UNDP Capacity Development Seminar
'Delivering on the Capacity Development Agenda'
Capacity Development Group
June 9-10, 2008, New York City

Report

1. Introduction

The MDG deadline is only a short seven years away. While additional financial resources will be vital for success, they are not enough to achieve the goals and promote sustainable human development. Without the right enabling environment, well-functioning organisations and a high-performing human resource base, many countries lack the foundation to plan, implement and review their own national and local development strategies. Capacity development helps to strengthen and sustain this foundation. It is the 'how' of making development work better and is at the heart of UNDP's mandate and key results areas.

The UNDP Strategic Plan 2008 – 2011 positions capacity development as the organisation's core service to programme countries. This is framed by the 2007 UN Triennial Comprehensive Policy Review (TCPR) which stresses the importance of effective institutions and national capacity development efforts and calls upon the UN to support them. An increasing number of national development strategies also emphasise the prominence and essential place of capacity development in achieving a country's development objectives, as well as the need to resource it adequately over the long-term.

The Capacity Development Group (CDG) hosted a two-day seminar for UNDP colleagues from the global, regional and country levels to discuss what it takes for UNDP to deliver on this shared capacity development agenda. The meeting helped to further shape and deepen the UNDP approach to supporting capacity development and reaffirmed UNDP's commitment to taking this approach forward. This report provides the key messages and action points emerging from the retreat to facilitate continued dialogue and teamed efforts on capacity development, both within UNDP and with our UN colleagues, clients and partners.

Background materials and presentations are available on the event website.

2. The Politics and Policy Context for Capacity Development

Key messages
- The UN Development Group (UNDG) Position Statement on Capacity Development, the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) Guidelines and the UNDG Capacity Assessment Methodology, all call for a unified approach at the country level in advocating for and taking action on capacity development.

- The relevance of UNDP, and of the UN system as a whole, is increasingly assessed against the ability to deliver on the capacity development agenda. Our member states have high expectations as articulated in the 2007 TCPR; they demand a streamlined approach across the UN system and clear and sustainable results, backed by measurable indicators. Such expectations, although they drive the prioritisation of capacity development as UNDP's approach and core contribution, highlight some of the tensions inherent in our work.

🞤 Capacity development is a longer-term process that does not often deliver tangible and quick results. Success will ultimately depend on whether capacity development efforts are linked to national reforms and financing processes.

🞤 A balance needs to be struck between taking a rigorous, evidence-based approach and being flexible and adaptive. UNDP's ability to maintain this balance between 'science and art' is part of its comparative advantage as it underscores ownership and reflects the need to adapt to the evolving needs of our programme countries and particular development contexts.

🞤 Being demand-driven does not mean that all demand is equally strategic from UNDP's perspective. If a request for support does not contribute to a wider agenda for reform, we should review it closely and also be able to say 'no'.

🞤 A key to UNDP's effectiveness and efficiency will be its ability to effectively capture knowledge and to use it strategically and systematically to connect individuals and organisations working on capacity development around the world, including through South-South cooperation. Another determinant of success will be the organisation's ability to develop its own internal capacities, ideally together with other UN agencies.

🞤 Based on the UNDG common positions statement on capacity development, joint resource mobilisation and joint missions may prove an entry point for a 'teamed' UN approach to capacity development, following the recently adopted UNDG Capacity Assessment Methodology. UNDP will, however, continue to be the main advocate for capacity development on behalf of the UN system.

Action points
🖉 Provide UNDP support to capacity development within the UN system, with particular attention to the integration of capacity development into UNDAFs, programmes, knowledge products and reviews and collaborative UN programmes at country level.

🖉 Strengthen communication efforts around capacity development, both within UNDP and the wider UN system and with our clients and partners.

3. The Four Capacity Development Strategies

Key messages
🞤 UNDP has identified four capacity development strategies that its analysis of available evidence and years of experience on the ground have shown to have an impact on the development and retention of capacity across sectors and themes. These strategies are: 1) Institutional Reform and Incentive Mechanisms; 2) Leadership development; 3) Education, training and learning; and 4) Accountability and voice mechanisms.

🞤 The consolidation and implementation of these four strategies is essential to the successful scaling-up of UNDP's capacity development services.

🞤 Capacity assessments are critical to developing an understanding of the capacity development response and the optimal mix of support to be provided in each situation.

🞤 While training can be an effective support strategy if well-targeted and embedded in broader efforts, capacity development should not be limited to training if it is to have a broader impact.

- Supporting institutional reform and promoting incentive mechanisms is ultimately about supporting change processes within organisations that enable greater responsiveness, efficiency and effectiveness in carrying out their roles. Facilitating functional reviews, promoting comprehensive human resources management systems and creating monetary and non-monetary incentives are key actions under this strategy.

- Effective leadership is a key to success. Such leadership is not necessarily vested in an individual, but can also sit within broader coalitions for change. Support for leadership should not be limited to one-off training exercises but should be based on action learning principles and coaching and mentoring. It should address underlying systems, such as incentives that motivate and support reformist leadership.

- Education is critical for the creation of human capital and provides the long-term foundation for a country's capacity development. UNDP can effectively advocate for investments in higher/tertiary education systems and research & development and can broker partnerships among various stakeholders to link education reform closer to the development agenda.

- Effective accountability and voice relationships bind together rights holders and duty bearers. Such relationships can be strengthened, for example, through the use of citizen and community report card initiatives, public information campaigns and public oversight mechanisms such as the Office of the ombudsperson. This involves working with parliamentarians, civil society organisations, the media and local communities.

Action points
- Focus on further research and the provision of additional guidance on the four capacity development strategies.

4. Programming for Capacity Development & Integration across Practices

Key messages
- Capacity development does not happen in isolation and is not a stand-alone effort. It must be anchored within a sector or theme and be embedded in a broader programme framework if it is to be effective.

- Doing so effectively, requires moving away from the idea of 'mainstreaming' capacity development across practices and recognising that capacity development should be at the 'core' of all UNDP support, i.e. its approach or the 'how' of our work.

- It therefore means going beyond a 'notional' integration of capacity development to a systematic and rigorous incorporation of a capacity development approach in our programmes and projects. A good example of this is the work of the Democratic Governance Group in the area of elections, which used to be 'event driven' and is now taking a broader 'election cycle approach' to promote longer term capacity development.

Action points
- Organise knowledge sharing workshops between CDG and the different practices.

- Explore how to incorporate linkages between CDG and the practices into programming and policy guidelines and tools.

- Poverty Group: develop a work plan for the next 12 – 18 months for working together with CDG.

🏱 Finalise the joint CDG/BCPR practice note and adapt the capacity assessment tool to the crisis prevention and recovery process. Document best practices.

🏱 Develop a framework for the development of in-country capacities to leverage investments related to climate change. Strengthen linkages between climate change and livelihood issues, including a clear articulation of the capacity implications for local communities.

5. Evaluating Capacity Development

Key messages

🔸 UNDP's contribution to capacity development is captured by a set of targets and indicators in the UNDP Strategic Plan 2008 – 2011. The challenge lies in operationalising these targets and indicators on the ground.

🔸 Capacity assessments should be incorporated into the design of our programmes and projects. They help set targets and indicators from the outset and hence provide the foundation for monitoring and evaluating changes in capacity over time. Involving stakeholders in the design and evaluation of capacity assessments and capacity development support helps strengthen their commitment to results.

🔸 Capacity development is not easy to measure. It is a soft and complex issue that is shaped by a range of factors. It needs to be assessed not just in terms of its results, but also in terms of the process of change.

🔸 Doing so does not require a multitude of evaluation frameworks. Instead, UNDP should invest in developing one system that puts capacity development at the center and that is sufficiently straightforward to be used by our Country Offices, clients and partners.

🔸 Support should be provided to Country Offices in taking the lessons from evaluations forward into programme and project design.

Action points
🏱 Promote collaboration between regional M&E advisors and the Capacity Development Teams to follow up with Country Offices on evaluation findings and support them in incorporating lessons into a management response.
🏱 Explore the potential for joint UN work on evaluating capacity development.

6. Capacity Development in Action: Moving the Agenda Forward

Key messages
🔸 A growing number of country examples are available to illustrate how the UNDP approach to supporting capacity development can be adapted to suit specific issues and situations, each with their own challenges and opportunities.

🔸 For example, in Georgia UNDP supports capacity development of local governments in the Kvemo Kartli region. Its experience to date highlights, among other, the difficulty of developing capacity when the turnover of staff in client organisations is high and the fact capacity development is process- not investment-oriented and requires a long-term commitment.

🔸 The case of Sri Lanka, where UNDP supports capacity development for local service delivery, shows the importance of identifying and investing in 'lynchpin' organisations and the need to link efforts at the micro-level (e.g. a capacity assessment of specific provincial

offices) with efforts at the macro-level, such as the promotion of sector working groups to enhance coordination.

- In Liberia, UNDP is assisting the Government to design a ten-year capacity development strategy and action plan support the implementation of the country's poverty reduction strategy. Because the initiative is very comprehensive and involves multiple players, coordination is a continuous challenge. Corruption, the lack of incentives, and low levels of education all need to be addressed if capacity development results are to be sustainable, thus calling for an integrated and comprehensive approach that draws from the four capacity development strategies that UNDP prioritises.

- What can be distilled from these and various other country examples discussed at the retreat (e.g. Turkey, Yemen) is the need for continued political commitment to and communication on the benefits of capacity development so that our clients and our staff understand the value-added of a capacity development approach and have the skills, knowledge and tools to support it.

- UNDP should therefore invest more in its in-house capacities and in elaborating practical and easy-to-use tools to support capacity development. Country Offices should systematically integrate capacity development in their UNDAFs and Country Programmes and Country Programme Action Plans.

Action points

- Invest in collating and disseminating good examples of capacity development in action to showcase that capacity development is more than training and investments in equipment.

- Invest in 'support packages' to facilitate the integration of capacity development into programming, at the UNDAF, CPAP and programme and project levels.

- Roll-out learning support on capacity development through online courses, face-to-face events and communities of practice, with the UN System Staff College and the UNDP Learning Resources Centre.