



Capacity Development in a Post-Conflict Context: Challenges, Prospects and Lessons Learnt – The Case of Liberia

*Capacity development in a post conflict context must proceed not only from an assessment of needs but also from an assessment of extant capabilities, taking into account the “social capital” - the talents and skills of the local people and their community networks that constitute critical building blocks for peace, reconstruction and development. **Viewpoint by Cleophas Torori and Lisa Reinarz, Capacity Development Team, UNDP Liberia***

1. The Capacity Challenge

As Liberia consolidates its transition from conflict to peace, stability and development, there are opportunities to develop and bring about effective leadership and change management capacities especially in the public sector. With its vast array of natural resources, the country stands to not only guarantee improved living standards for its people, but also contribute to human development. However, the enormity of the recovery and reconstruction challenge coupled with the exceedingly high expectations from the public eager to see improvements in their daily lives continues to impose a huge burden on the government. The pervasive and systemic capacity deprivation brought about by years of conflict and bad governance further complicates the equation. Lack of requisite capacity undermines state effectiveness, impedes revenue collection efforts, compromises delivery of basic social services such as healthcare and education, and promotes corruption. In the absence of strong and coordinated support for capacity development, the efficacy of ongoing and future reform initiatives would remain in danger of reversal. In short, the pervasive capacity gaps present a threat to ownership, scaling up and sustainability of efforts and results.

The one year review of the implementation of the Poverty Reduction Paper (2008-09) has revealed the continuing acute and binding nature of the capacity constraints to Liberia’s progress in achieving its development objectives. In its presentation of one year report to the Liberia Reconstruction and Development Committee (LRDC), the apex government-donor coordination platform on 3rd June 2009, the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs revealed that many government ministries and agencies are still lagging behind in many of the PRS interventions. The overall completion rate was reported at 18% of the 107 deliverables planned for the year. Extremely weak implementation capacity, poor inter-sectoral

coordination as well as absence of strong leadership at national and local levels were identified as key constraints.

2. Approach to Capacity Development: Emergency Response, Long Term Strategy

Cognizant of this, the Liberian government, with support from its international partners has initiated a variety of urgent measures to address the capacity problem as a critical post-transition priority. The approach adopted is two-pronged: addressing the short term capacity needs through the quick infusions of skilled expertise, both national and international, with incentives and systems to support them, and support to the formulation of long-term capacity development strategy that integrates technical expertise with capacities to plan, manage and deliver, as well as the 'soft' skills that promote dialogue, trust and long-term consensus-building; secondly, the pursuance of a conflict-sensitive CD strategy that guards against the resurgence of old cleavages but one that promotes horizontal equity, gender equality, regional balance, etc, especially as Liberia moves out of the emergency into development mode characterized by peace consolidation.

2.1 Emergency Response

A number of critical and innovative measures have been implemented to resuscitate the public sector. These include a wide array of public sector reforms, civil service reorganization, institutional re-organisation, recapitulation programmes as well as management reviews. Through GEMAP, the government has introduced a system of internal controls, overhauled financial management procedures as well as instituted measures aimed at fighting corruption. To address the severe human resource deficiencies, the government is implementing a number of transitional human resource capacity building measures including establishment of a repatriation fund, through the Liberia Emergency Capacity Building Support project (LECBS) to support the placement of high-profile Liberian officials in the public service to support the speedy service delivery.

Others include the establishment of the Senior Executive Service (SES), a powerful cadre of staff, some 100 of them, whose employment in high executive positions is intended to reinvigorate the public sector by restoring technical and operational efficiency, bringing new ideas, experiences and professionalism to support the reform initiatives. Through the TOKTEN, short for "Transfer of Knowledge through Expatriate Nationals", qualified expatriate Liberian professionals residing overseas (including physicians, medical doctors, economists, engineers and management specialists) continue to be brought back for short periods of time to share the skills they have gained during their residence abroad.

2.2 Key Results Achieved from Emergency Measures

There is no doubt that these measures are making a positive impact across the system. Through the infusion of these skilled personnel, many functional capacities are being restored through the design and roll-out of critical policies and strategies, laws and new management practices, among other capacities, helping to foster an enabling environment for the stimulation of economic recovery and infrastructure rehabilitation and delivery of basic services. Significant gains are also becoming evident in terms of the

practical application of knowledge, results-based management, introduction of internal controls and problem-solving approaches through "hands-on" training workshops, mentoring and coaching. There are also considerable gains in terms of adoption of new business processes, tools and frameworks to buttress management of government ministries and other agencies as well as guidelines, policy papers, new rules and regulations. There are also a wide range of new laws, policies and institutional reforms, and organizational restructuring processes covering a variety of state institutions including the Ministries of Planning and Economic Affairs; Finance; Foreign Affairs, Public Works; Lands, Mines and Energy; the Governance Commission; the Civil Service Agency; the Central Bank of Liberia; the Liberia Institute of Public Administration; General Auditing Commission, among others.

2.3 Long-Term Strategy Formulation

The above notwithstanding, however, these capacity building initiatives still remain largely disparate and disjointed and while the critical role capacity development plays in accelerating and sustaining the country's post-war reconstruction and development process has been appreciated, there are lingering concerns that the linkage between these 'quick-wins' capacity interventions and the overall capacity development strategy remain unclear. In addition, they are not anchored on a structured, holistic and cohesive platform to guarantee their long-term sustainability. Cognizant of this and on the urging by President Sirleaf for a coherent and outcome-focused capacity development strategy to underpin longer term national development agenda, the Government through the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs and with support from UNDP embarked on a project to develop a long-term (10-Year) National Capacity Development Strategy (NCDS). Significant progress has been made in advancing this work.

As a basis for the NCDS, considerable diagnostics work has been undertaken over the last one and half years focusing on capacity needs, assets and gaps in the public sector and to some extent in the private sector and civil society entities. The findings resulting from this exercise revealed the nature, extent and dimensions of the capacity constraints at individual, organizational as well as the enabling environment. A major analytical foundation for this process was the National Human Development Report for Liberia, published in 2006, aptly titled, "Mobilizing Capacity for Reconstruction and Development". The report also provided an excellent advocacy for a comprehensive strategy for capacity development in Liberia, thus creating a considerable demand for the NCDS.

3. The Liberia NCDS: A comprehensive Framework but a Strategic Approach

The NCDS aims to provide a cohesive framework through which multiple capacity development initiatives may be effectively coordinated, towards a common direction. Covering all sectors (public, civil service, private, community-based) and adopting a 10-year planning horizon, it defines capacity development as a process through which individuals, organizations and society obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities needed to set and achieve desired development goals. The NCDS is advanced through a comprehensive and holistic approach covering investments at multiple points of entry (human, institutional, and societal / enabling environment). Given its large scale, there is consensus that the capacity development agenda can only be advanced by a coalition of Liberian institutions and development partners, working in concert. The NCDS is driven by five strategic objectives that constitute priority

investments in capacity development over the 10-year period based on assessment of readiness, impact and feasibility and linked to Liberia’s growth and development. These are outlined in the chart below which also positions the relevant Liberian institutions to be counted upon in implementation so as to sustain progress in developing national capacity.



4. Key Challenges

- Enormity of the national capacity challenge, undoing fourteen years of civil conflict and thus the importance of early engagement with elected national authorities to develop a common and coherent understanding of the capacity challenge and identifying “priorities amongst priorities” to be addressed in addressing this critical question;

- Determining appropriate entry points for capacity diagnostics: Should it be human resource CD first, PRS pillar aligned or human resource based?
- Questions on the CD approach itself: building on what exists, or starting from the scratch with new objectives, new groups, new diagnostics? The latter more convincing, otherwise risk of 'one size fits all'
- Mobilising partnerships and resources to support long term capacity development agenda: comprehensive CD Needs Assessment/diagnostics and the 10-year National Capacity Development Strategy and action plan
- Combating stereotypes – moving capacity development action beyond the narrow preoccupation with sporadic training events, equipment support and traditional *chorus* workshops
- Improving the overall context for CD actions and interventions to take effect – combating corruption, improving compensation and incentives, investing massively in people.

5. Lessons Learnt

- In a post-conflict country capacity development must ensure a fair balance between physical recovery (restoration of infrastructure, economic revival, etc.) and 'governance' recovery, that is, restoration of governance institutions and, good governance principles and values. These processes must proceed simultaneously.
- The challenge of advancing ownership in a context of state fragility and the need for extensive engagement and stakeholder consultations as a prerequisite for building greater national ownership and accountability in the formulation and implementation of a national capacity development strategy.
- Special focus on the societal-level of capacity development as a requisite to overall national capacity development including embracing norms, values and searching for nationhood that would promote dialogue, trust and consensus-building, engagement, and peace-consolidation.
- Urgency to "develop capacity to build capacity", requiring innovative solutions to spark brain gain, including attracting more highly-qualified professionals to provide mentoring and coaching as well as investing in institutions that provide capacity development support services.
- Capacity development in a post conflict context must proceed not only from an assessment of needs but also from an assessment of extant capabilities, taking into account the "social capital" - the talents and skills of the local people and their community networks that must be become building blocks for reconstruction.

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