonisation. This is nothing but a pretext for rationalisation; it's not necessarily a way to improve the effectiveness of aid. It just means that, under the guise of harmonisation, bilateral funds are now being diverted to multilateral agencies and international NGOs. Bilateral funds that were intended for India's development, mind you.

What are you doing to influence decisions at the international level?

PRIA believes that our first battle ground is India. We must deal with the problems here first, but in parallel we must act globally. But you cannot deal globally if you do not act locally. In view of recent international developments, particularly donor harmonisation, we have re-assessed our priorities. We now invest less time and energy attending UN conferences in New York or EU events in Brussels. There are now fewer resources and little impact to be had there. Also, frankly, I find there's too much cynicism, too much resignation. Too many people have let go of their dreams, their ideals. They have given way to extreme realism.

Will it be impossible to change that situation?

No, of course not. I have dedicated my life to change, and I will not give up now. But we must find new spaces elsewhere. At PRIA, we are now shifting our focus, and will work more closely with the media, and in education. We are working with academic institutes, teachers and students to expose them to new ways of understanding, so that those individuals who eventually go into government will know what they need to do. Change does not come about just by working directly with the poor. There's a vast range of other crucial linkages to work on in order to change things. We work with other NGOs, so we can create a multiplier effect, and with politicians. We use

exposure visits, training, briefing papers, workshops and small meetings. What we really do is convene and design stakeholder forums where it's not us who speak, but the people themselves. We simply provide the platforms.

Isn't that a very roundabout way to achieve change?

Oh yes, perhaps. But we have found that making too much noise in the name of advocacy doesn't get you very far at all. You have to go about change diligently, consistently, sometimes with a hammer and tongs, at other times quietly and deliberately. You see, we use our public forums to sensitise people, but actual reform takes place almost invisibly. Our role is to open doors and to get people a seat at the table. They do the rest themselves.

What have been the essential ingredients in PRIA's success?

The crucial elements have been commitment and passion. We try to create safe settings in which people can take risks. But PRIA also needs resources. Preferably from donors who do not demand results displayed in a logframe yesterday. It's ridiculous, really. A large commercial firm does not expect its R&D department to meet targets like the sales unit does. In development, we can only apply those solutions we have found to work, but we spend most of our time finding them out. Funds for finding things out, however, are disappearing fast. Some donors can still be convinced, but that takes a lot of time.

The final key element in PRIA's success is our network. A large part of our time and energy at PRIA goes into sustaining our network, since if we don't sustain it, it will degenerate. How do we do that? It would take a week to explain fully, but the real key is people. It is essential to invest in people. Relationships are always between people, not between institutions. We must try to look after each other, even beyond the call of duty. And we have to have trust. We must keep creating opportunities for relationships to develop. Of course, a network must be purposive, not existential. You must keep an eye on the larger picture. And you simply must keep on pushing each other to deliver. <

Note: right column publications

Recent publications by Rajesh Tandon:

Voluntary Action, Civil Society and the State (Mosaic Books, 2002). This book describes the evolution of voluntary organisations and civil society in India, providing insights into the dynamics of the relationship between voluntary action and government. It also identifies the emerging capacity challenges facing voluntary organisations in India.

Civil Society and Governance (with Ranjita Mohanty; Samskriti, 2002). This book explores the interface between civil society and governance in India, where democracy has travelled some distance, yet economic and social inequalities continue to divide its people.

Systems thinking is back on the agenda

Applying systems thinking to capacity development

Systems thinking challenges many assumptions about the need for planning, objectives and control, and the ability of external agents to influence local change processes. By Volker Hauck

In recognition of the inadequacy of many capacity development efforts, policy makers and practitioners are constantly searching for more effective approaches.[1] The prevailing linear, project-based and social engineering approaches have failed to acknowledge the importance of system dynamics and the interrelationships between organisations. 'Systems thinking' is not new, but it has had little impact on the concept and practice of capacity development. Yet consideration is again being given to this body of thought. Systems thinking is back on the agenda.

In this context, ECDPM recently organised two workshops as part of the study on 'Capacity, Change and Performance'. The workshops brought together policy makers and practitioners from aid agencies and developing countries to discuss the idea and practice of systems thinking and their relevance for capacity development.[2]

The study on Capacity, Change and Performance is coordinated by ECDPM under the aegis of Govnet, the OECD/DAC working group on governance and capacity development. The study, grounded in 18 case studies, seeks to provide insights into how external agencies can support endogenous CD processes. The study also seeks to improve understanding of the relationship between capacity and performance, and the processes through which capacity develops. For further information, visit www.ecdpm.org

The workshop participants discussed a number of ways in which systems thinking can complement current approaches to the process of capacity development:

- *Cause and effect* relationships are not always linear; they are frequently complex, delayed in time, and unpredictable.
- *Planning.* Many successful systems have not had an overall plan, but have evolved through incremental adaptations.
- *Objectives.* Many CD processes do not have measurable objectives, but are guided by implicit intentions and ideas that adjust to emerging situations.
- *Interconnections* among the components of a system, such as organisations within a network, are important and can give rise to valuable synergies.
- *Feedback* is critical for learning and self-awareness, but the form it takes is culturally determined and cannot be applied in a standardised manner.

The workshops recognised the importance of *emergence* – the process through which elements of a system combine and interact over time to create a more effective whole. The question is to what extent external inputs can encourage emergence, and when they should be provided.

A complementary tool and perspective

Systems thinking challenges many assumptions about the need for planning, objectives and control, and the ability of external agents to influence local change processes. In so doing, it offers several insights that may help to broaden the understanding of complex development processes.

First, by looking at interventions as part of a network of interacting systems and sub-systems, systems thinking can contribute to the *change management strategies* supported by external agencies. By focusing on 'emergence' as a process of change, it recognises that specific CD outcomes cannot be simply engineered through the delivery of external inputs. Interventions need to be flexible and able to adapt to future, usually unforeseeable, system behaviour.

Second, a systems approach can be used as an *explanatory analytical tool*, both to understand the context of interventions, and to identify factors that facilitate or frustrate CD processes. It can therefore enhance capacity assessments (e.g. for programme formulation) while offering an alternative approach for evaluating interventions, helping to explain why things happened the way they did, and what lessons can be learned.

Finally, systems thinking offers a different perspective on the roles of *monitoring, evaluation and learning.* It highlights the importance of creating space within systems for learning, self-organisation and adaptation. It can, for example, help distinguish the different roles of monitoring and evaluation – both to satisfy donors' accountability requirements, and to meet the need for internal learning as the basis for adaptation and change.

Systems thinking carries several implications for development cooperation, calling for further policy discussion and exchanges with practitioners. It requires a better understanding of local contexts, more flexible time horizons, a willingness to accept risk and to think in terms of incremental strategies, and a review of monitoring and evaluation approaches. Equally important, it will need to be translated into tools and methods that can help practitioners to do their work more effectively.

Systems thinking is an approach for developing models to promote our understanding of events, patterns of behaviour resulting in those events, and even more important, the underlying structure responsible for that behaviour. In order to address a particular situation it is only through an understanding of the underlying structure that we will be able to identify appropriate leverage points to effect change within the system. <

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[1] Senge, P. (2005) The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization. Currency Doubleday.

[2] Morgan, P. (2005) The Idea and Practice of Systems Thinking and their Relevance for Capacity Development. ECDPM.

Meeting of the Learning Network on Programme-based Approaches

LENPA forum on capacity development

Réal Lavergne reports on a meeting on the interface between capacity development and programme-based approaches. Support for capacity development remains incipient in many areas. Further work is needed.

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In April 2005, over 100 analysts and programme officers from 20 donor organisations and partner countries met in Washington to discuss the challenges of providing support for capacity development processes in the context of programme-based approaches (PBAs). The meeting was organised by the Learning Network on Programme-based Approaches (LENPA).

The presentations in Washington included 13 case studies, two conceptual papers, a review of World Bank experiences in building state capacity in Africa, and good-practice papers on capacity development for public financial management and procurement. All of the documents and presentations are available on LENPA's extranet site (http://web.acdi-cida.gc.ca/pbas). Although this is a password-restricted site, readers are welcome to register by following the link on the home page.[1] A synthesis report on the forum is being produced. In the meantime, a summary report that was drafted as a companion piece to the present article has been posted on the Capacity.org website.

Development cooperation has changed dramatically in recent years, as donors have shifted away from support in the form of stand-alone projects in favour of programme-based approaches, in which donors combine their efforts in support of a locally owned programme of development. Programmes supported in this way tend to be relatively comprehensive, covering an entire sector, for example, or even a country's poverty reduction strategy. This allows the partners involved to take a more holistic and coordinated approach to the task at hand, under host-country leadership.[2]

As instruments for pursuing the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), PBAs can be seen to have two preoccupations. The first is the scaling up of activities that have proven to be effective in meeting the MDGs (such as more schools, textbooks or teachers). The second is enhanced institutional performance or productivity in developing countries, leading to improved outcomes, regardless of scale, through capacity development.

The search for enhanced institutional performance is fundamental to PBAs. Indeed, much of the critique of stand-alone projects that led to the emergence of PBAs is premised on the realisation that projects often undermine institutional capacity in developing countries by creating parallel structures rather than working with existing institutional arrangements.[3] Under PBAs, this approach is reversed, in favour of working with domestic institutions and encouraging learning by doing.

Programme-based approaches can thus be seen as an instrument of capacity development. At the same time, PBAs themselves can only succeed to the extent that local institutions have the capacity to deliver. This provides added incentives for all parties to promote and support capacity development processes in those institutions. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness[4] makes numerous references to the underlying principles of capacity development and programme-based approaches, and includes both concepts in indicators of progress 4 and 9.[5]

At the Washington forum, participants explored these subjects from a variety of thematic and sector perspectives, and shared their observations on false starts, strategies and approaches, donor roles, results and challenges. What emerged from these discussions was a picture of support for capacity development that is most highly developed in the areas of financial management and procurement, but remains incipient in many other areas, in particular those having to do with service delivery. Systematic capacity assessments and capacity development strategies appear to be the exception rather than the rule, and donors have much to do to improve their own capacity to intervene successfully.

LENPA members participating in the Washington forum were able to advance both their conceptual understanding of the challenges of capacity development under PBAs, and their knowledge of current practices. Further work is needed, both to deepen our understanding and to put that understanding into practice. The fact that indicator 4 of the Paris Declaration bears directly on the coordination of capacity development efforts should hopefully provide an impetus for more vigorous and better coordinated efforts to promote capacity development processes in the context of programme-based approaches. <

[1] For material on the Washington forum, including the case studies, click on Enter Here, then go to Conferences and Workshops\Washington 2005\Documents and Presentations.

[2] See OECD (2005) Harmonising Donor Practices for Effective Aid Delivery, vol. 2, box 3.1.

[3] Lavergne, R. (2003) Program-based approaches: A new way of doing business, Development Express, vol.3. CIDA, Policy Branch. www.acdi-cida.ru/publications/EExpress_Dec03.pdf

[4] Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, March 2005. www.oecd.org dataoecd/11/41/34428351.pdf

[5] Indicator 4 is about strengthening capacity through coordinated support. Indicator 9 is about the use of common arrangements and procedures, with specific reference to PBAs.

EVENTS

This section lists upcoming meetings, workshops and conferences. For a more extensive listing, visit www.capacity.org.

Final Workshop on Capacity, Change and Performance
Maastricht, the Netherlands, 29 November to 1 December 2005
www.ecdpm.org

The Deep Dynamics of Stakeholder Relationships
Noordwijk, the Netherlands, 8–11 November 2005
Organised by Cohesive Identity Consulting and the International Institute for Facilitation and Consensus (IIFC).
www.cohesiveid.com/stakeholder.html

OECD DAC GOVNET
Paris, France, 20–21 October 2005. Contact: Bathylle Missika, OECD, bathylle.missika@oecd.org

Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD)
Paris, 19 October 2005
(to be confirmed). Contact: thomas.theisohn@undp.org

NGO networks: Supporting learning and capacity building
Amsterdam, the Netherlands, 10–11 October 2005
Organised by BOND and PSO.
www.pso.nl/nieuws/nieuwsitem. asp?nieuws=80

INTRAC Monitoring and Evaluation Workshops
European M&E Workshop, Harnosand, Sweden, 10-12 October 2005. Asian M&E Workshop, New Delhi, India, 9-11 November 2005
www.intrac.org/conferences.php

Mobilising Local Capacities for the MDGs
The Hague, the Netherlands, 28–30 September 2005
Organised by SNV.
http://snvmdgs.eepa-portal.com/wcm/

Workshop on Networks as a Form of Capacity.
The Hague, the Netherlands, 20–21 September 2005.
Organised by SNV, UNDP and ECDPM.
www.ecdpm.org

PUBLICATIONS

This section offers a selection of publications related to capacity development. A more extensive list can be found at www.capacity.org.

Investing in Development: A Practical Plan to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals

UNDP/Earthscan, 2005, 329 pp. The final report of the UN Millennium Project describes how to achieve the MDGs. Practical solutions exist. The political framework is established. And for the first time, the cost is utterly affordable. Whatever one's motivation for attacking the crisis of extreme poverty – human rights, religious values, security, fiscal prudence, ideology – the solutions are the same. All that is needed is action.
ISBN: 1-84407-217-7
www.unmillenniumproject.org/reports/

State-Building: Governance and World Order in the 21st Century

Francis Fukuyama, Cornell University Press, 2004, 160 pp. 'Weak or failed states are the source of many of the world's most serious problems,' Fukuyama believes. He traces what we know – and more often don't know – about how to transfer functioning public institutions to developing countries in ways that will leave something of permanent benefit to the citizens of the countries concerned.
ISBN 0801442923
www.sais-jhu.edu/Faculty/fukuyama/

Improving Impacts of Research Partnerships

Daniel Maselli et al., Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries (KFPE), 2004, 86 pp. This book analyses eight case studies of research partnerships between the North and the South. It stresses the importance of planning, monitoring and impact assessment in the design and evaluation of research programmes, and highlights factors that can enhance or hinder impact.
ISBN 3-906151-83-2
www.kfpe.ch/key_activities/impact_study/

Capacity Building for Local NGOs: A guidance manual for good practice

Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2005, 217 pp. This comprehensive manual on capacity building for local NGOs can be used for training and development or as a self-help manual. Available on CD and free online in pdf format.
ISBN: print 1 85287 314; CD 1 85287 315 9 www.ciir.org/

A Brief Review of 20 Tools to Assess Institutional Capacity
UNDP/BDP/CDG, August 2005, 12 pp. This review of 20 institutional assessment tools draws from publicly available resources of non-profit organisations, management consultancies, UN agencies and other donor organisations.
www.capacity.undp.org/

Understanding Organizational Sustainability through African Proverbs

Chiku Malunga with Charles Banda, Pact/Impact Alliance Press, 2004, 84 pp.
In this book the power of traditional wisdom contained in African proverbs is directed at organisational development and change. The result is a fresh new perspective, with important lessons for leaders, consultants, volunteers and expatriates working in Africa.
ISBN 1888753366
www.pactpublications.com/

Scaling up versus Absorptive Capacity: Challenges and Opportunities for Reaching the MDGs in Africa
ODI Briefing Paper, May 2005, 5pp.
This paper argues that the 'scaling up' of aid flows that could materialise in 2005 is likely to run up against 'absorptive capacity' constraints, unless these are taken into account from the beginning, and adequately addressed in the design and implementation of improved aid delivery mechanisms.
ISSN 0140-8682
www.odi.org.uk/publications/

A Results-Oriented Approach to Capacity Change
DANIDA, 2005, 23 pp.
Capacity development support is a key element in development assistance, whether aimed at specific organisations or as part of wider sector programmes. This paper seeks a better understanding of what 'capacity' means, and the constraints and the options for changing and enhancing it.
www.um.dk/en/

ORGANISATIONS AND NETWORKS

This section provides links to organisations, initiatives and networks concerned with capacity development. For a more extensive listing, visit www.capacity.org.

Aid Harmonization & Alignment

This site is the World Bank's contribution to aid harmonisation efforts of the OECD DAC. It provides practical information for practitioners interested in the harmonisation of operational policies, procedures, and practices, with links to all reports and papers related to aid harmonisation to date.
www.aidharmonization.org

Development Gateway: Capacity Development for the MDGs

This is a major portal to resources, including links to events, news, data, publications, programmes, best practices, organisations, training information and research. It also offers a platform for knowledge exchange and discourse geared towards strengthening local capacities and resources to help meet the MDGs.
www.developmentgateway.org/mdg

European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM)

ECDPM is fostering better trade and aid relations between the European Union and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP-EU) and deals with the international policies that govern development between the ACP countries and EU member states. ECDPM helps organisations to build their own capacity, so that these stakeholders are well informed and confident to join in negotiations and broker the best possible deals for their countries or communities. www.ecdpm.org

International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC)

INTRAC supports NGOs and civil society organisations through research that explores policy issues, and training to strengthen management and organisational effectiveness. INTRAC's Praxis programme is about enabling CSOs to become more effective by linking theory and practice in the field of organisational capacity building.
www.intrac.org

Impact Alliance

Hosted by PACT, the Impact Alliance is a global capacity building network that brings together the know-how of hundreds of organisations from all sectors of development. The Resource Center offers access to publications, websites, events and other resources related to capacity building.
www.impactalliance.org/

OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)

The DAC is a key forum of major bilateral donors, and is the principal body through which the OECD deals with issues related to cooperation with developing countries. Subsidiary bodies of the DAC that address CD issues include:
- Network on Governance (GOVNET)
- Fragile States Group
- Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and Donor Practices
- Network on Development Evaluation www.oecd.org/dac

SNV Netherlands Development Organisation

SNV supports 1761 organisations in 26 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Balkans. SNV provides advice to strengthen the capacities of organisations at the 'meso-level' – above the grassroots but below national level – that can play a critical role in fighting poverty and achieving the MDGs.
www.snvworld.org

UNDP

UNDP is working in 166 countries to help develop the capacities required to achieve the MDGs. Flagship initiatives include Capacity 2015, which works through a series of partnerships to build capacities at the local level to realise the MDGs, and Harmonization and Capacity, which aims to integrate the commitments on harmonisation.
www.undp.org/capacity

CD IN THE SOUTH

African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF)

The ACBF, based in Harare, Zimbabwe, was established in 1991 by three multilateral institutions – the African Development Bank (AfDB), the World Bank and UNDP – African governments and bilateral donors. The site provides access to occasional papers, lessons notes and the findings of operations and thematic research.
www.acbf-pact.org/

Community Development Resource Network (CDRN)

Based in Kampala, Uganda, the CDRN provides training, research and advocacy services to build the capacities of its partners, mostly small NGOs and CBOs involved in community development work.
www.cdrn.or.ug/

Environment and Development Action in the Third World (ENDA-Tiers Monde)

ENDA is an international NGO based in Dakar, Senegal, with branches in Africa, Asia and South America. ENDA collaborates with grassroots groups and local organisations in search of replicable development models involving action, research, training and communication.
www.enda.sn

NETWORKS

Capacity Development Network (CDNet)

CDNet is a virtual workspace for dialogue, exchange and learning on capacity development. Registered users can create their own discussions, working groups and libraries on CD topics. The site offers 'resource corners', syntheses of research and analysis, tools and guidelines, and a library of case studies, learning materials, and links.
www.capacitywhoiswho.net/

CIDA Capacity Development Extranet

The capacity development (CD) extranet site provides access to information and analysis on capacity development in development cooperation. The audience includes CIDA's CD network, other CIDA personnel involved in CD, and development partners in Canada and abroad. Requires user registration.
http://remote4.acdi-cida.gc.ca/cd

Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD)

LenCD is an informal network including analysts from bilateral and multilateral agencies and NGOs engaged in development cooperation. The network facilitates learning on CD practices, mainstreaming capacity development and country-level collaboration. Requires user registration.
www.capacitywhoiswho.net/

Learning Network on Programme-based Approaches (LENPA)

This Extranet site enables members of both CIDA's network on PBAs and the international Learning Network on Program-based Approaches (LENPA) to share information and analysis on programme-based approaches and initiatives. Requires user registration.
http://web.acdi-cida.gc.ca/pbas

UNDP Capacity 2015 Information Learning Network (ILN)

Capacity 2015 ILN is a network of networks (meta-network) that is being developed to leverage knowledge in poor and transitional countries to meet the MDGs. Regional networks in Africa, the Arab States, Asia and the Pacific, Europe and the CIS, and Latin America will be launched soon.
www.capacity.undp.org/

Capacity development and challenges for donors

Beyond 2005

OECD photo

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The year 2005 is seen by many as a make or break year for accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. We have the prospect of significant increases in aid – possibly by an additional US$50 billion per year by 2010. At the same time, the Commission for Africa, the Millennium Review and the G8 Gleneagles meeting reached a clear conclusion: capacity development is one of the most critical issues for both donors and partner countries. With both the resources and the pressure for results, this is possibly the best opportunity donors have ever had to help developing countries address the long-term challenges of capacity development.

Some areas of consensus seem to be emerging. One of the most important, as set out in the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, is that capacity development is the primary responsibility of developing countries, with donors playing a supportive role. Developing countries must lead the process by setting specific objectives in their national plans. Donors should then mobilise their financial and analytical support around credible partner country objectives, plans and development strategies, making full use of existing capacities. To support commitments under the Declaration, donors and partner countries have agreed on indicators to measure progress, with targets for 2010. While this broad consensus is very welcome, donors will face some significant challenges over the coming decade.

First, much of what we have learned about capacity development over four decades points to a lack of a persistent and patient approach, with donors' short-term project goals displacing longer-term incremental changes. The scaling up of aid provides an opportunity to set more realistic timescales for this endeavour. But donor agencies still find it hard to plan beyond the electoral and budget cycles in their own countries and to ride out the ups and downs with partner country governments, particularly where human rights are at stake.

Second, there is a need for a more rounded approach to state building in which donors can help facilitate change. Donors could look more closely at facilitating interactions between states and their societies, rather than being locked into fragmented approaches that support either governments or civil society groups, to the exclusion of the other.

A third challenge will be to improve policy coherence between different parts of OECD governments, in particular to reconcile policies that support capacity development and training, with those that encourage emigration. About 70,000 African professionals and academics leave the continent each year.[1] Some of this is genuine 'brain gain' from which all can benefit, but in some fields, such as health care and IT, OECD government policies threaten to strip developing countries of essential skills.

Finally, a question remains about how to convert the international rhetoric on capacity development into changes in donor behaviour on the ground. Much depends on changes in donor agencies in terms of internal incentives, skill profiles and procedures if capacity is to be given high priority in policy and practice.

A new era featuring significant scaling up of aid presents opportunities for capacity development, but also magnifies the need to learn lessons from experience. What is needed is a determined concerted effort, by donors and partner countries, to implement what has been learned and to ensure that good practice becomes common practice. <

[1] *World Bank (2005) Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support. www.worldbank.org/oed.*