

A gateway for capacity development

Capacity.ORG

ISSUE 38 | DECEMBER 2009



Local capacity developers

CD MONITOR

Assessing capacity development for research

Colleen Duggan reports on a recent IDRC evaluation of its capacity building work with southern partners

FEATURE

The rise of local capacity developers

Jan Ubels explores the emerging capacity development support sector and the need for structural improvement for it to be more effective

INTERVIEW

Who are national capacity developers?

Heinz Greijn interviews three local capacity developers in Benin, Tanzania and Vietnam and finds out what drives them and the challenges they face

POLICY

Building sustainable higher education in Africa

Damtew Teferra argues that higher education is indispensable for producing local capacity developers with the skills and knowledge needed to be effective

PRACTICE

Connecting communities of practice

Thomas Theisohn and Tony Land on the need for the capacity development community to connect with and learn from other communities of practice

GUEST COLUMN

Empower LCDs

Brian Pratt calls for an honest debate: are we really doing our best to support local capacity developers or preserving our own institutions?

Assessing capacity development for research



Colleen Duggan
cduggan@idrc.ca
Evaluation Unit, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada

How can we best assess capacity building initiatives? Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC), in line with many development organisations, has been grappling with this question for a long while. Capacity development for research is fundamental to IDRC's existence, and in 2005, the IDRC Evaluation Unit launched a strategic evaluation to investigate the organisation's contribution to developing the capacities of the people and organisations with whom it works.

The IDRC study found, not surprisingly, that capacity building is an abstract concept, with different definitions reflecting many disciplines, values and ideologies. Capacity development is complex, but can sometimes be used as a catch-all phrase by practitioners when they have difficulties articulating exactly what it is they want to do or achieve through a project or programme.

IDRC staff and partners have strong views and beliefs about capacity development. Even the language used is full of allusions to power and control, and to how learning and change happen. Although there is a great deal of descriptive information regarding development projects that have attempted to build capacity, there are few systematic reviews analysing how research stakeholders construct the concept of capacity building in order to understand how it can be effective.

In response, we designed a study that would provide IDRC's staff and senior managers with an intellectual framework and useful common language to help understand and document the concept, experiences and results that IDRC has accumulated over the years. The evaluation focuses on the processes and results of IDRC support for developing the capacities of its southern partners. What capacities have been enhanced, whose, how, and how effectively?

Spanning a period of four years, the evaluation comprises five phases. Phase 1 aimed to define what IDRC means by

This section highlights news and recent developments in the area of capacity development. CD Monitor is compiled in collaboration with UNDP's Capacity-Net.

'building' or 'developing' capacities and to sharpen our understanding of how and with whom IDRC supports capacity development.

Phase 2 developed a set of typologies to assist IDRC staff and partners in conceptualising, planning, monitoring and evaluating capacity development at the individual researcher, organisational and network levels. The first two phases also produced a number of frameworks, including the 'research-into-use' framework (see diagram), for planning, monitoring and evaluating capacity development with individuals or groups of researchers.

Phase 3 produced a working definition of capacity development at IDRC – not an easy exercise considering the diversity of perspectives and disciplines within the organisation and among IDRC's partners. Phase 3 also generated a list of 'good practices for capacity development' capturing the key elements that IDRC staff and partners view as critical to building research capacities. The good practices are not intended, however, to act as a formal metric against which project results can be measured. Rather, they offer guidance and

act as an organisational barometer to ground the corporate culture and values that define IDRC support to capacity development.

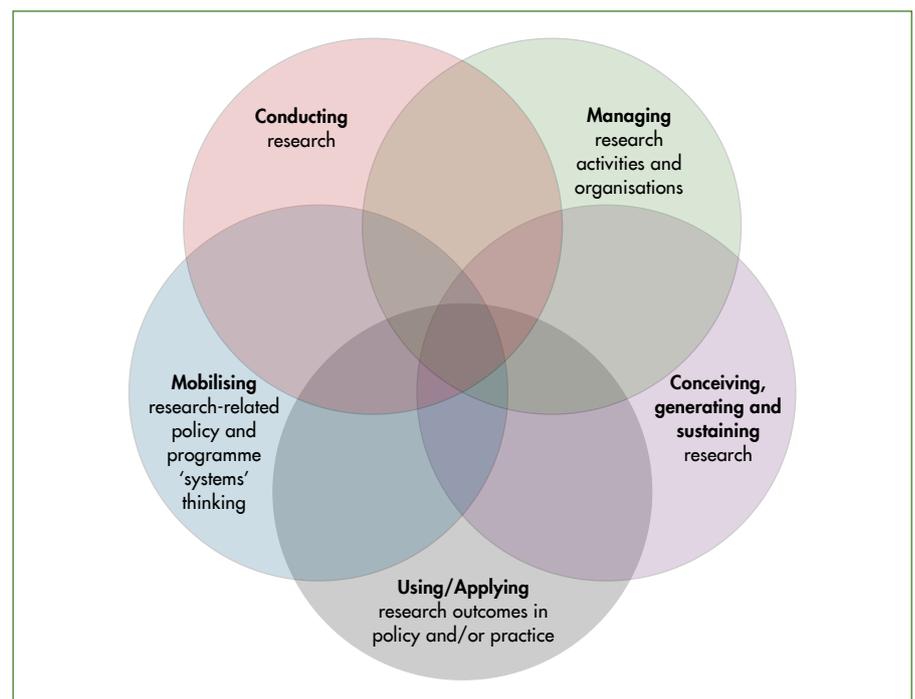
Given the growing interest within IDRC to understand the complexities of building research organisations, phase 4 aimed to provide evidence on how IDRC develops 'complete capacity' to carry out research-based activities within organisations. Six case studies examine different types of organisation (universities, networks, NGOs, a member of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research, and a national government) in different regional contexts. This phase also produced a cross-case analysis and a paper focusing on how IDRC could identify and communicate aggregate results more effectively both internally and externally.

In the fifth and final phase of this strategic evaluation, which will end in early 2010, we will prepare a synthesis brief highlighting the key findings and the most useful frameworks emerging from the study. <

Link

- Capacity building at IDRC, a strategic evaluation www.idrc.ca/evaluation_capacity

Research-into-use framework (from Bernard, A. and Armstrong, G. (2005) Framework for Evaluating Capacity Development at IDRC. Prepared for the IDRC Evaluation Unit).



The case for local capacity developers

Local expertise to support people and organisations in developing their capacities is arguably one of the most valuable resources a society can have to boost development.

In this issue of *Capacity.org* we focus on local capacity developers (LCDs) who 'own' this expertise. LCDs facilitate change, explore new ways of working and help enhance capacity, knowing what long-term development requires. This expertise is usually found among local consultants and NGOs, and in higher education and research institutes.

Many countries are short of LCDs and depend heavily on foreign experts. While this may be a valid way to acquire knowledge without having to invest in its development, there are also several pitfalls:

- Foreign expertise is expensive and often hard to find, which reduces the ability of a society to apply, maintain and develop solutions acquired from elsewhere.
- Foreign 'experts' often transfer knowledge and propose solutions that do not work because they have not been adapted to local realities or are not well grounded in the local context.

Capacity development involves building on local knowledge and, only where necessary and appropriate, bringing in foreign knowledge to create know-how and solutions that are state-of-the-art and context specific. This requires a critical mass of LCDs.

LCD support is an emerging sector and little is known about it. Jan Ubels, in the feature article, makes the case for more in-depth study and analysis. As a first step, SNV, supported by the UK Overseas Development Institute, conducted exploratory studies in Cameroon, Montenegro, Peru, Tanzania and Vietnam. Clearly, the need for high-quality capacity development services is growing.

At the sub-national level, however, due to limited resources, this need for high-quality services does not translate into demand. In terms of outreach and quality there is certainly room for improvement. Local capacity developers could improve their services enormously but the conditions in which they operate can be tough.

To find out what drives local capacity developers and the challenges they face, *Capacity.org* interviewed three LCDs from Benin, Tanzania and Vietnam. They suggest ways in which donors and national governments can help create a more enabling environment in which LCDs can grow.

What determines whether or not a country has a strong network of local capacity

developers? Policies that support tertiary education are crucial. Damtew Teferra explains the challenges facing African universities and the strategic choices they need to make. In the 1980s and 1990s African governments were wrongly advised by – yes – foreign experts, notably the World Bank, that higher education was a luxury developing countries could not afford and that it would be better to send their students abroad for higher education. This advice was based on calculations showing that the rate of return on investments in tertiary education was much lower than those in primary or secondary education. Although the data and assumptions underlying these calculations were flawed, the World Bank's education agenda remained unchanged for decades, contributing to the collapse of the university sector in Africa. In turn, this meant that African countries lacked the capacity to generate their own experts.

Today, many countries in sub-Saharan Africa have new policies and are investing heavily in higher education. Even the World Bank – in the book *Accelerating Catch-up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa* (2009) – has changed its views. It will be a challenge, however, for Africa to catch up with India, for example. Having invested in higher education for decades, India is now benefiting from a wealth of home-grown talent.

Guest columnist Brian Pratt focuses on another factor that both causes and perpetuates over-dependency on foreign expertise, the aid sector itself. Many subsidised aid organisations provide capacity development services by bringing in foreign expertise, thereby preventing the emergence of a local sector of capacity builders or even crowding out LCDs already operating in the market.

In a special article, and in anticipation of a global event, 'Capacity is Development', planned by UNDP in early 2010, Thomas Theisohn and Tony Land provide an overview of the capacity development knowledge architecture, which can be seen as comprising multiple communities of practice. Some of these openly link to capacity development, whereas others, without explicitly embracing capacity development concepts, generate relevant ideas and data. The authors argue that connecting these various communities of practice could trigger a rich cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices.

Heinz Greijn
editor@capacity.org
Editor-in-Chief

CD MONITOR 2
Assessing capacity development for research
Colleen Duggan

EDITORIAL 3
The case for local capacity developers
Heinz Greijn

FEATURE 4
The rise of local capacity developers
Jan Ubels

RESOURCES 7

INTERVIEW 8
Who are national capacity developers?
Heinz Greijn

POLICY 10
Building sustainable higher education in Africa
Damtew Teferra

PRACTICE 12
Connecting communities of practice
Thomas Theisohn and Tony Land

RESOURCES 15

GUEST COLUMN 16
Empower LCDs
Brian Pratt

Cover photo

Graduation day: students at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria.
Reuters / George Esiri

Rise of local capacity developers



Jan Ubels
jubels@snvworld.org
Senior policy advisor, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, The Hague

Every society needs its own intelligence and expertise to support change and development processes. In a globalising economy, a society can draw on international contacts and support, but to steer and develop itself, it needs internal expertise to succeed: people and organisations that understand their own society intimately and are able to bring about change within it.

In most developing countries a 'service sector' providing capacity development support is emerging, consisting of leading NGOs, consultancy firms, (semi-)public entities such as training and research institutes and independent consultants. We will call them local capacity developers (LCDs).

LCDs may operate at the local, sub-national, national or even regional level. They use different means and techniques for building capacity, including training, organisational development advice, project management support, change and process facilitation, coaching and mentoring, and knowledge brokering. Ideally, these techniques are combined with expertise relating to a particular sector, such as infrastructure, health or agriculture. Some LCDs are individuals who work alone or with colleagues or partners; others are also affiliated with international consulting firms or international NGOs.

Recent international policy statements, such as the Accra Agenda for Action in 2008, have emphasised that countries in the South need to make better use of and encourage the development of their own expertise for capacity development, rather than rely on external technical assistance. Discussions about technical assistance began with the publication of the Berg report in 1993, which criticised technical assistance

Little is known about local capacity developers in the South. The SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, supported by the UK Overseas Development Institute (ODI), carried out an exploratory study in five countries.

for being primarily donor-driven, led by outside expertise. It also noted the limited results in terms of sustained poverty reduction because of the failure to strengthen local capacities. Although the Berg report was given serious attention, there has been remarkably little analysis of home-grown expertise for capacity development. Nor has there been much debate on how the LCD sector can best be stimulated.

Understanding service environments

To rectify this lack of knowledge of local capacity developers, SNV, supported by the UK's Overseas Development Institute (ODI), recently explored the situation in five countries – Cameroon, Montenegro, Peru, Tanzania and Vietnam. These initial reconnaissances looked at local capacity development 'service environments' in order to understand the role played by various actors in supporting capacity development processes. They also examined how they work, and the demand–supply–financing interactions that seem to steer this work.

This article summarises the findings of these explorations, and identifies common issues that need to be addressed in order to develop a local capacity development service environment. It also refers to wider international policy commitments to stimulate the development and use of local or 'southern' expertise.

The 'service environment' refers to the market and non-market dimensions of the support system. In line with SNV's engagement with sub-national actors, the study focused on the degree to which the need for capacity development support at the provincial, district and community levels is actually being served by the emerging support 'industry'. It examined the nature of the organisations, financing patterns, the types of support or services they provide, and how demand and support relate to each other.

The five countries differ significantly in terms of the nature of their economies, their political systems, the relations between civil society, the private sector and government, the character and speed of decentralisation processes, and their natural environments.

In Peru, for example, there is a relatively strong consultancy 'industry', with several thousand professionals serving mainly the private sector and national (semi-)public agencies, and a community of development-related NGOs. In recent years, these two have crossed over into each other's terrain, with NGOs doing more 'fee-for-service' work and private consultants bidding for development programmes.

The findings of the study indicate that the number of LCDs operating as private businesses correlates with the size of the commercial sector. Thus the commercial capacity development sector is relatively strong in Cameroon, with its forestry and oil industries, and is developing quickly in the booming economy of Vietnam. The NGO sector is weak in Vietnam, however, due to its socialist history, but is relatively strong in Cameroon and Tanzania. Semi-public training and research institutes play an important role in capacity development in Vietnam, and have some prominence in Tanzania and Cameroon, but play a minor role in liberalised Peru.

With the recent emphasis on national implementation programmes, international consultancy firms have also started to focus on capacity development through their local offices and affiliates.

Emerging patterns

Despite the very different settings and service environments in the five countries, several patterns emerged:

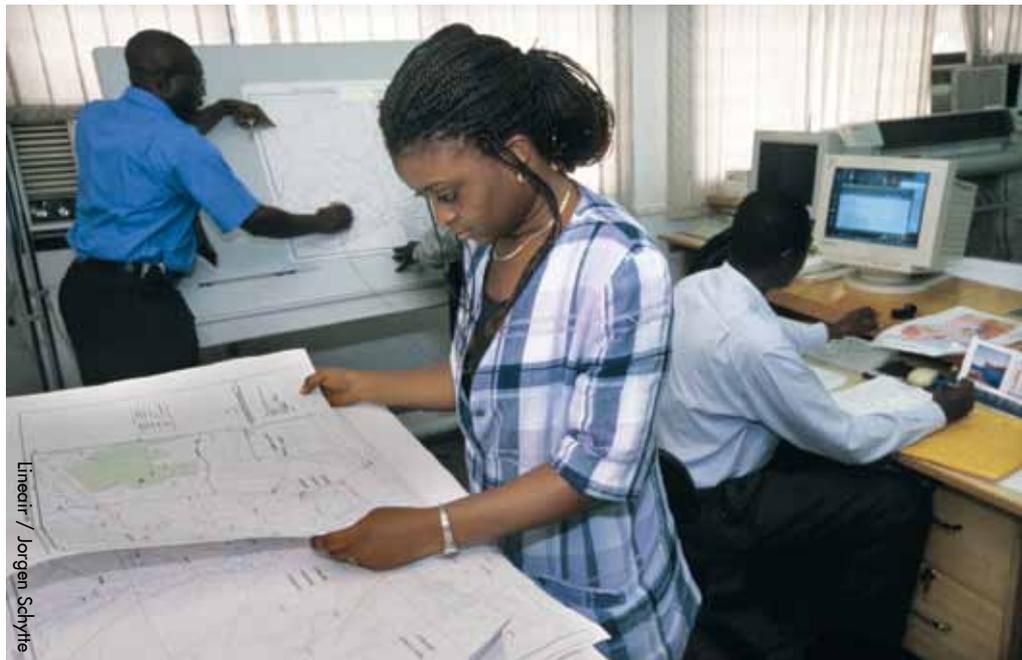
1. Most money for capacity development is spent on national level programmes steered and implemented from the capitals.
2. Most services are designed at the national level, by funders and service providers, far from the needs of clients at the local level.
3. Capacity development support providers are concentrated in one or two major cities, while at the sub-national level there are small NGOs or programmes with short-term funding.
4. With regard to the type of services provided, most local capacity developers offer standard modular training courses, combined with technical advice and project management services. More advanced services are rare.

5. A large knowledge gap exists between national and local actors, in relation to knowledge about professional capacity development, about the 'market' for capacity development-related services and about funding in particular.
6. In terms of prices, capacity development in its present form is expensive for clients at the sub-national level, most of whom cannot afford to pay 'national' consultancy fees, subsistence allowances, air travel, etc.
7. For sub-national actors the capacity development market is inaccessible, not transparent, and the quality of services varies considerably.

Although there are considerable variations within each country, these patterns are clearly visible, to the extent that they may be regarded as systemic phenomena created and maintained by the way the aid system and developing societies work.

The service environments in the five countries are clearly 'hybrid' in nature, populated by a mix of NGOs, private sector and semi-public actors. They rely on funding from multiple sources – international NGOs, private firms, governments and donors. A number of 'providers' may move from the commercial to subsidised market segments, and vice versa. NGOs, as well as commercial or semi-public entities, often depend on similar sources of funding. It is not uncommon for them to combine different legal forms in order to operate in this hybrid environment. Although each market segment is clearly different from the others, overall, the various forms of financing are intertwined, forming one larger market or service environment.

There are enormous differences in the fees for capacity development services. At the national level, it is normal for firms and NGOs to charge US\$100 to US\$350 a day, or even higher fees for more specialised policy work. Some international NGOs pay US\$250 to US\$350 a day to preferred consultants



Technical staff at the Center for Remote Sensing and Geographical Information Services, Accra, Ghana.

– fees that clients at the sub-national and local levels can not afford to pay. Locally, rates are capped at around US\$100 day, and are usually much lower. Many local NGOs are dependent on one donor or project, and so have to employ just one or two staff until they can find other sources of funding.

Limited choice, growing demand

The demand for a wider range of higher-quality capacity development services is growing. The concept of 'service delivery' used by many programmes and providers, however, is disappointingly limited and rather uniform. Most support consists of relatively isolated training sessions or workshops, rather than effective assistance that will bring about longer-term changes at the local level.

In addition, the number of lead actors providing capacity development support for a sector or theme within a country is usually quite limited (often between three and eight). National and international clients often demand a standard repertoire from providers of capacity development services. In roundtable discussions held in the five countries as part of the study, several participants expressed their desire to innovate and think more about outreach. But time and the resources needed to do this are extremely limited.

Yet clients are becoming more demanding, even at the local level. As one local mayor in southern Cameroon observed, 'One-off training or technical design are not enough. If I want my water department to function better I need somebody to work with that team over a long period, to look at the quality of work practices, the leadership, how they relate to citizens and user groups, their internal organisation. But it is very difficult to get such support, for financial as well as technical reasons'.

In different sectors within a country, capacity development services can be diverse. In agricultural or other commercial market chains, for example, capacity development service providers have developed a variety of 'business development services' models that could be transferred to other fields. In the water sector, for example, providers have experience with multi-actor platforms and processes that may be relevant elsewhere. In short, there is considerable potential for improvement through the cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches between sectors.

Below the 'glass floor'

At the sub-national level, capacity development service providers are

The macro–micro gap

Tanzania is a good example of the divide between international and national dynamics on the one hand, and local realities on the other. While national and international recognition of the need for capacity development is growing, local organisations find it difficult to access the funding and services they need to strengthen their capacities.

Capacity development is a top-down process. Initiatives, programmes and funding streams are designed by national actors without adequate understanding of the realities at the local level. Local initiatives are ignored and interesting examples of enhanced capacities remain isolated. Capacity development providers are unable to capture and nurture local initiatives that could be scaled up, as their work is driven by national agendas set by outside actors.

Many of those involved in the SNV/ODI study recognised the 'micro–macro gap' in capacity development, particularly the following elements:

- *Expression of demand:* local actors have insufficient capabilities and space to express demand and are thus simply recipients of capacity development interventions.
- *Quality of supply:* the supply of capacity development services is skewed towards supply-driven products and services, with a central-urban bias and often based on standardised approaches.
- *Imperfect markets:* while funding is available at national level for capacity development programmes and approaches, it is often not connect to local demand. Programmes are conceptualised at the centre and face considerable challenges in bridging the urban–rural gap.

predominantly NGOs and individual consultants. Because most funding is available in capitals, clients at the sub-national level can only afford the services of subsidised NGOs or individual consultants who charge reasonable fees. Their outreach is therefore limited. This raises a number of questions, such as what strategies or approaches would enable them to enhance their outreach? What measures are needed to increase the number of LCDs operating at this level at affordable rates? Would adopting more 'networked' approaches through peer-to-peer and horizontal learning be more effective?

The relational and knowledge barriers between actors that operate in the 'national arena' and those at the sub-national level are enormous. In the study, it was difficult to find examples of sub-national LCDs that had won government or donor contracts, even for work in 'their' own region where their advantages are likely to be enormous in terms of local presence, knowledge, connections and networks, not to mention their cost effectiveness. Together, these factors seem to create what could be called a 'glass floor' (rather than a glass ceiling) in the system.

Capacity development support clearly faces enormous challenges if it is to reach beyond the cities and meet the needs and (potentially huge) demand at the local level.

Ways forward

Improving outreach and quality are important challenges that cannot be met with current funding levels and support strategies. Are there cheaper, more effective networked and 'peer-to-peer' or horizontal learning approaches that can be used to improve capacity development support? If so, would they help solve the erratic, poor-quality outreach? In order to move forward and improve the service environments that are so urgently needed, a number of issues need to be addressed.

- A deeper understanding of capacity development service environments is essential. A 'value chain' perspective would help open up a range of relevant questions. For example, how does the capacity development support value chain actually work? How do demand, supply and financing meet and interface? What ranges of products and services are already provided, and how adequate are they? What service delivery models work most effectively and efficiently?
- The logic of funding. Funding arrangements must allow local actors to make more deliberate choices on what they need and what will work in their specific settings. Approaches must be promoted that go beyond standard training and ensure more meaningful impacts at the local level. Attention should be paid to 'brokering' market information and market relations, ensuring that they become more transparent, accessible and understandable to local actors.

- Current capacity development inputs (especially standard modular training) are not necessarily helping to bring about change at the local level. Better quality and innovative methodologies are needed that will foster and facilitate more effective local solutions.
- Capacity development approaches need to be scalable. One way to achieve this would involve building on peer-to-peer learning, brokering knowledge, networking, and using modern media. Another would involve adopting methods that influence groups of actors rather than individual clients through, for example, multi-actor processes, strengthening public accountability mechanisms and improving value chains.
- Much stronger support for the professional development of LCDs, especially those working at the sub-national level, is crucial, alongside the new approaches and key elements mentioned above.

Strategic action

Capacity development can help to ensure that poverty reduction ambitions are achieved. Yet many policies and programmes face difficulties in stimulating local change – also called the 'macro-micro gap'. The SNV/ODI study has shown that this also applies to the ways in which capacity development is supported. In most environments, centralisation, the supply-driven approach, fragmentation of efforts and the lack of outreach confirm this.

Although in many countries a 'capacity development service industry' is emerging, in general, policies, funding strategies and (sector) programmes pay only piecemeal attention to the structural improvements

that are needed in the service environment for capacity development. This has limited the access and outreach of sub-national actors, and can be regarded as one major reason for the failure to achieve ambitions such as the Millennium Development Goals.

SNV is starting to use the insights gained from the study to engage with local capacity developers as clients, sub-contractors and partners. In a number of countries, we are also establishing local capacity development 'facilities' that are jointly funded, locally governed and sometimes sector focused. These facilities use a combination of funding and brokering to stimulate sub-national environments so that capacity development demand, support services and finance meet more effectively. We will report on these initiatives at a later stage.

In the meantime, the challenge is to move away from providing direct support to capacity development towards ways of working that consciously support the emergence of an effective capacity development service environment. Little has so far been done to achieve this. With this article – and indeed this issue of *Capacity.org* – we are pioneering these new insights and perspectives. <

The author invites readers to submit ideas about what can be done to help the emergence of a strong and effective capacity development support sector in developing countries – by donors, international NGOs, governments, and the sector itself.

Further reading

- Elliot Berg (ed) (1993) *Rethinking Technical Cooperation: Reforms for Capacity Building in Africa*, UNDP.

How do donors and national government view LCDs?

The use of local consultants dates back to the early days of technical assistance to developing countries. But in the 1980s and 1990s the process of privatisation stimulated the development of national expertise. While expertise in technical areas grew, the 'soft' sector of institutional and organisational development – providing strategic and policy advice, coaching, training, etc. – lagged behind. It is far easier to find such knowledge in middle-income than in the least developed countries.

For international agencies, the advantages of using LCDs are clear. In particular, they

- understand the local context and cultural sensitivities
- speak the local languages
- know professional, formal and informal networks
- enjoy legitimacy and recognition among peers
- have knowledge of national institutions
- are familiar with the working environment and are able to charge lower fees
- tend to have a rapport with national decision makers who prefer to see their compatriots

employed at home than to lose them to better-paid jobs abroad.

Risks remain, however. Care must be taken to ensure that using LCDs and technical service providers does not lead to the loss of valuable expertise and capacity from government and other national institutions, especially in countries with few highly trained human resources. Indeed, there are many incentives for national experts to take better-paid jobs in international development programmes. The wider context needs to change, including reforms of public sector pay, labour market policies and pay practices by donor-funded programmes.

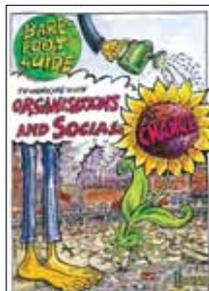
Important milestones in policy discussions on capacity development include the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008). Signatories to the latter agreed that capacity development is vital for sustainable development, and committed to 'the provision of technical cooperation by local and regional resources, including through South-South cooperation'.

PUBLICATIONS

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

Barefoot Guide to Working with Organisations and Social Change

Barefoot Collective, 2009

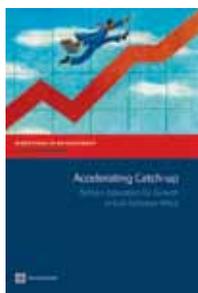


A do-it-yourself guide for leaders and facilitators of civil society organisations. Tried and tested concepts, approaches, stories and activities will help stimulate and enrich the practice of any organisation or individual.

<http://tiny.cc/bfg698>

Accelerating Catch-Up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa

World Bank, 2009



A more knowledge-intensive approach to development may be the only way to achieve sustained, outward-oriented development. While affirming the importance of primary and secondary education, this study concentrates on tertiary education. The authors warn that the rapid increase in enrolments that has occurred in recent years, has eroded quality and is undermining the contribution of tertiary education to growth.

<http://tiny.cc/acu247>

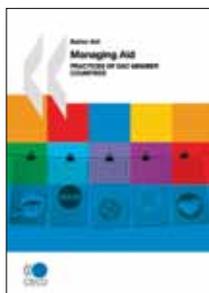
LenCD Resource Corners

In supporting the implementation of the capacity development commitments in the Accra Agenda for Action, LenCD is developing seven web-based resource corners online at

<http://tiny.cc/cdlens>

Better Aid

OECD, DAC



A new OECD publication series, Better Aid, draws on material tabled at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Ghana, 2008. Topics include: improving incentives in donor agencies, managing aid, managing development resources, aid effectiveness and monitoring the Paris Declaration.

<http://tiny.cc/betteraid>

Handbook on Planning, Monitoring and Evaluating for Development Results

UNDP, 2009



Launched in September this year, this handbook differs from previous versions. Recognising the importance of integrating results-based management at the design stage, this latest edition includes a section on planning.

www.undp.org/ea/handbook

Capacity Development for Good Governance in Developing Societies: Lessons from the Field

Ronald H. Kempe, *Development in Practice*, 19/1, 2009

Many developing countries lack the capacity, as opposed to the will, to achieve and maintain a climate of good governance, essential for economic transformation. This article examines important areas that need addressing for developing capacity for good governance.

<http://tiny.cc/dip816>

Opportunities for Change: Education Innovation and Reform During and After Conflict

Susan Nicolai (ed), UNESCO/IIEP, 2009

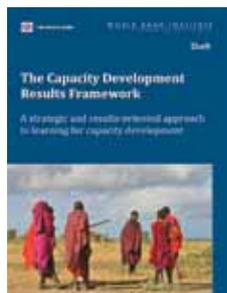


Conflict and displacement create unique challenges for education practitioners. However, opportunities for reform within the sector also arise during and after conflict. This book explores the prospects for positive transformation and how education ministries and implementing partners have brought innovation and reform to education systems. It examines how better practice could improve access, quality and system management.

<http://tiny.cc/ofc256>

The Capacity Development Results Framework: A Strategic and Results-oriented Approach to Learning for Capacity Development

Samuel Otoo et al, World Bank Institute, June 2009



WBI has developed an innovative Capacity Development Results Framework to guide, measure, and communicate capacity development efforts. It emphasises learning processes and provides guidelines and tools for capacity needs assessment, strategy formulation, adaptive management, and assessment and communication of results.

<http://tiny.cc/cdrf>

Development Outreach: World Bank Institute, Volume 11/2, October 2009



One billion people live in countries devastated by conflict. International aid only provides interim solutions. Development practitioners say that long-term success hinges on helping governments build the capacity to provide critical services and govern effectively.

<http://tiny.cc/fac45>

Making capacity Development Work in a Post-Conflict Context: Experience and Lessons Learnt from Liberia

Africa Viewpoint by Cleophas Torori and Lisa Reinartz, UNDP Liberia, November 2009

Liberia's transition from conflict to peace is a new opportunity to re-build its capacity. Liberia can improve people's living standards, expand their capabilities, and build a capable state and institutions. The huge task ahead, however, coupled with people's high expectations, presents significant challenges.

<http://tiny.cc/undpcd>

Capacity development in Nepalese schools



What does it mean to have a sector-wide plan for capacity development? What does it take to develop one? A five-day learning event for government and development partners in the education sector in Nepal focused on these questions in September 2009. Nils Boesen, who facilitated the event, reports that the participants found sensible answers to both questions.

<http://tiny.cc/nep>

Who are local capacity developers?



Peniel Uliwa
peniel@mma-ltd.com
Director, Match Maker Associates Ltd, Tanzania

Moussiliou Alidou
dirobenin@gmail.com
Independent consultant, DIRO-Center, Benin

Nguyen Thi Bich Tam
bichtam.learning@cecem.org
Trainer and consultant, Centre for Community Empowerment, Vietnam

Local capacity developers: who are they, what drives them and what challenges do they face? *Capacity.org* interviewed three LCDs from Benin, Tanzania and Vietnam to find some answers.

It is tough for local capacity developers when they have to compete against foreign consultancy firms and subsidised aid agencies that provide capacity development services. Local consultants have local knowledge at their fingertips, they speak the language and understand the people. Why then, do foreign aid organisations and even national governments discriminate against local consultants by considering them only as sub-contractors, or refusing to hire them at all? Heinz Greijn spoke to three LCDs to explore these issues and to find out what can be done to support and nurture the emerging LCD sector.

In your experience, is there unfair competition from foreign aid organisations? Is there evidence that they offer services for free to clients who could in fact afford your services?

Peniel Yes, very much so, although they don't necessarily do this on purpose. Staff in some organisations have to work a certain number of advisory days and they offer to carry out work that we could do easily and possibly in more depth. They may do the work for free or at heavily subsidised rates, or in exchange for contributions in kind. We try to be as cost effective as possible but we cannot compete with them. I believe these

Peniel Uliwa

Match Maker Associates, based in Dar-es-Salaam and Arusha in Tanzania, started in 2003 as a private consultancy and training firm. It focuses on private sector development for small businesses and smallholder farmers by fostering value chain development approaches. MMA works mainly in East Africa – Tanzania, Rwanda, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia – a list that will soon include Sudan.

'We now have seven associates and two affiliates from Uganda, Tanzania, the Netherlands, the UK and even Trinidad and Tobago! This international mix means we are able to understand the local context and can borrow and adapt solutions from other parts of the world.

MMA has four types of client. Donor projects promoting private sector development account for up to 60 percent of our income. Donor agencies hire us to carry out analyses, to support their programme teams or to train and coach their staff. A second group includes practitioners from the public sector and international NGOs, mostly donor sponsored, who want to develop their skills to engage more effectively in private sector development work. Public sector institutions, an increasingly important third group, hire us to conduct value chain analyses or help develop intervention strategies. And fourth, private sector investors may ask us to conduct feasibility studies, develop a business plan for an intervention or introduce them to local investors.'

Moussiliou Alidou,

Moussiliou Alidou has been running his own one-person consultancy firm for over nine years. Before that, he worked with various organisations, including SNV, where he gained a wealth of experience.

Moussiliou's areas of expertise include organisational development, strategic planning and evaluation, leadership training, and advising local government on decentralisation issues. His clients include UNICEF, Vredeseilanden, CARE International, SNV, ICCO, the Swiss Development Cooperation and, most recently, ECORYS. He is now writing a book about how to become and stay a consultant in Africa.

Moussiliou is based in Benin but his work mostly takes him elsewhere in West Africa including Mali, Ghana and Niger. He also collaborates with other independent consultants. 'When I first started I invested a lot of money and effort in advertising. I printed and distributed my own prospectus. Yet, these efforts did not bring me a single client. I have learned that the only way to promote your business is to do a superb job whenever you get the opportunity.

I now have a growing portfolio of clients. I like to help out local NGOs even if they cannot pay. I simply ask them to give me whatever they can afford. Sometimes, for people who want to engage in similar activities, I offer to take them with me on assignment free of charge so that they can learn.'

Nguyen Thi Bich Tam

Nguyen Thi Bich Tam works at the Centre for Community Empowerment (CECEM), a non-profit NGO in Vietnam. The centre has ten staff: seven trainers and consultants, and three administrative staff. 'Our fees cover staff and office expenditure. We also maintain a special fund for staff and community development.

We have two types of client. The first are international organisations that pay us to provide capacity development services to the second – the beneficiaries of our services. They include NGOs, community organisations – such as women's unions, youth unions or farmers' unions – and government agencies. We also have relationships with around 100 international NGOs, 30 of which are regular clients.

Our core business is consulting and training. We provide training methodologies and facilitation skills for those who train others – extension workers, for example. We also offer project management training, with a programme covering the project cycle starting with identifying and understanding the issues a community faces, project formulation, planning, implementation and assessing impact. The third area is organisational development: helping organisations assess their capacity, devising strategies to develop their capacity and managing their human resources. Fourth, a new area for us, we provide business development services for small and medium enterprises.'

subsidised organisations should work with a skeleton staff and outsource as much work as possible to local capacity builders.

Tam For me it is the other way around. We outcompete them. We provide high-quality services, emphasising learning. Our clients appreciate our methods of coaching. On several occasions we have joined in competitive bidding processes alongside international organisations and the assignments were awarded to us. We speak the language, we understand our people, and this is what gives us a competitive edge.

But I must admit we have also experienced unfair competition. An international NGO might facilitate a training course similar to ours but they would also organise transport for everyone to attend, or even offer training free of charge. We can't compete against that.

What can and should governments do to improve the LCD sector?

Peniel Giving LCDs preferential treatment would really help. If necessary, yes, bring in foreign experts and their knowledge by allowing LCDs to build consortia with them. What is happening now is that international firms shop around for local firms to work as subcontractors, but all LCDs do is arrange appointments and gather data, which doesn't build our capacity at all. It should be the other way around: the government should work with local firms and see what is needed to build their capacity so that they are able to do the job themselves.

Do you believe you can compete in terms of quality and price?

Peniel Yes we can, and where we are unable to compete we can cooperate with others. We can tap into a broad network of international companies to find a partner, in precisely the same way that international companies maintain databases and networks of consultants they use whenever they need expertise for an assignment. International consultancy firms subcontract to LCDs, but it should be the other way around.

Do you think some clients look down on you and believe that being an LCD means you are unable to do more sophisticated work?

Peniel Yes and no. I believe there is a perception among public sector institutions that LCDs do not have an impressive enough track record. Yet from the assignments we have done we do have the experience. Once we are on board and start working, they tend to change their perceptions pretty fast!

Moussiliou There are local consultants out there providing poor-quality services. Some are prepared to work for low rates, which may explain why they get the job.

That is fine, but another reason why those who provide poor services get government contracts is corruption in public sector organisations. These LCDs are prepared to bribe officials to get the job. On many



An adviser on spatial planning, Bentiu, south Sudan.

occasions I have spent a lot of time and effort preparing and submitting a proposal, only to discover that the contract had already been given to somebody else, under the table. They needed my proposal to cover the official's back and provide evidence that they had followed 'proper procedures'. One thing governments could do is to support the emergence of a healthy LCD sector to put an end to this type of corruption.

Tam We face competition from other LCDs providing poor quality training courses that carry the same labels as ours. On the one hand, it is a challenge for us to improve the quality of our services. We aim for the high end of the market. We offer high quality for a high price. We have to convince our clients that despite our prices it is still cost effective to work with us because the difference in quality will pay off.

On the other hand, it can be difficult for the client to assess quality at face value. Objective quality standards or certificates to help prospective clients distinguish between high and low-quality capacity development providers do not exist. The government could initiate a system of licensing whereby only providers that meet certain quality standards can offer their services on the market.

The government could also allow LCDs to compete with their own internal training centres. Some ministries run their own programmes to train thousands of their own staff. They should consider outsourcing this work and giving LCDs the chance to come up with competitive bids that may well be more cost effective.

What can foreign aid agencies do to improve the LCD sector?

Moussiliou I believe the LCD sector would benefit enormously if allowed to participate in training events and conferences as NGOs do. However, the fact that LCDs are often

also private companies seems to be a problem for foreign aid agencies. They may be willing to support you, but they want you to be an NGO, while I want to run a business. Foreign organisations assume that LCD fees should be lower than those charged by foreign consultants, even though the quality of the work is often the same or better.

Tam Yes, helping us develop our own capacity is certainly an area in which we could use more support from foreign aid organisations.

Another issue that needs to be resolved is the 'cost norm' system used by the European Commission, the UN and other donors to select consultants and determine their fees. It is based on qualifications and how many years experience a consultant has. Yet this system does not necessarily ensure good quality consultancy services and it discriminates against LCDs. The system needs to be updated to ensure that only the best consultants are hired.

Peniel Some organisations, including SNV, are very active in finding out what policies are needed to create a more enabling environment so that a strong LCD sector can emerge. So far, however, there has been little coordination or collaboration, and hardly any discussion with public sector institutions on how to address the issue. In Tanzania, we are exploring this issue with those involved in value chain development. We are starting to identify and share good practice in terms of involving LCDs. Such coordinated action is also required in other areas of expertise. <

Interviews by Heinz Greijn

Links

- Match Maker Associates: www.mma-ltd.com
- DIRO-Center, Benin: www.dirobenin.com
- Centre for Community Empowerment: www.cecem.org



Damtew Teferra

teferra@bc.edu

Coordinator, International Network for Higher Education in Africa, Boston College Center for International Higher Education, USA

Building sustainable higher education in Africa

Nurturing local capacity builders

The future of local capacity building in Africa lies in higher education. After years of neglect, the need to strengthen universities is at last moving up the policy agenda.

Doctors, engineers, lecturers, economists, agriculturists, veterinarians, planners and policy makers have all been trained in higher education institutes. To bring about meaningful development, the training of large numbers of people in these and other professions is urgently needed. Yet, Africa has the lowest enrolment rates in tertiary institutions worldwide.

Whereas developed countries can claim that as many as half of a given age group are in higher education, in Africa the figure is just five percent. In many sub-Saharan countries, the figure hovers around two percent. Clearly, massive financial, human, technical and logistical resources, as well as political will, are needed if poorer countries are to catch up with the rest of the world.

Why is this so important? The 21st century has been described as the 'knowledge era' or 'information age' because the global economy depends heavily on knowledge produced, organised and disseminated around the world. Knowledge is a powerful currency over which nations compete, often aggressively. Countries want to build institutions of knowledge producers, brokers and incubators in order to increase their global competitiveness.

What is happening in Africa? In the last decade or so, enrolment rates in higher education have increased dramatically. Compared with the rest of the world, however, the figures are still very low, and the obstacles alarming, for several reasons:

- the post-colonial origins of higher education systems in Africa
- flawed World Bank policies, including aggressive structural adjustment programmes and forced cuts in spending on higher education
- economic mismanagement by national governments, political repression and internal conflicts
- the 'brain drain' or the massive flow of highly skilled personnel out of Africa and the fact that they remain abroad after completing their studies.

Driven by the knowledge economy and changing macroeconomic conditions, such as trade liberalisation, higher education in Africa, is once again recognised as a means

of building local capacity to help nations build their economies and become meaningful economic players. It is also acknowledged that even accessing and using knowledge developed and produced elsewhere requires some level of capacity – to interpret and adapt it to make it relevant for national and local realities.

Knowledge brokers who can understand and make sense of the knowledge and information produced elsewhere require local capacity. In order to share knowledge and keep up with change, universities need to conduct research and generate and circulate knowledge. These central knowledge hubs need to be sustained with resources, support and strong policies.

The brain drain

The brain drain is depriving many African countries of the core group needed to bring about social, economic and cultural transformation. There are now more Nigerian, Ethiopian and Ghanaian medical doctors working in the United States and Europe than in their own countries. There are also more than 270 South African family physicians and nearly 100 medical specialists practising in just one Canadian province.

The situation in Africa is also exacerbated by the fact that many young people are leaving their countries of origin to study elsewhere. Many postgraduate students do not return after completing their studies, and this has been instrumental in reducing the scholarship opportunities in the region.

It is therefore ironic that foreign consultants are flocking in the other direction. According to the World Bank, consultants cost the region as much as US\$4 billion a year, money that could otherwise have been earned by African nationals. The widespread practice of hiring external consultants has seriously hindered capacity building efforts. In some cases, relying on highly paid consultants has stunted whatever capacity existed and has demoralised local people.

The inability to maintain existing local capacity is another constraint. For many reasons, graduates often remain unemployed

or underemployed due to the limited capacity of nations to absorb them.

A new challenge is emerging as professors and other staff reach retirement age. Some countries have raised the retirement age as it is hard to find equally well qualified replacements. Higher education institutions are no longer as prestigious or as attractive to prospective university teachers as they once were.

National governments, bilateral and multilateral organisations, and other international philanthropic institutions are now engaged in helping revitalise the higher education system. Good management is essential, as are funding, well-qualified and motivated staff, well-articulated research agendas, and education policies tailored to national needs.

The critical challenge is to find adequate funding. Numerous pledges, at national, regional and international levels, have been made to increase funding for research and development. But virtually no country in sub-Saharan Africa has fulfilled its pledges. Tanzania, however, recently increased its contribution to research from 0.3 percent to 1 percent of GDP. It is hoped this 300 percent increase will have a real impact in nurturing the nation's knowledge systems.

Strategic choices

So what can governments, aid organisations and policy makers do to revitalise higher education in Africa? There are several strategic choices they could make, as follows.

Develop and use local expertise

With few highly trained personnel, Africa needs to double its efforts to increase these figures. The improvements in university enrolment rates recorded over the last decade must continue, but with an additional focus on quality. Numbers alone will not raise capacity levels.

Yet there is often a discrepancy between what a nation needs and what its institutions provide in terms of training and education. Increased capacities in sectors such as healthcare, construction and information technology, for example, are desperately



Students at the University of Zambia, Lusaka.

needed, but many institutions produce graduates in areas where demand is low and declining. Education policies must ensure that countries build and develop programmes to enhance their national competitiveness at a global level.

Better use needs to be made of human capital. Graduates in Africa are often either unemployed or underemployed. Consultants are hired at exorbitant rates, while local professionals, as well as nationals working abroad, are refused similar compensation.

Increase resources

Capacity building requires financial, human and institutional resources. It is impossible to envisage strong capacity building capabilities without long-term financial and logistical support from governments, development agencies and philanthropic organisations, as well as private learning institutions. Now that higher education has been declared vital for national development, there are signs that bidding for resources is becoming easier, although the global economic crisis may be having a detrimental effect. The challenge is to use limited resources wisely and effectively.

Seize technological opportunities

The unprecedented developments in information and communication technologies have taken distance education to new levels. The wealth of information available on the Internet requires keen

'hunter-gatherer' skills to tap into it. Where do you start? Some leading universities, such as the US Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have put their curricula online so that everyone can access and use them.

Stop the brain drain

The brain drain seems to be slowing, as more African nationals opt to look for work in Africa. But the problem remains critical, especially in the healthcare sector. The challenge is to tap into expatriate networks around the world and provide trained professionals with opportunities to work in their own countries. The intellectual diaspora could play pivotal roles as researchers, consultants, practitioners, etc., in local capacity building efforts.

It is also important to ensure that highly trained people do not leave Africa in the first place, since it is far more difficult to entice them back once they have left. One approach would be to encourage them to stay in Africa as part of the capacity building effort. But for such a strategy to succeed, appropriate working environments, attractive salaries and benefits, as well as systems to safeguard intellectual freedom, are essential.

Strengthen regional cooperation

Capacity building efforts should refrain from futile attempts to offer comprehensive programmes at all institutions at the national, or even regional level. This is particularly beyond the reach of small countries or those

with nascent national knowledge systems. Small countries need to form partnerships at a regional level, taking into account the relative advantages of each country and institution involved. It is encouraging that many African countries are pursuing regional partnerships to build and strengthen their capacity by deploying new technologies.

Build an enabling environment

Even with unlimited resources, efforts to build national knowledge capacity can only go so far. The intellectual environment that cultivates and brokers knowledge needs to be free from suppression, fear and intolerance. The academic freedom to write, speak and teach, and the autonomy of institutions, are vital for creativity to flourish.

Building local capacity requires cohesive policies, a nurturing environment, considerable financial support and sustained political will. Africa has been beset by problems in the past, but with the proliferation of knowledge and increasing global competitiveness, Africa must build its own capacities and relevant knowledge systems if it is to join the 21st century on an equal footing with the rest of the world. <

Links

- International Network for Higher Education in Africa www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/inhea
- Association of African Universities: www.aau.org
- Centre for Higher Education Transformation: www.chet.org.za

Connecting communities of practice



Thomas Theisohn

thomas.theisohn@gmail.com

Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD),
Marseille, France

Tony Land

tland@info.bw

European Centre for Development Policy Management
(ECDPM), Maastricht, the Netherlands, and Anthony
Land Associates, Botswana

In the last decade, a vibrant community has grown up around capacity development, including *Capacity.Org*, the United Nations Development Programme's CDNet, the Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD), the UK Institute of Development Studies Capacity Collective, and others. This knowledge architecture reflects an emerging practice focusing on capacity development, particularly in the context of development cooperation, and from within which a body of conceptual and practical knowledge has developed.

Yet, some believe that the concept of capacity development is still too lofty, that it lacks operational relevance and that its practice is ill-defined. Indeed, in striving to develop its own concepts and operational frameworks, the capacity development

Capacity development is high on the policy agenda. To enrich learning processes and improve practice, the capacity development community must interact more effectively with other communities of practice.

community risks losing touch with other communities of practice that it needs to interact with and influence.

This article argues that the capacity development community needs to connect more effectively with other communities of practice to engage in dialogue and exchange, harness knowledge and gain insights. That capacity development today is recognised as a central and fundamental development challenge means that such engagement is all the more critical.

Reaching out in this way should not be regarded as one-way traffic but as mutually beneficial. Capacity development offers a powerful and critical perspective on development that can galvanise different communities to work together towards sustainable development. In appealing for more explicit interaction, this article recognises that an intricate network between communities of practice already exists, held together by individuals and groups active in several practice areas. It makes the case for more deliberate engagement and suggests ways to promote this. It also aims to encourage further discussion and exchange.

Explaining the terminology

To describe the capacity development knowledge architecture we use the following terms:

- *Capacity development community*, or *capacity development practice*, refers to

those for whom capacity development is a special interest area. It is a fairly loose term and does not necessarily link individuals within specific networks.

- *Community of practice* (CoP) describes practitioners, researchers and policy makers who share an interest in exchanging information, learning and professional endeavour about a common issue. It is more specific – describing formal and informal networks, organisations, professional associations and practitioner learning groups that purposefully engage around a specific topic. They may operate at any level from the global down to the country or community levels.

We also draw a distinction between *horizontal* and *vertical* communities of practice:

- *Horizontal CoPs* comprise professional disciplines that have influenced capacity development thinking and practice. Examples include public administration and organisational development, but there are many more (see diagram). While they do not necessarily embrace an explicit capacity development perspective, they underpin its theory and practice.
- *Vertical CoPs* typically include groups such as civil servants, professionals and interest groups that come together around a specific sector or thematic development challenge, such as health, education or rural development. While capacity development may not be their main professional area or focus, it remains an important cross-cutting issue that cannot be ignored.

The web of connections to other communities, horizontally and vertically, is illustrated in the diagram on page 13).

Horizontal CoPs

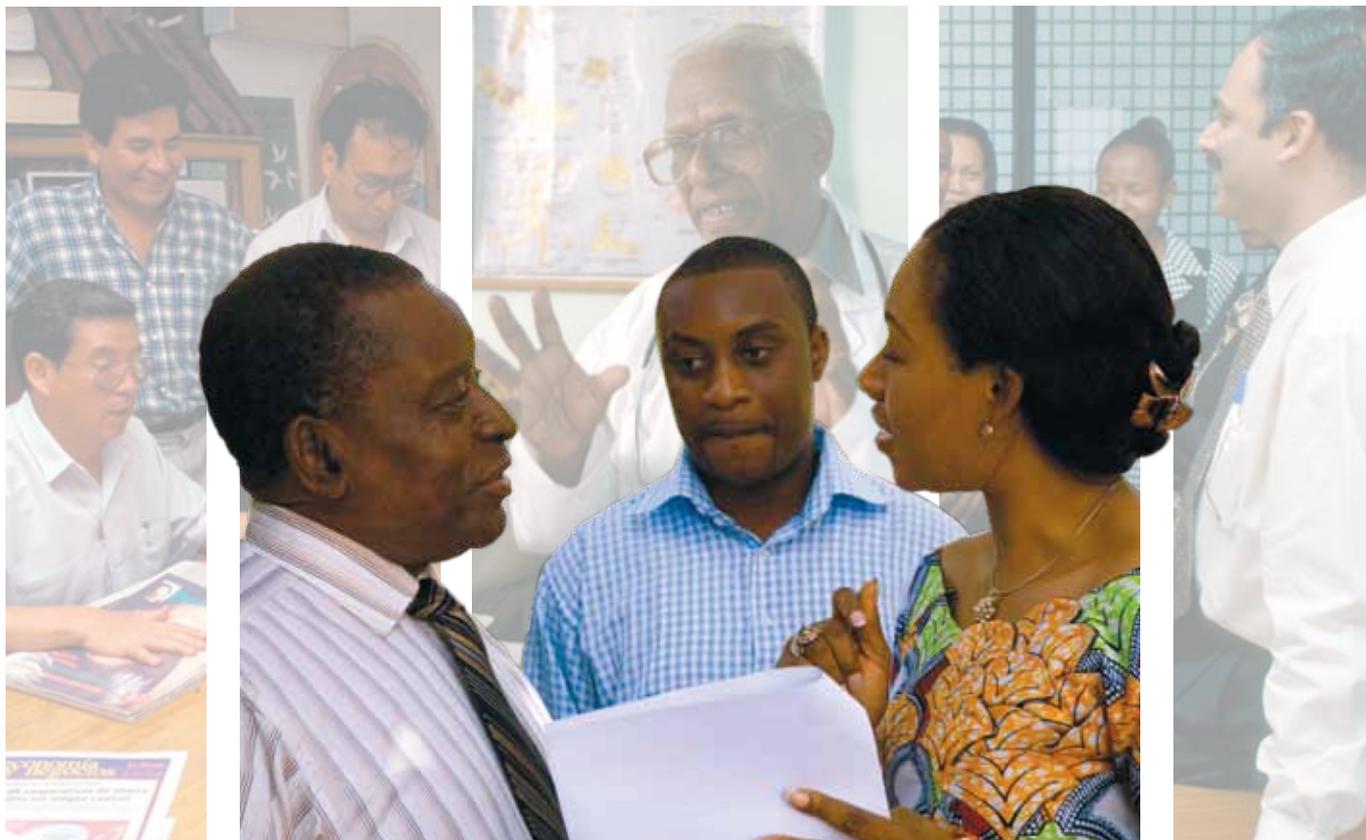
These are the building blocks of capacity development. Given their multidisciplinary character, many horizontal communities of practice contribute to capacity development.

The widely shared concept of *capacity levels* can help illustrate the range of horizontal communities that inform capacity development. These are the individual level (human capital), the organisational level (ranging from single organisations to complex networks), and the enabling environment (society or institutional level

Box 1: Organisations and institutional networks focusing on capacity development

Different organisations and institutional networks view capacity development in a variety of ways:

- **UNDP** concentrates on four strategic priorities: institutional arrangements and incentives, leadership, knowledge and accountability.
- **NEPAD's** Capacity Development Strategic Framework has six cornerstones: leadership transformation; citizen transformation; knowledge and innovation; using African potential, skills, and resources; capacity of capacity builders; integrated planning and implementation.
- The **ECDPM** capacity study distinguishes five core capabilities: to commit and engage; to carry out technical, service delivery and logistical tasks; to relate and attract resources and support; to adapt and self-renew; and to balance coherence and diversity.
- The **Accra Agenda for Action's** strategic priorities are: civil society and private sector engagement, country systems, enabling environments and incentives, capacity development in fragile situations, integrating capacity development in national and sector strategies, relevance, quality, and choice of capacity development support.



LCDs can connect and enrich isolated communities of practice.

reflecting the context within which individuals and organisations function).

Individual level

If capacity development was seen strictly as skills development or training, there would be few horizontal communities of practice to identify. Capacity development work would be informed by communities of practice addressing issues related to human resources development and management in contexts such as government, the private sector and

civil society. A more careful analysis might point to communities of practice in related disciplines and professional areas such as workforce planning, labour economics, the study of HIV/AIDS or even curriculum development.

Organisational level

For many people, the organisation is the natural entry point to address capacity development. An organisational focus brings capacity development in touch with a

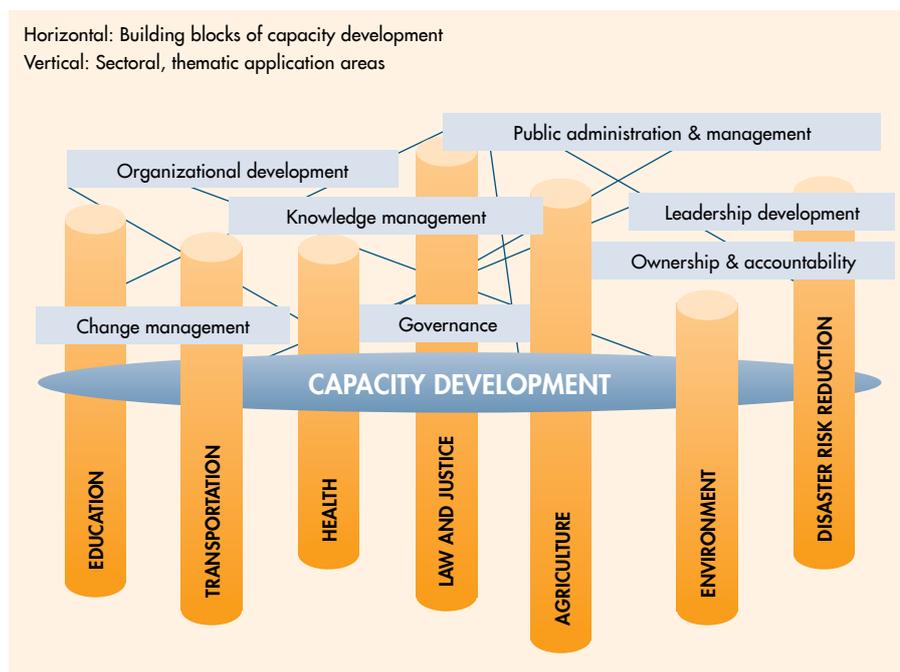
number of established communities of practice focusing, for example, on management and business sciences and their various offshoots including knowledge and change management. The language and conceptual tools of capacity development are often derived from these fields and many practitioners have their roots in the management consulting profession. Systems thinking (see *Capacity.org* 37) has also contributed to capacity development.

Capacity development in the public sector is close to the well-established fields of public administration and political science, including their own specialist areas such as decentralisation, health administration, leadership development, public finance management, accountability and public policy analysis. There are countless communities of practice built around these disciplines and sub-disciplines. Examples include the International Organisation Development Association and the African Community of Practice for Managing for Development Results (see box 2).

Capacity development work also focuses outside the formal public sector. Besides mainstream organisational development, there are offshoots focusing on capacity development in not-for-profit organisations and the informal or rural sectors. Work here is also related to participatory and community development and empowerment.

Enabling environment

There is growing interest in capacity development as a societal process, rather than as something that happens only within



Box 2: Examples of horizontal CoPs

International Organisation Development Association

IODA is an international network of organisational development professionals, consultants, practitioners and social scientists. This not-for-profit association has members from many countries who are initiating and supporting organisational change processes all over the world. IODA is dedicated to supporting and strengthening organisational development principles at the international level through research, academic programmes, peer mentoring and coaching, networking and sharing of knowledge, international projects, and cultural exchange.

www.iodanet.org

African Community of Practice for Managing for Development Results

AfCoP is an umbrella organisation which includes practitioners at different levels (senior, mid level and top management) in Africa. It is part of a management strategy using performance information to improve decision making. AfCoP uses practical tools for strategic planning, risk management, progress monitoring, and outcome evaluation. It is made up of 400 'managing for development results practitioners' working with African governments and civil society, as well as independent experts, collaborating in a global partnership.

www.cop-mfdr-africa.org

organisations. This coincides with an appreciation of the role of formal and informal institutions in establishing the rules of the game (laws, rules and regulations) within which individuals and organisations function. This societal level has the potential to facilitate or constrain the development of organisational and individual capacity.

This broader conceptualisation of capacity development has prompted thinkers and practitioners to draw inspiration from another set of professional areas: political science and political economy, new institutional economics and institutional development, law and governance, including cultural studies, sociology and anthropology. Again, each area has its own communities of practice and related knowledge architectures.

Vertical CoPs

Vertical communities of practice constitute the *application* areas where capacity development needs to be integrated and made operationally relevant. This is where most development resources go and where capacity development is increasingly recognised as fundamental to the achievement of sustainable development results.

One important task involves adapting generic capacity development principles and guidance to specific sectors or thematic contexts. The challenges of delivering primary healthcare, for example, will be different from those involved in providing secondary education or agricultural extension services, so any capacity development support needs to be tailored accordingly. Similarly, what is needed to address capacity development in complex sectors, such as the environment or disaster management, may be different in magnitude from those needed to tackle capacity issues in simpler organisations such as tax or business licensing offices.

At the same time, some aspects of capacity development are cross-cutting. Strategies and approaches used for managing change

can be relevant across different sectors. Lessons about the effective use of technical assistance may be carried over from one situation to another. Contextual factors relating to culture, power and politics may be relevant across all sectors in a particular country setting. Equally, lessons drawn from developing capacity in one sector, say the environment, can provide lessons for those working in another area. So opportunities exist for cross-fertilisation of experiences and joint learning.

Three examples of how capacity development knowledge can enter into a sector or thematic area are presented below.

1. Direct uptake by sector professionals and practitioners, or via sector and thematic communities of practice, such as the Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture (see box 3).
2. Organisational arrangements can help shape capacity development policy and operational guidance across an organisation. UNDP's Capacity Development Group, for example, was set up recognising that capacity development 'is everybody's business but nobody's responsibility'. Today, capacity development drives learning and mainstreaming in UNDP and the entire UN system. Similar relationships exist within the World Bank Institute and World Bank operations, which are very much sector based. Another example is the role of the senior coordinator for capacity development (see box 4) within the Organisation for Economic Cooperation

and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC).

3. A third approach involves structured learning events. For example, the Ethiopian government and the European Commission recently facilitated an event aimed at identifying capacity development challenges associated with implementing a transport sector programme. A similar event has just taken place in the education sector in Nepal.

Strengthening the connections

Capacity development as a connecting, or matrix, concept, opens up opportunities to build bridges between practice areas. At one level, capacity development is a practice area of its own nurtured by horizontal communities of practice. At another, it becomes operational when applied within sector and thematic realities. Drawing generic knowledge from capacity development thinkers and practitioners, and contextualising this knowledge within sector and thematic realities can add to productive capacity development learning.

In turn, drawing experiences from across sectors and thematic areas is a practical way to cross-fertilise learning, exchange lessons learnt concerning effective practice, and promote a common understanding of capacity development. In practice, however, opportunities for cross-sector learning are easily overlooked. Sector and thematic practitioners and experts tend – as do others – to work in isolation and to have their own language. They might not always recognise opportunities for cross-learning. The operational value becomes clearer as these links become intentional and purposeful.

Reinforcing existing horizontal and vertical connections will be beneficial. Capacity development practice can be improved by engaging with horizontal communities of practice, including the body of evidence and instruments they offer. Vertically, capacity development practice becomes operationally relevant when applied to sector and thematic development areas, while learning builds on concrete experiences in these areas.

There are many ways in which these connections can be strengthened:

- Individuals and organisations working across several communities of practice can function as 'connectors' to help cross-fertilise and carry knowledge back and

Box 3: Regional Universities Forum for Capacity Building in Agriculture

Originally a programme of the Rockefeller Foundation, RUFORUM is a consortium of 12 African universities, established in 2004. RUFORUM's mandate is to oversee graduate training and networks of specialisation within the member states of the Common Market for Eastern

and Southern Africa (COMESA). RUFORUM recognises the important and largely unfulfilled role that universities play in contributing to the well-being of small-scale farmers and economic development of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. <http://ruforum.org/drupal>

forth. At present, this happens in an informal way and is not easily recorded. More effort is needed to monitor what is going on in other communities of practice to enrich both capacity development dialogue and learning processes.

- The capacity development knowledge architecture could be rationalised. Many capacity development initiatives are fragmented and scope exists for closer cooperation to close learning loops. Examples include joint analysis, maintaining resource corners on critical topics, documenting case materials and making them accessible, and sharing insights to inform policy and practice. The deliberate opening up to horizontal practice areas and vertical applications should be a defining feature of the capacity development community of practice.
- Perhaps most important, all this should happen at the country level. Experience shows that it is through country level engagement that tangible insights are exposed. Bringing communities of practice together at the country level would promote learning and understanding around capacity development issues that are not easily tackled from within discrete sectors. Doing so would reinforce groups of champions who are able to make a real difference in a given context.
- Connections can also be strengthened through the ways in which development practitioners approach their work. For university students learning professional

Box 4: Senior coordinator for capacity development, OECD-DAC

Engaging with vertical work streams

Within development agencies the relationship between capacity development and sector and thematic groups needs to be strategically nurtured. The DAC's senior coordinator for capacity development actively engages with practice areas and thematic groups within the DAC that have recognised the need to engage in capacity development issues within their respective work streams, such as tax policy, the environment or managing for development results.

The capacity development coordinator is able to translate generic guidance to the specific needs of different work areas, which in turn can present practical insights into applying capacity development in specific contexts.

skills, it is vital to give them opportunities to learn about technical disciplines as well as the horizontal skills reflected in capacity development practice, as discussed above. Similarly, sector specialists can keep abreast of the generic building blocks of capacity development through professional training courses and tailored learning events.

The perceived loftiness of capacity development may in fact be a strength that can be harnessed to make connections between communities of practice more explicit and robust. For horizontal practice areas, capacity development offers a convenient platform to exchange ideas, complement knowledge and identify opportunities for synergy within a shared perspective. For sector and thematic communities of practice, capacity

development is a fundamental challenge begging for operational responses. As a defined practice area, capacity development offers a sort of 'one-stop shop' where we can access a complex system of knowledge that underpins capacity development theory and practice.

Finally, a note of caution. An important message from the capacity development community is that there are no standard recipes for success, and that context matters enormously (see *Capacity.org* 37). We hope that this article will both stimulate discussion and generate practical initiatives to connect the many communities of practice and achieve sustainable development results. <

Further reading

- ECDPM Study on Capacity, Change and Performance: www.ecdpm.org/capacitystudy

ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS AND INITIATIVES

Capacity Development Global Event Marrakesh, Morocco, 17–19 March 2010

This event, organised by UNDP, will bring together experts, practitioners, academics and leaders from both Northern and Southern countries. Ministerial-level keynote speeches, expert discussion panels and interactive sessions will focus on policy and investment choices for capacity development. The meeting will focus on understanding the role of middle-income countries in supporting solution exchange. What mechanisms can be used to facilitate such exchanges? How can solutions be adapted to local contexts? Is there a trend towards sub-regional capacity suppliers? www.capacitydevelopment.org

Interview with Noura Hamladji

Noura Hamladji is Deputy Resident Representative at UNDP

in Azerbaijan and talks about the importance of showing results for long-term capacity development initiatives and understanding national context. www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lxK_6gyvcl

Democratic participation

On 10 September 2009, the US Congress Committee on Financial Services held a hearing on the World Bank's Disclosure Policy Review and the Role of Democratic Participatory Processes in Achieving Successful Development Outcomes. Among those giving testimony was Joseph Stiglitz. <http://tiny.cc/usgov>

Rwandese Association of Local Government Authorities

A massive capacity building effort is required in Rwanda to help local governments come to grips

with their new roles given the decentralisation process taking place. RALGA acts as a broker between capacity building needs expressed by its members and those providing the services. RALGA is developing a database to track the quality of services provided and the evolution of capacity development needs. It will help RALGA gain an in-depth understanding of the needs of its members and become a reliable source of capacity development services. www.ralgarwanda.org

African Universities Tackle Globalisation

Sustainable development requires local experts who can tap into global knowledge resources and use this knowledge to develop local solutions. The capacity of Africa's Universities to deliver graduates trained to do this is far

below what is needed to bring about change. Eight African universities, facilitated by MUNDO (Maastricht University) and supported by EDULINK, discuss which strategic path African universities must follow to produce graduates who can scan globally and reinvent locally. www.mundo.unimaas.nl/mundo.html

Gender in value chains

This online platform by Agri-ProFocus is a resource and a virtual space to exchange experiences and knowledge concerning gender in value chains. It is for professionals worldwide interested in increasing the gender sensitivity of working on economic development with a sustainable rural development perspective and a value chain approach in particular. <http://genderinvaluechains.ning.com>

Aid organisations assume an indefinite future

Empower LCDs



Brian Pratt
b.pratt@intrac.org
Executive director, International NGO Training
and Research Centre (INTRAC), Oxford, UK

One of the core principles of development should be, without a doubt, that helping local capacity developers (LCDs) is a prerequisite for successful and sustainable development. It is a wonder that despite paying lip service to this principle, it is broken time and again.

Most LCDs supporting civil society are still NGOs themselves and, despite attempts at some cost recovery through fees for services, most in least developed countries are still dependent on external grant funding. Most formal centres of further education are still geared to other priorities (vocational, academic or state-led). In time, experience may show that tax-based funding and a higher proportion of fees for services will replace external grants, but this is still in the future.

More than ten years ago, INTRAC hosted a meeting of what we then called 'NGO support organisations'. We still maintain a list of such organisations on our website because we believe it is their ability to offer support services – primarily capacity building – that we should all be working towards.

Evidence suggests, however, that interest in supporting such groups is weaker than it was. In several developing countries, LCDs are reporting difficulties in obtaining funding and many are cutting their budgets and activities, sometimes quite severely, even in the poorest countries. Many have been obliged to become subcontractors to foreign consultancy firms, international NGOs and official donors rather than to prioritise building local capacity. In essence, they have been absorbed into the international aid business.

Why is this happening? First, self-interest among capacity building providers in northern

countries, personnel sending agencies, international NGOs and universities can undermine the goals of strong LCDs. Second, the obsession of donors for short-term outcomes and results (exacerbated by the focus on the Millennium Development Goals) forces them away from long-term investments in capacity building, since they are harder to sell to their own domestic constituencies.

Strengthen LCDs

In Europe, we need a more honest debate: are we really doing our best to support LCDs or are we preserving our own institutions? Some bilateral aid is still linked to domestic universities and organisations and is thinly disguised tied aid. Despite the principles agreed in the 2005 Paris Declaration, many European organisations survive on contacts with and contracts from their own governments. Others no longer seem committed to reaching the goal of 'working their way out of a job', which ostensibly inspired many NGOs in the 1980s.

Rather than working to five-year strategic plans, organisations are assuming an indefinite future! Some agencies are still sending people abroad whose real costs would keep a medium-sized local NGO going for a year.

We must also reverse the trend towards a simplistic results-based approach that undervalues building local capacity. Behind this short-term view is an implicit belief that development consists only of economic growth in the private sector, and therefore what we know as development assistance is regarded as little more than marginal contributions to social welfare. This, so the logic goes, means that there is little understanding, belief or need to develop local institutional capacity except for technical skills.

Based on the assumption that economic growth will 'trickle down' to poor people and communities and that the marketplace will provide the necessary skills for the economy, organisational and institutional capacity development is no longer in fashion. Neither are programmes to build local agency or empowerment at community levels.

The answer lies in strengthening the capacity of people and their communities to solve their own problems and tackle socio-political inequalities, alongside a commitment to sustainable capacity building, which includes reinforcing local competencies and organisational skills. We need to renew interest in and prioritise LCDs in the widest sense, alongside an understanding that this kind of work takes time, but ultimately pays real dividends, if done well. <

Capacity.org, issue 38, December 2009
Capacity.org is published in English, French and Spanish, with an accompanying web magazine (www.capacity.org) and email newsletter. Each issue focuses on a specific theme relevant to capacity development in international cooperation, with articles, interviews and a guest column, and annotated links to related web resources, publications and events.

Editor-in-chief: Heinz Greijn
heinzgreijn@yahoo.co.uk

Editorial board: Niloy Banerjee, Volker Hauck and Jan Ubels

Editorial board support: Niels Keijzer and Tony Land

Contributors to this issue: Moussiliou Alidou, Colleen Duggan, Tony Land, Brian Pratt, Nguyen Thi Bich Tam, Damtew Teferra, Thomas Theisohn, Jan Ubels, Peniel Uliwa

The opinions expressed in *Capacity.org* are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of ECDPM, SNV or UNDP.

Production: Contactivity bv, Stationsweg 28, 2312 AV Leiden, the Netherlands

Editing: Louise Daniel, Valerie Jones

Translation: Michel Coclet (French) and Beatriz Bugni (Spanish)

Layout: Anita Toebosch

Web content management: Wangu Mwangi

Publishers: European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM), Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Capacity.org was founded by ECDPM in 1999.

ISSN 1571-7496

Readers are welcome to reproduce materials published in *Capacity.org* provided that the source is clearly acknowledged.

Capacity.org is available free of charge for practitioners and policy makers in international cooperation. To subscribe, visit www.capacity.org. Issue 39 will be available in May 2010.

