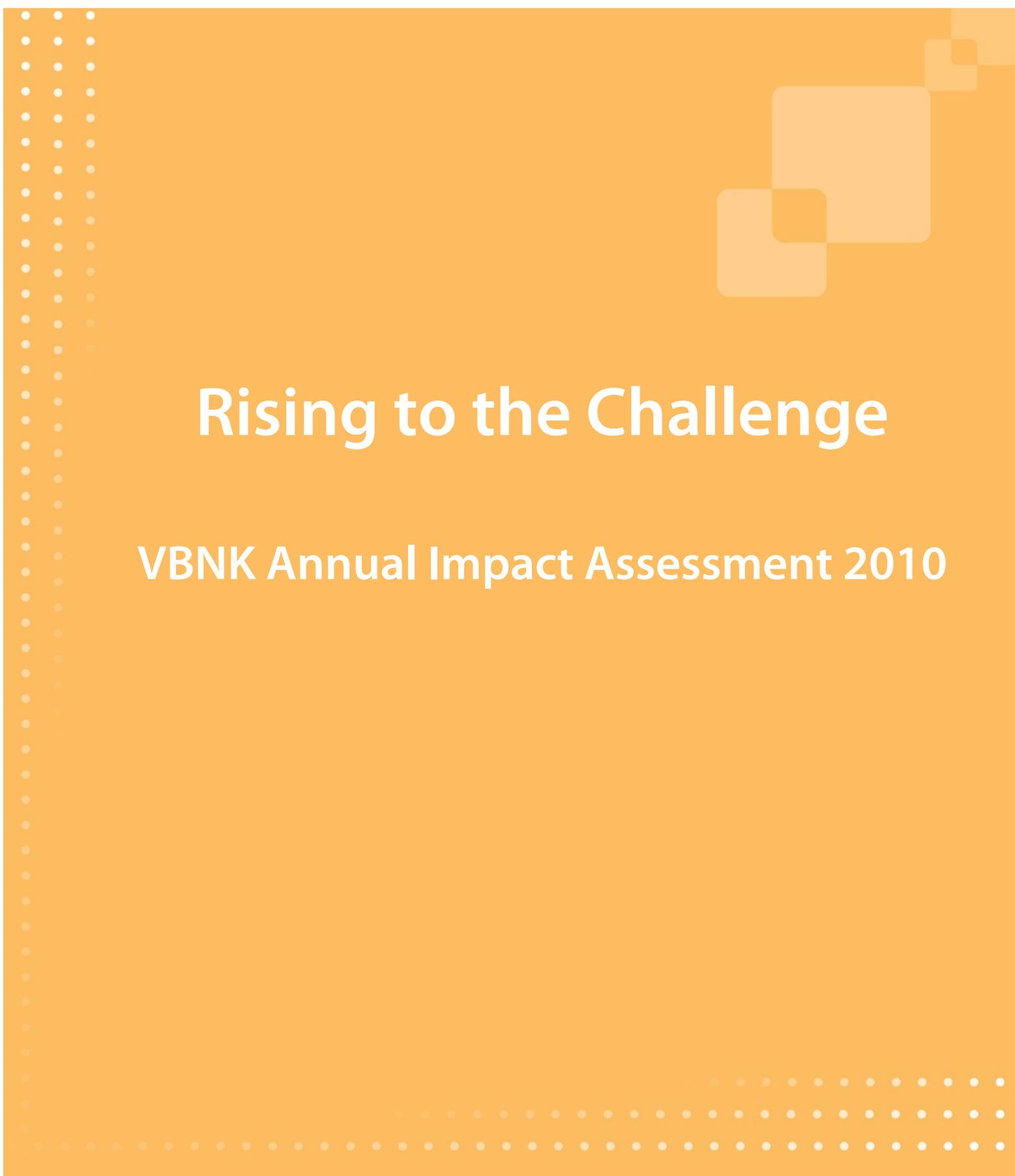


Rising to the Challenge

VBNK Annual Impact Assessment 2010



Preface

Breaking up the fear – allowing myself to feel independent and empowered

My change story is for the period covering the last 6 months. I was assigned to lead on the facilitation of an organisational development project called 'Capacity Development for the Cambodian Midwives Association (CMA) and the Cambodian Midwives Council (CMC)'. Working on the project over the course of six months, I have felt myself becoming more empowered to take on new risks in my career.

Before, I worked mostly as a trainer/facilitator, delivering different training courses. I was familiar with a range of facilitation methods and training content and the use of different training and facilitation tools. But I was caught in a continuous loop of training design and delivery and end-of-course follow up.

When I started working on the CMA/CMC, there was a lot of work that I needed to cover by myself, both technical and managerial. At the beginning, I felt hesitant and not that confident to decide what to do e.g. how to budget time and resources, which work to allocate to different staff. I felt that I had walked into the jungle without knowing the smooth way to go.

Later on, with some support from the Programme Unit Manager as well as from the Technical Advisor I was able to unlock my knowledge to do the work. I dared to confidently make decisions. For example, I had to design a training and organisational needs assessment for CMA/CMC. I've had lots of experience doing training needs assessments for short courses, but was unsure how to link a training assessment to the organisational needs. I tried on my own first and then asked for help and some ideas from the advisor. He showed me how to use a matrix to connect information we needed to put in the report with the capacity building plan in order to achieve the project objectives. He did not do it for me, but let me try by myself. Finally I could produce a training and organisational assessment questionnaire and a report [for the donor]. I did this without being told. There were other examples of getting tasks done for the project.

The support from Programme Manager did not put me as a baby staff. He did not direct me all the time, but more empowered me to take a risk by myself. Over time, I was able to ask for less and less input and dared to make decisions myself. Before, I was afraid of making mistake and of getting complaints from the Manager.

...the combination of support from the advisor and manager along with my existing resources (knowledge and experience so far) allowed me to break up the fear and to feel independent and empowered to do something. I also learned the importance of systems thinking when doing organisational development work, which can give appropriate recommendations that the client can easily apply.

Sim Noreth, VBNK Team Leader (July 2010)

Contents

Preface.....	1
Breaking up the fear – allowing myself to feel independent and empowered.....	1
Introduction.....	3
Our monitoring and evaluation framework.....	6
Approaching Impact Assessment 2010.....	6
The focus areas.....	8
Working in multi-stakeholder partnerships that include the private sector.....	8
Factors that influence the application of learning into the workplace.....	9
Opportunities created through Learning Forums.....	9
VBNK’s performance towards improving quality and effectiveness.....	10
Key finding from the four focus areas.....	11
Managing multi-stakeholder partnerships.....	11
Factors that influence the application of learning into the workplace.....	12
<i>How individuals are applying new learning into their workplace.....</i>	<i>12</i>
<i>How managers and supervisors influence learning and development.....</i>	<i>12</i>
Opportunities created through Learning Forums.....	13
VBNK’s performance towards improving quality and effectiveness.....	14
What does it mean for our work?.....	15
Rising to the challenge.....	18

Note: Detailed descriptions for each focus area in the impact assessment study are included in a separate consolidated Annex.

Rising to the challenge

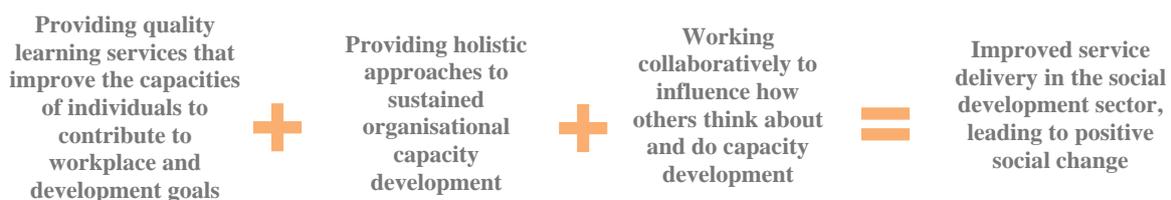
If we continue to approach learning and capacity development in the same way, we will continue to reinvent the same results, which may not lead to change.

Introduction

Early this year, PRAXIS¹ published a paper that looked at how capacity building providers, working with civil society organizations, were evaluating their capacity building efforts. The main findings of the research were that where organisations are clear about what they want to achieve through improved capacity (or capacity building) and where there is a clear understanding of the purpose of monitoring and evaluation, it is not difficult to come up with a sensible blend of tools, methodologies and approaches that can meet the needs of different stakeholders. But if capacity building providers lack an adequate theory of change; if they do not know what results they want to achieve; or if monitoring and evaluation work is burdened by uncertain, conflicting or unrealistic demands, then the whole area is a minefield (Simister and Smith, 2010, p.3).

We were intrigued by the question posed by the PRAXIS paper – Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building: Is it really that difficult? Thus Impact Assessment (IA) 2010 set out to see if we could rise to the challenge. We had already articulated a theory of change for our work (shown below) and committed to strengthening our focus on demonstrating results in the 2010 – 2013 strategic plan.

Our theory of change



Thus, beginning in January 2010, we reviewed our framework towards designing, monitoring and evaluating capacity development. We introduced Blooms taxonomy² and Kirkpatrick's³ four-level evaluation model as minimum standards in our design and

¹ Nigel Simister with Rachel Smith, 2010, *Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building: Is it really that difficult?* Praxis Paper # 23 (January 2010)

² Specifically, we are drawing on Blooms Taxonomy for Cognitive Levels of Thinking (knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation) as a guide for developing focused and measurable objectives in the design of interventions. See, for example, <http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html>

³ Kirkpatrick, D.L. (1994). *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*, San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler

monitoring and evaluation practice. Mid-year, prior to conducting the impact assessment study, we layered in a results chain (elaborated in the next section).⁴

IA 2010 also provided an opportunity to assess how well we are doing in terms of moving forward on the 2010-13 strategic directions,⁵ which include demonstrating programme quality, effectiveness and efficiency in advancing capacity development efforts in Cambodia; broadening awareness of the importance of learning and empowerment in development and management processes; and ongoing internal learning and organisational development to strengthen VBNK's capacity to provide high quality and responsive services.

IA 2010 thus also allowed us to look closely at the assumptions we make about capacity development, and which shape how we approach our work, such as:

- Capacity development needs to take place at multiple levels in an organisation for learning to take root;
- Processes that encourage peer learning and reflective practice are critical to learning;
- If we are to be effective in our work, then we need to challenge the status quo and break away from patterns of the past;
- Creative approaches (e.g. art, theatre, role playing) encourage individuals to un-learn and let go of old habits.
- Competence derives from skills and confidence to apply these skills. Other qualitative factors – like trust, pride and commitment – are also fundamental in the condition of learning and in the process of achieving capacity;

In order to test out and learn more about these assumptions, we selected four focus areas, which are illustrative of the different contexts of our work. These were:

Focus Area 1: Working in multi-stakeholder partnerships that include the private sector

Focus Area 2: Factors that influence the application of learning into the workplace, and how managers and supervisors influence learning and development of their staff

Focus Area 3: Opportunities created through Learning Forums

Focus Area 4: VBNK's internal performance towards improving quality and effectiveness

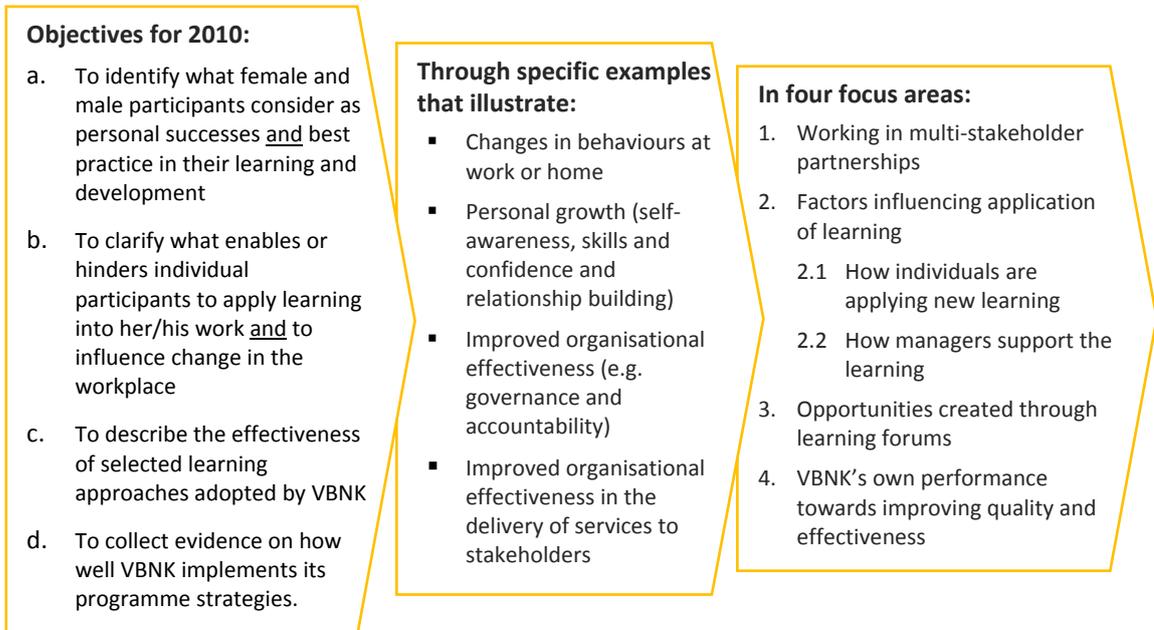
IA 2010 specified four overarching objectives, expressed here as questions:

- What do female and male participants consider as personal successes in their growth and development and what is 'best' practice in capacity development?

⁴ Evangelischer Entwicklungsdienst (EED), a core funder for VBNK, introduced in its 2007 position paper their standard for a results chain / effect chain. The unique feature of this framework is the identification of "a use of output" link between 'output' and 'outcome' and identifying 'use of output' as one of three effects.

⁵ VBNK established five strategic directions for 2010-2013, which include two programme-related strategies and three enabling strategies.

- What enables or hinders individual participants to apply learning into their workplace and/or to bring about change?
- Can we provide evidence for the effectiveness of selected learning approaches adopted by VBANK in its work?
- What evidence do we have for VBANK’s performance towards improving quality and effectiveness?

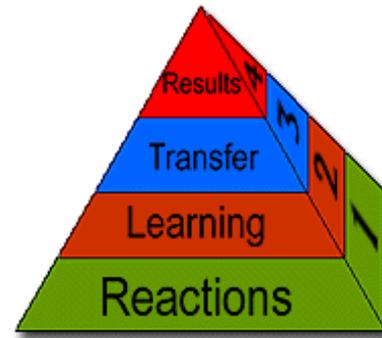


In addressing these questions, we have developed several stories. These include stories about what was learned from participants, from our partners and from our staff. (These detailed stories can be found in a separated Consolidated Annex document.)

The section that follows elaborates on the monitoring and evaluation framework.

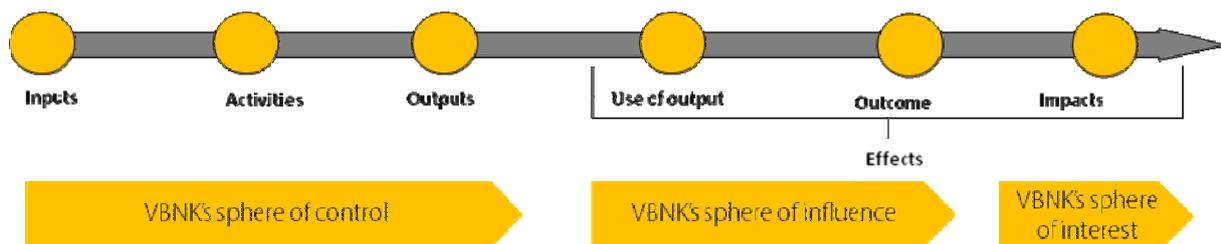
Our monitoring and evaluation framework

As mentioned, at the start of 2010 VBNK allocated time to critically review our design, monitoring and evaluation framework. We introduced Bloom’s taxonomy for cognitive levels of thinking and Kirkpatrick’s four-level evaluation model as minimum standards in our practice.



Subsequently, we made some adaptations in how we had been doing ‘level 1’ and ‘level 2’ evaluations, especially in how we were gathering and documenting the information gained through “learning application intentions” (LAI) that participants are asked to complete at the end of any training event and through course reports prepared for client organisations. The review highlighted the need to better assess transfer (application) of learning and more specifically define the influence towards results (effects).

We have also been guided by a results-chain provided by our core funder, EED. The results chain includes ‘use of output,’ an element that allows us to distinguish between levels of effects. This is of particular value in our work as it allows us to focus on how individuals, teams and organisations are applying their learning. The focus on use of outputs eliminates what is often a big jump between output and outcome, a grey area in impact assessment generally based on assumptions and attribution. Moreover, the results-chain allows us to articulate VBNK’s sphere of *control* (inputs, activities, outputs), sphere of *influence* (use of output, outcome) and sphere of *interest* (impacts).



Approaching Impact Assessment 2010

The purpose of VBNK’s impact assessment has always been twofold: 1) to describe the scope of influence on individuals and organisations who have participated in training services and learning events; and 2) to assess how well we have been organising and carrying out our services. We began by looking back at previous impact assessment studies (beginning with our first impact assessment in 2006). In past years we have focused our attention on what participants take away from their learning experience: what stays in their minds? What do they do afterwards? What moves in their heart? What bolsters their spirit?

This year we focused on analysing results chains. We selected participatory methods, such as most significant change stories and appreciative inquiry, as well as focus group and 1-1 in-depth interviews. The emphasis was on if and how well new learning is being applied into the workplace. That is we looked for evidence of changes in behaviours at work or in an individual’s personal life, stories that illustrate personal growth and changes in relationships, signs of enhanced organisational effectiveness, or changes in the ways services were being delivered to beneficiaries.

Drawing on the Kirkpatrick’s levels of evaluation, we also applied a bottoms-up methodology, starting from the support provided and then attempting to trace the changes forward. This is like starting from the pebble thrown into a pond and tracking the ripples as they spread outwards. The ‘ripples’ relate to a series of questions, which in turn correspond with specific stages in Kirkpatrick’s four-level model.

7. What has been learned along the way that might be of use when carrying out future capacity building work?	Lessons learned
6. What are the (or might be) the <u>ultimate effects</u> of these changes on the organisation or wider population?	Outcomes (results)
5. What changes have there been at an <u>organisational</u> level?	Transfer (how the learning has influenced organisational practice)
4. What changes can be seen in the way <u>individuals</u> behave?	Application (how the learning was used)
3. Did our learning services achieve the objectives (based on Learning application intention, post-learning evaluation and post-tests etc)?	Achievement of objectives
2. How was it organised and carried out? How was it received initially?	Inputs + reactions
1. What capacity support was provided and for whom?	Inputs

For each of the focus areas we assigned a team, comprising two or three VBNK staff. Each team was responsible for all steps of the evaluation from the preparation through to final reporting. Each team began by reviewing participant evaluations at the end of relevant training courses or learning services, looking at the individual participant’s learning application intention (LAI) and course report etc. This document review informed our teams on what to concentrate during our focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with the respondents. Each team was given the latitude to construct their own research formats and to select the research tools (for example, most significant change stories and/or focus group discussions).

In addition, this year we sought the assistance of a bi-lingual researcher to prepare the teams. She was able to bring rigour to the work and ensure that the teams were following a standard research discipline. She returned to meet with individual teams after data collection to help structure the analysis.

The focus areas

This section briefly describes each focus area and why they were selected for study.

Working in multi-stakeholder partnerships that include the private sector

The first focus area of this year's impact assessment aims to better understand what it takes to work in multi-stakeholder partnerships. This is because, increasingly, we are being called on to work in multi-stakeholder partnerships, and this has challenged us to think about our role. For example, we have been asked by an international NGO to provide training to women working in factories. The international NGO is part of a larger consortium that aims to enhance career opportunities for women in the garment sector. The work has raised interesting questions about who the client was, and whose interests we were serving. Beginning in 2009, we have also been supporting an initiative to work with high-level Government and Development partners to strengthen aid effectiveness in Cambodia. Thus we wanted to draw on our experience to ask: What are the opportunities and challenges of working in multi-stakeholder partnerships? How can these be opportunities and challenges managed? [How] is VBNK adding value to the partnerships and contributing to achievement of project objectives?

To address these questions we drew first on experience from a recently-concluded project with an INGO and nine local implementing partners. The INGO had a multi-year relationship with 10 local NGOs in Cambodia, and intended to develop the capacity of those NGOs in order for them to scale up their service delivery and achieve measurable impact on sexual and reproductive health in rural areas of Cambodia. The INGO thus contracted VBNK to carry out an organisational capacity assessment for each of the local NGOs and then to design and implement capacity development interventions with the partners over a period of 8 months. The assessment included a review of reflection reports and reports to the client INGO, feedback from the local NGOs (collected during a plenary session prior the closure of the project) and in-depth follow-up interviews.

We also looked in detail at a second partnership that involves the World Bank, the Ministry of Industry, Mines and Energy (MIME), GRET (a local NGO specialising in water and sanitation) and the private sector. In this case, we focused on the experience of working together with these partners during the past 18 months. The World Bank Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP) is a capacity building programme for domestic, private sector, piped water providers (DPSPs) to improve their business performance. WSP is a pilot and is working with ten participating DPSPs. The programme focuses on building business management and financial management and technical skills so as to increase the number of new, affordable water supply connections to rural communities. Participants include the owners, managers, operational staff, financial managers and accountants of the ten DPSPs.

The assessment was based on a review of project documents and 3-monthly reports to WSP and in-depth interviews with the project partners and with three DPSP managers participating in the project.

Factors that influence the application of learning into the workplace

The overarching objective for focus area two was: to clarify what enables or hinders individual participants to apply their learning into their workplace and/or to influence change.

We drew from selected customised VBNK and open access training courses for the study. VBNK's open access (pre-designed and pre-scheduled) courses are designed to enhance knowledge and develop skills that can be readily translated into work-place competence. They are also reviewed and revised annually, so as to ensure they remain relevant to capacity building trends in the social development sector. Customised services are tailored to specific individual and organisational needs. Thus the inquiry provided an opportunity to explore whether or not the courses offered were relevant. More specifically, the study drew on lessons emerging from previous impact assessment studies to ask two questions of VBNK's work:

- First, [how] are individuals applying their learning into their workplace? And, what results – if any – are we able to attribute to our open access and customised training services?
- Second, previous impact assessments have highlighted that managers and supervisors play a critical role in influencing the learning and development of their staff. Thus we also asked: [how] are managers and supervisors attending to this role?

The study was based on three in-depth focus group discussions with participants from each course, as well as in-depth interviews with managers.

Opportunities created through Learning Forums

This third focus area aimed to assess (a) whether or not creative approaches and empowering strategies do encourage individuals to unlearn and let go of old habits; and (b) whether or not individuals have been able to transfer their learning to influence others. That is, the focus area explores one of the programme strategies articulated in the strategic plan: “working collaboratively with others ...to develop pilots that ...challenge and expand understanding about blocks to learning.”

We selected two VBNK services as the point of inquiry for this focus area: the 2009 annual *Community Conversation*; and a workshop (*Encouraging Transformative Learning*) that we co-hosted in 2008 with the Cooperation Committee for Cambodia/Analysing Development Issues (CCC/ADI) Project for colleagues working in the social development sector in Cambodia.

The annual *Community Conversation* aims to provide a safe space for community members to be in conversation with other civil society actors to identify and seek solutions to critical social development issues. Through their participation, communities develop the skills and confidence to overcome hierarchies that have traditionally limited their involvement in democratic processes, and which have dictated who has the right to speak. In this way, community conversations make possible shared ownership of development initiatives by a

broader sector of society. More recently we have begun to understand that the *Community Conversation* can also be a tool to promote social accountability, and so the study set out to further explore this presumption.

The *Encouraging Transformative Learning* workshop was intended as a forum for NGO colleagues to explore different understandings of transformative learning and its relevance to their work in the social development sector in Cambodia. We were interested to learn what had been carried forward from the workshop.

The inquiry for this focus area drew on participant feedback and commitments made at the end of the two learning events, two focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with participants.

VBNK's performance towards improving quality and effectiveness

As a learning organisation contributing to capacity development, VBNK strives for its staff to demonstrate certain personal and professional qualities. These are a genuine commitment to personal learning and a desire to continually explore and push at the boundaries of learning in Cambodia. Our internal capacity building efforts aim to build a shared understanding amongst staff about the beliefs and values that not only influence our own learning, but which also affect how our programme participants learn. Together we have agreed on the following commitments: enabling others to learn and grow; modelling our values in our practice; building equitable relationships; and consistently allocating time for critical reflection and learning.

Recognising the connection between what we practice as individuals and what we demonstrate as professionals, we decided that IA 2010 should devote attention to assessing how well the organisation is performing. In particular, we wanted to ask what and how our staff is learning, and how this learning is showing up in their work with others (in their practice).

In approaching this fourth focus area, we first compiled and reviewed various internal documents about staff learning and changes in workplace practice; and then conducted in-depth 1-1 interviews with six VBNK staff (three women and three men).

Key finding from the four focus areas

The findings presented in this section are a summary of the more detailed stories for each of the focus areas provided in Annex 1.

Managing multi-stakeholder partnerships

As noted we looked at two partnerships: the first involving one INGO and ten local partners; and the second with the World Bank and Government, NGO and private sector. The findings confirm (a) that multi-sector partnerships are foundational for scaling up capacity development efforts in Cambodia, and (b) that effectively managing the partnership is integral to achieving the desired results. In summary, lessons emerging from this inquiry are:

- It is critical to take time up front to build understanding and buy in (commitment) to the nature of the partnership; to clarify and negotiate expectations and assumptions; to openly express concerns; and to agree on values that underpin the partnership and the approach to capacity development. This lays the foundation for building agreement on objectives and priorities. This process may appear time consuming but it smoothes the way for subsequent work.
- Equitable and trustful relationships are a key condition of learning and change, as they pave the way for the open dialogue needed to strengthen and maintain the partnership and to achieving the intended outcomes. Taking the time to build equitable and trustful relations establishes good standing when needing to re-negotiate priorities.
- Capacity development requires a long-term commitment to a process of change. Achieving such commitment requires that we start by building credibility with our partners through focusing on incremental ‘wins’ that have a direct impact on the bottom line. This is particularly important in partnerships with the private sector.
- Working in multi-stakeholder partnerships is dependent on the ability to recognise different pieces of the puzzle (to practice joined up thinking) and to be able to clearly and concisely communicate the connections amongst the partners. Equally important is the ability to listen to and acknowledge the challenges and constraints of each partner. This encourages the partners to ‘open up’ and look for alternative ways of getting the work done.
- Flexibility is particularly important when negotiating and influencing the partnership process. Doing home work (being well prepared) is critical if one wants to bring together diverse positions and interests of the various stakeholders, as this builds ‘credit’ with others and also provides us with the confidence needed to be flexible.

Some of these lessons have been hard earned. While our inquiry suggests we are now working more effectively, establishing the partnership has – in some instances – been time-consuming and time is cost. The challenge is to ask: how can we achieve understanding and agreement, relationship and credibility more efficiently? This becomes a point for future inquiry.

Factors that influence the application of learning into the workplace

As noted above, this focus area explored two questions: first how are individuals applying new learning into their work and/or influencing change? Secondly, how are managers and supervisors supporting the learning and development of their staff?

How individuals are applying new learning into their workplace

We looked at both customised and open access training courses in this focus area. The customised courses included a training that combined project management skills and interpersonal skills and a training course in participatory impact assessment. The open access courses included two different financial management trainings.

...dealing with difficult people is what I do every day. Now I am more confident than before. For example, when I run a staff forum, I think about the staff members who do not want to share ideas and keep quiet. I need to know why these people do not dare to share ...I then follow up with other [managers] about how to motivate staff and encourage participation.

During the follow up, participants commented not only on the technical skills they had gained but also on the learning processes used. For instance, it was reported that the VBNK project management course contributed to a deepened appreciation of project planning as well as to relationship building, influencing how participants think about their own work relations. The findings support an assumption that we make about capacity development, namely: that qualitative factors – like confidence, determination, creativity, pride and commitment – are key in the condition of learning and in the process of achieving capacity. That is, training programmes that set out to address the ‘hard’ skills as well as the ‘soft’ people skills are more likely to lead to learning than those that only deal with the technical side of organisational life.

The findings also confirm that sending several people from the same organisation onto the same course can lead to more significant changes at the organisational level than sending only one or two. This is because it is more difficult for one person to bring back new ideas and embed them into the existing work culture.

How managers and supervisors influence learning and development

Do not underestimate the value of talking: simple, ongoing talking – talking about the work, what we have done, what we need to do next and why – giving space and time for this kind of talking is important.

The findings confirm the assumption that managers need to create an enabling environment to support organisational learning. One way that they do this is through closely following their staff members’ learning journeys. It can be as simple as showing interest, through regularly ‘checking in’ and talking about the learning, thereby encouraging and deepening reflection. The manager must also demonstrate her/his own commitment to learning by being a learner her/himself. S/he must recognise the need to build her/his own capacity and to stay at the forefront, while also building capacity of others. All of this takes time, patience and humility.

The key qualities that I need to model... provide back-up support and coaching, time and patience, dialogue, flexibility and humbleness ...and commitment and encouraging people to live what they have learned (not just tell others what they have learned).

Another assumption we make in our work is that it is possible to challenge an individual learner's worldview and status quo, so that s/he can let go of the past and learn anew. But challenging an individual's worldview should be about more than unsettling them. It should also be about inspiring staff members to take risks and try out new ways of working. And, in the Cambodian context, it should be about healing and helping staff let go of the past. It is the role of the manager to provide staff with a scaffold⁶ that provides temporary safety and access to meaning. The understanding is that what the staff person is able to do in collaboration today s/he will be able to do independently tomorrow.

I had support ...in terms of encouragement... I had the support ...to have courage, to be brave and try new things... We only dare to take the challenge because we feel the support. We feel [the advisor], we feel [the manager] here and we feel each other.

Opportunities created through Learning Forums

The third focus area looked at opportunities created through Learning Forums to ask: (a) have the creative approaches and empowering strategies used by VBNK encouraged individuals to unlearn and let go of old habits; and (b) whether or not individuals who have experienced these creative approaches have been able to draw on their experience to influence others. Two VBNK services were chosen as the subject for the impact study: the 2009 annual *Community Conversation* and a workshop we co-hosted⁷ on *Encouraging Transformative Learning* in 2008.

The community conversation aims to provide a safe space for community members to be in conversation with other civil society actors to identify and seek solutions to critical development issues and through their participation, develop the skills and confidence to overcome hierarchies that have traditionally limited their involvement in democratic processes, and which have dictated who has the right to speak.

The *Encouraging Transformative Learning* workshop provided a forum for 70 NGO colleagues (Cambodian and expatriate) to explore their understanding of transformative learning and its relevance to their work in social development in Cambodia. Do such learning forums provide more than an opportunity to share and learn from each other? Does this learning get carried forward in any way? Two individuals who participated in the *Learning for Transformation* workshop both experienced change on a personal and professional level and both have been able to transfer this learning into their relations with communities.

For participants in the *Community Conversation*, increased confidence has been the precursor to more equal participation in both family and community lives. The findings confirm that the creative approaches used during the Community Conversation were a trigger for the freedom to speak up. As one of the woman said:

⁶ Based on Lev Vygotsky's work on thinking and speech, where a scaffold provides a temporary framework for support and access to meaning and is taken away when the learner secures control of success with a task.

⁷ VBNK and Cooperation Committee for Cambodia/Analysing Development Issues (CCC/ADI)

...I heard others listening to me, and this allowed me to feel valued. The turning point was the new methods of silent drawing in a group to create a picture and the exercise on river of life. The river of life was an entry point for expressing my own history... I liked this because I didn't feel on the spot.

In previous years we reported how the *Community Conference* was resulting in harmonisation within teams and community groups and increasing more active participation in community development activities. This year's study confirms these findings. But we are also seeing signs that – because it promotes dialogue across difference and encourages listening to one another – the *Community Conference* can also be an effective tool for promoting social accountability.

I learned that it is important to read other people's mind and to understand people's feeling. I applied this in my meetings with members of community forestry and villagers. In so doing, I can find better ways to communicate with them. Now, they trust me and approach me often to share and discuss about forestry issues in the community (NGO worker).

In 2011 we plan to explore further the idea of the Community Conversation as a tool for promoting social accountability.

VBNK's performance towards improving quality and effectiveness

As a learning organization in capacity development, VBNK strives for a team of staff that apply a set of beliefs and values that not only influence self-learning but clearly affect how our programme participants learn. In so doing, we have agreed that managers (supervisors) are accountable for enabling others to learn and grow and for supporting staff to learn through the performance of their work. Attention is given to challenging and changing patterns that shape our relationships and learning; and time is consistently allocated for critical reflection and learning. IA 2010 asked how well the organisation is performing in terms of staff learning. Simply put, we wanted to know: why do we / don't we learn? Are staff members regularly applying new learning into their work, and if not, why not?

The data point to factors that enable and block our own learning. We have confirmed, for example, that qualitative factors – like confidence, determination, creativity, pride and commitment – are key factors in the condition of learning and in the process of achieving capacity. We have shown that it is possible to challenge an individual's worldview so that s/he is able to learn anew. We do this with our clients through creative learning approaches that encourage peer learning and reflection. But while we hold onto this notion in our work, we seem unable to challenge some of our assumptions about learning and which hold us back.

At VBNK, Development Supervision⁸ is the vehicle for learning and strengthening staff capacity, where each staff member has an opportunity to reflect on and learn from her/his performance. Line managers serve as mentors and coaches, listening carefully and showing appreciation, while also challenging staff by asking critical questions. This year, staff members pointed to weaknesses in the development supervision discussions, and these concerns must be seriously considered. At the same time though, staff did not talk about

⁸ Development supervision sessions are conducted at monthly intervals and are an integral part of the VBNK staff appraisal system.

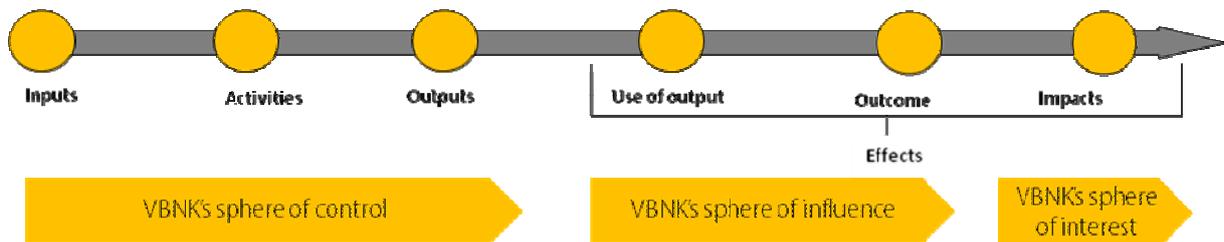
how they were approaching development supervision or how they were contributing (or not) to make development supervision work. In our training sessions and in our role facilitating organisational development, we talk to our clients about what they should do to embed learning into their daily work. The data suggest that we may not be walking the talk.

The capacity to learn is different for each of us. So we have to meet people at the level they are at. However if they are not interested in learning, they should not be rewarded... We have to work with each staff so that s/he has a clear direction... We can walk with them on their journey, but they need to be responsible too.

Our work experience clearly tells us that building trust between facilitators and participants and with partners is foundational to learning and change. And yet, the data presented here suggest that organisational politeness is getting in the way of open communications. We need to work harder at letting go of our own blocks that are binding us to the past.

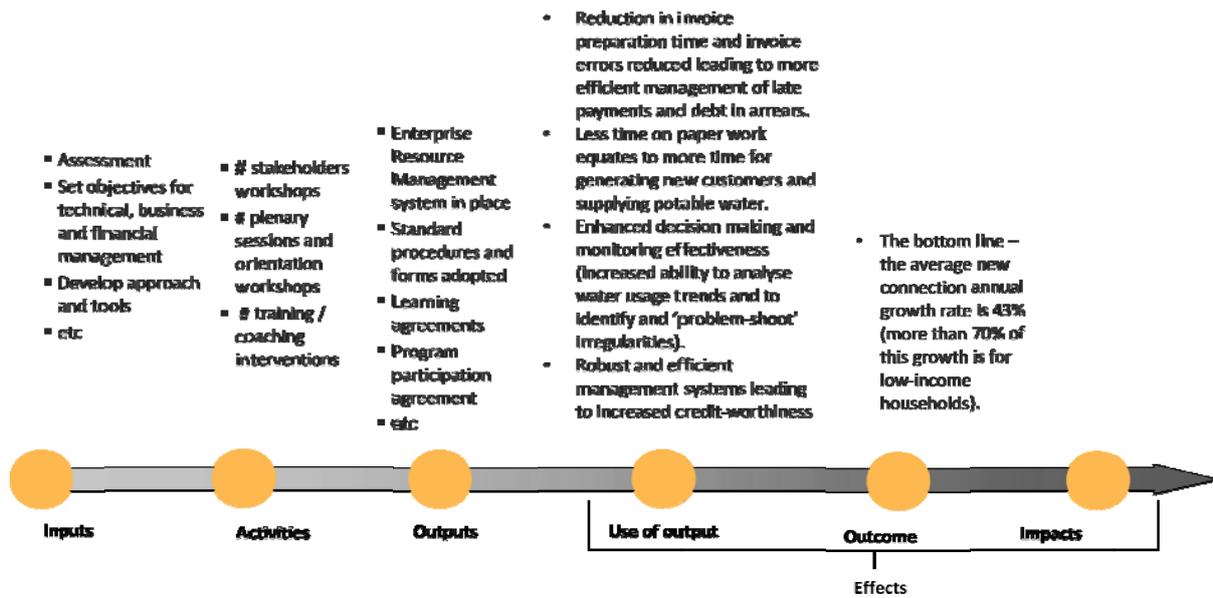
What does it mean for our work?

Since January 2010, we have been strengthening our Design, Monitoring and Evaluation framework. We were able to draw on the Kirkpatrick framework and the results chain to shape the impact assessment.

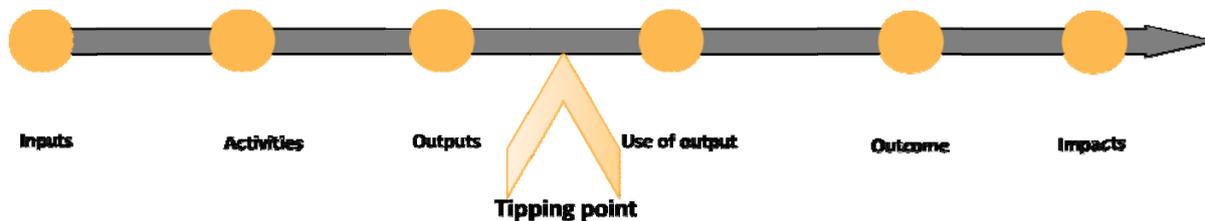


From all focus areas, the findings have confirmed that VBNK’s services are producing outcome-level impact in the social development sector. This is illustrated below using the World Bank Water and Sanitation Project as an example.

The results chain has thus allowed us to more clearly define our sphere of control and our sphere of influence, and in particular, what influences our own learning and how we in turn are enabling others to learn.



We have been able to show that if we make the effort to carefully document and compile the end-of-course evaluations and reports as well as the learning application intentions, then we have laid the groundwork for tracking how the outputs have been used and possible outcomes that follow. This becomes the tipping point that allows us to improve the impact assessment study.



In 2011, all programme staff will be required to implement the minimum standards that make up the design, monitoring and evaluation framework; this will become a feature of development supervision and performance review discussions.

This year, we were also able to draw on the results chain logic to confirm various assumptions we have been making about learning and capacity development. For example, capacity development needs to take place at multiple levels in an organisation for learning to take root. We have also confirmed that processes that encourage peer-to-peer exchange and reflective practice are critical to learning. This supports the holistic approach adopted in our learning and organisational development services. Increasingly, and as reported in 2009 for example, we are combining the dual methodology of training and follow up coaching in the workplace, so as to help trainees identify and address organisational factors that can

inhibit organisational learning and change. Coaching is also a feature of our holistic approach to organisational development.⁹

In 2011, we will need to more deliberately demonstrate the efficacy of this approach and disseminate the learning to colleagues from other organisations working in the social development sector and also to our donors. The findings about our own learning also indicate that we need to do more to strengthen our coaching skills. This should be a continued focus of our internal learning activities.

Impact Assessment 2010 clearly shows that one-off training courses are generally not effective and that training activities must address both the 'hard' (technical) skills and also the softer skills like confidence, will, creativity and commitment. Our experience working with an NGO (Room to Read) to combine project management and interpersonal skills training shows that this has led to greater changes in the organisation than in courses that only deal with technical matters.

Some participants from VBNK's open access and customised courses were able to *self-report* changes in work behaviour that they attributed to our training activities. For example, they reported more confidence in problem solving and in developing realistic annual plans. They also reported that they had got positive feedback from their line managers. In 2011, we will take time to triangulate these claims by following up with the line managers.

We have also shown clearly the important role played by managers in modelling the way for their staff – in short, to be the change they want to see: *When your staff sees you learn quickly, they will want to do the same*. They must also make sure that staff members feel secure and are willing to take a risk and try out new ways of working. An implication for 2011 will be to make sure we are measuring up this ideal inside VBNK, and that supervisors are creating a climate of open and trustful feedback.

The findings also tell us how – through Learning Forums and various publications – we have influenced the expectations of capacity development of other NGOs working in the sector. In 2011 we will continue to look for opportunities – either alone or in partnership with others, to promote learning amongst the wider development community in Cambodia.

This year we have confirmed that the creative approaches used in the *Community Conversation* encourage individuals to listen to one another, to talk about and let go of the past and to learn anew. The *Community Conversation* promotes trust and social cohesion. But this year, our data also indicate that the *Community Conversation* can also be a tool for promoting social accountability – if community members are able to express their concerns and hopes for the future and if NGOs and local Government authorities show they will respond. In 2011 we will further explore this idea (a) by reviewing and tightening the flow of the conference and documentation; and (b) by anchoring the conference to one development issue. Potential issues that were surfaced in previous conferences could be cross-border migration for work (particularly in the northwest corridor) or structural barriers that continue to block women's participation in decentralisation and deconcentration.

⁹ Reported in VBNK 2009 Annual Report, available at: http://www.vbnk.org/uploads/VBNKdocs/VBNK_AR%2009_Final.pdf

There are also important lessons relevant to working in multi-stakeholder partnerships and, in particular, working with the private sector. Some of these lessons point to 'good' partnership practice: taking time up front to build understanding of the nature of the partnership; clarifying and negotiating expectations and assumptions; and to agreeing on values that underpin the partnership. We know that capacity development requires a long-term commitment to a process of change. However when working with the private sector it is important that we start by building 'credit' with our partners through focusing on incremental 'wins' that have a direct impact on the bottom line. As in other areas of our work here in Cambodia, equitable and trustful relationships are a key condition of learning and change, as they pave the way for open and trustful dialogue required to strengthen and maintain a partnership and thus to achieve the intended outcomes. Moreover, it establishes good standing when needing to re-negotiate priorities.

More and more we are being asked to work in multi-sectoral partnerships and, in some cases, with stakeholders that hold quite diverse interests. We realise that these lessons are not generally understood by all programme staff. In 2011, we will endeavour to introduce these good practices into all of VBNK's partnership work.

Finally, the assessment has highlighted areas that we need to focus on in terms of our internal staff development. We need to engage in a more critical reflection, unpack and challenge our worldview and ask ourselves if we are living up to the values we espouse to the outside world. Specifically, we need to strengthen development supervision and our ability to give and receive constructive feedback. The assessment data suggest that organisational politeness is getting in the way of open communications. The question we must hold ourselves to in 2011 is this: How can we let go of our own blocks, which bind us to the past, and take responsibility for our learning?

Rising to the challenge

One of the story lines emerging from the 2010 Impact Assessment has been about how participants and clients are describing their journeys of change, and the factors that influence their learning. Another has been about how (and how well) we are challenging the approaches we take in our work, the assumptions we make about capacity development, and the results that we attribute back to VBNK. Yet another story line relates to our commitment to develop and disseminate replicable models for capacity development that are relevant in the Cambodian context.

As described in the Introduction, we have drawn from other research as well as from capacity development models and methodologies to link our theory of change to a results chain approach to designing, monitoring and evaluating our capacity development efforts. In the year ahead, we will be assessing how well this framework can be applied into all aspects of VBNK's learning and organisational development services.

The framework distinguishes between 'outputs' and 'use of output.' This has a particular appeal as it moves us up Kirkpatrick's hierarchy – from levels one and two (sphere of

control) to level three (transfer of learning). This in turn allows us to talk about how we can influence the application of learning into the workplace and whether or not this in turn has an influence on development practice.

We have also benefitted from the insights stated in a long-term study on capacity¹⁰ that describes the significance of five core organisational capabilities. These are to commit; to adapt; to balance consistency and diversity; to attract resources and support; and (above all) to deliver on development objectives. We are attracted to the description of these capabilities since they must be already recognised at the design stage and through to the post-programme evaluation stage of capacity development efforts. In the design phase, we can ask: What change are we looking for in the capacity of the organisation? How will these changes in capacity affect output and outcome? How can VBNK support these changes? And in our monitoring and evaluation: what has changed in capacity? How did changes in capacity affect output and outcome? How effective was the support provided by VBNK? And, what can we learn?¹¹

The IA 2010 findings show varying degrees of evidence for these capabilities. For example, all four focus areas provide evidence of will, empowerment, motivation and confidence, which are about the capability to commit. There is also a concentration of evidence related to the capability to adapt, which means there has been learning and managing change. Our purpose here is not to summarise the facts, but rather to prepare ourselves for the future. These five core capabilities will thus serve as an ongoing reminder to what it means to have capacity, not only in terms of what our participants and clients strive towards, but also for our own staff and organisational performance.

¹⁰ Morgan, P, Land, T, Baser, H (2008) *Capacity, Change and Performance Study Report*, European Centre for Development Policy Management, Maastricht: ECPDM, April 2008

¹¹ Piet de Lange, 2009, Evaluating capacity development support, Capacity.org, #36, April 2009, http://www.capacity.org/en/journal/cd_monitor/evaluating_capacity_development_support



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