Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

Olivier Serrat
Asian Development Bank

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Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

Abstract
{Excerpt} Feedback is a circular causal process whereby some portion of a system's output is returned to the input to control the dynamic behavior of the system. In organizations, feedback is the process of sharing observations, concerns, and suggestions to improve performance. In work that seeks to address the increasingly complex challenges of development, often with limited resources, feedback is essential to maximize development impact. Knowledge Solutions: Monthly Progress Notes asserts that the essential first steps of feedback are the processes of monitoring and evaluation. They identify challenges, recognize common constraints, and note that the submission of monthly progress notes on activities and accomplishments is too infrequently provided in the scope of projects and programs. There are opportunities too for more systematic capture and storage of feedback from executing agencies on the effectiveness of assistance in capacity development, prior to knowledge sharing and learning.

Capacity development is the process whereby people, organizations, and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time. In 2005, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness called for capacity development to be an explicit objective of the national development and poverty reduction strategies of partner countries. Bilateral and multilateral agencies, among others, have responded by elevating capacity development in their operations, and given attention to factors that drive success and factors that deter from it.

Keywords
Asian Development Bank, ADB, poverty, economic growth, sustainability, development

Comments
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Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

by Olivier Serrat

Rationale

Feedback is a circular causal process whereby some portion of a system's output is returned to the input to control the dynamic behavior of the system. In organizations, feedback is the process of sharing observations, concerns, and suggestions to improve performance. In work that seeks to address the increasingly complex challenges of development, often with limited resources, feedback is essential to maximize development impact. Knowledge Solutions: Monthly Progress Notes asserts that the essential first steps of feedback are the processes of monitoring and evaluation. They identify challenges, recognize common constraints, and note that the submission of monthly progress notes on activities and accomplishments is too infrequently provided in the scope of projects and programs. There are opportunities too for more systematic capture and storage of feedback from executing agencies on the effectiveness of assistance in capacity development, prior to knowledge sharing and learning.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

Capacity development is the process whereby people, organizations, and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt, and maintain capacity over time. In 2005, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness called for capacity development to be an explicit objective of the national development and poverty reduction strategies of partner countries. Bilateral and multilateral agencies, among others, have responded by elevating capacity development in their operations, and given attention to factors that drive success and factors that deter from it.
In 2008, a special evaluation study of the Independent Evaluation Department in ADB on the effectiveness of ADB’s capacity development assistance classified these positive and negative factors into four categories: (i) design and quality-at-entry factors within ADB’s control, (ii) design and quality-at-entry beyond ADB’s control, (iii) implementation factors within ADB’s control, and (iv) implementation factors beyond ADB’s control.) Since the success drivers in categories (i) and (iii) are design and quality-at-entry factors as well as implementation factors within ADB’s control, they can be achieved through improvement in ADB’s design and implementation practices for capacity development interventions. Since the success drivers in categories (ii) and (iv) are design and quality-at-entry factors as well as implementation factors beyond ADB’s control, which are contextual or external level factors by nature, they tend to act as incentives (opportunities) to capacity development performance. However, the negative side of these factors will tend to act as risks or constraints (threats) to capacity development performance. The study noted that although ADB has no direct control over these risks, some of them should be identified and mitigation mechanisms formulated during the design stage with good diagnostics. In more challenging environments, it may be necessary to be more realistic by developing a phased approach to capacity development interventions, or deferring them until some of these risks are addressed.

Presumably, the findings of the study are relevant elsewhere. Further, much remains to be done to put the preconditions for such good practices in place. This does not necessarily call for reinvention of the wheel. Development agencies can, by doing less and doing it well, do better for capacity development. Simple knowledge management tools that harvest experience for subsequent sharing and use are at hand. With regard to the technical assistance modality that donors often use, the tool described below shows how to invite feedback on preparation, design, and implementation; the performance of consultants; the contribution to change management, policy development, and capacity building; and constraints to implementation.

**Template**

The questionnaire¹ laid out below provides guidance on the preparation by executing agencies of assessments of the effectiveness of capacity development in the form of a recommended format and a description of the contents required. Naturally, flexibility in the use of the questionnaire should be exercised as it is intended to introduce approximate conformance in the more obvious components of monitoring and evaluation. The figure below suggests that there are seven of these: (i) capabilities, (ii) endogenous change and adaptation, (iii) performance, (iv) external context, (v) stakeholders, (vi) external interventions, and (vii)

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¹ Source: Adapted from ADB. 1996. Special Study on Assessment of the Effectiveness of Bank Technical Assistance for Capacity Building in Indonesia. Manila.
Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development: A Questionnaire for Executing Agencies

| Technical Assistance Data |
|---------------------------|
| TA Title                  |
| TA Number                 |
| Executing agency          |
| TA Amount                 |
| Date Approved             |
| TA Objective              |

| Technical Assistance Preparation |
|----------------------------------|
| 1. How high was the TA's objective in the Government’s overall priorities at the time, as indicated, for instance in the Five-Year Development Plan at the time or later? | High | Medium | Low | Do not know |
| 2. Was the TA's objective a high priority of the executing agency at that time? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 3. Who was the principal player in identifying the need for the TA? | ADB | Government | Executing agency | Do not know |
| 4. How satisfactory was the process of developing the terms of reference for the TA in terms of adequate consultation with the staff of the executing agency? | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |
| 4a. If not satisfactory: please cite the major reasons. |
| 5. Was a satisfactory process for institutional strengthening (i.e., enabling the executing agency itself to build on the outputs of the TA) developed before the TA was accepted by the executing agency (e.g., starting with a diagnostic analysis)? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 6. Before the start of the TA, did the executing agency realistically consider that by the end of the TA, it would gain the technical expertise to do the desired work itself? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 7. Were the major constraints, both inside and outside the executing agency, which could prevent the effective completion of the TA satisfactorily addressed prior to the terms of reference being finalized? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 7a. If yes, please indicate whether the constraints were | Internal | External |
7b. If no, please list the major constraints not addressed. (See Annex for a sample of constraints and problems.)

| Technical Assistance Design |
|-----------------------------|
| 8. How satisfactory was the design of the TA to achieve its objective? | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |
| 8a. If satisfactory, please list strengths. | If not satisfactory: please list weaknesses. |
| 9. How important was the TA’s objective to the work of the executing agency? | Very Important | Important | Not Very Important | No Opinion |
| 9a. In what way were they important? | | | |
| • From a technical point of view | | | |
| • From an institutional strengthening point of view | | | |
| 10. Did the design seek to transfer skills to the executing agency by the end of the TA? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 10a. If yes, how satisfactory was the approach to technology and skills transfer? | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |
| 10b. If not satisfactory, please state in what way. | | | |
| 11. Did the senior management of the executing agency play a major role in the design of the TA? | Yes | No | Do not know |

| Technical Assistance Implementation |
|-------------------------------------|
| 12. Were appropriate counterpart staff available to participate in the TA and benefit from it? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 12a. If yes, were the counterpart staff and trainees released as required without jeopardizing other high priorities of the executing agency? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 12b. When were counterpart staff made available for the TA? | From The Outset | Shortly After The Beginning | Late In The Project | Not At All |
| 12c. Was the counterpart approach to skills transfer effective? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 12d. If no, please cite the major reasons. | | | |
| 13. Were recommendations made under the TA to improve the functioning of the executing agency? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 13a. If yes, were the recommendations appropriate? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 13b. If yes, were the recommendations accepted? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 13c. If yes, how substantially were the recommendations acted upon? | Significantly | Partially | Not At All |
| 14. Did the TA do any staff training? | Yes | No | Do not know |
### Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

|   |   | Planned to be trained | Actually trained |
|---|---|-----------------------|------------------|
| 14a. If yes, approximately how many staff were planned to be trained and how many were actually trained? | Marked improvement | Some improvement | No improvement | Do not know |
| 14b. What level of long-term improvement in staff performance did the training produce? | Very competent? | Competent? | Not very competent? | Do not know |
| 15. Were the trainers Very competent? | Competent? | Not very competent? | Do not know |
| 16. Was the training Just long enough? | Slightly too short? | Too short? | Do not know |
| 17. At the end of the TA, how well could the counterparts and trainees, without further technical assistance, perform the tasks they were supposed to perform? | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |
| 17a. If not satisfactory, please cite the major reasons. |   |   |   |   |
| 18. How satisfactorily was the TA's objective achieved? | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |
| 18a. Please identify one significant and enduring outcome directly resulting from the implementation of the TA's objective. |   |   |   |   |
| 19. Did the senior management of the executing agency play a major role in the implementation and general guidance of the TA? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 19a. If no, did the lack of involvement have an adverse effect on the outcomes of the TA? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 20. Would the TA have been more effective if staff in central agencies had been more involved? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 20a. If yes, please explain in what way. |   |   |   |   |
| 21. Did women working in the executing agency benefit from the TA? | Yes | No | Do not know |
| 21a. If yes, please indicate approximately how many and in what way. |   |   |   |   |
| 22. Please list the major problems with TA implementation. (See Annex for a sample of constraints and problems.) |   |   |   |   |
| Performance of Consultants |   |   |   |   |
| 23. Please rate the overall performance of the consultants. | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |
| 23a. In terms of technical competence. | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |
| 23b. In terms of training and skills transfer. | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |
24. How well did the consultants understand the needs of the executing agency?  
   | Very well | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |

25. Please rate how well the consultants adapted their technical competencies to the needs and competencies of the executing agency.  
   | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |

26. How culturally sensitive was the work of the consultants?  
   | Very sensitive | Sensitive | Not sensitive | Do not know |

27. How well did the consultants understand the professional needs of the people working in the executing agency?  
   | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |

28. Did the consultants pay any special attention to the needs of the women working in the executing agency?  
   | Yes | No | Do not know |

29. Did the consultants Help The Executing agency To Do Things Or Do Things For The Agency?  
   | Help The Executing agency To Do Things | Do Things For The Agency | Do not know |

30. Would you employ the consultants again?  
   | Yes | No | Do not know |

30a. If no, please explain why.

31. Please rate the contribution of the TA in the improvement of the following:  

   **Institutional Development**

   31a. Management competencies of the executing agency (i.e., is the executing agency better managed as a result of the TA?)  
       | Major | Minor | None at all | Do not know |

   31b. Policy capacity of the executing agency  
       | Major | Minor | None at all | Do not know |

   31c. Operating systems of the executing agency (i.e., did the TA improve budget, planning, information systems, and procedures on a sustainable basis?)  
       | Major | Minor | None at all | Do not know |

   31d. Organizational efficiency of the executing agency (i.e., has productivity of the executing agency increased as a direct result of the TA?)  
       | Major | Minor | None at all | Do not know |

   31e. Technical competencies of staff working in the executing agency  
       | Major | Minor | None at all | Do not know |

   31f. Operational effectiveness of the executing agency (i.e., does the executing agency provide a better quality of service for the Government?)  
       | Major | Minor | None at all | Do not know |
### Assessing the Effectiveness of Assistance in Capacity Development

| Question                                                                 | Major | Minor | None at all | Do not know |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------------|-------------|
| 31g. Planning, monitoring and control of the executing agency          |       |       |             |             |
| 32. Did the TA result in the development of any performance indicators? |       |       |             |             |
| 32a. If yes, are those performance indicators still being used?        |       |       |             |             |
| 32b. If no, can you suggest performance indicators to assess the long-term effectiveness of the TA? |       |       |             |             |
| 32c. Over time, has the performance rating on the basis of these indicators |       |       |             |             |
| 33. To achieve the best sustainable results for the executing agency, was the length of time for the TA |       |       |             |             |
| 33a. If too short, please explain why it was too short.               |       |       |             |             |
| 34. Do the majority of the counterparts still work in the executing agency? |       |       |             |             |
| 34a. If no, do they still work in the public sector?                  |       |       |             |             |
| 34b. If no, broadly, why did they leave the executing agency and the public sector? |       |       |             |             |
| 35. Do the majority of trainees still work in the public sector?      |       |       |             |             |
| 35a. If no, broadly, why did they leave the executing agency and the public sector? |       |       |             |             |
| 36. Have the facilities created under the TA continued to receive funding even after TA completion? |       |       |             |             |
| 37. Did public service rules and procedures constrain the full effectiveness of the TA? |       |       |             |             |
| 37a. If yes, please explain in what way.                              |       |       |             |             |
| 38. Were there any incentives to encourage executing agency officers to participate in training provided under the TA? |       |       |             |             |
| 38a. If yes, please describe the incentives.                          |       |       |             |             |
| 39. How could TA implementation be improved?                          |       |       |             |             |
| 40. Would earlier reform of central agencies and their rules and procedures have improved the effectiveness of the TA? |       |       |             |             |

**General**

| Question                                                                 | Just Right | Slightly too short | Far too short | Do not know |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|--------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 33. To achieve the best sustainable results for the executing agency, was the length of time for the TA |            |                    |               |             |
| 33a. If too short, please explain why it was too short.               |            |                    |               |             |
| 34. Do the majority of the counterparts still work in the executing agency? |            |                    |               |             |
| 34a. If no, do they still work in the public sector?                  |            |                    |               |             |
| 34b. If no, broadly, why did they leave the executing agency and the public sector? |            |                    |               |             |
| 35. Do the majority of trainees still work in the public sector?      |            |                    |               |             |
| 35a. If no, broadly, why did they leave the executing agency and the public sector? |            |                    |               |             |
| 36. Have the facilities created under the TA continued to receive funding even after TA completion? |            |                    |               |             |
| 37. Did public service rules and procedures constrain the full effectiveness of the TA? |            |                    |               |             |
| 37a. If yes, please explain in what way.                              |            |                    |               |             |
| 38. Were there any incentives to encourage executing agency officers to participate in training provided under the TA? |            |                    |               |             |
| 38a. If yes, please describe the incentives.                          |            |                    |               |             |
| 39. How could TA implementation be improved?                          |            |                    |               |             |
| 40. Would earlier reform of central agencies and their rules and procedures have improved the effectiveness of the TA? |            |                    |               |             |
40a. If yes, please explain in what way.

41. Have the benefits of the TA been sustainable? Yes | No | Do not know
41a. If no, please cite the major reasons.

42. Please rate the performance of the ADB in TA preparation, administration, and supervision.

| | Very satisfactory | Satisfactory | Not satisfactory | Do not know |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 42a. If not satisfactory, please explain in what way. |
| 42b. Please rate the ADB’s responsiveness and flexibility. |
| 42c. If not satisfactory, please explain in what way. |

43. In retrospect, please rate the long-term effectiveness of the TA on the executing agency.

| | Successful | Partly successful | Unsuccessful | Do not know |
|---|---|---|---|---|

Annex: Sample of Constraints and Problems in Implementation

| Question 7b | Question 22 |
|---|---|
| 1. Shortage of counterpart staff and trainees / staff had no time. |
| 2. Lack of managerial skills / inadequate technical know-how. |
| 3. Management / financial / organizational problems within the executing agency and within the government itself. |
| 4. Sociopolitical / cultural / geographic and demographic factors. |
| 5. Unclear or absent policy / legislation / guidelines / control mechanisms. |
| 6. Inadequate database / inaccurate data generated / ineffective or poor management information system. |
| 7. Lack of incentives, support services, infrastructure, and facilities. |
| 8. Lack of coordination / communication / overlapping functions / disputes among concerned implementing agencies / task network. |
| 9. Lack of capital / funds / delay in release of government counterpart funds. |
| 10. Delay in recruitment of consultants / poor performance of consultants |
| 11. Training |
| 11a. Was too difficult or too short. |
11b. Was not relevant to work / did not provide skills usable in the prevailing circumstances.

11c. Did not interest the trainees / did not offer incentives.

**Further Reading**

ADB. 2005–2006. *Technical Assistance for Capacity Building of the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute II*. Manila. Available: [www.adb.org/documents/tars/cam/tar-cam-36634b.pdf](http://www.adb.org/documents/tars/cam/tar-cam-36634b.pdf).

Also view the questionnaire on effectiveness of ADB assistance in capacity building for *Capacity Building of the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute II*. Available: [www.adb.org/projects/tonle_sap/reports/tsri-09.pdf](http://www.adb.org/projects/tonle_sap/reports/tsri-09.pdf).

Also view the technical assistance completion report on *Capacity Building of the Inland Fisheries Research and Development Institute II*. Available: [www.adb.org/documents/tacrs/cam/36634-cam-tacr.pdf](http://www.adb.org/documents/tacrs/cam/36634-cam-tacr.pdf)

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**For further information**

Contact Olivier Serrat, Head of the Knowledge Management Center, Regional and Sustainable Development Department, Asian Development Bank (oserrat@adb.org).
Asian Development Bank

ADB, based in Manila, is dedicated to reducing poverty in the Asia and Pacific region through inclusive economic growth, environmentally sustainable growth, and regional integration. Established in 1966, it is owned by 67 members—48 from the region. In 2007, it approved $10.1 billion of loans, $673 million of grant projects, and technical assistance amounting to $243 million.

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Asian Development Bank
6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City
1550 Metro Manila, Philippines
Tel +63 2 632 4444
Fax +63 2 636 2444
knowledge@adb.org
www.adb.org/knowledgesolutions