

Context,
international cooperation



Capacity for Development: A plea for a real paradigm shift

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Fons van der Velden

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Key quote

No one 'develops' anybody else. People and societies develop themselves, with or without the help of outsiders.¹

¹ Eade, 2000: 13.

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the role and function of Technical Assistance (TA) – or for that matter Technical Cooperation (TC) – in the current discourse on development.

One of the main arguments is that TA is a manifestation of the broader paradigm of modernisation, which may be summarised as a direct continuation of 500 years of colonial history, rooted in a belief in the superiority of the people of the West, of Western knowledge and technology, and of Western civilisation as a whole. This ill-conceived position with sometimes colonial proportions is quite often reflected in the vocabulary used in the TA sector: *technical assistance*, *capacity building*, *capacity development*, *civil society building*, *transformation*, et cetera. The same is applicable to so-called development professionals from North and South, East and West. Several authors have remarked that it is really too ridiculous for words to think that outsiders could offer the solutions for problems in low- and medium-income countries. These observations may serve as a guiding principle in reflecting on new forms of technical cooperation.

In view of the foregoing it is reasoned that with regard to TA a rather radical paradigm shift has to be made. In the TA sector one has to stop thinking that ‘the North’, development professionals and the aid industry at large have to *develop*, *built*, *transform*, *advise* the other (countries, regions, societies, sectors, institutions, organisations and/or individuals). The issue is basically very simple: (poor and marginalised) people are knowledgeable. So-called poor countries, organisations and institutions have their own history, rationality, indigenous knowledge systems and traditions, which need to be respected and valued not only for their validity and usefulness but because they are part of the power of the poor. Human and social capital does exist and should not be ‘created’ but ‘nurtured’. This history and rationality is generally strong on knowledge of local diversity and complexity, precisely where outsiders’ knowledge is weak. Especially in view of the rapid changing contexts, the advantages over outsiders’ knowledge are even greater. Moreover, empirical research makes (abundantly) clear that poor people are capable of self-reliant organisation.

It is furthermore argued that TA aimed at institutional development should be given priority. In addition, more emphasis should be paid to the contributions of non-state actors which do not necessarily have a developmental background, such as civil society organisations and semi-government bodies.

With respect to strengthening civil society, it is stated that the role of support agencies and structures should be handled with less certainty, more modesty and wisdom and is bound to be limited. Careful analysis of needs and the social and political context is required, in order for donor intervention to enhance, rather than distort or even weaken, local processes of association and problem resolution. Furthermore, development cooperation by private non-profit organisations from North and South should be aimed at regulating and controlling current economic and political processes rather than facilitating them. With regard to strengthening civil society organisations and civil society at large, the potential TA contribution is rather complex and can only take place if the ownership of activities remains with the local partner organisation in all stages.

Finally, TA providers should choose the best modes of operation for providing opportunities for real two-way traffic and equality in the relationships between North and South.

Capacity for development: a plea for a real paradigm shift

1. Introduction²

The concepts *capacity development* and/or *capacity building* are consciously avoided in this article as they suggest processes that take place in a vacuum, start from scratch, and are linear, rational and mechanical. Actually, many so-called capacity building programmes have failed due to their focus on problems rather than on building on existing capacity and potential.³ The wording Technical Cooperation (TC), nowadays preferred in the UN system is more sympathetic than Technical Assistance (TA). However, TC is quite often in reality TA. In this paper these terms are used as synonyms.

In view of the rapid changing world and development scenarios in East and West, North and South it is important to reflect upon policies, instruments and procedures, not only with regard to development practice in general, but also with regard to technical assistance.

TC is not only the oldest but also the most important form of international development cooperation. Of all Official Development Assistance (ODA) some 25 per cent currently pertain to TC in the broadest sense of the word. Within bilateral aid programmes this may even be 40 per cent.⁴ In financial terms, TA encompasses a very large portion of the activities within the area of international development cooperation (some 13 billion dollars in 1998).⁵ This contribution often can not be traced in the budgets of the aid-receiving countries as they have no 'control' over these funds; they are supplied to them in an anonymous form from the capitals of the donors.⁶

Recently, the discussion about the relevance, aims and objectives, efficiency and effectiveness of TC has intensified, not only within the Dutch development community but also internationally. It should be acknowledged that the former Dutch Minister for Development

² This paper was first presented as a background paper to the PRISMA expert meeting 'Empowerment and capacity building', October 31, 2003. I wish to acknowledge the research assistance from my colleagues Annelies Haijink, Anne-Marie Leenknecht and Lotte Vonken. Moreover, Anne-Marie played an important role in the final editing of the paper. Lau Schulpen and Roel Snelder were so kind to provide critical feedback on the draft version of this document. I have also benefited from a research project (financed by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, SNV and the Association for Personnel Service Overseas, PSO) on TA Paul Hoebink and I carried out a few years ago. In the present paper, I refer to our joint publication (Hoebink & Van der Velden, 2002) in paragraph 2.a. I furthermore refer to my contributions in Van der Velden & Schulpen, 2002. A first version of this paper was presented during a conference on 'New roads to capacity building' in November 2002 in Driebergen, The Netherlands. The conference was organised PSO. I am grateful to PSO for the opportunity provided; it was a pleasant learning experience to dialogue with senior UNDP officials and other participants. A second version of this paper was presented during a meeting of the Capacity Building Forum of the Christian Relief and Development Association (CRDA, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) on January 29, 2003. The issue of 'capacity for development' is complex and diverse: comments are welcome at fvdv@developmenttraining.org

³ Cfr. James, 2002: 6. (See also the rest of this paper.)

⁴ Technical cooperation concerns all forms of aid in which the transfer of knowledge is at the centre. This involves grants or fellowships to inhabitants of aid-receiving countries for education or training in either their own country or abroad; and secondly, to pay consultants, advisors and related types of personnel, which may include teachers and administrative staff in addition to the costs attached to the supply of such. The first component of TA, training and education, has gradually shifted to the second, personnel assistance.

⁵ See also: OECD, 1991 and 1994a.

⁶ See, for example, the study of the aid flow to Mali (Naudet, 2000).

Cooperation, Ms E. Herfkens⁷, played an important stimulating role in these discussions.⁸ Such discussions should be welcomed, as the topic of the debate is relevant and complex.

Within this context, the contribution of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) should be acknowledged as well.⁹ In retrospect, it has been an important and very relevant decision to revitalise the international debate about technical cooperation. An update of the old so-called Berg report *Rethinking Technical Cooperation* of 1993 by way of a series of three publications, has served as an important input into this process.¹⁰

In the present paper some critical reflections will be given within the context of an overall appreciation of both process and content of the present TA debate.

The following issues will be addressed:

1. The broader context of the debate about TC, especially the emergence of the *New Policy Agenda* and the implications for Non-Governmental Development Organisations (NGDOs) in general, leading to the question; ‘Capacity for what?’ To create an enabling environment for the neo-liberal development model or to built up some countervailing power?;
2. Capacity enhancement is about agencies in the South *and* North and the interface between them;
3. The need to come to a real and radical paradigm shift in the TC sector: from doing things and advice to facilitation;
4. The importance to work on the basis of participatory learning and action, basically to go through the learning cycle;
5. The complex and limited role of TC with regard to strengthening civil society organisations and civil society at large.

2. Capacity for development: the broader context

a. UNDP publications

The publications of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Capacity for development; New solutions to old problems*⁷ and *Developing capacity through Technical Cooperation Country experiences* have many strengths. The debate about technical cooperation is summarised in a comprehensive and adequate manner for those not familiar with the discussions. Technical cooperation is frequently criticised for: undermining local capacities; distorting priorities; choosing high profile activities; fragmenting management; using expensive methods; ignoring local wishes; and fixating on targets.¹¹

Furthermore, important basic assumptions on which the ‘old’ TC is based are identified and analysed in depth. The authors argue that it is a ‘misconception’ to ignore existing capacities in developing countries and express their concern about the asymmetric relationship between donors and recipient. (‘... the belief that it is possible for donors ultimately to control the

⁷ Now special advisor for poverty alleviation to the general secretary of the UN, Mr Kofi Annan.

⁸ MinBuZa (Taakgroep Technische Assistentie, October 2000).

⁹ Fukuda - Parr et al, 2002; Browne 2002.

¹⁰ Fukuda - Parr et al, *Capacity for Development; New solutions to old problems* (2002) is the first publication; Browne, *Developing capacity through Technical Cooperation Country experiences* (2002) the second one. The third volume is yet to be published.

¹¹ Fukuda - Parr et al, 2002, 1 – 23.

process and yet consider the recipients to be equal partners’). In addition, the authors argue that it is time to ‘turn the process inside out: from knowledge transfer to acquisition’ and that the asymmetry needs to be addressed. Within this context, a number of operational guidelines are suggested with as new motto: ‘Scan globally, reinvent locally’. Last but not least, the publications contain important empirical data.

It should be acknowledged that both tone and content of the publications are quite radical for a UN agency. In this sense, it is quite unfortunate that the publication and many chapters have disclaimers stating that ‘the responsibility for the opinions rest solely with the authors and are not endorsed by UNDP or institutions of the UN system’. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that the authors do not always accept the ultimate consequences of their provocative and in-depth analysis. Maybe Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are in a better position than UN bodies to change the TA discourse radically.¹²

b. The broader perspective: New Policy Agenda

A few remarks should be made on the before-mentioned UNDP publications and the TA debate in general. The debate takes place in a period in which development paradigms and policies change significantly. The neo-liberal development model, building on Rostow-style modernisation theories,¹³ has become the dominant paradigm in the last decade. Its basic assumptions are: competition leads to economic progress and development; collective rationality follows from individual rationality; people act rationally; maximisation of profit in a perfect market is a universal value and leads to prosperity for everyone. Democracy according to the liberal democratic tradition follows from the tenet ‘more market and less state’.

In scientific literature this is referred to as the ‘New Policy Agenda’. Of course this agenda is not monolithic, as details differ from organisation to organisation. However, in almost all cases the policy of the organisations involved is, consciously or unconsciously, based on the twin concepts of neo-liberal economic and democratic theories.¹⁴

The New Policy Agenda not only serves as the starting point for international development organisations such as the World Bank and IMF, but – as it appears – for a number of UN and private development organisations as well. Virtually none of the participants in the debate have questioned the approach as such.

This raises the issue of ‘Capacity for what?’ The capacity-for-development issue can not be discussed without having a clear picture in mind, *a vision and mission*, about the ultimate aim. Does one wish to contribute to an enabling environment for the New Policy Agenda, or to a countervailing power, or take a position somewhere in between?¹⁵ At the organisational level this relates to vision and mission. As long as these are not clear one can not deal with issues at a lower level of organisational complexity. In the present TA discourse it appears that the dominant development paradigm is taken for granted.

¹² See paragraph 3.a of this paper about the comparative advantages of the NGDO sector.

¹³ Rostow, 1960.

¹⁴ With reference to Hulme & Edwards, 1997: 4-7.

¹⁵ See also Eade, 2000: 17 – 22. ‘In a context of rapid change, an NGO must be all the more clear about its own purpose and values and the role(s) it wishes to play’ (p. 18).

Private development organisations, whether or not pressed by the financier, often adopt the predominant development model in their own policy. A number of mutually (inter)dependent factors are responsible for this incorporation.¹⁶ A first factor is the retreat of the state. In the 1980s, the conviction was held that the government should reduce its direct role in economy. In the 1990s, there was a growing understanding that both the private and state sectors have an important role and that the state should focus more on its role as a facilitator of private initiatives. According to a recent World Bank report¹⁷ governments are not the sole actors. Individuals, communities, multinational companies and/or other civil society actors are just as vital in contributing to change. These actors often work ‘in partnership with each other’. From the perspective of cost effectiveness, the provision of basic social services to those who can not be reached through the market mechanism is in many instances left to, or carried out in collaboration with, NGDOs. Undoubtedly private development organisations in the North *and* the South have many years of experience in the provision of social services. However, an important qualitative difference is that these organisations are now in many places in principle considered the desired channel for social services. It can therefore be said that a deliberate choice has been made for the active and systematic involvement of NGDOs with regard to the provision of basic social services. In some countries this leads to substitution. In a great many countries with structural adjustment programmes, for example Tanzania and Bangladesh, governments encourage non-profit private initiatives to fill the gaps.¹⁸ The contingent Dutch medical doctors in Tanzania are a manifestation of this trend.

Secondly, NGDOs are considered major vehicles for the advancement of decentralisation and democratisation and as important actors within civil society. The latter is of crucial importance to the realisation of the New Policy Agenda.¹⁹ In many countries in the South and in Eastern Europe NGDOs are seen as a potentially important link between the state and the citizenry and as a stimulus to – and part of – a pluralistic civil society.²⁰

Thirdly, in many countries there is growing dissatisfaction with the effectiveness of governmental top-down development programmes; the comparative advantage of NGDOs as instruments to facilitate bottom-up development is increasingly being recognised.²¹

In theory, these developments offer many opportunities for not-for-profit private initiatives. However, if enormous expansion and recognition lead towards a situation in which the agenda of NGDOs in the North and the South is increasingly being influenced or determined by other actors, then it is a high price to pay. As stated by Smillie²² and other critics, NGDOs in the North and the South have increasingly become contractors, or even subcontractors, of big multilateral or national donor agencies. The organisations’ own policies, often combined with pressure from their main financial source, are the most significant force bearing down on organisations to join the mainstream. Many NGDOs depend (or have become dependent) on state funding. This is also the case with regard to the TA sector. As a result, the accountability mechanisms change and the autonomy of the organisations is increasingly compromised. In scientific literature this is often referred to as upward accountability – being accountable to, and satisfying the financier, i.e. the back donor – that sometimes takes precedence over

¹⁶ See for instance: James, 1997.

¹⁷ World Bank, 2002.

¹⁸ For ideological and pragmatic reasons, this is not without problems: NGDOs as a state within a state (Lewis, 1993: see also Chapter 1).

¹⁹ Hulme & Edwards, 1997a: 5-6.

²⁰ See Smillie & Helmich, 1993: 36.

²¹ See Fowler, 1997.

²² Smillie, 1995.

downward accountability (being accountable to the board, members and especially reference communities, beneficiaries of the organisation itself).²³ Increasingly, the adage ‘he who pays the piper calls the tune’ holds true. It goes without saying that this development greatly affects policy, instruments and workings of NGDOs at different parts of the globe. Moreover, it will reduce the diversity of the NGDO sector.

Similar tendencies can be observed with regard to TA suppliers. The question is whether these developments constitute a positive impact on the effectiveness, efficacy and sustainability of NGDO activities in the North and the South.

c. Paradox: crisis in the modernisation theory

The private sector has embraced the New Policy Agenda and for three reasons this is a paradoxical situation. In the first place, the ‘Western civilisation project’ is in serious crisis; secondly, Western dominance is heavily resisted, possibly more than ever; and thirdly, many private organisations in the North are experiencing a mid-life crisis.²⁴

The crisis of the dominant paradigm of development is related to a range of factors that have insufficiently been addressed or taken into consideration in the prevailing development approach. Most importantly, it should be recognised that *the* Third World no longer exists. In his policy document *A World of Difference* the then Minister of Development Cooperation of the Netherlands stated that: ‘The distribution of wealth among nation states of which the world is composed is much more differentiated now compared to a few decades ago.’ Some countries that were rated among the ‘underprivileged South’ in the past have succeeded in improving their position considerably; a number of the poorest countries seem to have been left behind. Within countries, both in the South and the North, a high degree of differentiation has taken place; so much so that it is increasingly appropriate to speak of ‘discord’.²⁵

Furthermore, and in spite of the theoretical notions implicit in modernisation theory and the neo-liberal tradition, developing countries did not succeed in bridging the gap with the West. Although considerable progress has been made in the field of human development, large groups of the world population are still excluded as is shown in UNDP publications.²⁶ Even in the most optimistic estimates regarding economic and population growth more people in the Third World are presently living below the poverty line than ever before. Moreover, the present mal-development goes hand in hand with an increase in different forms of violence: institutionalised violence from the top and responses to this violence from below.²⁷

In addition, many developing countries are presently mainly directing their efforts to stay afloat through short-term policies aimed at repaying their debts without much attention to mid-term or long-term policies.²⁸

Finally, two other factors have also contributed to the crisis: in many instances disastrous environmental consequences of the prevailing development model were not foreseen, and the

²³ Upward accountability is characterised by rules: ‘Were the proper procedures followed?’; downward accountability vis-à-vis beneficiaries is usually translated as participation (Hulme & Edwards, 1997).

²⁴ See my contributions, especially Chapter 8, in Van der Velden & Schulpen, 2002.

²⁵ Pronk, 1994: 183-185.

²⁶ More than one billion people still live in absolute poverty and the income of the richest five per cent is 150 times that of the poorest five per cent.

²⁷ Schrijvers, 1993; 1997.

²⁸ Schuurman, 1992: 18-19.

function and role of nation states have declined faster – and more rapidly – than was generally assumed. ‘The world market is an overarching entity beyond the control of nationally-oriented development policies.’²⁹ Besides, the course of events in a number of countries in the South has made increasingly clear that the international community can not be as easily shaped according to a set of values as was thought twenty or thirty years ago. Furthermore, nowadays it is generally accepted that the role of international development cooperation is only of minor importance.

The second reason why the private non-profit organisations’ acceptance of the dominant development model, the New Policy Agenda, is paradoxical is the fierce criticism that, perhaps more than ever, has been voiced:

‘Europeans display an exceptional inability to accept others as their equal, especially Africans. Once the principle of equality of both (value) systems is accepted, a dialogue can start. Currently there is no dialogue at all because Europe does not accept the idea of alliance that presupposes equality with other cultures.’³⁰

Criticism of the modernisation discourse is not new. Scholars, for instance Wertheim, argued that emancipation³¹ instead of modernisation should be the central issue.³² In his last book he stated:

‘My main objection to the concept of ‘modernisation’ was that it all too easily implied a one-way process initiated from above by a leadership that derived its qualifications from acceptance of Western concepts and Western techniques. No process initiated from above takes roots without the actual involvement of the people concerned (...). Emancipation ... is a process that does not develop in a unilinear, unambiguous way. Rather it is a dialectic process, which advances in successive waves.’³³

In other recent publications there is mention of the ‘economics of the madhouse’.³⁴ Harman not only pays attention to processes of impoverishment in the South, but in the Western world as well (mass unemployment, growing poverty, great pressure on the environment, social division, increased feelings of insecurity among large parts of the population, pressure of work and stress among those who have secured a place in the citadel). He speaks about a ‘madhouse’, because ‘the poverty in the world today is different. For it exists alongside wealth on a scale easily sufficient to banish poverty forever’.³⁵

The Ecumenical Movement Tomorrow, published under the auspices of the World Council of Churches, debunks the myth of the world as a global village in which people are all familiar with each other and share in the prosperity.³⁶ In contrast to the world as a global village there is ‘fragmented globalisation’ with sharp differences between the privileged and those who are excluded from participation in the world economy.³⁷

²⁹ Schuurman, 1992: 19.

³⁰ Achebe, in: Van de Werk, 1981: 371-372.

³¹ Defined as ‘any form of collective struggle on the part of groups that feel themselves to be treated as inferior or subordinate, fighting against privileges of the dominant groups’ (Wertheim, 1997:69-70).

³² Wertheim, 1971.

³³ Wertheim, 1997: 70.

³⁴ Harman, 1997.

³⁵ Ibid.: 9-10.

³⁶ Reuver, Solms & Huizer, 1992.

³⁷ Hamelink, 1993.

The neo-liberal development model has come under increasing fire not only in academic circles but also in societal organisations. Traditionally progressive organisations and individuals and representatives of the political centre speak about ‘predatory capitalism’.³⁸

Galbraith, looking back on the publication of his book *The Affluent Society* forty years ago, stated that ‘the depressing difference in welfare between the affluent and the less fortunate’ is not an economic problem:

‘... this goes down to a much deeper level of the human being. When people are fortunate in their individual well-being, and when countries are as fortunate, there is a general tendency to ignore the poor. Or they come up with another rationalisation for the happiness of the fortunate. The poor themselves are held responsible.’³⁹

Last but not least, many scholars, social organisations and individuals from the South heavily criticise the dominant approach to development in the West and the accompanying norms and values.⁴⁰ Basically, this criticism is not new. In 1854 Chief Seattle of the native American Dwamish tribe wondered about the implications arising from the strong emphasis on private ownership, for ‘How can one possess the air?’⁴¹ A similar more recent consideration comes from the Indian environmentalist Vandana Shiva who speaks about the ‘impoverished world view of the wealthy West’, as a result of a monoculture of the mind:

‘The ideology of ‘civilising’, which both justified and enabled Western dominance, is based on scientific and technical reductionism.’⁴²

Various ideological convictions from different parts of the world in the present and the past have warned against a premature and unconditional adoption and implementation of elements of the New Policy Agenda.

The third and final reason why embracing the New Policy Agenda is paradoxical relates to the fact that many NGOs in the North and the South find themselves in a mid-life crisis⁴³ As a result, they are easy prey to cooptation by the establishment.

d. The issue of credibility

It is striking that a United Nations agency, UNDP, has also engaged in this debate on values. The 1998 UNDP report on overconsumption by part of the world population, critically examines the ‘grotesque’ contrasts in the world, consumerism and the current development paradigm. This trend is very unfortunately not continued in the publication *Capacity for development*. The broader context of the New Policy Agenda and the unequal position of low- and medium-income countries and the complexities of the issues on partnership both at the level of countries and organisations is – in my view – insufficiently reflected in the present TA debate. The often unconscious and implicit assumption is that through providing TA relatively outsiders, professionals, the aid industry ‘have to bring something’, with as subtitles

³⁸ See Schmidt, 1998; Pronk, 1998a, 1998b.

³⁹ Galbraith, 1998; see also Galbraith, 1992, for more extensive argumentation.

⁴⁰ See Elizalde, 1993; Evers et al., 1993; Tandon, 1993. Many critical scholars maintain that the Western model of development is intrinsically unsustainable and undesirable. (Eade, 2002: 12.)

⁴¹ Seattle, 1980.

⁴² Shiva, 1997: 89-102; see also Shiva, 1993.

⁴³ For further details of this proposition, see Van der Velden 1994; Bossuyt, 1993; Hulme & Edwards, 1997.

'it is not us, but the others who have to change'. It is time to acknowledge that a large part of present-day TA is a manifestation of the broader paradigm of modernisation, which is, as Joke Schrijvers noted, 'a direct continuation of 500 years of colonial history, rooted in a belief in the superiority of the people of the West, of Western knowledge and technology, and of the Western civilisation as a whole'.⁴⁴ This ill-conceived, arrogant position with sometimes colonial proportions, is quite often reflected in the vocabulary used in the TA sector: *technical assistance*, *capacity building*, *capacity development*, *civil society building*, *transformation*, et cetera. Ribeiro almost cynically remarks:

'Before the existence of a development project, local people could hardly conceive that their fate was susceptible to being hijacked by an organised group of people'.⁴⁵

Basil Davidson once remarked, that 'it is really too ridiculous for words to think that the West could offer the political solutions for Africa's problems'.⁴⁶ Many others made similar comments, not only with reference to Africa but other continents as well.⁴⁷ Such an analysis may serve as a guiding principle in reflecting on new forms of technical cooperation.

3. Paradigm shift: from implementation and advice to facilitation

a. A new paradigm in historical perspective

In view of the foregoing, it should be concluded that a rather radical paradigm shift has to be made. In the TA sector one has to stop thinking that 'the North', development professionals and the aid industry at large have to *develop*, *built*, *transform*, *advise* the other (countries, regions, societies, sectors, institutions, organisations and/or individuals).⁴⁸ The issue is basically very simple: poor and marginalised people are knowledgeable. So-called poor countries, organisations and institutions have their own history, rationality, indigenous knowledge systems and traditions which need to be respected and valued not only for their validity and usefulness but because they are part of the power of the poor. In other words: human and social capital does exist and should not be 'created' but 'nurtured'.⁴⁹ Their history and rationality is generally strong on knowledge of local diversity and complexity, precisely where outsiders' knowledge is weak. Especially in view of the rapid changing contexts, the

⁴⁴ Schrijvers, 1993: 9.

⁴⁵ Lins Ribeiro, 2002: 179.

⁴⁶ See Davidson, 1992a, 1992b. For more than forty years Davidson has investigated the cultural history of Africa. In *The black man's burden: Africa and the curse of the nation state* (1992b) he reaches the conclusion that imported models such as the nation state do not do justice to historically determined local situations and are doomed to end in utter failure. The same arguments may be used for the current export of the New Policy Agenda. In this context reference can also be made to Adebayo Adedeji who argues that Fukuyama wrongly takes it for granted that there is a direct linear relation between neo-liberal democracy and the neo-liberal economic development model (Adedeji & Otite, 1997).

⁴⁷ See Sizoo, 1992; van Nieuwenhuijze, 1993; Posthumus, 1997.

⁴⁸ Lopes argues that the traditional expert counterpart model was based on the assumption that the expert had the specialised and the counterpart the local knowledge, and that the expert had a depository knowledge that 'needs to be passed on to the recipient, treating the latter as an 'empty vessel' (Lopes, 2002: 134 - 135). Denning states that in reality donor staff often knows what is going on, 'but are not encouraged to record this knowledge as official facts because it would reveal the disconcerting gap between donor rhetoric and political reality' (Denning: 2002: 235).

⁴⁹ See also the contributions of Malik and Malik & Waglé, in: Fukuda - Parr et al., 20002.

advantages over outsiders' knowledge are even greater. Moreover, empirical research makes abundantly clear that poor people are capable of self-reliant organisation.⁵⁰

Over the years, shifts in emphasis within the dominant development thinking and development policy have strongly changed the character of TA.⁵¹ The major changes are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: History of technical assistance in key terms

Period	Central concepts	Nature/instrument
1950s	Technical aid necessary for development Technical aid to fill gaps Predominantly multilateral	Engineering Government apparatus/ministries Economic planning
1960s	In addition to financial aid Volunteer programmes	Political load Emphasis on project preparation and implementation
1970s	Broadened application Social sectors Rural development	Transfer of knowledge and skills Counterpart model Training
1980s	Marginalised First critique Institution and capacity building	Professionalisation, commercialisation, contracting out Local acquisition
1990s	Management public sector Private sector Demand is more specific	Further professionalisation particularly with regard to volunteer organisations Twinning Flexibility

Source: Hoebink & Van der Velden, 2002.

At the end of the 1970s, the focus of development policy shifted towards a more participatory approach. Participation of the poor and the oppressed in development processes became the catchword. For TA, this implied an important qualitative change of policy. The focus shifted from conduct to the support of social initiatives on the part of the community and the dispatch of development workers in the area of community development, largely under the auspices of local non-governmental development organisations. Technical assistance was more broadly applied. In addition to the technical sectors, the social sectors also entered the picture, with a similar emphasis on transfer of knowledge and skills. In the medical sector, for example, the focus of policy shifted during this period from curative to preventive care, from hospitals and doctors to basic health care and paramedics.⁵²

During the 1980s, the scepticism with regard to TA grew. The importance of such assistance also declined as a result of the (debt) crisis in developing countries. Within the framework of

⁵⁰ See Chambers, 1994: 11. I do acknowledge that this gross generalisation cannot be universal. But the basic argument is that we have to make a radical shift from problems to existing capacities and opportunities at different levels.

⁵¹ See Schrijvers 1997; van der Velden & Zweers 1997; Hoebink & Van der Velden, 2002.

⁵² This is clearly illustrated by the experiences of doctors in the field (see Eshuis et al. 1994).

economic recovery programmes, other forms of aid were considered more important. TA was more or less pushed into the margins by programme aid. At the same time, TA was increasingly supplied as an extension of such aid for purposes of institution building and to guide the processes of privatisation and reduction of the role of the state.

This pattern continued throughout the 1990s when ‘custom work’ and ‘flexibility’ gradually became the catchwords in addition to ‘institution building.’ More than on the building of institutions, however, the emphasis was now placed on the process-oriented modification of institutions. A theoretical basis for this approach was also provided by the so-called institutional economics, which argues, for the importance of well-founded institutions in addition to the market.

It can generally be concluded that the past decades have seen low- and middle-income countries gaining access to well-educated, local, middle-level staff. The previous emphasis on personnel assistance and the direct involvement of expatriates in the designing, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of programmes has changed to more advisory services focusing on organisational development and a process approach at present.⁵³

b. Expert model versus process facilitation

The next step now has to be made: from advice to facilitation. In case this paradigm shift is made, which implies basically the acceptance that local information, relevant knowledge and wisdom does exist in the form of human and social capital, TA should no longer take the shape of doing things locally, and/or providing advice. Instead, it should be a process of facilitation.⁵⁴ In this context it is important to note that the thesis of development as transformation emphasises the process as much as the product. Facilitation is quite different from the actual development practice of many contemporary TA providers.

The major changes are shown in Table 2.⁵⁵

⁵³ See e.g. SNV’s recent policy changes.

⁵⁴ Cfr. the ‘indirect approach’ propagated by Ellerman, 2002: ‘Autonomous action is based on intrinsic motivation’ (p. 47). ‘Start from where the doers are and see the world through their eyes. ... Respect the autonomy of the doers’ (p. 57).

⁵⁵ Adapted from, and inspired by, James, 1998: 25; Lowe-Morna & Overland, 2002: 7-12; Ansell, 2002; Pretty et al, 1995: 1-37.

Table 2: Expert model versus facilitation process

Subject	Expert model Advisory services	Facilitation process
Aim	One-off problem solving	Ongoing ability of the recipient to solve its own problems
Assumptions	Problem easily diagnosed Problem not too hot and complex to be comprehended and handled by outsiders	Problems complex and diverse People within the system have competencies and talents
Nature of the problem	Technical Nuts and bolts	Cultural Complex Learning/adaptation
Scope of the problem	Single part of an organisation	Whole organisation (organisational development) Relationship with networks, sector and overall context (institutional development)
Nature of the diagnosis	By the expert in consultation with the client	By the client through the consultant's facilitation Emphasis on self diagnosis and assessment
Expertise required	System, sector and subject specific, with emphasis on knowledge and skills	Process facilitation with emphasis on skills and values 'A curious and continuous learner' Ability to tolerate and accept ambiguity and paradox
Methods applied	Survey Outside diagnosis 'Preaching and teaching' Bias towards control	Action-learning cycle Participatory learning and action Bias towards trust
Remedy from	Consultant/expert	From within through facilitation The client
Controlled by	Consultant/expert	
Change strategy	From outside/coercion?	From within the organisation
Focus	Formal organisational aspects 'Tip of the ice berg'	Emphasis on the informal initially not so conscious aspects 'The submerged, beneath'
Outputs	Reports and recommendations	Creating new ways of working
Risks	Lack of ownership	Neglect of task
Sustainability	Low	High Contributes to continuous learning

In summary, the role of the facilitator – as opposed to that of the advisor – consists of supporting an organisation to solve its self-identified problems by itself. This requires a listening and learning attitude of the facilitator and leaving the control of the process and the remedy for change with the client. The outcome of such a process would be a change process from within the organisation, leading to high sustainability and a continuous learning process in the organisation.

Some may argue, with a wink to Hofstede's theory and empirical observations about values in different cultures, that the facilitation approach will not fit into many cultures. However,

experiences by trainers and facilitators from various continents (Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe) with regard to participatory learning and action and facilitation demonstrate that such an approach does fit into different cultural settings and yields good results.

In this context it should be acknowledged that some organisations, such as SNV the Netherlands, have already made a beginning with changing their core practices at least at conceptual and policy level.⁵⁶ At the same time it should be acknowledged that although many organisations claim to be moving away from the traditional models, there in general has only been superficial change without fundamental transformation.⁵⁷ Some argue that the TA sector appears to be ‘immune to reform’.⁵⁸

c. Capacity enhancement relates to partners of different parts of the globe

Furthermore, capacity enhancement is not only about development actors in ‘the South’, but also ‘the North’ and the interface between these two. *It takes two to tango*. Capacity enhancement is an (ongoing) process, not an ad hoc event, and implies long-term investment, commitment and preparedness to change from all stakeholders involved. To put it differently: capacity assessment and enhancement should not be undertaken in isolation. They are deeply embedded in a broader international and national context and institutional relationship between development actors of different parts of the globe, and relate to the performance and behaviour of all stakeholders involved.

This issue should even be taken one step further. The role of the development industry can not be ignored. Professionals and their respective institutions are quite often part of the problem. This is not only the case in global international relations (e.g. the discussions about globalisation, World Trade Organisation, et cetera), but also in the aid industry at the level of multilateral organisations, governmental and non-governmental development organisations. This relates to donor policies, instruments and procedures. ‘By constantly creating new methodologies, jargon, initiatives and defined niches, it has overwhelmed the absorptive capacity of key receipts, making it impossible for them to really nationally own processes and introduce knowledge’.⁵⁹ Donors need to concentrate on issues where they have greater control, such as donor coordination. There are also many problems at the level of modalities. (See the Box I on the Logical Framework Approach as a case in point.)

Box I: Logical Framework Approach imposition

Over the last two decades, the Logical Framework Approach (LFA) has increasingly been used as a tool not only for project planning, but also for appraisal and screening of applications by funding agencies. Over the years, multilateral donor agencies (e.g. the EU), and bilateral donors and private development organisations have used of the LFA and/or related instruments as a prerequisite, obligatory and fixed format for access to support. It appears, however, that the LFA method is only being used when demanded by external funding agencies. This is not a surprise as the tool is basically anti-developmental: development is seen as a linear process; LFA provides a limited view of a complex reality; has a project and not an organisational focus; provides limited instead of double-loop learning; lacks political perspective; and has a negative impact on ownership.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ See e.g. SNV, 2000.

⁵⁷ Lopes, 2002: 134-135; Danielson, Hoebink & Mongula, 2002.

⁵⁸ Denning, 2002: 229.

⁵⁹ Lopes, 2002: 137.

⁶⁰ See: Van der Velden, 2003, forthcoming; Gasper, 1997; Gasper 2000; Couderé, 1994.

Many other examples from the development practice could be given to demonstrate that agencies in the North quite often are part of the problem. It takes two to tango indeed.

d. Facilitation and learning

Apart from the above-mentioned ideological and practical considerations, there is another important reason why in the TA sector a shift should be made from doing and advice to facilitation. From the early 1990s onwards there has been a growing realisation that organisational effectiveness is correlated with an ability to learn from experience.⁶¹ This insight is of particular relevance for the development sector. As entities dedicated to social and political change, they predominantly function as the natural open systems, where performance is highly dependent on and sensitive to instability and rapid change in the external environment.⁶² Moreover, poor accountability – and for that matter a limited learning capacity – may, in due course, affect the credibility and legitimacy of organisations.

Until recently the ‘learn and adapt’ capacity and issues of learning often received very little attention within NGOs in North and South. This is especially the case within the subsector of TA.⁶³ Way back in 1993, Smillie and Helmich observed that development is, or should be, a knowledge-based endeavour. The importance of learning what works, and why, is essential to success. Knowing what does not work might even be more essential.⁶⁴ The authors regretfully observe that the ‘failure to learn from failure’ is most probably one of the greatest shortcomings of the development sector. Such situations are, as recent developments show, common in North and South, East and West.⁶⁵

It should be acknowledged that – on account of a number of internal and external factors – the interest of the NGO sector in concepts such as ‘the learning organisation’ has increased significantly over the last few years. There is, however, still a substantial gap between rhetoric and reality. One of the main founders of the theory of action learning, Reg Revans⁶⁶, in the early 1980s already indicated that the capacity and the speed of learning should be greater – or at least equal – to the rate of change ($L > C$). More recently Fowler summarised the urgency of the issue as follows:

‘Crudely put, if NGOs do not learn from their experience, they are destined for insignificance and will atrophy as agents of social change.’⁶⁷

⁶¹ Senge, 1992.

⁶² Fowler, 1995: 143-145; Fowler, 2000.

⁶³ Ref. Van der Velden & Zweers, 1997.

⁶⁴ Smillie & Helmich, 1993: 18.

⁶⁵ Fowler, in: Edwards & Hulme (eds., 1995: 143-156).

⁶⁶ Revans, 1998.

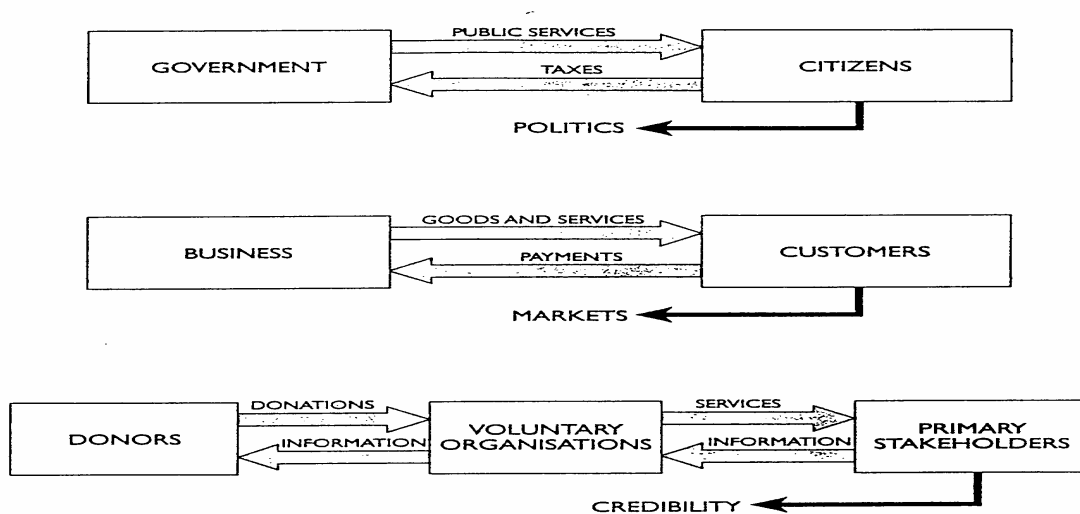
⁶⁷ Fowler, 1997: 64.

Box II: Views of the Dutch government regarding the importance of learning

The importance of learning with regard to strengthening civil society and civil society organisations has also been acknowledged by the Dutch government. In the white paper *Civil Society and Structural Poverty Reduction; Actors in Dutch civil society*⁶⁸ it is stated:

‘But social development is a complex, non-linear process, and it is often difficult to ascertain what constitutes a positive result. ... Hence, assessing the payoff in terms of results may put disproportionate emphasis on outcomes that can be measured or verified. The problem is not what is included, but what is excluded. Looking solely at results also deters people from taking risks in situations where innovation - which inevitably entails an element of risk - would be desirable or even essential. The point is not that there may be no mistakes or that interventions must not fail, but that lessons are learnt from those mistakes. In future, CSOs will not be judged by their results alone: the quality of their monitoring and evaluation systems and their ability to learn will also be taken into account’.⁶⁹

Fowler has stated that the learning disabilities in the aid sector are related to historical, psychological and ‘deep-lying structural conditions’.⁷⁰ Historically, most development organisations are action driven and less value is attributed to reflection and learning, which may only ‘increase the overhead costs’. Activism and a positive projection of achieved results towards the outside world may lead to an organisational psychology and culture that are not learning oriented. A third factor forms the loose linking of the performances of aid and the amount of money allocated to the sector.



Source: Fowler, 1997: 25.

These circumstances lead to the fact that organisational learning has (to) become an important priority for development actors. Peter Senge, the mentor of the theory about learning organisations recently once again stated:

‘the irony is that to do things faster you often have to go slower. You have to be more reflective. You have to develop real trust. You have to develop the abilities of people to truly think together. Why? Because it requires you to go through fundamental

⁶⁸ This paper was accepted by the Dutch parliament in September 2001.

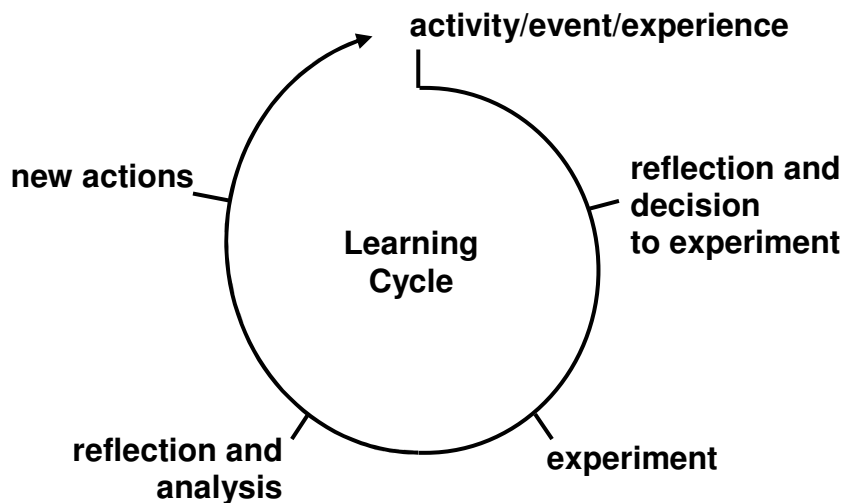
⁶⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2001: 7.

⁷⁰ Fowler, 2000: Chapter 9.

changes: redesigns of the most basic sorts. You need to build a shared understanding of how the present system works and why it takes so long. And, you need to have people who can trust one another through difficult systemic changes.’⁷¹

Overcoming learning disabilities requires a change in mindset as much as change in organisational characteristics such as shared values, strategy, structures, systems, style, culture and staff. In such a process the development practice (‘action’) provides – at least initially – the main vehicle for learning. Subsequent steps are: (a) recalling them; (b) reflecting on them; (c) trying to understand what was happening; (d) coming to some conclusions or having some insights (learning); (e) preparing to do things differently next time; and (f) than beginning on some ‘new’ actions.⁷²

These steps can be visualised in the learning cycle below.



Source: Adapted from Weinstein, 1999: 40 (combination of Kolb and Revans’ learning cycles).

Despite the fact that we speak about learning cycles, they need to be depicted as learning spirals (as shown in the figure above) for the intention that no return to the starting place takes place. The intention is learning and moving to a different place, hence the notion of something moving and changing, spiral.⁷³

In this action-learning cycle, facilitation and learning come together. The constant emphasis on learning and how it is achieved is one of the distinguishing hallmarks of a properly facilitated process. Those familiar with the present development practice of TA may realise that such a learning and facilitating approach to capacity enhancement, in South *and* North, requires expertise that differs from what is mostly available within many development organisations. Here lies a challenge for development practitioners and TA suppliers.

e. In summary: a few guiding principles

Based on a review of literature about capacity enhancement, a few good practices can be

⁷¹ Senge, 1998:139.

⁷² Revans, 1998; Weinstein, 1999.

⁷³ See also Fowler, 2000. It speaks for itself that the issue of learning and how to become a learning organisation can not be dealt with extensively within the framework of this paper. (See: Van der Velden, 2003, forthcoming). The above is, for instance, only part of the whole story. There is also an inner learning cycle or spiral, which implies deeper reflection at personal level not only about action, but also about thoughts and feelings.

identified that may be used as broad guidelines while working on the development of innovative TA approaches. They are summarised in the Box III.

Box III: Operational guiding principles capacity enhancement

- Capacity assessment and enhancement should not be undertaken in isolation: they are deeply embedded in a broader international and national context and institutional relationships between development actors of different parts of the globe.
- Blueprints for capacity assessment and enhancement are not desirable: issues are context and situation specific. There are no standard approaches, ingredients and/or recipes.
- Every process should start with an in-depth participatory analysis of the already existing capacities, talents and opportunities and should subsequently analyse the desired situation. 'Self-appraisal' is crucial in connection with the depth of analysis, ownership and follow-up.
- Capacity relates to the ability to achieve the overall purpose (mission, goals) of an organisation in an efficient, effective and sustainable manner.
- Capacity relates to individuals, groups and teams, organisations, network (interorganisational), sectors and society.
- Capacity enhancement relates therefore to individuals (Human Resources Development, HRD), organisations (e.g. Organisational Development, OD) and the broader context (Systems Development, SD); the combination of these factors leads to Institutional Development (ID).⁷⁴
- Capacity assessment and enhancement is an (ongoing) process, not an ad hoc event, and implies long-term investment and commitment from all stakeholders involved. It requires quality time and flexibility. Involvement and commitment of leaders is crucial.
- Ownership is the essential ingredient for a successful capacity assessment and enhancement process. Different power positions of stakeholders such as reference communities, intermediary organisations and donors must be analysed, acknowledged and understood.
- Capacity assessment and enhancement is not only about development actors in the South, but also the North and the interface between these two.
- Capacity assessment and enhancement must be partner organisation and not donor driven. Project deadlines and donor output indicators have a negative impact on the process. Donors should develop a coherent capacity enhancement strategy, allow and promote local ownership, understand the influence of power on ownership, acknowledge their own interests, support learning from experience and take responsibility for their own change.⁷⁵
- Capacity assessment and enhancement consultants should analyse the culture and the context, discern the nature of client ownership, design the process to promote ownership and deal with personal change, address power issues, monitor and measure their contribution and have a serving, supporting and facilitating attitude.⁷⁶

Reflecting on these factors one should keep in mind that: 'Poor people and NGDOs are dependent actors in constantly changing environments. Consequently, the core of systems strategies is an approach that enhances insightful agility', which is described as '...the ability to recognise, understand and adapt – in sustainable-oriented ways – to changes which determine the specific context'.⁷⁷ Organisations that do not regenerate themselves are unlikely to remain relevant, efficient and effective and may, especially since the competition in the development sector is also increasing, not survive.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Kruse, 1998.

⁷⁵ James, 2002: 146-150.

⁷⁶ Ibid.: 150-154.

⁷⁷ Fowler, 2000: 16.

⁷⁸ Fowler, 2000: 133.

4. The role of NGDOs especially with regard to civil society

Finally a few comments about the (eventual special) role of non-governmental development organisations with regard to capacity enhancement in general and strengthening civil society in particular.

a. *Comparative advantages not-for-profit private sector*

In the debate on the issue of operational choices concerning the future of development cooperation in general and TA in particular, it is often forgotten that the state, the corporate sector and NGDOs in the North and South are guided by different sets of values and objectives. After all, conviction, vision and values are at the heart of every organisation from which other characteristics of the organisation are derived. To understand the natural role of the different actors in the development community, it is therefore important to make these central values more concrete. As for the state, ideally its tasks is to protect and assure the lives of its citizens and regulate society; ‘money and a lot more’ is central to the corporate sector⁷⁹; In the NGDO sector more altruistic objectives prevail such as the care of fellow beings. The last-mentioned sector ‘makes up the private realm for the pursuit of recreational, spiritual, social, cultural, and other personal or collective interests’.⁸⁰ Fowler with regard to the fundamental differences between the different actors states:

‘Voluntary sector organisations do not have the legislative capacity and coercive force of the state, nor the economic clout of commercial capital and enterprise. What they have, instead, is the dynamism and power of self-willed human action, which can encompass very large numbers of people and exert significant influence in society.’⁸¹

Based on these differences in points of departure, NGDOs in the North and South have a number of comparative advantages vis-à-vis the ‘first’ and ‘second’ sectors: through their background, values, and involvement NGDO staff are closer to the target groups of development projects and programmes. Consequently, NGDOs are in a better position to contribute to developments from ‘below’. As a rule, NGDOs are less bureaucratic and cumbersome than the government, and therefore can respond more flexibly to local situations. In contrast to the corporate sector, NGDOs are better positioned to deal with the priorities of poor or marginalised groups because they mostly operate through the provision of subsidies rather than under market mechanisms. Their institutional flexibility makes it possible to engage in long-term relationships that in most cases are a prerequisite for sustainable development. Generally, NGDOs work more cost-effectively than the corporate sector. Furthermore, NGDOs can supply important services that are less attractive to others (for instance facilitating networks, functioning as information channels and catalysts, political lobbying and advocacy).⁸²

⁷⁹ The 1995 jubilee edition *Money and a lot more* of the Netherlands Development Finance Company symbolises this trend (Dalmeijer, 1995).

⁸⁰ In reality the distinction is of course less rigid and areas in which goals and activities overlap do exist (Fowler, 1997: especially chapter 1).

⁸¹ Fowler, 1997: 24.

⁸² See also e.g. Eade, 2000: 18. In spite of these comparative advantages, it should be recognised that the three sectors are complementary and should balance each other (See also Fowler, 1997: 27-28).

b. *NGDOs and capacity enhancement*

Within this context, it should be noted that the demand for capacity for development in North and South – partly under the influence of increased globalisation – is not declining but changing. Globalisation according to the logic of the New Policy Agenda⁸³ is leading to, among other things, the exclusion of particular groups, regions and countries. These are often of no interest to the commercial providers of TA and therefore left to rely on the services of subsidised institutions such as development organisations. There is thus a great necessity and challenge for not-for-profit TA institutions to further address this changing demand.

There are several problems with regard to TA in general. First of all, technical cooperation resources have actually declined for low-income countries, for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and for sub-Saharan Africa – as reflected in the total disbursements, per capita disbursements and as a proportion of overall development assistance – even as these resources have increased for the high-income countries, and for Asia and Eastern Europe⁸⁴. In the first chapter of the UNDP publication *Capacity for development*, the authors speak of a ‘disturbing trend’. ‘Countries most in need of capacity development are receiving less and less help’. This is obviously also the case with regard to regions, organisations and target communities. Where the need is the highest, outside support is only limited and decreasing. At the international level, this issue is closely interrelated with political issues, priorities and strategies. At the organisational level, especially in the NGDO sector, other aspects (see further on) play an important role.⁸⁵

A second problem relates to the issue of supply- versus demand-driven TA. The plea of UNDP and other critical actors such as the Dutch Ministry for Foreign Affairs for demand-driven as opposed to supply-driven TA and personnel assistance is certainly justified from the perspective of ownership and concomitant sustainability. From a political point of view this reasoning is correct, when the situation is portrayed without sufficient detail and subtlety. Over the past few years, different multilateral institutions and researchers have come to the conclusion that TA occurs – or should take place – under difficult circumstances. It should take place in the least developed regions and countries – also referred to as ‘minus areas’⁸⁶ – and with the weakest partners.⁸⁷ The problem in such situations is that the local receiving party often has no (or insufficient) capacity to conduct a clear ‘self-analysis and diagnosis’ and thereby adequately articulate the request or need. Ellerman in this context raises the question: if the receivers ‘are to become autonomous, then what is the role of external helpers? This paradox of supplying help to self-help.... is the fundamental conundrum of development assistance’.⁸⁸

A third problem arises from the plea for clear objectives. As with the argument for demand-driven TA, the plea for clear and measurable objectives is again politically correct, but should be considered in this context – in light of the afore-mentioned limited capacities of many receiving organisations – with caution and wisdom. In the case of weak partner organisations, there is often a need for intensive dialogue between the provider of TA and local partner organisations, which should not affect the ownership of the recipient. During the process of

⁸³ Van der Velden, 1999.

⁸⁴ Fukuda-Parr, et al., 2002: 4.

⁸⁵ Policies, instruments and procedures and back donor pressure play an important role here.

⁸⁶ Hommes, 1993.

⁸⁷ Hoebink & Van der Velden, 1998.

⁸⁸ Ellerman, 2002: 43 - 44.

discussion, the partner organisation learns to better identify and formulate needs and translate these into measurable objectives.⁸⁹

Local ownership is the fourth matter of concern with respect to technical cooperation. The general plea for local ownership is based on the assumption that TA is only provided in countries and situations where one can speak of sufficient administrative capabilities (good governance) and strong partner relations with a democratic tradition on the part of the partner. This is often – in light of the very nature of the problem – not the case.⁹⁰ Research also shows that TA needs not be at odds with local ownership.⁹¹

The fifth and final problem relates to the issue of imperfect market mechanisms. In the case of TA, one can often speak of an imperfect market as a result of the binding of the aid, the fact that the costs and prices have played little or no role in decision-making and transparency of this process and competition among the suppliers on the market.⁹² Caution is required in order to avoid the mechanistic assumption that market operation is the only or most suitable mechanism for guaranteeing ownership and demand-driven TA.⁹³

NGDOs can be(come) part of the solution to the problems raised above (regarding demand-driven TA) if one takes into account the comparative advantages mentioned earlier (see 3.a of this paper). NGDOs are for example well-suited for the job in case of weak partners experiencing difficulties articulating the request or need. A critical dialogue – in the form of a facilitated process involving the Northern and Southern partners with regard to the relevance, nature and breadth of the potential TA – is in many cases an important means for dealing with the classical dilemma confronting international development cooperation.⁹⁴ Those organisations, which are well suited to this role, are maintaining long-term partner relations with organisations and institutions that find themselves in such a situation and therefore frequently have the trust of the receiving parties. Within the Dutch context one can think of, for example, the co-financing agencies⁹⁵ and member organisations of the Association for Personnel Service Overseas (PSO).

The same holds for the plea for clear and measurable objectives. NGDOs, because of their long-term relationships based among others things on trust, are again more suited to the job and can provide long-term assistance with respect to identifying and formulating needs and translating them into measurable objectives.

The unbinding of aid can be part of the solution to the problem of imperfect market mechanisms and difficulties regarding local ownership. The unbinding of the aid is, in

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ The following frame of reference is often adopted for purposes of coherence and consistency: ‘strategy for poverty alleviation formulated by the government in consultation with a broad sample of the population’ (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2000). However, insufficient attention is typically paid to exactly those situations in which such consultation and strategy formulation can not be spoken of. Another overly simple conceptualisation of matters is, for example, that the filling of vacancies with foreign experts does not contribute to development (Ibid.: 2).

⁹¹ TA frequently contributes to the promotion of local expertise and thereby strengthens local ownership (see Goold, Ogara & James, 1998).

⁹² OECD, 1994.

⁹³ In this connection, the fact that some organisations maintain quite equal or balanced relations with clients and partner organisations in the South and thereby limit the dangers of becoming supply driven is sometimes ignored.

⁹⁴ For an interesting case study along these lines, the reader is referred to Goold, Ogara and James (1998).

⁹⁵ Lap, 2000.

principle, a positive step as it can be expected to enhance ownership and autonomy on the part of the recipient along with the price/quality relation in a 'perfect market'.

Several shifts are required with respect to TA in general. The strong emphasis on capacity enhancement should shift towards more human resource development, institutional development and systems development in the future in order to promote sustainable institutional development of weak partner organisations in low- and middle-income countries.⁹⁶ The distinction between TA aimed at institutional development and TA aimed at filling the vacancies is critical in this light. TA aimed at institutional development should be given priority although gap filling is not completely irrelevant from a humanitarian, developmental and strategic point of view.

In organisational terms, a plea is made here for integration *and* the establishment of separate budget lines and organisations. In such a manner, the topic will probably play an active role on the agendas of not only governments but also private development organisations during the next few years. In this context, much more attention should be paid to the contributions of non-state actors which do not necessarily have a developmental background, such as social institutions and semi-governmental bodies for the strengthening of organisational and institutional capacities of organisations in low- and middle-income countries.

Furthermore, one should not lose sight of the fact that many private suppliers of TA and personnel assistance in particular have their roots in Dutch society and therefore receive widespread grassroots support. This positive effect holds for numerous Dutch development cooperation efforts as well. Many of the activities of TA organisations can be referred to as twinning *avant la lettre*. For the years to come the crux of the matter is to sufficiently take these specific forms of achievement into consideration in ongoing development efforts.

c. *NGDOs and civil society*

Civil society inhabits the area between individuals or families and the state, and is made up of associational groupings of all sorts. In essence, 'civil society comprises the collectivity of those social organisations that enjoy *autonomy from the state* (are not part of the state or are creatures of it) and have as one important goal among others to *influence the state* on behalf of their members'.⁹⁷

Civil society may be defined as 'an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organisations which are no separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interests or values'.⁹⁸

Civil society has to be explained in its relationship with the state and with society more in general. Civil society is a theoretical concept and it can not be understood in isolation from the state and political society. Political society, according to Biekart,⁹⁹ is 'a separate sphere of actors and institutions, mediating, articulating and institutionalising the relations between the state and civil society'. Political society is thus an intermediary sphere between the state and civil society. In periods of state domination of political life, social actors in civil society will

⁹⁶ Kruse, 1998.

⁹⁷ Blair, 1997: 25.

⁹⁸ White, 1994; in: Biekart, 1999: 32-33.

⁹⁹ Ibid: 33.

try to find new independent forms and channels to recover the political initiative and balance state power through political society.

Properly defining the concept of civil society does matter, according to Whaites:¹⁰⁰

‘Given the importance that donor and NGOs attach to the concept, it matters a great deal, particularly where societies are heterogeneous and divided. The ways in which development NGOs perceive civil society, and consequently plan projects to facilitate the work of civil associations can have a significant effect on the evolution (or lack of fit) of civil society in which they work.’

There is a theoretical divide regarding the concept of civil society between those who opt for the definition of De Tocqueville and those who opt for Bayart’s more recent definition of civil society. De Tocqueville holds a largely positive view of the concept. For him, civil society is:

‘... a defensive counterbalance to the increased capabilities of the modern state. It provides a realm in which society interacts constructively with the state, not to subvert and destroy it, but to refine its actions and improve its efficiency.’¹⁰¹

Hence, civil society groups collaborate rather on ‘small issues’ that cut across ethnic, language and religious boundaries and bring people together in new coalitions. According to Whaites, most NGOs however lose sight of this classical view and adopt the view that *all* civil associations – that is, all community or development groups – naturally build civil society. The definition used by UNDP and commonly adopted by many NGOs, is an example. It looks upon social movements as civil society groups and the focus is on interacting with civil society rather than analysing its composite parts. Its definitions refer to civil society collectively, rather than individual elements within it, which according to Whaites is a limited definition of the concept of civil society.

‘... a village-level project in a highly heterogeneous area may unwittingly undermine the future growth of civil society. If the village is primordially homogeneous, and the project develops strong local organisations without setting up umbrella bodies to promote co-operation with other villages, what has it achieved?’¹⁰²

In contrast with De Tocqueville’s view, Bayart’s concept of civil society is also more along the lines of defining civil society collectively rather than separating society into different individual elements. According to Bayart, all associations and community groups are components of civil society. Many NGOs try to label all potential local partners as ‘civil society organisations’. Bayart’s work focuses on Africa and states that it is largely inappropriate to apply Western concepts of civil society to contexts in which primordial attachments are unlikely to decline in the near future.

‘... projects that simply strengthen groups associating on primordial grounds are facilitating a natural, competitive process arising from the specific characteristics of African civil society.’¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Whaites, In: Pearce, 2000: 125.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*: 127.

¹⁰² *ibid.*: 129.

¹⁰³ Whaites, in: Pearce, 2000: 129.

Whaites states that both views have their strengths and weaknesses and that ‘evidence is emerging to suggest that primordial attachments do change with the process of societal change’. Another school of thought is centred on ‘bringing the state back in’ and suggests that the state can hugely affect primordial entities through its own changing policies. Whaites therefore suggest that

‘... we should not yet give up on traditional evolutionary ideas of civil society. The interaction of social change with an active state structure may foster the integrative type of civil association envisaged by de Tocqueville, nurturing the future growth of civil society within developing states.’¹⁰⁴

Another theoretical debate with regard to the concept of civil society concerns the relationship between strong or weak states and strong or weak civil society. This relationship is less clear than theory suggests. Strong effective states are expected to benefit civil society, weak states could hinder civil society associations. However, in some countries it is the very weakness of the state, its failure to provide services or to engage in the local development process, which stimulates a thriving voluntary sector and, with it, a strong and vocal civil society. NGOs, according to Whaites, should also seek to build up the capacity of the state as an integral part of local grassroots work, instead of just replacing it in service provision. Short-term benefits of gap filling are outweighed by the dangers of doing so in a way that undermines the state. The involvement of the state should be looked upon as an important part of the development process itself, especially in cases of weak state and strong civil society.

A diverse, vibrant and large civil society is an important precondition for participatory, democratic development of poor and marginalised communities. This is one of the major lessons of the development practice over the last two decades of the last century, especially with regard to a number of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. It is against this background understandable that academicians, governments, multilateral organisations and (private) development organisations from North and South have developed an interest in studying the emergence of civil society organisations and civil society at large.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, an increased number of policy and operational guidelines have emerged.¹⁰⁶

Performance of private aid agencies is not something that can be easily measured and the question is raised whether it is possible to attribute particular achievements of Southern actors to the contributions of Northern agencies. One of the major lessons drawn from impact assessment studies¹⁰⁷ is that much still can be learned by examining *why* and *how* these agencies contribute to civil society building instead of detecting *how much* they contributed.

‘Donors need to be clear first on what development objective they seek through supporting Southern NGOs, and only then determine the most appropriate means of achieving this goal.’¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*: 130.

¹⁰⁵ Biekart, 1999; Fowler, 2000.

¹⁰⁶ See for instance: the webpage which was used for the expert and public debate in the Netherlands about the role of non-state actors with regard to strengthening civil society in low- and medium income countries. www.oneworld.net/nl/thinktank/maatschapp/index.html; Blair; in: Bernard, Helmich & Lehning (eds.), 1998: 65-81.

¹⁰⁷ With reference to Biekart, 1999; Bebbington & Riddell, In: Hulme & Edwards, 1997.

¹⁰⁸ Bebbington & Riddell, , In: Hulme & Edwards, 1997: 107-127.

‘Strengthening civil society as an intervention strategy can be better understood when it is explicitly attached to certain development objectives that explain why civil society should be ‘strong’ and which organisations in civil society should be prioritised for support.’¹⁰⁹

Increased direct funding will influence both the relationship between Northern and Southern NGOs, and those between Southern grassroots support organisations and popular organisations – relationships that are sometimes (perhaps often) fragile.

Donors should in general be cautious before moving into direct funding, according to Bebbington & Riddell. Rather the point should be to question such moves as a means of creating a space within which to think about more appropriate relationships between all the actors involved (donors, Northern Non-Governmental Organisations ((NGOs)), grassroots supporting organisations and membership organisations). In addition, the issue should be raised of how donors might best support a process that will strengthen these more appropriate relationships. Often a more effective role would be

‘... to work on improving the environment in which southern NGOs operate, on facilitating interactions between SNGOs, the state and other actors, and in bringing SNGOs into the elaboration of the donors’ country programmes ... in which rights of association, civil liberties and rights of access to minimal-quality services are achieved and protected: an environment in which training, financial and political support is given, and in which the state and markets operate in ways that do not weaken civil society.’¹¹⁰

Private aid agencies could support strengthening civil society through means of:

1. *Southern NGOs and strengthening civil society.* To strengthen civil society is – in part at least – to strengthen Southern Non-Governmental Organisations (SNGOs) and intermediary service delivery organisations, but in specific ways. To strengthen them implies enhancing their capacity to perform effectively (according to their own criteria of effectiveness), their accountability to their social base, and their capacity to represent their members’ concerns. Strengthening the capacity of SNGOs implies internal strengthening as well as addressing the way the SNGO interacts with its (political and economic) environment. This approach should also involve facilitating dialogue between different types of Membership Organisations (MOs) with different interests, and involve support to mechanisms that help resolve conflicts.
2. *Linking Northern Non-Governmental Organisations (NNGOs) and SNGOs.* SNGOs should set out the broad guidelines for a civil society, but at the same time allow the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the specific activities to come out of the NGO sector itself. It also supports NNGOs in their own process of redefining the terms of their partnership with SNGOs.
3. *Strengthening both the NGO and the state sector.* Donor support in strengthening grassroots support organisations and membership organisations makes abundantly clear that both sectors need to be addressed, There is a need for consistency between donor policy towards SNGOs and their policy towards public sector reform. It is not a

¹⁰⁹ Biekart, 1999: 96.

¹¹⁰ *ibid*: 126.

question of a strong state or strong NGO sector, but rather of the need for strength in both.

Strengthening the capacity of Southern NGOs implies internal strengthening as well as addressing the way the SNGO interacts with its political and economic environment. This approach should also involve facilitating dialogue between different types of MOs with different interests and involve support to mechanisms that help resolve conflicts.

In the recent past, various lessons have been learned with regard to the role of outside agencies in strengthening civil society:¹¹¹ Fowler and Holloway have summarised these in a list of general ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ (see Box IV).

Box IV: Outside agencies ‘do’s’ and ‘don’ts’ regarding civil society

Don’ts in the aid system:

- Stop treating people’s participation as something that happens merely in projects and programmes; also include the invisible, the informal.
- Stop equating civil society with NGOs, which has instrumentalised the role of NGOs as extensions of external agenda’s.
- The growth of NGOs cannot be equated with public trust in NGOs. We have neglected the work on public trust, of understanding of civic society organisations and on sustainability.
- Don’t exclude other kinds of organisations just because they have very different values from yours.
- Don’t allow your thinking to be dominated by NGOs – involve someone from another important block (like Unions) from the start.
- Don’t ignore traditional citizens’ groups simply because they are not documented in the modern sector.
- Don’t ignore representatives from government of the business sector because they have not shown their support for civil society thus far.

Do’s in the aid system:

- A reconceptualisation of CS as *collective action for public good* is necessary, instead of simply defining it as non-state, non-profit organisations.
- Be explicit and honest about the value-base of the ‘civic-ness’ to be supported and select relations accordingly and openly.
- Move from project intervention thinking and development approaches.
- Become much more skilled in mapping and deep analysis of living civil society.
- Better employ theories of organisational growth and development.
- Reach beyond aid-related civic organisations to ‘invisible’ civil society.
- Invest more in domestic resource mobilisation, civic relations, mandate creation and local accountability.
- Be as inclusive as possible – take into consideration all kinds of citizens’ organisations that may exist in your country.
- Clarify with your peer group whether political parties, trade unions and cooperatives should be considered part of the civil society sector.
- Ascertain whether there are existing directories of organisations, or research on the civil society sector.
- Think sectorwide, not just about your own subgrouping, within the civil society sector (underperformance in one part of the sector may affect the whole civil society sector).

¹¹¹ Fowler, 15 february 2001, see: www.oneworld.org/nl/thinktank/maatschapp/PresentationAlanFowler.html; Holloway, 2001, 70-74.

d. *TA and civil society*

In order to deal meaningfully with the subject of the role of TA organisations with regard to strengthening civil society and civil society organisations we have to go a bit deeper into the issue. In a recent publication, Biekart has distinguished four dimensions of strengthening civil organisations and civil society at large. Outside agencies can in principle contribute to strengthening (a) organisations; (b) networking; (c) lobby and advocacy work; and (d) citizenship.¹¹²

In view of the fact that emergence, growth and strengthening civil society organisations and civil society at large is by definition an endogenous, ‘from below and from within’, process, it is difficult to impose change from the outside. Especially civil society ‘does not lend itself to external manufacturing. It can not be created via blueprints from offices in Washington or London.’¹¹³ The role of support agencies and structures should be dealt with with less certainty, more modesty and wisdom and is bound to be limited. This position should have to be taken as a starting point.

Secondly: without careful and sensitive analysis of needs and the social and political context, donor intervention into local civil societies ‘can end up distorting and weakening local processes of association and problem resolution’.¹¹⁴

Thirdly, by the very nature of the process, non-state actors have a ‘competitive edge’ over state actors. It is easier to imagine a role for NGDOs and similar organisations in supporting civil society organisations in some countries than for states. Howell and Pearce have indicated that civil society assistance is often limited to fostering democratisation and it ‘also accords neatly with a broader agenda of promoting neo-liberal economic policies’.¹¹⁵ In the light of the above-described comparative advantages, and keeping in mind the identity and goals of the NGDO sector in general and the involved organisation in particular, development cooperation by private non-profit organisations from the North and South should be aimed more at regulating and controlling current economic and political processes rather than facilitating them. It is their public duty: to steer the process [of globalisation], to counterbalance profit maximisation and give a voice to those who are excluded or downtrodden.¹¹⁶ In short, it is not so much to promote private ownership but rather to denounce unequal property and income relations, to counter the unbridled abuse of power by the economic and political elite, to raise the issue of environmental degradation, to make a stand for human rights, and so on.

More at operational level TA providers can play a meaningful role with regard to strengthening organisations. Outsiders can in principle facilitate an organisational or institutional development process and/or facilitate management assistance or facilitate professional or technical assistance.¹¹⁷ With regard to the other dimensions, the potential TA contribution is far more complex.¹¹⁸ This can only take place when the ownership of the

¹¹² Biekart, 2002.

¹¹³ Howell & Pierce, 2002: 121.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Howell & Pearce, 2002: 89-122.

¹¹⁶ Pronk, 1998.

¹¹⁷ Burnett & Liz Martyn Johns, 2002.

¹¹⁸ Reference may be made to the issue of ownership, demand versus supply driven, the imperfect character of the TA market.

activities remains in all stages with the local partner organisations. Authentic development from within and autonomy of the people and counterpart organisations should be central. This implies that TA processes should be organised accordingly. The above-described facilitation methodology could be an appropriate option under such circumstances.

5. Epilogue

Looking back development cooperation may prove to be only a temporary phenomenon, or, as Breman puts it, ‘a bridging of two eras marked by late-colonial politics in the first half of the century on the one hand and the realisation of an integrated world economy organised on capitalist lines in this *fin de siècle* on the other hand’.¹¹⁹ This might indeed happen, if the development sector at large and the TA sector in particular do not manage to regenerate themselves.

In fact the choices are simple. At the level of norms, just as Chambers contends, it is about people first; at the conceptual level it is about the notion that development does not imply a linear process that runs the same course everywhere; and at the empirical level development experts should realise that conditions are complex, differ from place to place, that the pace of change can vary significantly, and that the poor often possess an enormous amount of knowledge and are perfectly able to organise themselves.¹²⁰ For the TA sector this presents quite a challenge.

TA organisations should choose their modes of operation in such a way that they provide opportunities for a real two-way traffic and equality in the relationships between the North and South.¹²¹ Indeed as Stephen Browne has argued: *Beyond Aid, from patronage to partnership*.¹²² In the Netherlands in particular the Dutch Association for Culture and Development (NVCO) has taken relevant initiatives to put this new form of development cooperation into practice:

‘Respect for diversity on the one hand and recognition of the importance to meet in shared responsibilities on the other hand provides the only sustainable basis for international cooperation.’¹²³

As the consequences of globalisation penetrate further into the lives of people in the North and the South, there will be a growing need for a response based on the joint norms and values that are present in the private non-profit sector. This is also globalisation, not ‘top down’ but ‘bottom up’, with human dignity in the centre.

¹¹⁹ Breman, 1997: 26.

¹²⁰ Chambers, 1994: 1-14.

¹²¹ Sizoo, 1992; Van der Velden & Zweers, 1997.

¹²² Browne, 1999.

¹²³ Sizoo, 1992: 34.

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