UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVENESS OF CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT :

Lessons from Sanitation Capacity Building Platform(SCBP)

Part III : Capacity Development Effectiveness Ladder (CDEL) Framework

The Capacity Development Effectiveness Ladder (CDEL) Framework identifies critical steps against which practitioners and evaluators may want to assess the effectiveness of their capacity development intervention. The CDEL framework restores the primacy of learning as the core of capacity development, and identifies steps/measure of monitoring its effectiveness.

The CDEL Framework is based on Sanitation Capacity Building Platform(SCBP) work, of leading a national level capacity development initiative, and a critique of international capacity development frameworks and approaches. SCBP is anchored by National Institute of Urban Affairs(NIUA). It is part of the NFSSM Alliance and is supported by the Gates Foundation.

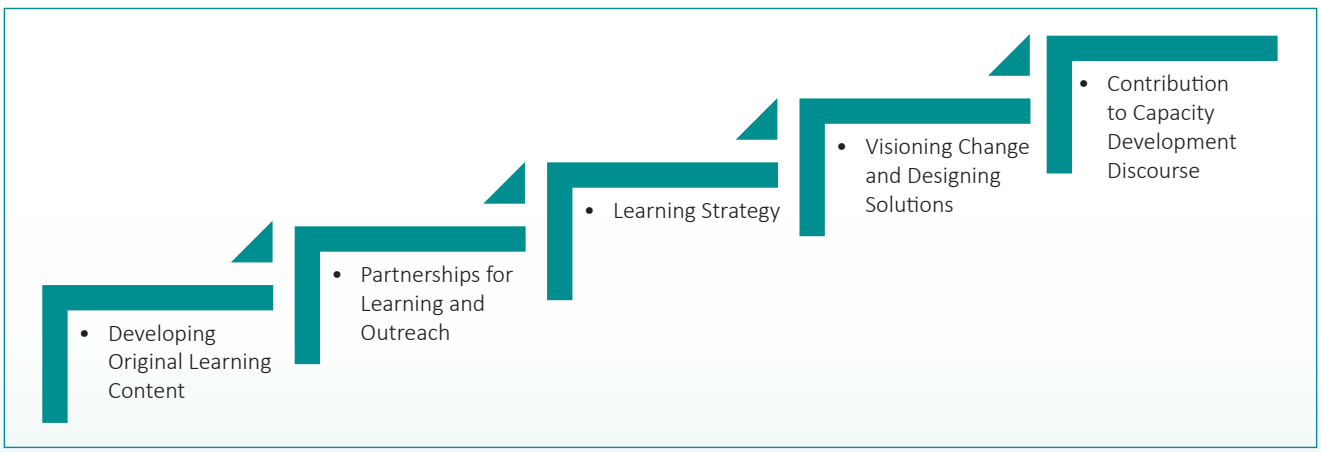
Summary

Understanding effectiveness of capacity development as a learning and knowledge priority is critical for reclaiming the legitimacy of capacity development itself.

By definition, capacity development is an all encompassing process of learning and capability development, including organisation development and enabling policy environment. Unfortunately, capacity development is increasingly seen as a component of Technical Assistance(TA), packaged into large multilateral and bilateral international programs and projects. Majority of which are for privatization of public sector utilities in infrastructure or even social development sector(education and health) reforms. Capacity development is reduced to a "Transaction Advisory support", for institutional transformation of large government departments and utilities, essentially for fixing a new legal quasi government or private entity/institution. Technical training is at best a limited add on learning focus, accompanied by workshops and exposure visits for senior officials and policy makers. With very little outputs and outcomes of knowledge generation, learning in terms of content and approaches.

The Capacity Development Effectiveness Ladder (CDEL) Framework highlights five critical steps/stages of an effective capacity development intervention that has learning as its focus: did the learning content generated by the intervention add any original learning value, were the partnerships appropriate in ensuring content development and dissemination,

Capacity Development Effectiveness Ladder(CDEL)



was there a learning strategy that was developed and implemented, was there a concrete visioning of solution(s) that connected learning to practice, did the capacity development intervention contribute to the national and international discourse and learning on capacity development.

This paper does not attampt to redefine capacity development. The Capacity Development Effectiveness Ladder Framework is a modest contribution to re prioritising learning as the core of capacity development work, defines some critical stages/steps that define effectiveness of a learning initiative, and provides a caution against seeing capacity development as a formalistic process and set of activities.

Capacity Development Effectiveness Ladder (CDEL) Framework

Capacity development has been much written about and debated. Seen as an extension of learning, capabilities and knowledge development, capacity development has been the focus of large international development programs and budgets.

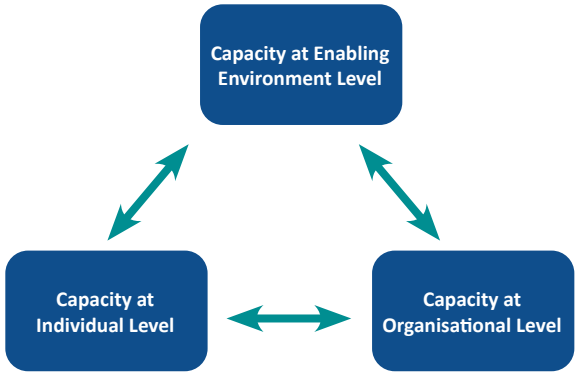
Capacity development, has been defined as:

> *"the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time. Simply put, if capacity is the means to plan and achieve, then capacity development describes the ways to those means.*
>
> *But what exactly do we mean by capacity development? Confusion around the term seems to have grown along with its popularity. For some, capacity development can be any effort to teach someone to do something, or to do it better. For others, it may be about creating new institutions or strengthening old ones. Some see capacity development as a focus on education and training, while others take a broad view of it as improving individual rights, access or freedoms."*[1]

Capacity development has come to be defined in a framework comprising three interconnected levels of capacity

Several international development agencies and UN systems define capacity development in the above framework. These three levels influence each other in a fluid way – the strength of each depends on, and determines, the strength of the others Some experts add two more components : accountability and sustainability.

Three interconnected levels/pillars of capacity development : UNDAF framework[2]



As a framework, this seems logical. To define the larger mandate of capacity development as more than just training programs. Seen this way, a capacity development intervention is then expected to contribute to outcomes at the institutional and policy level. But there are some issues we need to consider.

Capacity Development for Organisation Development/Re-structuring : Limitations

A World bank Independent Evaluation Group report defines effectiveness of capacity building as : "How well institutional rules of the game(for example relating to tax and spending regimes) are linked with sustained performance of both organizational entities(such as Ministries and Departments) as well as individuals responsible for delivering results(the staff)".[3] Why should an organizational re-structuring be considered a capacity development aim/outcome? **It is an Organisation Development objective in its own right.**

"Sustained performance" can be there in a limited way, having nothing to do with any learning achievement. Under re-structuring an institution, the roles of staff can be reduced to managing contracts and consultants only, then de skilling of sectoral expertise rather than skilling and learning, with some some contract management skills and templates, is all we get.

Developing capacity at organizational level unfortunately, often implies a "Transaction Advisory" support in the form of designing the legal

[1] *UNDP Capacity Development Primer; https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/capacity-development-a-undp-primer.html*

[2] *Capacity Development UNDAF Companion Guidance; https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDG-UNDAF-Companion-Pieces-8-Capacity-Development.pdf*

[3] *Vinod Thomas, DG IEG World Bank; https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/9585/389150Capacity0D1Brief11901PUBLIC1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y*

institutional structure, norms, procurement, hiring, etc. For its transition including legal registration, defining operating norms, procurement, change in roles of existing staff, lay off and hiring of new staff, protocols of decision making, revenue & costing, etc. Training or a learning agenda, is then a limited add on component that manifests itself in the form of workshops, conferences, exposure visits and some class room trainings using PPTs. Capacity and capacity development then is defined essentially as managerial competence to manage the institutional transition/ change, with little learning or knowledge generation outputs and outcomes.

Once the change management has happened, the capacity development intervention ends, leaving behind nothing in terms of empowered staff and institutions, a learning strategy, learning content and training modules, strengthened partnerships and institutions of learning.

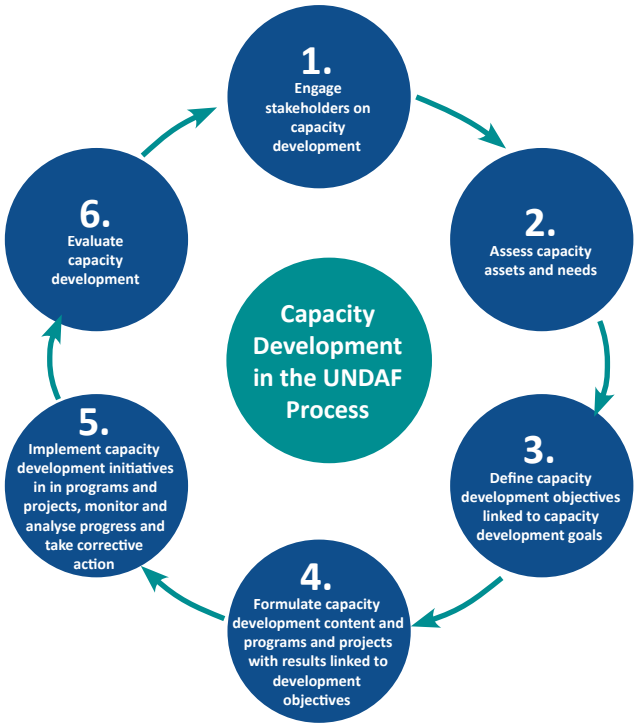
It is for this reason that capacity development is maligned :

> *"According to one early observer looking at the state of the field, 'capacity building' is simply being used as a 'buzz word' by international agencies for whatever they wish to do, with or without any accountability or logic (Enemark, 2003). The current state of the field among the major donors is such that it appears to have already reached a theatre of the absurd.*
>
> *A World Bank review noted that 'examples abound' in which these initiatives 'severely undermine public management in recipient countries and unwittingly block rather than promote progress in public sector reform and institution-building."*[4]

Effectiveness of Capacity Development – a creative learning endeavour

International capacity development frameworks adopt an instrumentalist approach in defining the process of capacity building, that marginalizes the value of learning and knowledge creation. As a primarily learning agenda, capacity development is a creative process that should be focused on the learning outputs, the process for generating learning, its outreach and its institutional sustainability. With the expectation that capacity developed will be put to use if not sooner than later.

Mainstream approach prescribed for capacity development, unfortunately consists of a set of managerial linear process of steps[5]:



Experience of capacity development by SCBP, shows that capacity development even in the constrained context of short term programs and projects, is a creative process, that is not linear. Many parallel actions or back and forth steps may be required, depending on the scale and depth of a capacity development engagement. In SCBP we did the engagement, the assessment and the development of capacity development content and programs and their monitoring and analysis, simultaneously, one feeding into the other. A learning strategy consisting of priority capacity development training modules for a target audience, emerged as an outcome of this experience, much later.

From experience of SCBP and from the critique of existing capacity development frameworks, we have defined effectiveness of capacity development as an outcome of a creative approach(not a linear process) with KEY STEPS and higher level outputs and outcomes in a step wise ladder - the Capacity Development Effectiveness Ladder framework.

Components of CDEL Framework

The Capacity Development Effectiveness Ladder Framework is a modest contribution to re prioritising learning as the core of capacity development work, defines some critical stages/steps that define effectiveness of a learning initiative, and provides a caution against seeing capacity development as a formalistic process and set of activities.

[4] *David Lempert; https://ruc.udc.es/dspace/bitstream/handle/2183/23397/EJGE_2015_4_2_5.pdf?sequence=3&isAllowed=y*

[5] *Capacity Development UNDAF Companion Guidance; https://unsdg.un.org/sites/default/files/UNDG-UNDAF-Companion-Pieces-8-Capacity-Development.pdf*

The Framework highlights concrete steps that define the inputs, outputs and outcomes of a capacity development intervention that has learning as its focus.

Five steps of effective capacity development :

- What was the value add to learning? The learning collaterals produced – the training modules, research, technical assistance, policy guidance – was there any value add or original work produced for the sector?
- What was strategic and effective in terms of partnerships and stakeholder engagement? Were these appropriate and effective in ensuring development of high value learning content, its quality assurance, and its dissemination for the widest reach and most relevant stakeholders?
- Did the capacity development program evolve into or produce a learning strategy? Did it develop as a creative and organic process of engagement and not as a formalistic one? Was it effective in achieving the aims of generating appropriate and high value learning and its dissemination?
- Did the capacity development intervention mature towards integrating learning with practice, did it achieve a higher level of meta narrative and understanding of change? Was there any concrete visioning of solution(s) that was implemented, or even defined and detailed as proof of concept of the learning aim?
- What was the larger, beyond the program, contribution of capacity development? What legacy did it leave? Did the capacity development intervention contribute to the national and international capacity development discourse?

Any ambitious long term capacity development intervention should leave a mark on all the five steps of the ladder over its life cycle, to justify its effectiveness. Less ambitious initiatives may achieve one or more steps of this ladder.

First Step : Developing original learning content

Developing original learning content, ensuring its relevance and quality and its uptake, requires a creative application of available resources and a strategy. The phrase “content is king” is widely used in the marketing world, it can refer to the capacity building as well.

Learning content can be very basic, off the shelf learning content, from existing sources and culled into desired modules. Most short term capacity development initiatives, end at this first step, with PPT based training content not backed by any learning notes or practical exercises and workbooks. Learning content, including training modules should have a form and content, and a quality assurance that justifies investment of effort and ensures its longevity. This is the first test of its effectiveness.

Unlike educational institutes that have a long gestation period for pedagogy and course development for a new course, development of learning content for a capacity development intervention is often constrained for time and is usually catching up with the program interventions on the ground. An effective capacity development program is one that can play this catching up game and come up with original learning content and training modules in quick time, test and deliver it as well.

Did the capacity development intervention create original learning content that added value to the sector? This is critical to assessing the effectiveness of the intervention, as a first step. Capacity development collaterals including training modules, should be able to synthesise and prioritise existing knowledge resources into suitable format of training modules, suitable for the purpose of the intervention.

> *From experience of SCBP we can say that engagement of academia, researchers, experts and practitioners working together, can create the basis for new and original learning content and training modules. Training Modules should have a combination of sound conceptual understanding backed with addressing critical bottlenecks for implementing the desired change. The number of training modules and scope should be tight and well defined to constitute a learning strategy.*
>
> *Validation of quality(of training modules and content) and effectiveness, is possible through feedback received in a training program from trainees, from a formal critical peer review process and open source sharing.*

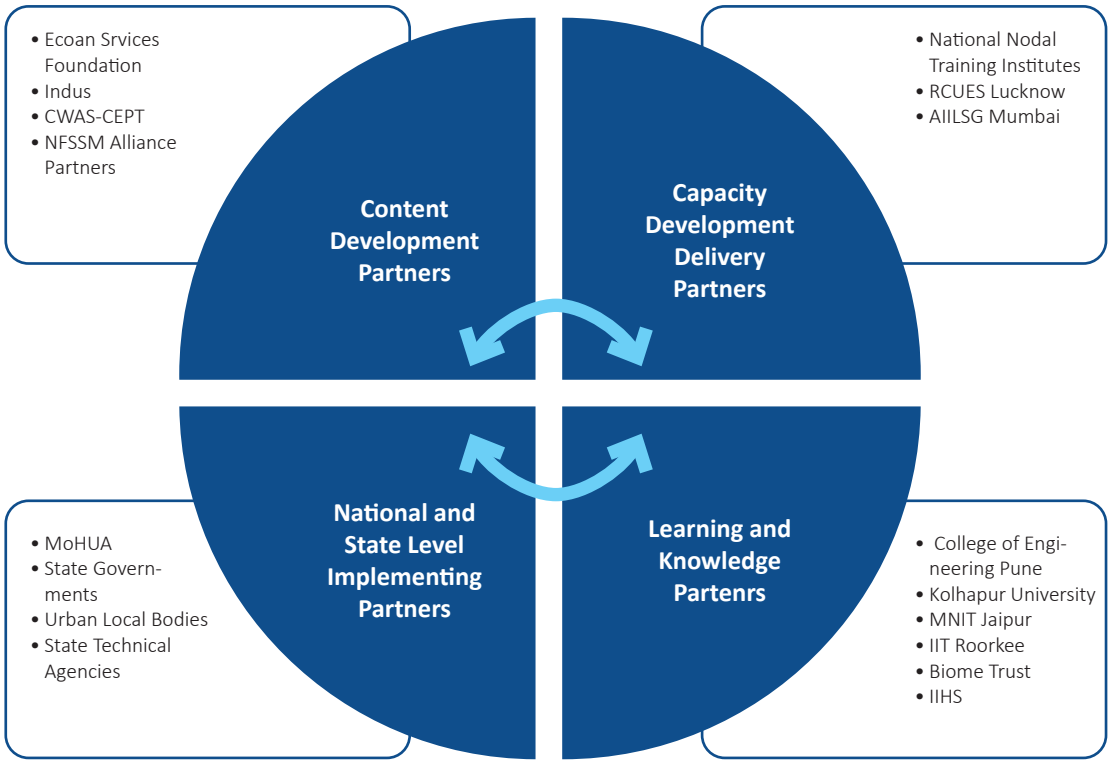
Under SCBP, all the modules were whetted through trial runs, followed by a Training Modules Review Committee(TMRC) that provided this quality control and assurance oversight. All the training modules, research and technical assistance, were put up on an open source knowledge portal of SCBP.

Second Step : Partnerships for Learning and Outreach

Partnerships are important not just for developing learning content but also for dissemination. The effectiveness of a capacity development intervention will depend on the range and quality of partnerships developed and sustained.

Under SCBP we developed four types of partnerships, in order to achieve maximum quality and impact.

SCBP Partnerships in Phase 2



Partnerships for learning have to have a high level of mutual give and take and cannot be sub contracted consultancy work.

Partnerships for developing original and high value learning content and training modules, mature over time. Based on trial and error, from implementation of initial set of modules.

There are different and important roles that partners play in developing content and its quality assurance and quality control.

From SCBP experience we can say that developing original learning content requires a careful partnership strategy. A group of partners and experts, can be effective only as a sounding board for a collaborative engagement. One lead technical partner must anchor the development of a module and conducting the pilot trainings. Finding this lead partner who is capable and can be entrusted with completing the job under strict timelines, is critical for capacity development engagement. A professional training expert, who is also has subject matter understanding, works with the lead partner in finalising the training module – anchoring content editing, engage in the pilot testing and final proof reading. This process is run through a consultative quality assurance and quality control mechanism that is anchored by a lead that was NIUA (for the SCBP program).

Academia partnership is important for capacity development. In the first part of this three series paper we had concluded with the importance of institutionalising capacity development with the engagement of academia and citizen groups involvement, as an independent formal process. The universities and research institutes can not only mainstream the learning content in their courses, but also contribute to higher level learning and content development including standards and norms, something that is missing in India and several developing countries.

What is important to note is that learning partnerships evolve, with conscious effort and mutual respect and understanding. In development work where short term contracts are a norm, this requires special effort on part of all to forge meaningful learning partnerships. Only then can you develop and deliver high quality content and training modules.

Third Step : Learning strategy

A capacity development strategy should be a "Learning Strategy" with clarity on what learning outputs and what process is put in place.

Development programs and capacity development initiatives don't have the luxury of long duration planning and pedagogy development. Most capacity development interventions rely on very basic trainings delivery strategy of 2 or 3 phase trainings. Where

existing knowledge and experts come together, compile what already exists in PPT formats and videos, deliver a set of trainings for priority trainee stakeholders and create a networking and learning space for peer exchange and learning events.

International development and training organizations parachuting in, may not be able to develop learning content and strategy that is contextualised to national and sub national context. A generic strategy of capacity development may end up becoming a formalistic roll out of training programs. Unfortunately very few large bilateral and other capacity development interventions are assessed for a learning strategy developed and employed effectively.

Under SCBP we were able to develop both a Normative Framework[6] for Capacity Development as well as its Digital Dissemination Strategy[7]. The training modules were categorised in 3 sets of modules for the government officials and private sector.

> *It is imperative therefore to develop a learning strategy based on an organic and creative policy and program engagement. With a focus on content development and roll out of a best fit set of training modules for priority stakeholders. The process followed is therefore as important as the outputs of training modules, technical assistance, research and policy guidance.*

SCBP aimed to achieve a combination of immediate skills and conceptual level learning outputs and outcomes. To anchor the Training Modules Review Committee(TMRC) for development of learning content, its assessment and re development to meet the changed needs – packaged in appropriate formats and modules.

The contribution of the Gates Foundation India WASH program lead in enabling this strategy to evolve as a collaborative process along with the NFSSM Alliance partners contribution, is duly acknowledged.

Fourth Step : Visioning change and designing solutions

Most often capacity development is limited to information and skills trainings, good in parts, but unable to communicate and convince any paradigm level change or improvement in existing practice. In the first phase of capacity development work by SCBP, we were focussed on providing a one off septage treatment plant for a city, as the solution for urban sanitation challenge(of setting up a Faecal Sludge Treatment Plant).

Capacity development should be able to **visualize the desired change at a higher level**, in all its complexity of technology, financing and management. This higher level change should then be differentiated into parts and translated into content of training modules. Finally integrating all the parts to make a higher level learning outcome or goal for the trainees.

> *To have a live example of this vision or change, developed through conceptual understanding and a practical engagement, is an important milestone in development of an effective capacity development intervention. It requires the lead capacity development organization developing its own capacity, to be able to conceptualise and provide concrete real life solutions that are also of highest conceptual understanding. Several NFSSM Alliance partners have used the learnings from pilot projects on Faecal Sludge and Septage Management(FSSM) in India that they implemented, for capacity development and training. The SCBP program, since it was not implementing pilot projects, could synthesise and present solutions by amalgamating the best of what was on offer.*

Defining a larger vision, more than one successful project, is important. City wide inclusive sanitation (CWIS) is one such conceptual visualisation that implores practitioners to aim for urban sanitation solutions from an inclusive and scaled up lens.

For SCBP capacity development work, the desired change was a paradigm shift in the national sanitation systems thinking and priority – from a centralized sanitation system to a combination of centralized and decentralized sanitation systems including non sewered sanitation systems. Conceptualisation of this change, as a city wide solution in combination with other solutions, was made possible when the administration of the city of Port Blair, an island township of India, sought a technical review of a mega budget centralized sanitation system proposal that was presented by a central government agency, for Port Blair town. SCBP employed its knowledge and resources to assess and propose a plan for the town that was a combination of decentralized and centralized sanitation solutions, as well as non sewered sanitation. The plan would save the Port Blair Municipality not only a significant amount of CAPEX and OPEX cost, but would also an appropriate city wide inclusive sanitation solution.

Technical assistance provided by SCBP for the integrated waste water management for the city of

[6] *SCBP Normative Framework for State level Capacity Development; https://www.niua.org/scbp/?q=learning-material/non-sewered-sanitation-systems-india-state-level-normative-framework-capacity*

[7] *SCBP Digital Dissemination Strategy ; https://www.niua.org/scbp/?q=learning-material/digital-strategy-capacity-development*

Port Blair, became a proof of concept of its training modules, and an important, live training resource for the SCBP capacity development work.

Any capacity development engagement should therefore be able to visualize what change is ideal in the given context, develop it, and use it for its training and learning content. Relying exclusively on solutions and case studies from the west will not be convincing for the national context. Having developed live examples or even case studies, and integrating them in capacity development work, is a proof of the effectiveness of the intervention.

Fifth Step : Contribution to Capacity Development Discourse

Organizations implementing capacity development interventions, specially those with well endowed budgets and longer timeframes, should be expected to demonstrate what contribution they have made to the capacity development discourse or atleast the sectoral understanding, at national and international levels. At the highest ladder of the capacity development effectiveness.

SCBP contribution on this count has been through its Normative Capacity Development Framework and Digital Strategy that can be applied to other sectoral capacity development interventions, the Water and Waste Water Policy Framework and Workbook[8] for the Ministry, the Resilient Urban Sanitation Response Framework[9] as a sanitation emergency response framework. At the international level SCBP has contributed to the Susana International Network Capacity Development Factsheet, and its restructuring as Susana 2.0. A chapter on South Asia Urban Sanitation Journey is included in an upcoming publication by EAWAG.

All Frameworks, Training Modules and Analytics, Research and Policy Briefs, that we develop as capacity development professional interventions – are in effect "**Deflected Actions"** (a term coined by Prof. Piers Blaikie[10]). Prof Blaikie coined it in his seminal work of in late 1980s, while addressing soil erosion in developing countries from a political economy lens and what learning and knowledge can contribute.

> *"Unfortunately soil conservation policies do not usually serve powerful economic interests, for example, land reform movements. In the latter case, land reform in many countries of Latin America and South Asia was a platform for a newly rising agriculture capitalist class to oust the backward feudal landlords who blocked their demands. Appeals to reason, to moral duty of conserve nature or to help the poor peasants and pastoralists through conservation simply have little to offer those who would carry out these policies. In these circumstances, there appear two ways forward – rhetoric, and what we may call 'deflected actions'. Both solutions call for a prodigious output in the form of seminars, conferences, reports and even financial commitments from foreign aid donors. The term 'deflected actions' refers to peripheral and support action instead of the real business of implementing soil conservation."*

Prof Blaikie reference to 'deflected action' covers not only programs and projects but also training and capacity development of institutions and individuals engaged in soil conservation, and all associated activities of mapping, monitoring, research, testing, GIS applications, etc. This learning and knowledge generation work is important in itself, in developing a deeper understanding of the problem and what needs to be done. But this work alone may not lead to any solution of the problems. Yet it is all that can be done and must be done. For problems that are deep seated, having a political economic dimensions like soil erosion in Africa and the inability to treat waste water and solid waste in South Asia.

Whether trained staff and trained institutions change their approach and goals, whether the system is able to overcome its political economic fix to change, will not depend only on the quality and effectiveness of capacity development intervention.

Capacity Development – what we need to remember and re consider

Capacity development should be an integral part of routine working of organizations. This is possible when junior professional staff are mentored by seniors, and all professionals at all levels in an organisation are provided opportunities for learning and growth. Capacity development best happens on the job and in a learning organization culture. This is how most of us grew up in the 1980-90s when capacity development was not an external input but a way of working, with organisation systems fostering learning on the job through cross assignments, mentoring by seniors, improving analytical and writing skills. Unfortunately, a consultancy culture abounds today in most organizations, that has corrupted learning and reduced professionals to petty task managers. Emphasis has shifted to optics of presentations, not on content. Organizations that prioritize learning

[8] *Policy Framework; https://www.niua.org/scbp/?q=content/urban-water-supply-and-waste-water-policy-framework*
[9] *RUSR Framework; https://www.niua.org/scbp/?q=training-modules/response-indian-cities-covid19-resource-book*
[10] *Piers Blaikie; Political Economy of Soil Erosion in Developing Countries; 1985*

opportunities for their staff, also have a culture of openness to critique, disagreement and valuing dissent. With a fall in learning priority and standards, a fall in organizational culture is also evident.

When external capacity development is programmed, then it is important to link it with some ongoing program implementation work. In a government capacity development initiative, it is critical to have an enabling policy and program funding to translate capacity development input into program and infrastructure outputs.

Perspective of capacity development is important. No doubt getting an understanding and practical know how for problem solving or implementing projects and programs is helpful. But can capacity development be reduced to **just skilling and training of professionals** and government officials? A deeper conceptual understanding and perspective to a thematic work, is important. In WASH – one needs to understand why water and sanitation systems underperform, why operations and maintenance is not a priority. The ecological, economic and social context to improving water supply, service levels and investments. Can, Behaviour Change Communication without understanding deeper individual and social self perception barriers, work to improve sanitation and hygiene behaviours?

Capacity development seen as only skilling – is fraught with the risk of redundancy of skills learnt for immediate needs. We are living in times when technology and system changes happen sooner than these skills are absorbed by professionals. Worse still, it does not enable people to think rationally and become decision makers in future when they will have to decide what strategic choices need to be made in the short and long term.

Education in its real sense implies developing a rational thinking perspective, of using logical frameworks of analysis, research on understanding why things are the way they are. That allows the trainee/student to think and imagine new directions and solutions. **Higher education at the university level is essentially a "passage into adulthood"**. Implying that higher education is not meant for imparting technical skills alone but developing a critical logical thinking individuals who know how to find solutions to the problems they will encounter. Capacity development should also be seen as continuing higher education of professionals. The crucial difference between producing task managers skilled for their role/tasks vs. leaders of the future who can think independently, plan and implement what is best for their context.

The Capacity Development Effectiveness Ladder (CDEL) Framework identifies critical steps against which practitioners and evaluators may want to assess the effectiveness of their capacity development intervention. The CDEL framework restores the primacy of learning as the core of capacity development, and identifies steps/measure of monitoring its effectiveness. The CDEL framework steers clear of Organization Development and Organisation restructuring/reform agendas, that are important in themselves but should not be seen as primary capacity development objectives. The CDEL framework is an integration of theory and practice, based on the experience of the Sanitation Capacity Building Platform work. The framework can be applied to all capacity development interventions.

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