

Approaches and Methods for National Capacity Building *(Report of a Workshop, September 1998)*

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Introduction: A Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa

In 1996, the African Governors to the World Bank presented a report to the President of the World Bank impressing the importance of human and institutional capacity building to the future of Africa. The report calls on both African nations and their development partners to take up this challenge and requests the World Bank to mobilise international assistance.

The initiative set in motion the conduct of national capacity assessments in a number of African countries. Other countries are now planning to do the same. Some countries have also prepared national capacity building strategies. National secretariats or focal points entrusted to coordinate national capacity building activities have been established in a number of countries.

More widely, the need for capacity is recognised by governmental and non-governmental organisations and donors. Traditionally, interventions have focused on classic capacity building areas such as individual and organisational strengthening, and project preparation and implementation. Efforts have also tended to focus on certain sectors or certain agenda's such as poverty alleviation, AIDS, environmental concern, and decentralisation. Bilateral donors are especially engaged in these types of activities.

Now, one faces the challenge to go beyond these levels, to adopt more holistic and integrated approaches. Both the scale - nation-wide - and the complexity - multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral - of national capacity building calls for an integrated approach and sustained coordination. Conceptual and methodological clarity are important inputs to achieve this.

In early 1998 therefore, the ECDPM, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the World Bank organised a workshop on approaches and methods for national capacity building.

The meeting brought together African representatives and other capacity building experts to exchange ideas and experiences on concepts and practices of national capacity and capacity building. Organised around a number of thematic modules, workshop participants discussed how to give operational meaning to these concepts, and identified some guiding principles for conducting national capacity assessments, preparing national capacity building strategies and designing associated monitoring and evaluation systems. In a final session, questions relating to the overall status of the Governors' initiative were discussed. This report provides a synthesis of presentations made, issues arising and conclusions reached.

Purpose of the Workshop

As a practice-oriented event organised around an exchange of ideas and experiences among participants, the meeting sought to:

- ?? give operational meaning to concepts of capacity and capacity building;
- ?? develop and further refine methods for national capacity assessments;
- ?? consider frameworks for formulating national capacity-building strategies and associated monitoring and evaluation systems;
- ?? identify necessary follow-up actions such as training and information dissemination.

As will be clear from reading this report, the workshop did not fully realise these objectives. Rather than developing a set of tools and methods to approach national capacity building, workshop participants instead identified a series of emerging principles related to the various themes discussed. These are presented at the end of each of the main sections of this report.

The Participants

The workshop brought together the expertise and experience of both African countries and external experts working in this area of capacity building. African participants from both governmental and non-governmental sectors attended from Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon, Ghana, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Malawi, Madagascar, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. In addition to the organising agencies - ECDPM, World Bank and the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (NEDA) - were representatives of the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), the Development Assistance Committee Secretariat of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, (OECD/DAC), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), and the Portuguese Institute of Public Administration (INA).

While the workshop primarily addressed the concerns of those persons most closely associated with the Governors' initiative at the country level, it was also expected that the conclusions could be of wider interest to consultants, researchers and administrators both in donor and African countries engaged in capacity-building work.

National Capacity Building in Context

A first session on "context setting" provided the opportunity for participants to introduce themselves and their country programmes, and in so doing to provide the context against which the technical discussion of the workshop could be addressed. It provided an opportunity to reflect on the different standpoints from which countries and external agencies are approaching national capacity building, and to address the question; "capacity building for what?"

Presentations

Each of the 12 African countries gave a short presentation setting the context of national capacity building, and indicating the main activities so far carried out. The presentations emphasised the importance of addressing context and particularly the diversity in situations and expectations in respective countries when developing programmes for national capacity building. Some of the key issues emerging from these presentations follow.

Initial stage or contributing to on-going efforts

In some cases a change of mind-set, both within society more generally as well as in government, was considered necessary before national programmes could develop. Other countries already had on-going initiatives, some of which had begun long ago. In Chad for example the assessment served to collect data but also to raise awareness on the need for capacity building. Other countries such as Uganda, Côte d'Ivoire and Zimbabwe had already started (national) capacity development in the 1980s or early 1990s. Here the assessment coincided with on-going efforts or policies like Malawi's 2020 vision or the 2025 vision of Tanzania.

National or sectoral plans

Whereas some countries indicated that national capacity building efforts could be accommodated by integrating them into existing national level activities, as in the Côte d'Ivoire, others emphasised the need for designing programmes at the sector level to make implementation possible. Uganda, for example, noted that visions and aims have been formulated at national level. However, implementation strategies needed to focus on lower levels.

Capacity building or utilisation

Different situations in the countries represented meant that views differed as to whether emphasis should lie on capacity building or utilisation. In general it was agreed that enabling existing capacities should be the priority. Côte d'Ivoire described the efforts to devise a strategy built upon existing capacities. Some countries, however, did stress the need for building capacities. Examples include Gabon where capacity is needed to exploit its rich natural resources and contribute to national economic growth, and Chad which is emerging from a war situation and needs human resources and strong institutions to develop its future oil economy.

Socio-political factors

From national experiences, several institutional factors emerged that are relevant for the design of capacity development strategies. In particular, the relations and division of responsibilities between the state, non-state actors and private sector determine their roles and their responsibilities. Madagascar described the difficulties in convincing stakeholders on the need for changing role divisions. In Malawi the assessment looked at these different roles and a national workshop was organised to discuss a national capacity business plan. Thus discussion of capacity building must relate to processes of institutional reform as in privatisation, decentralisation and civil service reform. Guinea-Bissau indicated

the need for special attention to manage such processes. It was suggested that political and governance constraints could be the focus of capacity building efforts but it was also indicated that these need to be overcome before any improvements in capacity can be expected. It was emphasised that conflicting views among national governments, opposition parties and donors need resolving.

Multi-donor approaches

Finally, in this overview of country experiences, national governments are faced with numerous donor initiatives concerning national capacity programmes and the consequent challenge to integrate these in existing efforts. In some cases, the different donor proposals could be accommodated into national programmes. In Chad the follow-up to the assessment was done as part of an UNDP programme. In Côte d'Ivoire the assessment was one of several studies done. The data were integrated into on-going work. Gambia has experience with an economic capacity building programme supported by UNDP and now intends to implement the World Bank

Governors' assessment in the near future.

Representatives from NEDA, the World Bank, UNDP and UN/DESA briefly commented on the country presentations. Underlining the inherent challenges involved in developing sustainable capacities, it was noted that most countries in the South and the North were facing a period of institutional adjustment which promised to be as challenging as the economic adjustment of the 1980s and early 1990s. Good governance, democratisation, public sector reform, privatisation, the strengthening of civil society and the search for sustainable development have implications for national capacity development. The challenge for the workshop was to exchange ideas and experiences with capacity and capacity development, especially the national assessments and strategies. While it was recognised that formulas and packaged prescriptions were not available or even advisable, a menu of options or a greater range of best practices could emerge. The inherent challenges involved in developing sustainable capacities were also noted - the time frame that was usually required, the need for changes to attitudes and mind sets at the country level and the reforms that donors and financial institutions would have to put in place in their own organisations. The World Bank outlined the present status of the Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa initiative. The programme was approaching a decision point with the submission by the African Governors (of the Bank) of a business plan and a request for further funding. In the countries themselves, a number of countries had established national secretariats and had begun implementation. Within the Bank, the Capacity Building Technical Group (CBTG) within the Africa Region was endeavouring to promote the main ideas associated with capacity development among country managers, in a variety of activities including policy dialogue, country assistance strategies and projects. Meanwhile, NEDA noted that capacity development has in fact been on the development cooperation agenda since the early 1980s. The renewed attention given now, however, only re-addresses the principal aim of development cooperation: To assist countries to manage their own affairs. Since being brought to the forefront, there has been an evolution of thinking. In the early 1980s, interest was raised by experiences with structural adjustment programmes and related civil service reforms. It became clear that many countries lacked the capacity to implement these complex reforms. The call for improved incentive structures, measures to stop brain drain and to retain senior staff emerged. Evaluations of aid

effectiveness further indicated institutional constraints and the negative role that aid could play; technical assistance often eroded existing capacity. Capacity development is today increasingly seen as an all encompassing concept. It should be an integral part of development activities.

Setting Capacity Building in Context - Some Emerging Principles

A summary of the discussion on the country presentations can be visualised as an informal set of principles that may be considered in thinking about capacity issues. These are: As was made clear in the country presentations, the context of capacity development - what was called the presence (or absence) of a conducive environment - was a crucial element in shaping eventual outcomes. Political support was crucial especially when institutional change met with resistance and hostility. The impact of history and heritage shape options as do the degree of trust and collaboration in a society. The nature and timing of capacity development interventions needs to be designed on more than narrow technical grounds. Although many countries were struggling with the same broad issues, the specific capacity development strategies had to be customised to fit in with the particular national, regional and institutional contexts. There was a limit to which generic analytical frameworks for capacity assessments could be helpful. The time frame for the development of capacities in sectors such as education and health needs careful consideration. In some instances, progress can be made quickly. But, more often, this complex process of social learning and political consensus-building could take generations as it in fact has done in most countries in the North. The design of capacity programmes needs to take this into account.

The idea of capacity utilisation as opposed to capacity development needs to be brought to the forefront of programme design and management. In many cases, countries have pools of human resources that are under-utilised. Brain drains, poor management, lack of incentives and encouragement and the absence of a professional working environment are only some of the reasons. Countries and donors need to encourage and facilitate existing capacities, albeit in an un-mobilised form.

There needs to be a better understanding of how incentives and rewards acting on both country and outside participants frequently work against the development of capacity despite intentions to the contrary. In some cases, the design and management of capacity programmes were biased against national expertise and ownership, simplicity, experimentation and learning, the demand (as opposed to the supply) side, legitimate risk and other factors generally held to be supportive of effective capacity development.

The need for a broader perspective that went beyond the technical and the financial. Most of the more difficult constraints to capacity development are political, cultural and even psychological. Donors and funding agencies need to take these more into account even if they can do little about them. Communication, persuasion, education, participation, consensus building (and maintenance), a more transparent supply of reliable information and greater efforts at inclusion are important to create popular support and legitimacy for capacity development programmes. Efforts had to be made to bring in organisations, groups and individuals such as those in the private sector and civil society. The process of capacity development was thus a part of a larger effort, a means to an end which relied upon broader approaches to democratisation and good governance. Donors and financing institutions would also have to increase their ability to deal with a wide range of groups beyond officials in the top levels of government.

The choices that shaped capacity development strategies were not obvious given the complex institutional changes involved. What type of leadership and from whom worked best in different cases? What intervention point should be selected and why? What specific steps could be taken to help foster the sustainability of new or improved capacity? What indicators of success could be used to improve monitoring and evaluation? Are national capacity 'strategies' feasible or even advisable? Where should a secretariat be placed and with what mandate? How can such a secretariat be in government but not necessarily of government?

Capacity development strategies need to focus on grasping opportunities as much as on solving of problems. The latter approach tries to make unsatisfactory situations disappear. The former, in contrast, tries to create something new and positive. A "positive" search for opportunities offers a greater chance to enlist support and commitment. Capacity development is a complex process of human and institutional change. As such, it usually involves more than the conventional training and technical assistance that long dominated international efforts at capacity development. In some cases, a shortage of resources is not the problem. Attitudinal change and the creation of a developmental mind set is key. It can be helpful to identify the core functions for which capacity is required – for example, service delivery, planning, financial management – in order to provide the focus for an intervention. This is the 'capacity for what' issue.

Concepts of Capacity and Capacity Building

The purpose of this module was to exchange ideas on the operational meaning of capacity and capacity building. Of particular interest was the notion of national capacity and capacity building. It is often difficult to implement these concepts in practical terms because they mean different things to different people. Both the scale – nation-wide – and the complexity – multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral – suggests a particular need to achieve some level of conceptual clarity as a basis for offering guidance to those responsible for national level activities. Part of the challenge in making capacity operational is to provide a useful definition upon which discussions, plans, monitoring and evaluation can be based. This can also help to facilitate communication between different countries, agencies and persons involved in capacity building work.

Presentations

Conceptual models and operational definitions developed by the World Bank and UNDP were presented. At the outset, the Bank introduced a definition that had emerged out of a number of the national assessments:

The proven ability of key actors in a society, mainly that of individuals, groups and institutions, to achieve socio-economic goals on their own

Presentations were also given by representatives from Chad, Gambia and Tanzania reviewing the ways in which concepts of capacity (using approximations of the donors' definitions) had been used in conducting national capacity assessments in their respective countries. These were quite similar to one another, placing emphasis on the ability of individuals, organisations and systems to set and implement

development objectives in a sustainable way. It was, however, recognised that such holistic and all-encompassing definitions provide little operational guidance, tend to be simplistic and brush over complex realities. It was suggested that donor definitions also tend to be restrictive and need to be adapted to local country realities.

For the country presenters, the pre-requisites underlying capacity development had become clearer during the conduct of national capacity assessments. More professionalism, institutional autonomy and managerial effectiveness were identified as needed. Those engaged in capacity development seemed to benefit from a vision of the end result in terms of capacity. Incentives, education and retraining, better governance and accountability and infrastructure were needed.

Some analytical frameworks

The World Bank introduced a simple framework for thinking about the purpose and design of outside interventions in support of capacity development. Donors could implicitly or explicitly adopt a set of behaviours that ranged from highly intrusive to gently supportive.

In the matrix, these behaviours were listed in order of declining intrusiveness and donor control as ...`do against', 'do to', 'do for', 'do with', 'help do', 'let do'. The specific operational nature of the intervention was likely to have differing consequences for the design of technical assistance and the outcomes in terms of capacity development. The UNDP summarised its approach to capacity assessment which it had been developing over the past two years. UNDP had now issued a document summarising this approach. It is available from MDGD and appears on its Web Site. This approach relied on the following principles or concepts:

The idea of strategic management borrowed from the corporate sector. The individual, the entity (e.g. group or organisation) and the environment are key parts of the framework; A systems approach to capacity development including an emphasis on managing interrelationships amongst groups, individuals and organisations; The incorporation of 'levels' of capacity at the national, regional or community; An emphasis of learning, experimentation and adaptation; The need for participation, inclusion, accountability and transparency; A reliance on the programme approach and national execution; Attention to measurable results.

The UNDP approach takes these concepts and integrates them around four major questions: Where are we now? Where do we want to be ? How to get there? How to stay there?

Towards Conceptual Clarity and Operational Meaning

Setting the limits

Participants attempted to assess the core dimensions or elements of capacity and capacity building which could help in providing conceptual clarity and operational meaning. It was agreed there must be some limits to definitions of capacity and capacity development lest they end up as definitions of

development itself. There must be some boundaries that indicate its essential nature: what it is and what it is not. The following considerations can help in setting those limits:

Clarifying concepts

Capacity is more of an outcome or a condition to be achieved, whereas capacity building or development is the process by which capacities are acquired.

Deciding on what constitutes capacity Capacity can be said to depend on the presence of:

- ?? Viable institutions,
- ?? Leadership and vision,
- ?? Financial and material resources,
- ?? Skilled human resources,
- ?? Effective work practices, including systems, procedures and appropriate incentives

Capacity for Whom and to do What?

There are different levels or scales (e.g. national, sectoral, community) at which capacity can be addressed One can also make a distinction between the capacities of different stakeholder groups; the public sector, private sector and civil society. Hence the question; ‘capacity for whom’ ?. Capacity has to be linked to function and performance. This is the capacity ‘to do what’ issue. Capacity (as an outcome) cannot be said to exist in the absence of any visible or verifiable evidence of a positive change in performance of some function or activity. This assumption had implications for monitoring and evaluation. Clarifying the mandate, roles and responsibilities of the entity(ies) in question can help address this question. To examine National capacity it is necessary to review relevant capacities at the individual, organisational and sectoral levels. Interactions between these levels need to be identified.

Taking account of the context: symptoms and their causes

Any useful approach to capacity development has to take into account the political, social, cultural, technical and financial aspects of the issue. This was especially important for being able to separate the causes and the symptoms of a lack of capacity. An "enabling" environment which provides appropriate incentives is essential for mobilising and utilising capacities. This notion can be applied at all levels (individual, organisations, country). The enabling environment can include many things – some more concrete than others. Many participants referred to governance issues in general, others to specific policies or laws, or resource endowments, others referred to questions of behavioural norms and attitude, and to the impact of donor interventions (see box). These factors can both promote effective capacity "utilisation", or result in "capacity erosion" at worst.

Contextual factors take on different degrees of importance depending on the country context, and the areas of capacity being addressed. On the whole, capacity is likely to be influenced by a combination of different but interrelated factors which may result in capacity being sufficient or insufficient, or under-utilised.

Being clear on causes and symptoms provides a basis on which to determine an appropriate response (skills enhancement, addressing incentives, reforming the public service, changing attitudes, adapting donor practices, providing hardware – material and physical infrastructure etc, etc).

Conclusion

Most of the discussion focused on the need to make the terms operational. There are a number of holistic definitions which give a general sense of what is meant by capacity. However the group agreed that there seemed little value added in searching for an optimal definition. To give operational meaning to these definitions, account needs to be taken of the local context. The considerations identified by the group and which have been listed here can help "un-bundle" the complexities of the concept, and in so doing, provide the basis on which capacity assessments can be conducted. They also suggest a convergence of thinking among the group on these conceptual issues.

Approaches to National Capacity Assessment and Capacity Building Strategies

The conduct of national capacity assessments is a critical phase in launching national capacity building programmes. Assessments provide the information upon which strategic decisions can be made. In so doing, the assessment provides the bridge between the conceptual framework and operational reality. What should be the scope of a national capacity assessment, how in-depth should the analysis of cause and effect be, and who should be involved in the process? Methodological clarity can help to frame complex diagnostic activities such as these. At the same time, there is need to recognise practical, day to day management and resource constraints which may limit the scope of any proposed assessment exercise. Designers need to keep sight of pragmatism, cost effectiveness and on the need to arrive at actionable conclusions.

The objective of this module was to share experiences on approaches to national capacity assessments (NCA) and national capacity building strategies (NCBS) with a view to highlighting useful lessons for countries yet to conduct NCAs or NCBSs and those currently in the process. As far as possible, an attempt would be made to refine methodologies and approaches.

National Capacity Assessments

Representatives from Gabon, Ghana and Uganda outlined their experiences in conducting NCAs. They focused particularly on the terms of reference, the methodology used for collecting and analysing information/data, stakeholders' involvement, the selection of NCA team members, the sectors covered (private and public sectors and civil society, education, training, etc.) and the criteria/indicators used to assess human and institutional capacity.

Focus

Assessments carried out in the different countries focused on particular areas of importance. In Gabon, seven sectors were assessed including education and training, health and demography, agriculture and stock farming, research and development, infrastructure and communications, private local business development and the public sector. The Ghanaian and Ugandan assessments looked at the roles, functioning and interrelationships of the state, civil society and the private sector. Research, training and education were selected as critical functions. The Uganda assessment did not, however, spend a great deal of time on sectoral analysis.

Methodology

Within the framework of the terms of reference set, different methodologies were applied to collect information. In Gabon, an opinion survey of 1083 people was conducted. These were mainly managers in public, private, civil society and traditional societies. In Ghana, focus group discussions based on sectoral and thematic issues were organised in addition to literature reviews and questionnaires. When assessing individual organisations or development actors, the assessment focused on the following:

- ?? Its ability to exist and operate as an organisation
- ?? Its ability to manage clients and beneficiaries
- ?? The sustainability of its activities
- ?? The relevance of its activities
- ?? Its accountability to funders and beneficiaries
- ?? The match or mismatch between the organisation and its environment

The Uganda analysis employed indicators to assess human and institutional capacity. The ones related to the human aspect were adequacy in number of skills, quality of manpower, effective use of skills. The institutional were effective performance of key institutions, availability of resources and work practices and procedures.

Lessons

A number of lessons had emerged out of the Gabon experience including the need to recruit independent people to conduct the surveys, the need for proper training, the need for a well-supported media campaign to alert the public. A key lesson from the Uganda experience was the need to keep the audience and purpose in mind, and to deliver a plan or a product that could be used by planners and other organisations.

Group discussions

In the subsequent group discussions, additional issues were addressed. Particular emphasis was placed on the need to clarify the purpose of a capacity assessment. Is it in fact an assessment, or rather an inventory, or an evaluation? One group argued that assessments should be treated as self-evaluations which took stock, assessed gaps in capacity and formulated programmes to fill these gaps.

There was general agreement that the process should be linked and driven by national visions and objectives rather than by a narrower conception based on operational problems and constraints. National commitment, ownership, involvement and political will are the driving forces behind successful capacity strategies.

Chad had, for example, used the national capacity assessment process mainly for awareness raising and as a means to begin creating a better national understanding and shared understanding of capacity needs and issues. This type of 'preparatory' approach was not unusual in countries at the early stages of building national capacities. The Côte d'Ivoire, in contrast, used the assessment process to develop inputs and insights that could be used to support broader development plans. In this regard, the conduct of the assessment was integrated into existing and on-going capacity review work. Both countries used the assessment process to rethink development goals, to clarify where they were in capacity terms, to specify intended results and outcomes and to help devise capacity development strategies.

On the question of focus and methodology, effort should be made to make use of existing studies and data. To avoid superficiality, specific areas and functions should be targeted for analysis based on a prioritisation of key sectors.

National Capacity Building Strategies

Côte d'Ivoire, Malawi and Guinea Bissau outlined their approaches to the preparation of strategies looking at history and constraints (emerging democracies, market economies, poverty, AIDS), overall and sectoral objectives and action plans and the work of the National Capacity Building Secretariat in formulating and implementing strategies.

Approach

Few countries had as yet prepared formal national capacity building strategies. Those that had, had done so in different ways reflecting their different country circumstances, and differing priorities. In the Côte d'Ivoire, the strategy is treated as part of a new economic programme designed to address the country's vision (Vision 2025) to become an "African Tiger" in the 21st Century. It is treated as only one of a number of assessments and strategies that are being fed into national development decisions. In Malawi, national capacity building arises in the context of political, economic and social reforms linked to its vision for the year 2020.

Progress

The NCA for the Côte d'Ivoire was completed in 1997. A National Capacity Secretariat has been established to function as a small facilitating unit with no major delivery responsibilities. A submission outlining the capacity development strategy and the role of the Secretariat had recently been submitted to the Government.

In Malawi, a strategy, in the form of a business plan, has been prepared to guide formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of capacity building plans and programmes. The plan itself contains goals and strategic objectives for enhancing education, training and learning, transforming the public sector, strengthening the private sector, giving voice to civil society and promoting capacity building through sectoral programmes. The decision to finalise the form, location and status of the capacity secretariat remains to be made and is the subject of debate both inside and outside Government. With World Bank support, the Government in Guinea Bissau has recently approved a business plan and the establishment of a national secretariat with three staff.

Group discussions

Some issues which emerged from the country presentations were further discussed in the working groups. It was emphasised that the conduct of capacity assessments and the subsequent development of a capacity building strategy should be treated as a continuous process. Whilst assessments were best suited to answer the 'what' questions - in UNDP terms, the 'where are we' and 'where are we going' questions, strategies dealt with how issues - the 'how will we get there' and 'how will we stay there' questions. Strategies needed to include action plans. They had to be supported by some causal analysis which separated cause and effect, problem and symptom. They had to take into account the many other initiatives of the government and other groups that would impact on capacity development outcomes. Strategies also had to be formulated in a participatory way in an effort to improve the quality and the subsequent implementation of any plans. In this regard special attention needed to be paid to getting groups and organisations working at the sectoral level to 'buy in' to the national strategies.

This is why the process needs to be guided to some degree by stakeholder expectations. Careful facilitation of the process as well as analysis of data was required to minimise potential conflict over decisions taken over resource allocation and the setting of priorities.

The groups noted that deciding on the appropriate set-up and location of secretariats had proven difficult for many countries. The general view was that they needed to be small, credible and representative of key stakeholders. Most countries had eventually opted to locate them within the governmental structure to help encourage state officials to collaborate.

Box 1:

Capacity assessments and capacity building strategies: Some questions

The presentations and subsequent plenary discussion raised a number of questions which were taken up in the working group sessions:

What is the connection and interrelationships between national capacity assessment and strategy? Where does one begin and the other end? Are they actually separate processes? What is the relationship between a sectoral strategy, say in health or education, and a capacity development strategy? What separates one from the other? What is the difference between public sector reform and capacity development? Is there duplication? Is the plan intended as one of strategic policy or implementation? How can 'capacity development' be mainstreamed? Does it, in practice, make sense

to have something called a national capacity development strategy? Are we not going back to the national planning strategies of the 1960s that were abandoned in the 1980s?

Did the participants have any experience to date on the sequencing of activities in a capacity development strategy? What was the experience in implementing comprehensive as opposed to more incremental approaches to capacity development strategies?

Emerging Principles on Capacity Assessments and Capacity Building Strategies

Based on the discussion in the workshop and the experience to date of carrying out national capacity assessments, a number of emerging principles were identified which can assist those responsible for designing and preparing national capacity assessments and capacity building strategies.

Shared Vision. Some common understanding of capacity and capacity development - objectives, potential strategies and assessment techniques is necessary if the broader process of assessment is to be effective.

Conceptual clarity has proved useful. But this shared understanding has to be tailored to the particular circumstances of the country.

Consensus Building. Capacity assessments are not simply analytical and technical 'stock taking' exercises that 'fill in the blanks' with respect to capacity resources and institutional abilities. They are also exercises to do with community mobilisation, of social learning and of building a consensus that could support subsequent efforts at implementation. This perspective led, in turn, to greater efforts at citizen and stakeholder participation. Some assessments had used survey techniques that proved useful. And they needed to suggest an actionable programme that gave participants and other interested groups some sense of the way forward.

Broader Context. Participants and funders also need to be aware that the assessment is part of a broader process that continues in some form after the assessment is completed. The assessment was thus not a self-contained exercise but part of a larger stream of events in the country. It could, however, serve to pave the way for some succeeding steps.

Many Actors. The better capacity assessments had relevance for government but were not completely of government. They sought a balance between generating government commitment but avoided government capture. If the latter happened, other non-state participants and stakeholders in the private sector and civil society would quickly lose interest and involvement and the broader value of the capacity assessment would be lost.

Enabling Environment. As discussed earlier, the better assessments seemed to draw strength from a supportive political environment that provided resources, political protection, more transparency and openness and the prospect of subsequent attention and action. Assessments that were captured and politicised had little chance of inducing useful results.

Different Approaches. Most assessments faced a dilemma to find a balance between ‘bottom up’ or top down’. Should, for example, an assessment focus on national issues first and then move ‘down’ to sectors’ or should it be the other way around? Part of the answer appeared to depend on the particular developmental circumstances of the country and the inclinations of the assessment participants. Some countries avoided this ‘either or’ choice and focused on issues such as education that need to be addressed at a variety of levels simultaneously. Another approach was to treat the national level assessment as a "scoping out" exercise arising from which more in- depth and focussed assessments could follow.

Part of the issue here was also to manage the tension between attempting a comprehensive national analysis which frequently could become abstract and unmanageable versus a more limited focus on particular functions which could frequently overlook broader capacity constraints at the national level.

Transformational or Incremental. Efforts at carrying out assessments and formulating strategies frequently had to contend with approaches that were either transformational or incremental. Again, no formula existed to determine the answer in any particular situation. Some countries at certain times (e.g. Russia in the late 1980s, South Africa in the 1990s) faced situations of massive change. Others faced conditions that allowed only piecemeal changes over longer periods of time.

Scale and Duration. There was a wide range of experience in terms of the amount of resources committed to capacity assessments. Some lasted only six to seven weeks. Others went on for seven months or longer. Each country again had to set a reasonable balance. Too little time and attention and the assessment would lack credibility and sufficient analysis to be credible. But the assessment went on too long, participating groups and outside stakeholders would lose interest in its eventual recommendations.

User Focus. It had proved useful to focus assessments on end uses and actual improvements rather than more general programmes of institutional reform. One way to encourage this kind of purpose was to identify certain critical functions in advance that should receive special attention during the assessment. Participants had to keep beneficiaries in mind when doing capacity assessments (‘capacity for whom’) but also the needs of planners and implementers who must try to make use of the assessment. There should be a clear sense of why an assessment is being carried out. Recommendations had to be realistic, affordable, specific and actionable.

Demand Orientation. Assessments had to resist the tendency to be ‘supply’ driven rather than ‘demand’ driven. As such, they tended to concentrate on institutional strategies, reforms and constraints as opposed to public needs and demands.

Donor Practices. Finally, assessments should not be limited to partner countries. Donors and financial institutions would have to put in place reforms in their own organisations to enable them to support capacity initiatives. The DAC of OECD had devised a check list to assist donors in this kind of work.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Capacity Building Activities

Since most experience with the monitoring and evaluation of capacity building processes is relatively recent, methods and instruments are not readily available. The scale and complexity of national capacity building makes the development of these all the more challenging. Whereas a lot has been written about evaluation methodologies in general, comparatively little has been written on how to monitor and evaluate capacity and capacity building processes.

In view of this, the purpose of the module was to reflect on different dimensions of this complex subject, to review different approaches that had been experimented with, and from the experience of participants, to identify key considerations to take account of in monitoring and evaluating national capacity building activities.

Presentations

Peter Morgan introduced the module by presenting a typology of the main uses of performance measurement. Different uses or purposes lead to the design of different kinds of monitoring and evaluation systems. These include:

- ?? supporting project/programme management to set objectives and monitor progress;
- ?? supporting the capacity development process itself – by involving local actors in looking at ways to improve organisational performance;
- ?? supporting donors' own accounting and reporting and project preparation requirements.

The first two of these are most relevant to the process of local capacity development, and should provide the basis for designing a monitoring and evaluation system, including indicators. The reporting needs of external agencies should build on these processes, rather than take over. Otherwise, there is a risk that the system and related indicators introduced are not relevant to local stakeholder needs, and may in so doing discourage local level ownership and commitment. There is also need to guard against the tendency for such systems to become mechanical and procedural. Representatives of Zambia and Zimbabwe outlined their experiences and the challenges that are faced in designing and managing a monitoring and evaluation system appropriate for capacity and capacity development. Zambia had conducted an assessment but approval of its recommendations and translation into a strategy were still pending. Capacity building was understood to encompass improvements in human resources (people), and institutions (organisations in the state, private sector and civil society), and to the processes/practices that facilitate the interaction between institutions and human resources. Recognising that capacity building was not a project or a programme in the conventional sense and hence did not lend itself to the use of traditional indicators, the following considerations need to be taken account of:

Monitoring should be seen as a surveillance system that can help participants to learn about the effects of the work as it progresses. Much of capacity building is experimental and needs to be monitored as such.

More emphasis needs to be given to the process aspects that lie at the heart of capacity development. Evaluations should be conducted in a more participatory way to encourage the local ownership of the results of the evaluation. The beneficiaries of a capacity development programme were in a key position to make key judgements as to its effectiveness. Too often, evaluations were written for technical specialists at the expense of making the findings available for a more popular audience.

It was important to be clear about the ultimate end user and purpose of evaluations. While the donors, funding agencies and governments obviously had important interest and accountabilities to meet, the ultimate users were the participants and beneficiaries whose capacities were being developed.

Greater efforts needed to be made to train African evaluators to carry out more of the monitoring and evaluation functions associated with capacity issues. The externally-driven nature of much of the monitoring and evaluation efforts had lessened its value.

In the past Zimbabwe had encountered a number of issues in its efforts to measure capacity and performance particularly in the public sector. It recognised the need to take account of experiences in these areas in designing an appropriate monitoring and evaluation system to support the national capacity building programme.

It is relatively easy to measure the 'stock of resources' such as number of schools of skilled people. But this amounts to an output and says little about the actual use or performance of these resources. In many cases, these kinds of output measures are not dis-aggregated and hence lose relevance for particular groups with more specialised interests and mandates. In 1991, for example, Zimbabwe conducted a manpower survey to provide better indications of the resources of particular kinds of skills. In many countries, both the objectives and the people changed rapidly. It was difficult to get sustained and reliable measures in such a turbulent environment.

For indicators to be useful for decision making, they had to produce certain information in a certain format and at a certain time. Unless the measurement system could meet these standards, it was not likely to be sustainable. Nor would it engender much support if it existed mainly to feed donor requirements for more information. Monitoring in the absence of political will and local commitment had little effect on project performance. The designation of the monitor was an important decision.

ECDPM and ACBF also summarised some of their recent experiences in developing capacity-related indicators in different situations. ECDPM noted that the need for a change in paradigms is increasingly recognised if real progress in capacity development is to be achieved.

In the case of Uganda, project participants had done a matrix outlining the differing approaches of different donors and funding agencies towards projects designed to build capacity at the district level. The exercise called for three reforms in current paradigms of project design:

- ?? realistic and manageable financial reporting systems;
- ?? joint definition of 'process indicators' for intangible results ;
- ?? bottom-up monitoring and evaluation systems and processes.

Lessons from the field are also starting to make clear that much greater effort needs to be made to tap local knowledge and expertise. Projects have to be designed to create or reinforce local commitment to project learning of which monitoring and evaluation were important components. The African experience in capacity building has to be documented to a much greater degree than is presently done.

In a different context ACBF has been developing tools and frameworks to assist the work of performance measurement, with particular reference to national-level macro-economic policy analysis capacity. A number of key monitoring and evaluation principles which had emerged from this work were highlighted:

Different institutions use different indicators at different times for different purposes;

Indicators need to be linked to a cause and effect analysis to yield useful information. Actions to ameliorate the causes of problems