



## Helpdesk Research Report

# New thinking on technical assistance to resolve knowledge and capacity gaps

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### Question

*Identify emerging thinking on how best to use technical assistance (TA) to resolve knowledge and capacity gaps in both donor organisations and governments in LMICs. Where possible identify: development outcomes, potential negative implications, key thinkers, appropriateness, effectiveness, lessons learned and case studies. In particular, try and identify cases studies looking beyond 'filling gaps' to developing knowledge and capacity in the longer term, and also at using TA to help develop, procure and manage advisory services.*

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### 1. Overview

There is a wide and diverse literature on technical assistance, much of which refers to addressing knowledge and capacity gaps in lower- and middle-income countries. This report identifies some novel or emerging approaches which appear to move away from the traditional approaches that commonly centre on short-term filling of capacity gaps and being primarily donor-driven.

Emerging approaches tend to emphasise empowerment and leadership by the beneficiary country, use of their country systems, and exchange of experiences as peers. There is a greater focus on longer term impacts and sustainability, and greater involvement of Southern countries as providers of skills. As these newer approaches have only been implemented quite recently there is generally a lack of rigorous evaluation material that assesses their impact.

Beyond enhancing knowledge and skills, as traditional approaches have done, these newer approaches have also improved implementation know-how, raised awareness, enhanced networks and strengthened coalitions.

### ***Twinning and Peer-to-Peer approaches***

As opposed to donor-driven technical assistance, twinning or peer-to-peer approaches emphasise the collaborative nature of the approach. These have usually involved middle-income countries as the beneficiaries and in some cases the providers of technical skills. An example is the **European Commission Twinning** approach where the quality of the expertise was seen to have been highly appreciated, and with synergies, rather than overlaps, with alternative technical assistance programmes. Amongst the **World Bank Peer-to-Peer** approaches there have been partnerships where both partners commit themselves to jointly agreed, measurable capacity development targets. Such activities are considered to have helped enhance knowledge and skills and enhanced networks, though rigorous evaluation evidence is limited.

### ***Think tank development***

To respond to knowledge gaps there have been attempts to build the capacity of think tanks in developing countries. The **International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Think Tank Initiative** is a multi-donor initiative that supports 49 institutions in 22 countries to develop research methods and skills, communication and outreach, and organisational development. The **African Capacity Building Forum (ACBF)** supports a number of organisations to build capacity including African think tanks. In both cases, anecdotal evidence suggests the supported think tanks have delivered positive outcomes, though rigorous evaluation is lacking.

### ***South-South and Triangular Cooperation***

There has been a growth in learning and sharing of technical assistance between developing countries (South-South cooperation) but little as yet between traditional donor countries, emerging donor countries and developing countries (triangular cooperation). The **Knowledge Sharing Programme** and the **South-South Experience Exchange Facility** have produced some evidence of positive impacts from knowledge exchange. They have been most effective when the knowledge exchange is context-specific, key participants have been identified, interaction has been promoted, and results monitored. The **New Economic Partnership for Economic Development (NEPAD)** initiatives include **regional sector policy frameworks** (e.g. on agriculture and infrastructure), **African Peer Review Mechanism** (on governance), and the **NEPAD Capacity Development Strategic Framework** (on various capacity development issues). There has been little evaluation of the impact of these initiatives. The **Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning** network has allowed public expenditure management professionals in various governments in Europe and Central Asia to form communities of practice for budgeting, treasury, and internal audit. This network enables the sharing of skills in an independent way.

### ***Other emerging approaches***

There are other emerging approaches which are yet to receive widespread implementation or be clearly articulated as a strategy by an implementing organisation.

The emphasis of technical assistance has generally been on training though some (e.g. Pearson 2011a, 2011b, 2011c) argue there should be much greater emphasis on understanding and improving learning and learning processes, and that it is important to create ‘**a learning organisation**’. This requires an understanding and insight into local and organisational culture, its history (especially if there has been recent conflict) and the culture of the development practitioners themselves. Some contend that encouraging creativity can encourage positive approaches to learning.

The **Public Technical Assistance** approach is driven by European donors. This approach aims to enhance technical assistance through, for example, the deployment of civilians, and expansion of the EC Twinning programmes approach. The extent of implementation of this approach is unclear. Despite the articulation of a **European Commission “Backbone” Strategy** to increase beneficiary country ownership and avoid parallel implementation units, there has been little progress in its implementation. Certain **analytical tools**, such as the Rapid Assessment and Action Plan (RAAP) toolkit, can help identify in a rapid and responsive way capacity development needs and how to address capacity weaknesses.

## 2. Twinning and Peer-to-Peer approaches

A recent in-depth study on effective technical cooperation found that it is most effective if there is a well-defined demand for change, willingness and capacity at political and managerial levels to lead and manage change, and a shared willingness by country organisations and donors to advocate change (JICA 2008). As part of this approach, the study notes that twinning and peer-peer learning between similar organisations within or outside a country can play an important catalytic role. Some of the most notable work in this regard relates to the European Commission’s Twinning Instrument and the World Bank’s Peer-to-peer work.

### 2.1 European Commission: Twinning

The European Commission’s Twinning Instrument was launched in May 1998 as one of the main institution-building tools for countries undertaking the European Union (EU) accession process.

The initiative was originally designed to help candidate countries acquire the necessary skills and experience to adopt, implement and enforce EU legislation. Twinning is currently restricted to EU member states, potential EU accession countries and countries covered by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) (Algeria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Egypt, Georgia, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Moldova, Morocco, the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Tunisia and Ukraine). Though initially focused on high-income countries, the Twinning programme is now involved in middle-income countries.

The instrument was designed for targeted administrative co-operation between EU member states (MS) and beneficiary countries (BC). Twinning projects set out to deliver specific and quantified results, rather than to foster general co-operation and deliver technical assistance. Projects are built around jointly agreed policy objectives deriving from the EU policy orientations and the BC Administration’s reform activities. Other key factors are:

- The beneficiary country (BC) selects its Member State (MS) partner.
- The selected MS partner undertakes to transfer the requested hands-on public sector expertise available in its home administration. This includes first and foremost the secondment of a full-time Resident Twinning Adviser (a public sector official) for 12 to 26 months.

- Twinning projects must bring to the BC a concrete operational result in connection with EU policies.
- The Twinning partners commit themselves to achieving the pre-agreed results, and not only to the means to achieve them.
- At the end of the project a new or adapted system must function under the sole responsibility and ownership of the BC.
- Twinning is a joint project, in which each partner takes on responsibilities. The BC commits itself to undertaking and funding reforms, the MS to accompanying the process for the duration of the project.
- To underpin the credibility of their commitment, the Twinning partners draft a Twinning work-plan, before starting work. It is possible to adapt the work-plan in the course of implementation, but there must be clear benchmarks to allow for close monitoring of progress towards the final result.
- The achievements of a Twinning project (the mandatory results) should have a lasting effect that remains even after the end of the Twinning project implementation.

A number of authors (e.g. Furness and Negre 2012; Herbert 2013) have suggested that the EU extend twinning further to share expertise with a wider number of countries. In a report on EU aid to middle-income countries, with a focus on South Africa, Herbert (2013) argues that it would be particularly valuable to invest in co-funded initiatives such as twinning to ensure a high level of relevance and buy-in on both sides.

A 2012 evaluation of the Twinning programme in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) area was largely positive (Bouscharain and Moreau 2012). The authors conclude that Twinning has proved to be an extremely effective instrument, more effective than other types of technical assistance projects. Other key findings were:

- Twinning projects have been successful when they:
  - responded to needs identified by partner country administrations;
  - when they were feasible and focused just on a few specific issues;
  - when partner country administration had sufficient absorption capacity;
  - when demonstrated a level of commitment to mandatory results; and
  - when the quality of EU member state expertise was high.
- The quality of EU member state expertise is highly appreciated across the ENP Region.
- No major overlap has been noticed between Twinning, TAIEX<sup>1</sup> and SIGMA<sup>2</sup>. There has been real complementarity between the 3 instruments and no major coordination issue between EU-funded instruments and other donors' programmes.

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<sup>1</sup> "TAIEX is the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument managed by the Directorate-General Enlargement of the European Commission. TAIEX supports partner countries with regard to the approximation, application and enforcement of EU legislation. It is largely demand driven and facilitates the delivery of appropriate tailor-made expertise to address issues at short notice." From: [http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/taiox/what-is-taiox/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/taiox/what-is-taiox/index_en.htm)

<sup>2</sup> "SIGMA is a joint initiative of the European Union and the OECD. We have been working with countries on strengthening public governance systems and public administration capacities for over 20 years." "[The

- The local, administrative and political context has had a substantial influence on the outcome of twinning projects.
- Twinning success or failure rests upon the central role played in each country by project administration offices and the resident Twinning Advisor. This is irrespective of whether the partner country has a decentralised or centralised management mode.

## 2.2 World Bank: Peer-to Peer (P2P)

The World Bank undertakes a number of peer-to-peer activities. LACMIC++, for example, is a peer-to-peer partnership that seeks to improve the performance of public agencies from Middle Income countries (MIC) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) by supporting partnerships with peer agencies from OECD countries. The World Bank facilitates the relationship between peers and compensates the participating public agencies for the travel costs and other expenses incurred during one year of the partnership, renewable to a second year. There are three fundamental principles in a Peer-to-Peer Partnership project (World Bank 2009):

- A Peer-to-Peer Partnership is a technical cooperation project in a specific area that must “concrete results” (see below). The project is not designed to provide only advice.
- A Peer-to-Peer Partnership project is not one-way technical assistance (TA) from the partner country (PC) to the recipient country (RC). It is a close partnership in which the leadership of the RC is essential. The partnership is also intended to foster communities of practice regionally.
- A Peer-to-Peer Partnership project aims to strengthen the capacity of public agencies from Middle Income Countries (MIC) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) by facilitating the adoption of best practices from OECD or other LAC countries.

Both project partners must commit themselves to working towards a commonly agreed result in a joint project implementation process. The “concrete result” can be an intermediate benchmark as long as there is a jointly agreed target. This target must be measurable and precise. At the completion of the Peer-to-Peer Partnership project, the recipient country should have improved its management capacity in a particular public sector management area.

A number of peer-to- Peer to Peer (P2Ps) training programmes are being implemented by the World Bank’s LACMIC++ programme. These include the following (World Bank internal document):

- **Improving the Effectiveness of Performance Monitoring in Colombia**  
*Public Policy Directorate in the National Planning Department (Columbia) partnered with Performance and Reform Unit HM Treasury (United Kingdom)*  
This is focused on institutional issues regarding the governmental function of national development planning. The technical exchange focused on delivery chain methodologies, indicator development (for the Colombian National Development Plan), monitoring and evaluation systems, and capacity development for the Colombian National Planning Department (DNP). As a result, Colombia has developed a delivery chain evaluation and improvement methodology for the Colombian housing sector.

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SIGMA] team of around 20 experts provides assistance in five key areas: Civil service management and administrative legal framework; Public finance and audit; Public procurement; Policy making and co-ordination; Public governance strategy and reform." From: <http://www.oecd.org/site/sigma/about/>

- **Performance budgeting and civil service**

*Ministry of Finance, Office of Planning and Budget (Uruguay) partnered with the Ministry of Finance (New Zealand)*

This is a programme of visits and workshops with high level actors participating from the Uruguayan Finance Ministry, the Civil Service, the President's Cabinet, as well as other technical agencies. The Office of Planning and Budget has finished a report, outlining achievements including improved budget structure, proposals for performance agreements for top civil servants and inclusion of performance information along the budget cycle.

- **Results Based Budgeting Agenda**

*Secretary of Budgets and Public Credit (Mexico) partnered with Treasury Board Secretariat (Canada)*

This is focused on results based management and budgeting at federal and state levels. This experience helped Mexico consolidate its framework for results based budgeting at federal levels, articulate national planning processes with budgeting processes, and implement monitoring and evaluation systems.

- **Design of Deconcentrated and/or Decentralized Organisms for Tax Administration for the State of Yucatan, Mexico**

*Institute for the Technical Development of Public Budgets INDETEC and Budgets Secretary, State of Yucatán (Mexico) partnered with Regional Agency for Tax Administration for the Autonomous Community of Murcia (Spain).*

This is focused on strengthening instruments for tax authorities at a state level in Mexico. Specifically this has been on the development of both the generic model for decentralized tax administration and a specific institutional and systems model for the State of Yucatan.

Evaluation evidence is limited on the effectiveness so far but there have been a number of positive results from peer-to-peer activities, including: enhanced knowledge and skills; enhanced networks; improved consensus and teamwork; increased implementation know-how; raised awareness; and strengthened coalitions (World Bank internal document).

### **3. Think tank development**

In relation to knowledge gaps, some of the most relevant work has been to enhance the capacity of think tanks. Two of the most notable initiatives in this field have been the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Think Tank Initiative and the African Capacity Building Forum (ACBF).

#### **3.1 International Development Research Centre (IDRC) Think Tank Initiative**

The IDRC's Think Tank Initiative is a multi-donor programme designed to strengthen independent policy research organizations in the developing world (IDRC 2010). It provides core, non-earmarked funding to participating organizations and technical assistance in three broad areas: research methods and skills; communication and outreach; and general organisational development. The initiative supports peer-to-peer review; and learning and exchange by bringing together supported organizations, outside experts, and other stakeholders. The Think Tank Initiative currently supports 49 institutions in 22 countries.

A 2010 evaluation report examines the progress of the Initiative but only with respect to having developed and applied a results framework to identify indicators of progress at the level of both individual grantees and the overall programme (IDRC 2010). The evaluation notes that there will be an external evaluation of the programme to provide an independent, informed view about how the Initiative is performing, the extent to which its objectives are being met, and the results and effectiveness of the programming. As yet no such report seems to be available.

### 3.2 African Capacity Building Forum (ACBF)

The ACBF aims to build new capacity and strengthen and use existing capacity in a sustainable manner for good governance and poverty reduction in Africa. It currently supports 39 think tanks in 25 African countries. Interviews with Dr Frannie Léautier, the ACBF Executive Secretary and ACBF members highlight a number of achievements by ACBF-supported think tanks (Capacity4dev 2013):

- **Institute for Democratic Government (IDEG) (Ghana):** Helped obtain peaceful outcomes during highly competitive elections.
- **Centre Mauritanien d'Analyse de Politique (Mauritania):** Has been influential in creating jobs for young people.
- **Ethiopian Development Research Institute (Ethiopia):** Provided background work to put policy in place in order to set up the Ethiopian Commodity Exchange, which allows small scale farmers to plan their expenses and sell their farm products at a better price.
- **Centre d'Etude et de Renforcement des Capacités d'Analyse et de Plaidoyer (CERCAP) (Mali):** Managed to build a partnerships with Malian civil society organisations and the Ministry of Finance, leaving CERCAP as a key intermediary in local conflict resolutions. CERCAP helped create a "Corridor of the Citizens", a local informal institution where the main leaders of the community are represented and that solves conflicts.

The ACBF 2011 annual report notes that the Foundation aims to see the development of more policy think tanks and the broadening of the focus of existing think tanks thematically and geographically (ACBF 2011). The annual report does not evaluate the efforts to strengthen think tanks but does outline the findings of an independent evaluation on its other programmes. The evaluation finds that the ACBF is a "vibrant organisation" with an increasingly important rationale and relevance demonstrated by demand for its services (ACBF 2011).

The ACBF is also involved in a number of capacity building projects relating to: journalism, statistics, women's development and communication, governance and transparency, economics and management studies, and leadership (ACBF 2011). Evaluation of these activities does not seem to be available.

## 4. South-South and Triangular Cooperation

The fourth High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness at the end of 2011 produced the Busan Partnership for Effective Development<sup>3</sup> that emphasises, amongst other things, a need for inclusive development partnerships and to broaden support for South-South and triangular co-operation.

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<sup>3</sup> Busan Partnership for Effective Development Co-Operation. Fourth High Level Forum On Aid Effectiveness, Busan, Republic Of Korea, 29 November-1 December 2011  
<http://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/49650173.pdf>

South-South co-operation generally refers to the sharing of knowledge and resources between developing countries with the aim of identifying effective practices. Triangular coordination normally involves a traditional donor country (i.e. an OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) donor), an emerging donor in the South, and a beneficiary country in the South. The scale of triangular development cooperation is still limited compared to traditional North-South cooperation or South-South cooperation (Ashoff 2010).

#### 4.1 Knowledge Sharing Programme and South-South Experience Facility

A number of South-South knowledge and capacity interventions have been undertaken. Korea Development Institute (KDI) and World Bank Institute (WBI) (2011) examine three knowledge sharing programmes: (1) KDI's **Knowledge Sharing Programme (KSP)** for advancing export development in the Dominican Republic; (2) KDI's KSP for promoting public-private partnerships and prefeasibility studies in Mongolia, along with providing support for deposit insurance reform; and (3) the World Bank's **South-South Experience Exchange Facility for the New Economy Skills for Africa Programme (NESAP)** in India for sharing knowledge on information and communications technology with African countries, including Ghana and Nigeria.

The study's found some evidence of positive impacts from knowledge exchange. The study identifies the following lessons for the design and management of knowledge exchange programmes (KDI and WBI 2011):

- **Localisation:** Respond to the demands of the partner country, to better target the knowledge exchange for a more efficient and effective programme
- **Identify key participants:** Strategically select participants on both the demand and supply sides of the knowledge exchange, to ensure participants have relevant experience to share and are in key positions to effect change.
- **Promote interactions:** Build sustainable momentum for change by encouraging and managing recurrent cross-country and within-country interactions, as well as by using knowledge exchange instruments that motivate or inspire, such as twinning arrangements or site visits.
- **Monitor results:** Understand what is meant by results, by focusing on changes in capacity—at the level of institutional capacity and the level of intermediate outcomes—for a more systematic documentation and analysis of results. Trace the change logic to identify the results chain of how knowledge exchange leads to intermediate outcomes that contribute to institutional changes that affect the development goal. Assign indicators to measure and monitor change that will help practitioners to track progress, document practical lessons in implementation, and make timely adjustments to the program when necessitated.

#### 4.2 New Economic Partnership for Economic Development (NEPAD)

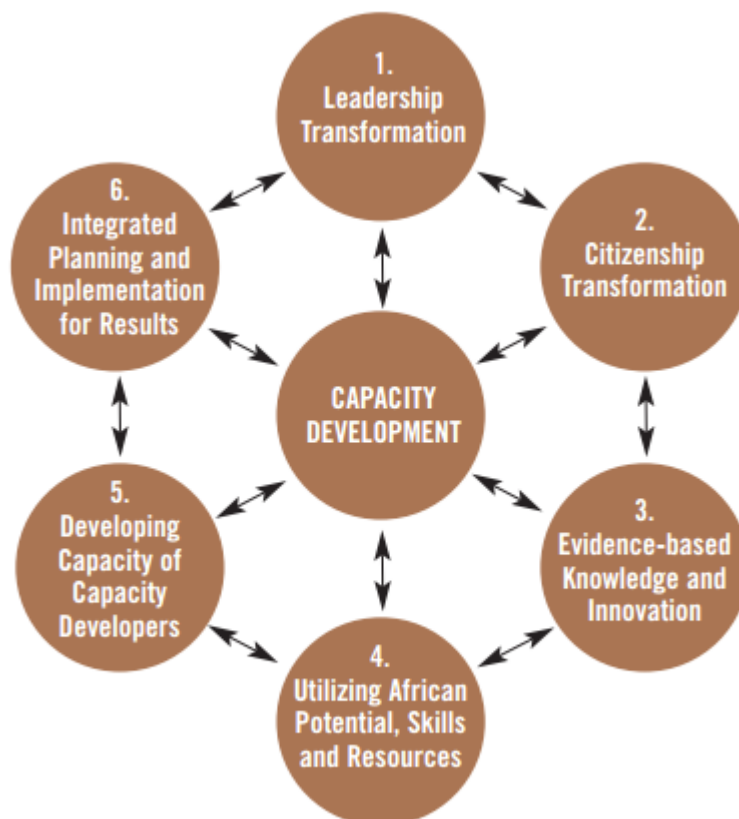
A notable mechanism has been the African Union's New Economic Partnership for Economic Development (NEPAD). Mayaki (2010) comments that since its inception in 2001, NEPAD has acted as a regional facilitator in promoting and connecting African countries and institutional actors for mutual learning related to the continent's development priorities and agenda. It has supported both South-South and North-South knowledge exchange. Mayaki (2010) outlines some key African mechanisms that have worked through NEPAD:



- **Regional sector policy frameworks:** These resulted from information and innovation exchanges in multi-stakeholder collaborations and partnerships. Sectoral priorities and frameworks include: Agriculture and Food Security through the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP); Infrastructure, based on the continental framework of the Programme for Infrastructure Development in Africa (PIDA). Other continental frameworks that offer mutual learning space for African development actors include the Africa-wide Capacity Development Strategic Framework (CDSF) and the Consolidated Plan of Action (CPA) for Science and Technology, and the Environment Action Plan (EAP).
- **African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM):** This self-monitoring review mechanism promotes peer exchanges across countries on good governance, accountability and efficiency. The APRM is a learning process among peers at the highest political level focusing on political, economic, and corporate governance and socioeconomic development. Participating countries can, voluntarily, benchmark best governance practices against global norms and standards.
- **NEPAD Capacity Development Strategic Framework (CDSF):** The CDSF is an instrument to assist countries and institutions to deeply analyse the fundamental capacity challenges confronting them; promote the adoption of innovative, appropriate and effective solutions to capacity development that take into account local needs, priorities and context; and encourage the application of integrated, comprehensive and sustainable solutions (NEPAD 2009). This framework offers a common approach for diagnosing and addressing fundamental systemic, organisational, and individual capacity challenges (Mayaki 2010). The framework stresses solutions, impact, and results-based innovation. The CDSF is built on six strategic cornerstones, or capacity development priorities: see figure 1.

**Figure 1. The Six Cornerstones of the Capacity Development Strategic Framework**

Source: Mayaki (2010)



NEPAD (2010) explains these cornerstones imply a need to:

1. Develop leaders at all levels of society (not just political) who are dynamic and strategic and capable of inspiring, driving and transforming Africa through results.
2. Develop better engaged and empowered citizens with the capacity to own and spearhead development and demand greater accountability and transparency from state institutions and other non-state actors.
3. Develop and use knowledge-based and innovation-driven policy and decision-making processes for effective development and learning.
4. Mobilize, nurture and retain African human and financial resources for development and transformation locally, continentally and globally.
5. Reorient, retrain and reposition capacity developers to adapt to Africa's progressive agenda and drive it through performance-enhancing institutions.
6. Foster the development of planning and implementation capacities to achieve better integrated and coordinated systems for enhanced results.

There does not seem to be rigorous evaluations relating to the regional sector policy frameworks or to the CDSF. An evaluation on the APRM process in Uganda found that the APRM committee had been representative of Ugandan society and independent in its actions and reports produced (Luutu and Tindifa 2011). Civil society groups have responded enthusiastically to the process though some have felt excluded. The role of the media was marginal. The evaluation did not determine specifically how successful the APRM has been as a capacity development tool.

### 4.3 Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning

Another notable south-south cooperation network has been the **Public Expenditure Management Peer Assisted Learning (PEM PAL)** network of public expenditure management professionals in various governments in the Europe and Central Asia (ECA) region. Rather than focusing on capacity building within single countries and bilateral relations between donors and governments, PEM PAL is a regional approach involving 20+ countries in a shared effort to improve the management of public expenditures. PEM PAL's success depends on demand-driven "communities of practice" in which officials from different countries with similar responsibilities develop their own agenda and decide how best to share experiences through networking, electronic learning, and face-to-face meetings. At present there are three communities of practice, for budgeting, treasury, and internal audit, that bring together practitioners at the most senior levels (typically up to the level of deputy minister).

## 5. Other emerging approaches

### 5.1 Creating a learning organisation

Pearson (2011a) notes that though training has been a central element to technical assistance and capacity building programmes in general, such practices have not been as effective as expected. She argues that training is just one of many approaches that can contribute to developing capacity but it is best to look at broader conceptions of, and approaches to, learning. Learning, by itself is not a panacea to capacity development, and factors such as leadership, systems and incentives are also important.

Pearson argues for a concept of learning for development beyond the simple acquisition of knowledge or skills to “the realms of capabilities and sense making that lead to expanded options for action” (Pearson 2011a: 5). She highlights these key points (Pearson 2011b) for creating a learning environment conducive to capacity development:

- **Essential starting point for effective capacity development is culture:** Using the lens of culture promotes understanding about challenges to capacity development rooted in belief systems. Development practitioners must understand the culture of the country they work in and how this impacts capacity development.
- **The psychosocial legacy of complex trauma creates significant challenges for effective capacity development:** The complex relationships between culture, context and psychosocial functioning can create deep-seated blocks to change initiatives. Resistance and risk-averse behaviour is deeply rooted in fear and other emotions produced by culture and experience. This is likely to have special relevance in post-conflict societies.
- **Capacity development is a discipline in its own right and is values based:** Effective capacity development requires certain knowledge and skills<sup>4</sup> but practitioners also need to be aware of their values - their motivation and agenda - and how these relate to who they work with.
- **Learning is a skill that needs to be learned and practiced:** Learning and analytical skills acquired with ease during childhood can be impossible to learn later in life. Repetition and perseverance is needed to unlock rigid thinking patterns that prevent learning.
- **Individual and organisational learning are inextricably linked:** It is important to coordinate and integrate learning at all levels of the organisation. Effective leadership in organisations can catalyse individual learning.
- **Creativity builds safe space for change and has proven benefits:** Creative practices can give people who are stuck in rigid thinking processes a nudge to become open to new learning. A number of methods can be effective depending on the context.
- **Creativity and learning support relevance and sustainability:** Reflecting on practices continuously and with an open-mind can ensure that the support remains relevant to the evolving context and is more likely to be sustainable.

Pearson (2011c) argues that this holistic learning approach to organisational capacity building in her experience with Cambodian NGOs has produced impressive results in some organisations and important learning about blocks to change in others. She concludes that this approach clearly demonstrates that moving beyond traditional training and organisational development interventions into processes that promote learning and its integration into everyday work practices has positive and lasting impacts. Organisations that were willing to engage with the learning approach found that both individuals and the whole organisation were able to function more effectively, and that this contributed to sustainability and resilience.

## 5.2 Public Technical Assistance

Public Technical Assistance is a capacity building instrument advocated by the European Network of Implementing Development Agencies (EUNIDA) (Capacity4dev 2010). It is based on the transfer of expertise and exchange of experiences among peers with the aim of strengthening public institutions to

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<sup>4</sup> For further information on knowledge and skills for effective capacity development see Ubels et al. (2010).

help ensure good governance, social cohesion and sustainable human development. This is usually provided through technical cooperation mechanisms, such as institutional twinning and exchange of experiences among peers or equals. These measures aim to deliver the added value of building capacity to form the basis for future technical cooperation mechanisms, including triangular cooperation and south-south cooperation. Public Technical Assistance aims to go further than the provision of experts only and includes a wide scope of modalities, such as the design of methodologies, sectoral know-how, management tools, training courses, and network activities, which can be used to strengthen the local and national structures. Public technical assistance aims to allow empowerment and leadership of the partner country, use of country systems, and exchange of experiences between equals.

There does not seem to be a clearly articulated strategy for this approach though Capacity4dev (2010) highlights, as examples, the EU Twinning programme (see section 2.1) and the deployment of civilians in a manner similar to the UK government Deployable Civilian Experts<sup>5</sup> programme (though it would not be restricted to conflict-affected countries as in the UK programme).

### 5.3 European Commission “Backbone” strategy

In 2007 the European Commission implemented a new approach so as to further increase (beneficiary) country ownership and abolish special implementation units. EC (2008) outlines the new ‘backbone strategy’ to undertake this. As such it outlines a set of principles to guide the future provision of EC-funded Technical Cooperation (TC) or technical assistance, and the design of Project Implementation Arrangements. The following principles are proposed for future TC operations:

- **Focus on capacity development:** TC is provided with the primary aim of supporting internal country processes to promote capacity development at individual, organisational and country-wide levels.
- **Use a demand-led approach where TC is not provided by default:** The provision of TC must be based on the demand and requirements of the partner country. Costs and available options should be transparent. Appropriate dialogue and support may be needed in order to enable clear formulation of the demand for TC.
- **Adopt a results-orientation:** TC design will ensure that TC inputs/activities are linked to targeted outputs which in turn lead to sustainable development outcomes. Appropriate indicators will be agreed in advance to monitor the implementation of TC.
- **Ensure it is a country-owned and managed TC process:** Country partner ownership is the key underlying principle for the organisation of EC-funded TC. From the identification to the implementation phase, partner countries will be actively involved in the design of PIAs and TC-supported programmes, including the procurement of TC services and the management, review and accounting of TC results.
- **Take account of country and sector-specific requirements:** TC support will build on a thorough understanding of the political, socio-cultural, sectoral and institutional context. Blueprint approaches should be avoided.

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<sup>5</sup> “[Deployable Civilian Experts] are non-civil servants who are available for deployment, often, at short notice, for assignments in countries affected by or at risk of violent conflict.”  
[http://www.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=category&id=61:deployable-civilian-experts&Itemid=79](http://www.stabilisationunit.gov.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=61:deployable-civilian-experts&Itemid=79)

- **Work through harmonised and aligned action:** TC support will be closely coordinated with other donors and aligned to country strategies and programmes through the increased use of pooling arrangements or other harmonised approaches, such as delegated cooperation.
- **Avoiding the use of Parallel Implementation Units (PIUs) and promote effective Project Implementation Arrangements:** The use of parallel PIUs will be avoided as far as possible in favour of implementation arrangements that are fully integrated and accountable to national structures. PIUs may be justified and/or ‘unavoidable’ in exceptional cases only, such as emergency situations (post conflict), or support to Non-State Actors or regional programmes. The use of ‘parallel PIUs’ should always be a last resort, and clearly justified.
- **Consider different and innovative options for the provision of TC:** The design of TC support should consider alternatives to the use of international long- and short-term consultants. Alternatives include the use of national and regional resources, twinning arrangements and knowledge transfer beyond standard training approaches.

The 2012 DAC Peer Review of the European Union notes that though the EC has agreed a “backbone strategy” for reforming its technical co-operation and implementation units; its application is still in the early stages (OECD 2012). This “backbone strategy” has started to influence positively how technical co-operation is being thought of, but has not yet been fully applied.

## 5.4 Analytical tools

Developing insightful and responsive tools can help identify key capacity development need. One tool, that was developed by the World Bank, is the Rapid Assessment and Action Plan (RAAP) toolkit which was used for an assessment in Barranquilla, Columbia in 2008 (World Bank n.d.). The assessment identified specific capacity weaknesses and consequent reforms. Overall, the reforms allowed for an increase in available resources to finance the provision of public services: public investment in 2011 was twice the size of public investment in 2007, and a large portion of the increase was used to improve and expand health services (World Bank n.d.).

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## Key websites

- Capacity.org – A gateway for capacity development  
<http://www.capacity.org/capacity/opencms/en/index.html>
- Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD) - <http://www.lencd.org/>
- Capacity4dev.eu - <http://capacity4dev.ec.europa.eu/>

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## About this report

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