

# Capacity development:

## Complex solutions for a complex world

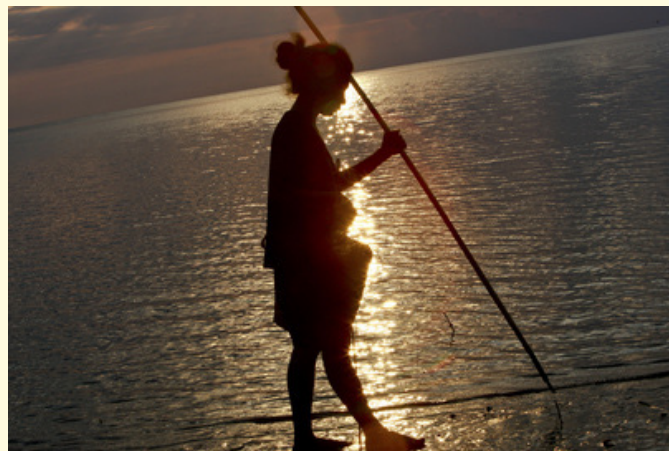


The world is changing fast – and with it, the very idea of development assistance. It used to be that only a certain set of wealthy, developed countries provided aid to developing countries. But today, countries like China, India, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela, Brazil, Turkey, Russia, and others are also major providers of aid, as well as private funds and foundations. Add to this the fact that countries can increasingly access financing from global markets. Wealthy countries have committed to providing 0.7 percent of their gross national product to official development assistance (ODA).

In response, developing and donor countries, emerging economies, the United Nations and multilateral institutions, global funds and civil society organizations all agreed to increase efforts to harmonize, align and manage aid. Developing countries committed to take control of their own futures, and donors agreed to improve coordination of assistance. The global consensus for the way forward: invest in national capacities for human development.

Capacity development supports the country-led articulation of priorities and needs, and deepens local abilities to deliver results tailored to the particular situation at hand. The approach looks at developing the institutions and the systems that people work in, as opposed to only training individuals – an ineffective trend of the past. Capacity development is not done for its own sake. Who it is done for, how it happens, and why it happens are crucial questions. For sustainable human development to occur, a country must lead its own development process and use its own institutions to plan, deliver and evaluate results. We know that institutions are complex – comprised of policies, legislation, processes and procedures, different departments and structures, people, and are influenced by politics and other power dynamics. It is perhaps because of this complexity that despite commitments, many capacity development targets remain unmet. Investing in capable institutions is a pre-requisite to longer term sustainable growth, equity and peace.

Support to strengthening national capacities calls for a systematic and rigorous approach to understanding what works to ensure institutions deliver better on their mandates, for the benefit of the people they serve. The **UNDP Capacity Development Group** has a process of engaging stakeholders around the local contextual factors that impact capacity development, methodologies that facilitate the diagnosis of capacity assets and



UN Photo/Martine Perret: Woman Collecting Fish at Sunset in Timor-Leste, 2009

*Capacity development is often likened to the Chinese proverb: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime."*

needs, and capacity development responses borne from country based evidence, learning and experience. UNDP supports government and non-state partners in assessing and developing their capacities – across areas such as leadership, how their organizations are arranged internally, how they use knowledge and what accountability mechanisms work. These approaches and responses have been tried, adapted and tested across institutions, across sector and thematic interests and across geography. The Capacity Development Group also studies the historical context of what drove certain policy choices, how institutions have worked together and what choices they have made and how they changed and developed – in order to share information with government partners seeking support in similar areas. For example, there is much to learn from India's investments in tertiary education, Singapore and Botswana's sustained commitment to leadership and public management capacity, Chile's social security programmes, or from China's local institutions that spearheaded progress in rural development.

The ideal end result is that countries can take care of their own development needs and states are able to deliver quality public services, develop and regulate markets, provide justice and security and promote and protect the rights of all people. Capacity development is an approach that encourages innovation and transformation to meet and overcome shocks. It is about ensuring longer term resilience in institutions and in communities, and is the basis for sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction, social protection and environmental sustainability.

*"Capacity IS Development" UNDP Capacity Development Group*