Capacity Building for Integrated Water Resources Management.

The importance of Local Ownership, Partnerships and Demand Responsiveness.

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Foreword.
The need for capacity building is unquestioned yet it is often treated as an add on to programmes, poorly implemented and with little regard to local capacity building institutions or long term follow up. In supporting capacity building for Integrated Water Resources Management Cap-Net is drawing on key lessons from international experience over the last two decades. These show that not only can we greatly improve the impact of capacity building but that using partnerships we can also greatly increase our ability to respond to the huge capacity building challenge.
The principles described here should be the foundation for all capacity building activities in water supported by international agencies.

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1. The Problem

1.1 Introduction

Inadequate capacity has been identified as a recurring issue preventing achievement of many national and international goals over the past two decades. Major international goals of poverty reduction, improvement in access to safe water supply and sanitation, reduction in child mortality and achievement of sustainable development are dependent upon the capacity of countries, their institutions and their people.

Capacity constraints are a severe limitation to development that extends across most, if not all, development sectors. As a consequence, actions in the field of capacity building have emerged since the Rio Summit on Sustainable Development (1990) and continue to be identified as priority areas. (International Conference on Freshwater, (Bonn, 2001); World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, 2002).

There are many aspects affecting the success of capacity building programmes and it is not as simplistic as only improving training and education. The problem is less a lack of financial resources than perverse incentives created by co-operating partners, poor conditions of service, factors encouraging brain drain and dependence on technical assistance. However many lessons have been learned during the past decade and there are new opportunities for capacity development to be addressed in a more sustainable manner and with greater impact.

Advances in communication have transformed our abilities to learn, opening up great new opportunities for some but increasing the knowledge gap for others. Experience slowly emerging from years of development interventions show that capacity building has to be anchored, owned and managed at country or community level. Combining new opportunities and experience we are now better placed to have the sustained capacity building impact necessary to support sustainable growth and poverty alleviation.

However, the new communication age also holds threats for those who lack access to new technologies. Unbalanced growth in the global economy puts resource poor communities further behind the developed world. Support is needed for those communities and countries that don't have the capacity to access the wealth of information presently being generated.

1.2 Water Sector Reform.

Water is a key resource for sustainable development and poverty reduction and improved water resources management is a major step toward achieving a more equitable, prosperous world. Water plays a vital role in relation to human health, livelihood, economic growth as well as sustaining ecosystems (Bonn, 2001).

The emerging water crisis arising from increased competition for use and other factors affecting water supply and demand is essentially a crisis of governance. Societies are facing a number of social, economic and political challenges on how to govern water wisely but there is increasing recognition that water resources are an integral component of the ecosystem, a fragile and limited natural resource, and a social and economic good. (UNDP, forthcoming).

What is Integrated Water Resources Management?

IWRM is a process which promotes the co-ordinated development and management of water, land and related resources, in order to maximise the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems. (GWP, 2000)

IWRM means a shift from water development to water governance. It also means recognising that there are many competing interests in how water is used and allocated and these various stakeholders should be active participants in water management. The traditional sectoral top down role of water professionals is being challenged and the demand is for integration - between sectors, between users, and equally importantly across the different components of the water cycle. There is an urgent need for additional skills in management, institutional reform, conflict resolution, social and communication skills in the existing and new water managers.

Widespread recognition of the need for water sector reform to embrace the principles of integrated water resources management has resulted in restructured water laws and institutions in many countries. Others are still in the process of adaptation to meet the challenges of sustainable management of the limited water resources.

Achievement of sustainable management of our water resources requires the participation of all members of society. It usually requires important changes to policy, legal and institutional structures. Critical support must be provided to institutions and individuals taking on new roles, improving awareness and knowledge amongst youth, and for a more equitable sharing and use of the limited and precious resource across user groups, communities and international borders.

1.3 Capacity Building

Capacity building is a continuous process reflecting society's need to respond to new ideas and technologies and changing social and political realities. Water sector capacity building supports the process of transformation for the implementation of integrated water resources management, including water policies and legislation, institutional development and human resources development.

In a forthright review of technical co-operation UNDP (UNDP, 2002) recognises the central role of local capacity which should be used as a starting point, not ignored as in the past. As countries transform they build on the present, they do not start from zero, skills are extended knowledge grows and new opportunities are created to use those skills. Capacity building takes place not just in individuals but in the institutions and society in a continuous and complex process weaving the very fabric of society.

What is Capacity Building?

Capacity has been defined as the ability of individuals and organisations or organisational units to perform functions effectively, efficiently and sustainably. This implies that capacity is not a passive state but part of a continuing process and that human resources are central to capacity development. (UNDP, 1998)
Capacity building consists of three basic elements (Alaerts et.al., 1991):

- Creation of an enabling environment with appropriate policy and legal frameworks;
- Institutional development, including community participation; and
- Human resources development and the strengthening of managerial systems.

The Ministerial Declaration from the Hague World Water Forum emphasised the need for a stronger water culture through awareness creation, the centrality of knowledge generation and dissemination and sharing and international co-operation in capacity building for developing countries (World Water Forum, 2000).

More recent meetings emphasise that decisions can only lead to effective management actions if the actors have the right knowledge and skills. Education and training should be demand oriented, participatory and hands –on, and make use of information and communications technology, distance learning and institutional twinning. Training should bridge gaps between the disciplines and include participatory methods and the realities of the lives of the poor (Bonn, 2001).

The complexity of the integrated approach to water resources management requires that capacity building must address holistically a wide range of issues, problems and opportunities across sectors. There is no one correct solution in implementing the generally accepted water resource management principles which again emphasises the importance of local control and local solutions backed by local adaptation of internationally accepted knowledge and principles.

Increasingly it is accepted that capacity building programmes are more successful and are more likely to be sustainable when they respond to an internal initiative and when they are approached through a process approach and not as single one time events (Land, 2000).

2. Capacity Building – Making a Difference

Lessons from past experience identify three major areas where strategic changes may make a significant improvement towards the successful development of capacity in the water sector.

2.1 Local ownership can be strengthened.

The last decade has seen much progress in promoting local control but development co-operation continues to bypass or undermine existing capacity by controlling the process and priorities for delivering capacity building.

Local ownership, whilst often mentioned in terms of development assistance, has been poorly defined in the context of capacity building. Local ownership of the capacity building process must be anchored in the local capacity building institutions. Without recognition of these as the key players in establishing the core capability for sustained delivery of capacity building services and their role as the information and knowledge centres, then external interventions will have little prospect for achieving long term impact. New focus must be given to anchoring capacity building service delivery in local institutions, strengthening over time their responsiveness to local needs and demands, and addressing their own capacity constraints.

Capacity Development is a long term process which can suffer reversal without the sustained activities to back up, revise and improve performance in response to developing circumstances. Rooting capacity building in local institutions enables not only effective and targeted follow up, but equally importantly keeps the capacity building institutions in tune with their clients and further helps develop their skills and expertise as centres of excellence and as resource centres.

The recognition that absorption of foreign information/ technology into the indigenous system is critical for both impact and sustainability places a very high premium on local rather than international expertise. Increasingly evident in some developing countries is the two systems of knowledge and production operating in parallel: modern and indigenous. UNDP states that when new knowledge is not integrated into indigenous knowledge or production systems it fails to have the expected impact. Despite recognition of the distortions produced by technical assistance, technical cooperation remains driven more by donor supply than recipient demand (UNDP, 2002).

Local ownership and control over the capacity building process may be seen as challenging in situations where local capacity building institutions have been bypassed both by external funded programmes who doubt local quality and internal implementing agencies who favour international expertise. For this marginalisation of local institutions to be broken they need to work collectively to maximise the existing local skills, address gaps in skills and knowledge and respond effectively to the capacity building demands.

2.2 Partnerships can overcome capacity constraints

New technology is creating an exponential growth in tools for capacity building and ways to access knowledge. Information can now be summoned from a wide variety of sources and in a multiplicity of forms. Linkages between people and institutions across the world can now take place horizontally and directly without passing through formal channels. Networks are arising in increasing numbers as people themselves grab hold of the opportunity presented to share ideas, information and knowledge. Perhaps often unintended, these networks themselves have become powerful tools of capacity development for individuals and institutions around the world, in developed as well as developing countries.

Current management concepts for water resources promote the integrated approach. Bringing together multiple disciplines, drawing in society to decision making processes, addressing financial, social and equity issues not only crosses traditional technical boundaries but demands new mixtures of skills. There are few capacity building institutions that could claim to have these skills much less have the experience on how to reach the right blend for

efficient water resources management. Partnerships amongst capacity building institutions are emerging as an effective strategy to share experience and skills and reach the critical mass of expertise required to address the demanding requirements of reform towards sustainable management of water resources.

At the same time as partnerships are being built horizontally between capacity building institutions, it needs to be ensured that requirements of water management implementers as well as policy makers are being taken into account. Their participation in partnerships for capacity building is therefore essential and in that way these partnerships need to expand also vertically within the water sector.

Effective capacity building will only occur when the capacity building institutions are sufficiently in touch with the implementing agencies to understand the real problems to be addressed and when they have the appropriate knowledge and skills to impart. A partnership approach is the most effective means of achieving this in the short term and also forms a framework for effective collaboration in the future.

2.3 Motivation from Demand

In the water sector where reforms towards sustainable management of water resources have created huge capacity building demands, capacity building institutions are slow to respond. In addition to the long term requirements in terms of graduates and skilled personnel much greater attention has to be given to the immediate capacity needs of government and civil society to support policy, legal and institutional reforms. In this respect those institutions charged with capacity building should be motivated to identifying these demands and gearing to address them.

The world of learning has been changing very rapidly. A large part of our growth takes place after formal education has been completed, increasingly through continuous education and training activities. In many countries the gulf between education institutions and the real world remains wide with a long-term view on the overall educational goals of society but less focus on the immediate needs of a rapidly changing world.

Capacity building is essentially a service and the preference for external assistance may reflect the common perception that a better service is provided by external assistance. Capacity building service providers must be encouraged to adopt a more demand driven approach, identifying the immediate needs and demands of society and responding to those. The lack of this identification and response, engagement with the implementing agency, leads to perceived inability to deliver and a lack of confidence in local capacity building institutions.

3. Cap-Net and Capacity Building

Accepting this huge demand for capacity building, there is a need to focus on strategies which build on the experiences of the past and give hope for a realistic and sustained impact on a global scale, not just in limited project and programme areas. Such a strategy must build on local strengths and skills, recognise the depth and importance of local knowledge, allow the full expression of local needs and priorities yet supplement this with targeted and appropriate external support and current international accepted knowledge.

A key element of the strategy must be greater harmonisation of capacity building interventions and support – ensuring that the international lessons from capacity building efforts of the past are fully incorporated at the international level into programmes and projects of the future. Therefore bringing a greater consensus to implementing capacity building in water is vital.

One challenge when addressing capacity building is to ensure that strategies recognise these realities and convert the words into actions. This is not easy as many of the underlying issues are intractable. However there are some steps that can be taken to overcome the shortfalls of the past and set the stage for greater impact of capacity building activities in the future.

The goal is sustainable management of water resources. Effective performance by the professionals, implementing agencies, decision makers and other stakeholders involved in actual day to day use and management of water resources represents the output and success of the strategy.

- Cap-Net and Local ownership and control of capacity building.

Cap-Net is promoting the use of local institutions to plan and manage delivery of capacity building services. Local institutions are assisted with regional or international technical and information support when requested and in response to identified gaps. Cap-Net is working with international partners to improve local access to capacity building materials, information and tools for water resources management. As IWRM remains a subject with slowly emerging practical experience and poorly documented country level access to IWRM information is a core constraint to appropriate and relevant capacity building.

- Cap-Net and Partnerships

Cap-Net is supporting networks of national and regional capacity building institutions. These partnerships provide the vehicle for the effective sharing of information and experience and delivery of capacity building services using the maximum of available local expertise and skills which is founded on the best of international and local knowledge. The rapid emergence of capacity building networks for water is demonstrating the concern with this issue across the world and Cap-Net is committed to enhancing this global connectivity across networks.

As an associated programme of the Global Water Partnership, Cap-Net is committed to working through partnerships at an international level where common goals emphasise synergy, co-operation and increase impact and effectiveness of capacity building initiatives.

Cap-Net is supporting existing and emerging capacity building networks in the formation and management of the network, planning and delivery of capacity building, and the establishment of a global system of exchange and learning between networks. Partnerships with international agencies and networks are used in the development of new tools and methods for capacity building which build on advances in communication technology linking with innovators and developers in this field and facilitating the dissemination amongst the global partnership of capacity building networks.

- Cap-Net and Responding to Demand

Cap-Net is promoting demand assessment tools and techniques with capacity building institutions and networks. Linkages between implementing agencies and capacity building service providers are vital to ensure relevance of capacity building and therefore impact. Country and regional Water Partnerships are one vehicle being used to assess demand and provide inputs to planning of capacity building activities. Cap-Net supports the training of trainers and improved access to the information materials and tools required to identify and respond to effective demand.

4. Finally.

Commitment is required at all levels to implement the lessons learned from the last decades of development assistance. These lessons can provide a significant opportunity to ensure that the transition of countries to sustainable management of water resources is achieved as effectively and efficiently as possible with appropriate capacity building support.

This strategy paper draws on current knowledge to distil a few critical areas where change is both possible and essential and which can make a large difference. The principles of local ownership, partnership and demand responsiveness are equally relevant to both country and international level decision making on capacity building and should underlie capacity building programmes at all levels.

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