

Partos Kwaliteitshuis
Joint Evaluation on Capacities for Development
(conducted as part of the IOB Evaluation on Capacity Development)
Policy Response

From: Cordaid, Hivos, ICCO, Oxfam Novib

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Introduction

Between the end of 2008 and early 2011 the four Co-financing Agencies (CFAs) Cordaid, Hivos, ICCO and Oxfam Novib have participated –under the banner of Partos - in the IOB initiated and coordinated Evaluation on Capacity Development (CD). The Partos evaluation was one of seven single studies¹ implemented under this IOB initiative. All studies used the so-called 5 Capabilities (5-C) model for describing capacity development.

The Partos study covered seven cases of capacity development, reflecting a wide variety in terms of organization type, type of results, geographical coverage and type of capacity development. These cases were explicitly selected from the CFA portfolios for their variety and the expectation that findings could contribute to learning and further policy development on CD². Learning about capacity development was the explicit focus of the overall IOB Evaluation (and not accounting for results).

The Partos evaluation resulted in a final report titled *Capacities for Development: Synthesis report Joint Evaluation Partos Capacity Development*, by Fons van der Velden and Udan Fernando, Context, international cooperation, 2010. The IOB Evaluation on Capacity Development resulted in a synthesis report, based on the seven single studies including the 26 cases they covered (*Facilitating Resourcefulness, Evaluation of Dutch support to capacity development*, April 2011).

Approach of the Partos evaluation

The Partos evaluation adopted a research approach that tried to meet as much as possible the exploratory and participatory intentions of this learning evaluation. This implied an active involvement of the otherwise ‘objects’ of evaluations: CFA programme staff and staff of partner organisations. They joined the evaluators and CFA evaluation staff twice in a meeting in Nairobi: at the beginning – in September 2009- to jointly define the start of the process, and again after the field work was done, in March 2010 – to jointly make sense of the findings.

¹ The other six studies covered PSO, SNV, Agriterra, NIMD, NCEA, Ministry of Health in Ghana.

² Cases studies were done on: CAL-Coalition of African Lesbians (Africa wide); ECM-Episcopal Conference of Malawi; ELA – Ethiopian Learning Alliance; PADEK – Partnership for Development in Kampuchea (Cambodja); PST-Programme Support Team (Cambodja); SOCCIS – Strengthening Somali Civil Society (Kenya/Somalia); YONECO-Youth Net and Counselling (Malawi).

Findings and conclusions of the Partos evaluation

-Changes at the level of Southern partner organizations

All seven cases showed evidence that Southern partners had developed their capacities. Changes could be observed in each of the five capability dimensions of the 5C model. Important internal factors influencing capacity development include: leadership of the organization and relationships with other actors and organizations; the organization's theory of change with regard to capacity development, including the desire to learn and embeddedness of learning within the organization, the felt need for the change process and the sense of ownership.

In the majority of cases the development of capacity was substantially influenced by external factors and actors. External factors and actors include (changes in) donor policies, external opportunities and interventions and -importantly -the national political situation and government policies. The evaluation confirmed that capacity development is a complex process that cannot be planned as a linear input → throughput → output sequence.

The case studies also provide anecdotal evidence of development outcomes as a result of capacity development of the partner organizations. They include: change of mindsets of farmers in Ethiopia about the role played by the private sector (ELA); the capacity of a village level organization to organize home based care for HIV affected and infected people (ECM); the capabilities of the organizations PADEK Cambodia and Yoneco Malawi to function as effective development agents in their contexts and realizing change for their beneficiaries.

-Effectiveness CFA interventions

Professionalism of CFA support:

The CFAs are external factors influencing the capacity of their partner organizations. The evaluation pointed out the following characteristics of a professional CFA: positive influence on partners' capacity development depends on CFAs displaying empathy, flexibility, understanding of the context, good communication and constructive criticism and willingness to think along with partners. Long-term relations based on trust, combined with consistent and continuous financial and technical support, have proven their value for capacity development in many occasions. Shared values and a common vision about the desired change were confirmed by the evaluation as important characteristics of a professional relation between CFAs and Southern partners.

The value of exogenous CD:

Contrary to the contemporary theory in use that effective CD is an endogenous process, one of the most important lessons of the Partos evaluation is that an exogenous approach to CD has a value in itself in developing capabilities. This was shown in several case studies, where the value and importance of an external stimulus is explicitly mentioned. For exogenous capacity development to be sustainable, systems and procedures need to be in place that enhance

Southern ownership and commitment, such as shared decision making and participatory approaches and linking up to existing knowledge and practices (capabilities). This is an important finding regarding the nature of effective CD: partnerships between northern and southern NGOs with regard to CD can bring about substantial benefits based on comparative advantages.

-CFA policy and practice on Capacity Development

The Partos evaluation confirms the relevance of the directions taken by the CFAs in their capacity development policies . It also confirms the necessary adaptations in CFA roles due to a changing global society, such as: supporting capacity development of inter-organizational cooperation, playing a role of co-creator of knowledge, broker roles and promoter of multi stakeholder processes. At the same time it warns that while moving into the direction of our new roles, CFAs have to assure not to lose the positive aspects of their existing ways of working.

The evaluation further states with concern that external pressures, particularly from their funding environments, tempt CFAs to narrow their CD efforts on satisfying upward aid-chain accountability demands. This kind of instrumentalization contradicts the essence of CFAs policies on capacity development.

Appreciation of the Partos Evaluation and Future directions

The CFAs consider the findings of the Partos evaluation (and the experience of the IOB overall evaluation) a very powerful stimulus for their thinking on capacity development. It has generated many insights, on the ‘emergent’ character of capacity, on the influence of external factors and the role of outsiders, on what constitutes “good practice” in CD and on necessary adaptations. Each CFA will integrate those insights into its future policies and practice. In that sense the learning purpose of this evaluation was realized.

The CFAs note with satisfaction the evaluation’s findings on their ‘professionalism’. The core elements of the long standing CFA approach are reconfirmed. Capacity Development is not a technical issue, and the CFAs’ major contribution to the development of partners’ capacities is critically connected to their practice of good donor ship. These findings are particularly welcome in a period where -as was also observed by the evaluation - this CFA approach is increasingly put under pressure by the external accountability demands made on the CFAs.

The IOB overall evaluation has generated an enormous wealth of information- especially in the form of the 26 case studies conducted as part of the seven single studies – that to our mind has not yet been fully digested³. With the aim to more fully reap the lessons of this material Partos will initiate a series of learning activities. For this undertaking Partos will cooperate with PSO and also seek the collaboration of the other actors in this evaluation process, including that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

³ The richness of this case material could certainly not be fully reflected in the IOB synthesis report.

One particular topic among these “learning activities” is “a learning evaluation”. The evaluation has triggered CFAs’ thinking on what constitutes a good learning evaluation. Using this experience Partos will organize a discussion on this topic. Another important topic that requires further elaboration and learning is the use of the 5C model in general and its use as a tool to monitor and account for results.