

Capacity Development in Water and Wastewater 25 years: What have we learned?

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The concept of Capacity Building for Water and Sanitation was launched during the UNDP Symposium in 1991 in Delft, The Netherlands. Many organisations, learning institutes and Capacity Building Networks, on the international, regional and national level, specifically dedicated to Capacity Building and Capacity Development were established, still exist and even operate until today. Quite a large amount of funding was made available for Capacity Building projects and initiatives by multi- and bilateral International Funding Agencies. This paper looks back at 25 years of Capacity Building or Development activities and tries to assess the impacts of all these Capacity Development activities on the Water Sector. Has it achieved its goals and objectives?

In the late 90s, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) did a special study to assess the effectiveness of Capacity Building projects in Indonesia. The findings were reported in an internal report in 1996 [Olivier Serrat]. In 2006, a round-table conference was held with 12 international experts on Capacity Building mainly from Asia and Africa, [A. Bos, UNESCO-IHE] with the main question: *“What are the most important lessons from the past about capacity building in the WATSAN sector in a way that leads to sustainable access to Water and Sanitation Services?”*

Recently, mid 2016 – early 2017, a Capacity Building Scan was carried out by MDF Indonesia and the Collaborative Knowledge Network (CKNet) Indonesia with financial assistance from the Government of the Netherlands [Jan T.L. Yap/CKNet and B. van Halteren/MDF]. The findings of the ADB Evaluation and the MDF/CKNet Scan were generalised and presented. Many of the findings have been identified during the round-table conference in 2006 as well. The findings of both of these studies and discussions were consistent with each other. There were no significant changes during the past 20 years.

One striking finding reveals that many water capacity building actors, do not really understand what capacity building or capacity development is really about. For this reason, this paper starts with a concise review of the term and definition of capacity building and capacity development].

Definitions [UNDP]:

Capacity Development commonly refers to the process of creating and building capacities and their (subsequent) use, management and retention. This process is *driven from the inside* and starts from *existing national capacity assets* (existing organisations).

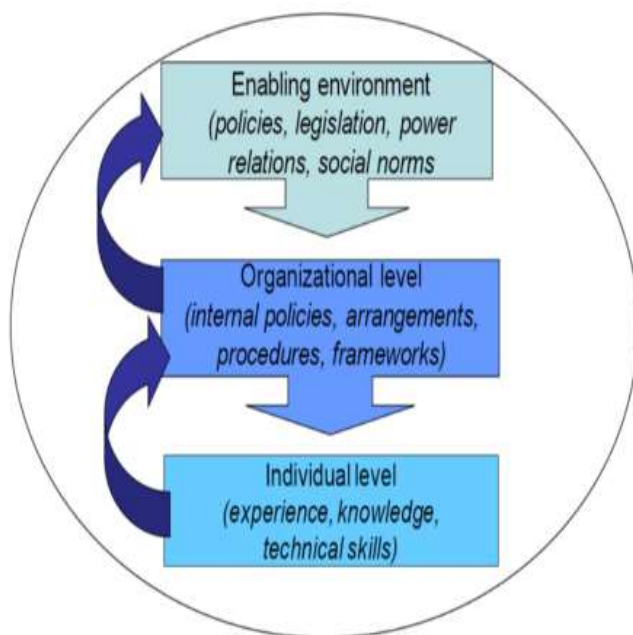
Capacity Building commonly refers to a process that supports only the initial stages of building or creating capacities and alludes to an *assumption that there are no existing capacities to start from* (new organisation). It is therefore less comprehensive than capacity development.

In this presentation, the terms Capacity Building and Capacity Development will be used interchangeably.

UNDP defines three levels of capacity as components of Capacity Development and are briefly described as follows:

The **enabling environment** is the term used to describe the broader system within which individuals and organisations function and one that facilitates or hampers their existence and performance. This level of capacity is not easy to grasp tangibly, but it is central to the understanding of capacity issues.

They determine the ‘rules of the game’ for interaction between and among organisations. Capacities at this level include policies, legislation, power relations and social norms, all of which govern the mandates, priorities, modes of operation and civic engagement across different parts of society.



The **organisational level** of capacity comprises the internal policies, arrangements, procedures and frameworks that allow an organisation to operate and deliver on its mandate, and that enable the integration of individual capacities to work together and achieve goals. If these exist, are well-resourced and well-aligned, the capability of an organisation to perform will be greater than that of the sum of its parts.

The **individual level**, at which capacity refers to the skills, experience and knowledge that are vested in people (individuals). Each person is endowed with a mix of capacities that allows them to perform, whether at home, at work or in society at large. Some of these are acquired through formal training and education, others through learning by doing and experience.

It is generally agreed that proper planning and implementation of Capacity Development (CD) initiatives requires analyses and interventions (as required) at all three levels, almost simultaneously, from the individual towards the institutional levels and vice versa (zoom-in and zoom-out).

Main Findings:

Main findings of the ADB and MDF/CKNet Capacity Development Scan revealed that:

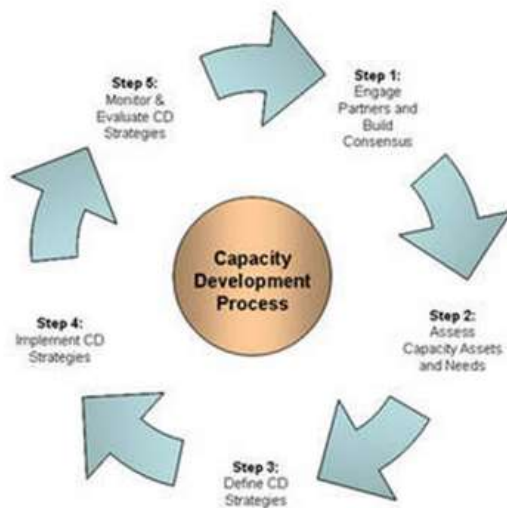
- a focused and coherent National Water Sector Capacity Development Strategy has yet to be matured in Multi- and Bi-lateral cooperation programmes;
- requests for CD projects emerged mainly ad-hoc, both from the Government and the Donors;
- ad-hoc selected CB Projects were not always of particularly high priority as compared to infrastructure development projects;
- CD interventions are almost always considered as **Project** and not as an ever continuous programme;
- CD interventions are mainly carried out by water engineers rather than specialists in organisation reform, leading to strong engineering focused approaches;
- Donors and Governments have been more effective in designing Technical Assistance projects that deliver technical outputs than in designing Capacity Development (CD) interventions that include **Water Institutional Strengthening**;
- the bottom-up approach to capacity building used in many projects and programmes is the opposite of what is usually regarded as more effective: the **top-down process**;
- most of the CD activities are **simple traditional training** programmes only! Capacity Development (CD) interventions require **much more attributes** than simple water knowledge and technical skills alone;
- Training & Education are still considered as **the only** solution for Performance Improvement of an organisation;
- traditional training approaches are still being applied, which focus on “**What people must learn**”. It is an activity based approach: “**Training for Activity**” → doing training activities only, with number of participants as the main and sometimes the only performance indicator of a CD project;
- knowledge & skills gained from these type of training approaches are **not fully applied** on the job, and are a waste of investment and effort;
- evaluation of CD programmes is difficult to conduct, when not properly designed **from the start**, the impact on the Water Sector as result of training alone is difficult to prove or demonstrate;

- in these cases, it is almost impossible to evaluate the impact of training on the water sector because **no appraisals** were made of the **existing and required competences and capacities** of staff at the **outset of a CD Project**, nor the **acquired competences** at the end.

Recommendations:

Recommendations for future CD interventions are among others:

- preparation and implementation of CD interventions should preferably give **priority to the zoom-in approach**, because the required political support from the higher echelon levels in an organisation, and the competence and skill of individuals should be derived from their skill required in the organisation and their responsibilities;
- conduct a **Capacity Development Needs Assessment** as basis for CD interventions;
- training should be focused on “**What people must do on the job**”, a performance based approach: “**Training for Impact**” → impact on the organisation, and ultimately the water sector;
- we must **shift from focusing** on what people **need to learn** (facts, knowledge) to what they **must do** (skill, performance) **to carry out their job properly**: A demand responsive approach!
- launch the “**REAL** Capacity Building Approach”, which is much wider than a narrow focus on training and human resource development by sending staff to attend training or education programmes only;
- assess the organisational role and its relationship with other institutions in the water sector and how they contribute in the performance of the water sector;
- consider how its staff can apply their new knowledge and skills gained through training, and whether the working systems within the organisation allow them to achieve good performance.



National and Regional Capacity Development Networks can play a role to improve the performance of the water sector in the Southeast Asian Region through Capacity Development in partnership with the National Water Institution (main actors). Network members should comprise of academics **and** water professionals. Together they **act in concert** with the main actors to agree on a **Shared National Water Vision**, that can lead to performance improvement of the national water sector.

Current practices in capacity development or capacity building is not working. Capacity Development is not training alone! Training is the easiest part of capacity development activities with almost no sustainable impact on the water sector.

Kuala Lumpur, 24 October 2017