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News and Events

“Internet: Bridges to development”, International meeting organized by the ANAIS Network, Bamako, 21-26 February 2000. At the initiative of the President of the Republic of Mali, Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, Bamako will be the capital of the internet in February 2000. (More info on www.anais.org/fr/activities/bamako2000/index.html)

“Sector-wide approaches and the implications for higher education twinning programmes” was a topic of debate at the 11th Annual Conference of the European Association for International Education, 2-4 Dec 1999, Maastricht, The Netherlands. (More info on www.eaie.nl).

From 27 to 29 October, the African Capacity Building Foundation, Harare, Zimbabwe organised in cooperation with ECDPM and the DAC Informal Network on Institutional and Capacity Development a workshop on “Operational approaches to institutional and capacity development”. The forthcoming December/January issue of Capacity.org will look at this event during which the capacity building debate on the African continent was revisited and intensified. (More info on www.capacity.org)

Advancing the policy and practice of capacity building in international development cooperation

Linking Sector-wide Approaches with Capacity

The “Sector-wide Approach” (SWAp) is held to promote and be supportive of capacity development. In recent years, it has been gaining appeal among multilateral and bilateral development agencies and a number of their developing country partners. It is seen as providing a framework for building stronger partnerships founded on local ownership, national execution and policy dialogue. In May 1999, the DAC Informal Network on Institutional and Capacity Development met in Ottawa to debate the relationship between SWApS, capacity development and partnership.

In this issue, we build on the conclusions and recommendations of the Ottawa meeting and open the discussion to a wider audience asking how developing countries' interests and priorities can be put at the centre? To what extent can donor-funded programmes bring about locally owned strategies and approaches? How can stakeholder participation be ensured and what strategies should be employed to build on local strengths and capacities?

This issue includes a set of guest contributions where experiences from Ghana and Uganda are presented next to a critical view on the topic. Finally, a number of publications used as background documentation for the Ottawa event are reviewed in the annotated bibliography section.

That SWApS are on the discussion agenda is also evidenced by a recently published special issue of the Journal of Health Policy and Planning: *Managing external resources in the health sector: lessons for SWApS?*, Vol. 14, No. 3, September 1999.

Further information on SWApS and other topics can be found on the *Capacity.org* web site.

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Implementing SWAPs at the local level

This contribution argues for a heightened focus and a more explicit approach to capacity development within sector-wide programmes. The discourse is located within the complex discussion of whether capacity development is an end in itself or a means to achieving development benefits. An important tenet of sector programmes is their reliance on local capacity rather than on long-term technical assistance, yet few if any such programmes seriously address the issue of sustainable local capacity development.

Capacity development in this context is understood to encompass an institutional framework, elaboration, organisation and management modalities, and a focus on human resource development. It largely refers to capacity building for individuals and groups. Capacity development here is suggested as a process aimed at assisting organisations to deliver their objectives, making efficient use of resources and internally managing processes of change whilst remaining independent of external support. Viewed within the context of a sector, this interpretation implies developing sector specific capacities both inside and outside government.

Key issues

My case study on the Ghana health sector-wide programme shows that Sector-wide Approaches (SWAPs) present additional challenges for institutional and capacity development in recipient countries as well as for in their partner international agencies. The experiences highlight the importance of “learning by doing” and understanding how to plan, manage and measure the needed institutional and human resource changes within a sector, whilst adjusting to a changing national institutional context. Second, external partners are required to move towards support for a wider institutional involvement and dialogue which translates the partnership concept into a more decentralised level of implementation and service delivery and brings development benefits closer to target populations. This approach would advance the DAC principle of building on and strengthening local capacity by using existing structures.

The DAC Informal Network on Institutional and Capacity Development meeting of May 1999 in Ottawa further elaborated two key issues in this respect.

First, how to merge the capacity development agenda with that of governance, which essentially requires a refocusing on democratic, rather than technocratic social transformation. Second, to adopt a more programmatic approach that prioritises the development agenda on more thematic, rather than sector considerations. This approach assumes that national sustainable development is a multidimensional process and that the policies and tools for its implementation, including those aimed at capacity development, must be developed and utilised in a multi-sectoral manner.

Central questions

Within the above framework and the need to place capacity development as an important thematic area in the development arena, we may ask whether local capacity is a constraint to getting at development challenges, or is local capacity itself the development challenge? Within sector-wide programmes there is little explicit treatment of capacity development issues beyond developing new institutional arrangements and improving administrative techniques, thus shedding no light on the answer to this question.

In some ways this suggests that human resource issues are not at the core of this particular development paradigm. With this in mind, the key questions are how capacity development can be more fully placed on the SWAPs and related agendas, (e.g. CDF) and who the capacity building is for? Put another way, how can the four DAC partnership principles be activated within sector-wide approaches to ensure, in particular, that the local capacity to undertake development activities is strengthened?

Rising to the challenges

The Ghana case study concluded that health reforms have been a major driving force for policy and institutional change supported by external partners through a sector-wide approach. Much of the external support remains in the form of Technical Assistance (TA) and there is an urgent need to address both the quantity and quality of this external assistance. With this understanding, the role of TA has to be more explicitly defined, monitored and evaluated within each sector-wide programme to fulfill a local capacity development agenda.

A key lesson is that TA tends to focus on systems development and on developing the skills and knowledge of a limited number of centrally placed state actors. The approach in Ghana has been in part successful, especially in terms of the much-needed overhaul of policy, and organisation and management practices related to planning and financial management. The challenge however is how to broaden the scope of TA to build the capacity of personnel at the periphery of delivery systems to develop more tangible abilities, skills, attitudes and relationships. The answer may be to strengthen local capacity and expertise to deliver locally owned capacity building inputs to a wider range of service providers as well as to civil society. In this way, individuals and groups can better express their needs within a local democratic governance framework.

This increased local ability to deliver capacity building inputs can be approached through concerted efforts to build and train units of qualified state and non-state actors at the sub-national level using external support. This innovative approach however implies a new dynamic interpretation of partnerships, where there is a recognition and willingness by external partners to engage with local partners

at the periphery of the national governance system. In other words, external partners together with local governments will endeavour to answer the question of capacity building for whom.

The discourse around sector-wide programmes and partnerships as a primary objective of development cooperation also raises the need for time-frames to be lengthened and targets to be made more realistic. This of course suggests that more time and space for local actors and local initiatives is required to enhance commitment, ownership and legitimacy, particularly for programmes which seek to bring about long-term institutional changes and overall capacity development. Also, external partners will be increasingly required to engage in more medium and long-term horizons.

The imperative for capacity development

The challenge for the sector-wide approach is to become an effective development cooperation framework which builds necessary capacity and yields the desired social and economic benefits. To achieve this, a carefully delineated programmatic

approach to sector capacity development is required taking cognisance of cross-sectoral inputs and applicability.

At the core of the sector programme concept is a well defined funding projection or financial resource envelop. Similarly, a human resources framework or "envelop" is needed to realistically define the how and when of the human resource element of capacity development. This would be the entry-point to formulate a comprehensive strategic capacity development component of sector programmes. Without this, the reliance by sector programmes on local capacity, rather than on long-term technical assistance will remain an elusive dream.

By Dr. Joe Annan, Accra, Ghana. e-mail: jsa@africaonline.com.gh

Sectoral incapacity? An alternative view point

Developmental jargon has been enriched with a new term: Sector Wide Approaches. Welcome SWAPs (the inevitable acronym which makes the concept look real). Origin? A derivation of the World Bank's Sector Investment Programmes (SIP). Date of first usage: mid 90's. Approximate life-span: about 7 years. Whatever one may think about the notion, one thing is clear: It has found users in the multilateral and bilateral agencies. Donor policies are being reshaped - recipient governments will have to adapt.

The question is: how?

That is the reason for this special issue of Capacity.org. The editors were fortunate to get guest contributions from Joe Annan and Florence Kuteesa. Joe Annan shows how Ghanaian officials were confronted with the need to translate the notion of Sector Wide Approaches. He also allows us to look over his shoulder and see how a group of officials at the level of a ministry took the initiative. Florence Kuteesa, from Uganda, provides a practitioner's view on involving

local government in the process. Without such translation, notions like SWAPs remain abstractions many of us employ, yet few of us take the trouble to test.

The documents in this file may help us to exactly do this: test relevance. In each of them a particular point regarding SWAPs is stressed. In one case this may be the needs and (im)possibilities of sectoral coordination. In another, the case is made for institutional strengthening or human resource development. From all, one message comes out loud and clear: If the approach is not adapted to local circumstances it is likely to fail.

Donors need to be warned ahead of time. With the advent of the new approach, many of them seem to believe that this is the way out of their problems. May be. But it might just as well be a way into problems for the compliant recipient. If no dialogue comes about, the game of hide and seek, so prevalent between recipient and donor, will

be played again. Recipient saying: Yes we will apply the approach. Donors saying: Good news, please go ahead. Evaluators saying three years hence: Neither of the two knew exactly what they meant by the notion.

And while we are at it: Are the donors aware what the approach implies for them? Are the donors ready to review some of their existing accountability requirements? Can they realise this, in the face of constant public scrutiny? If therefore, there is one reason for the editors to make this special issue, it is to start a dialogue which needs to be held. It is one thing to design a new approach. It is altogether another thing to indicate the institutional capacity conditions for the recipients to realise the approach. And, may we add: To ensure that donor capacity exists to effectively implement the new approach - a capacity dimension which is often conveniently forgotten.

By Louk Box, ECDPM

Involving local government in sector-wide programmes

The Education Sector Investment Programme (ESIP) is one major example of an initiative to build and sustain more effective development partnerships that seek to make aid more effective in realising the objectives of education in Uganda. At a time when Uganda is undertaking far-reaching decentralisation, the role of local governments becomes more pronounced in the “new SWAps partnership”. This paper reviews the opportunities and challenges of SWAps in the Education Sector and in particular the extent of participation by local governments.

Background

In 1997, the Ugandan President launched the policy on Universal Primary Education (UPE) to provide education for all primary-age children, by eliminating the school fees or tuition paid by parents. The immediate effect was a doubling of overall primary school enrolment from 2.3 million students in 1996 to 5.6 million in 1997. This had significant implications on resource (both financial and human) requirements. With such a sudden increase in enrolment plus the anticipated impact on post-primary education, the government had to work out a strategic plan to mobilise resources and make wise choices in their allocation.

UPE necessitated an in-depth review of the priority areas in the sector. In a widely consultative and participatory process, lasting almost two years and supported by a number of donors, government produced the Education Sector Investment Programme (ESIP). The programme states that emphasis will be placed on primary education and will gradually stretch to post-primary institutions to enable them to accommodate the graduates from the influx from primary schools. ESIP states the goals and objectives for the sector, identifies cost effective strategies and interventions by the respective stakeholders as well as an articulation of the critical resource requirements and costs envisaged over the medium term. The ESIP is fully owned by government and has been accepted by all development partners as a planning tool for mobilising and allocating limited resources in strategic and priority areas.

Since the responsibility of delivering basic social services has been decentralised to local governments, a significant share of resources is transferred to districts as conditional grants for teacher’s salaries, classroom construction, etc. Effective implementation of ESIP depends therefore on the capacity of the local governments to coordinate and manage the education programmes.

Provisions for planning, budgeting, and review

Since the introduction of a more transparent and consultative budget process at the national level, the education sector has gone a long way in instituting measures to determine more effective goals and to enhance accountability in the use of scarce resources. A sector working group has been established, involving all key stakeholders, including communities, local and central government,

donors, representatives of the private sector and NGOs. The working group, chaired by the Ministry of Education, sets the performance targets, advises on resource allocations and reviews the inputs and outputs of the delivery mechanism. This information is fed into the annual Budget Framework Paper.

There are also a number of consultative mechanisms, such as the monthly Coordination Committee on ESIP, led by the Ministry of Education; joint auditing, inspections and supervision visits to the local governments, and a Donor Sub-group on Education. This group brings together all concerned donors to discuss issues and to make efforts to streamline the SWAp. Government has also initiated Joint Reviews which include key stakeholders and donors. The first was conducted in April 1999 and is a significant step in coordinating interventions and monitoring the use of both domestic and external resources. These reviews will continue to be held twice a year.

Capacity challenges related to government participation

National coordination of ESIP mainly relates to policy resource allocation and technical guidance; whereas coordination at the local government level focuses on implementation. While the former is regarded as relatively effective, the latter has proven to be more difficult. Experiences among local governments however vary greatly.

The Decentralisation Programme has recently shifted the responsibility of actual implementation of education programmes to local government. Given that this is a new role, it is not surprising that the local authorities still lack adequate knowledge and understanding of ESIP. It is still seen as a national initiative led by the centre. The roles and responsibilities of the centre and local governments are not clearly defined. More effort is needed to provide a framework for re-defining roles of the districts vis-a-vis the centre and identifying capacity gaps relating to their new responsibilities.

Whereas most officials working for the centre (Ministry of Education) are acquainted with performance outputs, efficiency and effectiveness sustainability and coordination, many local authorities are not in position to articulate these issues within their broader planning and budgeting framework. Capacity in some districts is currently constrained by lack of critical skills related to planning, budgeting, accounting and management of the ESIP.

The situation is further aggravated by the absence of a functioning Education Management Information System. Moreover, it is imperative that local governments offer more attractive remuneration packages to attract and retain highly qualified and experienced personnel. To this end, District Capacity Building Plans are being developed to facilitate the mobilisation and utilisation of resources to address these gaps.

One significant element that has not received sufficient attention is a concerted effort towards fully involving local governments in ESIP. The process cannot achieve its full impact with respect to improved service delivery and accountability, unless a structured plan of action with regard to the transfer of appropriate knowledge is arranged, and local government is more involved in determining priorities and resources transfers. Such concerns raise a fundamental question of who is really in the lead: The local authority, the centre, or the donor? Admittedly, the majority of local governments still depend heavily on the centre or on donor support to fulfil key functions.

Besides weak capacity and coordination at the local government level, the coordination mechanism between the centre and local levels is acknowledged to be inadequate, which is reflected in insufficient strategic communication between the two levels, lack of effective coordination and follow-up, and a focus on reporting "spending" levels rather than on results achieved.

Concluding remarks

ESIP had proved to be an extremely complex, fast-moving and demanding initiative that has shaped decisions and forced reforms within a decentralised framework. The initiative demands risk-taking and decisiveness by the key implementors who are the local government authorities. There is no doubt therefore that the authorities need to fully understand the initiative, the implications for their responsibilities and functions, as well as the resource requirements so as to facilitate and enhance streamlined and well-coordinated implementation of ESIP.

The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and do not in any way reflect the views or official position of the Government of Uganda.

*By Florence Kuteesa,
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Discussing SWAps at the policy level

This year's Annual Meeting of the DAC Informal Network on Institutional and Capacity Development (Ottawa, May 1999) focused on the contribution of Sector, and Multi-Sector Wide Approaches (SWAps) to institutional and capacity development. Discussion was set within the framework of the DAC partnership principles contained in the DAC document "Shaping the 21st Century: The Contribution of Development Cooperation".

On the impact of SWAps, it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions. Host countries suggested that sector approaches are more responsive to local priority setting, can provide a framework for strengthening capacity of central government agencies and can help to reduce the "burden" of different donor procedures.

On the downside, concerns were expressed that in so doing, such processes

inadvertently lead to a re-centralisation of decision-making which can undermine efforts to build strong and accountable local governments. Moreover, civil society organisations risk being marginalised from the policy process.

During the event, participants from DAC member country institutions and southern partner organisations recommended that developing countries' interests and priorities be put at the centre of policy considerations. Capacity for conceptualizing, implementing and monitoring SWAps needs to be ensured and external support should build on existing institutional structures, rather than creating parallel structures and capacities.

In order to foster locally owned strategies and approaches, governments should be encouraged to use consultative methods and participatory techniques, in particular to ensure the involvement of civil society

and disadvantaged groups. Capacity building should be a key objective. In this regard, SWAps need also to be linked to broader reforms, e.g. decentralisation and public sector reform programmes. For donor organisations, a clearer division of labour among funding institutions was recommended to help focus on key areas of work and to ensure complementarity of approaches to development cooperation.

The full report can be obtained from the Development Co-operation Directorate of the OECD, Institutional and Capacity Development Network, Rue André-Pascal 2, 75775 Paris Cedex 16, FRANCE, or downloaded from the OECD web-site <http://www.oecd.org/dac/tcnet/>

Annotations

Gould, J., T. Takala, and M. Nokkala. 1998. *How sector programs work: an analysis of education and agriculture sector programs in Zambia, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Nepal*. (IDS Policy Papers, 1/1998). Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

This report provides a practical and insightful review of policy and operational questions concerning the sector wide approach to aid programming. It is written primarily with the aid manager in mind, but provides conclusions which will be of interest to a wider audience concerned with policy questions relating to capacity development, partnership, and the general performance of aid.

Against the background of a growing trend among donors to move from project to programme aid, the report was commissioned by the Finnish Ministry for International Cooperation to gain practical insights into the management realities of the sector wide approach. It is based on an empirical analysis of five sector programmes from Ethiopia, Zambia, Nepal and Mozambique and includes examples from the education, health, and agriculture sectors.

Two main thematic issues run through the analysis – the relationship between the Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) and donor coordination, and the dynamics of local ownership. The report is structured into two parts: An introduction in which the evolution and current status of the approach is presented. This is then followed by a set of practical questions and answers relating to conceptual questions, ownership, coordination, and wider implications. The case studies are annexed to the main report.

Definitions

“Capacity-building is not defined through the instruments used, but through its goal to enhance the capability of people and institutions sustainably to improve their competence and problem-solving capacities.” GTZ. 1999. Capacity building for sustainable development: concepts, strategies and instruments of the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ). Eschborn: Deutsche Gesellschaft für technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ).

“Capacity-building is an approach to development not something separate from it. It is a response to the multi-dimensional processes of change, not a set of discrete or pre-packaged technical interventions intended to bring about a pre-defined outcome. In supporting organizations working for social justice, it is also necessary to support the various capacities they require to do this: intellectual, organizational, social, political, cultural, material, practical, or financial” Eade, D. 1997. What is capacity-building?. In: Capacity-building: an approach to people-centred development, Oxford: Oxfam: 23-49.

(More on www.capacity.org)

In part I, it is suggested that the growing donor interest in SWAps is evidence of wider efforts to reform aid management, to move from a project to a programme logic and ultimately to ensure capacity development whilst assuring efficient resource utilisation. It is noted that the World Bank had taken the lead with the earlier introduction of Sector Investment Programmes (SIP) and that much of the thinking behind the SWAp stems from the SIP concept. Yet concerns about the risk of another blueprint approach being created have led some of the bilaterals to call for more flexible interpretations - one therefore finds different agencies giving different emphases to the application of the approach, resulting in the emergence of what can best be described as hybrid versions. So far, sector programmes have been applied to the social and infrastructure sectors and have therefore tended to focus on public sector institutions. Concerns have been expressed that this may undermine the participation of lower tiers of government and of non-state actors in the decision-making process.

To date most SWAps have been introduced in African countries, characterised as high borrowers and aid recipients where the donor community retains significant policy leverage and has a strong financial stake. Whilst still at an experimental stage, the approach is perceived as offering advantages to both sides of the partnership – for donors, it enables streamlined procedures and greater policy coherence and for local partners, a levelling of the negotiating platform. But to realise this potential, the approach is recognised to be demanding and complex from a managerial point of view. Critically, it is argued that outcomes will depend on the way in which the negotiating platform is designed as well as on how the negotiation process is managed.

In part II, four key issues are presented in the form of questions and answers. These cover the concept of sector development planning, ownership, donor coordination as well as wider implications.

Regarding the concept, the authors emphasise the difference between the SWAp and more conventional sectoral aid programming in terms of programme design. There is a qualitative difference in the sense that a long-term perspective is taken, the local partner institution is in the driving seat, and programming follows a process rather than project logic. Other questions consider the wider economic and institutional pre-conditions necessary for embarking on such an approach, and the extent to which, these can be met. Also, the extent to which in practice, the approach can contribute to more efficient management of aid as well as to the realisation of sectoral policy objectives.

On ownership, the author considers the impact that the wider political environment can have on realising policy objectives through the SWAp. Interesting questions are also raised regarding the extent to which genuine policy dialogue can be realised when

partners are unequal, and what this can mean for local ownership of the process. Finally, the report raises the thorny question about ownership? Whose interests are really represented around the negotiation table? To what extent can the approach nurture wider participation in the policy process? For donors, the report wonders if their ability to apply policy leverage may be weakened.

On coordination, a number of very practical and “real life” questions are addressed. Whilst on paper the approach provides a promising institutional framework for resource pooling and for promoting policy and procedural harmonisation, the willingness of both external agencies and local partners to do so may be questioned. As the approach is still in its infancy, it may be premature to draw firm conclusions. Whilst there is evidence of efforts to harmonise reporting and monitoring procedures, donors are moving with extreme caution towards resource pooling.

Instead the practice would seem to be for funding agencies to “earmark” their funds albeit within a commonly agreed policy and budgetary framework. The report therefore suggests a number of ways in which the longer-term objective of “basket funding” may be approached. On the provision of technical assistance and training services, current practice suggests that pressures remain on donors to privilege suppliers from the countries they represent. In this regard, the wider issue as to whether bilateral agencies risk losing their influence as well as visibility to the larger multilateral institutions by participating in such programmes is discussed.

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Other Capacity Building Web Sites

DAC I/CD Network: the Internet site of the DAC Institutional and Capacity Development Network. <http://www.oecd.org/dac/tcnet/>

Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies: on “Institution Building” and “Capacity Building in Urban Management” <http://www.ihs.nl/>

SANGONET: Southern Africa’s non-profit Internet service provider. Aims to build capacity through the use of electronic communication and information access. <http://www.sn.apc.org/>

(More on www.capacity.org)

Norton, A., and B. Bird. 1998. *Social development issues in sector wide approaches.* (Social Development Working Paper, 1). London: DfID.

This working paper was commissioned by the Social Development Division of DfID to produce knowledge and reflection on the implications of Sector Wide Approaches (SWAs) on social development and the consequences for the Department’s work within prime sectors such as health and education. The paper is intended for social development professionals and others looking for a potential use of sector programmes in order to fight poverty.

A concern when implementing SWAs, as expressed by the authors, is the risk of losing focus on primary stakeholders in social development and poverty reduction programmes. Through its focus on close cooperation with government institutions, there is an inherent danger of SWAs being implemented from a too technocratic and top-down delivery perspective. It is important therefore to pay extra attention to strengthening approaches to social analysis and processes of consultation and participation in sector programmes.

The paper starts by highlighting some literature on the theme and presenting a comprehensive review of approaches and key issues relating to the application of SWAs. A number of central issues are discussed ‘How to define the sector’; the question of ownership and leadership; which stakeholders to involve and to consult; and how to avoid centralisation when introducing SWAs. The major chapter elaborates on the need to strengthen the social impact of SWAs and suggests a number of tools, methods and processes which can strengthen the social development content of sector programmes.

Subsequently discussed are options on how to institutionalise social analysis in SWAs, how to strengthen processes of consultation and participation, as well as the need to strengthen civil society capacity to engage in sector policy and programming issues.

The working paper concludes by pointing at some key challenges. Above all is the need for partner institutions in the recipient countries to take the lead in this change process. Moreover, the capacity of excluded groups to articulate their demands on service provision and policy change has to be fostered, as well as the institutional responsiveness to such demands. Finally, the need to develop social analysis capacity and institutional learning processes by the partners is pointed at.

Reviewed by Capacity.org

Cassels, A. 1997. *A guide to sector-wide approaches for health and development: concepts, issues and working arrangements*. Geneva: World Health Organisation.

This paper was commissioned by four major donor institutions to look at ways to implement aid from a sector perspective. The result is a guide that provides a conceptual framework for discussing Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAs) in practice and stimulates an active contribution to this process from recipient governments and donor institutions.

The key message of the document is that SWAs can only succeed if governments as well as key donor institutions are fully committed to the concept and are willing to critically review a number of existing aid financing practices. One of the most fundamental challenges on the donor side is the willingness to give up their right to select which projects to finance, to submit themselves to local priorities and to use national systems for disbursing funds. This in exchange for having a voice in the process of developing sectoral strategies together with the recipient government and other donor institutions.

The major challenge on the recipient government side is to give priority to addressing prevailing capacity needs. Government ownership and institutional capacity is the *sine qua non* for a successful implementation of SWAs. Hence, each sector approach has to be accompanied with components to build government capacity to lead the process of sectoral development and to facilitate the establishment of appropriate structures and management systems, being responsive to government as well as donor concerns.

This guide has been developed to provide a framework for the health sector, which has been a prime experimenting ground for SWAs during recent years. However, a number of key questions and concerns are raised which are equally relevant to other sectors, such as the call for donors to use national systems for monitoring performance, financial management and procurement of goods and services. This may conflict with continuous donor needs to have their projects associated with specific inputs and outcomes (the quest for attribution), as well as the need for financial accountability towards the respective institutional and public background of each individual donor.

This paper has become a widely referred to document within the international discussion on SWAs. Contrary to earlier more technocratic approaches to aid through sector programming, such as the Sector Investment Programmes of the World Bank, the approach of SWA could be described as being more flexible. All stakeholders are requested to develop and formulate a common vision, based on genuine processes of consultation and participation between the donor side and governments. Cassels elaborates well on this point, but implicitly assumes that the donor community represents a homogeneous group. The challenge of bringing together donor views has been tackled by WHO, DANIDA, DfID and the EU. But many more have to follow if SWAs will have a chance to succeed.

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Capacity.org was set up by the European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) as a tool for development researchers, practitioners and decision-makers. As both a web site and a newsletter, *Capacity.org* brings together information, ideas, and viewpoints on capacity building policy and practice within international development cooperation. It acts as a platform for dialogue and provides a channel for informed review and synthesis of the complex issues faced by development practitioners and policy makers.

Focusing on both the "why" and the "how" of capacity building - debating policy questions and learning from practical experiences - *Capacity.org* seeks to "unbundle" the complex of ideas and practices that we call capacity building. In doing this, the editors particularly encourage the exchange of perspectives and experiences from the South, to ensure that the discussions are rooted in reality.

Developed by ECDPM, it is our aim to make *Capacity.org* a joint effort in which all of our various capacities and expertise are mobilised and shared. Interested individuals and organisations can help make *Capacity.org* an effective communication tool for people who seek to alleviate poverty through capacity building. Join us by contributing information, lessons, ideas and opinions, and feedback. Offers to co-finance parts of the initiative or to link related initiatives are very welcome.

<http://www.capacity.org>

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