



# Technical Assistance and Capacity Building in International Development

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## Question

*What are donors doing with regard to providing technical assistance especially in North Africa and what are the key lessons and trends?*

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# 1. Summary

This rapid literature review has been commissioned as an update to a previous report on technical assistance produced by the K4D programme in 2018 by Hannah Timmis. This report concentrates on technical assistance or capacity building in North Africa. This review found only one comprehensive study on technical assistance published after Timmis (2018) and a few recent examples of capacity building in North Africa of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

In the international development literature, technical assistance initially entailed short-term interventions to provide technical skills or research in developing countries. Technical assistance was largely donor driven and not adapted to the local context (Wilson, 2007). In the 1990s there was a shift away from technical assistance towards capacity building. Unlike technical assistance, capacity building focused on sustainability as well as obtaining local support for interventions (Tarp & Rosén, 2012).

The following development actors engage in capacity building in North Africa. The EU supports capacity building in the security sector in Libya and sponsors public sector institutional building through twinning instruments in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco (European Commission, 2019). Such twinning instruments involve training and mentoring through partnerships in the civil service between EU member states and countries in North Africa. The EU supports capacity building for environmental protection in Egypt and Morocco. The African Development Bank and the World Bank support capacity building as part of public sector reform in Morocco. Various UN agencies provide capacity building to support post-war reconstruction in Libya (commonpurpose, 2011). UNESCO and the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) promote cultural diversity in Tunisia. The literature suggests that countries in the MENA region welcome linkages with the international development community and are supportive of partnerships with the EU and international organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (The World Bank, 2013).

Evaluations of capacity building are limited and the literature focuses on the challenges of evaluating these initiatives. Methodological difficulties and time lags are the main difficulties that undermine evaluations of technical assistance and capacity building programmes. The limited evidence suggests that technical assistance has contributed to “islands of excellence” among institutions in recipient countries (Cox & Norrington-Davies, 2019). Thus, there has been improvement in particular sectors or institutions rather than broad-based gains in capacity.

The following key lessons emerge from capacity building programmes in Africa (Tarp & Rosén, 2012; The World Bank, 2013, 2014):

- Local ownership or support for these programmes is essential;
- Training programmes should be assessed and adapted to meet the needs of participants;
- Technical assistance must be adapted to the local context;
- Coaching, mentoring and peer to peer on-the-job training are more effective for knowledge transfer;
- Training and induction is required for both mentors and mentees as it is essential to build trust and buy-in among those being mentored;
- Flexible programmes are necessary in post-conflict settings; and

- Knowledge sharing and regional cooperation may enhance the effectiveness of technical assistance.

The literature does not discuss gender or disability issues.

## 2. Technical assistance in international development

Cox & Norrington-Davies (2019, p. 6) define technical assistance<sup>1</sup> as “knowledge-based assistance to governments intended to shape policies and institutions, support implementation and build organisational capacity.” In 2016, the OECD estimated that USD 18.4 billion<sup>2</sup> was spent on technical co-operation programmes. This statistic does not capture spending on technical assistance which is bundled with other development interventions. Hence, it is estimated that as much as USD 40 billion per year is spent on technical assistance (Cox & Norrington-Davies, 2019, p. 13). Germany, the UK and the USA are the bilateral donors that spend most on technical assistance.

Traditional short-term technical assistance is expensive and unsustainable in the long run (Tarp & Rosén, 2012). ActionAid (n.d.) found that technical assistance was generally overpriced and spent mainly on remuneration for consultants from the West. The average consultant<sup>3</sup> was paid around USD 200,000 per year (Action Aid, n.d.). Technical assistance was criticised for its inability to accommodate the local context (Wilson, 2007). In addition, large consultancy firms such as Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC), KPMG and Deloitte and Touche, Ernst & Young and Accenture were paid over £100 million for technical assistance by DFID (Action Aid, n.d.). Furthermore, recipient governments had little say over how technical assistance was provided. In some cases the terms of reference were prepared without consulting domestic governments and technical assistance was seen to promote Western agendas such as trade liberalisation in Vietnam and privatisation of public utilities in Rwanda, Bangladesh and Tanzania (Action Aid, n.d.). Due to these criticisms, there was a larger shift away from short-term technical assistance to capacity building or capacity development among the international community. This reflected a literal shift from “helicopter in and out” classroom-based training to long-term projects, which focused on localised learning and character shaping (DIIS, 2011; Tarp & Rosén, 2012, p. 16). Thus, since the 1990s the term capacity building has largely replaced technical assistance in the literature on international development (Wilson, 2007).

Capacity building (or capacity development) is conceptualised as enhancing individual and collective capability (Cigaran, 2017) or the ability of organisations to implement coordinated action to fulfil specific goals (Cox & Norrington-Davies, 2019). “All formulations of the concept of capacity have at their core the idea of the ability or willingness, power, resources and skill of people to do something. From a development perspective, capacity thus has to do with the ability

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<sup>1</sup> Technical assistance (and later technical cooperation) for international development emerged from the United Nations at the end of World War II and was primarily managed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (Wilson, 2007). Technical assistance became part of the official development assistance in the 1960s (Hynes & Scott, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> USD 15.6 billion from OECD donors, USD 0.2 billion from non-OECD donors, USD 2.4 billion from multilaterals and USD 0.2 billion from private donors (Cox & Norrington-Davies, 2019, p. 13).

<sup>3</sup> Donors prioritised their own nationals when awarding consultancy contracts. For example, 80 of the top hundred firms used by USAID were US companies, in Germany large tenders were advertised in German-speaking newspapers only and 80% of contracts awarded by DFID were given to UK firms.

of people to work together to generate some sort of positive developmental gain over time. It is about intentional collective action” (Tarp & Rosén, 2012, p. 17).

There is limited evidence on whether technical assistance or capacity building are effective (Cox & Norrington-Davies, 2019). There are few efforts to monitor and evaluate such programmes and methodological difficulties in terms of measuring the outcomes. In addition, there are times lags between the implementation of technical assistance and the emergence of measurable impact that further complicates assessments of technical assistance. The evidence suggests that overall technical assistance has contributed to “islands of capacity” because there have been gains in capacity among some government functions or institutions rather than enhanced capacity across the public sector (Cox & Norrington-Davies, 2019).

## **New trends in technical assistance**

Cox & Norrington-Davies (2019) identify the following recent trends in technical assistance:

- South-South cooperation or triangular cooperation that involves multilateral agencies, OECD donor funding and cooperation from developing countries is an important development in technical assistance;
- Bundling technical assistance with other interventions;
- The Doing Development Differently and Thinking and Working Politically approaches led to greater investment in political economy analysis as well as more analysis of the incentives that facilitate or block change. There is an emphasis on responding to political opportunities when they arise and interventions which are sensitive to context;
- Problem driven, iterative adaptation (PDIA) implies that technical assistance must be implemented in manner which allows for experimentation and adaptation and quick responses to changes in the political and socio-economic conditions;
- Technical assistance programmes require support from recipient country governments and reforms must be driven by local actors;
- The flexible technical assistance facility model is used by a number of donors including DFID and DFAT. It establishes a fund managed by a contractor which is used to provide flexible technical assistance which is adapted for the local context; and
- Investing in the knowledge sector through supporting think tanks, research institutes, parliamentary committees and other producers of development-related knowledge. Partnerships with niche agencies such as the Asia Foundation enable partners to produce knowledge independently.

Evidence on the effectiveness of politically astute or adaptive technical assistance is piecemeal and limited to very few case study assessments. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions on how effective the new approaches are (Cox & Norrington-Davies, 2019).

## **3. Capacity building for environment and culture**

### **Environment**

The recent literature on capacity building focuses mainly on climate change and the environment in North Africa and other regions. The focus of such capacity building is as follows (Cigaran, 2017):

- Competencies – the energy, skills and abilities of individuals;
- Capabilities – the collective ability of groups or systems to act; and
- Capacity – the overall ability of an organisation to create value for others.

The focus of environmental related capacity building is to strengthen the capacity capabilities and competencies of developing countries to achieve the goals under the Paris Agreement (Cigaran, 2017). At the macro-level capacity building relates to the organisational structure which a country might need for development in an age of climate change. This includes relationships between governments and civil society and the private sector. At the micro-level, emphasis is placed on the role of individuals and the resources they require to address climate change.

### **Capacity building for water integrity in the MENA region**

More than 60% of the population in the MENA region live under very high water stress, almost twice the global average (Ionita & Stanclu, 2018). The Regional Capacity Building Programme, Promoting and Developing Water Integrity in the Middle East and Northern Africa funded by SIDA (Implemented by the SIWI-UNDP Water Governance Facility, 2014- 2017) addresses this issue. The programme empowered a community of skilled water integrity ambassadors and practitioners through conducting 27 trainings (20 at the national level and seven at regional level) for the five countries. The Water Governance Facility trained select groups of which 49% of the participants were women (Ionita & Stanclu, 2018, p. 7). The programme worked with regional water integrity trainers to deliver the water integrity training on the ground. In terms of capacity building, the programme offered mentoring support during the implementation of water integrity action plans.

After conducting national water integrity assessments to inform the process of adapting existing training materials, a series of trainings at different levels followed, each adapting to the relevant capacity needs, specific objectives and target groups. A set of national training sessions were conducted for civil society, women, operational staff and mid-level managers. Effort was made by the programme to provide professional mentorship to a select group of alumni who received individual, on the job support to initiate integrity activities in their respective home organisations or areas of work (Ionita & Stanclu, 2018). Four regional alumni workshops were conducted targeting 104 selected alumni from the national trainings as part of the capacity building programme. The main objective of these trainings were to introduce water integrity and provide a forum for discussion to raise awareness and give a sample of water integrity initiatives.

The programme increased the profile of integrity issues in the national water debates evidenced by the interaction of high-level decision makers. MENA governments have managed to gain increased awareness and knowledge on the fundamental issues of water integrity. Increased understanding of the gender dynamics of corruption in the water sector in the MENA region was enhanced through the training workshops involving women. The training enhanced knowledge on developing and implementing water integrity action plans encouraging the participants to become water integrity change agents (Ionita & Stanclu, 2018).

### **Integrated coastal zone management in Morocco**

The project was funded by the Small and Middle Action Plan of the European Union (Basraoui, Chafi, Zarhloule, & Demnati, 2011). It included a diagnosis of environmental values, status, issues, institutional contexts, threats and opportunities at two sites on the Moulouya estuary. A geographic information system mapping of the uses, land tenure and institutional setup of the

coastal zone, proposed boundaries for the integrated coastal zone and technical reports that highlighted the conflicts of interest and key issues were produced. A committee was established to integrate the protected areas in the dynamics of the coastal zone. The main capacity building component involved the setting up of interdisciplinary working groups around major issues, such as pollution, natural resources, income generating issues, monitoring and indicators, and geographic information systems. In addition, awareness campaigns have been carried out to promote sustainable development on the coastline (Basraoui et al., 2011).

## Capacity building for protecting cultural heritage

UNESCO supports capacity building to protect cultural diversity and expression. The Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions was adopted in 2007 by 133 parties. A global capacity building strategy was developed by UNESCO<sup>4</sup> to enable the parties to build professional and institutional environments that would support diversity and cultural expression. The strategy proposes capacity development in the form of training, technical assistance and coaching and mentoring as part of multi-year projects that enable countries to revise legislation, strengthen institutional capacities for the governance of culture and enhance professional skills to support creative and cultural industries. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) is sponsoring workshops to increase dialogue between the government of Tunisia, civil society and the cultural sector (UNESCO, 2019a).

## 4. Capacity building for institutions

### Procurement

Capacity building is a crucial component of public procurement reform. Hence, capacity building is increasingly acknowledged as a priority in the MENA region (The World Bank, 2013). There was consensus that capacity building is more effective if implemented within the framework of a broader reform programme that creates an enabling regulatory and institutional environment for public procurement. Therefore, capacity building should be coupled with programmes that focus on improving governance, transparency and accountability. However, in general countries in the region have taken approaches to capacity building which are fragmented and hence do not contribute to building a body of knowledge within a country. Furthermore, the training often does not meet the needs of procurement practitioners (The World Bank, 2013).

The MENA countries are open to learning from examples provided by international training organisations and other countries (The World Bank, 2013). For example, New Zealand launched a successful capacity building for procurement initiative during the 2008 financial crisis. At this time, there were only seven qualified procurement professionals in New Zealand, so capacity building was initiated to increase the number of procurement professionals in a cost-effective manner. The Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) is a non-profit organisation that provides skills development and best practice tools for those working in procurement and supply management. CIPS has successfully implemented capacity building for procurement in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Lebanon and Afghanistan. The International Federation of Consulting

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<sup>4</sup> UNESCO is sponsoring a programme to protect under water culture heritage but it is not active in North Africa (UNESCO, 2019b).

Engineers (FIDIC) has established a regional accredited training centre in Jordan, which offers courses on a number of topics (The World Bank, 2013).

### **Capacity building for procurement in Morocco**

In Morocco a new constitution was adopted in 2011 which included 18 articles on promoting transparency, ethics, integrity, accountability and anticorruption. The capacity building strategy in Morocco has the short-term objective of providing training to practitioners on new public procurement regulations (The World Bank, 2013). A training of trainers programme supported by the World Bank was launched with the objective that those trained would then train the public procurement practitioners in various departments. A mid-term goal of the capacity building strategy was to install a regulatory authority that would oversee the design and delivery of training programmes. The aim is to train at least 6,000 practitioners within relevant ministries. The training includes academic courses and training, e-learning, mentoring and coaching and international cooperation (The World Bank, 2013).

Some lessons learned through Morocco's experience of capacity building for public procurement are as follows (The World Bank, 2013):

- The capacity building strategy must be responsive to the needs of the existing procurement system;
- Regular assessments of training are necessary to facilitate improvements and refinements; and
- Training programmes must be homogenous to improve the cost to benefit ratio and sustainability.

There is interest in building a regional approach to capacity building within the MENA region. Regional initiatives for capacity building will address common challenges in the region. Proposed initiatives include training of trainers programmes and establishing a mechanism to facilitate the exchange of knowledge with regard to best practice among procurement practitioners (The World Bank, 2013).

### **Regional networks**

Governments in the MENA region share similar challenges with respect to meeting public service demands but have been unable to share knowledge in a systematic and sustainable manner (The World Bank, 2014). More recently the MENA Network of Public Procurement Experts was set up as an innovative approach for government collaboration on procurement capacity building and professionalisation (The World Bank, 2014). This initiative is supported by the World Bank and was launched in 2013. Representatives from eight countries (Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan, Lebanon, Yemen, Djibouti, Egypt and the Palestinian territories) established the MENA Network of Public Procurement Experts.

### **Twinning instruments**

Twinning programmes were introduced by the European Commission in 1998 and has been implemented as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the EU southern Mediterranean policy (İşleyen, 2015). Twinning instruments facilitate the practical implementation of capacity building through institution building and cooperation between public institutions of EU member states and beneficiary countries. The aim is for the developing countries to align the legislation and administrative practices with those of the EU. Twinning activities are encompassed in joint

projects between EU member states and developing countries (European Commission, 2019). Twinning instruments are active across North Africa, in Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. The World Bank supports similar peer-to-peer exchanges (Rao, 2013).

In Tunisia and Egypt twinning instruments are used in areas such as water management, auditing, environmental health, education, competition and justice. In 2013 there were 16 such twinning projects operating in Tunisia. As such, Tunisia was the major beneficiary of the twinning instrument in the southern Mediterranean. In 2013 there were four EU – Egypt twinning projects operating in fields such as taxation, education and training and consumer protection. Twinning instruments are also used to provide training in the vocational and educational sector with the aim of ultimately increasing the chances for young people to find employment in Egypt and Tunisia (İşleyen, 2015).

Twinning instruments incorporate benchmarking techniques, which consist of calculative techniques and measuring tools in the form of indicators, quantitative outputs and deliverables. Each twinning project is required to determine a number of benchmarks to achieve within a particular timeframe (İşleyen, 2015). The benchmarks should be measurable and based on relevant indicators that specify the target that should be achieved within a specific timeframe and a given budget. "This makes each twinning project a purposeful activity that is "directly linked to an identifiable component" with "well-defined, focused and achievable" results". (İşleyen, 2015, p. 681).

### **Public financial management in Morocco**

As part of a broader reform programme, supported by the African Development Bank the European Union and the World Bank, Morocco undertook capacity building with respect to public financial management (4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011). Other technical assistance was provided through exchanges with French institutions and training of high-level Moroccan civil servants in French public administration schools. The World Bank supported a twinning programme that paired high-level civil servants in Morocco with mentors. Professional development centres in Morocco have entered into partnerships with schools and universities in France and other countries. At present, there is no evaluation capacity in Morocco as neither policies nor reforms can be assessed. In general, stakeholders feel that reform cannot progress unless monitoring and evaluation systems are put in place. The key impact of public financial management reform in Morocco has been a change in the budgeting practice. The budget is now a single document that is devolved to managers for allocating resources. Although it is not yet an accurate activity based budget the change in the budget has impacted on the institutional structures of ministries (4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011).

Some key lessons from the public financial management capacity building in Morocco are as follows (4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011):

- Country ownership and leadership is critical;
- The design and sequencing of capacity development should fit the country circumstances. In Morocco there was an alignment between the objectives of the national government and donors that resulted in a single matrix of objectives. However, a common vision and purpose was still largely absent; and
- Capacity development resulted in pockets of excellence but did not yield a broad-based improvement in skills across the public finance sector.



## Other institutional capacity building

Sweden's development and cooperation within the MENA region encompasses capacity building to strengthen democracy, human rights and gender equality. Such capacity building has the following objectives (Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2016):

- To strengthen the capacity of civil society organisations within the region with the aim of increasing their capacity to demand accountability and advocate for gender equality;
- Strengthening the capacity of public institutions to promote transparency and regional cooperation; and
- Enhancing the capacity of media to play a positive role in promoting democracy and accountability.

The United Nations Institute for Training and Research is supporting capacity building for local government in Algeria. This programme complements CIFAL Maghreb, a programme which was launched by the government of Algeria to provide training for local authorities with regard to urban governance and planning (unitar, 2019).

## 5. Capacity building in post-conflict settings

### Coaching and mentoring

Coaching and mentoring for civil servants in post-conflict settings has been used as part of state building in countries like Kosovo, Liberia, Iraq, Timor, Afghanistan, South Sudan and Somalia (Tarp & Rosén, 2012). It is not expected that coaching and mentoring will provide any quick fix revolutionary achievements. Moreover, coaching and mentoring must be supported with complementary interventions that aim to reform institutions, rebuild judicial systems, enhance recruitment and fight corruption. Hence, coaching and mentoring is only one tool in the state building toolbox (Tarp & Rosén, 2012).

In South Sudan an innovative coaching and mentoring model focusing on south-south capacity building was implemented (DIIS policy brief, 2011). It was assumed that involving neighbouring countries was the most suitable approach to capacity building because of cultural and linguistic similarity. In addition to similar values and administrative systems as well as local and regional knowledge. Moreover, this model was more cost-effective compared to traditional technical assistance since the average cost for a civil support officer was USD 50,000 per annum. It was believed that this approach represented a move away from the generally unsuccessful north to south technical assistance programmes (DIIS policy brief, 2011). Initially 200 mentors from Kenya, Ethiopia and Uganda was sent to work with high-ranking civil servants in South Sudan. It was expected that this initiative would be complemented by an African Union programme which would deploy up to 1,000 mentors in the civil service of South Sudan (Tarp & Rosén, 2012).

Some of the lessons from capacity building as part of state building are as follows (Tarp & Rosén, 2012):

- Capacity development should be guided by locally defined goals and means and should not be seen as a donor driven agenda (Tarp & Rosen). However, a pervasive challenge was that national actors lack the capacity for local ownership. Hence, this leads to a catch 22 situation with regard to local ownership (DIIS policy brief, 2011);
- Capacity building must be anchored within the government and aligned to national priorities;

- Coaching, mentoring and peer to peer on-the-job training are more effective for knowledge transfer;
- Training and induction is required for both mentors and mentees as it is essential to build trust and buy-in among those being mentored;
- A rigorous selection process must be used to select mentors;
- Evaluations should move away from conventional technical assistance outcomes which focus on “hard” outcomes such as drafting new laws or bureaucratic reform. Instead, they should be more focused on good relations between mentors and mentees. Hence, building and supporting such relations should be the priority for programme design, implementation and evaluation;
- In a post-conflict setting the project design must be flexible so that the intervention can be adjusted for the fluid and unpredictable conditions on the ground;
- Capacity development must be comprehensive and encompass the broader institutional, legislative and regulatory reform efforts in the country to create an enabling environment;
- Work plans are suitable for mid-term and final evaluations; and
- Coaching and mentoring programmes can benefit through knowledge sharing and networking among mentors.

## Training and workshops

In Libya the EU supported a capacity building programme for civil society and new public service bodies (commonpurpose, 2011). The programme was financed by the EU’s Instrument for Stability and was designed to respond to early requests from Libya for support with training on leadership, organisational and other management skills. The programme was implemented by Common Purpose (a European non-governmental organization) which worked closely with key stakeholders in the Libyan civil society and public service. The programme entailed the provision of experiential type courses for NGO leaders, volunteers and officials in the public service (commonpurpose, 2011). The training also encompassed women’s organisations, media groups and other organisations that desire to develop specific technical skills. The courses were run in partnership with community organisations and universities in Benghazi and Tripoli. In addition, Young Leaders Courses were offered to people in the 20 to 35 age range who were active in civil society. The courses focused on dialogue as well as analysing issues with the aim of managing diverse opinions constructively so that change could be handled in a positive way. In addition, technical advice relating to communication was provided to support water provision and financial management in Libya (commonpurpose, 2011).

A number of UN agencies engaged in capacity building in Libya, including the World Health Organisation, UNICEF and UN Women. The EU has provided capacity building in the security sector in Libya.

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## Key websites

- [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/tenders/twinning\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/tenders/twinning_en)
- <http://lencd.org/case-story/2011/supporting-capacity-development-pfm-practitioner%E2%80%99s-guide-vol-ii-country-cases-lesoth>

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