Technical assistance:

New thinking on an old problem

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Contents

Executive summary

This study explores the landscape of technical assistance (TA) to governments in developing countries. It looks at the nature and extent of TA as a form of development assistance, at the track record of traditional approaches and at the emergence of a new paradigm. The study considers both the theory and practice of TA, exploring why there has been a loss of confidence in traditional approaches and at how far the development industry has come in developing alternatives.

What is technical assistance?

For the purpose of this study, technical assistance is defined as '*knowledge-based assistance to governments intended to shape policies and institutions, support implementation and build organisational capacity.*' Definitional differences and inconsistent data make it difficult to estimate the volume of development aid allocated to TA. In 2016, OECD aid statistics recorded US$18.4 billion (current prices) in spending on dedicated Technical Cooperation programmes, but TA packaged with other forms of development assistance is not captured in the data. Clearly, TA is a substantial global industry in its own right, with some sources estimating that it could be as much as 25% of total aid or $40 billion annually.

TA has been part of development practice since the decolonisation period, with objectives that have evolved over time. Some of the earliest TA work centred on filling capacity gaps in newly independent countries, by training staff and helping to establish and equip new government agencies. From the 1980s, TA programmes recognised that capacity building was not just about skilling up individuals, but also addressing wider organisational and institutional constraints. Development practitioners now largely agree that for TA to be effective and sustainable, it needs to include a focus on individuals, organisations and institutions. TA now includes a wide range of practices, from training programmes to on-the-job coaching and mentoring, the 'twinning' of institutions, financial and technical support for cross-cutting public sector reforms, flexible TA facilities and 'triangular cooperation', where donors facilitate exchange of knowledge between developing countries. TA is often bundled with other assistance, in order to help developing countries manage investment projects or implement policy reforms linked to policy-based lending or sector programmes.

Does TA work?

The evidence on whether TA 'works' is limited. Alongside the difficulties in measuring the scale of expenditure, there has been systematic underinvestment in the monitoring and evaluation of TA, linked partly to methodological difficulties in measuring and attributing results. The evidence that is available is largely sceptical. The fact that similar TA projects have been repeated for decades in the same contexts suggests a pattern of repeated failure. There is little evidence of cumulative impact, leading to better development outcomes over time. There is, however, evidence that TA has generated 'islands of capacity' – particularly for discrete tasks that are easily monitored and in institutional sites that are insulated from the rest of the public sector.

The limited record of success is often attributed to weaknesses in TA delivery. TA is often used to support the delivery of aid programmes (e.g. within project implementation units), with limited ambition for building long-term capacity. It tends to be supply driven, reflecting donor reform agendas rather than national priorities. There are widespread problems with capacity substitution, where

external experts under pressure to 'get the job done' displace rather than build local capacity. TA is generally poorly coordinated among donors, resulting in multiple and often inconsistent offers of support to counterpart institutions. The literature concludes that TA has been largely immune from efforts to improve aid effectiveness, from the 2005 Paris Declaration onwards.

The theory underpinning TA has also come into criticism in recent years for resting on simplistic assumptions. It is seen as pursuing technical solutions to what are often political challenges. If capacity gaps are not the binding constraint on organisational performance, there is no reason to expect TA to deliver better results. Attempts to transplant Western institutional models and best practice standards has a poor record, and implies a misunderstanding of how institutions develop within each national context. There is a strong suggestion in the literature that donor pressure for institutional change can lead to misleading or perverse results, sometimes replicating the forms of Western institutions without producing the expected functionality.

The new paradigm: politically informed, adaptive TA

In recent years, a new conceptualisation of TA has emerged, linked to growing interest in the politics of development. The new paradigm understands institutional failures in terms of power and politics, rather than capacity gaps. While the new approaches are given various labels – Doing Development Differently, Thinking and Working Politically, Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation – they share common themes:

- The pursuit of localised and contextual solutions, based on an understanding of economic interests and power dynamics.
- Beginning with problems, rather than solutions, and pursuing change through problem-solving methods.
- Working towards incremental improvement in existing capacity, rather than attempting comprehensive reforms to fill capacity gaps.
- Ensuring local actors are in the driving seat in identifying problems and solutions.

The new approach recognises that institutional reform is messy, unpredictable and prone to setbacks. It foregoes the pursuit of predetermined institutional 'solutions', in favour of a flexible, adaptive and often opportunistic approach to identifying what will work in each context. It implies a substantial change in the role of the TA provider, from external expert to a broker or facilitator of change.

Some donors have been experimenting with new programme models for politically informed, adaptive TA. The TA facility is on such model. Generally managed by a contractor, it provides a flexible pool of resources for deploying TA to a counterpart institution or group of institutions, able to take advantage of opportunities as they emerge and scale back activities that prove unsuccessful. Other models include working through arms'-length intermediaries, which are free of the constraints of standard programme management systems and able to form relationships of trust with the counterparts.

While there is strong support in the literature for the new paradigm, evidence of its effectiveness is still emerging. There is a growing number of case studies showing that positive results have been achieved, but the basis for attributing results is not always clear and there is limited evidence as to whether the successes could be scaled up or replicated in different contexts. We do not at this stage know whether the approach calls for exceptionally skilled implementers, or whether it is based on a set of techniques that can be taught to anyone.

For the time being, the influence of this new thinking on TA practice appears fairly modest. There has been a significant increase in investment in political economy analysis and the importance of flexible and adaptive working is frequently referenced in donor documents. However, donor rules and procedures tend to work against the uptake of the new approaches. These include inflexible and overly technocratic designs, and programme management tools (e.g., logframes) that lock programmes into set deliverables. Pressures to spend money efficiently and achieve lower unit costs can also work against experimental approaches. The literature cautions against the danger that the development community ends up paying lip service to the new approach. It suggests that donors will need to change their practices in multiple ways, including:

- More investment in understanding local contexts and tailoring their programmes accordingly
- Creating more space in their programme management cycle for analysis, learning and adaptation
- In the selection of implementing partners, more emphasis on soft skills
- Developing alternative methods of accountability, that focus on promoting good practice and high-quality engagement rather than the efficient delivery of predetermined outputs
- An emphasis on small investments that deliver catalytic change, rather than delivering results at scale
- A different approach to risk management, with an emphasis on learning from failure.

There is an emerging body of guidance and lesson learning on various aspects of the new approach, including diagnostics, programme design, contracting, staffing, programme management, oversight and monitoring and evaluation. However, learning in this area remains in its infancy. To help the new paradigm become established in development practice, there is a need for more investment in:

- Monitoring and evaluation that identifies not just successful results, but how they were achieved
- Analysis of how donors rules and systems create incentives for and against the shift to more effective TA
- Further development of guidance and practical tools, to promote a shared understanding of good practice.

Acronyms

Abbreviation	Definition
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AGI	Africa Governance Initiative
AIPEG	Australia Indonesia Partnership for Economic Governance Facility
BSI	Budget Strengthening Initiative
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFAT	Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DFID	UK's Department for International Development
EAP	Economic Advancement Programme
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
FCAS	Fragile and Conflict Affected States
GPG	Global Partners Governance
GSDRC	Governance and Social Development Resource Centre
ICAI	UK Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KAPE	Knowledge, Application, Practice, Effect
KPP	Knowledge, Policy, Power
ODA	Official Development Assistance
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPM	Oxford Policy Management
PBAs	Programme Based Approaches
PEA	Political Economy Analysis
PFM	Public Financial Management

PIUs	Project Implementation Units
ST	Strategy Testing
TA	Technical Assistance
TAF	The Asia Foundation
TMEA	TradeMark East Africa
ToC	Theory of Change
TWP	Thinking and Working Politically
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

1. Introduction

The transfer of knowledge has always been central to development assistance – as important, from some perspectives, as development finance. To move towards more productive economies that generate sustainable and inclusive growth, developing countries need new policies and institutional capacities. It seems natural that they would look to international development partners for technical solutions to development challenges. Yet the process of transferring knowledge and building capacity is complex and the record of technical assistance decidedly mixed.

The technical assistance industry is worth tens of billions of dollars every year, yet it is difficult to find hard information on its extent, objectives and achievements. It is difficult to identify spending on technical assistance separately from other aid modalities. Underinvestment in monitoring and evaluation and technical challenges, including the long time periods required to achieve results, have made it difficult to measure outcomes.

The evidence that is available is largely sceptical about the contribution of technical assistance to development outcomes. There is evidence of pockets of success, particularly where technical assistance focuses on specific, limited and monitorable tasks, where patient engagement over time can help to build 'islands of capacity'. However, there is relatively little evidence that the technical assistance industry as a whole has led to large-scale, cumulative impacts.

Faced with a limited record of success, there has been considerable effort in recent years to diagnose the shortcomings in technical assistance – at both theoretical and practical levels – and to come up with new approaches. The current thinking stresses the need for politically informed, context-sensitive, locally-led, adaptive and problem-focused approaches.

This landscaping study explores how the field of technical assistance to governments in developing countries has evolved over recent years. It explores what technical assistance means in practical terms, why there has been a loss of confidence in traditional methods, and what new approaches have emerged. The purpose of the study is to help the Open Society Foundations' Economic Advancement Programme (EAP) to improve its support for reformers in developing countries. It is hoped that the study will also make a useful contribution to wider debates among donors and practitioners about the purpose and function of technical assistance.

"The challenge of changing institutions that structure human interaction to produce better development outcomes is a central problem for development thinkers, development agencies and practitioners," The Asia Foundation, 2011.[1]

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[1] The Asia Foundation (2011) *Built on dreams, grounded in reality,* link

2.   **What is technical assistance?**

2.1   Definitions

For the purpose of this study, 'technical assistance' is defined as **'knowledge-based assistance to governments intended to shape policies and institutions, support implementation and build organisational capacity.'**

'Capacity' is defined by Teskey (2010) as **"the ability of organisations to carry out, effectively and efficiently, programmes of coordinated action in pursuit of formal agreed goals."** The OECD (2006) defines it as **"the ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully."***[2]*

Technical assistance (TA) is one of the most commonly used delivery mechanisms in international development assistance. It became part of the development lexicon in the decolonisation era, as development organisations offered support to newly independent countries in building up core government functions. TA is also central to south-south cooperation, whereby developing countries support each other through the transfer of knowledge and provision of capacity-building support.[3]

TA remains a prominent feature of development assistance today. However, there is a range of terminology in use, often used interchangeably and imprecisely. Some of the key terms are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: TA terminology

Key Term	Definition
Technical assistance:	Knowledge-based assistance to governments intended to shape policies and institutions, support implementation and build organisational capacity.
Technical cooperation:	A term for TA that implies a more equal partnership between provider and beneficiary.[4] The term has increased in popularity as the development community has strengthened its focus on country ownership and leadership of development assistance.
Capacity building:	Assistance focused on strengthening organisations' capacity and skills, but can encompass various levels of capacity, from individual to whole of society.[5] Popularised in the 1990s as development practitioners recognised the need for 'enhanced capacity to be treated as a goal in its own right, not merely a means for achieving other development

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[2] OECD (2006) *The challenge of capacity development: working towards good practice*, link
[3] See for example the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme (ITAC) – link.
[4] GSDRC (2009) *Helpdesk Research Report: Changing approaches to technical assistance,* link.
[5] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* link.

	objectives.' [6] It is often used interchangeably with TA, although some argue that it implies greater attention to ensuring the partner country's capacity to set and implement its own development vision.[7]
Capacity development:	The term emerged in the 1990s to describe the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time.[8] Though often used interchangeably with capacity building, it acknowledges the agency of the partner country.

2.2 Spending on Technical Assistance

Definitional differences and inconsistent data make it difficult to estimate the amount of development aid allocated to TA. There is no doubt, however, that the amount is substantial.

OECD statistics include a figure on 'Technical Cooperation' – defined as **'grants to nationals of aid recipient countries receiving education or training at home or abroad or payments to consultants, advisers and similar personnel as well as teachers and administrators serving in recipient countries (including the cost of associated equipment)'.**[9] In 2016, the OECD recorded spending of US$18.4 billion (current prices) on Technical Cooperation, including $15.6 billion from OECD donors, $0.2 billion from non-OECD donors, $2.4 billion from multilaterals and $0.2 billion from private donors.[10] The OECD notes, however, that TA packaged with capital projects or wider aid programme is not reported separately.[11] These figures therefore refer only to freestanding TA programmes.

These figures are likely to understate the real scale of TA. Some sources in the literature estimate that it could be as much as 25% of total aid,[12] or up to $40 billion annually.[13] Action Aid's 2011 report on *Real Aid* estimated that at least one third of global aid is spent on TA.[14] While these estimates are impossible to verify, it is clear that TA is a significant industry in its own right. This raises the question, as suggested in the *Real Aid* report, that there are powerful economic interests involved in the delivery of TA that may be an influence on donor practice.

The extent to which bilateral donors use TA differs. In 2016, according to OECD statistics, the three bilateral donors with the largest spend on 'experts and other TA' were Germany ($918 million), the UK ($849 million) and the US ($841 million).[15] However, when we look at TA spend as a proportion of total

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[6] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* pp.7, link.

[7] Jones et al (2012) *Providing practical guidance for in-country programming: the value of analyzing knowledge, policy and power*, link.

[8] OECD (2011) *Perspectives Note: The Enabling Environment for Capacity Development*, link.

[9] OECD DAC (2018) *Technical Co-operation,* link.

[10] OECD.Stat (2018) *Aid (ODA) disbursements to countries and regions [DAC2a],* link.

[11] OECD DAC (2018) *Technical Co-operation,* link.

[12] Manuel, C. (2016) *Forget the money: De-linking technical assistance*, LASER Fourth Synthesis Paper, shared by email.

[13] Based on 25% of ODA gross disbursements in 2015 – see OECD.Stat, link. NB. It is important to note that estimates in the literature vary and the basis for them is not always clear.

[14] Action Aid (2011) *Real Aid,* link.

[15] OECD (2018) OECD.Stat, Total flows by donor to aid type 'experts and other technical assistance, link.

ODA, the three bilateral donors with the largest proportional spend on 'experts and other TA' in 2016 were New Zealand (11.9%), Australia (9.8%) and Korea (9.3%).[16]

Box 1: Technical cooperation agencies

Some bilateral donors have a dedicated technical cooperation agency, as part of the administrative of their aid. For example, the German GIZ is a government-owned enterprise that helps governments and public authorities and provides companies across the developing world with policy reform and capacity development. With over 17,000 employees in 130 countries,[17] it has in-house expertise on a wide range of development topics, as well as in organisational development, education and training. The majority of their work is commissioned and paid for by the Germany government, but it can also be engaged by other donor or development agencies or directly by the partner country. For example, GIZ has been supporting the Ethiopian government since 2005 with the planning and construction of 13 public universities.

Another donor country with a dedicated technical cooperation agency is France, whose agency for international technical expertise, 'Expertise France', was created in 2015 to support the transfer of French expertise to developing and emerging countries. Its mission is "to meet the demand from partner countries seeking to enhance the quality of their public policies in order to address the environmental, social, economic and security challenges they are facing."[18] For example, Expertise France has been supporting national and local authorities in Benin, Gabon, Kenya and Uganda to develop and implement low-carbon and climate-resilient development strategies.[19]

2.3 Objectives

TA is used by donors for a range of purposes, which have also evolved over time. Some of the earliest TA work centred on filling capacity gaps in newly independent countries, by training staff, equipping government institutions and helping to establish or reorganise new government bodies.[20] This usually consisted of bringing in technical experts from donor countries to work with and train government staff, together with scholarships for government officials to study abroad. Inevitably, deploying international experts involved a degree of gap filling or capacity substitution, and did not always achieve long-term results.

From the 1980s, TA programmes began to recognise that capacity building was not just about skilling up individuals, but also addressing wider organisational and institutional constraints. Institutions are the formal and informal rules and norms that organise social, political and economic relations.[21] These can be formal (e.g. written constitutions, laws and government systems) or informal (e.g. social norms,

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[16] OECD (2018) *OECD.Stat, Total flows by donor to aid type 'experts and other technical assistance,* link.
[17] Troilo, P. (2011) *Alleviating the confusion: Germany's new aid structure and business model*, Devex, 26 September 2011, link.
[18] Expertise France (2017) *Our missions,* link.
[19] Expertise France (2017) *Africa4Climate,* link.
[20] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* link.
[21] North (1990) in GSDRC (2014) *Defining Institutions,* link.

customs and traditions).[22] Teskey (2010) describes a shift in focus in the 1980s from individuals to organisations, and then a second evolution in the late 1990s to focus on institutions. Each evolution added another layer to the theory and practice of TA, building on previous approaches rather than discarding them.

Table 2: The evolution of TA approaches from the 1970s

Period	Focus	Mode of capacity development	Dominant ideas	TA paradigm
1970s	The individual	▪ Degree level training ▪ Skills acquisition ▪ Tools and equipment	▪ Counterparts ▪ Gap filling	▪ Scholarships ▪ Developed country training ▪ Manpower reviews ▪ Line positions ▪ On-the-job training
1980s - mid 1990s	The organisation	Reconfiguring organisational structures. Reforming and/or strengthening: ▪ Systems for policy making and analysis ▪ Systems for managing people, information, cash and assets ▪ Processes and activities that produce goods and/ or deliver services	▪ Business management ▪ Business process re-engineering	▪ Organisational audits ▪ Organisational restructuring ▪ Organisational twinning ▪ Job evaluation and grading ▪ Job descriptions ▪ Technical cooperation advisors ▪ Consultants
Late 1990s	The institutional environment	Incentive structures within formal organisations: ▪ Human resources management (pay, discipline, performance management) The wider institutional environment: ▪ The accountability of the executive to the legislature and to citizens ▪ Accessible and responsive government ▪ The legal and judicial framework	New institutional economics (rules of the game): ▪ Exit ▪ Voice ▪ Loyalty and compliance	▪ Sector or "whole" budget support (setting the incentive framework) ▪ Public expenditure management ▪ Performance management ▪ Pooled TA ▪ Empowerment and accountability ▪ Knowledge economy

Source: Adapted from Teskey, G. (2010)

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[22] Leftwich and Sen (2010) and Berman (2013) in GSDRC (2014) *Defining Institutions,* link.

It is now broadly agreed that, for TA to be effective and sustainable, it needs to either work across, or at least be sighted on all three levels (individual, organisation and institution). Teskey (2010) notes that a focus on only part of the system can restrict what individuals and organisations are able to achieve as a result of capacity building. He cites examples of systems where well-managed organisations are hampered by poor incentive regimes, including low pay, nepotism and corruption.[23]

"Organisations operate in a wider institutional environment that either may support or circumvent the organisation's ability to carry out its formal collective goals."[24] Teskey, 2010.

TA has also been used as a modality for encouraging policy reform. The 1990s are associated with the use of policy conditionality to drive structural adjustment in developing economies, principally by the international financial institutions.[25] By the 2000s, it was widely recognised that meaningful policy change cannot be externally imposed, and attention turned to promoting nationally owned development strategies, at the national or sectoral level. Donors provided technical inputs into those strategies, often in the form of studies prepared by international experts, and assistance with data collection, stakeholder consultation and the drafting of policies and strategies. This function of TA has also matured over time, with a growing interest on the question of how to encourage evidence-based policy making and greater responsiveness to public needs and preferences. This has included support for public consultation processes and the wider 'knowledge economy' – the networks of institutions within and outside government that produce, disseminate, interpret and use policy-related knowledge and evidence.

2.4   Common forms of TA

TA includes a wide variety of activities and can be delivered through a range of different mechanisms. The categories are not well established and the literature does not attempt an exhaustive list. The Reality of Aid (2016) list five modes of TA that have been in constant use since the 1970s:

- Embedding technical experts into government ministries to develop capacity and/or support organisational change
- Embedding technical experts within aid projects to support design and implementation
- Providing policy advice, often linked to development finance
- Providing advice to influence government legislation and regulations
- Sharing of experience through South-South Cooperation and/or civil society networks.[26]

Other common TA activities or modalities include:

- Scholarships and training courses
- On-the-job training, mentoring and coaching by embedded experts

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[23] Teskey, G. (2010) *Notes on capacity development – with a focus on fragile and conflict affected states.*
[24] Teskey, G. (2010) *Notes on capacity development – with a focus on fragile and conflict affected states,* pp.3.
[25] World Bank, *Review of World Bank conditionality: the theory and practice of conditionality – a literature review,* July 2005, link.
[26] The Reality of Aid (2016) *Technical cooperation as an aid modality: Demand-led or donor-driven?* Link.

- Twinning or peer-to-peer partnerships between equivalent institutions in the two countries, that may include visits, secondments, training and technical advice
- TA programmes or facilities: programmes with flexible funding, able to engage technical experts for short- or long-term roles in support of a set of reform of capacity-building objectives
- Funding for intermediary organisations able to partner with government institutions in developing countries, operating with a level of autonomy from the donor
- Financial and technical support for horizontal or cross-cutting civil service reforms, addressing issues such as organisational structures, pay and conditions, recruitment and training, performance incentives, accountability relationships and anti-corruption measures
- Triangular cooperation: financial support by an OECD donor or multilateral agency for technical cooperation between two non-OECD countries (South-South cooperation), usually to enable low-income countries to draw on the experience of a middle-income or emerging market country (see Box 2)
- Direct South-South cooperation that supports technical cooperation between developing countries (see Box 2)
- Financial or technical support to government or non-government organisations that produce, disseminate or consume policy-related knowledge and evidence, such as universities, think tanks, the media, parliamentary committees, statistical institutes, finance and planning ministries etc.

Box 2: South-South and triangular cooperation

'South-South cooperation' is the process whereby developing countries pursue their capacity development objectives by exchanging technical know-how with other developing countries. It recognises that advice and support from countries that have grappled with similar challenges in living memory may be more relevant than 'best practice' solutions from OECD countries. India, for example, provides a significant amount of development assistance to Afghanistan, much of which is technical assistance aimed at supporting Afghanistan to become self-sufficient in a number of sectors.[27] **'Triangular cooperation'** refers to support from OECD countries or multilateral agencies for South-South cooperation.

The importance of South-South cooperation was recognised at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana, in 2008. The UN has an **Office for South-South Cooperation** and the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Working Party on Aid Effectiveness hosts a Southern-led platform on South-South cooperation. The literature suggests however, that momentum for South-South Cooperation has been tempered by a combination of geopolitical tensions between certain southern governments and a lack of consensus around what a practical model of South-South Cooperation model might look like. [28] Positive examples of South-South Cooperation can be found and include, for example, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development

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[27] Mullen, R. D. (2017) 'India in Afghanistan: Understanding Development Assistance by Emerging Donors to Conflict-Affected Countries', *Changing Landscape of Assistance to Conflict Affected States: Emerging and Traditional Donors and Opportunities for Collaboration Policy Brief no. 10,* link.

[28] See for example Fues, T. (2017) *Is the romance of south-south cooperation coming to an end?,* link and Lengyel, M. and Malacaiza, B. (2011) *What do we talk when we talk about South-South Cooperation? The construction of a concept from an empirical basis,* link.

(IGAD) initiative through which Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda provided capacity development assistance to South Sudan. India has also committed to providing over 2,000 annual training slots and scholarships to Afghan nationals through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation programme and other scholarship schemes, including in agricultural research.[29] Overall however, the area of South-South Cooperation remains largely unexplored and there is little documented evidence on best practice.[30]

2.5   Bundling TA with other assistance

Dedicated or free-standing TA programmes are thought to make up only a small share of TA assistance. Most is embedded within other forms of development assistance, where it plays a range of functions.

Supporting the delivery of investment projects. Investment projects funded by loans from development banks are often implemented by project implementation units (PIUs). Used where the borrower government lacks the required procurement, financial management and project management capacity. These units are established outside the regular civil service structure, allowing them to recruit specialists at competitive salaries and operate according to the banks' requirements. The costs of training and operating the PIU may count as technical assistance, along with related support for procurement and financial management.

Supporting policy-based lending: Policy-based lending from multilateral development banks consists of budget support designed to help with the costs of implementing an agreed set of policy actions. In principle, it is offered only in sectors or areas where the recipient government has a demonstrated reform commitment. TA may be provided in conjunction with a development policy loan to support analytical work or capacity building of sector institutions.[31]

Supporting programmatic assistance: The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness encouraged donors to increase their use of programme-based approaches (PBAs), whereby donors provided coordinated funding for a government-led programme of action in a particular sector or area, using national systems for implementation to the extent possible. PBAs are often supported by TA to help the counterparts develop a sector-wide plan or strategy, support policy reforms or strengthen national systems for financial management and procurement.

In the social sectors, this may take the form of a TA fund, linked to a wider programme of support. For example, sector budget support in education might be accompanied by technical support for education policy, budgeting issues, curriculum development, teacher training and monitoring and evaluation.

In the infrastructure sectors, both development banks and bilateral donors provide technical assistance to promote policy and regulatory reforms, strengthen institutions and improve the selection, design

[29] Mullen, R. and Arora, K. (2016) *Indian Development Cooperation with Afghanistan and the 'Afghan-India Friendship Dam'*, Policy Brief, Centre for Policy Research, link.

[30] Tarp, K. N. (2015) *South-South Cooperation – A determined step into the unknown,* link.

[31] Asian Development Bank (2016), *Operations Manual Bank Policies: Policy-Based Lending*, link.

and delivery of national infrastructure projects.[32] This reflects a growing concern with the 'soft' or institutional side of infrastructure development and a recognition that, as developing countries gain access to new sources of infrastructure finance, strengthening their capacity to make better use of that finance is a useful objective for TA projects. Donors also support project preparation facilities, which help fund the high costs of feasibility studies and project design. Helping the partner country develop bankable projects increases their access to international finance.

Table 2: Common uses of TA

Donor	How they commonly use TA	Illustrative examples
International Financial Institutions (IFIs), including regional development banks	TA is a major part of the work of IFIs, most commonly used to: ▪ support developing country governments to strengthen public financial management (PFM), procurement and economic policy-making systems; ▪ provide advisory support to lending programmes; and ▪ provide analytical support to economic and sector work.	▪ **International Monetary Fund** spends about one quarter of its operating budget on capacity building,[33] often backing wider programme recommendations with TA.[34] Its focus is on providing TA and training to help governments build effective policies and institutions, usually working with finance ministries and central banks.[35] ▪ The **World Bank's** offer includes 'reimbursable advisory services', which provide clients with access to customised TA on a reimbursable basis, either as stand-alone projects or to complement existing programmes.[36] ▪ **Asian Development Bank** provides transaction TA, which directly benefits a project or is financed by ADB (e.g. project preparation, project implementation support, policy advice), and knowledge and support TA which includes general institution capacity building, policy advice and research.[37]
Bilateral donors	Bilateral donors most commonly use TA to: ▪ build capacity for supporting implementation of broader sectoral programmes (e.g. on health systems strengthening or regional trade agreements); and ▪ linked to the above, to unlock specific barriers to successful programme delivery. ▪ phase out of broader sectoral programming.	▪ **DFID,** for example, is using targeted TA to support the unlocking of barriers to economic development in Nepal. ▪ **USAID** is providing TA to the Ministry of Public Works in Afghanistan as part of phasing out investments in road construction. This is intended to support transition through restructuring and reform to self-sustainability.[38]

[32] The Reality of Aid (2015) *The Reality of Aid 2016 Report Theme Statement: Technical Cooperation and Capacity Development as an Aid Modality,* link.

[33] IMF (2014) *IMF Technical Assistance*, link.

[34] IMF (2008) *IMF Survey: IMF to Enhance Impact of its Technical Assistance*, link.

[35] IMF (2017) *Factsheet: IMF Capacity Development,* link.

[36] World Bank (2018) *Products and Services*, link.

[37] ADB (2017) *What is ADB technical assistance (TA)?* link.

[38] USAID (2016) *Road Sector Sustainability Project – Emergency Operation and Maintenance,* link.

	Many bilateral donors also support the 'twinning' of counterpart institutions in the two countries, to support exchange of technical know-how.	▪ **Australia's DFAT** has a series of economic governance facilities that provide technical advice and capacity-building support for economic reform – e.g. in Indonesia, focusing on areas such as tax, public financial management, trade and fiscal decentralisation; and in Vietnam, focused on competition policy. ▪ As part of its pre-accession process and European Neighbourhood Policy, the **European Union** supports twinning of government agencies between EU member states and partner countries in a wide range of areas.
Private Foundations	Private foundations have traditionally operated their own development projects or supported non-government bodies, such as NGOs and social movements. Some have also begun to work with governments on policy and institutional reform, although on a relatively small scale.	▪ The **Children's Investment Fund** is using TA to support government and private sector bodies on transition to carbon-neutral development in South Asia. ▪ The **Tony Blair Institute for Global Change** works with selected governments across Africa, supporting policy making and implementation processes at the centre of government and providing technical and capacity building support in line agencies. ▪ **The Asia Foundation** aims to play a catalytic role in advancing development and social progress in Asian countries, including through politically informed support for policy change.

We come back in section 3.3.2 to the question of whether bundling TA with other aid, especially financial support, results in supply-driven aid or implicit conditionality.

3. Critiques of TA

3.1 The state of the evidence base

The body of evidence on the effectiveness of TA is relatively weak. There has been little detailed analysis of whether some types of TA have been more successful than others, or of the conditions under which TA is most likely to effective.

The data challenges include:

- **A lack of data on the nature, extent and objectives of TA.** Simpson (2013) describes TA as a blurry and contested form of development assistance, noting that 'the development sector is far from having a common theory about how external advisers affect change in developing

countries and what they can realistically hope to achieve.'[39] The Reality of Aid Report 2016, using the 'technical cooperation' terminology, notes that it is difficult to measure the scale or value of different types.

- **Underinvestment in monitoring and evaluation.** The OECD reports that one of the most persistent weaknesses of TA is the lack of adequate monitoring, highlighting that TA providers do not undertake systematic monitoring of the recommendations they make and that scarce resources have prevented any real follow up on the effectiveness of TA.[40] Greenhill (2006) contrasts the lack of systematic analysis of TA and its contribution to capacity development with the vast amounts of money spent on it. A 2007 synthesis of evaluations of TA carried out by Danida found very little data on the effectiveness of embedded technical advisers, in particular, noting that it can be difficult to isolate this type of TA from other assistance modalities.[41] More recently, the 2016 Reality of Aid Report notes that while TA continues to play a large role in development assistance, its use and focus, and whether it meets core principles of development effectiveness, remain largely unanalysed.[42]

- **Embedding in other programmes.** Identifying the impacts of TA can also be challenging where capacity building activities are embedded into wider operations and are not tracked, monitored and evaluated as core objectives.[43] The World Bank (2005) notes that 'where TA is a component intended to complement a broader sector programme for example, the modalities and strategies of TA are often left out of the sectoral strategy and therefore do not get reported on.'[44] This suggests that the majority of TA is not tracked or evaluated.

- **Methodological challenges with assessing results.** A 2006 European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) report on Belgian technical cooperation highlights 'formidable methodological challenges associated with assessing TA personnel effectiveness, particularly when capacity building is the main objective.'[45] In the same year, an OPM evaluation of DFID's support to TA highlighted the challenge of drawing conclusions on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of TA personnel because a) capacity was not benchmarked at the beginning of TA projects, and b) it was difficult to identify outputs, largely due to a lack of government commitment, uncertain mandates, management weaknesses and design flaws.[46] The World Bank (2005) also recognises that its own information and reporting on TA has been focused on outputs (e.g. the number of participants trained) and has failed to measure learning outcomes or performance improvements. It concludes that knowledge among World Bank staff of good TA practice is as a result poorly developed.[47]

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[39] Simpson, R. (2013) *Does technical assistance need a makeover?* The Guardian, 19 June 2013, link.

[40] OECD (undated) 'Technical Assistance in Cambodia, FY1998-2003', pp.7-29, chapter in *Evaluation of the Technical Assistance Provided by the IMF,* link.

[41] Danida (2007) *Synthesis on Evaluations of Technical Assistance,* Evaluation Study, link.

[42] The Reality of Aid (2016) *Technical cooperation as an aid modality: Demand-led or donor-driven?* Link.

[43] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* pp.18, link.

[44] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* pp.18, link.

[45] ECDPM (2007) in Danida (2007) *Synthesis of evaluations on technical assistance*, October 2007, link.

[46] Danida (2007) *Synthesis of evaluations on technical assistance*, October 2007, link.

[47] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* pp.18, link.

- **Time lags.** The lengthy period of time before capacity building has a noticeable or measurable impact is another difficulty. Woodhatch et al (2011) note that 'meaningful, sustainable results are premised on proper investments in capacity development and these results materialize at different levels and at different times, along a country's development trajectory.'[48] Alari and Thomas (2016) question whether the absence of success in many cases, and in particular in cases of large-scale transformation efforts, is simply a reflection of the difficulty of such changes and of the fact that these changes, in reality, take decades.[49]

"There is little data-based analysis of the overall effectiveness of technical cooperation as an aid instrument, whether in terms of cost/benefit, impact on growth, fiscal impact or other financial measures," OECD DAC, 2006.[50]

- **Learning is not applied.** There is little evidence from the literature that a body of learning has emerged from TA practice and been applied in order to improve practice. In 2005, the World Bank reflected on its capacity building work in Africa between 1995 and 2004, noting that less than one-quarter of projects reviewed incorporated lessons on capacity building from past projects in their design.[51] It also found that at project completion stage, lessons about capacity building were few or stated only in highly general terms.[52] Some of the literature questions whether it is in the interest of donors to expose their TA to rigorous scrutiny. Keijzer and de Lange (2015) note that evaluation reports of individual capacity building interventions are rarely published, making it difficult to learn from past experience and hampering overall accountability.[53] Woodhatch et al. (2011) argue that much more needs to be done to capture the results from investments in capacity building.

3.2   Evidence on the effectiveness of TA

While the evidence base is not particularly strong, in this section we assess what the literature suggests about the practical effectiveness of TA. There is a general consensus that the record of TA has been largely disappointing – certainly compared to the scale of expenditure. The evidence suggests that it has fallen short of expectations both in terms of outcomes (building sustainable capacity) and impact (contribution to poverty reduction). Action Aid goes so far as to describe TA as ineffective, stating that it fails at both levels.[54]

[48] Woodhatch, T., Casazza, A., Lucas, B. and Werter, F. (2011) *Capacity Results: Case stories on capacity development and sustainable results,* pp.vi, link.

[49] Alari, C. and Thomas, P. (2016) *Increasing the Impact of Aid Interventions to Support Centre of Government Reforms: A Paper on the National School of Government International's Approach,* pp.24, link.

[50] OECD DAC (2006) *Development Cooperation Report 2005*, pp.119, link.

[51] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* pp.21, link.

[52] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* pp.21, link.

[53] Keijzer, N. and de Lange, P. (2015) 'Who's in charge here? Interrogating reform resistance in capacity development support', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.29-38, link.

[54] Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.24, link.

Andrews et al. (2012) argue that five decades of large unsuccessful capacity building support suggests a generic theory of change (ToC) that is deeply flawed. They reiterate earlier observations by Greenhill (2006) that the fact that TA projects have continued for so long, often in the same countries and sectors, suggests a pattern of repeated failure. Booth (2014) notes that both evidence and experience on the ground now suggest that standard formulas for improving public sector management have little real impact and fail to improve the way bureaucracies or political systems work in low-income settings.[55] Greenhill (2006) also references an OECD study that attempted to draw correlations between TA and economic growth but found no positive relationship.[56]

In 1993, the UNDP published the Berg report on technical cooperation, entitled 'Rethinking Technical Cooperation – Reforms for Capacity Building in Africa'. The report concluded that 'almost everybody acknowledges the ineffectiveness of technical cooperation in what is or should be its major objective; achievement of greater self-reliance in the recipient countries by building institutions and strengthening local capacities in national economic management.'[57] More recent literature notes that TA often helps lead to changes in the 'form' of institutions, without necessarily affecting their function. For example, Williamson (2015) notes that 'while institutional capacity, systems and processes have been developed, commensurate progress in the behaviour of individuals and institutions and improvement in public sector outcomes, have often not followed.'[58]

"Significant variability is found on whether agencies have been able to start using or enforcing the new technical knowledge [gained through IMF capacity building] and whether, as a result of these actions, there is a final impact on the ground" IMF 2005.[59]

Much of the literature also reports that technical experts sent to build capacity often end up taking on gap-filling roles, with no long-term results. The World Bank (2005) recognises that where TA has been used to fill gaps in skills needed to manage Bank-funded projects, it has had little real impact on strengthening client capacity.[60] A decade later, Land et al (2015) similarly highlight that too much 'doing' and not enough facilitation has resulted in capacity substitution and a plethora of uncoordinated projects, particularly prior to the emergence of aid effectiveness principles during the 1990s and 2000s.[61] Alari and Thomas (2016) argue that the inevitable pressure for progress at output level increases the likelihood that external support is deployed to make up for local capacity gaps. While this may produce short-term progress towards targets and milestones, it will not address underlying capability challenges and often results in a system reverting to 'business as usual' as soon as

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[55] Booth, D. (2014) *Towards politically smart, locally led development in Africa,* link.
[56] Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.29, link.
[57] Land, A., Grejin, H., Huack, V. and Ubels, J. (2015) 'Reflecting on 25 years of capacity development and emerging trends', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.1-18, link.
[58] Williamson, T. (2015) *Change in challenging contexts: How does it happen?* ODI, September 2015, pp.8, link.
[59] IMF (2005) *Evaluation of the technical assistance provided by the International Monetary Fund*, pp.101, link.
[60] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* pp.xv, link.
[61] Land, A., Grejin, H., Huack, V. and Ubels, J. (2015) 'Reflecting on 25 years of capacity development and emerging trends', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.1-18, link.

temporary donor support is removed.[62] Tilley (2014) argues that where genuine capacity building roles invariably become de facto gap filling roles, the impact is limited sustainability.[63]

While the overall pattern of results is weak, there is evidence of capacity-development outcomes in specific institutional settings – sometimes referred to as 'islands of capacity'. There is an argument, first highlighted in 1987 by World Bank Economist Aruro Israel, that the more specific, monitorable and limited the task to be performed, the easier it will be to develop the organisational capacity to carry it out.[64] It is easier to build the capacity of, say, a supreme audit institution, with a small, specialised team institutionally separated from the rest of government and delivering defined and relatively monitorable results. By comparison, building the capacity of a national education system means changing the behaviour of hundreds of thousands of teachers working in remote sites whose work is difficult to assess.[65] Evidence from the IMF's provision of TA to various reform areas in Cambodia into the early 2000s, for example, suggests that banking sector reform has largely been deemed a success. The National Bank of Cambodia was supported to revamp its licensing system and reduce the number of banks from 31 to 17, helping to restore soundness in the banking system and improving public confidence. Targeted TA included the training of two teams of inspectors, one for on-site inspections and a second to oversee the implementation and compliance with a new Chart of Accounts.[66]

"[UK security and justice assistance] is at its least convincing when it attempts to deliver generic capacity improvements to central [security and justice] institutions, in the hope that this will translate into practical benefits for the poor. The institutions involved are large and cumbersome, with strong vested interests working against change. Political support for transforming their culture and ways of operating often proves short-lived or illusory. The complex nature of justice systems means that a lack of progress at a single institutional site can nullify progress at others." ICAI 2015.[67]

The literature offers other case studies of successful capacity building in specific institutional sites, these generally involved embedded technical advisers working sensitively over a lengthy period of time. For example, Tilley (2014) describes how ODI Fellows embedded into the Tanzanian Ministry of Finance helped the government to establish an Aid Coordination Department and then to support the continuing professional development of its staff. The results were reportedly still evident four years after the support had ended.

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[62] Alari, C. and Thomas, P. (2016) *Increasing the Impact of Aid Interventions to Support Centre of Government Reforms: A Paper on the National School of Government International's Approach,* pp.48, link.

[63] Tilley, H. (2014) *Demand and supply of technical assistance and lessons for the health sector: Country Perspectives Note, Tanzania,* ODI, pp.13, link.

[64] Teskey, G. (2010) *Notes on capacity development – with a focus on fragile and conflict affected states*

[65] Teskey, G. (2010) *Notes on capacity development – with a focus on fragile and conflict affected states*

[66] OECD (undated) 'Technical Assistance in Cambodia, FY1998-2003', pp.7-29, chapter in *Evaluation of the Technical Assistance Provided by the IMF,* link.

[67] Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2005) *Review of UK Development Assistance for Security and Justice*, p. 38, link.

Box 3: A country-led approach to capacity building in Rwanda

The Strategic Capacity Building Initiative (SCBI) is a capacity building initiative of the Rwandan government, designed and delivered with the support of the Tony Blair Institute. Initiated in 2011, it works by pairing international experts in long-term deployments with young Rwandan professionals engaged in a fast-track entry scheme. The international experts support the counterpart institution with development of a new function or capacity, usually of a technical nature, while training the Rwandan counterparts to take over its management. While the scheme was funded and managed by the Rwanda government (which has an agency responsible for capacity building), the Tony Blair Institute provided hands-on support for its management for a number of years before phasing out its involvement. It focused on a number of sectors (energy; mining; foreign investment promotion; agriculture) that were seen as national development priorities.

The initiative proved highly effective at skills transfer to the Rwandan counterparts. Young professionals were given early exposure to complex functions (such as negotiating foreign investment contracts or running public tenders) and, under the guidance of the international experts, progressed quickly into management positions. As one Rwandan official put it:

> "The SCBI created very high expectations of the young professionals. They were paid more than normal staff and were groomed as future experts. This created a different mentality. They were forced to learn and demonstrate constant improvement. You could see this in their daily activities – the way they expressed their ideas – they became much more confident individuals."

At the organisational level, results were most evident where a new function was being developed – such as a mining cadastre, a minerals tagging and certification system and an energy investment unit. The scheme also played an important role in the development of Rwanda's national agricultural extension service. However, it required close management to keep the resources focused on strategic capacity building needs, as the counterpart institutions had a tendency to use the international experts in ad hoc ways (Agulhas, 2016).

3.3   Critiques of TA practices

In the absence of robust data on effectiveness, much of the scepticism towards TA in the literature comes from critiques of TA practice: how it is initiated, coordinated and delivered. In this section, we examine some of the main criticisms of TA practice.

3.3.1   Using TA to support aid delivery

TA is often used to facilitate the implementation of aid projects, in contexts where donors lack confidence in partner countries' ability to procure goods and services, manage funds and implement projects to the required standards. Where this is not part of a wider process of country-led reform, the

benefits are unlikely to extend much beyond the project in question. In effect, the TA makes up an additional transaction cost for accessing aid according to donor rules and requirements. This cost needs to be balanced, however, against benefits from additional rigour that donor procedures and requirements might bring to project implementation (e.g. reduced corruption).

It is likely that a high proportion of TA projects fall into this category. Recognition of this problem led the international development community to commit to using country systems to deliver aid, wherever possible, and to phase out the use of parallel project implementation units.[68]

3.3.2   Implicit conditionality

Donors provide TA to support policies and reforms that they approve of. This creates a risk that TA projects reflect donor rather than recipient priorities, undermining their effectiveness.

Policy-based lending has its origins in the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 90s, where financial support was conditioned on measures to address macro-economic imbalances, such as reducing budget deficits, liberalising markets and privatising state-owned enterprises. Where borrower countries were in urgent need of financial support, these measures were seen as imposed by the IFIs. The literature suggests that policy conditionality (and, by extension, any associated TA) is largely ineffective at inducing reform from borrowers that are not otherwise committed to the proposed reforms.[69] The arguments in favour of policy conditionality made in the literature are that, in the right circumstances, it can help reform-minded governments to overcome vested interests and that it acts as a signalling device to investors and other lenders, indicating confidence in the borrower government's policies.[70]. There is an extensive and highly critical literature on the particular policy prescriptions associated with structural adjustment (often termed 'the Washington consensus'), focusing on their failure to secure growth, their negative distributional impacts and their impingement on national sovereignty.[71]

"Putting external conditions on governments' behaviour through structural adjustment loans has not proven to be very effective in achieving widespread policy improvements or in raising growth potential. If the original objective was "adjustment with growth", there is not much evidence that structural adjustment lending generated either adjustment or growth."[72] Easterly, 2005.

From around the 2000s, the IFIs responded to these criticisms by changing their conditionality practices, reducing the number of conditions and taking measures designed to promote country

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[68] OECD (2005) *The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Five Principles for Smart Aid,* link.

[69] World Bank (2005), *Review of World Bank conditionality: The theory and practice of conditionality – a literature review*, July 2005, link.

[70] Bird, Graham and Thomas Willett (2004), *IMF conditionality, implementation and the new political economy of ownership*, IMF, *The Free Library,* link.

[71] See, for example, Stiglitz, Joseph, *Whither Reform? Ten Years of the Transition*, World Bank Annual Conference on Development Economics, April 1999, link.

[72] Easterly, W. (2005) "What did structural adjustment adjust? The association of policies and growth with repeated IMF and World Bank adjustment loans", *Journal of Development Economics*, 76 (2005): 1-22, p. 20, link.

ownership of agreed policy measures. In particular, this meant providing loans to support the implementation of national or sectoral development strategies adopted by the borrower government, often with policy actions that need to be completed prior to the release of the funds and benchmarks to measure progress. This is now a common modality for donors providing programmatic support to health, education or other sectors.

However, the problem is not entirely addressed. Implicit conditionality still underlies much TA practice. Developing countries are aware of what kinds of policy commitments will be supported by donors. Development strategies may be prepared mainly for the purpose of accessing external funds. These strategies are often prepared with the support of donor TA, and in some cases drafted by foreign experts. Greenhill (2006) describes instances of donor-funded advisers drafting 'country owned' development strategies, including in Uganda and Cambodia. TA provided to support policy development and implementation may therefore reflect donor priorities, leading to superficial or simulated change.

3.3.3 Supply-driven TA

Supply-driven TA reflects a wider and long-standing problem with TA, particularly when packaged with other development assistance; there are incentives for developing country governments to accept offers of TA that are poorly aligned with national priorities. This supply-driven nature of the TA may be one of the most important reasons for its poor record of success.

As early as 1996, the World Bank, reflecting on the role of TA in Africa, concluded that external interventions 'may actually have made matters worse on the capacity-building front because they have tended to exacerbate Africa's capacity problems through approaches that have been supply driven and geared to satisfying internal [donor] institutional demands rather than the capacity-building needs of the countries.'[73] In the mid-2000s, Greenhill (2006) similarly argued that where TA fails to respond to national demand, advice provided can be irrelevant to a country's needs and may therefore end up being largely ignored. More recently, Land et al (2015) argue that nationally determined priorities are often ignored or overruled by decisions taken at donor headquarters, fragmenting local ownership for reforms.[74]

Donor-driven reform agendas are not just prone to failure; they may also displace domestic initiatives. In Malawi, for example, Tambulasi (2010) reports that donor-dominated reform processes have eroded the capacity of developing countries to participate in viable development projects and led them to withdraw from their development mission.[75] The 2016 Reality of Aid Report similarly highlights that TA often promotes donor-inspired paradigms for governance, export-led development and private sector partnerships, at the expense of strengthening partner country policy processes.[76] The report calls on

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[73] World Bank (1996) in Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.26, link.

[74] Land, A., Grejin, H., Huack, V. and Ubels, J. (2015) 'Reflecting on 25 years of capacity development and emerging trends', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.1-18, link.

[75] Tambulasi, R. (2010) in Bridges, K. and Woolcock, M. (2017) *Now (Not) to Fix Problems that Matter: Assessing and Responding to Malawi's History of Institutional Reform,* World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 8289, December 2017, link.

[76] Reality of Aid (2016) *Technical cooperation as an aid modality: Demand-led or donor-driven?* Link.

developing country governments to curb supply-driven TA, recommending that they establish country units to:

- Coordinate country-driven analysis of capacity needs
- Negotiate with providers on potential technical cooperation interventions to meet these needs
- Exercise leadership in the selection and deployment of technical experts
- Monitor and assess lessons in relation to technical cooperation support for stronger and sustainable institutional capacities to address complex local development interests.[77]

Box 4: Supply-driven TA in Tanzania

> In Tanzania, a policy to guide demand-driven TA was proposed in the late 2000s but drafting stalled in 2009. Tilley (2014) writes that, in the absence of a national capacity building approach, the government has tended to accept whatever TA is offered, resulting in fragmented and supply-driven support. She explains that the most common way in which demand and supply interacted was that donors found an area of interest in their strategy, which was in line with that of the government. They then approached government with an offer of support. If the government agreed and made some suggestions for how this would be useful, the donor went ahead and drafted the ToR, which was sent to government for comment. Sometimes comments were received, other times there was no response and procurement of the TA was initiated with government sign off. While this involved some interaction of demand and supply, this approach reflects very limited government ownership and leadership.[78]

3.3.4   Capacity substitution

The literature suggests that poorly delivered TA can displace and even erode national capacities. The 1993 UNDP Berg report summarises criticisms of TA practice from the early 1990s. It noted the overuse of foreign staff, even for jobs that did not require specialist skills. Greenhill (2006) reports a growing body of evidence, much produced by donors themselves, that TA can undermine the capacity of developing countries.[79] The Reality of Aid (2015) similarly argues that, overall, TA has fostered a dependency culture and reduced the incentives for government officials to develop their own skills and abilities, noting that the very presence of foreign experts can lead to the degradation of local capacity and perpetuate the view that developing countries are unable to manage for themselves.[80]

Technical assistance is ***"a systematic destructive force that is undermining the development of***

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[77] The Reality of Aid (2016) *Technical cooperation as an aid modality: Demand-led or donor-driven?,* link.

[78] Tilley, H. (2014) *Demand and supply of technical assistance and lessons for the health sector: Country Perspectives Note, Tanzania,* ODI, pp.12, link.

[79] Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.3, link.

[80] The Reality of Aid (2015) *The Reality of Aid 2016 Report Theme Statement: Technical Cooperation and Capacity Development as an Aid Modality,* link.

capacity", World Bank Vice President, Edward Jaycox, 1993.[81]

Land et al (2015) note that disparities in salaries, equipment and motivation levels for external staff or 'technical experts' versus local staff often serves to exacerbate low morale within developing government ministries and institutions. Hadebe (2016) highlights how positioning external advisers as 'superior' personnel with power over long-standing local team members can disrupt hierarchies within the recipient organisation and also prevent these external positions from being challenged.[82]

The 1993 Berg report also critiqued the skewed incentive structures associated with TA, noting how technical experts were often used to 'gap fill' in order to get the job done, instead of focusing on genuine knowledge transfer. More than 20 years later, Land et al (2015) still highlight that foreign 'experts' are mostly hired for their technical expertise, with much less attention paid to their capacity building skills or experience. Keijzer and de Lange (2015) similarly argue that the selection of 'experts' tends to emphasise 'objective' criteria such as technical skills, years of experience and academic qualifications, as opposed to 'soft' skills such as change management and cultural sensitivity.[83] Ultimately this recruitment approach doesn't guarantee finding the right people, with the right skillsets, for the job of knowledge transfer.

Box 5: The per diem culture

> It is common for TA projects (and developing country governments themselves) to pay per diems to national civil servants for participation in seminars, workshops and travel. Some also pay salary supplements to participating national officials, to attract high calibre staff and recognise the additional burden of working on a donor project. As civil service salaries are often inadequate, per diems and allowances become an important source of supplementary income. TA providers are often accountable to their donors at the output level (e.g. numbers of people trained, whether or not they are the right people), and therefore have an incentive to make sure their events are well attended. This creates a shared incentive structure with national officials looking to maximise their income, displacing their intrinsic motivation and causing them to neglect national initiatives that do not come with per diems (Vian 2009). It should be noted that per diems are also paid by developing country governments for their own initiatives, as a form of salary supplement. One study by the Policy Forum found that Tanzania paid USD 390 million in per diems and other allowances in 2008-09 – equivalent to the salaries of 109,000 teachers.[84] However, some authors argue that this practice became widespread in developing countries from the 1970s as a result of the impact of development aid (Riddle 2010).

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[81] Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.24, link.

[82] Hadebe, R. (2016) in The Reality Of Aid (2016) *Technical cooperation as an aid modality: Demand-led or donor-driven?* Link.

[83] Keijzer, N. and de Lange, P. (2015) 'Who's in charge here? Interrogating reform resistance in capacity development support', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.29-38, pp.36, link.

[84] Policy Forum (2009) *Reforming Allowances: A win-win approach to improved service delivery, higher salaries for civil servants and saving money,* Policy Brief 9.09, link.

3.3.5   Lack of coordination

There is also a critique that donor approaches to TA have not been strategic, with TA often poorly coordinated between donors and, in the worst cases, offering contradictory or inconsistent reform advice. Donors may launch multiple reform and capacity building processes without due attention to context, in some cases exceeding the capacity of counterpart institutions to absorb new skills and knowledge.

In 2005 the World Bank argued that donor programmes had tended 'to focus on the supply of individual skills in the public sector without ensuring skill-building is appropriately synchronized with the organisational and institutional changes needed to improve public sector performance.'[85] It also noted that TA interventions are usually designed and managed operation by operation, making it difficult to capture cross-sectoral issues and opportunities and to learn lessons across operations. In Malawi, for example, an estimated 95% of civil servants were trained using donor funding, but because much of this was tied to individual projects, it had proven difficult for governments to develop and implement long-term, sector based or cross-sector training strategies.[86]

In 2006, Greenhill concluded that the donor-dominated, international expert-led model of TA had contributed to the failure to build capacity in eight main ways:

1. Technical advisers are under pressure to 'get the job done' rather than take the extra time to build capacity;
2. Incentives exist for technical experts not to pass on their knowledge. Continued employment of advisors may hinge on the existence of capacity gaps;
3. Technical advisers are often more focused on meeting donor demands than building genuine capacity;
4. Advisers often lack the softer skills or expertise needed to build capacity and transfer knowledge;
5. Southern governments often lack the motivation to acquire new skills through TA projects;
6. Heavy use of expatriate consultants fosters a 'dependency culture'. Officials don't develop skills and abilities as they assume international experts will always be there to do the job;
7. Lack of donor co-ordination, e.g. when foreign advisers change, they often provide contradictory advice;
8. Capacity building initiatives are undermined by a lack of policy coherence.[87]

While donors have been taking steps to reform technical cooperation policies in response to some of the criticisms highlighted, sceptics continue to argue that problems with technical cooperation have been known for many years, with few signs of change.[88] Greenhill (2006) argues that TA has been 'largely insulated from donors' efforts to improve the quality of their aid and to act on principles of ownership and partnership.'[89] Changes made by donors to date, have largely focused on tweaking the traditional TA approach, for example, reducing the number of PIUs, increasing the use of national consultants, pooling donor TA funds and untying aid.[90] Keijzer and de Lange (2015) similarly conclude

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[85] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* pp.xvi, link.
[86] World Bank (2005) *Capacity Building in Africa: An OED Evaluation of World Bank Support,* pp.33, link.
[87] Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.30, link.
[88] GSDRC (2009) *Helpdesk Research Report: Changing approaches to technical assistance,* pp.3, link.
[89] Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.3, link.
[90] GSDRC (2009) *Helpdesk Research Report: Changing approaches to technical assistance,* pp.3, link.

that 'despite widely shared concerns and dedicated efforts to sharpen both policy and practice, independent research and evaluations show only timid and tentative steps have been made to reform dominant approaches in this area.'[91]

3.4   Critiques of the theory of TA

This section looks at critiques of TA that focus on the underlying theoretical basis or ToC. It is widely agreed that TA is under-theorised and based on simplistic assumptions. Boesen (2015) argues that capacity development has largely been viewed as emerging automatically from conventional TA activities. There has also been an assumption that those who have had their capacity 'built' will subsequently act as drivers of change across their organisations and institutions as a result.

TA often promotes technical solutions to political challenges. The literature indicates that there has been too much focus on technical solutions to what are often social and political problems. Too much value has been placed on international technical expertise, and not enough on local knowledge. Greenhill (2006) argues that too much capacity development is based on untested assumptions about expatriate expertise and recipient ignorance, assuming that learning happens in just one direction, from expert to recipient. Andrews (2013) cites the example of donor support to anti-corruption reforms in Malawi, noting how the 'cargo transfer' of anti-corruption laws and structures that were functioning well in countries with significantly different supporting conditions, was done with 'limited engagement about the issue of anti-corruption amongst Malawi's parliamentarians, businesses, and civil society, and with no apparent discussion with church groups that had been centrally involved in pushing for democratic change prior to 1994.'[92] A challenge as complex as fighting corruption is not just about building a set of institutional capacities – even if that is part of an overall solution.

Capacity is not always the problem. There is often an assumption that 'lack of capacity' is the binding constraint on organisational performance, and that raising capacity will therefore improve performance. There are many other reasons why institutions may perform poorly – including the deliberate choice of political elites or of vested interests within the institutions. If institutions are kept weak by design, then external support for capacity building is unlikely to make a difference. Improving capacity within a tax administration, for example, may not improve performance if weak systems continue to provide opportunities for rent seeking. Similarly, improving the capacity of a police force does not lead to better public security if the police force serves the regime, rather than the public.

Replication of western institutional models. Most TA is based, explicitly or implicitly, on institutional templates from OECD countries. Greenhill (2006) argues that early efforts to provide TA tended to assume that the task at hand was merely to transplant Western institutions and related skills among an administrative elite.[93] The TA 'expert' or the donor themselves therefore took on the role of expert physician and diagnostician, 'transferring' technical solutions to fill knowledge 'gaps' that would then

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[91] Keijzer, N. and de Lange, P. (2015) 'Who's in charge here? Interrogating reform resistance in capacity development support', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.29-38, pp.32, link.

[92] Andrews, M. (2013) in Bridges, K. and Woolcock, M. (2017) *Now (Not) to Fix Problems that Matter: Assessing and Responding to Malawi's History of Institutional Reform,* World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 8289, December 2017, link.

[93] Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.5, link.

enable 'counterparts' to improve their performance.'[94] The basis of the claim to expertise of the TA provider is a knowledge of how institutions work in higher capacity settings.

It is now widely recognised in the literature that Institutional models from OECD countries are unlikely to be appropriate for developing countries. Bill Easterly's '*The White Man's Burden',* published in 2006, highlighted how the 'planners' have set goals and often externally shaped objectives, policies and institutions, thereby eclipsing the 'searchers', or internal agents of change within each country. More recently, Andrews et al. (2012) argue that the imposition of best practice solutions is one of the main reasons novelty is so often constrained in development. These solutions may be based on incorrect assumptions about the available budgetary and human resources, or depend upon other institutions that are missing (e.g. public sector performance management systems; controls against rent-seeking). Ramalingam et al. (2014) expand on the critique of supply-driven TA to explore how donors have been rolling out 'best practice' initiatives, noting that this has again arguably been shaped more by the needs of aid agencies than by evidence, with clear incentives for donor agencies to provide blueprints and unambiguous answers.[95] Bridges and Woolcock (2017) similarly describe how TA providers take a commonly used, highly designed and engineered best-practice solution and transfer it to a developing country, despite analysis to show that this rarely achieves the desired results. They note that the rules (informal and formal, legislative and cultural) that already exist will either support or undermine the success of any new rules that donors attempt to overlay.[96]

While TA has ostensibly moved on from 'best practice' to 'best fit', Western normative standards continue to underlie TA practices. The World Bank's Ease of Doing Business index, for example, suggests a blueprint of reforms designed to promote a favourable business environment. Little if any TA from traditional donors goes towards supporting action that does not reflect the economic orthodoxy. For example, states wishing to take an interventionist approach to the economy are unlikely to receive offers of TA, despite evidence that some of the most successful developing countries of recent decades have been interventionist.

Box 6: Public sector reform in western contexts

> **A striking feature of the literature on capacity building in developing countries is how little attention it pays to the reality of public sector reform in Western countries. Even in high-capacity contexts, organisational change is complex and difficult. Major public-sector reforms are almost never designed and implemented in a straightforward manner, with most either failing outright or changing course and shape as they adapt in response to stakeholder reactions. Lessons from the UK indicate that there is as much experience of failure, waste and false starts as there is of successful reform.[97] Panchamia and Thomas (2014) argue that, in the UK, 'the most ambitious reform blueprints are no more than partially adopted, let alone implemented...The majority of individual reforms**

[94] Morgan, P. (2002) in Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.26, link.

[95] Ramalingam, B., Laric, M. and Primrose, J. (2014) *From best fit to best practice: Understanding and navigating wicked problems in international development,* ODI Working Paper, link.

[96] Bridges, K. and Woolcock, M. (2017) *Now (Not) to Fix Problems that Matter: Assessing and Responding to Malawi's History of Institutional Reform,* World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 8289, December 2017, link.

[97] Alari, C. and Thomas, P. (2016) *Increasing the Impact of Aid Interventions to Support Centre of Government Reforms: A Paper on the National School of Government International's Approach,* pp.8, link.

have limped on, tailed off, or been discarded.'[98] There is therefore little reason to believe that institutional change in low-capacity contexts will take place in a planned and rational way.

Building false or misleading 'capacity'. Lant Pritchett and Matt Andrews highlight the dangers of 'isomorphic mimicry', where TA creates incentives for organisations in developing countries to simulate the forms of advanced institutions, without acquiring the functions. Andrews (2012) explains that there is a very real danger of aid interventions creating incentives for developing country organisations to adopt 'best practices' in laws and policies that look impressive (especially when designed with the support of international experts) but that are unlikely to work in the national context.[99] This in turn can lead to **'capability traps'**: a cycle in which developing country governments constantly adopt 'reforms' to ensure ongoing flows of external financing and legitimacy, yet never actually improve their function.[100] Uganda, for example, is described as a classic example of a country that has developed some of the world's best laws with international backing (e.g. on PFM and anti-corruption) yet has among the largest gaps between laws and practice.[101] Bridges and Woolcock (2017) similarly reflect on donor-supported PFM reforms in Malawi, reporting that almost 70% of objectives and indicators of success related solely to the form of institutions, while just over 30% relate to actual performance improvements.

Andrews et al. (2012) acknowledge a growing recognition among development partners that building the capabilities of human systems, including the state, is hard. Unsworth (2016) argues that transforming the effectiveness of government is a very difficult task, noting that the historical reality of civil service reform is that such reform is invariably achieved over decades, or even centuries, and is 'dependent upon economic diversification and the emergence of a middle class with the capacity and interest to organise and push for reforms.'[102] Ultimately, TA will only work if it is seeking to change or support something that people already want to see traction on.[103] Land et al. (2015) therefore conclude that transporting western models is unlikely to have any lasting effect unless local actors identify with the proposed transformations of their societies.[104]

"Donors must stop pressuring poor countries into adopting identikit reforms and must stop assuming Western 'experts' have better ideas about poverty reduction than those experiencing poverty first

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[98] Panchamai, N. and Thomas, P. (2014) *Civil service reform in the real world: Patters of success in UK civil service reform,* Institute for Government, pp.76, link.

[99] See for example Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. (2003); Pritchett, L., Woolcock, M. and Andrews, M. (2010); and Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. (2012)

[100] Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. (2012) *Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA),* Centre for Global Development, Working Paper 299, pp.1-2, link.

[101] Andrews, M. and Bategeka, L. (2013) *Overcoming the limits of institutional reform in Uganda,* Center for International Development at Harvard University, pp. 110, link.

[102] Unsworth, S. (2016) in Alari, C. and Thomas, P. (2016) *Increasing the Impact of Aid Interventions to Support Centre of Government Reforms: A Paper on the National School of Government International's Approach,* pp.7, link.

[103] Land, A., Grejin, H., Huack, V. and Ubels, J. (2015) 'Reflecting on 25 years of capacity development and emerging trends', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.1-18, link.

[104] Land, A., Grejin, H., Huack, V. and Ubels, J. (2015) 'Reflecting on 25 years of capacity development and emerging trends', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.1-18, pp.4, link.

hand" Greenhill, 2006.[105]

3.5 Reflections on the conditions of success for TA

The limited evidence base on the effectiveness of TA means that both successes and failures are likely to be underreported. Despite a strong sceptical vein to the literature, there is evidence that TA has delivered results in some instances – even if the overall returns have not been commensurate with the investment. Drawing on our experience, we identify a few conditions for success.

One is national leadership for reform and organisational development. For example, middle-income countries and countries with strong development leadership draw extensively on the experience of other countries to advance their national development goals. They often make informed choices as to which development partner can offer relevant expertise. Where the recipient country is the active party in identifying and selecting TA, the prospects of success are likely to be much higher.

Second, there is reason to believe that TA can be effective in institutional settings that are well defined and relatively insulated from political pressures and systemic weaknesses across government. Some of the most effective TA that we have seen has been in organisations such as central banks or national audit institutions, which are designed to be independent from the rest of the public service, or in specialised units within line ministries that operate with a high degree of autonomy. In these settings, sensitively delivered TA can help to build both technical expertise and *esprit de corps* and, if the wider political context is conducive, contribute to wider organisational effectiveness.

Third, there are moments in the political cycle in any country when governments face pressure to improve their performance in particular areas. All political systems are concerned with legitimacy, and improved performance is always one source of legitimacy, although often competing with others. Where TA programmes engage with particular national institutions over an extended period, they may succeed in identifying and responding to these moments of opportunity, when the support they offer corresponds with an alignment of political incentives or a particular constituency for change.

What the literature does convey very powerfully, however, is that the net effect of TA provided by multiple donors working across different sites and in different ways is not producing an overall trajectory of improvement in developing country capacity. While results are achieved from time to time, they do not appear to be cumulative. Indeed, this may be part of the nature of institutional change: it is often discontinuous and can be punctured by setbacks and reversals.

4. The rise of new development approaches

The last decade has seen a marked shift in thinking on good development practice, towards more politically informed, context-sensitive and locally led approaches. The shift began in the academic literature and through the efforts of groups of like-minded practitioners. It has now largely taken over

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[105] Greenhill, R. (2006) *Making Technical Assistance work for the poor*, Action Aid, pp.5, link.

as the dominant narrative on effective capacity building in the literature. However, the extent to which this has shifted the bulk of TA practice is not yet clear.

The new approaches are distinct enough in both theory and practice to warrant being described, by some, as a new paradigm (i.e. a completely new model for TA). However, we are aware that framing them in these terms risks overstating its degree of novelty. Arguably, the most effective TA programmes have always worked in a politically informed and adaptive way. However, it is only in recent years that this has become the dominant narrative about effective TA.

4.1   Politically informed, adaptive TA

Growing scepticism with the impact of TA approaches has contributed to a wave of interest in new development approaches that are based on a deeper understanding of national context, in particular the political context.[106] The Doing Development Differently (DDD) community of practice, for example, formed in 2014, has identified a set of key principles it believes underlies effective interventions. These include:

- Addressing underlying problems in a given context, rather than importing external solutions
- That the process of identifying problems is led by those impacted by them
- That any support is politically smart, with a focus on testing, learning and adaptation.[107]

Jones et al. (2012) reflect that TA is not deployed in a vacuum; it unfolds at the interface between knowledge and power. Persistent institutional blockages to development should therefore be understood primarily in terms of power and politics, rather than weak capacity.[108] Alari and Thomas (2014) highlight that 'politics is always either a powerful driver of, or barrier to, significant change'.[109] Land et al. (2015) similarly argue that, while the nature and extent of politics will vary from context to context and from intervention to intervention, it is rarely, if ever, absent.[110] The Thinking and Working Politically (TWP) community of practice was established in 2013 in response to the heightened awareness of the role that politics plays in development. The theory behind TWP overlaps with DDD's focus on politically smart development, but with a more explicit focus on the political. It highlights the centrality of politics to institutional change, and advocates the importance of using political economy analysis (PEA) and similar diagnostic tools to understand the context for institutional reform.

"Aid is an intensely political act. My experience in the countries that I've worked in is that aid is 10 per cent technical and 90 per cent political. This is why better leadership in local management is crucial to success, because it's about how politics works on the ground." Former AusAID Assistant

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[106] Ladner, D. (2015) 'Strategy Testing: An innovative approach to monitoring highly flexible programmes', *Working Politically in Practice Series: Case Study No. 3,* The Asia Foundation, link.

[107] Bain, K. A. with Booth, D. and Wild, L. (2016) *Doing Development Differently at the World Bank: Updating the plumbing to fit the architecture,* ODI, pp.7, link.

[108] Manuel, C. (2016) *Forget the money: De-linking technical assistance*, LASER Fourth Synthesis Paper, pp.1, shared by email.

[109] Alari, C. and Thomas, P. (2016) *Increasing the Impact of Aid Interventions to Support Centre of Government Reforms: A Paper on the National School of Government International's Approach,* pp.44, link.

[110] Land, A., Grejin, H., Huack, V. and Ubels, J. (2015) 'Reflecting on 25 years of capacity development and emerging trends', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.1-18, pp.8, link.

Director General, John Davidson.[111]

In an effort to incorporate political awareness into operational practice, development agencies have increased their investment in political-economy analysis (PEA). DFID's Drivers of Change work in the early 2000s, followed by its more recent focus on PEA, is a strong example of this type of thinking being applied in practice. Jones et al. (2012) have also introduced a Knowledge, Policy and Power (KPP) framework for exploring the causal interaction between political economy features and knowledge-policy links. For example, this may involve assessing how the level of decentralisation in government functions affects the types of knowledge needed to improve policy implementation.[112] Donors are also putting greater effort into understanding the institutional dynamics and the patterns of incentives that facilitate or obstruct change.[113] In recent years, some organizations, such as the World Bank and the OECD, have also organised their own internal political economy 'communities of practice' to support new ways of thinking and working.[114]

Despite a gradual shift towards thinking more politically, working explicitly with local politics and individual institutional contexts remains a relatively new idea, and translating thinking on politics into innovative approaches to TA is not straightforward. Carothers and de Gramont (2013) have described the gradual evolution of donor thinking around politics and institutional change as an 'almost revolution', but stress the difficulty of operationalising the concept that 'politics matter'.[115] Boesen (2015) similarly recognises that while PEA has dominated thinking in capacity development for more than a decade, translating this thinking into practice is difficult. Frameworks such as PEA and the Knowledge, Process, Practice model help to build understanding of context, but do not offer straightforward answers to complex development problems. What they do offer, however, is a challenge function, pushing practitioners to be more systematic and rigorous in the way they approach knowledge-based assistance.[116]

The new literature stresses that public sector reform is messy. The Asia Foundation (2011) likens the process of reform to the political equivalent of war – 'protracted even in the most favourable of circumstances, unpredictable in the extreme, and subject to vagaries of fickle political winds.'[117] Political incentives can, for example, lead those in power to avoid investing in capacity or to actively undermine capacity. The 2017 World Development Report notes how some African elites have shied away from capacity building for statistical systems due to the belief that high-quality data systems provide a tool for the opposition to audit their performance.[118] Their incentives are to maintain either weak statistical offices or partisan ones, staffed with political supporters rather than technical

[111] Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014) 'Development Entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change', *Working Politically in Practice: Case Study Series No.2,* ODI and The Asia Foundation, pp.3, link.

[112] Jones, H., Jones, N., Shaxson, L. and Walker, D. (2012) *Providing practical guidance for in-country programming: the value of analyzing knowledge, policy and power*, ODI Background Note, link.

[113] Fritz et al. (2014) in Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, pp.2, link.

[114] Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014) 'Development Entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change', *Working Politically in Practice: Case Study Series No.2,* ODI and The Asia Foundation, link.

[115] Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, pp.2, link.

[116] Jones, H., Jones, N., Shaxson, L. and Walker, D. (2012) *Providing practical guidance for in-country programming: the value of analyzing knowledge, policy and power*, ODI Background Note, link.

[117] The Asia Foundation (2011) *Built on dreams, grounded in reality,* link.

[118] World Bank (2017) *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law,* link.

experts.[119] In such contexts, politically informed development practitioners need to engage with the underlying political dynamics, seeking to identify and build up constituencies for change. The Asia Foundation (2011) argues, therefore, that reform advocates cannot avoid mastering the formal and informal rules of the local political game.

Recent literature recognises that effective capacity building does not work towards pre-planned institutional designs, but by brokering solutions to local problems and responding to political opportunities as and when they arise. Boesen (2015), Williamson (2015) and Manuel et al. (2012) all recognise that donors are placing more emphasis on context-sensitive, incremental approaches, in which the role of external TA providers is to facilitate change led by national stakeholders. Alari and Thomas (2014) argue that reform takes an incremental, imperfect, episodic, adaptive and opportunistic trajectory that learns from and builds on successive interventions in a way that cannot be planned.[120] Menocal (2014) similarly identifies a growing acceptance of the need to work in more iterative, adaptive and flexible ways.

"Structures are the most visible aspects of organisation – but not usually the most important for achieving results. The most common mistake made by people trying to reshape (institutions) is that they overestimate the role of structures relative to processes and cultures. It's striking that the most effective leaders achieve as much through influence and norms as they do through formal mechanisms," Geoff Mulgan, former Downing Street Advisor, 2014.[121]

In this vein, Matt Andrews introduced the concept of **problem-driven, iterative adaptation (PDIA)**. Responding to development problems in an iterative and adaptive way is about making a series of 'small bets' on solutions that might work, and adapting quickly to lessons learned. Experience suggests that this is better than risking a lot on one large gamble that assumes we can know in advance what is required to achieve results.[122] This kind of experimentation is about trying an intervention in a real context and allowing on-the-ground realities to shape the process, instead of relying on pre-set or universal ideas about what works.[123] Andrews describes PDIA as a pragmatic and operational synthesis of related arguments articulated in recent years by an array of scholars and practitioners working in different development sectors and disciplines.[124] Adaptive management is a related programming approach that has emerged in recent years, seeking to combine appropriate analysis, structured flexibility, and iterative improvements in the face of contextual and causal complexity.[125] Similarly to PDIA, it involves reacting and responding quickly to changes in the political and socio-economic operating environment.

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[119] World Bank (2017) *World Development Report 2017: Governance and the Law,* pp.12, link.

[120] Alari, C. and Thomas, P. (2016) *Increasing the Impact of Aid Interventions to Support Centre of Government Reforms: A Paper on the National School of Government International's Approach,* pp.11, link.

[121] GPG (2014)

[122] Booth, D. (2015) *Thinking and working politically,* GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack No.13, link.

[123] Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. (2012) *Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA),* Centre for Global Development, Working Paper 299, pp.14, link.

[124] Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. (2012) *Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA),* Centre for Global Development, Working Paper 299, pp.2-3, link.

[125] MercyCorps, IRC and ADAPT (2016) *Adapting aid: lessons from six case studies,* link.

Recognition of the importance of thinking and working politically was reinforced for development practitioners with the 2017 *World Development Report*, which considers why 'carefully designed, sensible policies' often fail when it comes to implementation. It is the first World Development Report in 20 years that focused on the role of institutions and governance in development. It emphasises the importance of truly understanding the underlying governance challenges that prevent effective policy implementation and highlights the need for functional improvements over institutional forms.[126]

4.2   Putting new development principles into practice for TA

4.2.1   Common principles and features

Looking across the literature on new approaches to development, including Thinking and Working Politically, Doing Development Differently, Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation and related initiatives, there are set of common principles that underlie them all and that can be applied to TA. These include:

- **Start with problems, rather than solutions.** Donors must solve problems, not sell solutions.[127] While this may sound obvious, it is clear from the literature that supply-driven TA based on western institutional models has often been a key feature of TA in the past. Institutions are likely to develop incrementally through the process of resolving specific problems, rather than according to blueprints or grand reform plans. Any level of problem can be relevant; what matters is that it has traction for change among people within the institutional framework where the problem resides.[128]

- **Locally driven.** Local actors must drive reform if self-sustaining political change is to take place. These actors are much more likely than outsiders to have the motivation, credibility, knowledge and networks to mobilise support, leverage relationships and identify opportunities in politically astute ways.[129] This implies that the problems that TA programmes seek to address should have a high level of salience to the counterpart organisation or in the wider political context, so that stakeholders can be mobilised in support of a solution. Note, however, that local leadership is likely to be contested. TA programmes look to identify and support constituencies for change, but there is no guarantee that they will be successful.

- **Change as an iterative process.** Development practitioners need to build flexible pathways to explore problem-solving, allowing for iteration and for dynamic and strategic changes to planning.[130] Practitioners must increasingly adopt deliberate actions of testing, learning and experimentation to support a more iterative and flexible approach to change. Practitioners need to continuously learn from failure as well as success. Deliberate iteration and experimentation should not, however, be confused with 'making it up as you go along'.[131]

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[126] World Bank (2017) *Building sustainable public sector capacity in a challenging context: South Sudan Governance Analysis,* Global Governance Practice, link.

[127] Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. (2012) *Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA),* Centre for Global Development, Working Paper 299, link.

[128] Manuel, C. (2016) *Delivering institutional reform at scale: problem-driven approaches supported by adaptive programming,* LASER: Second Synthesis Paper, pp.14, link.

[129] Booth, D. and Unsworth, S. (2014) *Politically smart, locally led development,* ODI Discussion Paper, pp.17, link.

[130] Harris, D. (2013) *Applied political economy analysis: a problem-driven framework,* ODI, March 2013, link.

[131] Booth, D. and Unsworth, S. (2014) *Politically smart, locally led development,* ODI Discussion Paper, link.

> Project management may involve an element of 'muddling through', but this must be purposive muddling, with definite goals in mind.[132]

In summary, applying new development approaches to TA programmes means that practitioners should focus on solving problems in an incremental and adaptive way, by identifying and supporting constituencies for change and building up local leadership. Andrews et al. (2012) argue that this calls for an understanding of why things are as they are and what are the constraints on change, so that the chosen methodologies and activities are feasible. Stepwise reforms then contribute to loosening these constraints over time.[133]

In 2016, Global Partners Governance (GPG), a company focused on supporting political and institutional development in partner countries, adopted the Knowledge, Application, Practice, Effect (KAPE) methodology as their contribution to the effort to find practical and politically agile approaches to institutional change.[134] The KAPE methodology concentrates on engaging with, and adapting, behavioural norms and is an intrinsically adaptive form of programming. GPG has described the KAPE methodology as a form of 'management consultancy for politicians in difficult places'. It aims to provide focused, practical, expert support to GPG partners in finding new ways of managing their daily problems.

Box 7: The KAPE methodology

Knowledge: really understanding whatever form of support or guidance is needed to help local partners manage the daily problems that are a cause – and often a result – of the wider institutional weakness. This allows project teams and developing country counterparts to identify the most suitable ways of finding solutions.

Application: making systems work in practice. In its simplest form it is about providing practical support to apply skills and implement new processes that help people do their jobs better and make institutional structures work more effectively. During this phase, forms of support have to stay relevant to the direct concerns of the people that it is seeking to help, without losing sight of the longer-term strategic objectives to which it is addressed.

Practice: finding pockets of good practice and establishing 'the new normal'. By using specific entry-points within an institution, the logic of change is to start small, finding new ways of working and adopting new techniques in isolated areas of the organisation. Developing 'pockets of good practice' is however, a process that takes time. Evidence of change will only emerge over a period of months or years.

Effect: improved performance and the ripple effect. The most significant and long-lasting institutional changes tend to start small, and are internally driven, by parts of the organisation that innovate and experiment. International assistance should work in this

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[132] Booth, D. and Unsworth, S. (2014) *Politically smart, locally led development,* ODI Discussion Paper, pp.13, link.

[133] Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. (2012) *Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA),* Centre for Global Development, Working Paper 299, pp.14, link.

[134] Power, G. (2016) *All About Behaviour: KAPE®, Adaptation and Sticky Institutional Change,* Global Partners Governance, Politically Agile Programming, Paper 3, pp.3-6, link.

> **way: improve specific parts of the institution, by creating pockets of good practice, and then support a ripple effect, that sees new practices and behaviours adopted across the institution, and possibly other institutions, to improve overall performance.**

This incremental approach changes the role and function of the TA provider, from external expert to facilitator of change.[135] Technical expertise may still be relevant and necessary, but the new focus is on dialogue and building partnerships founded on trust, transparency, shared risk taking and mutual accountability.[136] Simpson (2013) argues that by acting as brokers and coaches, for example, TA providers can bring people together to identify constraints and design solutions.[137] Tavakoli et al. (2013) talk about donors using their 'outsider status' to convene stakeholders and help them to resolve common problems.

Applying new development approaches to TA involves a different way of thinking about the process of capacity development. Traditional TA programmes typically begin by identifying capacity gaps and developing reform plans to address them (with international comparators an explicit or implicit reference point). The new approaches take existing functions and capacities as the starting point and look for opportunities to encourage incremental improvement. This makes it more likely that they will come up with context-relevant solutions.[138]

The new approaches also involve different ways of thinking about results. Practitioners need to move away from predetermining what success looks like, and instead participate in a more engaged and iterative analysis of problems, context and the range of possible solutions.[139] This is key to moving from 'thinking politically' to also 'working differently'.[140]

4.2.2 New programme models and approaches for TA

There is no systematic treatment as yet in the literature of the implications of new ways of working for programme delivery. Indeed, the literature notes that donor response lies along a spectrum, from introducing additional PEA into standard programming towards moving to fully flexible and adaptive delivery mechanisms.[141] When we consider how best to apply some of the current programming models and approaches to TA in particular, there are a few models that stand out.

The flexible TA facility is a model used by a number of bilateral donors, including DFID and DFAT. It takes the form of a fund, managed by a contractor, used to engage TA in a flexible manner for a particular counterpart institution or group of institutions, with an overarching set of objectives. The

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[135] Manuel, C. (2016) *Forget the money: De-linking technical assistance*, LASER Fourth Synthesis Paper, pp.1, shared by email.
[136] Land, A., Grejin, H., Huack, V. and Ubels, J. (2015) 'Reflecting on 25 years of capacity development and emerging trends', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.1-18, pp.10, link.
[137] Land, A., Grejin, H., Huack, V. and Ubels, J. (2015) 'Reflecting on 25 years of capacity development and emerging trends', *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.1-18, pp.10, link.
[138] Simpson, R. (2013) *Does technical assistance need a makeover?* The Guardian, 19 June 2013, link.
[139] Norris et al 2014 pp.20
[140] Slotin, J., Wyeth, V. and Romita, P. (2010); Williams, R. and Copestake, J. (2011) Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, pp.6, link.
[141] Green, D. (2014) *Thinking and Working Politically update: where have aid agencies, consultants etc. got to?* From Poverty to Power, September 2014, link.

contractor is responsible for political and contextual analysis, identifying opportunities to deploy TA effectively, and ensuring that the outputs (research; technical advice; dissemination products) are both technically sound and attuned to the local context. Activities are generally planned through an annual work programme, with the flexibility to respond quickly to opportunities as they emerge. The facility model provides a means of building up relationships with key counterparts, and the flexibility to scale individual activities up or down in response to changes in the context. The model is potentially effective for identifying key reformers within government and providing them with evidence and technical inputs to improve their prospects of bringing about developmentally significant change.

Box 8: Examples of flexible TA facilities

A DFID investment and infrastructure programme in Nepal includes a TA facility designed to accelerate public and private investment in large-scale infrastructure, particularly in transport and hydropower, in order to promote economic growth. It is managed by IMC, which is building the capacity of the Investment Board Nepal and responsible ministries to initiate and manage large infrastructure projects. It is designed to work in a flexible and adaptive way to evolving needs, with the flexibility to scale particular activities up and down according to need.[142] This work has helped to address bottlenecks that have prevented progress on investment and infrastructure in Nepal, contributing to more investor confidence and increased private investment in the energy and transport sectors.

The Australia Indonesia Partnership for Economic Governance facility (AIPEG) is the fourth in a series of technical assistance facilities established in 1999 to help Indonesia recover from the Asian financial crisis. It works in five areas: efficient markets, finance stability, revenue mobilisation, improved public spending and economic policy. It also has resources for new or emerging issues if warranted. It combines in-house expertise with the ability to engage short-term experts if required. The staff that manage the facility are long-standing Indonesia specialists who bring detailed knowledge of the context and a networks of contacts across government. AIPEG also supports 'Team Asistensi' – a group of Indonesian economists who provide economic policy advice to the government, operating as an informal think tank at arm's length from AIPEG. AIPEG partners with eight ministries and agencies, and has undertaken more than 300 activities. The programme has a low public profile, in recognition of the political sensitivity for the Indonesian government of involving foreign experts in high-profile economic governance issues.

One of AIPEG's key achievements has been to facilitate a series of reforms to the regulation of Indonesia's financial markets, including improved banking supervision. It supported the enabling legislation for and establishment of Indonesia's Financial Services Authority. Given that Indonesia suffered a catastrophic collapse of its currency and a drop of 14% of GDP following the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the strategic significance of this work is substantial. However, even working in a politically informed, flexible and iterative manner, there have been some issues (such as reform of

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[142] IMC Worldwide (2017) *Technical Assistance for Infrastructure: Challenges and Opportunities,* link.

> Indonesia's weak taxation system) where the programme has struggled to gain any real traction.

It is increasingly common to find small TA facilities included within larger aid programmes or portfolios. Manuel et al. (2016) suggest that this is a useful strategy, provided that the TA is de-linked from larger-scale programming.[143] Hudson (2016) similarly recommends the introduction of 'innovation funds' to pilot agile and adaptive programming, including supporting the capacity development of implementing organizations.[144]

Investing in the knowledge sector is another form of knowledge-based assistance, which focuses on building up the mechanisms by which development-related knowledge is generated, disseminated and used to inform policy.[145] It may involve investment in think tanks and research institutes, parliamentary committees and in-house government think tanks.[146] Boesen (2015) highlights the importance that donors can play in enhancing access to crucial knowledge that can strengthen processes in partner countries. Donors can also play a critical role in brokering broader networks and bringing actors together in or across sectors and constituencies.[147] However, it is difficult to link this form of support directly to development results.

Box 9: Investing in the knowledge economy

> **DFAT's Knowledge Sector Initiative** in Indonesia focuses on improving Indonesia's systems for evidence-based policy making by supporting the knowledge 'sector', both inside and outside government. It provides core funding to 16 Indonesian research institutes and think tanks to generate new knowledge, and works with media institutes and advocacy organisations on the communication of research results. It has worked to secure changes to procurement regulations to help the Government of Indonesia access research and analysis from think tanks. It also supports research units within government departments. It works with Bappenas, the planning ministry, on knowledge management and how to communicate good development practice to subnational government (a key goal following Indonesia's 'big bang' decentralisation, which shifted a large share of national development expenditure to sub-national authorities, where capacity is significantly lower). It also helped to develop and pilot an 'e-planning' tool that helps Bappenas to better target funding for priority development programs. In 2017, it helped to organise the inaugural Indonesia Development Forum, which brought together government, civil society and development partners.
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> So far, there is limited information on results from the programme. Early review suggested that it was a challenge for the programme to develop a strategic approach to

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[143] Manuel, C. (2016) *Forget the money: De-linking technical assistance*, LASER Fourth Synthesis Paper, shared by email.

[144] Hudson, A. (2016) *Politics matters, so what? Time for bigger bets (and more learning) on adaptive programming,* Global Integrity, July 2016, link.

[145] Boesen, N. (2015) 'Who's in charge here? Interrogating reform resistance in capacity development support", *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* link.

[146] Boesen, N. (2015) 'Who's in charge here? Interrogating reform resistance in capacity development support", *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* link.

[147] Boesen, N. (2015) 'Who's in charge here? Interrogating reform resistance in capacity development support", *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.25, link.

> supporting something as diffuse as the knowledge sector, and that the programme had struggled to gain traction from key stakeholders.
>
> Australia also supports a government think tank on social policy, the **National Team for Accelerating Poverty Reduction (TNP2K)**. Though funded by DFAT, it is located within the Vice-Presidency, which has a cross-government coordination role. It has been instrumental in some major changes in Indonesian social policy, including a move from regressive and wasteful fuel subsidies towards targeted social transfers. The reforms have reportedly saved up to $1.2 billion per year for the Indonesian budget, while helping to create an effective social safety net. At the technical level, TPN2K designed the system of social transfers and manages a unified household database that makes it possible to identify beneficiaries through a proxy means test. It also helped reformers within government to manage a highly contentious set of reforms (including heading off periodical proposals to reintroduce fuel subsidies) by providing hard evidence on the economic and social benefits of the new system.

Another approach to delivering knowledge-based assistance is through an **arm's-length intermediary**: an institution that operates with a level of autonomy from its funders, enabling it to enter into a trusted partnership with counterpart institutions without conflict loyalties or the unhelpful pressures and incentives created through traditional project finance.[148] An intermediary is typically a small-scale, niche agency with different incentives than those governing donors,[149] able to play the role of a developmental venture capitalist.[150] The Asia Foundation (2011) describes the intermediary's role as multi-faceted, setting out three main areas where its work can complement and support the aims of donors:

1. Helping development agencies to identify, nurture and foster lasting relationships with development entrepreneurs;
2. Serving as a buffer between development agencies and domestic political processes; and
3. Ensuring proper narrative reporting and financial compliance.[151]

Agencies able to play this role include, but are certainly not limited to, The Asia Foundation, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (formerly AGI), the Overseas Development Institute (particularly through its Budget Strengthening Initiative programme) and the Centre for International Development at Harvard Kennedy School. It is important to note that capacity and expertise in this area is growing in response to emerging markets and interest. Williamson (2015) notes such agencies have the independence from their funders to become true partners with government in supporting the government's own reform initiatives.[152] Tavakoli et al. (2013) reflect that these agencies tend to have greater ability to draw on and generate local knowledge, the autonomy to be pragmatic and imaginative in responding to local problems, and are answerable to at least some extent to country partners rather than just funders. The long-term presence of intermediaries in the locality also means

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[148] Booth, D. (2013) *Facilitating development: an arm's length approach to aid*, ODI, March 2013, link.

[149] Boesen, N. (2015) 'Who's in charge here? Interrogating reform resistance in capacity development support", *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* link.

[150] The Asia Foundation (2011) *Built on dreams, grounded in reality,* link.

[151] The Asia Foundation (2011) *Built on dreams, grounded in reality,* pp.266, link.

[152] Williamson, T. (2015) *Change in challenging contexts: How does it happen?* ODI, September 2015, link.

that its information, for example about binding constraints, political realities and potential development entrepreneurs, is often richer than that of their funders.[153] A distinguishing feature of arm's-length intermediaries is their willingness to work with government counterparts in their current form, despite the imperfections, recognising that political incentives are not immediately malleable and that constituencies for change need to be built over time.[154]

Box 10: Delivering through arm's-length intermediaries

TradeMark East Africa (TMEA) is a multi-donor funded, not-for-profit company that supports the growth of regional and international trade in East Africa. TMEA's in-house staff work closely with the organisations they support to scope out solutions to problems and facilitate change. It develops long-term partnerships, drawing on both inhouse and externally engaged expertise, supported where appropriate by small-scale project work (e.g. the development of border posts) to pilot new initiatives and test the waters for reform.

ODI's Budget Strengthening Initiative (BSI) provides TA to Ministries of Finance in fragile and conflict-affected states (FCAS) to build more effective, accountable and transparent budgets. BSI provides a combination of strategic advice, technical support and capacity development, supported by peer-to-peer learning to promote experience sharing.[155] It helps to develop core budget processes in low-capacity environments and to protect them from disruption during periods of instability.

The Tony Blair Institute for Global Change works directly with developing country governments in fragile, developing and emerging states to enhance their effectiveness. The overarching mission is to help governments and leaders make their vision for development a reality, with a focus on aligning behind national priorities. In Liberia, for example, the Institute (formerly AGI) has been supporting centre of government reform since 2010 and is helping to foster inclusive growth through infrastructure development and economic diversification.[156]

Arm's-length aid is by definition more challenging for the funder to manage, requiring a high degree of trust. The Asia Foundation (2011) argues that this is an unavoidable cost for gaining sufficient understanding of, and inroads into, the murky depths of local politics. Boesen (2015) also reflects that if relinquishing control, going with grain, and quickly learning and adapting is too difficult an agenda for donors, then the best choice is ultimately to leave the job to others who have more freedom to act as fits best. A more pragmatic solution in the interim may be to provide small-scale, arm's-length TA projects alongside more conventional ones.[157]

153 The Asia Foundation (2011) *Built on dreams, grounded in reality,* pp.266, link.
154 Tavakoli, H., Simpson, R. and Tilley, H. with Booth, D. (2013) *Unblocking results: Using aid to address governance constraints in public service delivery,* ODI, May 2013, pp.9, link.
155 Cox, M. and Robson, K. (2013) *Mid-term Evaluation of the Budget Strengthening Initiative,* link.
156 Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (2018) website, link.
157 Williamson, T. (2015) *Change in challenging contexts: How does it happen?* ODI, September 2015, link.

4.2.3 Practical lessons on applying new development approaches to TA

The literature on how to do adaptive, politically informed TA remains in its infancy, but some early themes have begun to emerge.

Engaging the right TA providers: Menocal (2014) also notes that engaging effectively with politics may call for a particular kind of person, someone who is comfortable with the uncertainty and ambiguity of political processes and the dilemmas and trade-offs they may present. These types of people are commonly referred to in the literature as 'development entrepreneurs', and are typically seen to act with perseverance and determination to achieve transformational change objectives.[158] Faustino and Booth (2014) note that the main traits of development entrepreneurs are courage, the willingness to act decisively in the face of uncertainty, intellectual humility, the ability to listen to others and admit mistakes.[159] Menocal (2014) adds that development entrepreneurs must be able to spot opportunities as they arise and must be able to think on their feet. A review of the World Bank's portfolio in Nigeria for example, highlights the importance of management behaviour, and of seasoned professionals who are able to innovate, and work to manage high levels of risk, while complying with important formal processes of reporting and safeguarding of ODA.[160]

Identifying the right counterparts: GPG (2015) highlights that changing an institution does not require blanket support that attempts to work with everyone in the institution; instead processes of internally driven reform invariably come from individuals or small groups within an institution doing things differently, who then have a catalytic effect on the behaviour of others.[161] Getting the right technical advice or evidence in the right hands and in the right form can therefore be a critical starting point for building constituencies in favour of change. GPG's KAPE approach for example, seeks to create locally owned 'pockets of good practice' with smaller groups of individuals, creating new ways of working that then ripple across an institution.[162]

Creating the right team dynamics: There is also emerging evidence that argues for smaller groups of stakeholders and teams to focus in on complex institutional challenges. This is based on the premise that solving complex and dynamic problems requires team members to be unafraid to ask questions or propose wrong or seemingly 'dumb' answers. Faustino and Booth (2014) state that team members must be willing to be vulnerable, to reveal what they know and think, as well as what they don't know or understand, and to acknowledge mistakes and celebrate better ideas, wherever they come from. Reflecting on the success of economic reforms in the Philippines (supported by USAID and/or DFAT), Faustino and Booth (2014) note that it took many, many people to make change happen, or what Matt Andrews calls 'multi-agency leadership'. However, success often resulted from individuals working in small teams, networks and coalitions to refine, test and develop ideas. In addition, managers had to be

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[158] Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014) 'Development Entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change', *Working Politically in Practice: Case Study Series No.2,* ODI and The Asia Foundation, pp.20, link.

[159] Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014) 'Development Entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change', *Working Politically in Practice: Case Study Series No.2,* ODI and The Asia Foundation, pp.21, link.

[160] Bain, K. A. with Booth, D. and Wild, L. (2016) *Doing Development Differently at the World Bank: Updating the plumbing to fit the architecture,* ODI, September 2016, pp.8, link.

[161] Global Partners Governance (2015) *Enabling Change: A Behavioural Approach to Political Programming,* Politically Agile Programming, Paper 2, link.

[162] Global Partners Governance (2015) *Enabling Change: A Behavioural Approach to Political Programming,* Politically Agile Programming, Paper 2, link.

willing and able to provide the safe space for innovation (and failure).[163] A Centre for International Development project to support capacity development in Albania, following the PDIA methodology, established 'Black Belt Teams' of civil servants in the counterpart institutions to identify problems and identify and implement solutions, with some external facilitation and technical support. While the record of the teams was mixed, the most effective were successful at achieving breakthroughs in key areas for economic growth. For example, a team working to resolve 32 identified problems in the garment sector achieved an increase of $165 million in exports and created an additional 5,000 jobs.[164]

In the Philippines, a number of partnerships have emerged in recent years amongst USAID, AusAid/DFAT, The Asia Foundation and Philippine leaders and organisations that highlight concrete examples of a conducive 'ecosystem' for transformational change. Underlying these successes is a clear division of labour, with donor staff often acting as 'development intrapreneurs' while local teams of 'development entrepreneurs' work to deliver results. Donor support is usually quiet and behind the scenes, recognising that it is often unhelpful for reformers in government to be seen to be drawing too much on foreign assistance. Booth and Unsworth (2014) conclude that in cases where donors avoided dominating the agenda or the reform process, this was critical in freeing up the front-line personnel to explore pathways towards changes that were both worthwhile and tractable.[165]

Tavakoli et al. (2013), based on an examination of programmes in Tanzania, Sierra Leone and Uganda, have identified six key principles that might support the transfer of knowledge and experience for more politically astute development programmes. These are:

1. Identify and seize windows of opportunity;
2. Focus on reforms with tangible political payoff (linking governance reforms to their immediate impact on a particular service delivery objective);
3. Build on what exists to implement legal mandates, rather than seeking to perfect rules and frameworks;
4. Move beyond reliance on policy dialogue, and focus on making existing systems deliver;
5. Facilitate problem solving and collective action solutions, in part by bearing transaction costs;
6. Adapt by learning, including incremental and iterative approaches.[166]

An evaluation of Australian knowledge-based support in Asian middle-income countries notes the following success factors:

- **Combining responsiveness with clear strategic direction:** TA providers achieve relevance by being responsive to requests for support from reform-minded counterparts. They have the flexibility to respond quickly to requests and windows of opportunity. However, simply responding to ad hoc requests for support does not necessarily lead to influence. The successful programs have clear priorities to guide their selection of activities.
- **Combining flexibility with patience:** National policy-making is unpredictable and subject to many factors beyond the influence of TA providers. Successful programs engage on a number

[163] Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014) 'Development Entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change', *Working Politically in Practice: Case Study Series No.2,* ODI and The Asia Foundation, pp.27, link.

[164] Agulhas Applied Knowledge, *Review of OSF support to the Government of Albania through the Harvard Center for International Development (CID) 2013-17*, June 2017.

[165] Booth, D. and Unsworth, S. (2014) *Politically smart, locally led development,* ODI Discussion Paper, pp.17, link.

[166] Tavakoli, H., Simpson, R. and Tilley, H. with Booth, D. (2013) *Unblocking results: Using aid to address governance constraints in public service delivery,* ODI, May 2013, link.

of policy issues in parallel, with the flexibility to scale individual activities up and down, depending on the level of momentum behind the work. This is combined with a willingness to remain engaged in particular policy areas over an extended period, and be ready with the right evidence and arguments when opportunities for change emerge.

- **Positioning:** Successful programmes learn which are the most promising points of engagement with government. Rather than just working with individual counterparts for each policy issue, they engage with groups of related agencies, enabling them to support inter-agency communication and coordination.
- **Access:** Successful programmes cultivate access to decision makers. This access can be built up over time, but is also bought in my hiring individuals with existing networks or by working through intermediaries with access to policy makers.
- **Profile:** National policy makers are naturally sensitive to any appearance that foreign countries are interfering with their policy choices. TA providers therefore work mainly behind the scenes, without prominent branding or public claims around influencing outcomes.
- **Trust:** Programmes respect the expectations of their counterparts for confidentiality and avoid any appearance of promoting the interests of their funders.
- **Knowledge and understanding:** Understanding how policies are made is essential. Successful programmes invest in building their knowledge of context, history, political positions, vested interests and key personalities. This helps them pitch their technical advice in the right form to the right people.
- **Use of evidence:** Good policy advice needs to be both politically informed and technically sound. Successful policy advocacy is ready with the right arguments and supporting evidence.
- **Campaigning:** Policy change is rarely a one-off event of adopting a new policy or law. It has to be sustained through implementation and protected against setbacks. Successful policy advocacy often takes the form of campaigns to build and sustain coalitions for change.[167]

4.3   Evidence on results to date

Despite a large and growing body of literature advocating for more locally led and politically astute development, evidence on the success of new approaches remains piecemeal and is largely linked to individual case studies, projects and partnerships, often written by programme insiders. These case studies lack standard methodologies and terminology. Alogoso and Hudson (2016) argue that it is not always clear if practitioners are talking about the same thing in terms of discussions around 'adaptation', 'learning' and 'working politically'.[168] There is relatively little attempt to break down results according to sector or regime type. Most importantly, the use of counterfactuals is rare and the basis for causal claims is often unclear (Law and Marquette, 2018). The literature contains a significant amount of advice on 'good practice', but little robust evidence on impact.

The available case studies point to specific changes, such as changes to laws and regulations or reforms to institutions. Some include quantified results, such as increased public revenues, savings to national budgets or improvements in economic performance – although the exact causal mechanism and the

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[167] DFAT Office for Development Effectiveness, *Investing in Regional Prosperity: Positioning the Aid Program to Support Australia's Economic Partnerships in Asia*, 2018, link.

[168] Algoso, D. and Hudson, A. (2016) *Where have we got to on adaptive learning, thinking and working politically, doing development differently etc? Getting beyond the People's Front of Judea,* From Poverty to Power, June 2016, link.

basis for causal claims is not always specified. Some of these – such as the Australian support for social system reform in Indonesia, which resulted in savings of over USD 1 billion[169] – are far larger than the donor investment, suggesting a high rate of return on the investment.

However, these tend to be one-off achievements that are unique to a particular context; there is no reason to believe that implementing the same activities in another context would yield a similar result. The literature points to a consistent set of good practices, but there is little evidence available on the replicability of results from applying these practices across different countries and institutional contexts.

Nor is there any strong evidence on the scalability of this type of work; both in terms of results and the potential for new ways of working to absorb large scale financing for TA. While the literature suggests that politically informed and adaptive TA can deliver meaningful results from time to time, we cannot yet know whether a large-scale shift of TA from more traditional models into the new ways of working would produce results at a larger scale, or simply make it harder to coordinate activities and to track and identify results. Similarly, as these newer ways of working have tended to involve quite focused activities and smaller amounts of financing, it is not clear whether working in this way can usefully be scaled up to absorb the huge amounts of donor financing channelled into TA every year. This was raised as a key issue for consideration during our interviews.

"While there are interesting and engaging case studies in the literature, these do not yet constitute a strong evidence base that shows these efforts can be clearly linked to improved development outcomes. Much of the evidence used so far to support more politically-informed approaches is anecdotal, does not meet the highest standards for a robust body of evidence, is not comparative (systematically or otherwise), and draws on a small number of self-selected, relatively well-known success stories written by programme insiders." Law and Marquette, 2018.[170]

4.4   Barriers to the uptake of more flexible and adaptive TA approaches

The literature and our own interviews suggest that the intellectual argument for more flexible and iterative TA has largely been won. In reality, however, traditional approaches to TA, and to development more broadly, still predominate. There appear to be a series of barriers built into donor systems and processes that make it difficult for them to embrace the new ways of working – or, at least, to do so at scale.

Donor organisations, by their nature, are often bureaucratic and can be unwelcoming of change. Unsworth (2009) notes that 'the notion of thinking of development as a technical problem that requires

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[169] DFAT Office for Development Effectiveness, *Investing in Regional Prosperity: Positioning the Aid Program to Support Australia's Economic Partnerships in Asia*, 2018, p. 39, link.

[170] Laws, E. and Marquette, H. (2018) *Thinking and working politically: Reviewing the evidence on the integration of politics into development practice over the past decade*, TWP Community of Practice, March 2018, link.

a (relatively) straightforward technical solution is deeply engrained in the way many development actors work.' Despite a much greater focus on the political in recent years, 'the default position is still technocratic.'[171] Andrews et al. (2012) similarly report that donors are often locked into ecosystems and organizational practices beyond their control, leading to problems with effective project implementation that remain difficult to solve. Bridges and Woolcock (2017) note that donor staff trying to pursue problem-driven approaches are often seen as naysayers, criticised for pointing out the problems of a traditional approach without having clear suggestions of what could work better.

The literature cautions against the dangers of lip service to the new approaches. Where elements of PDIA and politically smart and locally led development have been accepted into donor agencies, Menocal (2014) cautions that this often seems 'little more than a rhetorical wrapper on the traditional frameworks for business cases, assessment and evaluation.'[172] Making the jump from more traditional TA approaches to more politically aware programming, grounded in local realities, is likely to remain challenging for the time being.[173]

Donor incentives, both political and practical, work systematically against new approaches. Boesen (2015) warns that an 'asymmetrical relationship between donors and recipients and skewed incentives can make it impossible for donors to be 'honest brokers' of endogenous political processes.'[174] The politics of re-focusing the development approach are therefore likely to be complex.[175] Andrews et al. (2012) indicate that this will require 'challenging perspectives about when and how to tie development funding to reform results, asking if external agents and solutions can build local state capabilities, and clarifying whether and how local agents and solutions should play a greater role in their own development.'[176] These are all big questions that donor agencies continue to wrestle with.

Significant aspects of current practice also continue to undermine iterative and locally driven development across the board. Pressure on donors to deliver results for example, continues to increase, as donor agencies are required to justify their spending during times of austerity. Booth and Unsworth (2014) note that a focus on short-term results, often based on pre-determined inputs and linear project designs, coupled with tight restrictions on management overheads, routinely restricts the space for learning and for the acquisition of the in-depth political knowledge required to support new ways of working. Menocal (2014) similarly reports that 'pressure to disburse aid and a narrow concern for quick and visible results do not always provide the foundations to engage with contextual realities and institutional dynamics of change, and instead tend to encourage a focus on short-term outcomes that are least transformational or substantive.'[177]

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[171] Unsworth, S. (2009) in Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, pp.5, link.

[172] Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, link.

[173] Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, pp.2, link.

[174] Boesen, N. (2015) 'Who's in charge here? Interrogating reform resistance in capacity development support", *Capacity Development Beyond Aid,* pp.22, link.

[175] Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. (2012) *Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA),* Centre for Global Development, Working Paper 299, pp.7, link.

[176] Andrews, M., Pritchett, L. and Woolcock, M. (2012) *Escaping Capability Traps through Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA),* Centre for Global Development, Working Paper 299, pp.7, link.

[177] Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, pp.2, link.

"The difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones" John Maynard Keynes, 1935.[178]

Traditional project management and accountability tools favoured by donors often clash with the flexibility and opportunism needed to embrace new ways of working. Algoso and Hudson (2016) argue that 'pre-planned, linear, blueprint approaches to change fail in the face of contextual variations and shifting political interests.[179] Green (2014) also recognises that the technocratic approach of rolling out pre-defined programme activities, often linked to logframes, has 'created a system of staff, contractors, partners and evaluators, who even though they recognise that the system is often based on false assumptions, are either unable or unwilling to do everything differently.'[180] Power (2016) agrees that the logframe is not an ally of adaptation, recognising that pre-determined measures of success often force practitioners to continue down a set path regardless of how well things are working. Booth and Unsworth (2014) argue that legitimate questions around monitoring and evaluation will need to be addressed before new ways of working can really gain traction. What applies to the broader development landscape will also be relevant to how donors approach TA.

"If you know you're going to be measured against activities you said you were going to do, then you do your damnedest to make sure you stick to them, ignoring whether or not they are actually working – this makes processes more important than outcomes", Global Partners Governance, 2014.

In recent years, DFID's 'Smart Rules' and USAID's 'learn and adapt framework' have emerged as strong examples of donor frameworks developed to enable new ways of working. They emphasise intelligent application of principles over strict adherence to rules, and provide greater discretion to project managers, working within larger accountability structures. In reality, however, even when granted greater autonomy, programme managers have largely tended to default to old, inflexible approaches. The World Bank's current work in Nigeria highlights some of the challenges of doing development differently, suggesting that workarounds are often needed and parallel systems of reporting or delivery are commonly used.[181] These findings led Bain et al. (2016) to question the type of skills, organisational processes and incentives required to make this kind of approach more rational and commonplace. The current trend is for donor agencies to hire technical experts for example, with Bridges and Woolcock (2017) noting that the role of 'experts' is almost always to provide answers. Drivers and incentives in donor agencies therefore continue to push interventions along traditional pathways. Yanguas (2014) argues that ultimately being able to drive different approaches to development is about finding the right balance between individuals (creative, passionate) and organisations (consistent, predictable). Becoming more adaptive will require shifts in the aid culture and increased capacity amongst donor

[178] Keynes, J. M. (1935) *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money,* link.

[179] Algoso, D. and Hudson, A. (2016) *Where have we got to on adaptive learning, thinking and working politically, doing development differently etc? Getting beyond the People's Front of Judea,* From Poverty to Power, June 2016, link.

[180] Green, D. (2014) *Thinking and working politically update: where have aid agencies, consultants etc got to?* Link.

[181] Bain, K. A. with Booth, D. and Wild, L. (2016) *Doing Development Differently at the World Bank: Updating the plumbing to fit the architecture,* ODI, September 2016, pp.8, link.

agencies and their development partners to design and manage systems that respond to this way of working.[182]

New approaches to TA will therefore be contingent upon organisational and behavioural changes across the development community. Wilson (2016) highlights that a number of 'levers' will need to be adjusted to increase the capacity for adaptive programming, including those linked to risk appetite, delegated authority and project management approaches. Green (2014) questions whether the best tactic will be to encourage development practitioners to unlearn decades of 'old' approaches, or merely to help those who recognise its flaws to subvert the current system in a more politically informed way.[183] Research by Wild and Foresti (2013) indicates that, despite clear limitations at corporate level, by working under the radar, certain individuals and groups are already finding the space and willingness to adopt more flexible and process oriented ways of working. However, corporate systems limit the scalability of their work.

As with institutional reform in developing countries, reform donor institutions is challenging. The Asia Foundation (2015) is clear that the practices and policies of donor organisations can play a major role in hindering or facilitating flexible programming.[184] Iterative and adaptive ways of working call for a substantial deviation from the default methods of many donor-supported programmes and those who deliver them,[185] suggesting that a total rethink of the approach to development assistance is required. Kaplan (2016) cautions against the assumption that 'building a better donor' will automatically lead to transformational programming. He notes that while new ways of thinking and working are 'useful concepts', there is a need to be realistic about the extent to which real change can be externally driven, and also the extent to which donors truly have the political space to substantially shift their own methodologies and approaches.[186]

5.   Implications for funders

5.1   What are the lessons for funders?

This report has highlighted a number of challenges for donors that wish to offer flexible and responsive TA to developing country governments. Perhaps one of the first general points to consider is the size and shape of the TA sector, and whether it is realistic or desirable for all donors to move towards the new paradigm. Given the number of actors involved, a diversity of approaches is inevitable. There is as yet not much evidence as to whether the new approaches can be successfully delivered at scale by multiple actors. Individual donors still need to find their own fit within the TA space, while continuing to coordinate and avoid duplication with others.

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[182] Yanguas, P. (2014) *Doing Development Differently: The future is now-ish,* Effective States and Inclusive Development, link.
[183] Green, D. (2014) *Thinking and working politically update: where have aid agencies, consultants etc got to?* Link.
[184] The Asia Foundation (2015) *Strategy Testing: an innovative approach to monitoring highly flexible aid programmes,* Working Politically in Practice Series – Case Study No. 3, pp.14, link.
[185] Alari, C. and Thomas, P. (2016) *Increasing the Impact of Aid Interventions to Support Centre of Government Reforms: A Paper on the National School of Government International's Approach*, pp.47, link.
[186] Kaplan, S. (2016) *The Limits of the 'Thinking and Working Politically' Agenda,* OECD February 2016, link.

Donors will still need to use their judgement to identify when new ways of working are appropriate and where they are not. Despite clear arguments for more politically astute and flexible programming, it may not always be the best solution. The standard programming tools were introduced for specific purposes, such as ensuring the accountability of service providers and increasing value for money. There are costs to abandoning, which should be set off against the prospects of increased effectiveness. Furthermore, in contexts where the choice of implementing partner is limited, donors may not feel confident that increasing their flexibility will result in more sophisticated programming. The Asia Foundation (2015) argues that standard programming approaches are more suitable for problems with predictable, straightforward solutions, while flexible programme approaches are better suited to more complex problems where solutions are difficult to predict.[187] There is also evidence that traditional TA approaches can still work in high capacity institutions such as Ministries of Finance and Central Banks, where the role of TA is clear and can be precisely defined and monitored.

Donors will need to be realistic about what their TA can achieve, regardless of the approaches used. Donors and practitioners can easily overestimate their ability to understand and influence complex political dynamics, dynamics that by their nature can be inherently unpredictable. Even the most sophisticated programmes will make little progress unless there are reform constituencies available to support, and this may not always be the case. Booth (2017) similarly notes that "systemic change will only be achieved over the long term; there is no quick fix from new approaches."[188]

More specific messages that donors will need to consider include:

- **Our increased understanding of the complexity of development.** Bain et al. (2016) warn that the next generation of development challenges is likely to be more complex than the last, involving institutional reforms that have previously proven elusive. Development agencies will therefore need to rethink their culture, processes and skill sets in order to support positive momentum to achieve complex institutional reforms.[189]

- **The need to tailor programmes to the local context.** Jones et al. (2012) reiterate the importance of understanding localised interactions between knowledge and power for identifying the right time, topic and champions for engaging with government. This knowledge then needs to be applied in practice. To deliver more effective aid, donors will need to better engage local teams on the ground to continuously guide their programming.

- **The ability to become fit for purpose.** Alari and Thomas (2014) note that 'success ultimately depends on awareness, understanding and insight.'[190] Taking politics seriously is about more than just doing the analysis. Donors will need to reflect on their current practices to identify whether and how they can think and work politically in their everyday work and interactions.[191]

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[187] The Asia Foundation (2015) *Strategy Testing: an innovative approach to monitoring highly flexible aid programmes,* Working Politically in Practice Series – Case Study No. 3, pp.3, link.
[188] David Booth 2018 interview
[189] Bain, K. A. with Booth, D. and Wild, L. (2016) *Doing Development Differently at the World Bank: Updating the plumbing to fit the architecture,* ODI, September 2016, pp.9, link.
[190] Alari, C. and Thomas, P. (2016) *Increasing the Impact of Aid Interventions to Support Centre of Government Reforms: A Paper on the National School of Government International's Approach,* link.
[191] Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, link.

- **The space to change their own practices.** Tavakoli et al. (2013) argue that donors are 'best suited to help facilitate more flexible and iterative ways of working when they themselves emulate these characteristics.'[192] This might include for example, a greater focus on local learning and/ or more internal flexibility to accommodate changing priorities.

- **The best way to maintain accountability**. Menocal (2014) warns that as donors shift towards new ways of working, the relationship between flexibility and accountability will ultimately need to be managed and monitored. How best to do this is something that donors and practitioners will need to work through. Systems will need to be developed that are consistent with new approaches.

- **The need to empower TA providers.** If implementing partners are to seize opportunities and truly engage with flexible programming models, they must be given sufficient flexibility to respond quickly to contextual changes. Booth (2015) suggests donors find a 'new way of partnering with organisations that are capable of acting with the needed imagination and flexibility to solve fundamental development problems.'[193] To do this, Menocal (2014) recommends donors 'create an authorising environment for decision-making that encourages 'positive deviance' and 'creative innovation.'[194]

- **The importance of soft skills.** Simpson (2013) highlights the importance of engaging advisers that are able to build trust with counterparts and that can communicate and network effectively. Booth and Unsworth (2014) suggest changing recruitment and promotion practices to make it clear that other skills are valued alongside technical knowledge.

- **Increasing the appetite for risk.** The OECD (2012) recognises that more politically astute programming often requires a higher appetite for risk, including contextual, institutional and programmatic risk. Menocal (2014) agrees that this type of programming means donors must be 'willing to innovate and risk untested and uncertain new approaches, rather than the standard repertoire of development responses, even when it is unclear whether the investment will bear fruit.'[195]

- **Remembering it's not all about the money.** There is a growing school of thought that bigger budgets can make the delivery of TA more unwieldy and can also distort scrutiny and accountability relationships. Large donor projects can be overdesigned and rigid, preventing flexibility. Small amounts of money may be better suited to responsive and adaptable programming.

- **The donor role in generating evidence.** The literature highlights a clear gap in evidencing the success (or otherwise) of more politically astute and flexible programming. Moving forward donors will have an important role to play in producing evaluation material and demonstrating impact for new ways of working, including through case studies and programme evaluations.

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[192] Tavakoli, H., Simpson, R. and Tilley, H. with Booth, D. (2013) *Unblocking results: Using aid to address governance constraints in public service delivery,* ODI, May 2013, link.

[193] Booth, D. (2015) *Thinking and working politically,* GSDRC Professional Development Reading Pack No.13, pp.2, link.

[194] Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, pp.9, link.

[195] Menocal, A. R. (2014) *Getting real about politics: From thinking politically to working differently,* ODI, pp.9, link.

5.2   Existing practical guidance

This section pulls together some of the practical guidance that has been developed in recent years to support more flexible and iterative approaches to development. It focuses on five areas:

- Diagnostics
- Programme design
- Staffing and programme management
- Monitoring, evaluation and learning
- Governance arrangements.

It is not intended as a fully developed best practice guide for doing this type of work. Instead it seeks to highlight practices and techniques that other development practitioners have found useful. The aim is to promote reflection within donor organisations on the practicalities of funding more locally driven and responsive TA.

5.2.1   Diagnostics

When working in a problem-solving mode, the starting point is to understand the problems and the potential constituencies for change. Teskey (2010) argues that for donors and practitioners to provide effective TA, they first need to fully understand the nature of the agency whose capacity is being developed. They should therefore begin by identifying high-priority local problems. Booth and Unsworth (2014) suggest that the starting point should be 'a genuine effort to seek out existing capacities, perceptions of problems and ideas about solutions, and to enter into some sort of relationship with leaders who are motivated to deploy these capabilities.'[196]

Understanding power dynamics is another priority. Whaites (2015) suggests that practitioners 'interrogate both the project and the broader sector to identify where power and incentive reside and how (and for whom) they are being used.'[197] This could be done through stakeholder mapping, a tool that Teskey (2010) recommends for identifying and understanding the structure and nature of political interests and incentives, or through rigorous PEA.

Furthermore, discussions about power need to be continuous. While many donor projects now produce PEA, there is a risk that it is approached as a once-off exercise or product. The analysis should be a 'living' one, reviewed and developed continuously to inform and guide programming choices. MercyCorps et al. (2016) also advocate 'leveraging multiple forms of data through multiple channels to build and maintain a strong contextual understanding throughout the lifetime of a project.'[198] This similarly provides a basis for continuous reflection and where necessary, programme refinement. This type of on-going data collection, triangulation and analysis ultimately takes time. Development agencies may therefore need to consider dedicating specific analytical capacity to undertake diagnostic work.[199]

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[196] Booth, D. and Unsworth, S. (2014) *Politically smart, locally led development,* ODI Discussion Paper, pp.18, link.
[197] Whaites, A. (2015)
[198] MercyCorps, IRC and ADAPT (2016) *Adapting aid: lessons from six case studies,* link.
[199] MercyCorps, IRC and ADAPT (2016) *Adapting aid: lessons from six case studies,* link.

A final point is that diagnostics should also be inward looking. Whaites (2015) suggests donors encourage more of a focus on their own political economy in order to better understand where negotiations within their own organisations can be made and where they cannot. There is not much point pursuing the analytics for flexible programming for example, if your own organisational rules and processes will prevent this work from even getting started.

5.2.2 Programme design

Kleinfeld (2015) argues that programme designers should not assume to know the 'strategy' from day one. Instead they should create an experimental design that makes a series of small bets based on different theories of change.[200] Mintzberg (2015) notes that you don't plan a strategy; you learn it.[201] Reformers and funders should therefore begin with a problem they are trying to solve, a ToC and impact goals – but not with a rigid multiyear set of activities, objectives and metrics.[202] Whaites (2015) agrees that strategy should set a clear goal, but must allow for significant flexibility and iteration in the day-to-day efforts to make progress towards this goal.

Programme design should also recognise that politics is not static. As highlighted above, continuous analysis is key. Programmes must be designed in a way that allows continued assessment of the local context, the testing of original assumptions and adaptation based on new information and opportunities.[203] Kleinfeld (2015) argues that in practice this means that 'the theory of change, the strategy, the program design, and even the metrics initially selected must be treated as living documents: hypotheses to be tested and reworked, rather than goals to be measured against.'[204] Faustino and Booth (2014) argue that it is this 'process of testing, action and reflection (what worked, what didn't work and why) that is precisely what allows a team to reach the level of specificity needed to change incentives and behaviour.'[205]

"You can learn more by being specifically wrong than by being vaguely right…in many ways, an initial strategy sets a wheel of on-going learning and adaptation in motion", Zia Khan, Rockefeller Foundation, 2014.[206]

Change and experimentation therefore needs to be built into programme design from the start. Teskey (2010) suggests starting small, judging the appetite for development and reform, and later, if feasible,

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[200] Kleinfeld, R. (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, link

[201] Mintzberg, H. in Kleinfeld (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp.33, link

[202] Kleinfeld, R. (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, link

[203] Whaites, A. (2015)

[204] Kleinfeld, R. (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp.34, link

[205] Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014) 'Development Entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change', *Working Politically in Practice: Case Study Series No.2,* ODI and The Asia Foundation, pp.17, link.

[206] Khan, Z. (2014) in Kleinfeld, R. (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp.33, link

widening the scope of a programme. Bridges and Woolcock (2017) recommend treating 'reform designs as compasses rather than maps, there to provide insight and reaction, but not to give inflexible, prescriptive solutions.'[207] Best practice must therefore be replaced with 'best fit' or 'good enough' approaches. Bridges and Woolcock (2017) suggest constructing 'hybrid, second-best solutions' that build on the available supporting conditions, noting that 'such an approach is unlikely to end with a perfect, best practice model but it may nevertheless be good enough; locally relevant and more effective than transferring international standard counterparts.'[208] Power (2016) also recommends designing programmes that create catalysts for change, creating a demonstration effect that can be built upon. Bain et al. (2016) indicate that this may mean lowering the bar on project approvals but raising it for implementation.

Box 11: How to be experimental and adaptive

> **Practitioners should ask themselves the following questions:**
>
> - **Does the initial assessment allow enough time on the ground to gain a deep understanding of the system as a whole?**
>
> - **Does the programme design grow from the assessment of the context – and do the programme design, timeline, and expected goals seem realistic, given the baseline assessment?**
>
> - **Is the programme designed to affect structural aspects of the system?**
>
> - **Does the programme engage local actors who were already imbued with the mission before donor funding began?**
>
> - **Is the programme structured to test explicit hypotheses and assumptions and alter its activities based on those tests?**
>
> - **Does the programme allow for a flexible, iterated process, so that activities can be altered in response to critical junctures and windows of opportunity?**
>
> - **Does the programme design allow for a multiyear timeline, including follow-up after the date of the expected reform, if one exists?[209]**

Lasting reform also needs to be initiated from within the counterpart organisation. Power (2016) notes that 'programme design needs to consider the role of external assistance and how this can best enable and support processes of change, rather than implementing it.'[210] Teskey (2010) similarly recommends choosing the organisation that you intended to work with carefully. He notes that it is easier to design and implement programmes that seek to build capacity in organisations already addressing issues high

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[207] Bridges, K. and Woolcock, M. (2017) *Now (Not) to Fix Problems that Matter: Assessing and Responding to Malawi's History of Institutional Reform,* World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 8289, December 2017, link.

[208] Bridges, K. and Woolcock, M. (2017) *Now (Not) to Fix Problems that Matter: Assessing and Responding to Malawi's History of Institutional Reform,* World Bank Policy Research Working Paper No. 8289, December 2017, link.

[209] Kleinfeld, R. (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp.49, link

[210] Power, G. (2016)

on the political agenda, where initiatives for training, organisational change and institutional reform will be more welcome, or at worst, less opposed.[211]

5.2.3 Staffing and programme management

Staff competencies and incentive structures within funder organisations will need to adapt if they are to better align with new, more flexible development approaches. Hudson (2016) recommends a greater focus on ensuring staff have the right capacity and skillsets needed for adaptive programming. MercyCorps et al. (2016) advise practitioners to 'hire local, seek staff with an adaptive mindset that are inquisitive and able to ask the right questions, and provide mentorship and coaching to enable staff to maintain and/or develop the skills needed for adaptive working.'[212] Manuel (2016) similarly suggests that traditional skills are becoming less important, arguing that technical advisors should be 'development entrepreneurs, innovative, committed and able to absorb setbacks and failure.'[213]

Creating a positive authorising environment for new ways of working is equally important. Human resource incentives should seek to better reward results, learning and adaptation.[214] Crucially, setbacks should be seen as an occasion for learning, rather than censure. Kleinfeld (2015) warns that 'if program designers are subtly rebuked, lose prestige, or their programmes are judged poorly when hypotheses are incorrect, then the hypothesis-driven model will be useless.'[215] Decision-making authority should also be devolved as close to frontline staff and partners as possible, recognising that those closer to the problem are best positioned a) to understand it, and b) to try new things, see whether they're working and iterate accordingly.[216] This might include for example, increasing the financial approval limits of field staff.

MercyCorps et al. (2016) also recognises the need for donor operations to become better integrated if flexible programming is to be properly enabled. They suggest that donors 'bridge the gap between programmes, operations and finance teams so that everyone is on the same page and so that operations and finance teams are fully prepared to seek new ways of working and getting things done, rather than just defaulting to standard practice.'[217] They also encourage staff to develop a full understanding of their organisation's operating and financial procedures, recognising that where programme staff are well informed they are also well positioned to seek flexibility and creative solutions as and where needed.[218] Kleinfeld (2015) argues that resources should be put where they are most needed at a given moment, not where they were expected to be useful three years earlier when a programme was first designed.

Programme managers should therefore expect and encourage adaptation as programmes are rolled out and continuous learning takes place. The Asia Foundation (2015) notes that 'the path to reform

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[211] Teskey, G. (2010) *Notes on capacity development – with a focus on fragile and conflict affected states,* shared by email
[212] MercyCorps, IRC and ADAPT (2016) *Adapting aid: lessons from six case studies,* link.
[213] Manuel, C. (2016) *Forget the money: De-linking technical assistance*, LASER Fourth Synthesis Paper, pp.2, shared by email.
[214] Hudson, A. (2016) *Politics matters, so what? Time for bigger bets (and more learning) on adaptive programming,* Global Integrity, July 2016, link.
[215] Kleinfeld, R. (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp.36, link
[216] MercyCorps, IRC and ADAPT (2016) *Adapting aid: lessons from six case studies,* link
[217] MercyCorps, IRC and ADAPT (2016) *Adapting aid: lessons from six case studies,* link
[218] MercyCorps, IRC and ADAPT (2016) *Adapting aid: lessons from six case studies,* link

evolves over time through building relationships, gaining deeper understanding of the problems and interests at play, experimenting, adjusting programme strategies as insights emerge and recognising and seizing on unexpected opportunities as they arise.'[219] Adaptive programming cannot wait for pre-determined evaluation cycles to provide an opportunity for reflection and change.

5.2.4 Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Despite growing recognition of the potential role and importance of flexible programming approaches, working in this way can make monitoring a challenge. Kleinfeld (2015) states that 'development projects of this nature require engaging in the realms of policy, power, and politics – the nonlinear nature of this kind of reform can make it very hard to know whether you are on the right track, and how to measure whether you are achieving your goals.[220] New thinking around how to approach M&E in this space is therefore required. Kleinfeld (2015) argues that ultimately, measurement will need to align with a strong understanding of how the world being measured actually works.

Teskey (2010) recognises that capacity development should not be regarded as a linear process, warning that capacity may both appear and disappear at different stages of a project.[221] This is largely at odds with the linear M&E tools favoured by traditional donors, including the logframe. Development practitioners will need to shift away from measuring pre-determined specifics and instead look for patterns of change that indicate movement towards overarching project goals. GPG for example, uses an M&E approach that focuses less on reporting specifics and more on tracking progress towards strategic objectives of behavioural and political change. GPG Director Greg Power (2016) argues that 'practitioners should not seek to capture everything, but instead look for evidence of movement from knowledge to application to practice to effect.'[222]

Box 12: Can change be counted?

> **ODI's Budget Strengthening Initiative operates with a logframe defining its expected outputs and outcomes. In order to maintain the necessarily flexibility, its expected outcomes were defined as a certain number of significant policy or institutional changes at each of its programme sites, without specifying in advance what those changes were. The changes are reported by the programme in narrative form, and verified by an independent evaluator.**
>
> **While allowing the necessary flexibility, this approach has presented a number of challenges. It is difficult to identify a 'unit' of change, for counting purposes. Over a period of time, new changes build on old ones, making it difficult to identify where one**

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[219] The Asia Foundation (2015) *Strategy Testing: an innovative approach to monitoring highly flexible aid programmes,* Working Politically in Practice Series – Case Study No. 3, link.

[220] Kleinfeld, R. (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp.4, link

[221] Teskey, G. (2010) *Notes on capacity development – with a focus on fragile and conflict affected states,* shared by email

[222] Power, G. (2016) *All About Behaviour: KAPE®, Adaptation and Sticky Institutional Change,* Global Partners Governance, Politically Agile Programming, Paper 3, link.

> **change stops and the next begins. There are no objective measures for determining how many changes represent a good return on the investment.**[223]

Bakewell and Garbutt (2005) similarly advocate an approach that sets out the underlying programme logic and suggests ways of showing progress, but without becoming an unwieldy or rigid instrument that locks actors into inappropriate courses of action.'[224] Kleinfeld (2015) recommends donors consider factors such as 'the strength and intensity of support for and opposition to reform, who has power in the system, and the relative weighting of supporters and opponents, the rules or history of how political parties interact, the rules or ways citizens interact with their politicians and the rhetorical shape of the public debate.'[225] To encourage thinking in this way Kleinfeld (2015) has introduced the 'phase space' (i.e. the space of the possible). This requires practitioners to broaden out their focus, measuring the space of the politically possible and whether this is moving in a direction that is more amenable to reform and inimical to those who oppose certain policy goals.

When it comes to setting indicators, The Asia Foundation (2015) advises against investing resources upfront to establish baselines and identify indicators, noting that this could inadvertently 'lock in' a ToC and prevent teams from exploring other options or seizing opportunities when they emerge.'[226] Power (2016) similarly cautions that it is impossible to know what the most salient indicators will be in advance, recommending that practitioners adopt a combination of quantitative and quantitative indicators that can be used to reinforce one another throughout a project lifecycle.[227] Faustino and Booth (2014) recognising the challenge of identifying actionable metrics, advise practitioners to wait until reform objectives become clearer before identifying the 'measures that matter.'[228]

"Progress looks less like a freight train barrelling down a track, whose forward motion can be measured at regular increments, and more like a sailboat, sometimes catching a burst of wind and surging forward, sometimes becalmed, and often having to move in counterintuitive directions to get to its destination" Rachel Kleinfeld 2015 [229]

Underpinning the logic of adaptive and flexible programming is the need for continuous monitoring. Wilson (2016) argues that, in experimental situations, carefully built in M&E and learning is critical to enabling donors to overcome their natural inclination to hold back until they are more certain of what they can achieve. To meet this need for continuous monitoring, Australia's Department of Foreign

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[223] See Budget Strengthening Initiative website: Impact and evaluation, link.

[224] Bakewell, O. and Garbutt, J. (2005) in Power, G. (2016) *The logframe and the beautiful game: Project logic v football logic,* Global Partners Governance, Politically Agile Programming, Paper 3, link.

[225] Kleinfeld, R. (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, link

[226] The Asia Foundation (2015) *Strategy Testing: an innovative approach to monitoring highly flexible aid programmes,* Working Politically in Practice Series – Case Study No. 3, link.

[227] Power, G. (2016) *All About Behaviour: KAPE®, Adaptation and Sticky Institutional Change,* Global Partners Governance, Politically Agile Programming, Paper 3, link.

[228] Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014) 'Development Entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change', *Working Politically in Practice: Case Study Series No.2,* ODI and The Asia Foundation, link.

[229] Kleinfeld, R. (2015) *Improving development design and evaluation: plan for sailboats, not trains,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp.4, link

Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has been working with The Asia Foundation (TAF) to develop a 'Strategy Testing' approach: a monitoring system designed to facilitate and support programme flexibility. While it remains a relatively new tool, initial feedback from programme teams and external researchers suggests it is proving to be an effective system.[230] An indication of success is that other TAF programmes outside the DFAT-TAF partnership are either adopting Strategy Testing themselves or expressing interest in incorporating features of the approach into their work.[231]

Box 13: Strategy testing

Strategy testing (ST) is a monitoring approach that requires programme teams to take periodic, structured breaks from day-to-day programme implementation to collectively reflect on what they have learned and to ask whether the assumptions underpinning programme strategies remain valid in light of new information, insights and shifts in local context. Programme teams then adjust programmes as needed to increase the likelihood of achieving results. The approach ensures new insights and information gathered during programme implementation continuously informs programme direction. It is intended to drive, as well as track, an iterative process of narrowing and refining programme outcomes and adjusting the strategy to achieve those outcomes.

ST is not synchronised with donor reporting cycles but with the programmes pace and direction of change, so that adaptation occurs in response to emerging opportunities. This allows teams to transform what they learn into immediate action, rather than delaying application of lessons learned until an end-of-programme review.

The process includes:

1. Programme teams develop an initial ToC to articulate a collective understanding of the problem the programme aims to address and the key factors that might enable or undermine actions taken. The initial ToC is the teams 'best guess' about the most likely path to change and is expected to evolve over time.

2. The first ST exercise is done approximately 4 months after the initial ToC, and then repeated every 3-4 months. This involves a structured discussion that generally takes a full day and must include all members of the core programme team. In some cases, trusted partners or external consultants are invited to join all or parts of the session. The team reflects on the latest ToC, critically assessing whether new information increases the team's confidence in their current strategies or suggests they need to adjust the programme. The ToC is revised as needed and reasons, along with operational and budget implications, are documented in an 'adjustment to ToC form'.

3. A timeline tool is used throughout the programme to capture all major decisions and events that occur. This also helps to inform discussion at each ST.

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230 The Asia Foundation (2015) *Strategy Testing: an innovative approach to monitoring highly flexible aid programmes,* Working Politically in Practice Series – Case Study No. 3, link.

231 The Asia Foundation (2015) *Strategy Testing: an innovative approach to monitoring highly flexible aid programmes,* Working Politically in Practice Series – Case Study No. 3, pp.13, link.

> **Following each round of ST, the programme team submits completed documentation to the regional team responsible for overall management of the DFAT-TAF partnership (i.e. revised ToC, updated Timeline, Adjustments to ToC form). These documents record all programmatic decisions and adjustments, serving an important accountability function. The regional management team reviews the documentation and provides feedback where necessary.**

5.2.5 Contracting and oversight

Pellini and Nixon (2016) argue that formal contractual agreements inevitably result in power imbalances between funder and TA provider, with a degree of rigidity that hinders more flexible approaches. Despite recognition of the challenges associated with traditional contracting mechanisms, limited guidance exists on the type of governance arrangements that might enable more flexible and adaptive programming. A couple of approaches that have been tried in this space, including flexible grant agreements and partnership agreements.

Flexible grant agreements focus on high-level objectives; activities and outputs are indicative, allowing an iterative process to evolve. Faustino and Booth (2014) reflect on the use of flexible grant agreements in the Philippines, pointing to the central role these can play in attracting development entrepreneurs and promoting new, and more flexible, ways of working. They note that, if properly structured, this type of grant can provide the balance between accountability and autonomy.[232] Hudson (2016) similarly calls for procurement and contracting processes that focus on high level results, suggesting that these enable, support and incentivize adaptation. Putting into place the open contracting principles that the World Bank and others have championed can enrich the informational environment for learning and adaptation.[233]

Partnership agreements take a different approach. These are typically brokered by a third party, involving a process of negotiation that results in a shared set of working principles and systems, creating space for context-driven solutions and increasing the appetite for risk.[234] DFAT has introduced this way of working in Indonesia for example, to govern its Knowledge Sector Initiative. In this instance, a partnership broker helped to identify major implementation challenges on both sides of the partnership, supported a workshop to identify and agree shared goals between the donor and the delivery team, and developed a set of common working principles, communication practices and protocols. A health check of the partnership undertaken six months later found much better investment in the programme's shared vision, improved communications and better reporting mechanisms.[235]

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[232] Faustino, J. and Booth, D. (2014) 'Development Entrepreneurship: How donors and leaders can foster institutional change', *Working Politically in Practice: Case Study Series No.2,* ODI and The Asia Foundation, link.

[233] Hudson, A. (2016) *Politics matters, so what? Time for bigger bets (and more learning) on adaptive programming,* Global Integrity, July 2016, link.

[234] Pellini, A. and Nixon, N. (2016) *Are partnership agreements a way forward for Doing Development Differently?* Doing Development Differently, link.

[235] Pellini, A. and Nixon, N. (2016) *Are partnership agreements a way forward for Doing Development Differently?* Doing Development Differently, link.

Donors and practitioners will ultimately need to work together in breaking the deadlock around effective management for adaptive programming. GPG (2016) argues that practitioners will need to get better at explaining the benefits of this type of work and at providing reassurance to donors on the use of resources. Donors on the other hand, will need to get better at thinking outside of the box and identifying opportunities within existing management processes and arrangements.

When moving to adaptive programming, donors are required to give up some of the security that comes with traditional programme management tools, such as logframes, that enable them to hold their implementers to account for a defined set of deliverables. This loss of control needs to be counterbalanced with active oversight of programme delivery, to provide an alternative form of accountability. Programme steering committees or similar governance bodies, involving representatives of both the funder and the counterpart institution, provide adaptive programmes with permission to operate in a flexible manner, and offer stakeholders a means of ensuring that the adaptations are well-founded and directed towards agreed goals. The more politically sensitive the terrain in which the programme is operating, the greater the need for clear rules of the game and robust governance structures to ensure they are met.

6. **Conclusions**

It is clear that we are at an inflection point in TA practice that is long overdue.

Scepticism about traditional TA practice has been growing steadily for many years. Despite the weaknesses of monitoring and evaluation data in this area, the available evidence suggests that the overall development return on TA has been disappointing. There are many convincing critiques in the literature of conventional TA practice, including for its poor coordination, its supply-driven nature and implicit conditionalities. Recent literature offers a more fundamental critique, suggesting that TA rests upon a faulty ToC It challenges the assumptions that institutional change is primarily a technical challenge, that capacity gaps are binding constraints on institutional performance, and that 'best practice' institutional models can be replicated in new contexts. The literature points out the substantial risk of perverse effects from overinvestment in TA – including the risk that Western institutional models are replicated in form but not in function. While conventional TA can succeed at times in building islands of capacity, there is not much evidence that these have a cumulative impact on building overall developing country capacity.

In response to these critiques, a new paradigm for TA has emerged, based on context-specific, politically informed and adaptive delivery models. The new paradigm recasts capacity development not as the achievement of predefined institutional forms, but as the results of engaging national actors in solving practical problems in an iterative manner. It reimagines the role of the TA provider, from external expert to a facilitator or broker of change.

While there is a high level of intellectual support in the literature for the new paradigm, the evidence base for its effectiveness remains underdeveloped. There is a growing number of case studies pointing to successful changes brought about through the new approach. However, there is limited evidence on whether these results can be scaled up or replicated in different contexts. We do not yet know whether they require exceptionally skilled implementers or whether they are techniques that anyone can learn.

There is also little in the literature at present on which development challenges are suited to flexible and iterative approaches.

It is also clear that there are significant practical barriers standing in the way of their widespread uptake. The transaction costs involved in moving towards flexible and politically informed programming are high. Donors tend to default to technocratic approaches and their standard programme management tools create disincentives for implementers to innovate. A major shift in TA practice would require a significant rethink of standard programme design and delivery practices.

There is therefore a significant risk that the new paradigm results in a shift in rhetoric, rather than practice. Concerns are already being raised in the literature that programme designs are paying lip service to the new approach, without building in the necessary contextual analysis, stakeholder engagement and continuous learning.

At this important juncture, we need to continue to invest in research and analysis on TA practice and results, to develop the new paradigm from an appealing set of ideas into practical delivery models that can be widely adopted. This will include investment in three areas:

- Monitoring and evaluation of new approaches to TA, to document not just successful change but also the conditions and success factors that brought it about.
- Further analysis of how donor rules, contracting processes and programme management systems affect the behaviour of implementers, and how to incentivise the right behaviours.
- The development of further guidance and practical tools on adaptive TA, to promote a shared understanding of what good practice looks like.

7. Annex A: Interview list

Name	Organisation	Position
Daniel Roger	World Bank	Economist, Impact Evaluation Team
Jim Brumby	World Bank	Director Public Service and Performance in the Governance Global Practice
Jasmine Khan	World Bank	Strategy Group
Verena Fritz	World Bank	Senior Public Sector Specialist
Greg Power	Global Partners Governance	Director
Heather Marquette	Birmingham University	Professor of Development Politics
Alan Whaites	National School of Government International	Senior Advisor and Head of Profession
David Booth	ODI	Research Fellow
Neil McCulloch	OPM	Project Director
Lisa Williams	OECD DAC	Acting Team Lead Accountable and Effective Institutions
Taylor Brown	Palladium Consultants	Consultant
Jonathan Said	Tony Blair Foundation	Former Country Head, Liberia
Jaime Faustino	The Asia Foundation	Programme Director, Economic Reform and Development Entrepreneurship
Peter Taylor	DFID	Deputy Head, Better Delivery Department and Head of Profession Programme Delivery

Written material was also provided to inform this piece of work by Graham Teskey, Principal Technical Lead on Governance for Abt Associates (and informal chair of the TWP working group), Clare Manuel, former Director at the Law and Development Partnership, Verena Fritz, Senior Public Specialist at the World Bank and Greg Power, Director at Global Partnerships Governance.

8. Annex B: Links to practical guidance

Here we provide links to practical pieces of guidance and templates for thinking through and 'doing' more flexible and iterative development work. While these tend to focus on approaches to development more broadly, they are relevant and can be applied to the field of TA.

Bridges and Woolcock (2017) provide a table that sets out a series of questions that teams can ask themselves to ensure a more PDIA principled approach. The table lists each set of questions under different 'principals', compares the questions against typical practice, documents tools to consider and also sets out further reading (p.26-29) – Link.

Global Partners Governance (2016) has prepared a paper that introduces and describes its approach to institutional reform and political change. In it GPG set out their KAPE (knowledge-application-practice-effect) methodology and describe how this has been used in practice to support parliamentary committees in Iraq – Link.

Kleinfeld (2015) provides a basic matrix for thinking about empirical evaluation and how 'more' and 'less' rigorous approaches work and can be implemented in practice (p.41). She also sets out a series of questions that programme designers should ask themselves when seeking to design more flexible and adaptive programmes (p.49) – Link.

The DFAT-TAF Partnership provides examples of the tools and templates used to undertake their Strategy Testing approach. This included examples of the Strategy Testing Timeline, Strategy Testing Guide Review Questions, Strategy Testing Adjustments to the Theory of Change and templates for the same (p.5 onwards) – Link.

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