PERSPECTIVES NOTE

TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION FOR CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

Draft for discussion

22 November 2010

Review of Perspective Notes "on the road to Busan"

We invite your comments and inputs in the preparation process of 5 Perspectives Notes on Capacity Development priority areas that will help inform the preparation process for the 4th High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness.

Please provide your comments by 6 December 2010
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Your views are much appreciated! Thank you very much in advance.

Preface to all Perspectives Notes

In November 2011, the global community will meet in Busan, South Korea to review progress on the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action. Through its Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF), preparations are under way to take stock of progress made by donors and partner countries in implementation of joint commitments.

To complement this effort, the OECD/DAC, in cooperation with the Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD) and the Southern initiative CD Alliance, has carried out a process to reflect on the specific commitments and implications of the Paris Declaration and the AAA for capacity development. The preparation of a set of technical Perspectives Notes is a key input to that process. In all, five papers have been prepared on capacity development priorities in relation to:

- the enabling environment
- sector strategies and country systems
- fragile situations
- technical co-operation
- civil society actors

The purpose of these Perspectives Notes is threefold: (i) Provide a review of the current state of play with respect to CD priorities highlighted in the Paris Declaration and the AAA. (ii) Provide an input to the Southern led "Synthesis Report" on key CD messages for Busan. (iii) Establish an operational vision for further technical work post-Busan. These Notes also will provide background for LenCD resource corners and learning materials.

To ensure coherence and consistency across the five papers, the OECD/DAC definition of capacity and capacity development is adopted as a default: **Capacity** is the ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully. **Capacity development** is the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time.

These definitions remain quite general and call for further precision in order to be operationally useful (Box 1).

Box 1. Discussing Capacity Development

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

⇒ **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.

It is difficult to discuss "capacity development" without first determining what kind of capacity is needed and what it should look like in operation. Without this clarity, discussions on capacity development tend to become general exchanges on what makes for good development practice. Regardless of which of these or other approaches is used, it is critical for practitioners to understand what they are seeking in terms of capacity and to use this as the basis for identifying activities which will help to encourage its development, rather than assuming that certain mechanisms will automatically enhance capacity.

This series of Perspective Notes was prepared by a professional drafting team assembled with support from the OECD/DAC and LenCD. The team included James Hradsky, Nils Boesen, Anthony Land, Heather Baser, Silvia Guizzardi and Mia Sorgenfrei. James Hradsky led in drafting this Note on *Technical Cooperation for Capacity Development*, which subsequently benefitted from comments from the rest of the team, from peer reviews by ...., ..., ... and a wider electronic vetting process through the LenCD global network. All comments from those involved that have helped contribute to a sound paper are acknowledged with thanks.

These Perspectives Notes do not reflect an official position of either the OECD/DAC or LenCD. The many contributors may not endorse every viewpoint in the note and they bear no responsibility for any remaining errors or omissions.

Executive Summary (TO BE ADDED)

Section 1: Introduction

1.1. Technical co-operation – the traditional aid instrument in support of capacity development

"Technical co-operation" (sometimes used interchangeably with the term "technical assistance") is generally acknowledged by donors[1] to include the traditional aid categories of ***technical assistance***, ***training*** and ***educational grants***. These potentially quite different support actions nevertheless have the common (and sometimes overlapping) objective of supporting the capacity development of the partner country.

With the onset of modern approaches to aid in the 1960s, technical co-operation and financial support, packaged in the form of short term donor projects, seemed reasonable initial responses to the challenges of overall development in the emerging countries of the day[2] and vestiges from this era are still found today. With greater experience in the use of technical co-operation over time, criticisms (particularly of technical assistance) surfaced, both from the donors and partner countries (cost; not aligned with country needs; lack of local management control), one written milestone for which was the well known Berg Report commissioned by the UNDP in 1993[3]. An impetus for change in technical co-operation practice slowly built momentum as donor thinking shifted from a traditional focus on skills transfer supply to a more strategic and demand driven concept of "capacity development". By viewing technical co-operation as a means to an end (i.e. capacity development), individual donors could begin to rethink their "good practice" policies in this area. By the time of the Paris Declaration (2005) donors and partner countries alike identified capacity development as one of their short list priorities. Today, technical co-operation is still one of the most visible aspects of donor action in relation to capacity issues and its focus is very much on how to do it more effectively. One international specialist has offered a helpful historical characterisation of its evolution over three "generations", selected aspects of which are noted in Box 2. Today's world of technical co-operation, depending on the aid agency, is largely transitioning from the second to third generations of this characterisation, although considerable first generation activity stubbornly remains.

How large is the investment in this particular form of assistance? OECD statistics suggest that aid use of technical co-operation has fluctuated around a fairly stable one-quarter of overall Official Development Assistance (ODA) over this timeframe, with major variations among donors. In absolute terms it represents a significant expenditure, perhaps in the $25 billion/year range in recent years[4]. This aid instrument still is a standard aspect of most forms of international aid, including that of non-governmental organizations, foundations and South-South co-operation. In fact, "technical co-operation" is so well embedded in aid operations that it is difficult for most donors (and partner countries) to identify and report upon. While only an order of magnitude estimate, one detailed analysis of 2003 ODA data submitted by the donor agencies to the OECD suggests that of the total attributed to technical co-operation, perhaps one-half is in technical assistance, with the remainder split between training and educational grants (and other minor categories).

[1] Key elements of traditional technical co-operation used for past OECD/DAC statistical reporting directives generally includes **personnel** (including experts, teachers and volunteers), **study/skills assistance** (traineeships and scholarships) and **research** on problems of developing countries.

[2] UNDP, 2002

[3] Berg, 1993

[4] The OECD has attempted to work with the donor community to improve upon its recording and reporting of technical co-operation flows. A new and more specific nomenclature was established and initial reporting based on that format will appear in 2011.

Box 2. Three Generations of Technical Assistance

First Generation (*prevalent in 1960s - early 1980s*): Supply (and donor) driven; framed in 2-5 year projects; focused on gap filling at the level of individuals, tasks and the transfer of knowledge and techniques; use of industrialized world good practice; extensive focus on training. Tend to bypass country systems and to make use of substitution TA.

Second Generation (*turn of century forward*): Most donors now evolving towards this approach. Emphasis on country commitment and ownership; uses "linear" performance management; seeks to move TC towards capacity development; favours strategies of planned change; focuses on good practice models; delegates most aspects of TA management to outside management contractors; sees donor role as processing, contracting, monitoring. This approach responds to demands from domestic groups for control, clarity, efficiency, results and accountability.

Third Generation (*emerging)*: Based on new needs of SWaps, Paris Declaration and better understanding of complexities of development. Uses context as starting point; sees indigenous institutions, culture and structures as key determinants; uses searching rather than planning; integrated with governance and political economy issues; aware of dynamics of change including informal level; deliberate effort to shift control and decision making to local systems and actors; build on strengths rather than weakness; need for longer term engagements.

Source: Peter Morgan, 2009

1.2. This Perspectives Note

This Perspectives Note makes an attempt to summarize the considerable learning about technical co-operation for capacity development that has occurred in recent years, particularly in support of the international aid effectiveness process. Specifically, reference in the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action is found at the level of paragraph 14 where it is agreed "…that technical co-operation is one means among others to develop capacity…" Paragraph 14(b) goes on to affirm that "Donors' support for capacity development will be demand-driven and designed to support country ownership", then states:

"… To this end, developing countries and donors will (i) jointly select and mange technical co-operation, and (ii) promote the provision of technical co-operation by local and regional resources, including through South-South co-operation."

In reviewing attempts at collective learning since Accra, it is apparent that this topic continues to be a reform target for development co-operation leadership, North and South, and several aspects remain topics where additional review and dialogue among partners is needed. As will be noted subsequently, emerging experience collectively offers hope that some commonly accepted principles for better practice in developing capacity is possible by the time of Busan.

Three caveats about this Note merit remarking at the outset. (i) Because of the range of opinions and analysis on technical co-operation, it is modestly intended as an inventory of what has been said and where core consensus seems possible. (ii) It offers options rather than prescriptions. (iii) It is not meant be a definitive conclusion, but rather the starting point of a process of collective dialogue and change.

The following **Section 2** provides an overview of most recent evidence of the state of our knowledge and most promising directions for aid support of technical co-operation for capacity development. This evidence informs the identification in **Section 3** of emerging perspectives on aid funded technical co-operation and the operational implications this will have for partners. **Section 4** summarises a series of key messages about more effective and sustainable technical co-operation for discussion in Busan and beyond. Finally, the **Annexes** provide key references used in assembling this Note.

Section 2: Reviewing the Evidence

Consistent with the expectations of the AAA and the current vision for reform of modern technical co-operation, we are reminded that technical co-operation is no longer about skills transfer alone. It is first and foremost about partner countries asserting leadership and investing resources to make it work. Subsequently, it is about enabling donors to play their support role more efficiently and effectively. It is not about supply, it is about demand. And finally, context is at the heart of any capacity action – the specific approach used in any given context will vary according to local circumstances, even though many of the basic operational principles may be fairly similar whether discussing post-conflict situations or middle income states.

In examining the key sources of recent evidence on technical co-operation, this Note gives special focus to analysis drawn from country level sources of information published within the last five years since the Paris Declaration. Consistent with the previously noted definition, the following assessment attempts to look at three key types of traditional technical co-operation: *technical assistance*; *training*; *educational grants*. Evidence within this range of aid instruments is particularly visible for technical assistance.

Already noted earlier, the topic of technical assistance has been the object of significant international scrutiny since its early use by aid agencies in the 1960s. Over 25 relevant studies are identified in annex. Many are field based and together involve more than 100 country examples. Three of these reports (ECDPM 2007; JICA, et.al. 2008; EU 2008) actually survey the landscape of existing evidence to provide an organised direction for consensus. They tend to converge around similar conclusions for consideration by the donor community as it funds technical assistance for capacity development.

Finding No. 1: Partners already are testing innovations in technical co-operation for capacity development.

Concrete actions are being taken both by many donors and partner countries to better shape technical co-operation with a capacity development perspective – which most understand to be the priority (although not necessarily only) objective. These efforts have a globally similar sense of objective and approach and represent an emerging agreement on technical co-operation good practice. Below is a summary of experiences of 11 donor and 7 partner country reform approaches, more information on which is found in Annex 1.

Donor efforts are focused on the reshaping of their internal processes and abilities, sometimes as a specific objective on technical co-operation, sometimes as a sub part of a broader interest in capacity development. Most actions are agency-centric, with minimal sharing of experience or discussion with others. An aggregation of the types of donor action already in use is summarised in Box 3.

Box 3. Types of donor innovation

- *Written guidance*: Numerous formal statements on technical co-operation are being used by aid agencies in the form of political statements, strategy, policy, guidance/concept notes, approach papers, practice notes, or working papers. The majority of these statements either focus directly on technical co-operation or situate it the context of overall interest in capacity development.
- *Agency capacities*: To better equip their systems with the types of capacity needed to address technical co-operation for

capacity development, agencies are trying a variety of internal actions. They include: training staff; dedicating staff positions or a unit to the issue; monitoring and/or evaluating field operations; organising learning processes; setting up a dedicated website; using special external peer groups.

- *Changed practices*: Particularly at the level of field operations, a variety of operational changes are being attempted in relation to technical co-operation (mostly technical assistance): emphasis on practical local ownership and management; greater alignment with country system reforms; strategic integration at the sector level; physical placement of experts in government office space; support of regional efforts to build local capacity; pooling and harmonisation among donors; emphasis on use and development of local expertise; use of experts in advisory rather than implementation positions; support for greater South-South co-operation and learning; minimal use of special Project Implementation Units.

- *Focus on evidence*: Setting up results based technical co-operation; promoting knowledge sharing on what works and not; funding research and analysis of technical co-operation for CD.

Partner country innovations are more concerned with taking charge and redirecting donor funds and assistance in directions that fit more strategically with their own priorities. Key types of actions already found in some partner countries are summarised in Box 4.

Box 4. Partner country innovations

- *Written guidance*: Often in response to donor encouragement for greater leadership, some partner countries establish formal statements of guidance or strategy that pragmatically focus on capacity and/or technical co-operation. Emphasis is on clarifying partner country roles and asserting a more jointly managed process of national leadership over it.

- *Internal organisational action:* Countries may set up an administrative unit specific to technical assistance management, focus on more joint implementation and learning, and/or seek to integrate capacity issues and TA into comprehensive or sector planning, including civil service reform.

- *Changed practices*: Countries may seek to: exercise stronger leadership in the selection and use of experts; better integrate local expertise through coaching, twinning, or the use of diaspora; set up programmes to build the capacity of local experts and trainers to reduce the need for foreign experts; use the current aid effectiveness process as a window of opportunity to reform; foster use of local, peer based learning.

These efforts represent a modest beginning. Nevertheless it is an important early foundation for future joint learning and action in this well funded, traditional area of donor-partner country collaboration. Despite frequently stated intentions to carry out regular monitoring and evaluation of the results of these reforms, only modest impact and learning evidence is publicly available to date. With a modest effort to better join up the results of these efforts, greater clarity and consensus forming would seem possible in a reasonably short timeframe. The political will to do so could be one result of the Busan High Level Forum.

Finding No. 2: Understanding complexity can help establish realistic expectations.

Effective and sustainable capacity development is frequently conditioned by broader context factors, on which technical co-operation is likely to have little effect, including systemic factors in the economy

and in the institutional setting. Civil service salaries and incentives, for instance, continue to be a fundamental dilemma that, if not addressed, will continue to undermine many development efforts. Technical co-operation can help to accelerate or remove bottlenecks to progress in relation to these reforms, but it cannot be expected to be a key driver of capacity. Criticism of technical assistance may be misdirected because the basic constraints to capacity were of a nature that no expert, however good, could address.

One systems analysis (ECDPM, 2008) notes the weakness of capacity assessment frameworks when they assume that capacity issues can be explained by an examination of only parts of the system. It maintains that no single factor or element – incentives, financial support, trained staff, knowledge, structure – will *by itself* be an explanation for the development of capacity. Therefore, single interventions (e.g. training) are not likely to make a significant difference unless they represent a key point of leverage that can shift overall behaviour.

A systems approach also points to the inherent difficulty of using rigidly planned, engineered efforts for capacity development in such complex environments. While appealing from the point of view of standard donor administrative requirements, controlled, directed change, especially when imposed from a foreign source, rarely works over time and can even damage the natural process of change by blocking or curtailing unforeseen opportunities for innovation. It suggests that effective change must work with the natural dynamics and energy within the system and not against them. Systems emphasis is on emergence and opportunities rather than on goals and matching strategies. Approaches need to be "good enough" and flexible enough to evolve with local realities.

Finding No. 3: Technical co-operation is more than technical.

Technical co-operation is more than technical. It is part of a broader relationship between donors and country partners, both of whom have multiple incentives and interests, sometimes different from and sometimes even counteracting efforts to focus on capacity. Technical co-operation is often targeted by these forces towards quick disbursement of funds and the achievement of visible results. When capacity development is a more direct purpose of technical assistance, the advisers may end up filling gaps anyway because the incentives for capacity development are weaker than those which support immediate problem solving. Technical assistance may, in practice, be used to supervise or manage donor support, especially where it is still difficult for many donors to relinquish management control – for example where trust between partners is less than optimal.

Several of the problems of technical co-operation can be linked to pervasive incentives for politically attuned actors on both sides to assert that development problems – including those of capacity -- can be solved far more quickly than is actually the case. Technical co-operation can seem to be a "solution" to the compression and overloading of short term agendas that build more on political expedience than evidence about what works and what does not. These underlying factors can create multiple operational dilemmas for donors and partner countries when trying to make technical co-operation more effective in support of capacity. Because dilemmas may likely prevail, it is important that approaches to reform realistically recognize their existence and work around what is doable.

Box 5. Donor systemic constraints

- *Tensions between objectives*: Aid agencies face a range of sometimes conflicting operational objectives, some less visible than others, that shape and limit their work processes: domestic political pressures to maintain the appearance of clarity and control; demands to demonstrate results in the short term; periodic use of technical assistance to manage partner relationships, inside and outside government.

- *Difficulty of accepting risk*: Aid agencies working in weakly capacitated countries have difficulty maintaining their credibility when they simultaneously suggest that short term aid delivery there can be effective, resilient and accountable. These contexts can be fraught with risk and uncertainty – and many capacity interventions will fall short of expectations.

- *Domestic constituencies:* Technical co-operation and capacity development often do not have dedicated domestic or international constituencies, as may be the case for more politically visible themes such as climate change or anti-corruption. Further, aid funded technical co-operation is a large industry, involving contractors, non-governmental organisations and a range of donor government departments and agencies, all with their own motivations and priorities – and all capable of promoting perspectives that their own needs.

- *Organisational focus*: Technical co-operation often does not have an organizational home in the aid agencies, where it generally is difficult to have a focussed and evidence based corporate discussion on the topic.

Source: Morgan 2009

Finding No. 4: Technical co-operation can be most effective when it has a good fit.

Effective technical co-operation is one which strategically fits well with the needs of the local context. Several country level actions can help to ensure good fit.

Practical country ownership – Joint decisions on the use of technical assistance increasingly relate to strategic and operational plans at various levels within the country. Breaking down specific capacity issues around locally owned strategies helps provide a mutually acceptable anchor point for more pragmatic capacity assessment and action, and therefore for determining the potential contribution of technical co-operation. Alignment with locally led policies and processes also helps align the expectations for assistance offered in relation to local demand and local absorptive Several examples are noted in Annex 1 of countries where the critical mass of technical assistance offered led authorities to launch forms of local discussion to ensure that this support was in line with national priorities.

Box 5. Making space for local leadership

AusAid designed the *Making a Difference Programme* to improve its technical assistance through practical capacity building. It aims at bringing together assistance staff and their partners in a safe space outside the work place to give them a shared learning experience on equal terms. One underlying purpose is to empower the participants to freely express their views, as their understanding of cultural differences and power imbalances develops. The participants are supported to develop their own capacity building tools, techniques, and experiences to be applied at individual, group and organizational levels. In Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea, Communities of Practice have emerged where members help each other address their most burning learning needs about capacity building in practice.

Source: AusAID in OECD, 2009

Public service reform and TA – Sustainable public sector capacity development can depend on the underlying factors (recruitment, productive use and retention of skilled and motivated staff, globalisation of labour market) that encourage or hinder public sector performance. Partner countries frequently may not have the capacity for organized workforce planning and human resources management necessary for effective donor provision of technical assistance support. Afghanistan, for example, is country resolutely engaged in this direction.

Weighing alternatives - Full transparency is seldom used to examine technical assistance alternatives and the relative strengths, weaknesses and costs of each. Traditional technical assistance often is criticized as costly, although often viewed as necessary[5]. South-South and triangular co-operation options that complement traditional technical assistance are increasingly visible, as demonstrated by the 2010 high-level event in Bogota and the current discussion for Busan. Utilization of competent local experts or national diaspora increasingly also are alternatives to expatriate technical assistance.

Approaching fragile situations – Aid funding of technical assistance in the special context of fragile situations often circumvents known good practice strategies as a matter of expediency, since they often are more difficult to apply. Existing institutions are particularly vulnerable; existing capacity can be undermined through "poaching" of government staff for project positions or through use of topping up mechanisms that distort already poor incentives to perform. Joint learning processes such as the International Dialogue on fragile states demonstrate that more concerted collective action is needed to ensure that good intentions "do no harm". Donor instinctively supply massive, early technical assistance in emergency situations that often is not collaboratively defined nor situated in a longer term vision of progressive capacity development.

Finding No. 5: Effective TC requires clear operational roles and flexibility to engage locally.

At a more operational level, effective technical co-operation requires jointly acceptable and transparent "rules of the game" and flexibility to adapt to complex contexts of capacity evolution.

Management roles – Responsibilities for management of aid-sponsored technical assistance often are not established clearly on the basis of upstream, mutual agreement. This limits the degree to which partner countries can play an active management role, although examples are available of successful partner country involvement in technical co-operation review/selection panels, or development of criteria for selection and TA performance appraisal. A strong, emerging theme is that technical co-operation for capacity development is only effective when country partners can invest what it takes to make it useful.

Capacity of donors – Donor agencies routinely do not assess their own capabilities to support capacity and change processes in the field, nor for ensuring the effective use of technical assistance. Some donors deploy more specialised staff to country or regional offices to support agency internal programme design and implementation, but rarely for purposes of partner country capacity development. It is similarly rare

[5] The high cost of technical assistance results in part from expert fees, but most studies find that the largest cost comes from significant non-salary costs associated with overseas assignments.

for aid organizations to highlight capacity development criteria in the performance evaluations of staff, nor to provide incentives for consistent application of their policies on technical assistance. The capacity of donors to address the various practices summarized in this Note, and the reforms that it may imply for their business processes, merits greater individual and collective agreement.

Pooling – Pooling arrangements for technical assistance, often as part of joint sector support programmes, are attempted by some aid agencies to improve donor harmonization, to reduce redundancy of effort, to reduce cost and as a means of shifting the balance of technical assistance management towards partner countries. It can encourage discussion about options and to negotiate a more appropriate use of technical assistance. It logically can oblige all partners to think more strategically on the use of technical assistance. Pooling of technical assistance in reality has tended to be difficult to put in place because of differing donor business processes.

Box 6. Examples of pooling

In **Malawi**, DIFID is funding assistance to the Health SWAp on behalf of other donors aligned behind the government's Programme of Work. There is now coordination of assistance by the World Bank, UNFPA, Norway and DFID. Government manages jointly with the donors and all assistance is untied, most from African countries (*mixed pooling*). In **Ethiopia**, donors in the Education Pooled Fund have a pooled mechanism that coordinates assistance. The fund is a donor project outside government. Strategic direction is by a joint donor-government committee (*mixed pooling*). Also in **Ethiopia**, the Public Sector Capacity Building Programme (PSCAP) is a pooled donor technical assistance funding mechanism that goes through country systems. Some 91% of DFID funding to the programme is pooled. A part of the PSCAP funds is for government to source assistance using World Bank procurement arrangements. Donors are working together behind country led plans as a result (*mixed pooling*).

DFID, 2006

A results orientation – The performance requirements of traditional aid technical assistance often was framed in terms of "deliverables" such as training courses, workshops, or studies. Newer approaches focus on country partner system performance such as tangible improvements in service delivery or regulatory efficiency. In the absence of a clearly formulated partner country frame of reference, the roles and functions attributed to technical assistance will be similarly unclear, with the potential for subsequent unfocussed behaviour and limited impact and sustainability. This can be especially important in complex and politically sensitive environments, such as in fragile situations, where donor short term results considerations may weigh heavily. Practical flexibility can be built into terms of reference by collaboratively setting a results agenda over an initial timeframe, with prior agreement to meaningfully track performance and to revisit indicators when turning to the next phase.

Box 7. Regional results based management

European Commission support to implementation of the SADC (Southern African Development Community) Protocol on Finance and Investment is a capacity development programme for SACD Member States and the SACD Secretariat with a clear results orientation. The programme is meant to help SACD implement its own regional agreement that needs to be turned into domestic legislation in SACD Member States.

A key feature of the programme is peer exchange and peer learning: staff from SACD Member States is seconded to other Member States and to the Secretariat during the period of the programme. The programme is owned and managed by SACD and support is received from several donors, Long-term and short-term assistance provides expert and advisory inputs. All assistance is recruited by SADC and typically from the region. Experts are accountable to the SADC Secretariat.

Source: European Commission, 2009

Finding No. 6: It also is important to move beyond training and educational grants to support learning for capacity development.

Within the broad category of "technical co-operation" the majority of reform attention has focused on the topic of technical assistance, while other instruments like training and educational grants have tended to be seen as "win-win" arrangements – providing measurable skill transfer and capabilities for targeted partner country recipients, while offering donors a domestically popular and simple management option.

However, recent evaluations[6] have highlighted recurring problematic aspects of these instruments: high cost; difficult (and therefore limited) impact assessment; modest ultimate utility; unclear sustainability. While aid-supported training is generally considered high quality, too often it may neither be useful in the local context, nor sustainable in the longer term. While educational grants are locally valued, participant selection often is not strategic, the studies undertaken not relevant to local priorities and successful graduates may not return to their place of origin[7]. In the case of both training and educational grants, monitoring and evaluation too often is minimal and results far from clear. Indeed, given the several billions of dollars annually attributed to these instruments, it is reasonable to conclude that they merit good fit scrutiny similar to that noted above in relation to technical assistance. As current practices have been in use for a long time and are deeply entrenched, reforms more in line with capacity development objectives may require considerable commitment and be a challenge for both the suppliers and users of learning services.

Training viewed as "learning" - There is emerging agreement on the need to move beyond a narrow vision of training, to the broader concepts of *learning* and *learning practices* [8] – which include training as one possible component. Learning is a complex change process that concerns the organisational and institutional levels as well. The fundamental importance of a supportive environment suggests that organizational and contextual capacity constraints need to be addressed simultaneously and in some cases, first. This goes well beyond transferring of technical skills towards a broader vision of acquiring the capabilities to make decisions and act.

Partner country role – Few agencies have yet to identify a systematic approach that provides for country ownership and leadership of learning programmes. Partner countries are generally favourable to the concept of training, although they often agree that cost of training and other learning options is an issue and sometimes are vocal in support of the building indigenous training capacities where possible. This can include regional level action or collaboration among a group of partner countries. A logical longer term direction suggested by these perspectives is for donors to shift from supply to demand driven learning programmes and to help open up the training market to Southern providers (simultaneously helping to build local capacities).

6 IBRD (2005); NORAD (2008); Pearson (2010).

7 While statistics vary considerably because non-returnees are not registered officially, one report (Le Loet, 2010) suggests that as much as one half of overseas students in French universities may not return to their country of origin.

8 A number of successful approaches, tools and techniques are available to support learning – beyond the realms of formal study and training. They include, for example, coaching and mentoring, e-learning tools, experiential learning, leadership development approaches, exposure visits, and partnership arrangements such as twinning.

A long-term vision – The use of training and other learning techniques to achieve sustainable capacity development impact calls for long term perspectives**.** This can conflict operationally with shorter-term preferences of donor and partner countries. Strategic links and human resource management frameworks often are absent that connect short-term activities like training to long-term change goals for continuous learning and sustainable capacity impact. Time bound results frameworks need to be negotiated among all parties and used to track and discuss activity progress and change.

Summing up

The above discussion underlines that aid in general - and at the centre of it technical co-operation - is a relationship business. The relevance, quality and effectiveness of technical co-operation depend on constructing and maintaining trustful and productive relationships among the stakeholders. It is worth spending energy on thinking through the conditions that foster such productive relationships as drivers for development results. The Paris principles and Accra commitments if actually implemented can go a long way in making this happen.

Section 3: Summary and Operational Implications

3.1. An emerging joint consensus

Perspectives on technical co-operation today, whether from partner countries or donors, globally recognize a number of building blocks to future agreement on more jointly acceptable approaches. Basic elements include:

- ⇒ **Use technical assistance to support and stimulate partner country processes**
- ⇒ **Progressively shift management to partner countries, as possible**
- ⇒ **Improve technical co-operation action by adopting a capacity development perspective**
- ⇒ **Jointly manage technical co-operation actions flexibly but around results**
- ⇒ **Use evidence based learning as a longer term, central feature of future policy and action**

3.2. Implications for attainment of AAA objectives

"*Jointly select and mange technical co-operation…*" AAA paragraph 14b (i)

"*… promote the provision of technical co-operation by local and regional resources, including through South-South co-operation*" AAA paragraph 14b (ii)

Implications for partner countries and donors

In reviewing the implications of evidence to date on the use of technical co-operation for capacity development, it is important to emphasise the generally donor-centric focus of reports, evaluations or other forms of documentation, including this Perspectives Note. Because of the current interest in shifting action in this area to partner country perspectives as a starting point, a first overarching implication for all partners is that any future effort be re-oriented to take this into account[9].

The implications and options below that are drawn from current evidence appear to be a reasonable foundation for a broader based approach to partnership in technical co-operation. These options are not necessarily new, but now can be brought forward more meaningfully in the context of the aid effectiveness agenda. Today's agenda is less a question of "what" to do, but rather "how" to do it. This is brought out most forcefully at the level of country experience.

Policy

⇒ RETHINKING ROLES: Technical co-operation effectiveness ultimately requires strong partner country involvement and concrete investment of its leadership in decision-making and management of technical assistance, but also training and educational grants. Donors increasingly are ready to adapt their systems and procedures so as to permits this type of partner country role.

[9] One case in point is the April 2010 "Dili Declaration" which identifies capacity development as a pillar of its action plan, but where partner countries reflected their own, different, focus on donor hiring and procurement practices at the local level.

To ensure that informed decisions are made at the country level there needs to be full transparency about the alternatives available, including strengths and weaknesses of different options and cost implications.

⇒ STRATEGIC DIALOGUE – The issue of technical co-operation should be discussed openly wherever required (e.g. where funding is large, or where there are potential distortions of effort or other dilemmas) at the appropriate levels between country stakeholders and external partners. It is a strategic issue integral to the discussion on aid effectiveness, capacity development and public sector reform, and as an item for mutual accountability. Partner countries can demonstrate commitment in visible and high level ways (offer champions, engage society). In their strategic dialogue, country partners should require clarity about the actual purpose of the technical co-operation. Opportunities to engage donors on technical co-operation issues at the operational level can occur through organized participation/leadership in substantive, results-based management or in sector level forums.

⇒ PLANNING AND HRM: One frame of reference for technical co-operation engagement and planning is that of human resource planning and management within the local public service. Within that context it may be possible to think more strategically about the use of all forms of technical co-operation as instruments for sustainable capacity development. It also is a logical bridge to use of technical co-operation in relation to public sector reform. Local planning instruments, including sector development plans can offer a useful more specific reference for assessing capacity and determining the potential contribution of donor technical co-operation.

⇒ DONOR SYSTEM CONSTRAINTS: Donors agencies need to assess their own capabilities for supporting capacity and change processes in the field and for ensuring the effective use of technical co-operation personnel, training and educational grants. This includes examination of systemic constraints and dilemmas as well as human resource considerations, especially in the country offices. At a more detailed level, this could imply: deployment of specialised staff to country/regional support offices; more systematic training; better sharing of analysis and action in the (often fragmented) donor national systems; better sharing among donors and partners, in headquarters and the field. Donors need to ensure that performance criteria for staff provide incentives for consistent application of this policy (e.g. as part of the staff annual work plan) and may imply rethinking of overall staff and performance planning.

Implementation

⇒ BEGIN WITH OPERATIONAL VISION: Technical co-operation for capacity development begins with partner country strategy and donor activity design must work from that perspective. Operationally specific local strategy/plans (country, system, sectors) can be pragmatic entry points. Subsequent (or simultaneous) harmonisation of action with other donors around these entry points may be another. Depending on context, it needs to be remembered that there are limits to what any specific external intervention can achieve, especially in complex and politically sensitive environments.

⇒ FOLLOW UP ACTIVITY DESIGN: More detailed activity design, including those of technical co-operation, should include proper diagnosis and understanding of the context. Other issues that can be addressed at this level include: the appropriate mix of technical co-operation approaches and knowing when to shift from one to the other; the benefits of flexible and iterative programme approaches; appropriate approaches to results accountability and learning; how to provide the right incentives. At this level, partners can identify ways to build in greater flexibility in accommodating evolving needs and demands.

⇒ LOCAL OPERATIONAL ENGAGEMENT: Partner country participation and/or leadership are integral to technical co-operation management. Depending on local preferences and sharing of responsibility this involvement could include review/selection panels, development of criteria for selection (personnel, training, scholarships) or performance appraisal. Donors have a collective responsibility to ensure that local choices to their activities are made as openly as possible, including attention to donor tying practices and greater attention to local, regional and broader South-South options, where relevant.

⇒ TA QUALITY CONTROL: In addition to making sure that TA personnel have facilitation, training and coaching skills at the time of selection, insist on quality standards and seek to improve upon them over time. Practical suggestions from field experience: insist on a counterpart to work through; don't participate in workshops, meetings etc without a counterpart; don't start new reform processes (unless there is a lot of buy in) but support existing/planned processes – go where the energy is; work with local capacity development service providers rather than bringing in outside orgnisations; link training with changes in systems, procedures, policies; work at multiple levels, individual/organisational, practical/strategic; consider part-time but long-term TA modality (although can be management intensive

⇒ e).EXPERIMENT WITH POOLING: Donor pooling arrangements can be a simple, operational means for country partners to think collaboratively and more strategically about technical co-operation, its use and composition. Technical co-operation pooling arrangements have some obvious efficiency and effectiveness implications, but will be possible only to the extent that donor processes and motivation locally accommodate them.

⇒ RESULTS BASED ACTION: Locally derived and jointly led frameworks for monitoring and evaluating the role and performance of technical co-operation, are key to its use and management. External support for local management of this process can empower country partners to assume full and legitimate responsibility for it, while pragmatically building their own organisational capacities. This includes use of properly structured results frameworks for individual technical co-operation, and measures that increase accountability between technical assistance and local supervisors. More broadly, donor support of learning systems at the local and regional level are potentially one key way to anchor successful capacity reforms in the local landscape.

Section 4: Key Messages for Busan and Beyond

4.1. Busan

Box 8. Key messages in technical co-operation

⇒ ***Organized, South-North collective action on technical co-operation for capacity development is possible now***: There is a willingness to carry forward the current reforms of donor supported technical co-operation. Its vision must be clear and better integrated with the broader issues of capacity development than that of technical co-operation alone.

⇒ ***Donors play a critical supporting role***: Technical co-operation approaches can change substantively when donor policies and resources can be brought to bear on these issues. Much can be said about the need for the political will for change at the level of partner countries and this applies to the donor community, as well. Donors need to assess their own internal capacity to change if they hope to be effective in supporting the direction of this reform.

⇒ ***Future directions in aid-supported technical co-operation must be guided by the actual experience of partner countries***. Effective action is highly context specific and for impact and sustainability must be guided by local stakeholders. Organized Southern leadership is emerging, including in Africa. Partner countries can help rationalize technical co-operation by setting out clear national policies and joint management arrangements.

⇒ ***Joint learning to joint doing***: Considerable room still exists for better joined up learning about more effective use of technical co-operation. This should continue to be organized and could make better use of global or regional networks. Post Busan, partners also have an opportunity to more pragmatically implement, monitor and adjust their common efforts to promote more effective technical co-operation in countries directly concerned.

4.2. Thinking about increasingly operational challenges post Busan

A longer term determination to change

With reference to the characterisation contained in Box 2, if partners seek to evolve from a second to a third generation model of technical co-operation, it will require a deliberately structured effort. It implies an evolution away from narrowly interpreted managerial, technical and task oriented systems of thinking and doing, to one that proactively anticipates the complexity and risk reflected in the realities of country level action to shape a relationship that is built on greater mutual accountability and constructive collaboration. This will require that donors improve the overall framework for aid, rather than tinker with procedures. Similarly, partner countries can no longer absorb aid without translating it into improved service delivery.

Southern leadership

By definition, partner countries with weak capacities will find it more difficult to shape and invest scarce resources in the management of technical co-operation at the local level. Nevertheless, where political will is present, several countries already have shown that it is possible. Because of their significant resources and experience, donors play a critical role in supporting this leadership. Not only do donors need to ask if they really are willing to give up the "driver's seat", partner countries must ask if they are ready to take the wheel.

Greater involvement of non-state actors

Especially when looking at technical co-operation with a capacity development lens, the current aid focus on functions, institutions and skills in the public sector cannot be a long term solution. It is imperative that partner countries and donors shift greater attention over time to the appropriate empowerment of key non-state actors, especially civil society and the private sector, who already are recognized as the predominate developers of most forms of capacity in the formal and informal sectors of today's partner countries. Future approaches to aid and development effectiveness need to identify the approaches, institutions and individuals who can best drive these agendas from the partner country perspective.

Capacity as the "exit strategy" for technical co-operation

Aid professionals have long contemplated "capacity" as the ultimate objective of development co-operation and aid agencies routinely use technical co-operation as a primary instrument to address this objective. At any level of partnership, more routine joint examination of impact and sustainability over time and their logical end point would be a simple way to ensure that technical co-operation (experts, training, educational grants) are regularly framed with a similar sense of urgency and focus.

ANNEX 1: Selected aid approaches to capacity development

Aid agencies

Australia: Technical cooperation represents almost one-half of all aid. Its' approach to technical assistance has been reformed over the last five years in support of local ownership and co-ordinated at the sector level. AusAid is one of the few aid agencies to institutionalize its" capacity function, with full time staff to HQ and the field, and with written staff guidance, specialized training and results monitoring and evaluation.

Denmark: DANIDA, especially its Technical Advisory Services group, has had a longstanding interest in technical co-operation and capacity development. It currently is revising its capacity development approach to enhance effectiveness. At the level of technical assistance, it is focusing on ensuring demand for TA and that TA concentrates on advisory as opposed to implementation activities. DANIDA emphasizes the pooling of resources with other partners.

European Union: The implementation of technical co-operation reform forms the centerpiece of capacity development in all EuropeAid activities. Following its *Backbone Strategy*, it produced *Guidelines on Making Technical Co-operation More Effective* in 2009. Significant is the 2009 Council political commitment by member states to a more common European approach, including greater local ownership, avoidance of "Project Implementation Units", special consideration in fragile situations and organized monitoring. The Commission set up in 2009 www.capacity4dev.eu to facilitate exchange of lessons and good practice.

France: AFD is the lead agency in reforming technical co-operation. Its 2007 Governance Strategy accords a central role to institutional and human capacity building, particularly in terms of targeting agents and structures of change. Technical assistance, training and educational grants long have been an important part of French aid . The new approach aims to build up and support local expertise as a priority and seeks to better encourage local ownership and alignment.

Germany: The *Guidelines for Financial and Technical* Cooperation define technical co-operation and capacity development as a key function and core service line for GTZ, DED and InWEnt – and were recently revised to include commitments to aid effectiveness. Policies in GTZ, CIM and InWEnt support greater use of local personnel and diaspora, as well as South-South co-operation and experience sharing. GTZ produced major new capacity guidelines in 2010 *CapacityWORKS.*

Japan: JICA notes that its technical co-operation focuses on individual skills and knowledge transfer with a goal of targeting government institutions and improving their ability to provide public service in key sectors. In 2008 it co-financed a major *Joint Study on Effective Technical Cooperation for Capacity Development* , with recommendations for flexible and locally led approaches. Japan actively supports South-South co-operation.

Netherlands: In 2002, the Ministry for Development Co-operation sought to discontinue the provision of Dutch technical assistance, which was viewed as too supply driven. That policy continues to evolve and currently supports demand driven aid practices, including TA. It now is rethinking its technical cooperation approach and modalities, especially in the context of its work at the sector level.

United Kingdom: The DFID *How to Note On Providing Technical Cooperation Personnel* explains its support for TC in the form of personnel, training, knowledge and research. It views TC as one input in the long term process of capacity development. DFID supports technical co-operation that is harmonized with other donors, demand-driven, country led and easy for partner countries to access, preferably through a market for advisory services that offers choice to the partner country.

Asian Development Bank: The Asian Community of Practice for MfDR, managed by partner countries with logistical and financial support from the ADB, is seen as an example of South-South and triangular co-operation. Examples occurred between Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam around a joint approach to mutual accountability. It also supports regional and sub-regional co-operation through the Greater Mekong Sub-region, the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation and in sub-regional grouping in South Asia.

UNDP: UNDP is revising its approach to technical cooperation to enhance its impact on capacity development and has outlined a new paradigm for technical co-operation that supports a nationally-owned and country driven capacity development process. It also supports South-South co-operation, especially through a special administrative unit on this topic.

World Bank: In 2005, the World Bank Task Force on Capacity Development in Africa recognized the need to move towards pooling donor funds and technical assistance, and to rethink the use of technical co-operation overall. The Africa Region Knowledge and Learning Centre promotes S-S learning exchanges. Bank evaluations suggest that technical co-operation needs review and re-direction so as to contribute effectively to capacity development.

Partner countries

Afghanistan: Submerged in a $3 billion supply of gap-filling technical assistance, while recognising in its national plan that capacity development as a cross cutting issue and that the improvement of public sector capacity in particular are the key challenges to national development. It has put in place several activities to manage better its technical assistance more in line with national priorities: The *Civilian Technical Assistance Plan* seeks to provide targeted, government led provision for TA that is aligned with national priorities for capacity development. The *Management Capacity Programme* supports the interim buy-in of critical management capacity for line ministries to deal with donor provided technical advisory assistance. The National Institution Building Project supports long term and integrated approaches to the capacity needs of ministries and agencies at the central and sub-national level. As a matter of policy, wherever possible TA is placed tactically in the context of Afghan strategies, such as in civil service reform. Afghanistan has considerable experience in use of its diaspora.

Liberia: Following its 1989- 2003 civil war, Liberia's *National Capacity Development Strategy* and *Action Plan* attempts to address the country's "severe capacity crisis" at the individual level (low learning outcomes, poor skills profiles, brain-drain), institutional level (erosion of public systems; loss of competence, authority and effectiveness of public institutions, weak non-state institutions) and societal level (depressed economy, low productive capacity, widespread poverty and disempowerment). In support of Plan implementation, a National Capacity Development Unit has been established within the Ministry of Planning and Economic. The Unit focuses on national leadership of all forms of capacity development, including technical assistance. This includes the use of skilled expatriate nationals.

Cambodia: Cambodia's guidelines in the 2008 *Provision and Management of Technical Cooperation* lay out national expectations in this area. It includes technical cooperation as an input to capacity development, outlines institutional and operational arrangements, including at the sector level, under national leadership. It also links approaches to latest aid effectiveness commitments and sets up a system for resource allocation and implementation follow up. It underscores the importance of mutual cooperation, collaborative innovation and joint learning.

NEPAD: As the operational agency of the African Union, NEPAD is now attempting to implement the Union's 2010 Capacity Development Strategic Framework (CDSF). While not specific to technical co-operation, the CDSF provides the elements of an important continent-wide vision of how technical co-operation should be provided: focus on use of local vision, skills, management processes, whether at the local, national, regional or even continental level. NEPAD also supports peer based technical co-operation among African states wherever possible. As a policy level networking agency, NEPAD has the potential to promote efficient use of technical co-operation (and aid generally) across the continent.

Rwanda: The Rwanda Public Sector Capacity Building Secretariat (PSCBS) aims "to enhance capacity of public institutions to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, accountability, and transparency in service delivery". PSCBS is the broad institutional answer (Secretariat, Fund, Steering Committee, staff) to all aspects of national capacity building, including technical co-operation.

South Africa: Since 2006, the National Treasury has undertaken studies on the promotion of more effective aid, including capacity development issues which relate to technical co-operation. Seven principles were identified (clarity of roles/relationships; link to delivery; comprehensive planning; learning; use systems perspective; accountability; deliberate focus on method). These elements have influenced its' own aid programme to Africa.

Tanzania: Tanzania and local development partners formulated in 2009 a National Technical Assistance Policy (NTAP) which focuses on the use of technical assistance in support of capacity development, through local jointly managed approaches and emphasis on the use of local personnel. Still in its earliest stages, NTAP is seen as a starting point for joint local learning on good practice in the use of TA. NTAP notes that traditional "gap filling" rather than proactive capacity development in a longer term sense has tended to be the rule in Tanzania to date.

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