

Local Government Capacity Building and Development: Lessons, Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

The conceptualisation of capacity building is rather an oversimplified subject but is a very complex and in most cases one which has been misappropriated by scholars and practitioners. The term capability, capacity and capacity building have become the rhetoric of public officials and students of Local governments who have unfortunately misconceptualised them. The notion of local government and community capacity building is both explicit and pervasive in the rhetoric, missions, and activities of a broad range of contemporary community development efforts. However, there is limited clarity about the meaning of capacity and capacity building and development which clarification becomes one of the central discourses of this paper. Against this background an extensive conceptual analysis of capacity development, reflecting its historicity, elasticity and dynamic nature will anchor this paper. Justification for local government capacity building and a contextual analysis of local capacity development in Zimbabwe, particularly the Rural District Councils Capacity Building Programme (RDCCBP) and the Urban 1 and 2 programmes will be reviewed on a case by case basis.

Keywords: Local government; Capacity building; Capacity development

Introduction

Capacity building and development: A conceptual framework

Nwankwo et al. defined capacity as the capability of a person, an institution or organization to perform a given task effectively, efficiently and on a continuing basis and with reduced dependence on external resources. Capacity building is therefore concerned with human resource development (people), institutional development (local government system) and the overall policy environment within which the local governments (as public service organizations) operates and interact. Capacity building can also help to determine the efficient utilization and allocation of human resources among competing demand(s). Simply and generally defined, therefore, capacity building implies activities which strengthen the knowledge, abilities, skills and behavior of individuals and improve institutional structures and processes such that the organization can efficiently meet its mission and goals in a sustainable way. Grindle [1] argued that, "capacity building is intended to encompass a variety of strategies that have to do with increasing the efficiency, effectiveness of government performance. [1] Grindle further suggested that capacity is seen as a variation of a strategy which include inside dimensions of building capacity inter alia human resources development, organizational strengthening dimension and institutional reform dimension. The discussion above therefore clarify that there are numerous definitions of capacity development, each reflecting a particular bias or orientation. Some describe capacity development as an approach or process, e.g. towards reduction of poverty, while others see it as a development objective, e.g. targeting the development of individual or organizational capacity. Many definitions fall somewhere in between these two perspectives. The definition by [2] CIDA suggests that capacity development includes various "approaches, strategies and methodologies" which seek to improve performance at different social levels. In other words, it argues that there is no single approach or prescription ('one size fits all') for capacity development. At the same time, as underlined later in this review, capacity development as an approach is based on certain principles and orientations which collectively do distinguish it from other approaches to, or perspectives on, development.

Capacity development, according to the Rwanda capacity building

strategy for local governments 2011-2015 is understood as a "process through which individuals, organizations and society obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development agenda. As such, capacity development is advanced through a comprehensive and holistic working approach, which shall be local government driven to be effective and relevant". Blair's conclusion that capacity development is about making local government "effective and accountable" brings unquestionable centrality of capacity building in local governance.

Capacity gaps and needs: Justification for local government capacity development

With state decentralisation rapidly becoming the key features of intergovernmental relations around the world (Zimbabwe is no exception to this trend), with higher expectations for bridging the gulf between the state and civil society and government structures and bodies, building the capacity of local government should be a key agenda of central governments and other development partners in order to empower local governments to provide services efficiently to their constituencies Dillinger. Nickson stressed that this process of decentralisation followed a long period in which local government had no major functions, little financial resources and practically no political autonomy. The centrality of capacity development for sustainable local governance is therefore unquestionable and can best be summed up in Blair's statement that "good local government is not just a matter of creating the right legal, political and institutional framework. It is also about actively building local authority capacity, particularly the understanding and skills, and the ability and desire to learn." Effective local government according to Blair requires good leadership and strategic management, good service provision, and good community

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participation which can only be achieved through what Brough referred to as “innovative” capacity development initiatives.

In analyzing local government capacity for sustainable rural development in Nigeria and Zimbabwe, Nwankwo et al., Ndlovu et al., respectively, inveighed that, it is common knowledge that the local government has the weakest capacity to initiate and manage rural development programmes. This, they said is attributable to the qualitative and quantitative dynamics of institutional capacities available at the local government level which is seriously insufficient. They further submitted that the officials are performing their functions without the relevant qualifications to perform effectively and as a result, available resources for accelerated and sustainable rural development are inefficiently utilized for the purposes intended and hence compromising the quality and quantity of services provided. These two countries being former British colonies had their local governments dualised and differentiated to advance colonial interests. As such little attention was paid by the colonial system to developing the capacity of native local governments, a feature that was visible at the attainment of independence. In Zimbabwe, for instance, the Rural Councils were better capitalized and had the capacity to provide services efficiently than District Councils which were a local government structure for communal areas (former tribal trust lands) and purchase lands

Strategies for Capacity Development in Local Government

The most unfortunate fact behind the inefficiency of many capacity building initiatives especially in developing economies was because of what Nwankwo, Ndlovu, Masuko, Mujuni attributed to a lack of a comprehensive strategic framework towards capacity development. As such, Nwankwo argued that it has become imperative to adopt urgent measures aimed at raising the executive capacity profile of local governments if they are to fulfill the rural development role which has been assigned to this level of government. Chaskin’s submissions seems to anchor with Nwankwo’s observation above and added that the experience in capacity building in relation to accelerated and sustainable development at the local government level should be located in a strategic framework to enhance the sustainability of capacity development and complement its success potential. The following measures were suggested by Nwankwo, Biti and can be considered as a framework of strategies for capacity development at local government level, Governance and accountability – building credible institutions that are viable and credible, Human skills – individual skills and the link to institutional development – these two are inextricably linked. This can be achieved through the following measures: 1) Staff development at local government and community level must be intensified. 2) Training in planning and management of local development must be hastened as this will form the basis upon which the local government human capacity will be strengthened. 3) Conducting of a staff audit as a first step with a view to determining areas where there is excess capacity and shortfalls which are to be addressed. 4) Carrying out recruitment of suitably qualified persons to improve the quality of staff available at local government level. 5) Capacities to capture the knowledge from past experiences to use for future and more advanced interventions. However, depending on the Local Government capacities and the need to enrich the process with experiences beyond the Local Government, Local Governments may opt to employ the services of external facilitators. In such instances, care must be taken to restrain external facilitators from taking over the process from the Local Governments

Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building Strategies

In its 2011-2015, capacity building strategy for local governments,

the ministry of local government for the republic of Rwanda, submitted that since the adoption of the decentralization policy in 2000, different initiatives aimed at building capacities of the local governments have been implemented. Despite a considerable presence of decentralized governance capacity building initiatives benefitting local administrations, it remains difficult to account for the quality of the products delivered and establish their impact and consistency with both the national orientations and local needs, following weak monitoring, coordination and harmonization. Most capacity building interventions have been delivered in un-coordinated manner, supply driven, reactive and sometimes not in line with the recipient’s needs. Cases are apparent where one capacity building intervention is delivered, and within a week, another provider comes to a district to deliver a capacity building package that is not very different from the one delivered in a week gone by. Most of the capacity building interventions have been delivered based on assumed and feelings of the providers mainly, central institutions, NGOs and projects.

Ndoro in the Zimbabwean of 20 September 2012 [3], pointed out that, since the arrival of community capacity building as such a dominant subject in international aid, donors and practitioners have struggled to determine a concise mechanism for determining the effectiveness of capacity building initiatives a factor cited as a gap in the implementation of [4] Rural District Council Capacity Building Programme (RDCCBP), Urban 1 and Urban 2 in Zimbabwe. According to the Rwanda capacity building Strategy for local governments 2011-2015, the monitoring and evaluation framework of the local government capacity development strategy should focus on performance monitoring to keep track on whether the agreed upon activities are being effectively and correctly implemented. Such a framework will therefore allow for regular and consistent tracking of performance through reviews of various inputs and outputs for each strategic objective. In 2007, Watson, developed a criteria for effective evaluation and monitoring of capacity building. Watson complained that the traditional method of monitoring local government capacity development that is based primarily on a linear results-based framework is not enough for capacity building. He argues that evaluating capacity building should be based on a combination of monitoring the results of their activities and also a more open flexible way of monitoring that also takes into consideration, self-improvement and cooperation. Watson observed 18 case studies of capacity building evaluations and concluded that certain specific themes were visible:

- 1) Monitoring an organization’s clarity of mission-this involves evaluating an organization’s goals and how well those goals are understood throughout the organization
- 2) Monitoring an organization’s leadership – this involves evaluating how empowered the organization’s leadership is-how well the leadership encourages experimentation, self-reflection, changes in team structures and approaches.
- 3) Monitoring an organization’s learning – this involves evaluating how often an organization participates in effective self-reflection, and self-assessment. It also involves how well an organization “learns from experience” and if the organization promotes the idea of learning from experience.
- 4) Monitoring an organization’s emphasis on on-the-job-development - this involves evaluating how well an organization encourages continued learning, specifically through hands on approaches.
- 5) Monitoring an organization’s monitoring processes - this involves evaluating how well an organization participates in self-

monitoring. It looks at whether or not an organization encourages growth through learning from mistakes

In 2007, USAID published a report on its approach to monitoring and evaluating capacity building. According to the report, USAID monitors the following variables: program objectives, the links between projects and activities of an organization and its objectives, a program or organization's measurable indicators, data collection, and progress reports. USAID evaluates why objectives were achieved, or why they were not, the overall contributions of projects. It examines qualifiable results that are more difficult to measure, it looks at unintended results or consequences, it looks at reports on lessons learned and uses two types of "indicators" for progress which are output indicators and outcome indicators. Output indicators measure immediate changes or results such as the number of people trained. Outcome indicators measure the impact, such as laws changed due to trained advocates.

Capacity Development Initiatives: A Global Survey of Selected Cases

Capacity development initiatives in Peru spearheaded by private companies in a classic public private partnership is atypical example of how private institutions can partake in the development of local government capacity. The programme which was dubbed, "promoting municipal strengthening and social accountability around revenue from extractive industries" is one of the success stories in local government capacity development spearheaded by PERU LNG (Liquid Natural Gas Project). In 2008, the company started working with consulting private services on revenue management advisory services program in Peru to strengthen municipal investment management in three provinces. This program was based on a two-pronged "push-pull" approach. On the "push" front, local governments receive capacity building to efficiently plan, manage, and make sound investment decisions was the target. On the "pull" side, which is known as the social accountability component, or "Mejorando la Inversion Municipal" (MIM), civil society organizations receive support on how to monitor revenue inflows and municipal investments in order to increase both transparency and accountability. They publicly disseminated the information and created channels for feedback to municipalities about local demand and perceptions of their performance.

In the five year capacity building strategy for Rwanda, the major driving factors emanated from a juxtaposition of decentralisation efforts against the institutional capacity of local government. It was reinforced that, decentralization as a mechanism of shifting centres of powers, decision making and responsibilities over allocation of resources and provision of services, needs to be accompanied by required measures to build capacities of all actors and players involved. Thus, the capacity building strategy for Rwanda proceeded from this perspective. The vision, mission and objectives of the strategy were therefore centred on ensuring that local government have qualified and skilled staff operating in a conducive environment supported by adequate ideological, legal and institutional frameworks for effective service delivery. Its broader aims were to "integrate effective approaches to assessing current capacities, identifying required capacities and investing in collaborative initiatives to capitalize upon and further develop capacities in a sustainable manner across the core work of the local government sector". (Capacity building strategy for local governments).

Discussing the factors behind the success of capacity building in Rwanda, Mujuni argued that, the approach to capacity building in Rwanda is blended with optimization and benchmarking of best

practices internationally and selecting the ones that best suit the Rwandan context. This, Mujuni further postured, is one cardinal reason why Rwanda's unique capacity building approach has become successful.

Local Government Capacity Building in Zimbabwe: A Case Study

In an effort to rescue the ailing urban authorities, the government with assistance from donors introduced Urban I and II initiatives and Rural District Councils Capacity Building Programs (RDCCBP) to build the capacities of local authorities. The programs were intended to achieve a number of objectives such as urban infrastructure provisioning; strengthening the technical capacity of local authorities; provision of urban housing as well as strengthening the institutional capacity of central and local governments for the following activities: planning; budgeting; implementation; management; reducing government funding of urban services and allowing service charges to be levied by local authorities as well as the private sector provision of services. In justifying the introduction of RDCCBP, Masuko, stressed that the failure of rural communities to effectively participate in the development and decision making processes of their areas after independence was and is attributed to an absence of capacity at the Rural District Council (RDC) level. The government set up a Capacity Building Programme in 1997 as a strategy to address this RDC shortcoming. This RDCCBP project, according to Goldman et al. [5] was aimed to develop the capacity of all RDCs to plan, implement and manage on a sustainable basis their own district development programs and to provide and maintain essential services to the rural population. It has three main components: institutional development programme, human resources Development programme, capital development programme. The ultimate aim was to provide the basis needed for adopting meaningful policy measures geared towards the building of local skills and capacities for planning and managing rural development at the decentralized levels. The main elements of these programmes according to Paradza [6] were manpower and institutional development which included the provision of block grants to fund Rural District Council development programmes. The grants were supported by the deployment of external facilitators to all RDCs. The facilitators were trained to identify RDC weaknesses and assist in the formulation of solutions. While these initiatives did briefly improve the provision of local services and finances, the two programmes heavily relied on donor funding and could not be sustained on withdrawal of donor funding. Consequently, they fell victim to the deteriorating Zimbabwe Government-donor relations and corruption. Over time both rural and urban local authorities' capacity to deliver services rapidly deteriorated and in some cases grounded to a halt as municipalities failed to provide water, waste removal, security, health and infrastructure and maintenance. The collapse of donor funding left the Zimbabwe government solely responsible for funding the local authorities for example the government assumed 100 percent responsibility of funding for public health. Ndoro also shares Chatiza's views when he noted that, "these various initiatives, like so many others, came to an abrupt halt in the early 2000s, owing to the deterioration in economic and political conditions and related withdrawal of donor support". Masuko's research on the social capacity at Manyame Rural District Council examined council's capacity, through an analysis of the following variables: council resources, such as human, equipment and financial; organisational and administrative structures; management systems and procedures, instruments for information gathering, processing, and storage and the type of information that council has access to; role of councillors in relation to electoral conveyance belt

for the constitutional needs and as a mechanism for accountability of services demanded and, methods of organising people for meaningful development. Other scholars, notably Dillinger, [7] Blair from their various studies seems to agree and have used some of the elements of this framework in contextualising and streamlining capacity development initiatives at both local and central levels and therefore its holistic nature makes Masuko's research generalizable across all local authorities as the basis for examining the impact of capacity building although variables in local conditions remains critical in influencing differences in results. Because of his Manyame study, Masuko concludes that the issue of sustainability goes beyond decentralising the fiscus and physical and human capacity building, a point agreed to by Fiszbein and Deborah. The conversions of such capacities, Masuko further elaborated and how they are invested to develop organisational skills of beneficiaries are equally important if they are to be transformed into guiding meaningful productive and social activities. Strong, effective, representative and resourceful local government institutions with a potential for raising revenue and investment capital are viewed by Mujuni, and reinforced from Masuko's findings as central to the capacity building and sustainability of local government structures. The capacity to raise revenue thus depends on the local government's own capacity to raise revenue. This in turn depends on the depth of the productive base in the district in question, in other words, the social capacity base and how it is best organised to meet these demands is a crucial aspect of rural development. Masuko also argues that entrepreneurship within the various RDCs should be an essential component of the local government philosophical outlook. Successful rural community projects, according to Masuko, are those projects that "involve rural communities in the planning, programming, acquisition of material, organisation of labour, management of resources and networking capacities", to raise revenue and sustainability'. Masuko also examined some structural and technical factors that compromised the successes of the discussed local government capacity building in Zimbabwe generalizable from his research at Manyame RDC. He argued that questions were arising on the sustainability of the RDC capacity; in terms of social involvement given that the focus was more on the RDCs' physical, monetary and human capacities only. The other problem identified was the excessive dependency on external assistance for the five-year projected period of the capacity building programme. Masuko also questions whether the projected five-year period was adequate to create the required institutional capacity for rural development. In his presentation, Masuko argued that the 'trickle down' theoretical approaches to capacity building to empower rural communities and create sustainable capacity have generally failed to live up to expectations. An important missing element to the capacity building agenda is the absence of a clear social capacity component. Masuko believes that the social capacity component is equally critical to the building up of more sustainable rural community development capacity.

Ndlovu, Gargan and Masukoall seem to agree that, the existing decentralisation agenda does not clearly reveal the areas where the RDCs and central government have a convergence of interests. The only existing RDC development activity is through the income generating projects (IGPs) which only strengthen RDC structures and do little as to empowering rural communities. If a social capacity base was put in place, it could successfully trigger rural transformation and sustainable development of rural communities, through capital and technical skill's injection.

According to Ndlovu from June 2001 to July 2005, the Urban Institute (UI) provided technical assistance and training to urban and

rural local authorities in Zimbabwe through a task order from USAID under the global Sustainable Urban Management Indefinite Quantity Contract. The program was launched as the Pilot Program to Develop Local Governance (PPLG) covering six local authorities. Upon the successful completion of the PPLG, a follow-on, expanded program began, which was initially called the Long-Term Local Governance Program (LLGP). This program, which provided assistance to 13 local authorities, was subsequently re-named the Local Government Support Program (LGSP).

The program, Ndlovu et al. explained, "Focused on promoting transparency, accountability and greater capacity in the management of decentralized services and on building the capacity of local civil society organizations (CSO) to advocate for strengthened integrity, openness and responsiveness in local government". It also sought to foster a constructive and productive citizen participation in local government processes and procedures while maintaining an apolitical, non-partisan approach that was critical to its achievements. Ndoro's opinion, in the Zimbabwean justified this view when he said, when considering whether or not to decentralize powers to local governments; one must also consider the capacity of central government and that of local government and establish whether the present local government is efficient, effective and accountable to provide services in expected qualities and quantities. All these interventions highlighted in this review justify the unquestionable centrality of capacity building for enhancing the capacity of the Zimbabwean local government system and to further the importance of such interventions, speaking during the high panel discussion officiated by President Robert Mugabe, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Alain Noudehou said, "we in the United Nations believe that committed leadership, resilient institutions, a strong knowledge base, and accountability for results are four key levers for a real change in capacity development in Africa". The Resident Coordinator further noted, "To bring change in these four areas, there is a need for a comprehensive and systematic development as opposed to ad-hoc interventions".

Ndlovu, further explained that the Pilot Program to Develop Local Governance in Zimbabwe (PPLG) was initiated in June 2001 and completed in December 2002. The program's 18 months of implementation focused on six local authorities: the City of Gweru and Masvingo; Gwanda and Kariba Municipalities, and the Rural District Councils of Chipinge and Mutoko. The major theme of the PPLG was to assist the pilot areas to establish good local governance practices through local authority interaction with and responsiveness to civil society, with the objectives of improving transparency, accountability, and efficiency in policymaking and service delivery. The PPLG Team assigned the contact person within the LA to facilitate meetings on developing the Restructuring Action Plan (RAP), on strengthening participatory budgeting and on achieving other program aims. Over the course of the PPLG, it became evident that local authorities in which a local official took on the role of "champion" of the PPLG had the most success with the program. When a local official (generally, technical staff, not an elected official) worked as the "driver" of the meetings and took on the preparatory work in logistics, data collection, etc., the PPLG was able to work more effectively and efficiently.

Results and Lessons from the PPLG

The program also evaluated the issues hindering the full implementation of the PROMUN municipal financial management system installed in many [8] urban councils in Zimbabwe. Local authorities found that there was not enough support or maintenance for the system. Changes in software service providers, licensing and

source code issues compounded the problems many local authorities had in implementing the system so that it met their needs. Because of factors such as inadequate training, high employee turnover, expensive service and/or licensing charges, software programming questions, and a shortage of hardware, local authorities struggled to maintain and make full use of the PROMUN system and other accounting packages. In many cases, these programs were not fully operational. This was found to be a major obstacle to local authorities' timeliness, accuracy and transparency in reporting internally and to local stakeholders, as well as their capacity to efficiently evaluate and adjust the allocation of resources, or to apply performance management techniques using budget and service performance data. These issues were later addressed in the follow-on to the PPLG. In some local governments, the political context complicated and delayed the PPLG's activities. In Kariba, the central government suspended the elected Executive Mayor and the entire elected city council and replaced it with a three-person commission. It also appointed an Acting Town Clerk and Acting Treasurer. While this centralized restructuring suspended the activities of the PPLG in Kariba for a period, some efforts were resumed in Kariba with the support of the Commission.

Conclusion

This paper dissected the concept, process and strategy, monitoring

and evaluation of capacity building initiatives. It also reinforced the centrality of capacity building and development as a measure of improving the overall competence of institutions both private and public.

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