HUMAN AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (HICD) DESK REVIEW

Recommendations for Improving Capacity Strengthening Approaches

This resource offers recommendations for improving the effectiveness of capacity development approaches drawn from past USAID capacity strengthening experiences. In doing so, it begins to make connections between conceptual lessons found in the development literature and programmatic learning emanating from USAID activities.

This exploratory analysis draws from two loosely interconnected efforts:

- USAID’s Paper Series on Capacity and Capacity Strengthening, particularly Inquiry 3 on Approaches to Strengthening Capacity of Local Actors, and
- A synthesis of recommendations from nine evaluations and final reports for Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) activities posted on USAID’s Development Experience Clearinghouse.

WHICH APPROACHES WERE EMPHASIZED IN THE HICD EVALUATIONS AND FINAL REPORTS?

As the chart below demonstrates, most of the HICD programs included in the synthesis implemented a holistic set of capacity development approaches largely consistent with the findings of the literature review. Experiential approaches to capacity strengthening noted in the HICD evaluations and final reports reviewed included coaching, study tours, on-the-job training, and small grants. These opportunities were implemented alongside what we might consider more traditional capacity development approaches, such as training and technical assistance. See the table on p. 3 for more details.
WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Inquiry 3 of the Paper Series on Capacity and Capacity Strengthening discusses themes found in the literature about how development practitioners should approach strengthening organizational capacity with local actors. Consistent with the HICD model, Inquiry 3 highlights the need for experiential approaches to capacity development, emphasizing that local capacities should be strengthened according to local needs and contextual considerations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Three particular recommendations from the synthesis of HICD evaluations and final reports aligned closely with themes identified in Inquiry 3:

• Focus on quality and duration, not just quantity of activities.

• Make capacity strengthening efforts integrated and flexible. Be experimental and iterative and tailor approaches to the organization.

• Use active learning approaches - these are more effective at strengthening the capacity of both individuals and organizations.

Below is a list of recommendations from the synthesis of HICD evaluations and reports that align with findings from Inquiry 3 on approaches to strengthening capacity.

HICD Program Design Considerations: Design an HICD program that is integrated or comprehensive and flexible, combining various approaches such as grants, technical assistance, study tours, coaching, training, hands-on experience and other innovative strategies. Focus on quality and duration rather than quantity of activities.

Staffing HICD Programs: Create opportunities to deepen the experience of staff of supported organizations and to strengthen local expertise through mentoring and twinning arrangements.

Appreciating and Leveraging Local Capacity: Be experimental and iterative when establishing and maintaining relationships with local institutions. Tailor support to an institution that focuses on practicing new skills in order to replicate and multiply them.

Management of Time and Financial Resources: Explore flexible approaches to providing material or financial support to organizations to support their progress toward improved performance that may require resources not otherwise available to them.

Performance Measures and Indicators: Work aggressively to convince stakeholders that it may be counterproductive to the development objectives to press for fast and easily quantifiable results. Accept that fewer results can be achieved if there are expectations placed on the program to achieve results in the short-term.

Institutional Buy-In and Commitment: Ensure alignment between USAID’s and the target organization’s objectives, so that capacity development efforts address the organization’s areas of greatest concern. Design the HICD program as a formal partnership between the organization and USAID.

Institutional Capacity and Change Management: Expect less in the short term and expect more lasting results in the longer-term. Consider ways USAID can shift from a more direct role and “project-based outsourcing” to more collaborative roles such as that of broker, facilitator, and convener for ideas and networks.

Considerations for Sustainability After the HICD Program Ends: Integrate sustainability plans into HICD program designs.

1 Twinning is an approach to capacity strengthening in which two organizations, potentially working in different regions or sectors, intentionally collaborate to learn from each other’s experience as they pursue a common objective.
Most of the HICD evaluations reviewed discussed a range of holistic capacity strengthening approaches in addition to training.

### Key
- **Blue**: approach discussed in the evaluation/report not mentioned in the evaluation/report
- **Red**: HICD package of approaches

### Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>More Traditional (capacity 1.0) approaches</th>
<th>More Holistic (capacity 2.0) approaches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technical Assistance*</td>
<td>Training &amp; Workshops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HICD Plus Project Final Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FORECAST HICD Services Project USAID/Armenia Final Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Performance Evaluation of Two Democracy and Governance Projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Evaluation of HICD in Rwanda Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition (FORECAST) Liberia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of USAID/Georgia FORECAST Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of the HICD Component of USAID/Macedonia’s Human and Institutional Development Program</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID/Haiti HICD Support to SONAPI: Final Completion Report</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*More Traditional (capacity 1.0) approaches: Technical Assistance*, Training & Workshops, HICD Assessments.

*More Holistic (capacity 2.0) approaches: Increase Local Capacity to Implement Capacity-Strengthening, Coaching, Study Tours, On the Job Training, Small Grants, Other.

*HICD package of approaches: business case analysis; change management process; web-based PM&E system, internships/partnership brokering; research/analysis/expert consultation, expert consultations, event sponsorship, software purchases, website hosting, creation of community of practice, creation of Balanced Score Card.

*Technical Assistance*: e.g. strategy development, HR support, IT support.

*Less Holistic* - Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition (FORECAST) Liberia

*Somewhat Holistic* - Evaluation of USAID/Georgia FORECAST Program

*More Holistic* - Evaluation of the HICD Component of USAID/Macedonia’s Human and Institutional Development Program

*Less Holistic* - USAID/Haiti HICD Support to SONAPI: Final Completion Report