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**DAC SEMINAR ON TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION AND CAPACITY
DEVELOPMENT: SYNTHESIS REPORT**

(Note by the Secretariat)

held on 9-10 December 1996 at the Centre de Conférences Internationales, Paris.

This document, prepared by the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) in conjunction with the Secretariat, is submitted for INFORMATION and DISCUSSION to the Development Assistance Committee at its meeting on 24-25 March 1997.

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DAC SEMINAR ON TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

9-10 December 1996, Paris

SYNTHESIS REPORT FROM THE DAC INFORMAL NETWORK ON TECHNICAL CO-OPERATION

Chairpersons: M. Jean-Marie Guehenno and Mr. Alessandro Pio

I. Introduction

1. This report is a synthesis of issues and recommendations arising at the Seminar on Technical Co-operation and Capacity Development held in Paris on 9-10 December 1996. The seminar was sponsored by the French Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation on behalf of the Informal Technical Co-operation Network (TC Network) of the OECD/Development Assistance Committee (DAC)¹.

2. The seminar was specifically designed to engage practitioners from developing countries in Africa and Asia in discussions on capacity development. The agenda was built around case studies presented by the developing country experts, as well as their commentaries on donors' policy papers (a list of participants and documentation is appended). A number of permanent DAC Delegates attended as observers.

3. Plenary sessions and working groups focused on three major topics identified in earlier meetings²:

- defining and assessing "results" in institutional and capacity development;

1. The TC Network is a working group of volunteer representatives from DAC Member agencies, comprising professionals in the field of technical co-operation and capacity development. The Network was created following a June 1994 DAC/UNDP/World Bank High Level Seminar on Improving the Effectiveness of Technical Co-operation in the 1990's, to provide guidance to DAC Members on innovations and best practice in these areas.

2. Previous meetings were held in London and Eschborn. The issues they raised are synthesised in Policy Brief No. 5 by the European Centre for Development Policy Management, "Capacity Development: How Can Donors do it Better?", Maastricht, September 1995.

- institutional and capacity development and decentralised management of aid programmes;
- integrating institutional and capacity development into sector investment programmes.

4. The seminar provided a platform for the developing country experts to offer their personal reflections on donors' approaches and practices in institutional and capacity development. The composition and format of the meeting were designed to encourage learning and stimulate dialogue among development partners and to strengthen the DAC's efforts to implement the "partnership" approach.

II. The Context: a Paradigm Shift

5. Mr. Richard Carey, Deputy Director for the Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD) at the OECD, described a fundamental change underway in development co-operation. He cited the call by the OECD for a "paradigm shift" towards partnership and local ownership:

Sustainable development...must be locally owned. The role of external partners is to help strengthen capacities in developing partner countries.

To give substance to our belief in local ownership and partnership we must use channels and methods of co-operation that do not undermine those values. Acceptance of the partnership model ... is one of the most positive changes we are proposing in the framework for development co-operation. In a partnership, development co-operation does not try to do things for developing countries and their people, but with them ... Paternalistic approaches have no place in this framework. In a true partnership, local actors should progressively take the lead while external partners back their efforts to assume greater responsibility for their development.³

6. The shift to real partnership and local ownership is emerging at a time of scepticism, even hostility in the North towards development aid, while profound social and political change is affecting a number of developing countries. In this respect, participants recognised that this context can be unsettling:

- The people, communities and institutions of developing countries are often confronted with turbulence and uncertainty. Their economies can be fragile, their progress towards democracy often uncertain. Changing institutions, cultures, values and technologies create a sense of insecurity but also opportunities for innovation and creativity.
- Change is inherently political, implying new roles and affecting relations of power and interest. The people and institutions involved will have to make a major commitment to engage in real partnerships.
- "Institutional pluralism" is a key component of change. No single institution can do all things well. Responsibility for implementing the partnership approach will have to be shared with different actors, groups and coalitions representing diverse beneficiaries and stockholders.

3. Shaping the 21st Century: the Contribution of Development Co-operation, OECD, Paris May 1996, p. 13.

7. Mr. Carey challenged participants to provide examples, analyses and recommendations to help donors and counterparts meet this agenda and start building true partnerships (partnership meaning reciprocity and a readiness to change the syndrome of “dancing to donors’ tunes”). The participants’ contributions are embodied in the summaries below.

III. Main Messages and Practical Implications

A. *Partnerships for sustainability*

8. Supporting innovations and building on local ownership, knowledge and institutions is difficult and time-consuming. Yet it offers better guarantees of sustainable results.

9. Donors seeking to promote partnership and sustainable development should:

- adapt their programming to the fact of profound political and social change;
- give governmental and non-governmental institutions the political, practical and intellectual time and space to develop their own agendas for change, and to negotiate foreign assistance in their own frameworks;
- seek to understand and empower existing and emerging indigenous institutions which survive and function even without foreign assistance – listen and learn, respect their values, and try to adjust to their pace, agendas, and methods of work;
- show confidence in the competence of developing-country people and institutions: be ready to respond to locally-generated plans and proposals, and to adjust procedures as conditions change;
- be ready and able to adapt to a different role, one of support and facilitation rather than direction and implementation, which means “letting go” of detailed formulation and management functions;
- engage donor country, politicians and constituencies in building the public conviction that a thoughtful, balanced partnership and genuine local ownership are the key to return on investment in development co-operation.

10. Governments, institutions and communities in developing countries face related challenges. They should:

- build on their own capacity and competence to formulate their own development plans and agenda and co-ordinate donors’ commitments to those;
- demonstrate accountability and transparency in using their own and foreign resources, to build public and political support, and to gain donors’ confidence;
- learn to say “no” to projects and programmes that overtax people, institutions and resources, and which are not assimilated into the country’s strategic agenda for capacity development.

B. *Implications for assessing results in institutional and capacity development*

11. “Managing for results” is still widely seen as sponsored and promoted by donors. People, governments and organisations in developing countries continue to feel the imposition of donors’ techniques and approaches⁴.

12. **Development partners should be prepared to negotiate and manage new forms of accountability, including shared responsibility for results.** The following recommendations were made:

- Design performance indicators jointly. Defining results and indicators is a political process and local definition of “the problem” is essential if the resulting programme is to be well-conceived and locally-owned. Work back from objectives to indicators, avoiding prefabricated “universal” indicators.
- Make time and space for different opinions to challenge and verify indicators. For example, review evaluative yardsticks with people in the institutions and communities involved.
- Be very selective in choosing indicators - do they really assist in implementing and monitoring the programme? Capacity development requires indicators of process and relationships as much as “end results”. Nevertheless, it is important to create indicators of long-term impact, to identify capacity that remains after external assistance ends.
- Design implementation techniques jointly, to build on the resources, skills, and potential of institutions and communities in developing countries. Priorities should be negotiated, with both sides' resources and capacities closely scrutinised and matched to the responsibilities assigned. There is a real need for fresh approaches to traditional project implementation, such as twinning, or direct co-operation between decentralised actors. Host agencies can and should take responsibility for monitoring implementation. This is an essential ingredient of institutional development and capacity building.
- The link between indicators, monitoring and implementation should allow changes in project design and resource allocation as conditions change.
- Recognise that Management Information Systems (often part of the baggage of management for results) can be burdensome. Many are donor-specific and uncoordinated, as well as dense and rigid.

C. *Implications for capacity development and the decentralisation of aid programmes*

13. Decentralising the management of aid is an essential part of the paradigm shift towards partnership and local ownership. If donors are not prepared to operate through decentralised approaches, the new paradigm is not likely to be realised.

4. An issue recognised elsewhere within the OECD. See “Finding Problems to Suit the Solutions: Introduction to a Critical Analysis of Aid Methods and Instruments in the Sahel”, report prepared by the Club du Sahel, OECD, September 1996.

14. Decentralisation is attractive because of its potential to engage non-state actors and lower levels of government, and hence to build wider ownership and sustainability in a project. Its attractiveness should not obscure some real dilemmas, however:

- Decentralisation is not a panacea. Without a committed central government playing a co-ordinating/facilitating role, decentralisation is unlikely to succeed. Ideally, there should be a clear linkage or complementarity between the decentralisation of aid programmes, and broader national policies and practices for administrative decentralisation.
- Decentralisation is inherently complex, involving multiple actors at different levels of society. The “point of entry” or level of intervention for foreign assistance may not be obvious. It thus becomes all the more important that external agencies seek and follow local advice.
- Decentralising aid management means more than simply providing resources to local governments and non-state actors working in isolation. It calls for new approaches to local development, strengthening local institutions and promoting democracy at local levels. Yet local institutions may lack the information, experience and mechanisms to foster collaboration, and donors or national agencies may resist local efforts towards co-ordination.
- It may not be easy for government actors (national or foreign) to work with groups and organisations in civil society. On the one hand, non-state actors may have limited capacity, or their resources may not fit the operational patterns of government or international agencies. On the other hand, donors’ cultures and behaviour may create obstacles for effective work at local level. Paternalistic attitudes, unrealistic timeframes, rigid and inappropriate accountability can be dysfunctional, particularly in the context of decentralising schemes. There may be an opportunity for NGOs to take on an intermediary or facilitating role, promoting collaboration and supporting local actors’ efforts to develop their own programmes of action. At the same time, NGOs’ own management capacities and their legitimacy and accountability cannot be taken for granted.

15. **Despite the scepticism expressed about the chances of success of decentralisation schemes, the seminar offered evidence of changing practices.** Savings and credit organisations in Africa have established a continent-wide network, with donors playing an arms-length support role. In Uganda, DANIDA has assisted in devolving the management of an integrated development programme to district authorities. GTZ acted as a “facilitator” in an exercise through which Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Agriculture created its own agenda for organisational change and renewal, setting an example which is being emulated in other Zimbabwean ministries as well as in neighbouring countries.

16. **Drawing on those successful experiences with decentralisation, participants made the following recommendations:**

- Donors and government institutions should open up all phases of the project cycle to local participation. This means managing a demand-driven process, inclusive of and responsive to local communities, their specific cultures and dynamics. This approach would allow donors to encourage and benefit from the skills and capacities of groups and organisations in civil society. It would also offer them an opportunity to assist local governments in creating broadly-based strategic development plans to guide action by local and foreign institutions.
- Effective decentralisation of the management of aid requires donors to decentralise their own patterns of operational responsibility. This implies a change of culture and attitude as much as procedure. Donors will need to develop process skills and strategic thinking. Within their own organisations they will need to encourage a culture of learning, that is adaptive to change and receptive to different notions of time.
- National (central) governments will still play a critical role, co-ordinating donors and promoting decentralised management of aid. They have an opportunity to promote decentralised administration of government as a whole. Donors can play a key part in supporting central governments in their new roles, and in participating in dialogue on effective ways to promote decentralisation. If they do not themselves move towards decentralised modalities, however, their advice will lack experience and credibility.
- Decentralising aid management invites the different actors to review their own roles and comparative advantages. Development agencies and host governments should explore the use of subsidiarity - the principle of delegating activity to the lowest possible level -- in development co-operation. As the development agenda becomes more complex and an increasing number of local actors move to the forefront, the different donor agencies (including northern NGOs) will have to adapt and adjust. The principle of subsidiarity will be central to this process.

D. *Implications for integrating institutional/capacity development into sector investment programmes*

17. Are Sector Investment Programmes (SIPs) a useful vehicle for changing strategies of development co-operation? Can they be effective tools for building institutional capacity? Reaching agreement on the definition of a sector is an issue in itself. The seminar settled on the flexible definition used by DANIDA:

*a coherent set of activities which need to be looked at together to make a meaningful assessment, and which can be identified in terms of a relevant set of policies, institutions, and finance. ... Sectors can also be cross-institutional and/or thematic ... if the co-operation country has a relevant framework of institutions, policies, etc.*⁵

5. "Guidelines for Sector Support", Copenhagen, DANIDA, April 1996, cited by Graham Teskey, ODA, Sector Investment : Capacity Building and TC Implications, December, 1996.

18. This approach allows users to go beyond traditional categories to consider cross-sectoral issues such as the environment. The World Bank definition of SIPs is more narrow, built on stringent financial agreements and joint implementation procedures. The UNDP offers yet another approach, by programme rather than sector. This emphasizes a common and co-ordinated response to “the problem” as defined by developing-country governments.

19. A SIP offers a co-ordinated approach for a specific application within a coherent national framework. But it poses real challenges to both donors and developing-country governments. **For donors, it means:**

- stepping back from micro-management;
- adopting national needs as the basis for performance indicators;
- asking themselves if they have the necessary expertise and experience in organisational process and change;
- committing substantial resources and pooling these with other agencies;
- accepting guidance from the host country;
- working towards greater coherence among themselves.

20. The host government undertaking a SIP faces the task of managing donors and donor resources within sectoral programmes defined according to their own needs. This may mean difficult political choices, such as rejecting projects that do not fit the parameters of sectoral strategies.

21. **Given these constraints, the key questions are:**

- Who leads the process of formulating SIPs?
- What is the time-frame?
- What are the respective roles of donors and host governments?

22. These issues are complex and require further debate. **A number of suggestions were made:**

- Leadership responsibility for SIPs should rest clearly with the host government, the starting point being its overall plan or policy framework to which donors could subscribe. Hence, the host government would decide if, when, and how technical co-operation is to be used. Specialisation/concentration of donors could also be explored within the framework.
- Methodologies for institutional assessment within sectors should be jointly designed.
- Donors should play a facilitation role as requested in areas such as policy definition, strategy development or negotiation to help build consensus among the diverse actors involved in a SIP. Donors could also provide specific technical inputs as necessary.

- Donor co-ordination in implementing SIPs is essential. Managed by host governments, this co-ordination must include: financial mechanisms (aiming for flexibility in disbursement and procurement); accounting for expenditures (emphasising transparency); monitoring and evaluation (with performance indicators oriented to development impact).
- Donors should revisit their legal and accounting provisions to recognise the fact of a shared programme, pooled resources, and joint accountability. This implies building organisational flexibility and a readiness to adjust quickly to particular circumstances.

IV. Some Concluding Thoughts from Participants

23. Are donors ready to change? This is one of the most pertinent questions to ask of aid agencies. As one participant put it: “How can we change thirty years of donors telling ‘partners’ what to do”? Can development agencies muster the political will to change themselves and relinquish some of their power and privileges? Can they renounce detailed control over resources, a critical step towards building motivation, confidence and capacity at local levels? Do they have the expertise to promote capacity development? Are they genuinely sympathetic to developing local ownership, learning about local realities and respecting local knowledge and agendas? Can they learn to trust local systems and people, and maintain a positive attitude towards “failure”?

24. To test donors’ willingness to change, i.e. to move from donor-driven development co-operation to local ownership and partnership, aid agencies might answer seven questions posed by a Ugandan participant:

- **perception:** how comprehensive is your understanding of “capacity-building”?
- **trust:** how much authority do you entrust to local institutions?
- **attitude:** how accommodating are you towards initial local failures?
- **priority:** what do you choose to support?
- **compromise:** how willing are you to move away from “conventions”?
- **initiative:** are you ready to take a lead in advising central governments?
- **sustainability:** what can you contribute to financial and technical sustainability?

V. Follow-up for the TC Network

25. Participants made several recommendations on the operation of the TC Network. These were pursued in a follow-up meeting of TC Network members and have been incorporated into a programme for the Network for 1997 and 1998. They include the following:

1. Encourage development agencies to assess themselves against principles of partnership in their programming for institutional and capacity development. Develop a checklist for self-assessment and suggest that the DAC High Level Meeting in May 1997 should endorse the idea of a process of collective self-assessment by DAC Members.

2. Draft a Policy Brief for decision-makers on the basis of the seminar. Ensure that the Policy Brief contains operational advice for programming and is widely distributed to aid agencies and developing-country partners.
3. Contribute to the proposed revision of the *DAC Principles for Effective Aid*.
4. Take the debate about institutional and capacity development to the field. Consider a developing country as the venue for the next seminar. Look for ways to engage field staff of development agencies in the debate.
5. Use the knowledge of the TC Network and resource people in developing countries to strengthen the capacity of staff in development agencies to deal with institutional and capacity development. Share and reflect on experience.
6. Ensure high-level political, financial and logistical support among policy-makers for the TC Network, which exists as a follow-up mechanism to the June 1994 DAC/UNDP/World Bank High Level Seminar on Improving the Effectiveness of Technical Co-operation in the 1990s.
7. Ensure that future TC Network meetings include participants from developing countries and rely on them for advice and comments on planned activities.

ANNEX 1

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ANNEX 2

LIST OF DOCUMENTS/LISTE DES DOCUMENTS

DONOR DOCUMENTS, CASE STUDIES AND COMMENTARIES FROM DEVELOPING
COUNTRY EXPERTS/DOCUMENTS DES DONNEURS ET ETUDES DE CAS ET
COMMENTAIRES DES EXPERTS DES PAYS EN VOIE DE DEVELOPPEMENT

ABEGAZ Zwedie (UNICEF, Ethiopia)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Commentary on:</i> "Institutional and Capacity Development, Results-based Management and Organizational Performance"
ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK <i>Alessandro Pio</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Case Study on:</i> "Integrating Institutional and Capacity Development into Sector Investment Programs -- Some Lessons from the Asian Development Bank's Experience", with Summary • <i>Commentary on:</i> "Decentralized Management of Official Development Assistance Programs/Projects: the Philippine Experience and Perspective"
BANERJEE Niloy (South-South Solidarity, India)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Commentary on:</i> "Institutional and Capacity Development, Results-based Management and Organizational Performance" -- An NGO Response to Institutional and Capacity Development
CIDA (Canadian International Development Agency) <i>Peter Morgan and Ann Qualman</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Institutional and Capacity Development, Results-based Management and Organizational Performance" with Executive Summary
EUROPEAN COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Institutional Development Study", Final Report, Volume 1, Synthesis" with Summary (in French)
DGIS (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Institutional Sector Assessment. A Methodology" October 1996
GTZ (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit) <i>Renée Chao Beroff and Martin Harder</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Réseau des institutions d'épargne et de crédit autogérées en Afrique : une expérience innovante en développement institutionnel horizontal"

KASUMBA D.G. William (Uganda)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Case study on:</i> "Decentralisation of Donor Cooperation -- Experiences and Challenges for Institutional Capacity Development. Lessons from Uganda" • <i>Commentary on:</i> "Capacity Development for Environmental Management: A Case Study from the South Pacific "-- A critique of Donor Intervention Based on Experiences from Uganda
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