

capacity for a change

DUNFORD HOUSE
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from the
Capacity
Collective
workshop



training O.Dev

Policy/ Institutional Reforms

Working along with

Dialogues



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Capacity for a change

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Executive summary

Development agencies invest huge amounts in Capacity Development (CD). Even so, it seems to have become a catch-all concept incorporating almost any form of technical assistance, and is often presented as a rather neutral, value-free form of engagement.

Yet, although much has been written about CD, dissatisfaction remains with both the idea and its practice. In this context, a group of practitioners and researchers from different parts of the world came together with representatives of donor organisations in a workshop in Sussex (UK), in September 2007. We aimed to share our concerns about the gap between what we know, and what we do, regarding the development of capacities of individuals, organisations, and more widely in society. We wished also to explore more systemic, contextualised and purposeful approaches to CD. Although the entry point for these discussions was the capacity for the generation, dissemination and use of knowledge, broader issues emerged for CD in general, and these are reflected in this paper.

Terminology for capacity development is often vague and inconsistent, and related concepts are cloudy and ill-defined. We believe that it is critically important to move beyond CD based on an instrumental and technical understanding of knowledge to encourage debate around deeper meanings of **knowledge, learning and change**; to better understand the way **power relations** influence the capacity of individuals and organisations to engage as actors in processes of development and change; and to explore more **systemic approaches** to learning and change.

Considering evidence from CD practice, we have gathered a number of insights. Most CD initiatives adopt an instrumental and technical approach, emphasising mechanical fixes for technical blocks, applying predetermined inputs for training, organisational development or institutional reform, with little attention to systematic contextual assessment of capacity needs or drawing on valuable knowledge associated with wider disciplines. Theoretical understandings of change processes are rarely articulated. Despite the common rhetoric of 'partnership', insufficient attention is paid to the nature and evolution of the relationships within which CD is to be promoted, and a North-South transfer of capacity is often assumed, rather than a process of mutual learning and change. Our reflection on the evidence has led us to identify four key dimensions of successful CD. First, an evaluative, rather than a merely descriptive, stance to capacity development analysis appears to be an essential attribute of successful interventions. Second, successful CD focuses on the dynamics and processes that are encountered or seen as desirable, and emphasises the importance of learning, rather than applying a limited technical/rational model. Third, a critical dimension of successful CD is the systemic integration of the levels of individual, organisational and wider society. And fourth, a nuanced understanding of specific context is needed, recognising the importance of political, social, economic and cultural factors. Fundamentally, we believe that valuable opportunities are being lost for learning, which demands a continuous interplay between developing theoretical understanding and improved practice.

On the basis of this evidence, how might we reimagine CD processes? Energy for good change exists in every context, but we must learn to construct approaches to detect the dynamics of specific context and to mobilise and nurture this energy productively through a process of dialogue. This means focusing on change and adaptive management in an approach rooted in endogenous strengths, needs, aspirations and expectations arising from specific contexts rather than seeing CD always from an exogenous, deficit perspective. We believe that a real sea-change may be achieved in how CD is understood and practiced, by:

- promoting **empowering** relationships
- supporting **rallying ideas**
- mobilising **dynamic agents**
- proactively **framing and shaping the context** for CD
- enhancing **grounding/enabling knowledge and skills** through systemic learning processes.

Looking forward, there is a wide range of actions that may facilitate this change in the current paradigm for CD, moving towards a more systemic approach that mobilises energy for good change. As a group of actors committed to change, we believe that we should be:

- supporting the development of innovative strategies for evaluation of CD from a systems and learning perspective
- revisiting the way CD processes are labelled, to ensure that learning is maximised from a very wide range of activities as well as being more rigorous about what is understood as CD, and
- examining the relative strengths and weaknesses of CD interventions within different forms of partnership, over different time-frames, in order to identify the variables that bring about significant and positive change in power relations, equity and voice.

We have identified also specific ways forward for certain groups of actors - including donors, and a wider group of researchers, CD service providers and practitioners.

Finally, we believe that a real shift in thinking and practice of CD requires a shared learning process of different actors – donors, academic researchers and practitioners. In the Capacity Collective we hope to involve actors who have not participated so far in this dialogue, in a shared endeavour to challenge and reimagine CD. Only through a combined and committed effort in advocacy and dialogue, and a determination to link theory, policy and practice systemically, will the benefits from capacity development processes be realised in ways that make a real difference to the development challenges of the future.

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Peter Taylor and Peter Clarke, IDS, Sussex, January 2008.

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1: Introduction

Capacity development is a term used to describe a vast range of processes, activities, and interventions that aim to enhance the potential for different actors to contribute to the achievement of wider development goals. A basic assumption, that 'capacity' is necessary for development, underpins support to activities which include training, education, infrastructure development, organisational development and many more, in almost any context where it is understood that a capacity deficit exists. Capacity development, at least in terms of language used, seems to have become a catch-all that incorporates just about any form of technical assistance, and which appears to be a rather neutral, value-free form of engagement between different development actors. But is there broad satisfaction with the idea and practice of capacity development as it is experienced now in its many and varied guises?

The answer to this question appears to be 'no'. In fact, capacity development (CD) is a highly contentious issue, that provokes intense debate about both meanings and practice. Mechanistic and technical-rational approaches to CD are widely reported – and in some cases appear to bring successful outcomes, but a perception is growing that a more systemic approach to CD is needed, requiring the interactions between knowledge, learning and power relations to be addressed directly. CD lies at the heart of many development-related programmes, and indeed publications, and a debate has emerged around preferences for a focus on either results or processes. Such a debate seems to create a false dichotomy, however, since process and results are constructs; seeing them as opposite ends of an artificial spectrum may blinker our thinking about the meanings and practice of capacity development. Alongside this debate, there are also questions about how we evaluate CD processes, and to what extent we should attempt to identify impacts related directly to CD interventions. Although the debates on these issues are often quite strong and animated, it appears that there is a lack of basic evidence to really support some of the arguments that are being made. Research and analyses of these issues are sparse, and concrete findings are in short supply, especially those which are grounded in particular contexts, and which allow more generalisable conclusions to be drawn which can influence practice.

Context is vitally important in capacity development processes, and the context in which this paper has been prepared also needs to be explained. In September 2007, a group of individuals came together at a workshop in Sussex in the United Kingdom. They aimed to share their interest and concern about the gap between what we know, and what we do, regarding the development of capacity of individuals, organisations, and more widely in society, in ways that are systemic, contextualised and purposeful. The entry point for these discussions was around capacity issues regarding the generation, dissemination and use of knowledge, particularly by research institutes. Ultimately, the discussions highlighted a range of concerns, issues and ideas that have broader implications for capacity development processes in general, an outcome that is reflected in this paper. The workshop, which the convenors (the Institute of Development Studies, UK) had called optimistically and

The quantity of books, reports, websites, networks and online publications on capacity development is somehow overwhelming
(comments made by participants during the workshop)

deliberately the 'Capacity Collective' brought together representatives of academic, research and donor organisations as well as practitioners from different parts of the world. Coming from a wide range of professional and geographical contexts, the participants (listed on page 1) spent three days exploring:

- Their personal experiences of enabling and disabling factors that affect capacity development processes
- The gap between what is known of both theory and practice of CD, and what is actually applied through action
- The reasons this gap persists, and what might be done by different actors to bridge it
- Ways in which different actors and agents could engage collectively to address this challenge

This paper is supported by other documentation and data.¹ It aims to raise the key concerns, issues, and hopes emerging from the workshop analysis and reflection for changes in the way we think about and support capacity development processes. The content of this paper reflects the range of ideas and views contributed by participants in the workshop, and our collective belief in the need, globally, for change in understanding of CD which requires us to find more effective ways to develop and share knowledge of its theory and practice. We believe that unless current practices change dramatically, we will miss one of our greatest opportunities to contribute to development as 'good change'.

The purpose of this document

This paper aims to set out for policy makers and a range of actors across donor/practitioner/research communities, a series of challenges and opportunities for support to capacity development. It pays particular attention to a systemic approach for understanding and supporting the development of capacity at three interlinked levels: the individual, the organisation and in wider society.

Through earlier dialogue among widely differently positioned people concerned with development, we concluded that:

- Individuals' capabilities of many different kinds are limited by their capacity to construct useful knowledge, to share that knowledge with others, and to apply that knowledge in practice and in ways that may lead to further construction of knowledge through critical reflection on their practice
- Organisations' ability to learn, and therefore to adapt and to manage change effectively, is often severely constrained by a lack of capacity in a wide range of areas; we need to strengthen our collective ability to understand, systemically, the strengths and also the weaknesses of organisations which shape their capacity to perform
- In wider society, the need to address the dynamics of power that underlie relationships between individuals and organisations is often avoided or neglected. This is a major shortfall, since we believe that the nature of such relationships affects access to and use of knowledge, and may disable or enable learning and performance in many different contexts.

These conclusions are of universal relevance and indicate the need to identify and overcome the gaps in our knowledge and practice of capacity development in a range of key areas, including:

- research – enabling individuals and organisations to identify research needs and carry out research in different fields, including pure, applied and social sciences; supporting other organisational forms to engage with research and to make use of knowledge generated through research

¹ Documentation and data were obtained through a review of selected CD approaches and initiatives conducted prior to the workshop, and several scoping papers based on the work of selected organisations in different parts of the world

- education and training - for example of policy actors, educators, extensionists, researchers, community-based organisers and local change agents
- organisational learning and change that enables organisations, including education and training providers, research organisations, community-based development organisations; policy groups within different kinds of governmental, non-governmental and private organisations, to develop their vision, mission, policies, and strategies, and also to manage effectively their infrastructural and resource needs
- support to the development of capacity for social change more widely in society, for example: the media, government organisations engaged in development; NGOs and non-profit organisations engaged in development activity; and also within the private sector – e.g. organisations specialising in communication, training, or organisational development.

Overview of the paper

In this document, we address this range of issues in section 2, starting with a discussion of some current understandings and practices of CD. We draw on evidence from the literature and from personal experience, and identify a series of issues that we believe are critical. In section 3, we go on to make suggestions on how we might reimagine CD. Finally, in section 4, we make a number of specific recommendations, some of which are valid for all organisations engaged in CD, whilst some are aimed particularly at certain types of organisation.

2: Analysing the current situation

In order to reimagine, we must first see and understand where we are.

Much has been written about CD, and we do not intend to cover all the theoretical debates in this short document. Instead, we attempt to map out what we believe are some critical issues that need to be seen systemically, rather than as isolated issues or disconnected debates. Firstly, we provide, briefly, some insight into the scale of the concern, by exploring the extent to which external support is provided to CD in different ways. We then consider some of the key concepts for our understanding of CD. Finally in this section, we consider some of the evidence gathered in relation to 'what we do' regarding CD in different contexts, and identify some particular challenges that are emerging.

Scale of external support

Capacity development is first and foremost about people – but if we consider some expenditure figures (see Box 1), we quickly acquire a sense of the scale of the issue we seek to explore in this document. Investment in CD by various development agencies, taking ODA programmes in Southern countries alone, is huge. Evidence suggests that most donor support to CD is provided to tertiary education, research capacity and knowledge management, closely followed by CD in health and governance. Different donors favour different levels of intervention, in some cases at the level of the individual or organization, and in other cases at a societal level through wider networks or systems. There has been very heavy emphasis on CD programmes within ODA in different regions and sectors in Sub Saharan Africa. For all this enormous investment, and the considerable efforts and costs in terms of time, energy and good will of a wide range of individuals and organisations, it is surprising to encounter a lack of consensus on the meaning of capacity development. This has led to CD processes being conceived and implemented in a host of different ways, making it extremely difficult to carry out adequate evaluation of their outcomes, let alone to develop an understanding of their impacts. We will say more about this in section 3 of this paper.

Who is defining what Capacity Development is, and for what?

Box 1: Donor expenditure on capacity development

It is apparent from a survey of Donor reports² that CD spending is vast, even though figures are rarely collected, systematically, by donors on their expenditures. Statistics on capacity development should always be treated with some caution as the DAC itself advises (2007:112). A figure oft cited is that 25% of overseas development assistance is accounted for by CD (e.g. Whyte, 2004: 8; Collier, 2007) but this depends on the definition of CD used. If CD is equated with technical assistance (TA) then the 25% figure is accounted for more easily. Supposing that CD is defined as TA, then the largest donors annually (2005) in absolute terms are USAID (US\$10bn), BMZ (US\$2bn) and JICA (US\$2bn). If we look at percentage of total aid expenditure while defining CD as TA then the largest donors annually (2005) are USAID (38%), DFID (31%), BMZ (22%) and CIDA (22%).

² a more detailed data set on this issue forms table 2 (appendix H) in a volume of additional material, available on request

Can we call Capacity Development a professional field?

Conceptual challenges

Much has been written on meanings of CD, but our collective inquiry into CD concerns has led us to realise that we need also to look at several cross-cutting themes. These appear to influence extremely strongly what we mean and what we do, and include meanings of knowledge, learning and change; power relations and capacity development; and systemic approaches to learning and change.

Meanings of capacity development

Capacity development has been described in many different ways, and attempts to articulate meanings of both 'capacity' and 'capacity development' (or often 'capacity building') have been a key element of the ongoing work around this theme in recent years (SNV, 2005; Morgan, 2006). In CD programme documentation, however, terminology for capacity development is frequently vague and inconsistent, and related concepts are often cloudy, ill-defined, or not articulated. Many CD initiatives are undertaken without an explicit framework for capacity development, and may not even be recognised as capacity development if not labelled thus.

One of the 'definitions' of capacity and capacity development most widely referred to by a range of organisations is as follows:

'capacity' is understood as the ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully (OECD 2006:12) and:

'capacity development' is understood as the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time (*ibid*)

In this definition, CD is an endogenous process, which may or may not receive support from external actors. It is not a form of intervention, which would have to be referred to as 'facilitating CD' or 'supporting CD'.

Ongoing work by Morgan (2006, p.8) has helped to extend this understanding: **capacity is that emergent combination of attributes that enables a human system to create development value.**

Needless to say, some commonality around understanding of 'development' is also needed. Here, we are happy to work with Chambers' notion of development as 'good change' (1997). We see also strong connections with Sen's notion of capability (Sen, 2001), and an understanding that capacity development is a crucial means of removing a wide range of 'unfreedoms' that inhibit or limit the capability of individuals and organisations to act for good change in any societal context.

Definitions of capacity and capacity development in the reports and documents of different organisations place particular emphasis on either the achievement of results, outcomes and goals, or on processes. As mentioned in the introduction, seeing these as different points on an artificial spectrum may blinker our thinking about the meanings and practice of capacity development.

Meanings of knowledge, learning, power and change

Just as the term 'capacity' is highly contested, so are notions of knowledge, learning and change. It would be inappropriate here to claim the intellectual high ground and offer a superior definition of these terms. A recent review of the literature (Guijt, 2007) indicates that there is a real need to encourage debate around understandings of these terms, rather than to assume, simply, that current paradigms and epistemological perspectives are universal (see Box 2).

A shift in how we understand the role and significance of knowledge in relation to development, learning and change has great significance for CD processes.

Box 2 - Alternative views of knowledge

Knowledge, as typified within the concept of a 'knowledge society', is becoming an essential ingredient in every part of our lives; for economic production, for the activities, structures and systems of the state and major institutions, and for most of our daily needs as citizens (Taylor, 2008). The search for an objectifiable 'truth' grounded in universal knowledge that explains the world is futile however, as many authors would argue. In 1996 Reuben had already perceived a loss of faith amongst a number of leading US-based higher education institutions *in the power of knowledge to elevate individuals and the world* (p. 265). Bawden (2008) observes that *special emphasis must be placed on the epistemic dimensions of cognition that contribute so much to the character of our paradigms* (p. 72). Such authors are now stressing increasingly the importance of learning processes that are based on co-construction and subjectifying of knowledge, through processes of critical reflection on experience.

By reminding ourselves constantly of Chambers' (1997) question, *Whose knowledge counts?* we may seek ways of expanding our understanding of knowledge, and find opportunities to explore not only intellectual knowledge, but also personal and particular dimensions of knowledge. These may include the emotional, the artistic, the spiritual and the psychological (Heron 1999, Heron and Reason, 2001), which often are neglected. These aspects are critical to developing a sense of agency and power, as they are vital ingredients that individuals and groups need in order to become effective agents of change. They enable learners to become more conscious of the powerful, internalized and often hidden factors that constrain agency (Pettit, 2006). Such notions suggest that there is a need for us to inquire into the very nature of knowledge, using knowledge itself to help us develop deeper understandings of learning. As a result, we may be able to move beyond the instrumental and technical via a basic accumulation of knowledge. Learning could thus be seen as a process of developing and changing our way of viewing and thinking about the world, recognising that *education is about conceptual change, not just the acquisition of information* (Biggs 2003, Ramsden 1992).

Don't use foreign standards to judge what is local capacity - capacities are diverse and multidimensional

Power is another key issue for our discussions on CD, although the different ways of conceptualising power often seem complex and confusing (Taylor, 2008, forthcoming) (see Box 3 on the next page).

Box 3 - Understandings of power

Veneklasen and Miller (2002) conceive three 'faces' of power; visible, hidden and invisible. Hayward (1998) has explored power from a structural perspective, seeing this as a network of social boundaries that constrains and enables action for all actors. Foucault (1979) understands power as 'discourse', where power is everywhere; diffused and embodied in regimes of truth. Power is embedded in the way we see and think; it pervades social structure, not individuals, and is a process of social and structural change. Bourdieu (1990) on the other hand sees power as 'symbolic violence' which creates 'embodied dispositions', or habitus. These dispositions give rise to 'fields' or 'socially stratified spaces', norms and conventions, which we 'incorporate' or 'inscribe' as ways of behaving into our bodies and actions. Consequently, our dispositions or 'habitus' are 'spontaneously attuned' and perceived as part of the natural order of things.

Drawing on theoretical understandings of power, Gaventa and Cornwall (2001) suggest that certain methodological approaches, for example participatory action research which places a strong emphasis on co-learning processes, have the possibility to challenge power relations and contribute to empowerment and social change within communities. They achieve this by helping to generate knowledge as a resource, shaping and framing action to produce and use knowledge, and raising consciousness of how the production of knowledge changes the worldviews of those involved. Gaventa (2005) has recently developed a three dimensional framework for power analysis, the 'power cube', which explores the relationships between the levels at which engagement takes place (global, national, local), the spaces in which actors engage (closed, invited, claimed) and the forms or faces of power that are played out in these levels and spaces (visible, hidden, invisible). An understanding of power relations helps us to conceive ways in which power constrains or broadens the choices of sense-making or learning processes available to social actors to build their understandings and abilities within specific capacity development processes. It may also reveal how power relations influence more broadly the overall capacity of individuals and organisations to engage as actors in processes of development and change.

A training institution... will see the capacity problem as a training problem, and will more often than not ignore any elements that cannot be solved by training

There is a growing relevant body of theory on concepts of power; but it is rare to find literature that applies this in order to problematise power relations in CD. If power relations are mentioned, it is more to highlight their importance, rather than presenting empirical evidence of how they affect capacity development interventions. This may be because they are contentious issues for methodological reasons (difficulties in 'measuring' power and learning, and establishing causal factors) but possibly also because they are seen as uncomfortable areas to explore, with potentially negative implications for relationships between donors and grant-receiving organizations. Even 'performance', which might be assumed to be key to the notion of capacity development, is often ignored due to emphasis being placed on the input (training, organisational development, political/institutional reforms) rather than on the processes and products of change.

A critical inquiry into the nature of social change is also vital. As Reeler writes (2007, p.2): ***We need good theories of social change for building the thinking of all involved in processes of development, as individuals, as communities, organisations, social movements and donors. The conventional division in the world today between policy-makers (and their theorising) and practitioners is deeply dysfunctional, leaving the former ungrounded and the latter unthinking.*** In an ongoing initiative exploring 'facilitating learning in action for social change' ('FLASC'), an understanding of social change was arrived at as follows:

*a process of dialogue, debate and action resulting in major shifts in social norms, and is generally characterised by the highlighting and legitimisation of discordant voices, particularly of those marginalised in society, and leading to improvements in their rights, entitlements and living conditions.*³ We do not suggest that this is a final definition of such a complex concept, but it may help us to frame our thinking about the relationship of capacity building with wider processes of development.

Finally, the systems movement, which has a long and quite influential history, has been extremely influential through its contribution to holistic understandings of learning, addressing not only intellectual sense-making, but also moral and spiritual dimensions, values, attitudes and beliefs of those engaged in development processes. CD aims generally to promote learning, but evidence suggests that it is rarely approached from a systemic, learning perspective, even though such approaches have been highly important in shaping the notion of the 'learning organisation', a concept used widely in the private sector. It seems invidious to consider CD in isolation at the level of the individual, or the organisation, or within society more widely. Systemic approaches appear to offer both theoretical and practical frameworks that allow us to explore the relationships between learning and change at these three different levels in an integrated way. By failing to inculcate a systemic learning approach to CD overall, we might presume that opportunities are being missed for critical reflection on action (which allows systemic inquiry into the very nature of the systemic approach being used to facilitate learning and change). We may also observe a resulting tendency for CD processes to adhere to inflexible plans and frameworks which do not support adaptation to emerging needs and changing circumstances.

Are these theoretical frameworks of any value to CD? Through our collective inquiry in CD, we tried to observe whether there is a significant gap between 'what we know' and 'what we do'. As this report goes on to demonstrate, there is a growing sense that CD processes frequently are insufficiently grounded in theory or conceptual frameworks. This situation arises largely due to a lack of evidence of what actually takes place in different contexts. Without such evidence, unfounded assumptions continue to flourish. The assumption, for example, that capacity development at one level of intervention (e.g. individual, or organisation) contributes to increased capacity at other levels is challenged by some of the results observed from different CD processes. An increase in individual capacities often fails to translate into increased project or organizational capacity. We need to understand the circumstances under which individual and organisational interests are likely to converge and when they are likely to be in conflict. Moreover, capacity outcomes during a project do not necessarily lead to transformative changes or development impacts once the project is completed, especially when obstacles to change are not tackled by other interventions. Scaling up can cause undesirable changes in terms of process and the capacities developed in earlier smaller scale interventions are not necessarily maintained. Interventions based on close collaboration and joint work between those who develop their capacities and those who support them are reported to be a good complement to more traditional forms of capacity development and likely to facilitate the transformation of individual capacities into project and organizational capacities (see Box 4).

³ Taylor, Deak, Pettit and Vogel, 2006, p13

⁴ Checkland 1999, Senge 1990, Bawden 2004, SNV 2005

Box 4 - Close collaboration and follow-up for organisational and societal development in Afghanistan's Central Highlands

Experience shows how difficult it is for enhanced individual capacity to translate into organisational and wider development. Work supported by the Aga Khan Foundation in the Central Highlands of Afghanistan has paid particular attention to establishing this link, through close engagement with the local context, grounding in local institutions, and a commitment to systematic follow-up and learning.

The Programme for Professional Development (PPD) aims to enhance the capacity of local development professionals to contribute to sustainable and participatory development in the region, through a combination of multiple entry points. Regular training courses on themes around participatory development approaches and organisational development have been complemented by follow-up sessions, in which participants have reflected on the opportunities to apply their learning in their respective organisations. Consistent with its focus on learning from experience, it has responded to the results of follow-up, and in its second year will include specific measures for organisational development and support, preparing senior management and other staff to support learning application.

Espineli, Marissa B. (2007). 'Capacity Development in the Central Highlands Region of Afghanistan: The Programme for Professional Development.' Scoping paper for the Capacity Collective.

The lack of emphasis given to theories of knowledge, learning, change and power relations is of course an issue not only for donor organisations supporting development in countries in the South, but also for those same organisations and other actors in both North and South in understanding and acting to develop their own capacity needs.

Issues arising from the evidence

From our review of case studies and evaluations of capacity development interventions, and our subsequent discussions in the Capacity Collective workshop, we can gather a number of insights. We recognise that these are based on rather limited empirical evidence, which is itself a constraint. We have not identified, for example, any empirical studies or evaluations that have looked specifically at how capacity development interventions have addressed knowledge creation, sharing and use by individuals or organisations or within wider society in a systemic fashion. Findings from studies of capacity development interventions are generally based on qualitative studies and formulated in terms of performance changes. Attempts to evaluate CD also tend to take an instrumental view, looking at outcomes and impacts from a project/programme intervention view. Training, organisational development and 'technical assistance' are the types of capacity development activities described most frequently in the studies reviewed, although there are some examples of approaches which emphasise the criticality of learning processes (see box 5 overleaf).

Didactic pedagogy, status and the desire for certificates prevail above all else

There is still too much reliance on single/simple interventions such as training



Box 5 - Creative learning approaches with Cambodian NGOs

Using learning and creative approaches in workshops and conferences improves social dialogue, organisational learning and the quality of community interventions. VBNK is a Cambodian NGO working on capacity development for the social development sector, with a focus on learning and creativity to find solutions for intractable problems. In all its events VBNK uses methods such as the World Café, the Action-Reflection-Learning-Planning tool, Appreciative Inquiry and exercises that call for creative outputs. In a post-conflict country where lack of good communication and trust are major barriers to development and change these processes produce highly effective results. Participating agencies have identified a range of positive outcomes and impacts from exposure to these processes. For example, as a result of being introduced to organisational learning tools and to the use of creative and participatory methodologies for community work they say they now have improved internal learning; better relationships and cooperation with both Government and communities; better teamwork and less conflict within the organisation; and more satisfactory outcomes from village level interventions. Interestingly most respondents in the impact assessment said that they learnt more from the process of the VBNK events, experiencing creative learning processes for themselves, than they did from the content of the events.

Jenny Pearson, Director VBNK, Capacity Collective

Nevertheless, evidence from the discussions in the Capacity Collective workshop and our critical review of the literature on CD coincide in identifying certain structural limitations of current theoretical understanding and practice.

Although attempts have been made to develop more planned and strategic CD efforts which are multi-directional (N-S and S-S) and have a strong learning focus, the majority of initiatives to support CD adopt an instrumental and technical approach, rather than a systemic perspective. This emphasis on mechanical fixes for technical blocks seems often to be based on a rather narrow view of development, featuring direct support to training, dialogues, organisational development and political or institutional reforms. Important as these interventions are, they are often seen as the starting point (or indeed the only activity), with the assumption that broader change will then take place. (Research conducted in Vietnam highlighted some major challenges to CD success, see Box 6).

Box 6 - The learning challenges of capacity development in central Vietnam

Research conducted in Vietnam in 2006 highlighted four major challenges faced by organisations involved in capacity development. The first challenge is the application and transfer of learning into household or work situations. The second relates to attendance. In other words, who participates in CD and why? The third challenge is dealing with different mindsets and diverging interests and the last one concerns timing, sequencing and seasonality of capacity development.

Respondents identified factors that appear to improve learning and increase the amount of capacities developed, such as:

- an invitation (or selection) process that takes into consideration participants' interests, needs and readiness to learn while paying attention to factors that may influence attendance and participation
- activities that are relevant to the context and the needs and take into account previous knowledge, skills and experiences of participants

- activities that are planned according to participant and trainer availability (with special emphasis on groups of participants that may have particular needs such as poor people and women)
- approaches and material that are adapted constantly, building on actual knowledge and skills and responding to project constraints and timelines
- follow-up activities such as on-site coaching and mentoring, 'trainer-sitting', networking, visits to former participants, etc.

The different challenges of CD influence one-another. Therefore acting on one without considering the others is unlikely to be sufficient. Nonetheless, the research concludes that it is possible to design and implement activities that facilitate learning and support significantly the development of capacities. Activities that succeeded most were those taking into account the particular context in which CD takes place; the specificities of the various persons involved as well as power relations.

Kattie Lussier (2007). Presentation to Capacity Collective Workshop.

In this instrumental approach, resource allocation is bound both to limited areas of support, disconnected from other parts of the system, and to strict timelines, which are overwhelmingly short-term. Pressure on 'partners' to undertake activities within specific project timetables is a factor widely agreed to be limiting the quality of much CD support. It is rare to find long-term commitments to CD that allow patterns of support to emerge in a responsive fashion.

Since support to capacity development is generally based on the application of a limited range of preconceived technical inputs, there has been little attention to the systematic assessment of capacity needs. Baselines for evaluating the success of CD support strategies are rarely set up. It is not clear to what extent programmes and projects have contributed directly to increasing capacity since studies on this have often not been carried out. Where evaluations have been conducted, they are usually related very specifically to project outputs, and not undertaken with respect to wider change processes, nor as opportunities for reflection and learning by different stakeholders. As a result, imposed change is resisted, both by those perceived to be 'powerful', and by those perceived to be relatively less powerful. Part of this challenge stems from the fact that needs, when identified, are set out by individuals or groups who supposedly are representative of a particular community, for example 'government' or 'nation'. In practice, these 'claimed' needs may not be felt by those whose engagement in change processes is most critical.

The narrow technical base of initiatives to promote CD demonstrates a failure to draw on valuable knowledge associated with wider disciplines, such as: adult education, psychology, information systems, even in an era when 'interdisciplinary' approaches are seen as beneficial. There is a tendency towards simplification when moving to implementation stages, failing to take into account complexity, non-linearity, the need for reflexivity and the uncertainty of change in human systems. Different actors engaged in CD processes tend not to articulate their own theoretical understandings of how change happens. When these assumptions are not addressed explicitly, there is an increased risk of conflicts and tensions between what is said and what is done. Rational planning tends to be privileged over attention to values, emotions and principles of partnership and cooperation.

CD is frequently not supported purposefully. The purpose is often not stated at all, or there may be differing perceptions of the purpose (implicit, hidden and even negative) amongst different stakeholders. Some stakeholders may also exercise their relative power

in different ways. For example, some policy-makers may not be interested in research, and some political agendas may be disguised as technical agendas.

A number of the limitations we have identified relate to organisational roles, and specifically the practice of 'partnership'. Formal organisations often are seen as the appropriate location for CD processes, purely because they have identifiable boundaries. In practice, organisations may not provide the best focus for CD; informal, more permeable networks may in fact possess greater energy for change, but this may not be seen, simply because they are not formalised. They may, in practice, be 'invisible' to formal external actors. The range of stakeholders perceived to have key roles to play in CD is often limited to a few governmental or non-governmental organisations, failing to take account of the roles of wider Civil Society Organisations, as well as the private sector. Furthermore, there are major challenges for the scaling-up and scaling-out of capacity from individuals to organisations and to wider society, and the relationships and linkages between capacity at these different levels are rarely acknowledged.

Although the rhetoric of 'partnership' suggests a cooperative initiative towards common goals, there is often insufficient attention to the nature and evolution of the relationships within which CD is to be promoted. A more reflexive approach to such relationships demands a common strategic vision, shared ownership, and effective and accountable forms of governance. Southern 'partners' in northern-supported CD initiatives comment frequently on the perception by external agents that they have a capacity deficit characterised by 'barriers', 'gaps' or 'limitations', whereas they often understand their northern partners and/or donors to have their own capacity gaps that prevent them from working cooperatively towards common development goals. This lack of capacity for equitable cooperation and the paradigm of the North 'developing capacity' in the South are related to inequitable control over resources, with Northern organisations usually holding the reins and controlling the agenda. A further difficulty of partnerships is that many 'partners' are involved in more than one CD intervention or programme, founded on different principles and values. These differences make it difficult to work towards more joint and collaborative CD efforts which bridge across the work of different programmes, even when activities appear similar.

Capacity Development innovations don't fit easily with existing donor procedures and incentives

There are other structural difficulties related to unequal partnerships, such as the brain-drain from Southern organisations and the location of centres of learning and knowledge service providers removed from the realities and direct concerns of many practitioners. Although an inexorable reduction in organisational capacity is perceived in some regions, it is important to gain a longer-term perspective: history matters. For example, the need for an enhancement of capacity of research organisations in Africa is often cited, but these cases illustrate the dynamic nature of capacity. Many of the same organisations now seen to need development of capacity may have been perceived as having considerably higher levels of capacity some years earlier. What has caused this difference? Is it due to problems of brain drain and failure to maintain and build infrastructure, or due to problems of asymmetrical power relations in which shifting donor policies have created a disabling and disorienting environment for the management of organisational learning and change? In either case, there is a need for greater 'upward questioning' by agents of change and development of the donors and policy makers whose shifting agendas may exacerbate capacity gaps.

Issues of power are central, therefore, to the problems of equitable partnership, and also have much wider implications. Although difficult to address, it seems feasible that the impact of CD has been limited by a collective reluctance amongst both northern and

*Capacity is not just about
Human Capacity ...
Data matters too!*

southern actors to address systemically the issues of power, equity, social justice, inclusion, distribution of resources and voice which constrain CD in both the North and South. Consequently, the considerable energy that is available amongst practitioners, communities, donors, trainers and others is often not made sufficient use of, and is then channelled in other directions that are less constructive. CD initiatives need to take into account the relationships of power and knowledge in specific contexts which fundamentally influence how CD processes play out in practice.

Approaching CD through preconceived entry points such as training, organisational development or technical assistance may lead to a divorce of CD for human capacity from essential 'harder' elements, such as hardware and infrastructure or information needs. Thinking systemically means crossing boundaries and taking account of the relations between these 'hard' and 'soft' elements. This is illustrated by the importance of linking human capacity for research to data and technical capacity (see box 7).

Box 7 – Thinking systemically about research capacity

Data and technical needs are crucial parts of any research capacity system, alongside human capacity. Data needs may include such 'Research Resources' as panel studies, longitudinal data, and census and administrative data. Developing human capacity without taking account of issues relating to the availability and quality of data means that the human capacity developed cannot achieve its fullest potential and that fundamental questions cannot be fully addressed. Indeed, if capacity is developed but has no outlet then there is a possibility that it will migrate to take up opportunities outside of the system – researchers are likely to move where the jobs are, but could also potentially move to where the resources necessary for good research are available (ie. to the developed world or the private sector.) Access to good quality data is also critical in order to span the research and user domains, informing and providing baseline information for policymakers and other non-academic actors and organisations. These issues also have hardware and infrastructure implications, such as the need for hardware for data analysis (availability of secure data labs, for instance), telecoms, IT provision and access to library resources (electronic or traditional).

How do we relate 'what we know' to 'what we do'?

The evidence above presents a complex situation, particularly when we see the extent to which 'what we do' (our practice) appears to depart from 'what we know' (our theoretical understanding – or lack of it). From our review of the literature, and available evidence, four key dimensions emerge:

1 Frameworks used to analyse capacity development tend to be either for **descriptive** purposes, or for **evaluative** purposes. The purpose obviously makes a significant difference to the questions asked ('What is it?' and 'What is it for?' as opposed to 'How well was it done?' and 'What happened as a result?'). Certain evaluative frameworks ask all these questions, but the majority have one purpose or the other; thus determining quite strongly what is learned as a result of application of the framework. Evidence suggests that taking an evaluative stance to capacity development analysis is an essential attribute of successful interventions that aim to **develop capacity**.

2 Some frameworks for capacity development stress a highly **technical/rational** model, framed around inputs and outputs (perhaps leading to outcomes, and even impacts). Others place much more stress on the **relational** nature of capacity development.

*Scattergun approaches
which rely on luck to
join various interventions
together are not sufficient*

Evidence suggests that successful CD interventions focus on the dynamics and processes that are encountered or seen as desirable, and emphasise the importance of mutual reflection and learning.

3 The **level** at which capacity development takes place is another distinguishing factor. Certain organizations focus on capacity development specifically at the individual, the organizational, or the wider societal (systemic) level. The organizational level seems to be the most widely utilized as a site for intervention, although the majority of actual 'inputs' relate to training at the individual level. The linkage between capacity development at the individual level and at the organisational level is often assumed, rather than explored in detail (although a recent World Bank evaluation has studied this relationship, see Box 8). Evidence suggests, as shown in the following diagram, that integrating these three levels in a systemic fashion is critical to success.



Box 8 - Does individual training result in organisational capacity development? – evidence from a World Bank evaluation.

One of the most common tools used for capacity development is that of training. But, for training to contribute to the capacity of developing world institutions, it is not enough that training results in participant learning. Learning must be relevant to the needs and goals of target organisations and trainees must have the resources and incentives to apply what they have learned on the job. A recent World Bank Independent Evaluation Group (2008) study of training efficacy found that, while in most cases, former training participants had demonstrably learned, this learning resulted in workplace behaviour change, and, subsequently, in organisational impact, only about half of the time. Where training did not contribute to sustainable organisational capacity, the two primary causes were insufficient targeting of training to organisational needs, and insufficient resources or managerial support for trainees to apply what they had learned on the job. This finding reinforces a growing body of evidence that in order to enhance training efficacy, considerably more attention and resources must be devoted to focusing training programs on the specific needs of target organisations through thorough needs assessment, and to supporting implementation of learning in the workplace (Brinkerhoff and Apking, 2007).

Aliza Inbal, Capacity Collective Independent Evaluation Group (2008). Using Training to Build Capacity for Development. World Bank, Washington DC: 2008. Brinkerhoff, R. O. and Apking, A. M. (2007). High Impact Learning. Perseus Publishing, Cambridge, MA.

4 Finally, we see differences in the extent to which the **context** is recognized explicitly as a critical element in any capacity development intervention. CD approaches are frequently decontextualised and apolitical. It is often assumed that if the approach is 'right', the outcome will be positive, but evidence suggests that a more nuanced perspective of the context is needed, which includes an awareness of the relationship between knowledge and power. This requires recognition of the importance of political, social, economic and cultural factors.

These four dimensions may provide us with a way to frame our understanding of CD in relation to our practice, even amidst the many limitations in broader support to CD that we have cited above. Although there is of course much good CD experience to draw upon, the gaps between theoretical promise and practical reality seem difficult to overcome. Fundamentally, our theoretical understanding and our practice are failing to learn from each other; in three key areas.

Firstly, there are limitations in the **theoretical understanding of CD**, which is affected by a tendency to ignore or underplay some critical concepts and factors that influence its processes and outcomes, and a failure to draw on other broader areas of knowledge. Understanding fails to develop because of limitations and rigidity in the current development paradigm which underpins this understanding.

Secondly, **theoretical understanding does not always translate into practice**; what is known is not reflected in what is done. Values, principles and concepts of CD expressed in project or programme frameworks, often fail to translate into practical action. The concept of a systemic approach to capacity development seems difficult to articulate and convey in language that is accessible to practitioners, and crucially, to donors. Furthermore, organisations experience tensions in trying to bring about a significant shift in how they approach CD. Service providers may be disinclined to take on board apparent complexity when buyers of their services appear content to accept more straightforward, technical inputs.

Thirdly, **successful practice fails to translate into developed theoretical understanding**. There are insufficient, detailed stories of success being shared widely. These may be known locally, for example being captured within project documentation, but the important detail and key learnings for others may be lost in short descriptions or series of bullet points. The lack of evidence from practice to support our understanding is due in part to variable 'labelling' practices – where many processes go under different labels and hence are not identified as CD. In this way valuable opportunities are lost for learning as a continuous interplay between developing theoretical understanding and improved practice.

3: Re-imagining CD processes

*Without a doubt
Capacity Development
is an effective
development driver*

Despite the very extensive range of widely available literature⁵ related to CD theory and practice (conceptual, methodological, case studies), our survey and discussions have demonstrated the urgent need to recover these opportunities for learning. In this section, we look at ways that we might reimagine CD processes, drawing strongly on the ideas that emerged in the Capacity Collective workshop.

Our process of joint reflection on the current situation has led us to some broadly shared conclusions. We believe that capacity development must engage at the level of the human system – within which the roles, actions, norms and beliefs of individuals, organisations and wider society are closely interlinked. It is necessary for us to make strong connections between the importance of process and the criticality of results and outcomes. The recent development of the 'Outcome Mapping' methodology is one example of an innovation which attempts to do this (see box 9).

Box 9 - An Alternative Approach to Evaluating Capacity Development – Outcome Mapping

Development organizations are under pressure to demonstrate a broad and lasting impact of CD programmes, yet this is extremely difficult, given the complex interaction of different factors that contribute to long-term change. IDRC's Evaluation Unit has responded to this challenge by developing the Outcome Mapping methodology. Instead of assessing the products of a program (e.g. national research capacity) the method focuses on outcomes, understood as changes in behaviour, relationships and/or activities of direct programme participants (individuals or organisations), logically linked to programme activities, although not necessarily directly caused by them. The approach takes a learning-based view of evaluation, grounded in participation and iterative learning, and encourages evaluative thinking throughout the programme cycle by all team members.

This shift significantly alters the way a programme understands its goals and assesses its performance and results. Outcome Mapping establishes a vision of the positive human, social, and environmental change to which the programme hopes to contribute and then focuses monitoring and evaluation on factors and actors within its sphere of influence. The program's contributions to development are planned, and assessed, based on its influence on the partners with whom it is working to effect change.

Through Outcome Mapping, development programmes claim contributions to the achievement of outcomes rather than the achievement of development impacts. Although these outcomes enhance the possibility of development impacts, the relationship is not necessarily one of direct cause and effect. Outcome Mapping concentrates on monitoring and evaluating the influence of the programme on the roles programme partners play in development.

Earle, S., Carden, F. & Smutylo, T. (2001). Outcome Mapping: building learning and reflection into development programs. Ottawa, IDRC.

⁵ A list of networks and information resources is provided in Appendix B.

The absolute key is to align with local change processes

We should emphasise the centrality of learning to all CD processes, whether it is by individuals, organisations, or learning taking place more widely in society. We need to recognise the need for performance, as an indicator of capacity, without which it may be rendered meaningless. A deep and well-founded understanding of the context in which CD processes unfold is essential. Underpinning all these are the core issues of power and purpose, which although often ignored, provide the beacon that guides and even governs all CD processes towards their particular outcomes.

If we are to articulate our vision for a new form of practice for capacity development, we need to base it also in our understanding of how change happens. We believe that this understanding is rarely articulated, although attempts are made, such as those mentioned earlier in section 2 of this report. Indeed there are likely to be at least as many theories of how change happens as there are attempts to develop capacity. If we understand CD as a form of change, then it seems crucial that we state explicitly how we see change taking place, and the factors that influence change. So many of the challenges associated with current practices of CD seem to emanate from the practice of instigating change from outside a specific context, and the assumption that external agents are the most effective drivers of change. Coupled with technical, instrumental approaches, we believe that such change processes fail to attract the energies that need to be used purposefully for positive change – from the various actors within the context itself. External actors may well have a role to play – as facilitators, guides, mentors, coaches, supporters and providers of needed resources, but the intrinsic motivation for change must come from those whose capacity is to develop.

Mobilising energy and the importance of specific context

Energy for good change exists in every context, but it may be difficult to detect this energy amidst the forms of institutional inertia mentioned already in this paper. It is not always easy to find and identify what people are already good at, to understand where energy is currently channelled, and to recognise whose interests are being met. Finding out how 'success' is understood, and where and how it is appreciated, is often problematic because actual 'success' does not fit conveniently within the boxes of expected results, target or outputs within logframes. Any review of collective and individual understandings of success will require a careful look at politics, cultural dimensions and power relations associated with different interests.

If we are to respond to the insight of the Capacity Collective workshop, that in order to support CD processes we must learn to work systemically, a shift is needed from the classic response of selecting from a pre-defined repertoire of technical inputs. It will be necessary to construct strategies, approaches and methods to detect the existing dynamics of the specific context in which CD processes are unfolding, and to mobilise existing energy productively through a process of dialogue within the context.

Working systemically

The Capacity Collective workshop provided an opportunity to explore an exciting new vision for a more systemic approach to CD. By exchanging stories of CD practice in different contexts, we identified four key dynamics that foster and drive processes of change. By paying attention to these, we may be in a stronger position to understand existing energies and dynamics, and consequently support and nurture the emergence of CD processes that are more organic and likely to bring about more sustainable change (see photo opposite and cover).



1. **Empowering relationships** that are based on cultural competence and enhanced by leadership capabilities, and an understanding of power dynamics within the specific context. Such relationships encourage synergy of efforts, may help to overcome resistance to change, and provide enhanced legitimacy of processes as well as outcomes of CD.

2. **Rallying ideas** that are accessible to a wide range of actors and framed using clear language, terminology and concepts. These would be motivational, based on experience of people within their own context, grounded in theory, but tested in action; and shared widely and effectively. Ideas that are generated collectively and communicated effectively facilitate the ownership of change processes by all actors.

3. **Dynamic agents** who are reflexive, exhibit flexibility, are opportunistic and adapt to changing circumstances. They are self-confident, but also aware (through reflexivity) of the attitudes, mindsets and worldviews that shape how they work. We need to recognise that often such people are active within networks that may not be 'visible' to external organisations or service providers unfamiliar with the immediate context. Since such external organisations tend to 'see' formal organisations, they may miss opportunities to work with networks that can be a force for good change. Such networks may also provide a real linkage between learning and change that spans the individual, organisational, and even societal levels.

4. **Framing and shaping context** within the wider systemic environment of the issue, challenge or activity concerned, and going beyond the particular agents, relationships and ideas involved. Successful support to CD depends on complementing a focus on the specific context with an ability to read and respond to the wider system, and the dynamic interactions between its elements. Although serendipity no doubt plays a part in both successes and failures of CD processes, a more proactive approach may well bring benefits. Understanding the consequences of timing, sequencing and seasonality, for example, may have a critical impact on immediate change processes within the bigger picture.

In addition to these four dynamics, we see the importance of a further **cross-cutting requirement for grounding/enabling knowledge and skills**. Communication skills, conceptual grasp of learning processes, reflexivity, leadership, and a strong process orientation need to be connected strongly with the ability to understand, and interact with, specific technical needs and requirements, thus ensuring that both process and outcomes of CD are taken account of.

Internal/external agendas

It is important of course for all organisations and institutions to have a strategy which guides their way forward within a changing environment. Such a strategy, however, is often misplaced under the influence of external factors, which lead it to be either forgotten or ignored. Inappropriate strategy and purpose can even mis-channel energy, leading to resistance, conflict and self-protection. All organisations therefore need to look critically at how they learn.

Different agendas and expectations of organisations and institutions do, as we saw earlier, tend to create asymmetries in power relations that in turn may have a negative effect on desired outcomes. Although the 'North-South' dichotomy is problematic, there is a very strong perception that Northern agencies, particularly donors, need to listen and to become more open to the wishes and felt needs of organisations in the South, whilst ensuring that the pressures they feel themselves are conveyed to those whom they support. Greater openness and dialogue may provide a route to a more systemic approach to CD. This is not a one-way shift, however. Organisations in the South may explore ways of being clearer about their vision and strategic purpose, and to engage in hard talking, when needed, with Northern development agencies determined to pursue their own agenda. Practitioners in the South, whilst being highly aware of the challenges and opportunities of their immediate context, need also to be open to conceptual and theoretical learning that may enhance their practice – thus becoming critically reflective 'thinkers' as well as practical 'doers'. The notion of the 'thinking doer' is attractive in contexts where individuals may be driven very much towards action.

A mutual learning approach to CD is vital, based on open dialogue by all those organisations that wish to effect change. This is the basis of a reciprocal relationship between collaborating partners in change processes. Donor organisations, service providers and research institutes that support CD will all benefit from a deeper understanding of their own CD needs and required actions to address these needs. Organisations receiving external funding may be prone to responding to the demands of exogenous audiences and stakeholders, particularly in relation to the achievement of results in the short-term. There is a real tension between a desire for rapid outcomes, and the recognition that effective CD processes need sufficient time. Innovations by recipient organisations may not be valued if they do not fit easily with donors' existing procedures, incentives and motivations (a problem that is likely to increase with further donor 'harmonisation').

Knowing how to unlock what people/institutions already have is equally important as pouring in new tools and techniques

The desire by organisations playing a supporting role to see the 'impact' of their support is highly problematic. There is inadequate evidence demonstrating direct causality between inputs aimed at supporting CD and identifiable change (whether at the individual, organisational or wider societal level, with difficulty of attribution increasing with breadth of impact being sought). Short-term mechanistic tools are not appropriate for measuring long-term organic process. A strong push by external organisations to see proven impact is, we believe, somewhat misconceived and may actually channel energy and resources away from more systemic, and more effective CD processes.

In general there is a need to articulate a systemic approach in ways that are accessible to different audiences. Visualising the systemic will be useful, but may bring dangers of yet again simplifying what is by nature complex and uncertain. We need to show the gap between what we 'see' as systemic and what we 'do' as typical CD practice. To do this, it helps to work at the specific level of the context. We need to place a normative, active emphasis on the purpose of CD, in order to move the different factors that affect change. We need to make the connection between purpose and strategy. And, we need to find ways in which strategy leads itself organically to informed action, and particularly to action which mobilises energies which can bring about good change.

If we want Capacity Development to generate development we must change the way we think, plan, engage in and evaluate CD processes

To conclude this section on how we might reimagine CD, some key directions have emerged. In order to make the connection between what is known and done, we need to look holistically at CD processes, and take a normative stance on how we (as a more collective and collaborative CD enterprise) approach planning, implementation and evaluation. This involves us identifying key strategies for CD that support a more systemic approach. There is a need therefore for all actors engaged in development processes to focus on change and adaptive management that is rooted in endogenous strengths, needs, aspirations and expectations arising from specific contexts rather than seeing CD always from an exogenous, deficit perspective. We hope to achieve a real sea-change in how CD is understood and practiced by:

- promoting empowering relationships
- supporting rallying ideas
- mobilising dynamic agents, and
- proactively framing and shaping the context for CD in which sets of grounding/enabling knowledge and skills are enhanced through systemic learning processes.

In the next and final section of this report, we consider ways forward that may help to bring this change about.

4: Ways forward

Recognise the role of various actors – researchers, practitioners, policy-makers and donors - in reinvigorating CD debate

New methodologies for assessment, planning and M&E may help bridge the gap between knowledge and practice

There is a wide range of actions that can be taken in order to change the current paradigm for CD. Some of these are long-term, with the outcomes not being seen for some considerable time. This does not make such changes unmeaningful, however. Unless both short-term and longer-term change is brought about, collectively, by the ever-widening group of actors engaged in CD processes, the current state of inertia, confusion and waste of valuable energy and resources will continue. There cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' approach. Open and transparent dialogue is critical, with a greater willingness of different organisations to listen and appreciate what does already work, as well as to confront the tensions and constraints that sometimes present real challenges. Critically, a systemic approach to CD is needed, avoiding the time-worn prescriptions of training and organisational development 'interventions', and giving real attention to the means of mobilising energy for good change.

We believe collectively, as a group of actors committed to effective, equitable and positive change, that we should be:

- Supporting the development of innovative strategies for evaluation of CD and change processes from a systems and learning perspective - paying particular attention to comparative analysis of existing capacity and resulting needs, and processes by which CD interventions are then established through collaboration of different stakeholders
- Revisiting the way in which CD processes are labelled, to ensure that learning is maximised from a very wide range of activities that are not picked up in explorations or research on CD - as well as being more rigorous about what is understood as CD, to move it on from the current 'catch-all' for a vast range of unrelated development interventions
- Examining the relative strengths and weaknesses of CD interventions with different forms of partnership, and over different time-frames, in order to identify the variables that bring about significant and positive change in power relations, equity and voice, as well as other benefits. In this way, challenging questions of politics, governance and accountability may be addressed in ways which are not determined entirely by the inequity of asymmetrical North-South relationships

These are ways forward that we all can pursue, within our own organisations as well as with a wide range of actors engaged in CD processes in many different contexts, in both North and South. We believe that there are also some specific ways forward for certain groups of actors. Many of our proposals relate to capacity development for the generation, sharing and use of knowledge, which was our entry point and responds to the specific institutional focus of many of us. Our broader aim is to contribute to developing theoretical understanding, policy and practice in relation to CD more generally.

What would be effective for the Capacity Collective is to find a way of getting unlikely new actors in on the thinking, for example through research

Despite its variegated definition and history, 'real' CD is the only effort that leaves a footprint that has a chance to last

We recommend that **donor organisations** should consider:

- supporting pilot CD processes that follow a systemic approach in different contexts (regionally, and in settings with different 'baselines'), in order to identify more clearly which variables have a critical impact on effectiveness of CD processes; these may include exchanges and visits, basic training, co-creation and sharing of knowledge, alternative mechanisms for resource management and accountability over ODA support to development research
- engaging with international and regional networks (including National and Regional research systems) that problematise and address challenges associated with CD processes, and provide support to those organisations and networks equipped to take forward elements of the agenda in a coherent fashion.
- encouraging and resourcing research that is sufficiently meaningful to the challenges and needs of practitioners and supporting organisations, with potential for direct application of results, including the emergence of methodologies and approaches generated in local contexts.
- providing more funding for education and training of Southern practitioners in the South, thus basing these learning processes within local contexts; coupled with ongoing support to enhance the capacity of Southern education and research institutes to deliver quality programmes that meet the needs of these practitioners
- reflecting on their own internal capacity to develop effective long-term partnerships around CD processes and to address issues of ownership, adaptability and longevity of support to CD initiatives; donors should pay closer attention to how they track spending on CD support, with due attention also paid to how this is labelled. Mediation may be needed to support a more productive dialogue and engagement between organisations in North and South.

For other organisations (**research institutes, service providers, and CD practitioners**), we recommend that they consider:

- identifying and undertaking research that examines the case for and against the search for 'impact' of CD interventions; explorations of the influence of demand and supply for CD services; inquiry into the effectiveness of different forms of learning process and the influence of context on learning outcomes; mapping of CD experiences in different countries to identify what has worked and what has not from the perspective of those affected and involved directly. There is a need to test emerging and existing theory relevant to CD directly on the ground, and to share the resulting learning much more widely.
- providing learning opportunities for practitioners that acknowledge the realities and challenges of their local contexts. More attention needs to be paid to learning needs identification, and CD interventions should innovate rather than follow well-trodden paths. Local and regional learning networks, learning or reading weeks, immersions and exchanges in contexts that challenge an individual's mindset are all interesting ways forward.
- articulating ideas, concepts and theory in accessible language (including translation into languages other than English) without losing the understanding that uncertainty and complexity are integral to processes of development and change. Communication mechanisms are needed for sharing of CD-related information that are equitable and transparent, recognising the different needs and perceptions held by different actors engaged in CD processes
- developing formal education programmes for professionals engaged in CD work; at Masters level and through PhD research (in both Northern and Southern educational institutes); this may lead to the growth of a professional field of capacity development that is grounded in the principles and approaches described in this document.

There is an urgent need for sharpening overarching thinking on capacity development and also to underpin that with systematic academic/research work

We believe strongly that the development of evidence-based policy on CD, and a real paradigm shift in thinking and practice of CD, cannot be achieved by one narrow group of organisational actors alone. The Capacity Collective is conceived as a shared endeavour to challenge and reimagine CD, bringing together the experience, knowledge, practice and motivation of different actors – donors, academic researchers and practitioners. We hope to involve individuals and actors who have not participated so far in this dialogue, to continue questioning our own understanding and practice, and move collectively towards more appreciative forms of inquiry. In this way, we hope to build on what is being done well, linking what we do with what we know. The learning from our collective efforts may be shared through both existing and new forms of communication channels. We recognise that it is vital for us to open up a wider platform for dialogue, connecting to all kinds of actors engaged in CD. Most importantly, this platform should be inclusive, so that no-one is excluded on technical, geographical, linguistic or political grounds.

Only through a combined and committed effort in advocacy and dialogue, and a determination to link theory, policy and practice systemically, will the benefits from capacity development processes be realised in ways that make a real difference to the development challenges of the future.

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Appendix B: Major internet sites on capacity development

ACBF – African Capacity Building Foundation

<http://www.acbf-pact.org/>

African Economic Research Consortium

<http://www.aercafrica.org/home/index.asp>

Cap-Net Capacity Building for Integrated Water Resource Management

<http://www.cap-net.org/>

Capacity.org

<http://capacity.org/en/>

CIDA

<http://les.acdi-cida.gc.ca/project-browser>

Development Gateway Foundation (dgCommunities)

<http://topics.developmentgateway.org/capacitydevelopment>

DFID Technical Cooperation

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/mdg/aid-effectiveness/technical-cooperation.asp>

ELDIS

<http://www.eldis.org/go/display/?id=13645&type=Document>

European Centre for Development Policy Management

<http://www.ecdpm.org/>

Health Policy and Planning

<http://heapol.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/content/full/22/4/274>

IDRC

http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-70623-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html

INTRAC

http://www.intrac.org/pages/about_intrac.html

OECD/DAC

http://www.oecd.org/document/38/0,3343,en_2649_34565_37038950_1_1_1_1,00.html

OneWorld UK

http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/capacitybuilding?gclid=COHAje_On40CFR5UEAodGnBW0A

SIDA

http://www.sida.se/sida/jsp/sida.jsp?d=806&a=5318&language=en_US&searchWords=capacity

UNDP <http://www.capacity.undp.org/>

World Bank Capacity Development Resource Center

<http://go.worldbank.org/TFIPT5BOR0>



capacity
for a
change



Enormous amounts of funding are invested every year in capacity development (CD). There are many positive outcomes from this, yet there is often dissatisfaction with both the idea and the practice.

This report from the 'Capacity Collective', based on an international dialogue and workshop, sets out for policy makers and a range of actors across donor/practitioner/research communities, a series of challenges and opportunities for support to capacity development. It aims to encourage further debate on deeper meanings of knowledge and learning, and on ways in which power relations influence the capacity of individuals and organisations to engage as actors in processes of development and change. It pays particular attention to a systemic approach for understanding and supporting the development of capacity at three interlinked levels: the individual, the organisational and in wider society.

The report contributes to an ongoing, open dialogue that aims to help reduce the gap between 'what we know' about capacity development, and 'what we do'.



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