

# Technical Cooperation – Success and Failure: An Overview

submitted to UNDP

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

1. Regular reappraisals of the value and effectiveness of technical assistance (TA) for development cooperation have taken place for many years<sup>1</sup>. Robert Cassen's book entitled *Does Aid Work* reflected this concern in the mid-1980s. In the early '90s, the OECD/DAC and the World Bank gave the issue some attention<sup>2</sup>. In the mid 1990s, a series of publications including *Rethinking Technical Cooperation: Reforms for Capacity Building in Africa*, a UNDP document published in 1994 took up the debate. Now, in 2001, we are engaged once again in looking at technical assistance under the overall sponsorship of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands with coordination by the UNDP.

2. As requested in the UNDP terms of reference, this paper looks at four (4) groups of questions connected to the TA issue:

- What have been (and are) the corrosive practices that TA has produced? Why do they persist given that the symptoms of dysfunction are apparently so obvious?
- What accounts for some of the instances where TA performance has been effective? Simply, why does TA seem to work when it does work?
- Does the emerging evidence from the programme approach, SWAps, PRSPs and CDFs point to promising alternatives to current practices?
- What are some possible improvements to TA for the future?

3. This paper is not intended as yet another earnest action plan complete with careful recommendations. Many useful reports have been written in recent years which contain a series of (mainly the same) operational steps to TA improvement. This is more a 'why' than a 'what'

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<sup>1</sup>In 1969, the Pearson Commission wrote that it had encountered "much thoughtful concern about this vital activity and believes that a reorientation of the technical assistance effort would be an important contribution to accelerating development" p.180

<sup>2</sup> OECD/DAC, *Principles for New Orientations in Technical Cooperation*, 1991. In November 1991, the World Bank issues the Report of its Technical Assistance Review Task Force.

or a ‘how’ paper. It tries to step back and see the TA ‘problem’ from the perspective of the organizational pressures and dynamics involved. It puts forward some views about how and why we ended up in this cycle of reappraisal and unproductive reform. And it looks ahead briefly to see the latest proposals for change.

## **2. THE EMERGENCE OF DONOR -DRIVEN TA**

2.1. The space for any organizational reform is usually shaped, at least to some degree, by legacies from the past. It may therefore be helpful to look back briefly at the evolution of the approach to TA that evolved within the international development cooperation system after the end of the Second World War. Seen from one angle, there was nothing new about international technical assistance. TA, as an exchange or transfer of knowledge or techniques, had been going on for centuries. Peter The Great brought in French engineers to build St. Petersburg. Japan borrowed relentlessly from the West after the arrival of Admiral Perry in 1851 in an effort to catch up with Europe and North America. The private sector managed huge flows of technical assistance for centuries. Simply put, people had been engaged in varying levels of cross-national, cross-cultural learning for most of their history.

2.2. What was new - indeed revolutionary - was the approach to TA used by the international development community beginning in the late 1940s. Many aspects of this new approach were a radical departure from much of what had gone before. And it is in the last few years that have begun to see the outcomes of this experiment with some sort of clarity and detachment. Some of the key components of this new approach were the following:

- The design and provision of international TA became, for the first time, an issue of public policy. TA for development cooperation was funded from the government budgets of developed countries. This had two major implications. First, the bulk of the financing was to come from the supplier rather than the receiver of TA on the assumption that poor countries could not or would not pay for such services. This accelerated a shift of power and control from the recipient to the supplier, the reverse of the conventional pattern up to that time. Second, the provision of TA was now to be managed as a public sector activity and according to the government regulations and procedures of each supplying country. TA activities were now to be bureaucratically structured and controlled as part of a process of change. TA now became part of projects and programmes for which staff in IDOs were accountable.
- Specialized public sector organizations, that is development assistance organizations (IDOs) or donors, were set up to manage and control its provision. But these IDOs were unusual structures, the like of which we are not likely to see again. For the most part, these were ‘all-purpose’ organizations responsible for providing the bulk of development cooperation. They were mandated to deal with activities as varied as road maintenance, bee keeping, gender mainstreaming, human rights, structural adjustment, public sector reform and wheat

production. But they suffered at the outset from structural flaws that gradually eroded their capabilities over time. Their clients were located in other countries but their key stakeholders were domestic. Virtually none were equipped from the beginning of their establishment with effective research capacities or capable field systems. Being public sector organizations, they were weighed down with a host of commercial, security and political agendas that diluted their development impact.

- Their functions were, in broad terms, divided between the normative side (meaning political /symbolic) and the operational, a dichotomy that was especially acute in development organizations and one that was to create insoluble constraints to effective management.<sup>3</sup> On the normative side, the programmes of such organizations including those to do with TA were focused on grandiose objectives that could never be achieved. Starting in the post-war period and accelerating through the remainder of the century, development programmes in general and the application of TA were expected to help in the resolution of public policy questions of immense difficulty and complexity in contexts of genuine deprivation and lack of capacity . These included issues such as eliminating world poverty, solving the governance problems of ungovernable states and so on. Simply put, to maintain some sense of domestic support and legitimacy, IDOs had to promise levels of performance and development benefits that could never be achieved.
- On the operational side, three biases were programmed into IDOs that can still be seen a half century later. Most were structured to emphasize the planning and control of TA-rich projects which were to be ‘designed’ and then ‘delivered’. An organizational device adopted from the construction industry in North America - the project - was adopted to organize most of the TA. In the process, IDO capacities for creative experimentation, for process facilitation, for incremental discovery were stunted from the outset.<sup>4</sup> Second, IDOs were not set up to emphasize implementation as a core competence. Most were fixated on policy issues. Internal incentive systems rewarded those staff who committed funds and then moved on. TA performance proved difficult to monitor. As a result, a planning-implementation gap grew up in technical assistance that can still be seen today. Third, these same incentive systems acted against much consideration being given to institutional issues, a traditional bias in the public sector. The emphasis gravitated toward task accomplishment and directly resolving development problems that seemed in urgent need of attention.
- From the outset, IDOs (and most of their permanent staff and TA personnel) came with a particular view of the nature, creation and transfer of knowledge. This viewpoint has been called ‘positivist’ by scholars of such matters. From this perspective, knowledge had an independent existence and could be detached from context, perception and action.

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<sup>3</sup> For analysis of this issue at the World Bank, see Robert Hunter Wade, *The US Role In The Malaise At The World Bank: Get Up, Gulliver!* paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 28-30, 2001.

<sup>4</sup> For a longer analysis of this point, see Dennis Rondinelli, *Development Projects as Policy Experiments: An Adaptive Approach to Development Administration*, 19883

Knowledge was not something that was created as part of a process of social construction. Given these assumptions, the role of the TA advisor or development practitioner soon became one of expert physician and diagnostician, ‘transferring’ generic technical solutions to fill knowledge ‘gaps’ that would then enable ‘counterparts’ to improve their performance.<sup>5</sup> In addition, this transfer process also got caught up with a kind of techno-hubris. For the first time in history, TA was seen as something that could have a major impact on complex problems in three to five years or less. The less capable that countries were and the more they appeared to need technical improvement, the more they should receive. Many in the development community lost a sense of reality about what was feasible and absorbable. And they lost track of what they did and did not understand about the complex systems in which they were intervening.

- Underpinning this faith in expertise was the mental model of technical and economic control and rationality. Answers were usually knowable and could be structured into manageable programmes that could be planned and scheduled in advance of implementation. IDOs could focus on isolated components such as training or policy analysis. Political, social, organizational aspects could be addressed separately. Tools and techniques were the key to performance improvement including log frames, strategic planning, work breakdown structures, decision trees and action plans. Simply put again, TA was part of the ‘machine thinking’ of the late 1950s and early 1960s which thought in terms of institution ‘building’, ‘tools’. ‘machineries’ of government and the rest. Smart people using best practice were seen as the key. Success was natural and achievable provided enough control, direction commitment and ownership could be applied. Projects could engineer success by tracking ‘results chains’. Failure was an aberration for which participants must be held accountable.

2.3. We need to keep in mind the differences in the approach to TA that this post-war model represented. In the past, TA, in the form of some sort of voluntary exchange, had been mostly a private sector activity focused on the needs of individuals. Clients or customers were in charge. The process was not consciously managed as a government programme. Time limits mattered much less. The importance of cultural adaptation mattered a great deal. Broader (and hidden) government agendas were less intrusive. The scale and breadth of the objectives were much more modest.

### **3.. THE OUTCOMES**

3.1. Before addressing the issue of the corrosive outcomes of this approach to TA, we need to reflect a bit more about the idea of success and failure in development cooperation. Much of the writing on TA centers on failure and poor performance. But much of this analysis obscures more than it reveals. Most of our ideas about this subject seem to come from somewhat simplistic notions of ‘pass’ and ‘fail’. Few incentives also exist for participants to analyze

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<sup>5</sup> The development cooperation industry was one of the few to adopt the counterpart approach to training.

success and failure in any detail for fear of unsettling their key domestic constituents. Thus when we talk about failure and corrosive practices, we need to ask more ‘so what’ and ‘compared to what’ and ‘why’ questions if we hope to end up with serious judgments on the performance and contribution of TA.

3.2. The following are some qualifications to keep in mind when thinking about the success and failure of TA.

- Many development problems are insoluble through the application of TA from any source. They are deeply systemic and societal dysfunctions that took our own societies decades and even centuries to partially address in much more conducive circumstances. Most accounts of TA failure come from the far end of the spectrum of difficulty, i.e. organizational performance in soft sectors supported by Governments in poor unstable states. Even choosing an approach to addressing issues such as good governance or poverty reduction is problematic given the contested theories of action or solutions that rise and fall in the development agenda<sup>6</sup>. Yet most IDOs continue to create an impression of their programmes having the potential for dramatic improvement.<sup>7</sup>
- The ‘so what’ question needs to be addressed. In the early 1980s, a World Bank came to the conclusion based on a survey of 95 completed projects that had some form of TA for capacity building, that 36% achieved ‘substantial success’, 51% were ‘partially successful’ and 13% had ‘negligible’ results.<sup>8</sup> From the late 1980s up to 1997, about 30% of Bank-supported projects had ‘unsatisfactory’ development outcomes at exit according to bank evaluations. Close to 66% were judged not to have had ‘substantial’ institutional development impacts. But these figures and particularly the latter ones to do with institutional development are about the same as can be found in organizational change efforts in the private sector in North America.<sup>9</sup> We could therefore come to a quite different conclusion, i.e. that most efforts at capacity building fail at about the same rate, everywhere

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<sup>6</sup> A comment by the American analyst George Kennan in 1951 about Russia in 1951 still makes good reading....” Let us not hover nervously over the people who come after, applying litmus paper daily to their political complexions to find out whether they answer to our concept of “democratic.” Give them time; let them be Russians; let them work out their internal problems in their own manner... The ways by which peoples advance toward dignity and enlightenment in government are things that constitute the deepest and most intimate processes of national life. There is nothing less understandable to foreigners, nothing in which foreign interference can do less good”. cited in Cohen, p.215

<sup>7</sup> “The facts are clear and simple to relate. Between 1987 and 1998, the number of people living on less than 1\$ per day, the Bank’s measure of extreme poverty, remained the same. The proportion of the population declined modestly from 28% to 24%. This is not much of an accomplishment for an expenditure of \$200 billion”. Allan Meltzer, *Testimony at the Hearings before the Joint Economic Committee*, US Congress, March 8, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Robert Casseen, *Does Aid Work?* 1986, p.200

<sup>9</sup> footnote

and at all times *and especially the first time*.<sup>10</sup> But they fail for different reasons in different contexts.

- We also need to put TA in a more balanced perspective. It is usually one of the most visible components of a development activity but in practice simply one of many influences that goes to determine the overall effectiveness of the activity. It is part of a wider 'soft system' over which it has only a marginal leverage. The TA itself can be well-designed and managed but end up submerged under the weight of broader organizational, economic, financial and political constraints.<sup>11</sup>
- Finally, we need to bear in mind the fact that, on balance, TA in the latter part of the Twentieth Century made a series of genuine contributions. Most of these advances have been in activities such as meteorology, agriculture, health, population and high technology<sup>12</sup>. The common thread appears to have been the transfer and absorption of technical procedures into non-politicized environments. The ratio of success seems to drop dramatically when TA is used to address organizational and social constraints.

3.3. Nevertheless, TA has had a pattern of poor performance that is now well documented. The UNDP has labeled these patterns as 'corrosive'. We can summarize these as follows:

- TA in many instances lead to *the erosion of the ownership, commitment and independent action of national actors*. Put in place to help generate independence, TA led in too many cases to a sense of dependence<sup>13</sup>. IDOs and their implementing agencies used the disparities in power, resources and technological confidence to crowd out national initiative. IDO staff in many cases were also uncertain about how to combine the need to meet their specific management accountabilities with the less obvious needs for listening, experimentation, timing, learning and responsiveness. This issue of dependence taps into one of the perennial debates in all societies that arises out of the act of one person or group or country helping another. It is also the basis of many of the criticisms made of development cooperation. How can such an exchange lead to an on-going ability to perform?
- A key part of this erosion in national ownership was a growing trend, especially in the 1980s, *to undermine the functional capabilities* of those whom TA was trying to assist. TA, in short, ended up making many situations worse. In their efforts to control, manage

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<sup>10</sup> We tend to lose track of the arithmetic of innovation. Over 75% of all new businesses fail. Over 80% of new products in the private sector fail within six months. No more than one out of every 5000 compounds makes it through the development and testing stage to become an approved drug in the USA. For every 1000 turtle eggs laid, only one makes it through to adulthood.

<sup>11</sup> TA in the private sector has a series of advantages including less politicization, fewer agendas, better incentives, less ambitious objectives and a tighter technical focus.

<sup>12</sup> See Robert Cassen, *Does Aid Work*, chap.6

<sup>13</sup> Brautigam

and accomplish, IDOs went around indigenous organizational systems and set up their own structures which then sucked resources away from the failing national capabilities such as those to do with planning, budgeting and administration.

- TA in some instances led to *encouraging countries to put in place the wrong policies, organizations and institutions*. One of the main corrosive effects of TA was to help put in place decisions and techniques that proved to be damaging in the medium and long term.<sup>14</sup>. In the early 1960s, TA thinking reflected a concern about adapting the techniques from one context to fit them into that of another. By the 1980s, this theme had disappeared. In many cases, formal organizational techniques were introduced that were too heavy, too complex, too costly and in the end, unsuitable for unstable, resource-poor environments. IDOs also found it difficult to tell the difference between indigenous organizations and institutions that could be modernized and reformed to make a broader development contribution and those that needed to be dismantled to prevent special interests from capturing the benefits. In some cases, the supply of new flows of funds set off a new chain of unforeseen political effects that TA suppliers did not understand.
- The fourth has to do with *lack of sustainable impact*. Too many TA interventions appeared to leave no organizational legacy even in the short term. Once the IDO assistance was withdrawn, the financial and organizational support systems in the country also withered away leaving behind abandoned staff and a good deal of dissatisfaction and frustration. But we need to be careful about this kind of analysis for a number of reasons. First, a good number of organizations in the public sector built through TA in the 1970s proved to be sustainable but also unproductive and predatory. Many of the privatization programmes in the 1980s and 1990s were devoted to eliminating organizations that had been made sustainable in the 1960s and 1970s using TA.
- TA can be cited for *self-perpetuation and excessive costs*. IDOs and other domestic interest groups pushed expensive TA as a specific solution to ill-defined problems. TA slowly turned into a transfer of resources from IDOs to some of their own constituents. The care and feeding of the TA personnel created overhead costs that drained scarce resources and time away from national officials. And the high costs of such interventions also shifted investments away from other development possibilities that could have offered better opportunities.
- Finally, the TA issue had a corrosive effect on *the motivation and sense of professionalism of some staff within IDOs*. For many, their experience in designing and managing the application of TA to critical development opportunities and problems shaped the self-perception of their professional contribution. If TA was seen as a pattern of

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<sup>14</sup> Readers will be familiar with many of the debates on subjects such as structural adjustment. For a severe critique of US technical assistance to Russia in the 1990s, see Stephen Cohen, *Failed Crusade: America and the Tragedy of Post-Communist Russia*, 2000

recurring poor performance that persisted despite the best efforts of operational staff within IDOs to get it right, the internal organizational effect was to erode the professional morale and sense of personal mastery of those responsible in IDOs at the operational levels for making development programmes operational. Indeed, the tension in IDOs between those at the senior level who had to manage external perceptions and those at the middle and lower levels who had to deliver programmes arose in part from differing views on improving dysfunctional TA<sup>15</sup>.

#### **4. WHY DID TA FAIL AND WHY DID IT PERSIST?**

*why did it fail?*

4.1. We can see all kinds of examples of organizations persisting in policies and practices that they know to be unproductive. IDO are no different in this respect. Again, this paper offers only some broad speculation. Different explanations will apply to different IDOs and in different countries.

- Country ownership and motivation remained the single greatest determinants of TA effectiveness. Yet once the obvious acknowledgment was made of its importance, IDOs found it an awkward principle to integrate into their operations. Governments everywhere usually showed uneven patterns of enthusiasm for projects or policies (e.g., between ministries, amongst organizational levels or professional groups) depending on various political and bureaucratic factors. Operational staff did not have any systematic way of assessing borrower commitment during TA design. There was a sense that the notions of commitment and ownership remained abstractions that were either too subjective or too political to analyze with any rigor. The more complex the intervention, the more difficult it was to assess and help maintain country ownership and commitment. And it was not always clear how technical excellence could be combined with country ownership. Finally, few interventions were likely to focus on the ownership issue on the assumption that a likely mixed judgment on country commitment might lessen the chances of management approval.
- For the most part, disparities in power and influence amongst the participants and the intrusion of non-development agendas led to the wrong structuring of the key TA relationships. In many cases, aid relationships were deformed and turned upside down. IDOs, for example, became much more responsive and accountable to their domestic stakeholders and regulators than they were to those in the counties they were trying to assist. Implementing agencies, for the most part, responded to the IDOs that paid them. Recipient governments ended up more accountable to the international funding community

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<sup>15</sup> See Robert Hunter Wade, p.6.

than they were to their own electorate<sup>16</sup>. Country agencies that negotiated TA projects such as finance ministries were not the ones that had to make such arrangements work. And in many cases, the ultimate beneficiaries were not as involved in the design and preparation of such projects as they needed to be.

- Much of the TA was predicted on an implicit ‘missing link’ theory of capacity building, i.e. that technical and policy advice was the key missing link of the development process much as in a cross word puzzle. This assumption turned out to be untrue and naive in most cases. As we will see later in this report, knowledge and technique were almost never the catalyst that was needed to get a dysfunctional system to reconfigure itself and move towards effectiveness. The key(s) lay elsewhere in the context that few TA suppliers understood.<sup>17</sup>
- In many cases, participants ended up focusing on the visible, easier ‘hard’ stuff and largely ignored the harder, more ambiguous ‘soft’ stuff. IDOs and hired executing agencies focused on the two main activities: first, the ‘hard’ structures of the delivery process - proposal calls, contracts, work breakdown structures, terms of reference, memoranda of understanding, budgets, the provision of equipment reporting and the rest. And second the ‘hard’ technical strategies usually imported from outside. But for the most part, all the participants failed to manage or in many cases, even think much about the ‘soft’ stuff - a sufficient understanding of the critical contextual factors, motivation, gaining ownership and incentives, legitimacy and credibility, sense making, managing relationships and constituencies, in short, the key ingredients to encourage and support change and innovation. TA was supposed, above all else, to assist in and induce personal and organizational change and performance improvement. It was supposed to help create or strengthen organizations and institutions. Yet in practice, most TA projects had little idea about how to go about doing this.
- Most TA interventions struggled under the weight of conflicting objectives. TA was in many cases, designed to meet supplier objectives such as commercial gain, political support or cultural penetration. Some TA was put in place to add to the organizational capabilities of the supplier by monitoring financial management or gathering information on project activities. Some was put in place to convince domestic stakeholders that the IDO was responding to their demands. Another implicit pile of objectives was loaded on by the recipients. TA was accepted for symbolic reasons, to get access to accompanying operating costs, training and equipment. Some TA became resources to be used in internal bureaucratic struggles for power and authority. And some was used to simply get work. The explicit stated objectives of most TA projects and programmes - short-term performance and longer-term capacity building - were simply two objectives amongst many others that had to contend for resources and attention.

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<sup>16</sup> Brautigam

<sup>17</sup> Janine Wedell analyzes the failure of TA in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s and attributes a good deal of the reasons to a pervasive misreading of the context in many of the countries involved especially the complex system of informal relationships, involving personalized patron-client contacts and lateral networks which pervaded the official economy and the bureaucracy.

- This traditional approach to TA gradually buckled under the weight of its own inherent tendency for fragmentation and complexity. The reliance on projects, those “privileged particles of development” in the words of Albert Hirschman chopped up the development process. Styles of thinking in the international development community emphasized some issues, e.g. economics and ignored most others. Few IDOs had much incentive to coordinate their efforts with those of other organizations. Most tried to keep full control over their interventions in order to create the appearance of accountability and management. Interest groups within and outside IDOs introduced more and more TA components into their interventions regardless of the limited capacity to absorb such interventions. Similarly on the country side, few organizations, especially within the public sector, had much interest in inter-organizational coordination and the sharing of their access to outside resources.
- Most projects could not get over the growing ‘knowing-doing’ gap that hindered the work. Much TA still contained a good deal of residual arrogance about the validity of certain kinds of knowledge and techniques. Yet the most effective TA practitioners factored in their lack of understanding of a whole range of issues from the outset. To be effective, the performance of TA depended critically upon the ability of participants to learn the right things fast enough and then to feed it quickly enough into the action cycle and then back again into learning to make an overall difference to performance. Despite the endless production of ‘lessons learned’ and ‘best practices’ on activities such as TA, it is clear in retrospect that virtually all the participants in development cooperation, both at the country and the IDO level, did not have the resources or the time or the incentives or the willingness to master the learning-performance-learning cycle described above.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, many of the factors that locked the TA system in place acted as well to limit learning and above all, action.
- In hindsight, we can see that the conflicting purposes of TA were never resolved. Much of the work of the conventional approach to TA, especially in the earlier years, was focused on task accomplishment in both the short and the longer term. In the 1980s, capacity building was given more emphasis and TA personnel were mandated to help national participants build various functional capabilities. Yet this second task was frequently traded off against the first. And finally, IDOs did not find ways to add a third critical purpose, that is, helping country participants to build the capacity to build capacity. Most efforts at TA never found a way to help make organizations adaptive, flexible and able to deal with the many discontinuities that soon overwhelmed them after the withdrawal of IDO support. Countries needed organizations that came with an in-built capacity for creative evolution and change. To this day, we still know little about how to use TA to generate that kind of capacity.

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<sup>18</sup> The inability of the development cooperation industry to learn effectively and quickly as been documented extensively. See Robert Cassen, 1986. Also Eliot Berg, *Why Aren't Aid Organizations Better Learners?* 2000, SIDA, *Operational Learning in Development Cooperation: How Knowledge is Generated and Shared*, 1998

- As their economic and political systems eroded in the 1970s and 1980s, many countries lost the capacity to manage and absorb TA setting to up a vicious cycle of non-performance. The more their capacity for the management of TA declined, the more IDOs stepped into help ensure their investments were effective which in turn, further erode country capacities.

*Why did this approach to TA persist?*

4.10. We need to be a bit more nuanced at this point. The traditional approach to TA did change slowly over the last three decades. The value of participation was recognized in the 1970s and 1980s. Process approaches to TA design appeared slowly in the late 1970s. An emphasis on capacity building was added in the 1980s and less reliance was placed on expatriate TA. The dysfunctions of TA were again analyzed extensively in the 1980s and 1990s. The need for country ownership began to be addressed in the 1990s. But these were incremental improvements which on balance, did not make a great difference to the rate of TA success or failure. The pace of reform and adaptation remained halting and cautious over much of the period. How then can we explain this slow response to failure? Why did the efforts at TA reform proceed at such a leisurely pace? Why did TA practices that most individual practitioners knew to be harmful continued despite some collective efforts to reform them? Why the persistence (some might say addiction)?

- Most IDOs have been ambivalent about the idea of results and performance. For much of the period, the burden on IDOs was to perform at the ‘front’ or the symbolic end by producing plans, policies, intentions, prescriptions, strategies and the pursuit of development fashions. Few rewards existed at the ‘back’ end in terms of a disciplined approach to implementation and the generation of sustained performance at the field level. Neither IDO allocations nor budgets and staff financial benefits were connected to performance at the field level. In fact, the fate of few constituencies in any part of the system including at the country level depended much on the actual performance of TA. Those that did had little chance to use exit or voice. Ending up with structured orderly failures was, in some instances, a better option than leaving behind a messy success.
- Part of the underlying dynamics of the performance issue turned on the ‘who benefits’ question. Turning TA into a public sector programme, i.e. a stream of resources supplied from one government to another led to the dysfunctional outcomes that the ‘public choice’ school of analysis has long predicted.<sup>19</sup> Interest groups with control over public decision making in both the supplier and recipient countries tried to capture many of the benefits from TA including jobs and income, higher fees, overhead costs, bureaucratic power and

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<sup>19</sup> See Eduardo Wiesner, “Transaction cost economics and public sector rent-seeking in developing countries: toward a theory of government failure” in Robert Picciotto and Eduardo Wiesner, *Evaluation and Development: The Institutional Dimension*, The World Bank, 1998

organizational survival. Poor TA performance in a narrow developmental sense was affordable and persistent, in part, because of the benefits the broader process of resource sharing conferred on many of the participants.

- As Eliot Berg has shown, it is extremely hard to kill failed ideas in development cooperation including most of those associated with TA.<sup>20</sup> The planning-implementation gap discussed earlier in Section 2 compartmentalized thinking. Participants are convinced that special circumstances in the context and not the inherent weaknesses of the ideas restricted effectiveness. People continued to believe that idea X could still work provided more resources and more country commitment could be made available. Feedback was confused and unreliable. Definitive judgments about cause and effect were rarely clear enough to block the flow of resources into and around the system.
- In an industry preoccupied with development fads and fashions, technical assistance has long been perceived as an intractable and slightly dowdy old issue. It has had none of the intellectual flash of big policy issues where IDO careers are made. Concern about its ineffectiveness has been concentrated mainly at the operating levels of IDOs and Governments where people were in a position to see the persistent dysfunctional patterns. In particular, ministers in Governments and senior officials in IDOs have shown little interest in the issue over the years. Simple put, those with the knowledge had no power to change it. Those with the authority gave it little priority.
- But this is not to say that symbolic reform programmes were not put in place. As discussed earlier in this paper, most IDOs in supplier countries have been poorly structured and equipped from the beginning to carry out their *operational* objectives. The deeper goals of these agencies lay elsewhere. This basic choice has had major implications for the issue of TA given its high degree of operational content. One response of the IDO community has been a series of never-ending programmes of TA reform, none of which were ever resourced for success. Simply put, few IDOs were in a position in the 1980s and 1990s to accept the implications of TA reform. A compromise was the promulgation of a series of symbolic reforms that promised the appearance of change. In the words of two analysts, “solutions normally last for a much shorter time than insoluble problems.”<sup>21</sup> Given the cross pressures under which IDOs found themselves, the payoffs arising from a concerted all-out effort to improve the performance of TA were not worth the organizational grief given the other issues facing IDOs.
- TA also played a critical organizational role for IDOs that for the most part, had weak fields systems. TA personnel functioned as financial controllers, as monitors and information

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<sup>20</sup> Berg, 2000

<sup>21</sup> For the same patterns in the UN and the World Bank, see Helge Ole Bergesen and Leiv Lunde, *Dinosaurs or Dinamos: The United Nations and the World Bank at The Turn of the Century*, Earthscan, 1999

gatherers and as commercial ambassadors. They in effect, played roles that brought security and legitimacy to IDOs but which could not be funded out of regular operational funds.

- Finally, it can be argued that the alternatives to TA, especially to individual IDOs, were not clear and were certainly not agreed. The international development community was dealing here with a classic collective action problem. If one IDO undertook major reforms such as untying for international TA, other supplier countries could benefit at its expense and in the process alienate key domestic constituencies in the supplier country. In many ways, this collective action dilemma locked the international development community into a kind of cautious, low-performance state of interaction that is common in many situations in which individual efforts at reform are not punished rather than rewarded. .

## **5. WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR TA EFFECTIVENESS?**

5.1. Reading much of the literature on TA ( including this report) would lead to the belief that few examples of useful TA exist. Even those positive examples that can be found are usually poorly analyzed in terms of the root causes of their performance. But many of the effective use of TA can be cited. Most observers will have their own list of projects and programmes which used TA to good effect. Annex 2 contains a summary of five cases from which a number of hypotheses (as opposed to lessons) can be derived. These five focus on the connection between TA and capacity building. This list is not obviously not intended as a rigorous or even a representative survey. Many of the organizations involved are small. Most are outside the public sector. But they do provide some clues about making TA effective, some of which are set out below.

- All these cases either started with, or soon developed, a conscious ‘theory of action’ or a ‘mental model ‘ or a set of organizing principles about building their capabilities and the potential contribution of TA to that process. Most such as IUCNP and the Madrassas started with some basic ideas and then slowly experimented and expanded their scope as their confidence and access to resources grew. Access to outside TA was used to check progress, provide new ideas and fill in certain gaps. But TA contributed only marginally to these core management ideas which originated with national participants themselves reflecting on their lives, their work and the needs of their country or region. All these organizations ended up with a set of organizing principles that worked in the context. And most kept a balance between accomplishing daily operational tasks and crafting longer-term strategies for organizational improvement.
- These projects generated a good ‘fit’ or balance between the TA and other organizational aspects. For the purposes of this analysis, this notion of ‘fit’ can be divided up into five

components: context, purpose, strategy, methodology and management.<sup>22</sup> The TA fitted into this system of activities but did not supplant it. It helped the organization to evolve into a combination of features that added up to a well-performing system.

- The participants in all these cases moved quickly beyond issues to do with their sense of ownership and participation. These were seen as obvious and not something that outside TA had much of a role in affecting. TA could damage country ownership but could not do much to create it. The bigger challenge for the leadership was to generate and sustain the motivation of the staff and incentives that drove their work forward. Staff were encouraged to see their work as a chance to improve both their own sense of professional mastery and to make a contribution to the development of their country. In the Tanzania case, a range of incentives for the lawyers and accountants having to do the growth of professional respect energized the process of institutional development (e.g. building the rule of law and better national standards of auditing and accounting).
- These projects early on developed a ‘reprocessing’ ability, i.e. a capacity to sort, synthesize, discard and customize technical knowledge coming to them from a variety of TA sources. Most technical advice, particularly coming across cultures, that was offered from one group or organization to another does not fit into the new context. It is not focused on the right stuff. It is too advanced. It is old stuff. Its organizational implications cannot be dealt with quickly. And so on. These projects developed the ability to sift through the flow of TA advice and pick out the parts that could be applied to the type of problems and constraints that they were facing. They learned how to ‘mix and match’. In practice, they turned themselves into simple little ‘learning engines’ that had a sense of what they needed to know. And they developed a flow of indigenous TA back to the supplier - a feedback loop - that helped to redirect the flow of TA back to the project.
- They got their organizational and personal relationships more or less right. Power and authority stayed at the level of the project and its distribution was managed according to the implementation needs of the participants not the reporting and accountability needs of the IDO. TA providers assumed an important, but essentially secondary, role. IDOs focused more on support, facilitation, learning and buffering. In these projects, there were no counterparts. Projects were never ‘handed over’ at the termination of outside assistance.
- Effective TA needed a network of champions to make it work, that is, a group of people who cared profoundly in both professional and personal terms about the fate of the intervention. At the receiving end, the TA intervention needed entrepreneurs, protectors and managers. And it needed followers as well as leaders to make it effective. At the supplier end, it needed people playing many of the same roles. And above all, it needed a strong relationship between these two groups.

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<sup>22</sup> These characteristics are similar to those of Samuel Paul set out in 1982—program environment, strategy, structure and processes.

- Effective TA depended on an effective approach to change management. Timing and sequencing, for example, were critical. Country actors frequently had to delay major organizational changes while they went through a preparatory period of communicating, shoring up shaky internal coalitions, dealing with recalcitrant stakeholders, doing pilot projects and educating staff on the nature of the reforms. In retrospect, no amount or type of TA would have made much difference to judicial reform in Tanzania in the 1980s. Or strategizing for environmental protection in the 1970s in Pakistan. Effective TA could still function in unstable politicized environments provided it could tap into deeper pools of support and protection. The rhythm of the TA design must allow for a period for gestation and learning. By itself, TA appeared to have little success in implementing large-scale organizational changes unless such changes were part of an effective program of change.
- All these projects appeared to find a way to surmount the performance dilemma. They needed to use TA to gain some early results so as to establish their credibility and momentum. But they also accepted the point that objectives such as capacity building would require sustained efforts over many years. They managed to use TA to generate the right kinds of results in the right order in the right sequence.

5.2. This list does not demonstrate much of the conventional wisdom that still pervades the debate on TA. None of the examples relied much on training. Indeed, some such as the Madrassas devoted little, if any resources, to formal courses or study tours. Many of them used the dreaded ‘gap filling’ TA and found it to be a useful part of their efforts to become more organizationally sustainable. Some of them such as IUCN Pakistan survived and indeed prospered in a dysfunctional institutional environment and made every effort to take advantage of the opportunities that such a context produced. Some of them benefited from inspired individual leadership. Others relied on group solidarity and consensus to make a difference.

5.3. What all these cases shared was an complex amalgam of opportunity, commitment, imagination and discipline or what Janine Wedell has colorfully called “ a chemical reaction”<sup>23</sup>. And at the heart of this reaction lay a quality which one analyst has called ingenuity.<sup>24</sup> Technical ingenuity, much of which was helped by TA, related to the functional, the physical and the procedural. But what was critical was the quality of social ingenuity at the country level which related to the ability of individuals and groups to collaborate for productive ends. All these organizations had the ability to summon up the social ingenuity to make good use of the TA.

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<sup>23</sup> Wedell, p.8.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Homer-Dixon talks about ingenuity as something like a set of insights that tell us how to arrange the constituent parts of our social and physical worlds in ways that help us to achieve our goals. p. 21

## 6. ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO THE DESIGN AND MANAGEMENT OF TA

6.1. The argument in this paper is that a new approach - a new mental model of TA - has been slowly emerging in the latter part of the 1990s. Much is still experimental and open to question. But it is now possible to see new patterns and mechanisms appearing driven both by countries themselves and by a number of IDOs unwilling to accept incremental adjustments to past TA practices. Included in these changes would be innovations such as Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAs), Comprehensive Development Frameworks (CDFs), and Poverty Reduction Strategy Programmes (PRSPs).<sup>25</sup>

6.2. The factors driving these changes have been the following:

- A heightened concern about the performance and results of development cooperation programmes and their ability to make much of a difference to a whole set of intractable issues. If IDOs are to improve the performance of their contributions, TA is an obvious focus of attention.
- A whole host of new actors moving into development cooperation with more innovative approaches to TA. Some of these organizations include new foundations such as the Soros and Gates Foundations with financial capacities equal to traditional funding agencies. In addition, large international NGOs, multi-national corporations, new networks and many others are becoming major players in international TA.
- The specter of the growing irrelevance of development cooperation organizations
- The need to put more focus on global public goods that require much more collective action to implement.<sup>26</sup>
- A new generation of leadership coming from certain bilateral donors mainly in Europe and their willingness to address a variety of issues such as budgetary support.

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<sup>25</sup> It may be helpful here to note the evolving pattern of thinking on collaborative approaches including SWAs. Many of the initial prescriptions in the mid-1990s bring back memories of the centralized planning techniques of the 1960s including a comprehensive inclusion of all sector expenditures, implementation procedures common to all financiers, clear sector strategies and frameworks in advance of implementation, medium term expenditure programs capturing most of the significant contributions, a high level of 'blueprinting' and finally, the participation of all national actors including NGOs and the private sector. This enthusiasm for order, comprehensiveness and technical rationality has faded as the experience of implementation has accumulated. The second generation of SWAs in particular seem less ambitious in their design, less prescriptive and more willing to respond to field conditions. .

<sup>26</sup> See Inge Kaul, Isabelle Grunberg and Marc Stern, *Global Public Goods: International Cooperation in the 21st Century*, 1999. also Ravi Kanbur and Todd Sandler, *The Future of Development Assistance: Common Pools and International Public Goods*, 1999

- The growing demands of countries for more effective ways of designing and implementing development cooperation.

6.3. These mechanisms differ in certain ways but they do share some common principles that respond to some of the constraints to effective TA discussed earlier in this paper. We can summarize three of the key principles as follows:

- The restructuring of organizational relationships to encourage country ownership of its own development interventions and those of IDOs. The intent is to redesign the allocation and decision making processes to emphasize country control and by having IDOs make more use of country financial and administrative systems for programme delivery. In the medium term, we may see IDOs cease having their own country programmes for a particular country.
- The reduction of the fragmentation of development interventions. This is to be addressed in a variety of ways including all the key actors in these collaborative arrangements, by having Government take the lead on greater IDO coordination, by paying more attention to a greater range of development influences including social, cultural and political, by harmonizing IDO procedures such as reporting, accounting and monitoring and by trying to do away with separate implementation structures controlled by individual IDOs and by shifting IDO policies away from tied aid and towards more budgetary support. We can see here the shift to a more ‘systems’ approach to development cooperation.
- The encouragement of more trust and collective action amongst all the participants. . Achieving effectiveness in activities such as SWAps critically on trust, open dialogue and the transparency of information and actions. IDOs would give the Government more space to assert its ownership and leadership. Governments would enable IDOs to meet their accountabilities by treating them as legitimate stakeholders and dialogue partners. Hopefully, the incentive pattern will start to reward IDOs for inclusive rather than individualistic behavior.

6.4. The potential for some long-overdue innovation in TA practices follows from these broader principles. Collaborative, or more precisely, ‘pooled’ TA, is a reform that holds promise to improve TA effectiveness in the years ahead.<sup>27</sup> To make pooled TA work, the following issues are important.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For a review of the issues to do with pooled TA, see Heather Baser and Peter Morgan, *The Pooling of Technical Assistance: An Overview based on Field Experience in Six African Countries*, ECDPM report to The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands, October 2001.

<sup>28</sup> The above report goes into more details on the advantages, disadvantages and risks of three types of a

- Putting in place improved overall relationships between countries and IDOs that foster greater collaboration at the operational level. Countries such as Tanzania have already devised innovative approaches to the overall management of development cooperation that has already produced results.
- Encouraging IDOs to change their own TA policies which would allow them to untie funds for pooled TA.
- Helping to build the national financial, legal and administrative systems that can allow countries to manage the planning, procurement, contracting, assessment and supervision of TA.
- Helping countries to build the capacities to manage these kinds of complex collaborative arrangements.
- Helping to build a series of collaborative relationships - within Governments, with the IDO community, between Governments and the IDO community - that can create an enabling environment for TA pooling.
- Thinking through new approaches to TA in general that can help to make such interventions make a more effective development intervention. This should include improved approaches to the monitoring and evaluation of capacity building using TA.
- Rethinking the implications of new forms of shared accountability by Governments and IDOs for pooled TA.

6.5. Most of these approaches are still relatively new and the pattern of their longer-term outcomes is still to emerge. But they have the potential to be part of the core of the new approach to TA which we can expect to see emerge in the years ahead. We can see, for example, an effort to rebalance the aid relationships with the country or the client returning to its appropriate role as the central actor in the TA relationship. The controlling flow in TA is likely to go back to being the demand side and not the supply as in years past. International development organizations slowly lose their intrusive, directive pattern of intervention. More holistic, systems thinking approaches begin to replace the mechanical technocratic patterns of the last few decades.

## 7. WHAT TO DO NOW?

7.1. It does appear that the intervention ‘model’ of TA that has shaped its design and delivery over the last half century is finally on its way out.<sup>29</sup> We can now see signs of change and innovation ranging from the increase in budgetary support to the use of the Internet. This section briefly outlines some of these trends, many of which will be under consideration in the UNDP exercise.

## **A updated view of TA**

7.2. Much of this report has focused on the failures of the past approaches in which IDOs ‘delivered’ TA to recipient counties. A good deal of thinking, e.g. no more ‘gap filling’, focuses on addressing these past failures. But we need much more strategic thinking about the means and ends of TA in the new century. Declines in the prevalence of TA is not an automatic indicator of progress and self-reliance is not the ultimate standard to which countries should aspire. In a world in which all countries, rich and poor, are short of the skills and intellectual capital they need to make rapid progress and are competing for them on a global scale, when “foreign aid is as much about knowledge as it is about money”, there is little justification for reducing TA for its own sake.<sup>30</sup> What is really at issue in making TA effective is not its presence, volume or cost. The heart of the matter is its purpose, design, context, selection and mode of provision - in short, its modernization and creative deployment. In any such exercise, special attention needs to be paid to issues such as the role of the Internet, ownership, the new TA needs related to decentralization, human resources planning, pay and incentive schemes, alternative methods of delivering and applying knowledge and more creative ways to approach organizational innovation and change.<sup>31</sup> And for the foreseeable future, many poorer countries will need some sort of subsidization to take part in this global process.

## **The reform of IDOs**

7.3. International development organizations are now looking at other ways for TA to be introduced into development activities. In the longer term, it may be that IDOs may need to get out of operations and programme delivery altogether and concentrate on broader policy questions and domestic liaison. We may therefore be looking at the restructuring of IDOs as they adjust to new ways to provide TA.

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<sup>29</sup> I hesitate to call this a ‘turning point’. I am reminded of the economist who predicted nine of the last four recessions.

<sup>30</sup> The World Bank, *Assessing Aid: What Works, What Doesn’t, and Why*, 1998, p. ix

<sup>31</sup> Some of these issues are addressed in the UNDP Human Development Report 2001 entitled *Making New Technologies Work for Human Development*

- The trend to the decentralization of IDOs needs to continue. Individual field offices need to be staffed with officers who can master the substance of complex policy and organizational issues and who can negotiate in the context of collective action on TA in the context of SWAps.
- The principle of pooling may need to be extended beyond specific development programmes into the formal IDO structures. One suggestion made at the recent meeting in Geneva is for a national development cooperation commission operating at the country level managed by IDOs and national participants.
- Some smaller IDOs which no longer have the capacity on their own to support complex interventions may have to merge, at least in an organizational sense at the field level, with other IDOs in a similar position. We can already see the formation of integrated IDO field offices at country or regional levels which can function as knowledge and organizational hubs. These may eventually be self-financing and be loosely-coupled to any specific IDO.
- IDOs are now losing the capacity to function effectively as TA suppliers, controllers, allocators and gatekeepers. An increasing proportion of relevant technical knowledge is now housed in global networks involving many countries. Some of these may need subsidization from IDOs to focus on the specific issues that need addressing in a range of countries<sup>32</sup>.

### **Experimenting with collaborative and market-based approaches.**

7.4. Approaches such as SWAps, SWAp-like programmes and CDFs offer promise for new way to apply TA. Over the next three to four years, a concerted effort needs to be made to learn from the emerging experience.<sup>33</sup>

7.5. The UNDP will be studying ways to introduce more market-based approaches and this report does not go into this issue in any detail. But it may be the case that these two approaches - collaborative and market-based - may be in conflict in certain instances such as the use of pooled TA with SWAps. Special attention will have to be given to the experience on this point.

### **Monitoring and measurement**

7.5. We need to develop more effective approaches to assessing the results of TA interventions in the field. In the future, collective monitoring and evaluation will likely replace

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<sup>32</sup> E.g. ACCESO, a regional NGO based in Costa Rica, is now establishing a website dedicated to frameworks for organizational analysis.

<sup>33</sup> There is already a growing literature on the SWAp experience including The World Bank, *Education and Health in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Review of Sector-Wide Approaches*, 2001

traditional control techniques. The good news about the recent emphasis on performance and results is the potential discipline it can exert on TA design and the impetus it can give to learning more about the drivers of performance at the field level, both of which have been weaknesses in the more traditional approaches to TA over the years.<sup>34</sup> The bad news is the potential for the current collection of mechanical measurement techniques to push participants back into unproductive practices such as acting against innovation and experimentation, manipulating data and indicators for the sake of appearances and a disregard of process issues.

### **Capacity building**

7.6. IDOs increasingly claim capacity building to be the key objective of contemporary TA. Yet there can be examples in the world of a global industry (i.e. international development cooperation) devoting so little resources to improving its core competencies in such a critical area. In the 1960s, enormous resources were devoted to agricultural research. The Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research still exists as an international network. If TA is to improve its performance in the new century, a similar effort is required to support capacity building.

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<sup>34</sup> See, for example, Omer Gokcekus, Nick Manning, Ranjana Mukerjee and Raj Nallari, *Institutional Environment and Public Officials' Performance in Guyana*, World Bank Technical Paper #506, 2001

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## **ANNEX 2 -FOUR CASES IN EFFECTIVE TA**

### *The New Paradigm Project in Cuba*

1. In 1998, the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) started a regional project in Central and South America called “Building Capacity for the Strategic Management of Institutional Change in Agricultural Science and Technology Organizations in Latin America” or the “new Paradigm Project” with support from the ISNAR, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The Netherlands. Its overall purpose was to build the conceptual, methodological, organizational and technical capacities in the strategic management of change. The initial home of the project was in The Swine Research Institute in Cuba, one of sixteen (16) organizations comprising a technical network within the Government of Cuba.
2. The critical success factors here included:
  - A sustained effort in applied action research

- An explicit emphasis on thinking in new ways about institutional and organizational change including whole systems change, constructivism, soft systems theory, action learning and so on.
- An experimental approach to designing an effective way to facilitate and support such a process of change.
- Complete ownership by the participants particularly those from Cuba, the host country. Donor agencies provided general monitoring and support only.
- The outreach to other countries for knowledge and advice including Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, Dominican Republic and Panama,
- The purpose of TA, going in all directions, is to teach how to learn what participants have to know.

*The International Union for the Conservation of Nature in Pakistan (IUCNP)*

1. The Pakistan Office of IUCN, The World Conservation Union was established in 1987 with one staff member working half time. The organization was a hybrid being both a quasi-autonomous field office of an international organization and a Pakistani NGO. IUCNP made its reputation in Pakistan by working with the Government on a national conservation strategy which was later judged to be one of the best of its kind in the world. It then diversified into the design and management of field projects. By 1992, it had about 35 staff. By 1996, it had grown to 75. By 1998, it had branches in all the regions and provinces of Pakistan and had over 300 staff. By 2000, it had become the driving force behind the growth of IUCN's programme and organizational structure throughout Asia. Throughout, this period, IUCNP received TA from a variety of donors.

2. The critical success factors here included:

- The ability to take advantage of the opportunities that are constantly available in a difficult and dysfunctional environment.
- The ability of the organization to devise and constantly refine its strategy of building its own capacity.

- The determination of national staff to build a Pakistani organization that could compare with the best NGOs in the world.
- The ability to use ‘gap filling’ TA for productive purposes.
- The need for such an organization to manage its stakeholders, both domestic and foreign, with skills and discipline.

### *Building the rule of law in Tanzania*

1. Few challenges can be more daunting than building the rule of law in a highly politicized environment. Politicians have little patience with notions to do with the separation of powers, the independence of the judiciary and limitations to political interventions. Budgets, even for the basics of pens, paper and court rooms are always derisory. Legal issues in many countries have no real constituency ready to fight for their attention. And such issues are often seen as foreign concerns and of little importance to a poor country. And yet Tanzania has made genuine progress in building the rule of law over the past twenty-five years with the help of some substantial TA.<sup>35</sup>

2. The critical success factors here included:

- The critical role of a national champion i.e. the chief Justice of Tanzania, over a period of two decades and his access to support and resources through an international network of legal experts. The critical aspect of ‘ownership’ began with the personal not the organizational.
- A sense of history and timing. The Tanzanian political system would not accept the idea of the separation of powers and legal restrictions on political decisions in the 1970s. No intervention, no matter how well designed, could have an impact. By the mid-1980s, the political dynamics had shifted. Space and opportunities for reform had opened up.
- As the economy shifted to a more market-based approach and as the political system evolved toward a multi-party model, new domestic constituencies arose supporting legal reform and outside TA.

### *The Madrassas Schools in East Africa*

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<sup>35</sup> This whole story has been told in Jennifer Widner, *Building The Rule of Law: Francis Nyalali and the road to judicial independence in Africa*, 2000.

1. The Islamic community in Mombasa decided to establish a system of madrassa schools for early childhood education that could combine both the teaching of both Islamic values and certain non-religious skills that would allow children to make their way in a secular society. The Aga Khan Foundation and the Bernard Van Leer Foundation combined their efforts to help community groups set up schools in the Mombasa area, then in a few rural areas of the Coast Province and then later in Uganda and Zanzibar. TA was provided to the overall programme over a period of six years. The schools themselves were managed and partly paid for by local Islamic communities but had to meet strict performance standards laid down by the programme. Schools eventually graduated and were then given funds to start a community endowment.

2. The critical success factors were the following:

- A disciplined focus by programme staff on organizational learning and its linkage to performance.
- An ability to take technical advice on early childhood education and customize it to fit into a quite different cultural and religious context.
- An emphasis on ‘what if’ divergent thinking. Staff were encouraged to come up with ingenious solutions such as the community endowments.