



Preparedness Enabler's Guide

PEG

May 2023

The Preparedness Enabler's Guide (PEG): Practical Do's and Don'ts along the path to sustainable localisation

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Website: <https://logcluster.org/>
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Citation: De Bonis D. & Holmes A., 2023. "The Preparedness Enabler's Guide (PEG): Practical Do's and Do Not's along the path to sustainable localisation." Global Logistics Cluster (GLC), Rome Italy.

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Foreword

The localisation discourse is largely driven by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain commitments, all of which compel signatories, OECD donors and international humanitarian organisations to demonstrate progress towards shared localisation goals.

Founded in the Logistics Cluster Strategy 2016-2021, the **Field Based Preparedness Project (FBPP)** is the Global Logistics Cluster's response to the Grand Bargain, IASC and several other global frameworks promoting localisation in the emergency preparedness and disaster risk reduction spaces.

Led by the Logistics Cluster partner community on global, regional, and national levels, the FBPP was born with a strong community spirit and grew from initially four pilot countries in 2018 to reaching over 21 countries across the globe in 2022.

Gaining knowledgeable first-hand experience of some of the universal challenges to sustainability that can affect the more traditional, operational approaches to logistics preparedness, the FBPP recognised early on that supporting **sustainable institutional capacity development** is key to realising localisation goals.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, the FBPP worked to integrate an **Institutional Capacity Strengthening (ICS)** approach and methodology into its design and implementation.

The **Preparedness Enablers' Guide (PEG)** emerges from this FBPP experience in adopting a system-strengthening perspective, a non-exhaustive guide to new approaches to **enabling** the preparedness of others.

As such, we hope that those of you working on sustainable preparedness will find the PEG useful in achieving your shared goals.

It was an honour and a unique experience to work with and learn from so many **passionate colleagues across the Logistics Cluster community**, and I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to all colleagues, partners, friends who are the heart and soul of the FBPP.

Martin Keitsch
Global Logistics Cluster Head of Preparedness

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the following individuals and teams who have been instrumental in helping shape the PEG by sharing their inputs, experiences and reflections over the years:

For their vision and support to advancing new approaches and perspectives in Logistics preparedness:

- Athalie Mayo, former Global Logistics Cluster Coordinator
- Martin Keitsch, Head of Preparedness

For their commitment to operationalising the framework and materials described throughout the PEG as part of their in-country FBPP rollout as FBPP officers in Bhutan, Kenya and Tajikistan respectively:

- Temmy Tanubrata
- Daniel Kirwa
- Zarrina Mirzoboeva
- Radislav Cicic

For their inputs and review of emerging versions of the PEG as part of an external Peer Review Group comprising sector professionals and senior academics:

- Albrecht Brecht, Managing Director, Prepared International (PPI)
- Cesar Russo, Senior Capacity Strengthening Consultant, Regional Bureau for Asia and the Pacific (RBB), World Food Programme
- Guillaume Mathieu, Readiness and Operations Advisor, Action Contre la Faim.
- Juan Gálvez, Team Lead, Global Logistics, Procurement and Supply Chain Excellence, International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
- Magnus Hagelsteen, Researcher & Director MSc programme Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change Adaptation (DRMCCA), Lund University Centre for Risk Assessment and Management (LUCRAM)
- Wipawa Chuenchit, Regional FBPP Manager, Global Logistics Cluster (GLC)

Additional thanks to the many other colleagues whose names may not appear here, but whose support and contribution over the years have been vital and are greatly appreciated.

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Abbreviations

ARI	Ability and Readiness Index
CAS	Complex adaptive system
CD	Capacity Development
CNM	Capacity needs mapping
FBPP	Field-based preparedness project
GLC	Global Logistics Cluster
ICS	Institutional capacity strengthening
LoU	Letter of Understanding
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding



THE PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE

At a glance: What do you want to do?

 <p>Understand the fundamentals behind effective localisation</p>	 <p>Recognise and avoid common localisation challenges and pitfalls</p>	 <p>Design and implement enabling localisation engagements</p>		
<p>I want to learn more about...</p>	<p>I want to avoid...</p>	<p>I want to know <i>how to:</i></p>		
<p>Key concepts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rationale for localisation • The importance of complexity • The need for change management skills <p>Key priorities that aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • (Re) Centre the action • Recognise different capacity types and levels • Support institutionalisation • Recognise institutional ecosystems • Encourage sustainability • Define capacity outcomes • Advocate, educate and evolve <p>Key principles that focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership • Partnership • Contextualisation • Commitment, continuity and stability • Flexibility • Systems-strengthening 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terminological ambiguity • Overlooking implementation failure • The “isomorphic mimicry” trap • The “expert blind spot” • Underestimating complexity • Other pressures, rigidity and short-termism • “Doing” as a shortcut to enabling • Different types of “project failure” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess the context for feasibility <p>1) Strengthen existing engagements</p> <p>2) Start from scratch (full roadmap)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Phase 0. Learning and preparation • Phase 1. Local actor engagement and prioritisation • Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment • Phase 3. Design and implementation • Phase 4. Monitoring, evaluation & learning 		
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Go straight to a practical tool to support the CD process¹</p> </div>				
<p style="text-align: center;">I want to use the...</p>				
<table border="0" style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td data-bbox="576 1498 1010 1874"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 steps of engagement • Ability and Readiness • CD framework, entry points and process milestones • CD Fundamentals • Capacity Needs Mapping (CNM) Process Guidance and guiding questions </td> <td data-bbox="1010 1498 1447 1874"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Outcome Statement (COS) Formulation Guidance • Capacity Transformation Process • Monitoring guidance • Sample Theory of Change tailored to the FBPP COS • Stakeholder Mapping </td> </tr> </table>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 steps of engagement • Ability and Readiness • CD framework, entry points and process milestones • CD Fundamentals • Capacity Needs Mapping (CNM) Process Guidance and guiding questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capacity Outcome Statement (COS) Formulation Guidance • Capacity Transformation Process • Monitoring guidance • Sample Theory of Change tailored to the FBPP COS • Stakeholder Mapping
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¹ These tools have been customised for the FBPP and are publicly available online: logcluster.org/preparedness/ics. For access to the sector-neutral versions, please reach out to the authors through info@iumladee.com.



THE PRACTITIONER'S GUIDE

At a glance: Troubleshooting questions

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Overview

Capacity Development is the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time.

What the Guide is about

For decades actors in humanitarian and development spheres have been advocating for “**capacity development**” as a means of enabling others to perform autonomously in pursuit of their own goals. Yet, in spite of enormous investments and a diversity of approaches, there is a growing consensus amongst practitioners, donors and stakeholders, that securing sustainable capacity outcomes that lead to measurable results and autonomy, is challenging.

Yet, from challenges emerges learning. There are still many different approaches to putting capacity development into practice, but increasingly, important concepts, models and considerations are finding a common shape as practitioners, academics and other key actors share lessons and experiences of what works – and what does not.

This Guide aims to contribute to that process of sharing and creating a common understanding of the fundamental “Do’s” and “Don’ts” of effective **capacity development** for local actors. It presents key concepts and considerations emerging from the experiences of the [Global Logistics Cluster Field-based Preparedness Project \(FBPP\)](#), together with practical tools and step-by-step guidance to help translate them into day-to-day work. It is based on FBPP learnings and experiences and a broad cross-section of academic literature. It emphasises process over product, explaining that *how tools are used and their findings leveraged* can have greater impact on outcomes than just “having” the tools.

The Guide is not about the *technical* aspects of humanitarian preparedness; it assumes that readers come with their own technical expertise in this regard. Instead, it aims to support subject matter experts in engaging with local actors in a way that will support effective localisation. It offers a non-exhaustive roadmap in this regard, drawing on insights from the

FBPP as the Cluster’s response to global initiatives promoting localisation.

Who the Guide is for

This Guide is intended for anyone (individual or organisation) wishing to enable others through a capacity development process, who would like to understand what more can (and should) be done under the capacity development umbrella beyond the traditional “training and workshop” approaches.

It may be particularly relevant to organisations with strong technical and/or operational capacities that wish to support other organisations in acquiring similar ones in a way that they will be able to maintain them over time without constant external support.

How the Guide is structured

The Guide targets *practitioners*. It is highly distilled to offer a quick, practical read. It presents key considerations that should be taken at face value when defining the capacity development process, in a very succinct *need to know* manner. Where relevant, these are followed by step-by-step operational guidance and tools on how to translate them into meaningful action (or interaction) on the ground. The various sections answer the questions “**What do I need to know?**” and “**Now that I know that, how do I work with it?**”.

Where appropriate, sections will end with references to additional reading that may help inquisitive readers answers the questions “**Who says it is that way? Where can I read more?**”.

Layout and navigation

This Guide has been optimised for *digital* reading and uses hyperlinks to help readers navigate it:

- [Green links](#) go to other sections within the Guide.
- [Blue links](#) go to internet links *outside* the Guide.
- The link in the footer page points to the most recent online version of this Guide.

The PEG includes a **Glossary** where important terms, definitions and concepts are clearly and concisely defined; where these items appear in the main body of the PEG they are [hyperlinked](#) to their Glossary definitions for ease of reference.



Premises and considerations

Boundaries and scope

Prevailing mindsets. The PEG emerges from practical experiences in the humanitarian preparedness space, but it speaks to a **development-oriented mindset**. As such, for some readers, reading the PEG may entail familiarising with *the idea* of applying a development lens to humanitarian approaches *before* taking on board the PEG's learnings and recommendations on *how to do* so effectively, in practice. Thus, for some, the PEG may offer a double-barrelled learning journey.

Thematic focus. The institutional capacity development framework and guidance package discussed in the PEG is **sector-neutral** by design and can be customised to speak to any humanitarian and/or development supply chain or programmatic space. To serve the mandate of the FBPP, it was **customised** to speak to the humanitarian logistics preparedness context, and as such, the practical examples and experiences reflected in the PEG relate to this space.

Stakeholder entry-points. The PEG is concerned with capacity development engagements unfolding in **local actor** contexts and specifically, to those involving individuals covering national, sub-national and/or local roles mandated to prepare for, coordinate and lead humanitarian response within national borders.

Language Conventions

Capacity development should be read as synonymous with *capacity strengthening* but not as equivalent to *capacity building*, *augmentation* or *substitution*, all of which may be seen as smaller actions that can contribute to a wider capacity development process.

Local actors includes those government stakeholders and/or other national/sub-national organisations who are *seeking to introduce change* within their own contexts, policies, practices, procedures and structures, to achieve objectives of their own setting.

Facilitating organisations describes those organisations engaged by the local actors as a partner to help facilitate the change process.

Capacity Development Practitioner (CD Practitioner) describes a person working privately, in or on behalf of, a

facilitating organisation and interfacing with local actors on capacity development engagement design and delivery.

Partnership describes the *relationship* between local and facilitating organisations that enables a change process to move forward.

Engagement refers to the actions operationalised under the partnership and reflects **flexibility and process evolution** that sees all parties participating actively. It is used *in contrast* to “project” but may be used interchangeably with “programme” given the longer-term impact-oriented philosophy underpinning the latter.

Project describes an individual or collaborative enterprise that is planned to achieve a particular aim. It often involves pre-planning, assumptions of linear cause and effect logic, limited or short timelines for completion, fixed budgetary and/or other resource investments and expectations of tangible and demonstrable results. It may experience rigidity in implementation and may be grounded in implicit imbalances in power relations.

Enabling is used throughout the PEG, in the sense of “*making possible*” and occurs through the *partnership* between the local actor and facilitating organisations. The partnership enables local actors to perform autonomously and effectively in the pursuit of their goals by acquiring or strengthening the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources.

Positionality

Recent research acknowledges there is a global drive to support localisation as a path to locally led practice; however, much of the literature in this field is and has historically been, generated by actors from the global north. As such, it is informed by their perspectives and knowledge frameworks; the same applies to the PEG.

To help balance worldviews, the PEG authors engaged and consulted the global FBPP officers who are nationals of the countries where the FBPP is/was active. These officers contributed invaluable insights, perspectives and experiences around engaging with government counterparts and the provision of capacity development support. An informal peer-review group was also established, encompassing a mix of actors from around the world.

Reading: (Baguios et al., 2021)



Background to the PEG

The Preparedness Enablers' Guide (PEG) was born from the Global Logistics Cluster's **Field Based Preparedness Project** (FBPP). The FBPP is the Cluster's response to several global initiatives promoting localisation, including:

- [Grand Bargain](#) commitments on "localisation" and "disaster-preparedness" (see [Workstream 2](#))
- The [Transformative Agenda to Build national capacity in preparedness and contingency planning](#) (IASC, 2015b)
- The [Common Framework for Preparedness](#) (IASC, 2013) which states the importance of national leadership – complemented by civil society – and the need for (nationally -led) joint planning and coordination with the full range of humanitarian actors.
- The [Emergency Response Preparedness Guidelines](#) (IASC, 2015a) which advocate for "a proactive approach to emergency preparedness", and stress the collaborative role of clusters in preparedness by "[defining] how agencies will work together to achieve sector-specific objectives". They also acknowledge that preparedness "can be complementary to development action ... [by] building national and local resilience".
- The [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015 – 2030](#), specifically Goals 5 and 6.

The FBPP commenced in 2018, and initially focussed on operational forms of support for local actor preparedness. [Candidate countries were identified](#) using a series of global indices and a scoping mission assessed the feasibility of and country interest in initiating the project in each. The FBPP's objective was, and remains, to strengthen and localise national humanitarian logistics capacities to increase local actor autonomy, but *how* this has been pursued has evolved significantly since project inception.

Initially, FBPP in-country activities largely consisted of ad-hoc training (e.g., warehouse management, erecting mobile storage units, etc.), training-of-trainers when requested, and tailor-made and facilitated table-top simulation exercises aimed at bringing key local actors together to discover, document and address potential operational issues. However, in 2019 an internal review found that FBPP activities, while welcomed by national actors, were not leading to sustainable outcomes for them –i.e., people trained often moved on to other roles, the operational causes and solutions coming out of the simulations were blind to the complex political, economic, and social systems they resided in; and local actors were not enabled to design and run simulations on their own.

To address these shortcomings, the FBPP adopted a comprehensive institutional capacity strengthening framework in 2020 and developed guidance (available [here](#)) tailored to the humanitarian supply chain context.

This helped broaden the operational focus to encompass the broader institutional systems underpinning national logistics preparedness capacities –i.e., the enabling policy environment, institutional systems, financing and the roles of other actors. Guidance addressed how capacities could be developed, maintained and modified by local actors to help reduce dependence upon international support.

Rollout of the above began in 2021, and during rollout, [ability and readiness assessments](#) were added to the package. Conducted jointly between the FBPP and local actors, these helped move the FBPP to a demand-based approach as they facilitate greater agency among national actors in (i) deciding whether or not to engage with the FBPP, and (ii) in deciding whether the engagement should adopt a more traditional training-and-simulation based approach or an institutional capacity strengthening one.

In 2022 the FBPP received additional two-year funding which allowed it to take on more of a *platform* role. Today it maintains 'back-office' resources at global and regional levels through which countries may seek FBPP facilitating support for their own humanitarian logistics preparedness.

Thus, the FBPP history and evolution have allowed it to explore a more system-wide and enabling perspective in its humanitarian logistics preparedness work and this experience and learning are captured in and shared through this PEG.

I What we need to achieve

I.1 The global agenda

In recent decades global efforts to reduce disaster risk and vulnerability have met with some success. Yet exposure and risk are increasing as climate related disasters grow in frequency and intensity.

People's risk of exposure to disaster is increasing faster than their ability to deal with it is, and the economic, social, health, environmental impacts are most felt at local levels. Disaster preparedness is becoming more important than ever in protecting development gains.

The [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030](#) was the first major agreement of the post-2015 development agenda and provides Member States with concrete actions to protect development gains from the risk of disaster. It is the successor instrument to the [Hyogo Framework for Action \(HFA\) 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters](#).

But what do global, regional, national and local actors need to do to deliver against these global agenda?

I.2 Priorities going forward

I.2.1 Enhance preparedness capacities

A key element of any effective disaster risk reduction strategy is preparedness.

'Preparedness' refers to the ability of governments, professional response organisations, communities and individuals to recognise, anticipate and respond effectively to the impact of likely, imminent or ongoing hazards, events or conditions. (adapted from (OCHA, 2016))

Effective preparedness is a **multi-disciplinary** capacity that relies, to greater or lesser extents, on effective coordination and oversight, hazard analysis and early warning, vulnerability analysis, shock-responsive programming, humanitarian supply chain, and emergency telecommunications. This means that

enhancing preparedness may call for support in one or more of these areas.

Preparedness allows **local government** and **other actors** to be aware of risks and deploy staff and resources quickly when needed. Greater speed and quality of assistance can make a big difference in saving lives and reducing suffering.

At **community and household** levels it helps people plan for and manage the impact of shocks on their and their families' livelihoods and wellbeing, helping them to reduce negative coping strategies.

Failure to invest in preparedness, particularly in contexts prone to recurring disasters or crisis situations, can lead to **government** and other key stakeholders experiencing a state of continuous crisis response, depletion of financial and structural resources and an inability to respond to people's needs effectively and efficiently in the interests of rapid recovery. At the **community and household** level, it can lead to gradual depletion of individual and family resilience capacities, an inability to anticipate, prevent, absorb, adapt and transform before and after a crisis, greater vulnerability to shocks and an increase in negative coping strategies.

I.2.2 Prioritise localisation as a strategy

Localisation is a **process** through which local actors gain the skills and resources needed to spearhead **locally led practice** so they can act **autonomously** without continuous support from external organisations.

This can involve strengthening and leveraging existing local resources and capacities – provided this does not create an unrealistic and unsustainable financial and practical burden on the local actors themselves – or can involve strengthening their access to information, partnerships and external resources and the decision-making skills required to leverage these in the most effective and efficient way possible under diverse circumstances e.g., optimising partnerships, and/or pre-agreements to mobilise international capacity when needs exceed established thresholds.



Today the challenges of changing global contexts and stretched national and international resources are such that a realistic approach to localisation may need to be “as local as possible, as international as necessary” (Barbelet, 2018).

Localisation can be thought of as the journey, while locally-led practice is the destination. (Baguios et al., 2021).

The term [localisation](#) can be understood in many ways, as there is no single, accepted definition. However, in all cases, the road to enhancing national **preparedness capacities** lies, among other things, in strengthening the preparedness capacities of local actors.

Why localisation? Local actors are likely to understand the context better than external actors (meaning they have strong *contextual capacity*), they know what will work and what will not, and are likely to be known and accepted by those in need of assistance and protection. This knowledge and familiarity can make organising and delivering assistance faster, easier and **more effective**.

Local actors are often on-site or close by when disasters strike, which means mobilising them to areas in need is not costly and limited funding can go much further (IFRC, n.d.). As COVID demonstrated, they can also move more freely even when international borders are closed.

In the 2016 [Grand Bargain](#) the global humanitarian community recognised the **pivotal role** of local actors in preparedness, and committed to promoting **localisation processes** to increase their engagement in preparing for and responding to disasters, thus helping to bridge the humanitarian and development divide.

Failure to invest in localisation means that local response efforts may **continue to depend** on external or international organisations and donors. Yet these players are increasingly stretched, as climate change and geopolitical tensions increase the frequency, intensity and impact of disasters and demands for external support.

Reducing demands where possible by strengthening local capacities to address them is essential.

I.2.3 Adopt systems-strengthening models

Localisation requires shifting power from international to national and local institutions and actors by directing **resources** towards them, supporting their increased **agency**², recognising, respecting and leveraging their existing capacities and ensuring they have the **space** to operate and grow, and the **motivation** to do so. Yet, this can be challenging as the relevant spaces are often crowded and dominated by international actors (often from the global north), who may be under pressure to comply with international donor requirements.

Efforts to support local actors in strengthening their presence, role and leadership in these contexts for the longer term, can benefit from holistic [systems-strengthening](#) approaches. These approaches focus on reinforcing their strategic positioning and [functional capacities](#) whilst offering the more traditional forms of capacity development (e.g., trainings, building infrastructure etc.), which instead focus on shorter-term engagements and more tangible, measurable outputs.

In this way, local actors are facilitated in advocating – internally and externally – for increased resources and space within which to operate autonomously, as appropriate to context, while simultaneously working to strengthen critical technical and operational capacities.

Failure to invest in systems-strengthening approaches can affect the *sustainability and/or the appropriateness* of the support provided. Engagements that propose the traditional one-size-fits-all model may not invest in key processes to institutionalise change and/or may fail to appreciate the uniqueness of local contexts. This means they may not recognise key interdependencies between different people, functions and institutions in the wider system and may fail to pinpoint where – and with whom – critical capacity assets (opportunities) or gaps and needs lie. This can result in the common problem of **short-lived benefits of a supply-driven offer** which does not address what receiving stakeholders actually need,

² In general terms, **agency** refers to a sense of being able to take action, and to anticipate potential consequences. By extension, agency can also be a deliberate act of *refusal* e.g., by *refusing* to accept the requests or actions of others. In the localisation context,

agency can be thought of as “the ability of [Local actors] to identify their problems and priorities, and design/implement their own solutions” (Baguios et al., 2021). It can also be the refusal to accept the offers or approaches of external (Facilitating) parties.

but rather, facilitates those supplying the support as it leverages what they are best equipped to offer.

1.2.4 Work at the Nexus

Given that systems-strengthening approaches recognise the complexity of the wider context, they allow engagements to recognise, anticipate and adapt when conditions and needs change e.g., as can happen, for example in contexts that fluctuate between, or reflect both humanitarian and development-ready realities.

As such, systems-strengthening capacity development engagements can help bridge these realities by identifying opportunities for integrated multi-sector and multi-disciplinary approaches, and entry-points for continuity over the longer-term and support to institutional and individual resilience-building.

This aligns perfectly with the Grand Bargain and 2019 OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Recommendation on the **humanitarian-development-peace nexus** which encourages greater policy and operational coherence among actors operating in the humanitarian, development, and peace pillars of key global frameworks (including, for example, Agenda 2030), as they work to strengthen resilience in fragile contexts *whilst also* addressing the root causes of humanitarian challenges.

Why is this important? Failure to recognise the role of systems-strengthening capacity development approaches in operationalising the nexus means engagements may continue to deliver more traditional life-saving support to local actors in humanitarian contexts through capacity augmentation (injecting capital and assets) and substitution (doing things for them). In these cases, there is less planned and intentional longer-term investment in the processes and institutional mechanisms needed to increase the preparedness and prevention capacity of local actors and their organisational resilience.

Organisational resilience enables local actors to operate optimally in times of peace and stability but with the readiness and shock-responsiveness required to respond autonomously in times of crisis.

1.2.5 Invest in sustainability

While definitions may vary across the board, all players recognise that a key premise of the localisation discourse lies in ensuring the **sustainability** of local actor capacities – i.e., it is not just about imparting and strengthening capacities in the immediate, it is about ensuring that those capacities remain in place *and relevant to context* for the longer term.

As such, thinking around capacity development is constantly being refined to better pinpoint and define the mechanisms that contribute to the “sustainability of capacity” in practical terms.

As a result, capacity development practitioners must make a conscious effort to ensure their support facilitates incremental but robust and well-grounded continuous organisational change processes.

Why is this important? Failure to acknowledge sustainability as a primary objective of capacity development engagements means that facilitating organisations may find themselves stuck in the loop of “**doing the same thing over and over**” without leaving behind any long-term benefit, as the capacities they strengthen are not secured or retained for the future.

What does this look like in practice? *A local actor requests support in reducing stock-outs at the local facilities level by improving centralised and decentralised inventory management. The facilitating organisation designs and offers a training programme on best practices in commodity tracking and inventory management for logisticians. Over a two-month period, sessions are delivered to over 120 officials. However, after six months, post-training follow-up reveals that 65% of those trained are either no longer in their positions or are in their positions but have not been provided with the tools they were taught to use in the training to improve inventory management. The local actor requests a repeat of the trainings, believing that a refresher is what is needed to push the officials to adopt the new inventory management procedures. Yet, the problem persists after the second cycle of trainings because other aspects of the system that are critical to securing sustainability have not been identified and strengthened alongside the individual skills and knowledge development.*

Localisation

What is localisation?

Localisation builds on the idea that those closest to the action are likely to have the best understanding of the context and acceptance by the people in need of assistance and protection, and therefore are essential for an effective humanitarian response (2016 World Humanitarian Summit and The Grand Bargain³).

What are (some of) the alternative understandings?

Academic literature notes that “despite the formulation of strategic initiatives and abundant practitioner literature on the topic, localisation as a concept appears to be surrounded by confusion and ambiguity ... [and] there is no sector-wide accepted definition of localisation...” (Frennesson Lina et al., 2020, p. 82). It can be “confused with **decentralisation** ... [defined as] strengthening [a facilitating organisation’s] affiliated regional, national, or subnational offices” (ibid, emphasis added). In some cases, “localisation is an umbrella term that is ‘used to refer to any and all activities considered to involve local actors’” (ibid). Academic literature notes that “despite the formulation of strategic initiatives and abundant practitioner literature on the topic, localisation as a concept appears to be surrounded by confusion and ambiguity ... [and] there is no sector-wide accepted definition of localisation...” (Frennesson Lina et al., 2020, p. 82). It can be “confused with **decentralisation** ... [defined as] strengthening [a facilitating organisation’s] affiliated regional, national, or subnational offices” (ibid, emphasis added). In some cases, “localisation is an umbrella term that is ‘used to refer to any and all activities considered to involve local actors’” (ibid).

An alternative definition, and one more aligned with the intent behind the Grand Bargain is that of **localisation as transformation** which proposes that “localisation’s aim is to **increase the authority and capacity of national/local actors** not affiliated to an [facilitating organisation]” (ibid, emphasis added). This approach seeks to “addresses the political, financial and power [im]balances between [facilitating organisations] and ... local actors”. **This is the definition the informs the PEG.**

It is important also to note one important caveat here under the “transformative” approach to localisation: “national staff still working in international organisations would *not* be considered part of local capacity... because their work is contributing to the objectives and agendas of an international organisation”. **However**, we should also remain aware that “the career path and experience of national staff as contributing at some point to local capacity” (Barbelet, 2018). (Barbelet, 2018). That is, although a facilitating organisation developing the capacities of its national staff is not considered by the PEG to be a part of localisation, it nevertheless makes an important – though indirect – contribution to locally-led practice over time and can be considered complementary to the ideals of localisation. Where local branches of international organisations have strong skillsets, these might be leveraged for expertise as necessary.

As discussed in [Terminological ambiguity](#), understanding the different ways in which the term can be understood is a critical first step in reaching agreement on a common understanding on key terms.

³ The Grand Bargain commits humanitarian donors and aid organisations to involving national and local partners in decision-making processes in humanitarian responses, and to advocates for national and local partners delivering assistance in accordance with humanitarian principles

Under the Grand Bargain’s Localisation workstream, six commitments were agreed to by the signatories of the Grand Bargain. Of these, the FBPP contributes directly to two commitments: (1) multi-year investment in the institutional capacities of local and national responders and (3) supporting national coordination mechanisms.

Why is localisation a priority?

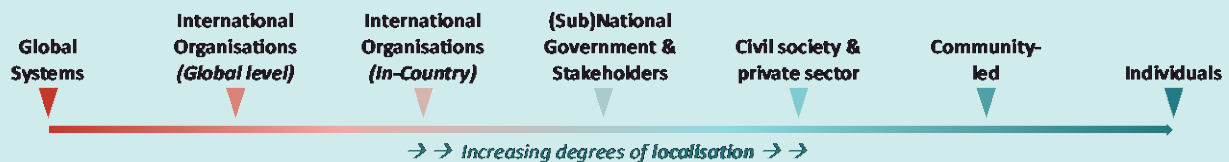
The localisation discourse is largely driven by the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and its resultant Grand Bargain commitments⁴. As signatories to this declaration, OECD donors and international humanitarian organisations must show an intent to adhere to these localisation commitments.

Capacity development is an essential element toward realising these commitments, as it prioritises sustained Local actor agency and autonomy in assuming increased roles and funding.

The localisation 'spectrum' and locating "Who is 'local'"

Under the 'transformative' definition of localisation (which leads to locally-led practice), who is considered 'local' can variously include individuals, community groups, civil society, national private sector organisations, and/or national or sub-national governmental agencies (Baguios et al., 2021).

The diagram below illustrates a spectrum of 'localisation', ranging from the 'decentralising' approach where, say, an international organisation increases their own staff and in-country organisational presence (decentralisation model, red arrows) through to the layers of indigenous local actors with the aim of achieving locally led practice (the transformative model, green arrows). Within this latter segment, the PEG, as a guide to *institutional* capacity development is primarily concerned with interactions with government actors or civil society organisations.



Source: (PEG Authors)

- At the **global systems** layer (IASC, UN System, etc.), preparedness includes developing and disseminating guidance and protocols (e.g., IASC guidance for cluster coordinators, etc.).
- At the layer of **international organisations (global)**, preparedness may include having up-to-date surge rosters and a body of trained staff ready to deploy.
- The **international organisations (in-country)** layer is where ideas of 'localisation as decentralisation' can occur, with the international organisation shifting operations away from headquarters and toward country offices. Here, preparedness may include having clear and current understanding of national emergency response regulations, and a good understanding of tangible and non-tangible assets to support a response.
- Transformative localisation begins at the level of **(sub)National governments and stakeholders, civil society organisations**, and the private sector.

A clear understanding of how 'locally-led practice' is defined is also critical. The IASC, for example, defines successful localisation or response as "meaningful participation, representation, and leadership of local and national humanitarian actors within **IASC humanitarian coordination structures**" (IASC, 2021) – that is, local actors operating within externally-defined structures.

UNISDR, on the other hand, defined locally-led disaster response as local institutions being able to "effectively anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current disasters" (UNISDR, 2009). Here, local actors act fully autonomously, without reference to external parties.

⁴ See <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain>. The Development equivalent of this being the 2005 Paris declaration (<https://www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/45827300.pdf>) that "Developing countries set their own development strategies, [and] improve their institutions"

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Type of model/approach	Definition of 'local'
Global South movements, networks and funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communities across the Global South • Community-led organisations • Community foundations • Community and other proximate leaders • Local and national civil society organisations in the Global South
North to South funds and funding mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grassroots actors and movements • Local and national organisations based in the Global South • Representatives from Global South country governments • Private sector representatives from the Global South • Organisations rooted in the communities they serve
Global networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and regional governments across the Global South and North • Community-based organisations • Social entrepreneurs and innovators across Global South and North • Local leadership within developing contexts
Policy frameworks and initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and national non-state actors (headquartered in their own aid-recipient countries, not affiliated to an international NGO) • National and sub-national state actors (state authorities in aid-recipient countries at local or national level) • Local and national organisations from the Global South
Practical and measurement tools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local and national organisations from the Global South • Civil society organisations in the Global South • Community-led organisations in the Global South • Global South organisations and partners

Source: (Baguios et al., 2021, p. 2).

What does the *process* of localisation entail, and where does 'Capacity Development' come into the picture?

As with the term 'localisation' itself, there is also no generally accepted definition of what localisation (in its transformative sense) entails. We can view localisation processes through the lenses of⁵: (funding) **resources** (including the directness, quality and access of funding); the **agency** of local actors to identify their problems and priorities, and design/implement their own solutions (emphasising autonomy and self-directedness); and whether local actors' **ways of being** are being recognised, respected and used in the localisation process.

Capacity development is one strategy, among others, that can contribute to the achievement of locally led practice. Other forms of support may include resources, funding, etc. To be effective, capacity development, whether supporting individuals, organisations or government organisations, must employ tools, mindsets and approaches that are appropriate to the specific context. Lack of clarity around what level, which entities, and which mechanisms are being supported, will result in inappropriate, ineffective or obstructive approaches.

Capacity development in service to supporting locally led practice should seek to catalyse a "full transfer" of capacities, such that once "work in a country is complete [the supporting organisation] can withdraw permanent presence"; they should avoid "partial transfer" which leaves local actors dependent on external support in some shape or form. (Frennesson Lina et al., 2020).

Key take-aways:

- The PEG focusses on the "*localisation of logistics preparedness capacities*" (Frennesson Lina et al., 2020), as opposed to, say, localisation of *resources* or *infrastructure*. It advocates for a "full transfer" of capacities, such that once "work in a country is complete [the facilitating organisation] can withdraw [from] permanent presence" (ibid).
- **Local actors** are likely to understand the context better than external (Facilitating) actors, they know what will work and what will not, and are likely to be known and accepted by those in need of assistance and protection
- This knowledge and familiarity can make organising and delivering assistance faster, easier and more effective.
- Leveraging this knowledge as a base for strengthening Local actor capacities

The process of localisation should:

- Focus on localising capacities in addition to tangible resources or infrastructure, ideally in an integrated manner.
- Catalyse a "full transfer" of capacities so Local actors no longer need external support to perform.

Local actors can refer exclusively to Local actors or more widely also local branches of international organisations. For the Project, it refers to **Local actors** which, as per the *whole-of-society* approach includes: state, civil society⁶, private sector, academia, media, faith-based groups, local market actors, communities and individuals.

⁵ The concepts here, drawn from (Baguios et al., 2021).

⁶ Civil society encompasses the following non-government groups, whether formally or informally incorporated: National and local NGOs; National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies; Community-based organisations; Faith-based groups; National academia & specialist organisations; Local media (traditional and social).

II What to watch out for

II.1 Learning from the past

Part I lays out the rationale for investment in the localisation of preparedness and response capacities to enable nations to prepare for, manage and mitigate the impact of increasing natural and man-made disasters around the world in a timely and autonomous manner.

As resources dwindle and crises increase, the need to ensure that capacity development provided in support of localisation is effective and sustainable is of paramount importance. A journey of continuous improvement that learns from the past and adapts for the future is essential.

Since internationally financed capacity development came to the fore in the 1970s (referred to at the time as *capacity building*), the terms, definitions, philosophies and conceptual models underpinning its practice have been evolving on a continuous basis, yielding a wide range of perspectives and practices, some contradictory and some complementary to mainstream practice.

This evolution provides a rich foundation for practical application. In this chapter, the PEG pulls together key learnings as a rationale for proposing its contribution to capacity development through structured and methodologically robust discipline.

It describes some of the main learnings and pitfalls that local actors, facilitating organisations and donors may encounter along the way and shares recommendations on how best to mitigate them in the future.

II.1.1 Terminological ambiguity

Capacity building, capacity development, capacity strengthening, training, augmentation, etc. Often these terms are used interchangeably in the international capacity development space, yet they can mean different things to different people.

As such, practitioners around the world operate under a cloud of “**terminological ambiguity**”, guided by their own professional frameworks, history and expertise rather than by a universally recognised capacity development lexicon, discipline and methodology.

Terminological ambiguity also relates to the use of acronyms and abbreviations - particularly those people assume others will ‘*just know*’ the meaning of. While these can be a useful shorthand for communication for people “in the know”, they can exclude or confuse those who are NOT. This can be further exacerbated by power differentials and second language hurdles, with local actors often being reluctant to seek clarification.

Why is this important? Working to different conceptual models in terms of what makes for effective and sustainable capacity development can introduce confusion and misunderstanding between those providing it and those receiving it, particularly in relation to the operational implications of the process. Making assumptions about other people’s familiarity with abbreviations and acronyms can create discomfort and a reluctance to seek clarification for fear of such requests suggesting a lack of expertise and knowledge.

Some conceptual models revolve around short-term, input-output engagements with a focus on technical and operational capacity transfer, others speak to longer-term outcomes that also look at functional or [soft capacities](#); some speak to injection of capital and/or assets to rapidly [augment](#) local capacities, others work to trigger slower processes of internal change.

Lack of clarity around basic principles, assumptions and conceptual models makes defining clear and realistic objectives, roles, and responsibilities challenging, which can sometimes lead to tensions, disappointment and unmet needs and expectations.

What does this look like in practice? *A local actor (e.g. a National Disaster Management Organisation) has accepted an offer for “capacity development” support. Based on previous engagements with other facilitating organisations, it understands that term to mean an immediate injection of assets e.g., telephones and computers, so it can stock new offices, and financial assistance so it can hire new section managers. The facilitating organisation, however, understands the term to mean it will offer leadership coaching support to the new section managers and support to coordination capacity. Unless jointly clarified, expectations will not align and are likely to be unmet on one or both sides.*

In another instance, the local actor receives a facilitating organisation's concept note for a potential capacity development engagement. It is appealing but contains numerous abbreviations and acronyms. Some of the acronyms are also used by the local actor **but to mean something locally specific** which is clearly not what the facilitating organisation is referring to. Reading and assessing the proposal will be difficult and confusing for the local actor until these elements are clarified. The concept note also contains many acronyms from within the United Nations humanitarian space that the local actor does not recognise. As representative of the National Disaster Management Organisation (the local actor), counterparts reading the document may feel "they should know" what these mean, and are concerned about how and when they can seek clarification without appearing unprofessional and/or uninformed, or jeopardising their standing in the eyes of their peers or managers.

What can we do about it?

Q1) How do we eliminate confusion around CD terms and definitions?

The PEG includes a [Glossary](#) where important terms, definitions and concepts are concisely defined.

However, the inclusion of terminology on the PEG does not *in itself* address the problem of terminological ambiguity. The glossary is intended as a *starting point* for discussion between partners. It is the **process of jointly discussing**, defining, and agreeing on terminology that is essential to effective capacity development partnership and engagement. At the very least, knowing *where* differences of understanding lie can be a valuable starting point.

Practical steps:

- During initial discussions around the engagement, ensure both sides agree to define shared *terms and definitions* (including abbreviations and acronyms) at the outset.
- After initial stakeholder mapping, convene lead players and table key terms and definitions for discussion and consensus around contextualised definitions (see the [Glossary](#) for *non-prescriptive* reference).
- Develop an engagement-specific lexicon with local actors and submit to key decision-makers in all

parties for approval. This is an opportunity for decision makers to also become familiarised.

- Annex the endorsed lexicon to the partnership agreement, following roles and responsibilities, etc.
- Develop a simple socialisation calendar for all local actor representatives who will engage in the capacity development process and roll it out.
- Circulate endorsed lexicon to all partners for later reference.
- Regularly update the lexicon as understandings evolve and nuances deepen.
- [Language Conventions & Glossary](#)
- [Phase 0. Learning and preparation](#)
- [Reading: \(Hagelsteen & Becker, 2019\)](#)

II.1.2 Overlooking implementation failure

Progress towards collectively agreed development objectives like the SDGs varies significantly around the world. Efforts to support countries falling behind often focus on better aligning national objectives, policies and strategies with global or regional goals. Yet this often takes place without having completed an in-depth analysis with stakeholders to identify if the key challenges to performance lie primarily in *inadequate policy* or in *poor implementation* of adequate policy.

Why is this important? The global development "push" often sees governments whose systems and services are already struggling to achieve basic objectives, commit to more ambitious ones that have even more complex and burdensome implementation requirements. As a result, expectations, systemic stress and institutional capacity gaps increase unrealistically, exacerbating poor performance – all because implementation capacity was not duly considered at the outset, objectives were not set realistically and support to implementation capacity was not prioritised. This premature "load-bearing" e.g., expecting institutions to deliver against policy objectives when they are not ready, can aggravate implementation failure and undermine other capacity development processes investing in more sustained systemic reform.

What does this look like in practice? *Local actors wanting to address national low-vaccination coverage figures request capacity development support and are engaged in revising national health and vaccination policies and strategies for inclusivity to ensure "no one is*

left behind". Yet, key constraints to coverage include inadequate last mile delivery in remote areas due to seasonal flooding and road impasse, insufficiency of terrain-ready transport logistics and understaffing at health facility level. These challenges will persist and be further emphasised under new, more demanding policy objectives and policy-aligned measurement criteria.

"We are so capacity developed, we have received years and years of leadership development, now we are top notch [small laugh] in capacity, the only thing we need now is funds to do our work."

(Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 5)

What can we do about it?

Q2) How do we make sure a CD engagement considers implementation capacity?

The PEG emphasises the importance of holistic, systems-oriented assessments as *essential precursors* of demand-driven and needs-based capacity development engagements.

Partnership steps:

- During inception and partnership agreement phases secure the agreement of parties to a capacity assessment approach that assesses both the policy and regulatory environment *and policy implementation capacity*.

Practical steps:

- Ensure the capacity assessment framework is holistic and considers the wider institutional ecosystem and critical interdependencies that impact implementation capacity.
- During the capacity assessment process, ensure technical and operational counterparts from all levels of the system (central, sub-national and local as relevant) are consulted to obtain accurate views of real implementation capacity.
- Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment**

A word of caution. In many contexts implementation capacity is limited in very practical terms by a lack of financing and other essential infrastructural resources. Facilitating organisations and donors may consider [core support](#) or **direct financing** options to offer an alternative support modality to ensure local actors have resources for long-term operations.

However, while these approaches acknowledge and respect that capacity exists locally and can be an important tool "to push out power and money to the local organizations" it is essential that these resource injections always be accompanied by wider capacity development initiatives to support local actors in mobilising resources for sustainable financing and/or in identifying alternative approaches to securing essential local capacities in times of need (e.g., it may be neither viable nor appropriate to utilise financial resources to secure fixed staffing and/or preconditioning levels if more flexible ways of meeting needs locally can be identified); if this is not done, these capital investments may be wasted for lack of continuity and sustainability and/or may create financial dependencies to keep established resources in place.

Reading: [\(Pritchett et al., 2010\)](#)

II.1.3 The "isomorphic mimicry" trap

In cases where support to policy reform is appropriate, it often leans on policy and legal frameworks that have worked well in countries making good development progress. Similarly, where support to *implementation capacity* is identified as a critical entry-point, organisational models for effective implementation are also 'copied' from those same contexts to guide implementation capacity development and help avert implementation failure.

Why is this important? In these situations, many development actors prioritise *modernizing* stakeholder institutions by promoting an intense reform process that imports implementation models and designs. These may be seen as effective elsewhere, but have not necessarily been validated within, or adapted to, local context. This practice is denoted academically as one of *isomorphic mimicry*. As a result, these reforms are often predominantly structural, at times superficial, and rarely contextually and institutionally functional and sustainable.

“[A] major weakness is that donors keep treating the in-country organizations as though this is the first time that anybody’s tried to help them and they are starting from zero”
(Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 5)

What does this look like in practice? Local actors wanting to improve logistics preparedness by increasing prepositioning are shown a prepositioning model from a successful supply chain systems design exercise in another country with similar geophysical characteristics and crisis response challenges. Given urgency of need, time and resource constraints on all sides, and the perception of faultlessness often associated with “international best practice”, the local actors agree to mirror the original prepositioning model. Accordingly, they invest, among other things, in the same inventory management solution. However, it later emerges that significant modification to the system are needed to accommodate the local distribution networks, introducing additional processes, costs and delays and little (if any) immediate implementation benefit.

What can we do about it?

Q3) How do we avoid the “isomorphic mimicry” trap?

The PEG outlines six principles that underpin capacity development engagements, to ensure they offer context-relevant, realistic capacity outcomes and “fit-for-purpose” solutions.

Practical steps:

Prior to active engagement, the capacity development team in the facilitating organisation should:

- Familiarise with and learn to recognise the challenges and pitfalls of capacity development (“know what to watch out for”)
- Engage in one or more internal team discussions to brainstorm around the key principles for capacity development and to discuss approaches to operationalising each
- To the extent possible, engage with the key donors behind the capacity development engagement to socialise the principles with them as well, to introduce a new-way-of-working from the very outset
- [What to watch out for](#)

- [Fundamental principles](#)
- [Advocate, educate and evolve](#)

Partnership steps:

- During first discussions with local actors, share information on the approach to capacity development that will be adopted (including the principles) and welcome local actor perspectives, views and recommendations around them.
- Identify with local actors some preliminary steps that can be taken at the outset to ensure the partnership and subsequent engagements uphold the principles.
- [Academic works: \(Pritchett et al., 2010\)](#)

II.1.4 The “expert blind spot”

“There was a consultant who flew in and drafted a contingency plan but I was never involved with that. I was not consulted, at all. I think that is just an outrage. I did not say anything because it was an international consultant. I did not want to raise a fuss. I let it happen”
(Hagelsteen et al., 2021, p. 4)

Studies suggest the “expert blind spot” often prevents – or at least severely hampers – development actors’ understandings of local context. They may, for example, define stakeholder problems (and potential solutions) through the lens of their own technical expertise and previous experiences (professional comfort zone) and/or their own organisational agenda. That can lead, among other things, to the isomorphic mimicry trap discussed above.

Expert blind spot: “...excessive focus on external experts’ own technical capacity and their low ability to appreciate the value of local knowledge” (Hagelsteen & Becker, 2019, p. 4)

Why is this important? In these cases, practitioners may come into a capacity development engagement *with a solution looking for a problem* (or “a hammer looking for a nail” in the words of one practitioner). The expert blind spot makes it hard for them to imagine alternate perspectives of what the underlying issues might be, to justify exploring alternate explanations, let alone alternative solutions. This means solutions end up being

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supply-driven rather than demand-driven and are less likely to be contextually fit-for-purpose.

At the same time, in some situations, local actors may fail to appoint a recognised, lead focal point with enough time and authority to actively engage in and direct the capacity development engagement; not only can this lead to an excessive reliance on the external experts and/or propagate the belief that a 'technical solution will fix our problem' but it creates a fertile terrain for the expert blind spot to flourish unchecked.

What does this look like in practice? *A stakeholder seeking support with overall supply chain performance embarks on a supply chain system design exercise. The practitioner hired by the supporting organisation to facilitate the process is a logistics analyst and thus, the exercise unfolds around data-driven analysis of logistics performance and modelling. However it does not include a more strategic, functional analysis of the wider system, including for example, relevant policy instruments, digital systems or fiscal space. Instead, the system design approach and recommendations are defined by the professional expertise and comfort zone of the practitioner engaged to support the process.*

What can we do about it?

Q4) How can we limit expert technical bias when discussing CD plans with partners?

- In addition to following the same recommendations listed under **Q3)** which encourage operationalising the fundamental principles of capacity development, the PEG suggests a number of important considerations for facilitating organisations (and potentially local actors) when recruiting or designating staff to engage in the capacity development process.

Partnership steps:

- During partnership agreement discussions, ensure all parties recognise the need for *capacity development skillsets* among the staff who will be designated to represent them throughout the process
- Agree that the local actors will designate a focal point with enough time and authority to actively engage in and spearhead the capacity development engagement internally so that the burden of daily operational work does not fall to the external actor (facilitating organisation).

- Agree on the key characteristics and profiles required, ensuring negotiations, relationship-building, strategic thinking and institutional memory are among those that should be covered by party representatives.
- Agree on the composition of representative teams to ensure strategic, technical and operational profiles are present.

Practical steps.

- Review standard Terms of Reference and/or key profile descriptions and share across all parties.
- Academic works: ([Hagelsteen & Becker, 2019](#))

II.1.5 Underestimating complexity

Institutional capacity development engagements unfold in institutional realities that exist and operate within wider, ever-changing, **complex adaptive** social, political and economic systems. In seeking to catalyse sustainable institutional change, their success depends largely upon peoples' perceptions of the *value* of that change, and their motivation and ability to learn and adopt new behaviours that can shift system performance.

Why is this important? Working in [complex adaptive systems](#) means that single interventions can meet with unexpected consequences and/or hurdles; change processes are **neither linear nor predictable**. As a result, capacity development actors must be ready to assess, reflect and adapt their strategies, actions, timelines and sometimes even objectives, to be effective. Yet, capacity development engagements are often conceived of as *projects*, with pre-defined problems and solutions to be realised within limited timeframes and with budgets whose use may be dictated by donors.

A projectized approach does not allow for the [flexibility](#) required by non-linear change processes and as such, many capacity development engagements are simply doomed to fail by their very own design.

What does this look like in practice? In early 2022 the FBPP engaged with county actors in Kenya to define humanitarian supply chain capacity development objectives, carry out a capacity assessment and validate a multi-year workplan. Yet, by mid-2022, following elections, many of the people involved in that process had moved on. A traditional linear management approach would have pushed the workplan over to the new administration but would have risked undermining their ownership of it and missing the chance to review it through 'new eyes'. An adaptive management approach was taken instead, and the results of the earlier process were shared with the new officials for their discussion, revision, approval (or dismissal) so a workplan they could support and own could emerge.

What can we do about it?

Q5) How can we ensure we consider the “full picture” before we propose a CD plan?

- Undertaking a full context analysis is vital in this regard but before this can be done, all parties should familiarise with the systems-strengthening thinking and framework proposed by the PEG.
- [Phase 0. Learning and preparation](#)
- [Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment](#)
- Reading: [\(Hagelsteen & Becker, 2019\)](#)

II.1.6 Other pressures, rigidity and short-termism

Complexity extends beyond the local actor context as facilitating organisations can also be subject to “external” pressures e.g., from within, from their donors and even from other indirect stakeholders. This often pushes them to adopt and even promote, a short-term, projectized approach instead of a longer-term programme-oriented one.

Even the best CD practitioner, who systematically respects and operationalises the core capacity development concepts, models and frameworks in collaboration with local actors – will be subject to a wide range of pressures that are beyond their control.

These can include, among other things:

- Donor-imposed limitations on the use (allocation) of specific funding e.g., for assessment instead of practical engagements

- Short-term, rigid or top-down imposed reporting timelines that emphasise “**clear, deliverable results**” that can be demonstrated to taxpayers and political patrons.
- Facilitating organisation or donor perspectives that investing in the time-consuming phases of establishing ownership and contextualisation may jeopardise internal planning and reporting timelines, and that these processes can “*only happen in an ideal world*”, so the position of “*we won’t do it this time because we’re rushed, but next time we will make sure we do*” prevails.
- Donor- or other stakeholder-imposed targets and performance metrics that are unrealistic or unrelated
- Political, geographic and/or operational priorities of the facilitating organisation
- Differing views around who should be responsible for securing change and delivering against results
- Ambiguous reporting procedures and accountabilities for capacity development progress.

These pressures can limit a CD practitioner’s “**freedom to move**” and ability to fully operationalise key capacity development concepts and principles.

A ‘projectized’ approach can also result in short-term timelines and strict frameworks with defined inputs and outputs. While the latter gives an *impression* of control, it can result in an excessive focus on the **results** of capacity development **rather than the process**.

*“Once the project is approved, you cannot add, you cannot remove anything. Projects do not have that flexibility”, “The **[facilitating organisations] report to the donor and not to the government, being more accountable to the donor than to the local actor**”*

(Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 3 emphasis added)

For many organisations working simultaneously in the humanitarian and development spaces, the risk of new crises interfering with ongoing capacity development engagements and hijacking local and facilitator actor resources and expertise is also a very real scenario.

Others may simply resist – or be unable to change - even if their donors allow for long-term agreements and flexible reporting e.g., a donor may provide 5-year agreements to a facilitating organisation, but highly risk-



adverse facilitating organisations may only provide 12-month agreements to local actors:

“We were shocked actually when we found out that that the local CSOs [Civil Society Organization] only had 12-month agreements ... which means that local organizations are ... [losing] staff because they don't have any financial security, they can't do long-term planning” (Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 4)

This may be a result of internal structural constraints, lack of awareness, and/or insufficient incentives for facilitating organisations to change.

In the same manner, local actors will also be subject to external pressures – both hidden and visible. Power dynamics and conflicts of interest also exist at the local level, which can mean some actors still get excluded from the capacity development processes.

As CD practitioners, being continuously aware of this fact can also aid in understanding local actor approaches to engagement.

What can we do about it?

Q6) How do we mitigate the impact of external pressures and perceptions around the CD process?

In many cases it will be difficult to significantly change the structures and expectations of the other parties in the capacity development partnership. Nevertheless, to the greatest extent possible, advocacy and education around the fundamentals of capacity development should be pro-actively planned and carried out *as part of every capacity development engagement strategy*.

- [Advocate, educate and evolve](#)
- Reading: ([Hagelsteen & Becker, 2013, pp. 7–11](#)), ([Hagelsteen & Burke, 2016, pp. 47–51](#)), ([Hagelsteen & Becker, 2019, pp. 3–8](#)), and ([Hagelsteen et al., 2021, pp. 7–9](#)) “Seven types of Project Failure”, ([Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 3](#))

II.1.7 “Doing” as a shortcut to enabling

Many facilitating organisations are working to change their profiles and ways of working so they can be recognised as effective **enabling partners of choice** even

though they have historically been positioned as **implementing partners of choice**.

However, capacity development that is committed to promoting sustainable localisation, sees organisations that have historically demonstrated their value added, or organisational “worth”, through the achievement of measurable implementation targets, struggle to relinquish control over the generation of tangible results in favour of promoting softer, often unmeasurable and less “attributable”, change processes.

As a result, many organisations successfully transition to capacity development-friendly organisational policy, strategy and communication, but **fail to change their operational business model accordingly**. This leads to a continued implementation-oriented practice that is in tension with evolving organisational policy.

What can we do about it?

Q7) How do we make it easier for facilitating organisations to demonstrate their contribution through CD?

Most organisations, local actors and donors continue to measure their capacity development performance in terms of programmatic and/or service delivery results, measured through specific, quantitative indicators. The approach adopted by the PEG includes a new way of describing, documenting and measuring the soft, incremental change catalysts and processes that comprise capacity development; these are relevant in the short- medium- and longer-term. As such, through a careful **process milestone monitoring** approach, gradual contributions to longer-term institutional change processes can be carefully documented and tracked.

- [Phase 3. Design](#)
- [Phase 4. Monitoring, evaluation & learning](#)

Local actors and donors may *also* prefer the facilitating organisation ‘doing’ instead of enabling as it may be seen as leading to quick results with minimum resource requirement by the local actor or quickly delivering against donor expectations for demonstrable impact.

At the same time, some facilitating organisations may not know what they need to do differently to become better at “enabling” others. In this regard, an introspective review of organisational strategies and



capacities may be in order so that an appropriate change management and capacity development plan can be articulated for *the facilitating organisation itself*.

What can we do about it?

Q8) What does a *facilitating organisation* need to do to shift from a “doer” to an “enabler”?

Not all organisations or individuals are ready (and able) to be effective “enablers”. To be effective enablers, organisations or individuals must be able to:

- Perform the function** in question in an effective, replicable, legitimate and credible manner.
- Externalise their knowledge** by packaging it in an understandable and context-sensitive way.
- Transfer their knowledge to others** through appropriate and effective actions.
- Institutionalise** knowledge through the capacity transformation process.
- Evolve** in their own identity to reflect the changing nature of the partnership.
- Relinquish** control and accountability for specific results.

Each can be done in different ways, and will require different skills, approaches and professional profiles. A first step for organisations wishing to transition from one model to the other, is to undertake an internal capacity assessment that speaks to this objective, so that a longer-term business transformation workplan can be developed.

- [Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment](#)

II.1.8 Different types of “project failure”

As highlighted above, many factors can challenge the capacity development process; some are quite evident and can be “academically labelled” and identified, others emerge more as retrospective reflections, often from local actor perspectives, practical realities and experiences.

An underlying commonality relates to the prevailing “projectized” approach and the challenges and traps flagged above, demonstrating that short-termism and project-like mindsets undermine even the best of intentions. Summarised and adapted from the works of

(Hagelsteen et al., 2021, pp. 7–9), common “project failures” include:

1) No capacity assessment, or not led by local actor.

Facilitating organisations need to understand the local context and existing capacities as well as build relations with the local actors. The capacity assessment process is critical in this regard but should be facilitated by the *local actors given their contextual capacity*. Due to the many pressures listed above, facilitating organisations often skips this vital first step, further perpetuating many of the above challenges and traps.

2) Facilitating organisation develops project plan.

Even when the capacity assessment is done, facilitating organisations often come with their own agenda, conditions, predefined project proposals and fixed timeframes and metrics. They do not engage with the local actor to contextualize these elements to local circumstances. This means that local actors lack control and ownership, and this can aggravate issues of dependency; local actors cannot move towards independence and self-efficacy because they are blocked by the static models and blueprint solutions of their facilitating organisations.

3) No time to implement.

On the other hand, though there are times when facilitating organisations fail to invest in the capacity assessment and project planning processes, there are shared local actor experiences that say *sometimes so much time* goes into these early phases that project funds or time allocated run out before any substantial activities are implemented and the important parts of the project are rushed and/or plans end “up on the shelf”.

4) Wrong time to engage.

In a similar vein, in some situations the timelines underpinning the design and implementation of capacity development engagements are largely dictated by the facilitating organisation, rather than by a careful consideration of – and prioritisation by – local actor convenience and availability.

5) Only ad hoc short-term training.

Many engagements labelled as *capacity development* focus overwhelmingly on short-term technical training activities. In fact, capacity development is often by default thought of as training (both by local actors, facilitating organisations and even donors). Yet short-



term trainings have limited impact when delivered in an ad hoc manner. What little impact they may have is not sustainable, as the participants change jobs or may not be the right person to be trained in the first place.

“A one-day or two- day workshop may create awareness but not much more. In most workshops people attend, sit, listen and then get up and go...” (Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 3)

Often the facilitating organisation does not have the [processual capacity](#) and/or pedagogical knowhow to conduct effective training nor to support local actors to institutionalise similar initiatives for greater retention and autonomy.

It is a long-term process to transfer knowledge and knowhow that leads to people being able to run institutions and processes by themselves. a local actor representative said “for a project to be sustainable and to have any impact, I think it is minimum of three years” (Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 3)

6) Pilot without scale up. Where implementation does follow training, it is often limited to pilot projects, with little plan for scale up and **follow up**. While they are often designed with grand plans for expansion after starting in a couple of selected districts or communities, donors habitually finance only this modest start and then pull out – leaving stakeholders, in the words of a government official from Uganda **“with a severe case of pilotitis”**. This is sometimes built into the project design, demanding economic commitments from the Local actors that are unrealistic or simply not prioritized when the facilitating organisation’s support ends.

7) No focus on utilization. In line with previous failures, projects often focus primarily on creating capacity but do not focus on supporting local actors in using the capacity (e.g., putting it into practice). As such, few efforts are made to ensure the acquired capacities can actually be used – which is the whole purpose of capacity development.

“Capacity development is learning by doing.”
(Armstrong, 2013, pp. 213, 221)

8) No focus on retention. Capacity development engagements rarely focus on supporting local actors to retain newly acquired capacities –i.e., they cannot hold on to them over time, to allow uptake and utilisation. While capacity flight or loss is often the result of internal, local actor institutional challenges and limitations that are not necessarily within the more intuitive spheres of interest and influence of the facilitating organisation, the fact that they ignore or neglect to address them means that any capacity that is created is nonetheless very short-lived.

9) No focus on institutionalisation. Retention is not only about managing staff turnover, but also about the regular adaptation of policies, structures, processes, procedures, regulations, and laws which help secure or institutionalise capacities for the longer term. These actions are not often explicitly considered in capacity development (Hagelsteen et a. 2021).

II.2 A discipline taking shape

In general, capacity development is recognised as a cornerstone of development cooperation – yet many still struggle to conceptualise it. It is often described as a complex, broad or “fluffy” concept.

“Anybody can pull on a capacity development hat ... it’s something that is seen as kind of “Well, just task anybody ... they really have to know water [technical area of programme] to do this work, but capacity development ... yeah ... it’s fine, we’ve done something”
(Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 6)

For years, many local actors, facilitating organisations and donors have lacked detailed knowledge about what capacity development was and how to go about it. This meant they consistently came to the table with differing views and expectations, defined largely by their own professional expertise and strategic comfort zones but generally lacking in essential change management skills.

*“You can’t do it without the specialty, but it needs to be standing at least on three legs [subject matter expertise, sound pedagogy and organizational development] and **when you put 95% of your focus on your subject matter***

expertise, well, you are doing something different than capacity development.”
(Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 6)

For example:

- **Facilitating organisations** may focus their efforts on teaching the technical capacities that they possess as subject-experts and/or in alignment with their own organisational strategic objectives.
- **Donors** may focus their efforts on ensuring that funding envelopes are allocated and utilised in a timely manner, in line with their administration's foreign aid policy.
- **Local actors** may focus on their efforts on filling pressing operational gaps so that they can respond to immediate population needs and/or contextual pressures and/or on capacitating the facilitating organisation (e.g., bringing them “up to speed”).

Such differing priorities cannot possibly align smoothly when parties come together to jointly define a capacity development engagement.

Repeated experiences typified by strategic and operational tensions, imbalances, conflicting priorities and differing perceptions of need and ideal solutions, unmet expectations and different timelines, measures, etc. have pushed the global capacity development community of practitioners and academics towards a gradual, organic shaping of the discipline.

In this regard, a few pivotal realisations, or strategic mindset shifts have emerged, as have a number of recognisable challenges or “capacity development traps” that CD practitioners today are advised to avoid.

II.2.1 A vehicle for mutual learning

Although capacity development was initially born as a top-down, outside-in and generally unilateral “transfer” of technical knowledge and skills from facilitating organisations to local actors, the contextual knowledge of local actors has been gaining in appreciation as a pivotal input to successful institutional change.

As such, applying a “co-diagnosing, co-designing, co-acting and co-learning” lens to capacity development processes could help acknowledge that all parties can contribute in different but equally important ways and

that capacity development engagements, if enacted through more balanced and equal partnerships, can impart mutual learning and benefit to all parties.

Given that capacity development partnerships are intrinsically susceptible to power asymmetries between the parties, explicitly acknowledging the contributions of each can help counter the imbalances.

However, for mutual learning to emerge all parties must share a communications-oriented mindset and make space for conversation and sharing. They must acknowledge their respective contributions and find time for open dialogue about their respective perspectives of the present and future partnership.

What can we do about it?

Q9) How do we establish a CD partnership that promotes mutual learning for all parties?

Although communication, information-sharing and learning are often spontaneous and informal processes, it is important to **formalise** the commitment and accountability of all parties to them, to ensure they actually take place.

The agreement articulated and signed by all partners (e.g., Memorandums of Understanding (MoU), Memorandums of Agreement (MoA), Letter of Agreement (LoA), etc.) can be revised to explicitly reflect:

- Jointly agreed descriptions of the capacity contributions of all parties
- The commitment of all parties to conducting joint context analyses and capacity assessments ensuring concrete steps are taken and opportunities provided for local actors to provide contextual knowledge
- The commitment of all parties to allows for and regularly allocate time to their respective representatives to convene brainstorming and information sharing sessions
- [Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment](#)

The longer-term **Operational workplan** should foresee from the outset:

- Planned events early on spearheaded by the local actors in which the facilitating organisation is given an in-depth overview of the wider national and institutional context, so they can “know the environment”

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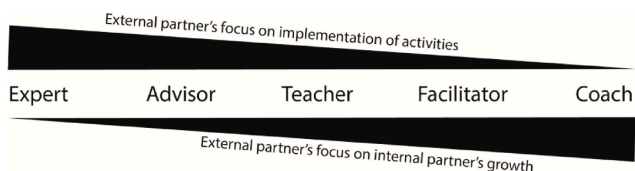
- regular “review and discussion” events dedicated to information sharing and discussion around the progress of the partnership and engagement, changing contexts, required revisions and course changes, etc.

II.2.2 Roles, responsibilities and dynamics

Capitalising on the opportunity for mutual learning through equal partnership, communication and sharing, means changing traditional capacity development roles and dynamics.

This relates to the impersonal, collective roles of the parties e.g., of “the” local actor or “the” facilitating organisation as entities, but also to the personal, individual roles of those who represent them and sit around the table for the dialogue.

Roles are no longer static and fixed; rather they change depending on the purpose of the exchange, whether it focusses for example on implementation of activities – where the facilitating organisation may take a technical expert lead – or on supporting internal local actor growth – when the local actor may take the lead in contextualising knowledge and capacities and guiding the facilitating organisation; often roles can shift back and forth between the two.



Source: (Hagelsteen et al., 2021, p. 7)

These roles are all important and may be needed at different times, in different situations and for different purposes. Thus, capacity development partnerships must be flexible in accommodating how and when each party contributes, and in recognising the different roles that are and will be needed throughout.

As owner of the engagement, the local actor ideally has responsibility for:

- identifying and prioritising needs so that capacity can be developed from what already exists
- analysing the added value of the facilitating organisation’s proposal and to direct the focus into what they (the local actor) needs

- proposing actions and investments for consideration by the facilitating organisation as to whether these fit with the facilitating organisation’s mandate, budget and priorities
- coordinating and monitoring projects and consulting between different partners with a view to avoiding duplication and wastage of resources while maximising complementarity

The role of donors could include, among other things:

- To encourage facilitating organisations to adopt a more outcome-oriented approach
- To facilitate local actors and facilitating organisations by streamlining agreement and reporting formats and encouraging flexibility
- To act as facilitators, brokers or matchmakers that can bring different actors together, even across borders where applicable, to increase communication and coordination among them.

Over time, the role of the facilitating organisation should change from being an implementer and expert to facilitating and fostering collective learning, local actor ownership and empowerment.

Roles need to continuously evolve, be routinely renegotiated, and clearly communicated to all to meet expectations and ultimately, for the facilitating organisation “not to be needed anymore”.

What can we do about it?

Q10) How do we ensure all parties are ready and able to adapt to changing roles and responsibilities?

In the **partnership agreement**:

- Clearly outline the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of the local actors, the facilitating organisations and, where relevant and applicable, donors.
- Clearly identify areas where both parties will recognise and respect the strategic, technical and/or operational lead of the other
- Clearly state that dynamic relationships are expected of the engagement and thus mechanisms for their discussion, assessment and reformulation are to be foreseen, including where necessary, the articulation of exit strategies when roles shift accordingly.

In **operational terms**:

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- Sensitise all parties to the need to designate the right people to act as capacity development focal points and partnership representatives.
- Provide inputs to the Terms of Reference of the capacity development engagement and its supporting roles
- Socialise all sides to the recommended professional profiles to support capacity development engagements e.g., highlighting the importance of negotiating skills, mentoring and constructive guidance capacities, and professional and sectoral seniority and competence.
- [Phase 0. Learning and preparation](#)

III How we want to achieve it

III.1 A new way of thinking

Part II outlines the key challenges and pain-points emerging from decades of capacity development work. It does this to facilitate a collective reflection around the common challenges that persist in capacity development today, to help identify which can be addressed (and which cannot), and orient conceptual and practical investments to this effect.

The PEG is not the first reflective exercise of its kind; already by the 1990s, thinking among global capacity development practitioners had begun to change.

*Today, capacity development is understood to be about enabling **transformations** that empower individuals, leaders, organisations and societies to enact change that is generated, guided and sustained by those whom it is meant to benefit (UNDP, 2015).*

Still, although views have changed, some practices (and practitioners) have not. Catalysing transformational change processes is challenging and there is need for greater **strategic and conceptual clarity** around critical concepts, including the:

- complexity of system behaviours.
- importance of defining clear objectives.
- nature of sustainability and capacity change.

There is also a need for **operational clarity** on how to:

- establish institutional capacity baselines.
- identify the right entry points for support.
- ensure and measure sustainability of results.
- document and report on progress.
- define what resources are required.

This chapter aims to provide clear and simple insights and advice to help answer these questions in real-life, practical settings so that future institutional capacity development engagements are better able to respond to the internally motivated change processes of local actors and lead to more sustainable institutional capacity transformation.

III.1.1 Fundamental concepts

Acknowledging complexity

International development is littered with examples of **simplistic solutions to complex problems** that have failed to deliver lasting change because critical elements of the wider system have not been considered e.g., schools being built to improve education only to find there aren't enough teachers to teach in them; training up teachers in rural areas only to find they migrate to urban centres where opportunities are brighter.

Systems approaches appreciate that we live in a **complex**, interconnected world (a 'system'), and they try to model a specific part of the overall system whilst always remembering that it is *only one part* of many greater systems (The Partnering Initiative, 2022).

A **complex adaptive system (CAS)** can be seen as a set of interconnected elements, e.g., people, organisations, communities etc., all with social, economic and political dimensions, that come together to create a system. All elements are individually important, but it is the *relationships between them* that define how the system behaves and whether it thrives or fails (Florini et al., 2023).

At the same time, because a system is comprised of **relationships**, how one sees the system depends largely upon one's position *within* it. Moreover, the many interactions between the elements means that a key feature of all CAS is that for any given intervention in a system, there will be **unintended consequences**.

Dynamic systems modelling can be used to help understand and navigate the complexity of capacity development in CAS by identifying key drivers and interactions within the system and simulating different scenarios and interventions, allowing practitioners to anticipate and adapt to unexpected consequences and non-linear change processes.

Reading: "System Dynamics Modelling of Humanitarian Relief Operations". 2008 Paulo Gonçalves. Available at: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1139817>



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Change management skills

Even when the dynamics of a complex adaptive system are acknowledged and a robust systems approach is adopted in planning and implementing a capacity development engagement, changing how things are done in an organization and between organizations (systems) depends heavily on the effectiveness of the **change management skills of local leadership**.

Yet, in many cases, these very skills may be among the weakest, and need to be strengthened among local leaders so they can take ownership of the capacity development process.

As such, a key priority of any capacity development engagement will be to ensure leadership skills are transferred *alongside* the other areas of capacity development, as relying on the change management skillset of the CD practitioners – who will only be available for the duration of the engagement – would go against the principles of localisation outlined in earlier sections.

Ensuring facilitating organisations are *equipped to transfer* change management skills may require them to tap into specific professional profiles (experts) with demonstrable experience in change management specifically, institutional reform and intercultural communication, leadership practices, self-reflection and learning, ability to identify and leverage local habits and practices, and agile approaches to addressing and solving (institutional) problems.

In some situations, this may also entail supporting local actor leadership by creating opportunities or spaces for them to step out of the urgent day-to-day “fire-fighting” mode so they can find the mental time and space to think about the more strategic processes and institutional development that are underway.

III.1.2 Fundamental priorities

The fundamental **priorities** presented below are those that suggest a new or different ways of conceptualising the purpose and scope of capacity development engagements, considering the challenges of past practice. They are priorities that, if taken on board, have practical implications for how capacity development partnerships, engagement planning,

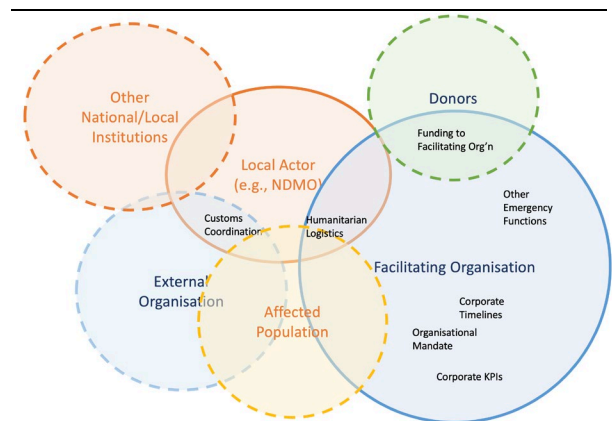
design and delivery unfold. Many other priorities are mainstreamed into current practice that are not listed here; this list does not undermine, replace or otherwise diminish their relevance and value.

(Re) Centre the action

This priority is presented to encourage capacity development partners to ask (and answer) the question **“Who is the capacity development engagement for? Who is driving it?”**

It can be helpful to distinguish between the **traditional** approach to answering these questions and the “re-centre-ing the action” approach that the PEG is promoting. **Traditional approaches** to capacity development often put the *facilitating organisation* at the centre of the action:

- Although responding to local actor requests, the *facilitating organisation* leads in designing, organising, socialising and delivering the response.
- Content and delivery are somewhat driven by the corporate priorities, timelines, expertise and donor agreements of the facilitating organisation.
- Local actors participate and “receive” the products of these processes but they neither design nor drive them.



Source: (PEG authors)

What does this look like in practice?

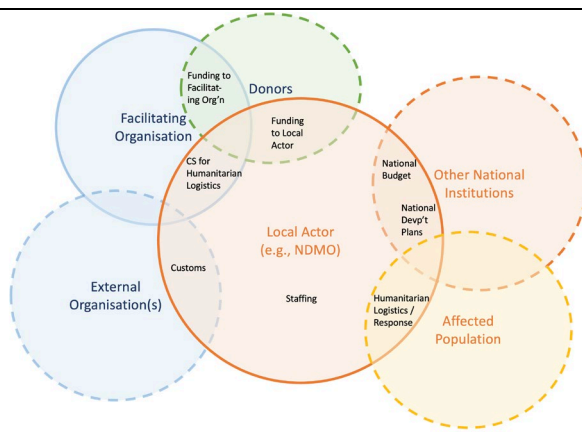
A government ministry (the local actor) wants to automate its supply chain management workflows and appoints an external facilitating organisation to

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support the process. The facilitating organisation conducts a business process and infrastructural analysis to identify needs, drafts technical specifications, identifies appropriate market providers and initiates a bidding and tendering process for the local actor. The local actor is involved in the review and selection of bids but the facilitating organisation proceeds to finance and issue the contract for the commercial provider. The facilitating organisation provides the recommended specifications to the commercial provider and oversees system development and deployment accordingly. In this example, the local actor was the target of the various actions; it was engaged and aware of the steps taking place, but was not involved in the design nor execution of the analyses, the specifications and the tendering. As a result, it is unlikely that the local actor would be able to replicate a similar process in the future.

Taking the “(re)centre the action” approach instead helps address many of the challenges identified in [What to watch out for](#), the “centre of action” needs to shift to the *local actors* so that:

- Local actors drive the capacity development process through their full engagement in all phases.
- Content and delivery are driven by the local actors’ mandate, priorities, roles and responsibilities, timelines, existing partnerships, existing capacities and self-identified gaps and needs, etc.
- Local actors internalise the assessment and change processes. This means initially generating products with help, eventually being able to replicate processes and products for the future, without external actor engagement.



Source: (PEG authors)

What does this look like in practice?

A government ministry wants to automate its supply chain management workflows and appoints an external facilitating organisation to support the process. The facilitating organisation requests Ministry-appointed focal points for the process and works with them to jointly design and complete a business process and infrastructural analysis, considering among other things, current and future ministerial needs. The ministry’s procurement function is consulted to ensure a tender for commercial support is launched in line with existing institutional practices, possibly leveraging existing commercial partnerships. The tender and bid review panel is led by the ministry’s procurement team and internal focal points, with the facilitating organisation as an external advisor. Funds, if needed, are transferred to the Ministry from the facilitating organisation but the commercial contracting is completed by the Ministry. Technical specifications for the system are developed jointly by the ministry and the commercial partner with the facilitating organisation acting as an external advisor.

Why is this important?

Re-centring the capacity development process around the local actor is the first and single most **critical step to enabling localisation**.

At the same time, recentring in this manner, has multiple implications for *all* actors involved. It requires planning, discussion and agreement between local actors, facilitating organisations and donors.

Some considerations relate to, among others:

- Partnerships and relationship building
- Roles and responsibilities
- Time and length of engagement
- Speed and “measurability” of change
- Responsibilities and control for change.

Positioning the local actor at the centre of the engagement underlies all of the capacity development principles discussed below.

What can we do about it?

Q11) What do we have to do differently to re-centre CD engagements around local actors?

- [Phase 1. Local actor engagement and prioritisation](#)
- [Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment](#)

Recognise different capacity types and levels

This priority is presented to encourage capacity development partners to ask (and answer) the question **“What are the different capacities that need to be in place in order for the objective to be achieved?”**

Well-functioning systems depend on *different* capacities being able to *adapt* to contexts and circumstances and *work together smoothly* in a reliable and predictable manner. These capacities often reside in different people, in different locations and at different levels of the institutional ecosystem.

Different models and frameworks are in circulation to help define and categorise capacities. The simplest one divides capacities into [soft](#) or [hard](#) capacities. Another proposes three types e.g., [technical](#), [processual](#) and [contextual](#)⁷. Others propose more detailed listings that include, adaptive, analytical, collaborative, influencing, innovative, technical, operational and strategic.

Why is this important? Different capacities can be found in all contexts; they interact and are interdependent, to the extent that a lack or weakness in one can undermine the strength and utility of one or more of the others. Thus, focussing on transferring and/or strengthening only one type of capacity or at one level only, is not likely to leave lasting results. Current practices focus overwhelmingly on strengthening the technical capacities of individuals. Overlooking processual and contextual capacities can result in lack of ownership and sustainability and exacerbate power imbalances in the partnership.

Acknowledging different capacity types also enables all parties to clearly identify what is needed and which capacities each partner will bring to the partnership. It also helps ensure that an appropriate mix of short- and

longer-term activities are planned for as the different capacity types and levels will require different forms of support and engagement.

What can we do about it?

Q12) How do we ensure the CD plan addresses the different types of capacities and capacity levels that are critical to the outcome?

- [Phase 3. Design and implementation](#)

Support institutionalisation

This priority is presented to encourage capacity development partners to ask (and answer) the question **“How do we advocate for stronger ownership and autonomy of capacity among local actors?”**

A key premise behind **localisation as a process** is that it enables local actors to perform effectively, at scale and autonomously over time.

A key premise behind **capacity development** as a means of supporting the localisation process, is that it aims to help local actors to **institutionalise** the capacities that will contribute to regular, effective performance in a way that they can sustain both the capacities and the enhanced performance, over time.

Institutionalisation means fully integrating a behaviour or a practice is into the daily attitudes, knowledge and practices of the people working to fulfil a mandated function in an organisation or institution. Like a daily habit, things that are institutionalised are not questioned, they are just done. (PEG Authors)

Institutionalisation is **neither a linear nor a rapid process**. It depends on *multiple* capacities transforming to work together in a *reliable, adaptable* and *predictable* manner. It is grounded in two important considerations:

- 1) Behaviours, practices and capacities do not transform in a vacuum but rather emerge in mature and habitual institutional contexts (or **ecosystems**).
- 2) Creating a change in institutional behaviour and practice in the short-term does not guarantee

⁷ Adapted from Hagelsteen, M. et al, 2021.



institutional ability to **retain the change** over the longer-term.

Both are discussed further in the following sections.

Failure to invest in institutionalisation may lead to several institutional risks for both the local actor as well as the facilitating organisation, including but not limited to:

- **Reputational risks**, related to, among others: wastage of the resources invested in initial capacity creation e.g. roll-out, training and uptake, increased inefficiency in performance as mixed practices are adopted, etc.
- **Technical and operational risks**, which may include, a reversal to earlier unoptimized practices for lack of staff able to use the capacities properly or for lack of management expectation that they use them.

What can we do about it?

Q13) How do we ensure the engagement is designed to support institutionalisation of capacity change from the very outset?

[Phase 3. Design and implementation](#)

Recognise institutional ecosystems

This priority is presented to encourage capacity development partners to ask (and answer) the question “How do we design capacity development support that contributes to wider institutional change processes?”

Institutional systems and services, whether related to humanitarian logistics preparedness (or any other sectoral response), are complex and dynamic. They emerge from, operate in, and are influenced by, their wider host **institutional context or ecosystem**.

Institutional ecosystems generally require a supportive **political** and regulatory domain, a well-functioning **organisational** domain with operational infrastructure, and a critical mass of appropriately skilled **people**.

Enabling optimal ecosystem performance may require transforming capacities across all these domains. Efforts that acknowledge the complexity and interdependency between them will likely be more effective in doing so, than those that do not.

Single interventions that focus on a single capacity are unlikely to make a significant difference unless they impact a key [leverage point](#) that can shift an entire system’s behaviour (Diriba, 2015)

As a result, it can be hard to know **where** to intervene, **what** to influence and **how** to do so sustainably.

Recognising the **wider** institutional ecosystem and identifying inter-related entry-points for capacity development support will be essential to designing a viable system sustainability or institutionalisation plan.

Why is this important? Capacity development efforts that do not identify wider ecosystem influences and dynamics may invest resources upfront to create immediate operational capacity to perform a specific function, but may fail in the long run to secure, among others: leadership appreciation of the value the specific capacities may have for the wider system; political will and ownership in defining institutional accountabilities for capacity uptake; financing to support capacity retention and modernisation costs over time and collective readiness to support capacity integration with and across related functions.

All these conditions are **essential pre-requisites for sustainable capacity institutionalisation**.

*** Critical distinction ***

This also relates to a **critical shortcoming** of current practice whereby capacity development is conceptualised as **training** (*in turn often referred to as **capacity building***). **This is inaccurate**. Rather:

*While all training may be seen as **an element of capacity development**, not all capacity development takes shape in the form of training.*

Capacity building, or **training**, is generally focused on a *specific set* of individual skillsets, usually those that can be conveyed in a classroom, that address some immediate technical or operational need. Training, including Training-of-Trainers, does not generally address the institutional mechanisms that are essential to enabling local actors to retain, adapt, modernise and **utilised** the content and learnings of the training over the longer-term. A training course is also unable to recognise or address any **structural**



factors that may limit or render irrelevant that training's use in the field (e.g., a trained warehouse manager is of no use if the warehouse is non-operational due to funding constraints, or if the wrong products are stored and are not relevant to the response actions outlined in contingency plans).

What can we do about it?

Q14) How do we ensure the wider institutional ecosystem is taken into consideration in the design of the engagement?

- [Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment](#)
- [Phase 3. Design and implementation](#)

However, there are times when CD practitioners have to adapt to the reality of their stakeholder demands and expectations and oftentimes, ongoing support actions. This means that even if the practitioner and the facilitating organisation align with the above concepts, putting them into practice may take time and a phased approach.

What does this look like in practice? A local actor has requested operational training in warehouse management and has allocated time and staffing resources for this purpose only. The facilitating organisation is able and willing to meet this demand but is aware that more could (and should) be done because a capacity assessment has revealed other institutional capacity gaps.

What can we do about it?

Q15) How do we make an ongoing operational engagement more systemic?

Where there is a demand, an expectation or simply an ongoing commitment that conceptualises the facilitating organisation's capacity development offer as a series of technical/operational trainings, or a series of infrastructural augmentations –i.e., adopting a linear—thinking, short-term output-oriented approach, transitioning to a longer-term, outcome-oriented and holistic systems-strengthening approach can be overwhelming and challenging.

In these cases, key elements of sustainability can be added to the elements (e.g., training, infrastructure, etc.) that are the subject of the engagement – *without*

immediately expanding or even discussing wider, systemic issues. This means simply exploring the capacity transformation phases in relation to the ongoing activity – is there space to work on retention? Invest in expanding the availability of capacity? Embedding capacity creation into local actor settings, roles and responsibilities?. At a later date, once local actors have familiarised with and agreed with the value of investing in sustainability actions, discussions around a wider systems-strengthening approach with institutionalisation objectives can be tabled.

- [Phase 3. Design and implementation](#)
- [Capacity Transformation Process](#)

What does this look like in practice?

After the 2021/22 Madagascar tropical cyclone season, BNGRC (*Bureau National de Gestion des Risques et des Catastrophes*) asked WFP Madagascar and the Global Logistics Cluster to organise a Preparedness Tabletop Exercise (TTx).

Traditional approaches to TTx's generally see the facilitating organisations plan, organise, convene and deliver the event with local actors in the receiving seat.

However, in this case, to focus on localising capacities around TTx organisation as a modular, institutional learning opportunity, the BNGRC was *put in the lead* of TTx planning and preparation, with the facilitating organisations available for support and guidance when needed. BNGRC Management representation included the Director of Operations, the Logistics manager and the first technical advisor of the General Director.

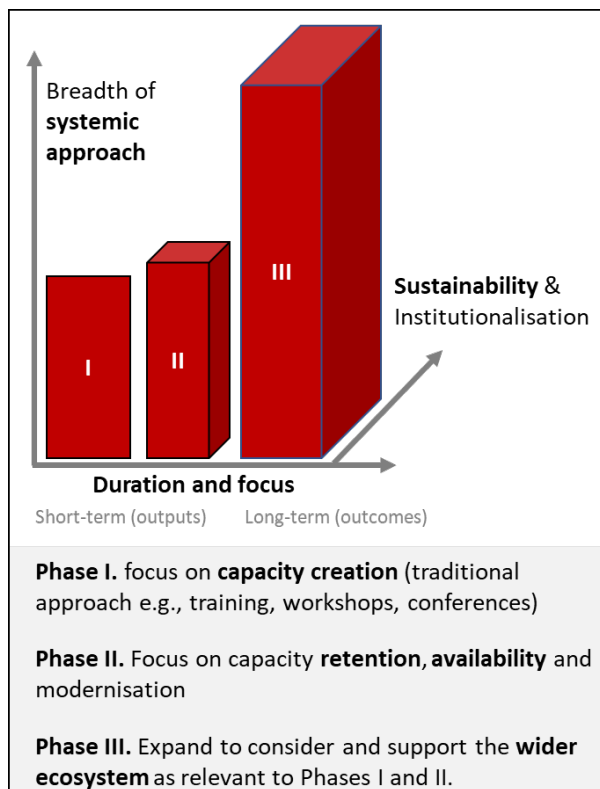
Thus, the BNGRC exercise management team, also comprising other local actors, brought technical knowledge and experience from past capacity strengthening initiatives and emergency responses, and the team lead in the design, planning, delivery, evaluation and follow-up on the TTx as a whole.

This approach to TTx implementation delivers on **capacity creation**, but also begins to strengthen local actor **retention** of the many capacities required to be able to **replicate** similar exercises in the future. This is – and will be – key to BNGRC **growth and autonomy**.

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Practical steps (when only training has been requested):

- As per best practice, conduct a **Learning Needs Assessment** (LNA) to inform proper contextualisation and design of the training materials, e.g., Warehouse Management Training modules.
- As part of the LNA, **gather information** on current institutional practices around internal staff development practices, job descriptions, etc.
- **Design and deliver** the training module as requested, **but also**
- Draft a short plan to **discuss and advocate** with local actor leadership around practical approaches to supporting the sustainability of training results with a focus on enabling capacity retention and utilisation to improve performance
- Introduce the idea of later phases of wider support across the ecosystem for greater sustainability.
- Agree on and **articulate a workplan** to operationalise the training sustainability approach in the short- to medium-term and time, willingness and resources available, map out the longer-term systems-strengthening approach.



Source: (PEG authors)

There can be times when responding to an explicit stakeholder demand could be counter-productive e.g., wasteful, inefficient, etc.

In these cases, it can be helpful to prepare comparative scenarios for stakeholder consideration exploring pros and cons of responding to the request as presented versus considering a more holistic approach.

What does this look like in practice?

National stakeholders seek help to strengthen 'preparedness to respond' by requesting support with building additional warehouse capacity (e.g., a new warehouse because the existing one is full).

The traditional approach would aim to support fund raising and tender the construction work on behalf of the local actor.

However, **an alternative approach** (IFRC, 2023) could be - together with a local actor focal point – to:

- (1) review stock levels in the existing warehouse,
- (2) review local actor contingency plans
 - support designing them if they do not exist
- (3) identify which items and volumes of pre-positioned items should be stored under the local actor's wider sourcing strategy so there is clarity around what can be managed in-house and what can be outsourced
 - support designing a prepositioning strategy if one does not exist
 - advocate for designing a wider sourcing strategy if one does not exist
- (4) review current stocks vs. strategic prepositioning
- (5) determine which stock should be moved out of the warehouse (due to low rotation or low relevance to core response strategy)
- (6) estimate warehouse space now available and assess if additional space is still required
- (7) identify possible logistics solutions besides in-house capacity to avoid expanding in-house supply chain management capacity that might not be easy to retain over time (e.g. rent space from a 3rd party, establish partnerships with other actors who could source items on behalf of the local actor, etc.)
- (8) run a cost-benefit analysis to select the mix of technical solutions that best fits local actor needs

- (9) develop a logistics capacity plan that could include a range of smaller capacity projects from different partners).

In all cases developing a clear **capacity development strategy** that gradually increases the breadth or 'systemicity' of its approach over a longer period of time – with a consequent increase in focus on longer-term outcomes as opposed to shorter-term outputs - will also gradually contribute to greater institutionalisation and sustainability – regardless of the starting point of demand.

Encourage sustainability

This priority is presented to encourage capacity development partners to ask (and answer) the question “How do we ensure that the capacities we strengthen together actually “stick” over time?”

Having a solid overview of the ecosystem and clearly identifying **where** to intervene and **what** to do to introduce a new-way-of-doing business *still does not guarantee* the new practices will persist over time.

Successful systems rely on establishing essential institutional capacities but also on ensuring their **permanence and availability** over time.

Sometimes, when capacities are strengthened during a specific engagement, the opportunity for local actors to apply and use them (and/or keep them) may not always arise within the engagement timeline (for example, in the context of capacity strengthening in preparedness and crisis response).

Local actors are also often faced with internal challenges that make it hard for them to “hold on” to capacitated staff. This can relate to a simple lack of resources and/or incentives to hire and keep qualified people who instead, move on once they are capacitated, or limited staff numbers so that expanding mandates cannot be met.

What does this look like in practice?

In logistics preparedness traditional practice has often focussed on building stockpiles, strengthening procurement capacity, increasing fleets of vehicles and augmenting equipment at country level, all with a view to leave these elements to the local actors for daily management and maintenance. However, these

efforts inevitably also create a financial burden on the local actors which are frequently unsustainable.

An **alternative approach** instead can support local decision makers identify a wider range of options through which they could mobilise the capacities needed e.g., national outsourcing (private sector, other national actors or international actors with national presence) or international outsourcing (again private sector or humanitarian actors), and via a cost-benefit analysis identify and select the best mix of options from a needs-based perspective but also considering longer-term sustainability.

In this regard, and as sustaining unlimited capacity is never feasible, it can also be helpful to work with local actors to help identify a realistic “local actor capacity threshold” beyond which other resources must be tapped into.

This can help establish strategic operational partnerships leveraging the mix identified above, to ensure appropriate response capacities in those scenarios where the local actor capacity threshold is exceeded. This could include for example, establishing national stockpiles of relief items that are cost-effective with an option to call for regional/global stockpiles when the scale of a disaster surpasses the national stockpile levels (or the coverage capacity of vehicles, specialised staff, or other critical resources) (IFRC. 2023).

Thus, capacity development engagements must plan for longer-term sustainability by being aware of the importance of going beyond capacity creation alone, and by adopting measures that will help local actors recognise, define and work to address their internal thresholds and challenges.

Sustainability after the project ends is critical to ensure local actors do not find themselves where they started: “We need to look at the future and the sustainability of an intervention. What if funding ends, what happens [then]?”

(Hagelsteen et al., 2021, p. 5)

Embedding capacities once they have been strengthened is about developing **internal mechanisms** to protect, value and retain the people



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within whom those capacities lie *and* ensuring those capacities continue to have value to the institution.

Thus, capacity development engagement should foresee and include, when and where possible, action to ensure:

1. Continuing institutional **demand** for capacity.
2. The right people get the right knowledge and skills (Capacity **creation**)
3. The newly skilled people stay in the institution (Capacity **retention**)
4. There are enough skilled people to meet demand (Capacity **availability**)
5. People's skills remain up to date and relevant (Capacity **modernisation**)
6. The new capacities enhance performance (Capacity **utilisation**).

* Critical issue *

For example, many short-term project-based capacity development initiatives did not consider the total cost of ownership in their design. Focusing mainly on the initial one-off cost to develop the capacity, both the recipient and the donor do not identify nor factor in properly how to keep that capacity beyond the project's timeframe (e.g. in 4 or 5 years). This is especially relevant in projects heavily grounded in asset augmentation like building warehouses and setting pre-positioned stockpiles of relief items or acquiring new vehicles. The question of "how will the local actor cover maintenance and running costs in the future?" is often not posed. As a result, **well-intended projects can leave local actors with extra financial pressures and ultimately even less capacity in the mid-term than they had at the outset of the engagement.**

What can we do about it?

Q16) What actions can we take to increase the likelihood of longer-term sustainability of the capacity changes achieved through the engagement?

[Phase 3. Design and implementation](#)

Define capacity outcomes

This priority is presented to encourage capacity development partners to ask (and answer) the question

"How do we make sure capacity development engagements actually deliver what they say they will?"

Capacity development engagements generally work towards specific predefined objectives. Traditionally, these objectives are articulated in terms of programmatic **results** and desired **targets** – i.e., measurable indicators of change, expressed as human development or institutional performance indicators.

For example, an objective behind engaging in capacity development in humanitarian logistics preparedness may be defined as *improved emergency response time*; or a *reduction in commodity stock-outs at critical and recurrent points of need*.

However, capacity development engagements that focus on institutionalisation, sustainability and capacity transformation must work towards two **complementary and inter-dependent objectives**: growth *and* results.

- **Growth** refers to the **increased capacity of stakeholders** to do things on their own over time and is expressed as a sustained change in desired and relevant stakeholder behaviours and practices.
- **Results** are the measurable project or programme outcomes that stakeholders achieve because of their growth.

Why is this important? While short-term results can be achieved by external actors and/or partners, they are rarely sustainable –i.e., they cannot be reproduced by local actors. A focus on growth drives sustainability and ownership of results by enabling local actors to:

- Change current behaviours and practices in anticipation of changes in contexts and stakeholder needs.
- Absorb unexpected shocks through proper planning and quickly return to pre-shock performance levels.
- Incrementally adapt institutional behaviours and practices to evolving needs.
- Transform behaviours and practices through continuous research, development and innovation.

These capacities underpin **institutional resilience**, self-sufficiency and autonomy and their development must

play a key role in all capacity development engagements.

What can we do about it?

Q17) How do we define appropriate, realistic and feasible CD outcomes with partners?

- [Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment](#)

Advocate, educate and evolve

Regardless of how challenges are described, what they are called and/or who is perpetuating them, what emerges from previous practice and learning, is that local actors, facilitating organisations and donors often come with different ideas, beliefs and expectations of capacity development as a means for effecting long-term change and promoting development gains in a world of short-term windows of opportunity.

Local actors, facilitating organisations and donors all have beliefs and perceptions about:

- their own mandates, identities and reputations and what the other actors expect of them
- their own mandates, identities and reputations and what they expect of themselves
- the mandates, identifies and reputations of the other actors and what they can do, should do and – importantly – should not do
- what (and whose) priorities should drive a capacity development engagement and how to resolve when there are tensions in this regard
- what capacity development aims to achieve and what they can reasonably contribute to that process and/or are accountable for
- what local ownership and demand-driven design really means and implies in practical and temporal terms
- how capacity development achievements can be measured and described
- what factors contribute to effective and sustainable change within complex settings

Why is this important? In many cases, these beliefs and perceptions may be fact-based and well-informed, but in many, as described by the learning above, they are not.

Thus, the foundations on which capacity development partnerships are forged become a quicksand of shifting goalposts, mismatched definitions, differing parameters and understandings, and they are likely doomed to fail from the outset.

As such, a critical priority for all capacity development actors going forward, will be to support a gradual transition to a shared understanding of the latest developments, approaches and methodologies that will contribute to making capacity development a more robust and effective discipline.

What can we do about it?

Q18) How do we advocate for a mindset shift and change perceptions around CD among all actors involved?

Possible focus areas include, but are not limited to:

- Donor harmonisation in relation to reporting formats, agreement conditions
- The importance of addressing political differences between donor agenda *by and among the donors* prior to initiating capacity development engagements on the ground, as opposed to letting them surface in design or even implementation phases
- Creating a common mindset and understanding within and across international and national NGOs and other partners who regularly support in-country capacity development engagements
- How to resolve tensions between local ownership and the political priorities of donors' and/or facilitating organisations
- Arriving at a broader understanding of the importance of *ownership* in the context of capacity development and what it actually means

- [Phase 0. Learning and preparation](#)
- [Phase 4. Monitoring, evaluation & learning](#)

III.1.3 Fundamental principles

While the fundamental priorities (above) highlight **what** capacity development actors might want to think about doing differently, the following fundamental **principles** introduce important considerations that can guide **how** they go about it.

In the spirit of positioning the local actor at the centre of the engagement, the principles are articulated in



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terms of the *relationships* that underpin capacity development engagements – whether between the local actors and facilitating organisations, between the parties and the engagement as a formal commitment, or between the engagement and jointly agreed, longer-term goals and objectives.

As such, the principles revolve around:

- **Ownership**, which describes how local actors *relate* to the capacity development engagement.
- **Partnership**, which describes the relationship between the different parties of the capacity development engagement.
- **Contextualisation**, which describes the relationship of the engagement to its environment.
- **Commitment, continuity and stability**, which describes the relationship and investment of the parties to the pursuit of the mutually agreed objectives.
- **Flexibility**, which describes the relationship of the engagement to a changing and dynamic context.
- **Systems Strengthening**, which describes the relationship of the engagement to securing sustainable and institutionalised change.

Ownership

Ownership describes how local actors *relate* to the capacity development engagement.

It relates to whether or not they see value in the capacity development engagement and its proposed outcomes, whether they recognise their own objectives and needs in the design and implementation of the process and whether they are intrinsically motivated to actively participate and pursue it and sustain the capacity gains it leads to beyond the duration of the engagement itself.

Ideally, the aspiration is for local actors to have strong and sustained ownership of the capacity development engagement at all levels. This is generally grounded in the notion of *informed consent* of leadership and all concerned staff in both the local actor context and the facilitating organisation tasked with supporting the engagement. This consent is then concretised through explicit and widely acknowledged leadership

commitment and an adequate resource investment in the process e.g., people, time, opportunity, equipment, infrastructure, finance, etc. Ownership is to be claimed by local actors – it cannot be imposed from the outside.

Why is this important? Strong local actor ownership underpins continued investment and commitment to persist with the capacity development process *even when it is perceived as slow* and to sustain the capacity development outcomes over time, once the engagement with the facilitating organisation has come to an end.

Challenges to establishing strong local actor ownership however can arise from within the local actor setting as well as the facilitating organisation.

Facilitating organisations may be concerned that strong local actor ownership could:

- Threaten existing (and comfortable) power structures and/or claims of expertise
- Give rise to concerns of reputational risk
- Present impediments to own way of working
- Introduce externalities that could jeopardise project planning, timelines, processes etc.
- Jeopardise internal planning and reporting timelines, and therefore place meaningful local actor ownership as something that can ‘only happen in an ideal world’ and the position of “we will not do it this time because we’re rushed, but next time we will make sure local actor ownership is prioritised”.

Local actors may struggle to develop strong ownership if they feel **external pressures or priorities** are driving the engagement. For example, if:

- Their problems are being re-defined to speak to the facilitating organisation’s expertise and priorities or donor conditionalities
- They are engaged only at the end of key processes
- Their contribution is not recognised nor leveraged
- A detailed context and capacity analysis isn’t used to inform objectives and direction.
- Flexibility to adapt to institutional realities is low
- They have no voice in discussing donor-facilitating organisation funding conditionalities



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(even when the funds are destined for their institution)

- Their own financial contribution is not recognised
- Different facilitating organisations present them with conflicting conditions, terms, engagements

“We talk about it in a kind of colonial way sometimes: that we are capacity building ... like assuming that there is nothing, you know? But people on the ground really know their own needs and we are not there yet to let them formulate that and fund that, but instead, together with international civil society organizations, the UN, everybody, like to decide. It’s a power relationship. It’s still difficult to really live local ownership because they might decide on [something] completely different.” (Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 5)

Local actors may also face more **internal strategic and/or practical operational challenges**, for example, if:

- there is low political will, momentum and/or leadership commitment to the process
- there is [informed consent](#) at the executive level, but little willingness at the operational level (where the work happens)
- priorities do not align with the administration’s political agenda and priorities
- There are competing demands for time and resources and/or they lack resources to own and/or manage the process, a ‘firefighting mode’ where continuous operational pressures do not allow senior leadership nor middle managers to set time to think about structural changes (tackle the root cause of problems), while only superficial quick-fixes are applied to keep operating
- There are no internal incentives or structures for staff to grow and use their new capacities
- There is little internal desire to achieve autonomy of capacity e.g., a preference to rely on external support
- There is a preference for the facilitating organisation to ‘just do it’ (it’s faster, cheaper, easier, etc.) and a belief that afterwards that they (the local actor) can easily take ownership.

In all cases, developing genuine, well-grounded ownership takes time and requires good leadership within the local actor setting. Facilitating organisations often are not able to invest that time and have little influence over existing leadership capacities.

What can we do about it?

Q19) What practical steps can we take to advocate for and encourage strong local ownership?

- [Phase 0. Learning and preparation](#)
- [Phase 1. Local actor engagement and prioritisation](#)
- [Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment](#)

Partnership

Partnership describes the relationship between the different parties of the capacity development engagement.

Yet:

... the language of 'partnership' often masks a complex reality, which is that [organisational] relationships take many different forms, and that these vary widely in terms of the ways in which power, interests, substance and so on are organized. (Robinson et al., 2000, p. 13)

Organisations can be parties to a **competitive** relationship, a **coordinating** relationship or a **cooperative** or **collaborative** relationship.

Organisations in a **cooperative** (or **collaborative**) relationship work together, voluntarily, to achieve something neither could achieve alone. Unlike ‘coordinating’ type relationships which have a central decision-making authority, cooperative relationships are self-organising, evolving through consensus building. That is, “cooperation assumes power based on **knowledge, expertise, and/or contribution**, rather than **power derived from role or function** in a hierarchy.”

As the main aim of a capacity development engagement is to foster locally-led practice, the **cooperative** relationship is most beneficial. This can include, among others, co-operative agreements, partnerships, collaboration, coalitions, alliances or

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networks. Though all different from each other, they share common characteristics that distinguish them from competitive and hierarchical coordination partnerships –i.e., they are (i) trust-based; (ii) working toward a commonly agreed goal; and (iii) self-organising rather than having top-down control.

In capacity development engagements, the partnership is further defined by the reasons and purpose for which the parties come together in the first place, the contribution that each can bring to the relationship, how roles are defined and how each party understands “who will do what”, how decisions will be made and all related accountabilities. It relates to how issues of trust, transparency, shared values, risk and mutual benefit are perceived and addressed and to the distribution and use of power between the partners.

Ideally, the partnership underpinning capacity development engagements is a voluntary and collaborative relationship between local actors and facilitating organisations, with both believing that it creates more value to each of them than they could secure on their own –i.e., that the partnership as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Partnerships should be representative and inclusive on both sides, with all parties agreeing to work together towards a common purpose, of mutual (but possibly different) benefit and/or to undertake a specific task and to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits equally.

Why is this important? Establishing positive, equitable partnerships – including beyond and across sectors and areas of expertise – is critical to effective capacity development. This is particularly important when circumstances might suggest power and knowledge differentials between the local actors and the facilitating organisations and/or between the different stakeholders within the partnership. Healthy partnerships support local actor ownership, facilitate contextualisation, create space for genuine commitment, continuity and stability, and evolve over time.

Challenges to establishing healthy partnerships however can arise from within the local actor setting as well as the facilitating organisation.

Local actors may:

- Sense that facilitating organisations do not appreciate the importance of learning about and adapting to the local actor’s way of working
- Have high expectations for personal and professional travel and development opportunities
- Fail to clearly articulate their own strengths and weaknesses which can affect the relevance of the support provided
- Come with a rigid mindset or lack “points of comparison” because of limited experience and/or exposure to non-national, or foreign ways
- Have differing definitions of ‘partnership’ within/across their own internal structures and/or be confronted with multiple (possibly conflicting) definitions of ‘partnership’ with different partners.

Facilitating organisations may:

- Have a corporate view of ‘partnership’ as a client/vendor or transactional relationship and thus struggle to formalise flexibility e.g., in MoUs
- Define stakeholder mapping, selection and partnership motives based on their own timeline, mandate and perspectives instead of those of the local actor
- See itself as more capable, organised and experienced so better placed to lead in most areas
- Underestimate/underinvest in the capacity to listen and empathise with local actor realities and needs
- Engage CD practitioners with strong technical skills but weak in negotiating and partnership-building
- Fail to learn about context, previous efforts and existing capacities, before designing their support
- Frequently change their staff/representatives, which slows down progress as it impacts trust.
- Fail to recognise that establishing trustful relationships can take time

“It takes 25 thousand glasses of tea, of chai, in [a country] before you can have ... a very frank discussion with people in the administration”
(Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 5)

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As a **shared responsibility**, the parties may:

- Fail to clearly define and/or recognise respective contributions, roles, responsibilities, and align key terminology at the outset
- Fail to acknowledge that one or more partners may be faced with *unchangeable* structural issues e.g., limitations on headcount, infrastructural failure, changing administration, etc.
- Fail to identify known *unmovable* constraints that will impact the engagement and thus, fail to work around them together
- Come with very different social and/or organisational cultures, priorities and beliefs about acceptable timelines and approaches.
- Fail to consider high turn-over of staff acting as key stakeholders, at both local actor and facilitating organisation, and find a way to minimise how that might affect the partnership, new people sometimes require to re-build trust and the partnership itself.

What can we do about it?

Q20) What practical steps can we take to ensure an equitable and mutually beneficial CD partnership?

- Reframe current practices of capacity development into an approach of “co-diagnosing, co-designing, co-acting and co-learning”.
- Acknowledge the value of the partnership itself as an opportunity for mutual learning, sharing of *experiences between partners* and *social participation*.
- [Phase 0. Learning and preparation](#)
- [Phase 1. Local actor engagement and prioritisation](#)
- [Commitment, continuity and stability](#)
- Recommended reading: [The Partnering Initiative \(2022\)](#)

Contextualisation

Contextualisation describes the relationship of the engagement to its environment

It refers to a wide range of critical elements, including, but not limited to how facilitating organisations learn about and understand the wider context within which the local actors operate; how they conduct context and capacity assessments together with the local

actors; respecting, learning from and incorporating local knowledge and expertise ([contextual capacities](#)); and how they define objectives, terms and practices using terminology and constructs that are relevant and acceptable to the local actors and prevailing political, cultural, social and economic norms, behaviours, practices and organisational structures.

Ideally, contextualisation is a dynamic, on-going part of the capacity development engagement. It is enabled by constant open-minded dialogue and exchange of information between the parties, a willingness and humbleness of the facilitating organisation to learn and adapt its own beliefs, practices and expertise to what will be most effective in context and in delivering against local actor capacity development expectations. It also relates to an openness to the tools and methodologies that facilitate systematic, coherent and comprehensive information gathering and documentation processes that describe the wider systems within which the local actors are operating.

Why is this important? Understanding the context and recognising that it may change in ways that could impact the capacity development engagement is critical to assessing the relevance, feasibility, and appropriateness of a specific course of action. It also conveys respect for, and recognition of, the complexities and capacities that local actors face and already possess, increasing mutual trust, facilitating an equitable partnership and encouraging local actor ownership. In this regard, studies have found that while local actors expect facilitating organisations to have sufficient technical capacity, frustration can emerge when the support provided is not adapted to specific local circumstances, needs and aspirations.

“They come in, they do consultancy work for 2–3 months, they do not use existing capacities, they give their report, they go home. So, [the report gets] put on the shelf”
(Hagelsteen et al., 2021, p. 4)

Challenges to effective contextualisation however can arise both through the implications of the [expert blind spot](#) and earlier challenges that relate to conflicting priorities, agenda etc.:



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Facilitating organisations may:

- have time and/or resource constraints that hamper or prevent longer, consultative assessment processes e.g., getting funding may have required providing a clear problem statement before there was time to carry out an assessment
- unilaterally decide what is needed based on 'international best/good practice' (see [isomorphic mimicry](#)) and what contextual information is relevant
- lack sufficient [contextual capacity](#) define the assessment based on its own 'technical arsenal' and expertise (see [expert blind spot](#))
- assume that local actors are 'monolithic' (or a 'black box') and thus fail to consider how internal fragmentation / politics / etc. can affect outcomes
- fail to identify national partners working in the space, focussing only on international ones
- propose an assessment methodology that is not comprehensive, systemic (holistic) nor systematic e.g., focusses on one specific capacity or institutional function only
- propose a 'one size fits all' approach for ease of own analysis and internal reporting

Local actors may

- fail to question or challenge the proposed assessment framework for lack of expertise or confidence
- fail to allocate enough internal resources to drive or co-drive the process (e.g. an active focal point; time from different stakeholders to be interviewed, attend meetings, review documents)
- see the process as a formality over which they have little control

As a **shared responsibility**, the parties may:

- be unwilling and/or unable to a non-linear (systems oriented) mindset
- uphold cultural barriers whereby the focus area (e.g. preparedness) or participatory processes are not seen as valuable e.g., a more fatalistic world-view prevails

Donors may:

- doubt that the capacity gaps identified by the facilitating organisations are representative of the needs on the ground

- request a needs-analysis through their own embassies rather than engage directly with the local actors and key facilitating organisations.

"[Donor's] definition of working demand-driven is to ask the desk officer at the [country] embassy, in the specific country: what are the demands? Not to ask the government, it's too complicated ... And then that is of course a dilemma, because we have our ... priorities" (Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 4)"

What can we do about it?

Q21) What concrete actions can we take to ensure accurate and appropriate contextualisation of the analysis and design of the engagement?

How to mitigate these challenges? Both sides can:

- discuss and acknowledge respective 'expert blind spots' and how to navigate it
- agree on a shared glossary and terminologies
- ensure the assessment framework is presented for joint discussion and contextualisation with/by the local actor
- the assessment process includes explicit processes to attune to and prioritise local technical, [processual](#), [contextual](#) knowledge
- ensure complimentary partner and stakeholder mappings include national and international partners working in the same space
- the assessment process is planned, resourced and prioritised to be locally-driven "iterative and emergent processes" (Hagelsteen & Burke, 2016), and not a one-off exercise
- map out recent similar assessments and leverage findings to the greatest extent possible
- increase communication between donors (via the embassy) and facilitating organisations to provide facilitating organisations with deeper contextual knowledge.
- [Phase 0. Learning and preparation](#)
- [Phase 4. Monitoring, evaluation & learning](#)

Commitment, continuity and stability

Commitment, continuity and stability describes the relationship and investment of the parties to the pursuit of the mutually agreed objectives.

It refers to the clarity and explicitness with which the local actor and the facilitating organisation acknowledge, describe and quantify how they will contribute to the capacity development partnership and the pursuit of its objectives. It relates to how they allocate human, financial and leadership resources to the process. It also relates to how both sides acknowledge the importance of individual relationships, trust and flexibility in 'staying the course', to the greatest extent possible, with the same people throughout the process.

Ideally, when stipulating the capacity development partnership, all parties will benefit from strong leadership support. This will offer the consequent freedom to earmark or block-off human, financial and structural resources for a reasonable amount of time so that capacity development gains are not lost to staffing changes, shifting priorities, diversion of resources, etc. In the best cases, such commitments, roles, responsibilities and accountability, as relevant to *all parties*, are clearly articulated in the final, signed capacity development partnership agreement.

Why is this important? Abrupt interruptions in resources (of all types) can reset the capacity development process back, as relationships, progress and learning need to be re-established after momentum is lost. This takes time, and if repeated, can lead to frustration, disillusionment and gradual abandon of the process which loses perceived relevance and value.

Challenges in this domain can arise on all sides

Facilitating organisations may:

- Be bound to short, projectized funding envelopes that do not allow for long-term planning (see 'Different types of project failure'). It might be linked to not offering contract types long enough to attract and retain staff with required capacity development competencies
- Be bound to internal corporate timelines that do not accommodate (or acknowledge) long processes

- Be driven by donor policies or priorities which can change based on donor government agenda
- Have fragmented internal commitment
- Lack awareness of the need for longer-term engagement, internal socialisation and commitment
- Lack of awareness of the internal processes (e.g., financial planning and budgetary) and timelines of the local actors.
- HR policies force staff to change country or role after a period of time shorter than the development engagement

Local actors may

- Lack the basic internal capacities to "stay the course" e.g., inadequate staff coverage, lack of equipment, basic capacity, etc.
- Designate the 'wrong' staff and/or staffing profiles to the capacity development engagement
- Lack managerial support for the staff designated to participate, thus increasing demands on their time to be able to meet regular workload obligations

"You spend a lot of time in workshops and seminars so you can hardly do your work because you are always (being) capacitated"
(Hagelsteen et al., 2021, p. 5)

- Not designate enough people to ensure uptake and continuity and/or only be able to engage small organizational units with limited time availability of their staff
- Intentionally seek capacity substitution for quick results, advocacy, "fire-fighting", etc.
- Face internal constraints (e.g. lack of political will, need for quick wins for advocacy/ build internal support) that encourage short-term actions/thinking
- Lack internal leadership support for long-term institutional change processes, particularly in those areas focussing on "unknown issues" or things that have yet to happen (e.g., as with preparedness and crisis response)
- Become disillusioned if personal expectations of travel and professional development are not met

"When we start the partnership there is also a thinking on the receiving countries that people would be travelling to the country of the

partnership, to learn, to get some benefits. Benefits of education and other stuff [...] ...And if our expectations are not met, we become disappointed" (Hagelsteen et al., 2021, p. 4)"

- Lack internal incentives for staff participating as an “extra” in addition to their regular obligations

Flexibility

Flexibility describes the relationship of the engagement to a changing and dynamic context.

It refers to the idea of *evolution* in that capacity development engagements must be able to adapt as their environment, actors, knowledge, power dynamics, and resources, change continuously. These ideas of *flexibility* and *evolution* are what underlie the use of the term *engagement* instead of *project*.

Engagements should adopt responsive but also ‘proactive’ change by continuously evaluating goals and approaches, modifying them as appropriate.

Ideally, all parties to the capacity development partnership understand what a [complex adaptive system](#) is, and that the capacity development engagement is operating within one. Acknowledging this means understanding that eventualities cannot be fully planned for or predicted, and therefore there is a certain degree of risk at the outset. As such, the partnership will need to prioritise open and continuous dialogue between the parties – either initiated by either side as and when required, or on a regular schedule of ‘check-ins’ to avoid having conversations occurring only when triggered by a problem. These conversations should reflect on and consider new and/or evolving contextual realities that affect the capacity development process *as they occur* and to adapt the design and implementation accordingly. Not the same as fickleness or lack of structure and orientation, flexibility suggests adapting based on a pondered evaluation of relevant factors, after joint review and discussion.

To be effective, capacity development requires adaptability and flexibility: you need “a whole package of adaptivity ... it never goes the way that you envisaged from the start, it always

goes back and forth and up and down” (Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 3)

Why is this important? Capacity development engagements can only be as positive as their outcomes remain relevant to local actor needs and context. However, as needs and context can change over the course of an engagement, flexibility allows facilitating organisations to adapt design and implementation approaches to stay focussed on relevance and value-added for local actors. Among other things, this helps local actors trust that the facilitating organisation is working in the interests of the local actor and not their own organisational priorities.

Challenges to flexibility can arise from all sides:

- Engagements may be subject to **conditionalities** which are set before it even begins and leave little room to the other parties to negotiate them. Conditionalities cascade down the chain of involved organizations, from the rules and regulations of the donors, to those of the facilitating organisations and the local actors.
- Parties may approach engagements with a ‘fixed in stone’ mindset from the outset in order to align with corporate results frameworks and/or donor requirements, etc.
- Have few or no mechanisms to revise engagement design (its goals, strategies or activities) once underway, or revising implies laborious internal processes and approvals
- Not be willing to “wait” for slow change processes to develop and take root
- Perceive they have little space to revise designs and plans proposed at the outset, as this could jeopardise related donor funding

Systems-strengthening

Systems-strengthening describes the relationship of the engagement to securing sustainable and institutionalised change.

It refers to how the design and planning behind the capacity development engagement demonstrate a non-linear approach to change management and acknowledge and accommodate the inherent complexity of the institutional ecosystem within which it aims to catalyse change.

Ideally, all phases of project planning and design reflect comprehensive approaches and an appropriate mix of short- and long-term activities that address different capacity types and needs across different, but related, entry-points within and/or across the institutional ecosystem. These activities leverage key interdependencies between the entry-points in order to better shift the performance of the system as a whole; they *do not* focus on singular actions or entry-points as these are not generally sustainable.

Why is this important? The results of singular actions that focus primarily on the creation of technical and/or operational skills, knowledge and capacities through capacity creation but omit to strengthen retention and utilisation of capacity are not usually sustainable over time. Singular approaches also risk missing and/or under-estimating the consequences of other factors and realities existing within the institutional space; a systems-thinking orientation, accompanied by similar tools, analyses and processes, can help with advance detection (and mitigation) of possible risks and challenges to the capacity development outcomes.

Challenges to adopting a systems-strengthening approach can arise from both sides as **local actors** and **facilitating organisations** may, among other things:

- Lack shared definitions of what systems-strengthening, sustainability and institutionalisation mean and thus, how they can guide and be operationalised throughout the project cycle
- May have limited strategic thinking capacity and/or may not be engaging the right professional profiles for the early phases of strategic positioning, analysis and design to capture “the bigger picture”
- Have a corporate culture that promotes tools and programme frameworks that are predominantly linear in their design, implementation and monitoring
- Prioritise short-term process completion to achieve demonstrable outputs (at the expense of longer-term sustainability)
- Have an organisation, mandate or thematically-centric “tunnel vision” view of the problem or challenge and/or consider only those areas in which it is recognised as having expertise and credibility

- Underemphasise or recognise the need to engage with partners having complementary service offerings
- Have operational obligations that simply do not allow for the “thinking and discussion” time that formulating systems-strengthening plans require
- Be entrenched in a “business as usual” mindset that limits participatory and consultative brainstorming and discussion around more inclusive engagement models, behaviours and practices.

What can we do about it?

Q22) What can we do to ensure the engagement adopts a sustainable systems-strengthening approach?

- [Phase 0. Learning and preparation](#)
- [Phase 1. Local actor engagement and prioritisation](#)
- [Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment](#)
- [Phase 3. Design and implementation](#)

III.2 A new way of working

Earlier sections answers the question “What is the learning we should reflect on?” and begin to answer the question “What should we do differently?”.

This section describes the different phases of the capacity development process and explores how, when, where and with whom all the considerations raised in earlier sections can be addressed in practice.

The phases are:

- 1. Local actor engagement and prioritisation**
- 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment**
- 3. Engagement design and implementation**
- 4. Monitoring, evaluation and learning**

In addition to these phases, a critical “zero” phase is recommended during which all parties – and generally the facilitating organisation to start with – are given an opportunity to learn and prepare for the capacity development engagement in line with the systems-strengthening concepts laid out by the PEG.

Phase 0. Learning and preparation

Objectives of this phase of the process:

- To ensure all parties have an opportunity to familiarise with fundamental capacity development concepts, principles and approaches as well as key terms, definitions, abbreviations and acronyms
- To set the basis for informed partnership discussions that are grounded in a shared understanding of capacity development implications and requirements
- To ensure all parties are aware of the longer-term roadmap and have an overview of the key steps that may be relevant in the context

What priorities do the phase and approach speak to?

- [Adopt systems-strengthening models](#)
- [\(Re\) Centre the action](#)
- [Recognise different capacity types and levels](#)
- [Support institutionalisation](#)
- [Recognise institutional ecosystems](#)
- [Encourage sustainability](#)
- [Define capacity outcomes](#)
- [Advocate, educate and evolve](#)

What principles do the phase and approach speak to?

- [Ownership](#)
- [Partnership](#)
- [Contextualisation](#)
- [Commitment, continuity and stability](#)
- [Flexibility](#)
- [Systems-strengthening](#)

What challenges can be addressed?

- [Terminological ambiguity](#)
- [Overlooking implementation failure](#)
- [The "isomorphic mimicry" trap](#)
- [The "expert blind spot"](#)
- [Underestimating complexity](#)
- [Other pressures, rigidity and short-termism](#)
- ["Doing" as a shortcut to enabling](#)

While the parties to a capacity development engagement may not be new to the practice, adopting a coherent systems-strengthening approach will likely represent a significant mindset shift for some or all of

them. Thus, a gradual, phased exposure to key concepts and practices is recommended.

What can we do about it?

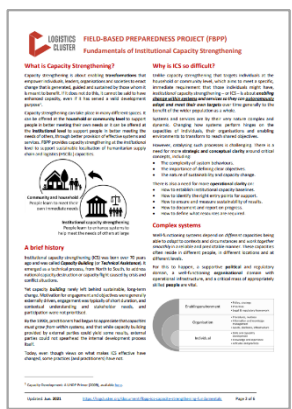
Q23) How do we get all parties on the same page regarding a systems-strengthening approach?

Tools and guidance proposed:

- [Capacity Development Fundamentals](#)
- [Theory of Change for Capacity Development](#)
- [9 steps of engagement](#)

Summary of the tools

- **Capacity Development Fundamentals**



This is a 6-page document that presents the key concepts discussed throughout the PEG in summarised form. It is suitable for a quick read by non-specialists. It aims to give a general overview of the key considerations that shape capacity development as a

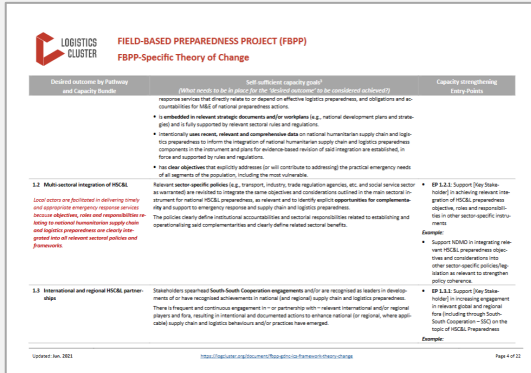
*discipline and a long-term engagement strategy for development; it describes **how** capacity development should be conceptualised. Topics addressed include: key challenges of institutional capacity development; basic thinking about complex systems; the importance of defining appropriate capacity development objectives; reflections around sustainability through capacity transformation; a framework to support systematic description and identification of institutional system elements; core principles (to note that some have since evolved and may differ from those presented in the PEG); considerations around contribution to change; and partnerships and roles.*

- **[Theory of Change for Capacity Development](#)**
- This is a 20+ page document that lays out the narrative behind the framework for capacity development and capacity assessment proposed by the PEG. It complements the Fundamentals document by describing **what** capacity development engagements should consider in order to reflect a systems-strengthening design. It describes the five impact pathways proposed by the ToC, the diverse capacity*



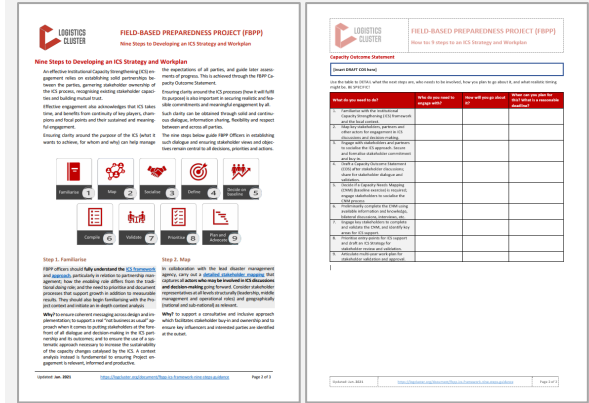
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bundles that define the pathways, and the entry-points for capacity development support that fall within each bundle, all of which underpin the operational methodology proposed by the PEG. The five pathways include: the policy and regulatory environment; elements of institutional effectiveness and accountability; aspects of strategic planning and sustainable financing; local actor technical and operational capacity and the engagement of other actors, such as civil society, the media and academia.



9 steps of engagement

This is a 3-page guidance document that proposes a practical 9-step roadmap to developing a stakeholder-validated capacity development engagement strategy and workplan in line with the principles and recommendations outlined in the PEG. It suggests how to operationalise support in line with the Theory of Change and the core principles for capacity development. Among other things, it suggests: familiarising with the thinking; mapping stakeholders; engaging with stakeholders; defining objectives; conducting a capacity assessment and establishing baselines; compiling the findings; validating the findings; prioritising entry points and actions and then implementing and/or planning and advocating for implementation support. It comes with a practical worksheet that can be used as a planning tool by the facilitating organisations, together with local actors, donors and other partners as relevant to context.



Practical steps

- The staff who will be representing the facilitating organisation for the engagement should familiarise in detail with the above documents prior to engaging with local actors.

Phase 1. Local actor engagement and prioritisation

Objectives of this phase:

- To ensure all parties have the same understanding of the rationale and scope of the capacity development engagement
- To arrive at consensus around objectives and to manage expectations of all parties with regard to achievements, timelines, roles and responsibilities and accountabilities, etc.
- To lay the basis for a clear and detailed partnership agreement that accommodates flexibility while securing commitment and continuity
- To facilitate local actor ownership

What priorities do the phase and approach speak to?

- [\(Re\) Centre the action](#)
- [Recognise different capacity types and levels](#)
- [Recognise institutional ecosystems](#)
- [Define capacity outcomes](#)
- [Advocate, educate and evolve](#)

What principles do the phase and approach speak to?

- [Ownership](#)
- [Partnership](#)
- [Contextualisation](#)
- [Commitment, continuity and stability](#)
- [Flexibility](#)



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What challenges can be addressed?

- [Terminological ambiguity](#)
- [Overlooking implementation failure](#)
- [The "isomorphic mimicry" trap](#)
- [The "expert blind spot"](#)
- [Underestimating complexity](#)

What can we do about it?

Q24) How do we engage with stakeholders and navigate differing expectations to formulate appropriate CD objectives?

Tools and guidance proposed⁸:

- [\(9 steps of engagement\)](#)
- [\(Capacity Development Fundamentals\)](#)
- [\(Theory of Change for Capacity Development\)](#)
- [Stakeholder Mapping](#)
- [Capacity Outcome Statement \(COS\) Formulation Guidance](#)

Summary of the tools

- **Stakeholder mapping (guidance and worksheets)**

This is a five-page document that walks readers through a systematic approach to stakeholder mapping and classification (e.g., as strategic, political or technical challengers or champions) and provides broad recommendations for engagement for each class. It comes with a practical worksheet to capture information as well as a chart for plotting stakeholder "scores" to match to recommended engagement strategy. This is an essential exercise that will underpin the context analysis and should be completed together with the local actors so as to capture their knowledge of local players, their agenda, influence and interest levels, etc.

- **Capacity Outcome Statement (COS) Guidance**

This is a 4-page document that explains how to discuss and articulate a coherent statement of desired capacity development outcomes as opposed to defining a traditional impact-level results statements as the objectives of the CD support. It helps CD

practitioners and local actors navigate the spectrum of highly focussed, operational requests that are hard to operationalise, so that a practical, actionable statement can be jointly crafted and agreed to. This will facilitate accurate and coherent capacity assessment and subsequent engagement design, implementation and monitoring. This document and the process behind it should be shared with the local actors and they should drive the process of formulating the COS, so that the final statement speaks to their known and own institutional priorities and targets.

⁸ Brackets around a document name indicates that although the item has been described in an earlier section, it is an essential

foundation to gaining a full understanding of the unbracketed items being explained in the current section.



Practical steps

- The staff who will be representing the facilitating organisation for the engagement should familiarise in detail with the above documents
- Following the 9 Steps, once there is consensus to proceed with a systems-strengthening approach, local actors should be asked to lead the stakeholder mapping exercise.
- The facilitating organisation should request/suggest a dedicated meeting with decision-makers and then technical representatives to explain the approach and to ensure that inputs from all levels are included.
- Once the stakeholder mapping is complete, in a separate meeting or discussion forum, begin to explore the formulation of the capacity development objectives.
- The local actor should be given an opportunity to familiarise with the COS guidance and a brainstorming session can be held to see how the "formula" for the COS takes shape in the local context. (*Follow guidance in the documentation*).

Phase 2. Context analysis and capacity assessment

Objectives of this phase of the process:

- To acknowledge, channel and leverage local actor knowledge and capacities
- To facilitate ownership through [informed consent](#)
- To understand the wider context and identify major factors that will impact the sustainability of the capacity development process and outcomes
- To identify critical institutional capacity assets, gaps and needs across a range of capacities to inform a systems-strengthening approach
- To define strategic yet realistic, feasible and relevant capacity development objectives

What priorities do the phase and approach speak to?

- [Adopt systems-strengthening models](#)
- [\(Re\) Centre the action](#)
- [Recognise different capacity types and levels](#)
- [Recognise institutional ecosystems](#)
- [Define capacity outcomes](#)

What principles do the phase and approach speak to?

- [Ownership](#)

- [Partnership](#)
- [Ownership](#)
- [Contextualisation](#)
- [Systems-strengthening](#)

What challenges can be addressed?

- [Overlooking implementation failure](#)
- [The "isomorphic mimicry" trap](#)
- [The "expert blind spot"](#)
- [Underestimating complexity](#)
- [Different types of "project failure"](#)

Capacity development takes place in complex multi-level environments which means that a robust context analysis should acknowledge this (to reasonable levels of detail). To do this, the PEG proposes a step-wise process that looks at **ability and readiness** for change at the national, sectoral and institutional levels.

Key concept: Ability and Readiness (ARI)

How effective can capacity development engagements be in supporting local actors to reach their targets and goals, depends to a large extent on the **ability** of the local actors to absorb and benefit from the partnership as well as their **readiness** to do so.

Ability and readiness are influenced by external and internal factors. They are also related to the relevance and feasibility of the objectives, and to the design of the capacity development engagement itself.

External factors include the national social, economic and political contexts, the general level of sectoral development, local actor institutional maturity and the baseline levels of critical local actor capacities.

Critical capacity development design factors include how well the outcomes defined in relation to the context, and whether the approaches proposed are feasible and coherent in relation to the external factors.

Local actor ability and readiness to work towards strategies and objectives can differ widely: some may not have the capacity to develop and implement plans as they direct limited capacities elsewhere (e.g., in fragile contexts), while others may have the capacity to



develop and implement but may not have prioritised them or linked them with other relevant investments.

Thus, understanding ability and readiness helps define realistic and feasible capacity development outcomes and activities.

An important point to note is that the ability and readiness does NOT assess local actors' ability or readiness to engage in the activity itself. Instead, it assesses local actors' ability and readiness to take on a capacity development engagement toward undertaking the activity autonomously in the future.

[Ability and Readiness](#)

Why is this important? Conditions in local actor contexts can create challenges and/or opportunities for capacity development engagements.

“...the countries that are in the most need of development (...) are those countries that are least likely that the aid will have an effective result in the long-term”
(Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 4)

The above can apply to fragile states, for example. Instead, for middle-income countries whose national budget has grown, Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) represents a very small percentage of the state income, which creates different dynamics.

“They have a clear understanding that there is one specific part of a specific sector that has an experience that might be interesting for them, ...and they are in a position to very clearly specify this and point down and say: ‘either this or we are not interested’”
(Hagelsteen et al., 2022, p. 4)

Understanding contexts and dynamics is therefore **essential** so that capacity development engagements are appropriate and fit-for-purpose.

What can we do about it?

Q25) What are the steps to a comprehensive analysis of context to help establish a realistic and feasible approach?

Tools and guidance proposed:

- [\(9 steps of engagement\)](#)
- [\(Stakeholder Mapping\)](#)
- [Ability and Readiness](#)

Summary of the tools

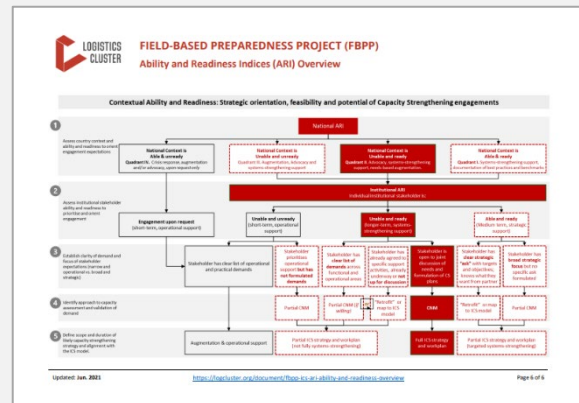
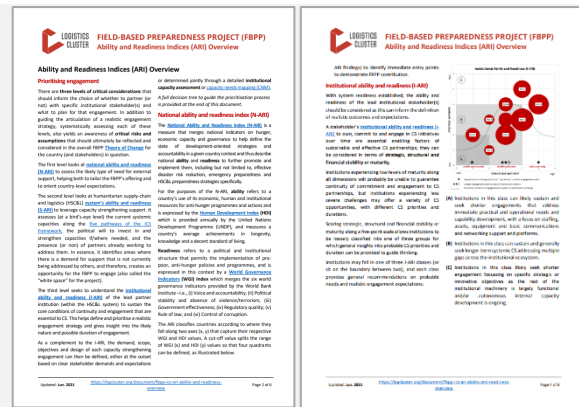
- **Ability and readiness**

This is a 6-page document that briefly describes how the National, the System and the Institutional ARI work. While the concepts of ability and readiness are common across the measures, the parameters or variables that are used to define them vary as follows:

- *National ARI: the key measures relate to the country's human development and governance indicators;*
- *System ARI: the variables relate to perceptions around support needs in the preparedness focus area of relevance (for the FBPP this related to HSC&L) as per the five pathways of the capacity development framework; perceptions of local actor political will or appetite to address eventual gaps; and the presence of other partners already working to address them.*
- *For the Institutional ARI, the variables relate to local actor's own perceptions of strategic, structural and financial maturity.*

The guidance comes with scoring sheets in Excel that generate bubble maps to illustrate findings. The National ARI, the stakeholder mapping and the System ARI a) help position the capacity development offer along the spectrum that ranges from a more operation and augmentation based to longer-term systems-strengthening orientation; b) identify key sector actors who will be critical to the capacity development engagement and c) identify the most like entry-point for support considering the level of sectoral development and other partner engagement.

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Practical steps:

- Plan for a preliminary discussion with the lead local actor to discuss the relevance and acceptability of the proposed **roadmap for context analysis**.
- If local actors are in agreement, review the National ARI methodology and jointly discuss findings around positioning and **general orientation** for capacity development planning.
- Review the methodology for the System ARI with local actors and if in agreement, complete leveraging local actor knowledge, to identify general “white space” for capacity development support.

While the ARI exercises can be completed together with local actors almost as focussed desk review exercises, leveraging local actor inputs and knowledge, the institutional capacity assessment is the exercise that instead requires significant planning, socialisation, attentive participant selection, iterative dialogue final validation and time.

The findings will provide **baseline** values for the capacities that will be targeted for change and insights into exactly which areas need support and what needs to happen for them to be strengthened.

The capacity assessment can also help **refine the capacity outcome statement** articulated at the outset if the finding suggest other capacity areas should be prioritised over those initially identified.

What can we do about it?

Q26) How do we complete a comprehensive institutional capacity assessment and define relevant and appropriate objectives?

Tools and guidance proposed:

- [\(9 steps of engagement\)](#)
- [\(Capacity Outcome Statement \(COS\) Formulation Guidance\)](#)
- [Capacity Needs Mapping \(CNM\) Process Guidance and guidance questions](#)

Summary of the tools

- **Capacity Needs Mapping (CNM)**

This is a 7-page document that describes how the CNM is used at the outset of the engagement, to establish a shared and mutually agreed-upon baseline understanding of the country’s current preparedness capacities (as per key area of focus). It can also be conducted at intervals throughout implementation to see where capacity levels are changing. The CNM systematically explores capacities along all five pathways and capacity bundles of the capacity development framework. CNM findings form the basis for all subsequent activities and they must be legitimated and/or validated by all stakeholders. Ideally local actors are fully engaged in and actively participate in the CNM process, are the source of its findings and have opportunities to revise and reformulate them at the end of the exercise.

The CNM Guidance note is accompanied by a set of detailed guiding questions (customised to the preparedness area of interest) and a table that allows local actors to compare their capacities against benchmarks to yield a final overview of baselines.

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Phase 3. Design and implementation

Objectives of this phase of the process:

- To ensure the design consistently speaks to local actor priority areas of interest, existing capacity and identified needs
- To ensure the design faithfully reflects the findings of the capacity assessment and addresses capacity needs across different levels (and does not divert into a linear, capacity creation-only plan)
- To ensure an appropriate mix of activities is foreseen to address the different types of capacities that will be required to achieve the capacity outcome
- To ensure concerted efforts to address capacity retention, availability, modernisation and utilisation are included (and not just capacity creation)
- To ensure complementary activities – within the local actors space and/or with other partners – are identified and leveraged where possible

What priorities do the phase and approach speak to?

- [Adopt systems-strengthening models](#)
- [Invest in sustainability](#)
- [\(Re\) Centre the action](#)
- [Recognise different capacity types and levels](#)
- [Support institutionalisation](#)
- [Recognise institutional ecosystems](#)
- [Encourage sustainability](#)
- [Define capacity outcomes](#)

What principles do the phase and approach speak to?

- [Ownership](#)
- [Partnership](#)
- [Contextualisation](#)
- [Systems-strengthening](#)

What challenges can be addressed?

- [Overlooking implementation failure](#)
- [The "isomorphic mimicry" trap](#)
- [The "expert blind spot"](#)
- [Underestimating complexity](#)
- [Different types of "project failure"](#)

Practical steps:

- If not already done earlier, to orient the in-depth institutional capacity assessment, begin discussion around local actor priorities, needs and known capacity strengths and needs. Work together to draft a preliminary **capacity outcome statement** that aligns with local actor strategic and operational priorities.
- Plan for socialisation meetings with the local actor to introduce the CNM methodology and allow time for familiarisation, customisation/contextualisation of the guiding questions, etc. and practical discussions around how best to complete the exercise.
- Assess appetite and willingness of the local actor to spearhead a capacity needs mapping to determine baseline capacities and identify key entry points for capacity development support. Leverage the stakeholder mapping to facilitate the process.



What can we do about it?

Q27) How do we ensure CD design will contribute to sustainable change and institutionalisation of capacity?

Tools and guidance proposed:

- [Capacity development framework, entry points and process milestones](#)
- [Capacity Transformation Process](#)

Summary of the tools

- **Capacity development framework, entry points and process milestones**

This is a substantive document (60+ pages) that outlines the full framework for capacity development adopted by the FBPP. It describes the five pathways and the bundles of capacities that fall within them and the different entry points for support that could be considered should the capacity assessment reveal a need. Essentially, it provides insights into **what to do in response to a capacity gap**. In addition, it distinguishes between **soft processes** (e.g., policy revision and coherence, articulation of procedures, strengthening of coordination mechanisms, advocacy for financing, etc.) and those that support the practical roll-out and implementation of specific functions or **hard processes** (e.g., roll-out of IMS/MIS, delivery of Training of trainers, roll-out of research and evidence generation exercises, etc.) and the different process milestones that can be considered for each, in line with the key concepts of the sustainable capacity strengthening approach.

LOGISTICS CLUSTER FIELD-BASED PREPAREDNESS PROJECT (FBPP) Entry-Point & Process Milestones Compendium	
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- **Capacity Transformation Process**

This is a 5-page document that complements the one above. It describes the different phases of the capacity transformation process which contribute to the longer-

term institutionalisation (and sustainability) of capacities. The phases include: determining the demand for capacity; creating capacity; capacity retention; ensuring the availability of capacity (within and across the local actor space); planning for capacity modernisation and creating opportunity for capacity utilisation. For each of these phases, broad recommendations for capacity development support are provided, to be adjusted to local actor institutional context and existing relevant functions e.g., human resource management, administration, institutional learning platforms, etc. These actions should be integrated within and throughout the design of the capacity development engagement.



Phase 4. Monitoring, evaluation & learning

Objectives of this phase:

- To provide an approach to incremental monitoring of capacity development process and milestones completion (in lieu of monitoring through long-term results)
- To facilitate proper classification and documentation of capacity development processes to support robust narratives around the capacity development services offering and its achievements
- To support advocacy, education and evolution in the field of institutional capacity development

What priorities do the phase and approach speak to?

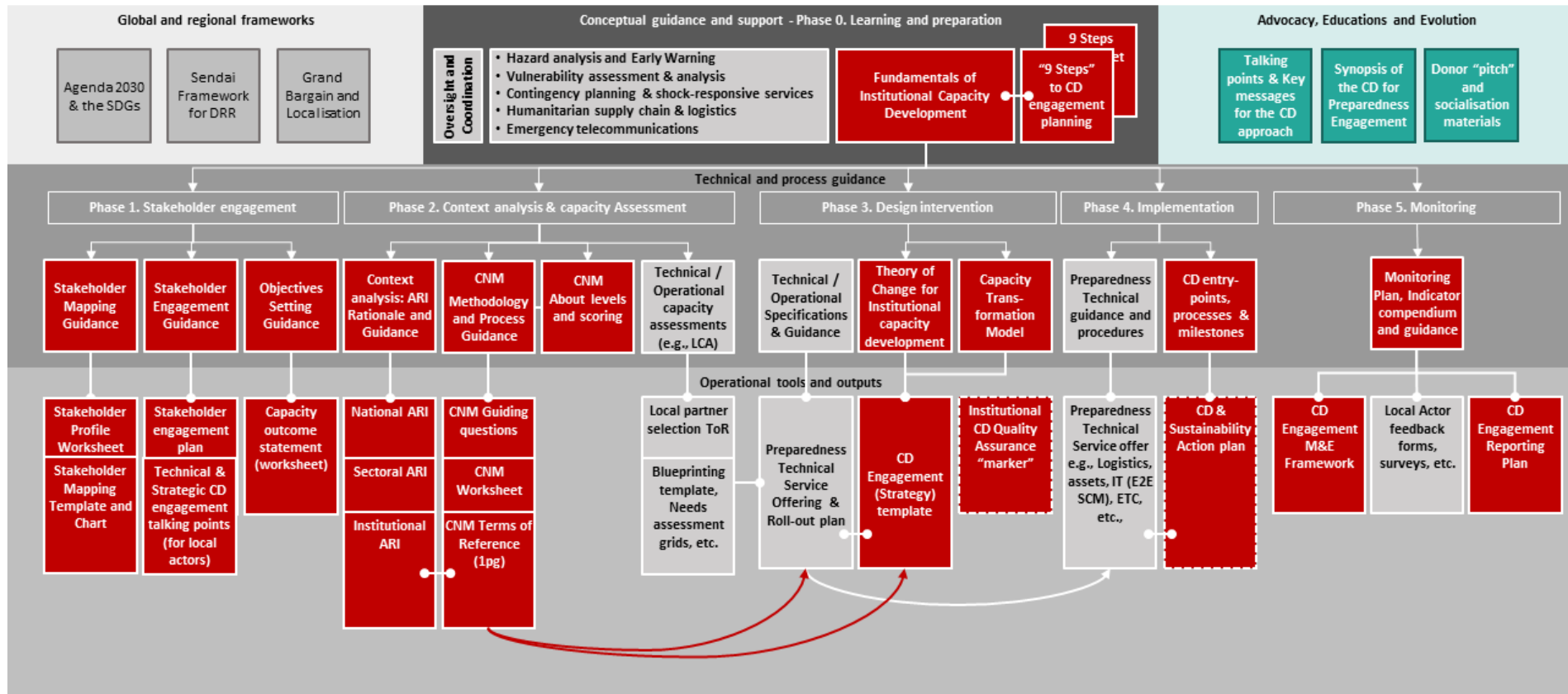
- [Recognise different capacity types and levels](#)
- [Define capacity outcomes](#)
- [Advocate, educate and evolve](#)

What principles do the phase and approach speak to?

- [Ownership](#)

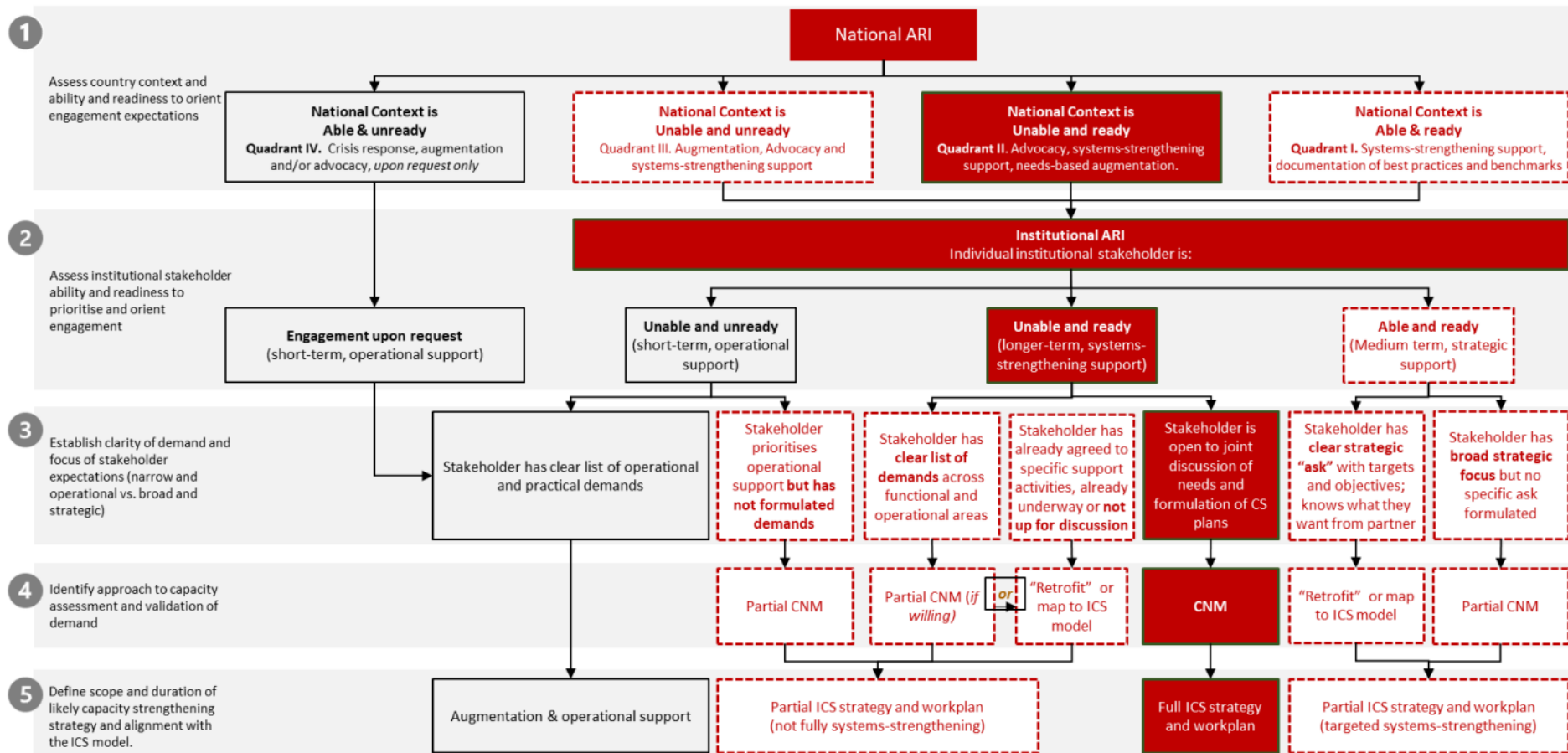
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III.3 Overview of tools and practical steps



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Contextual Ability and Readiness: Strategic orientation, feasibility and potential of Capacity Strengthening engagements



IV Glossary of key terms

Agency refers to a sense of being able to take action, and to anticipate its potential consequences. This includes acts of *refusal*, where someone can demonstrate agency by *refusing* to accept the requests or actions of other. Within the localisation context, agency can be thought of as “the ability of [Local actors] to identify their problems and priorities, and design/implement their own solutions” (Baguios et al., 2021). It can also be the refusal to accept the offers or approaches of facilitating organisations.

Capacity augmentation relates to the provision of physical goods, designed and built by the facilitating organisation and handed over to the local actor at some point. If this handover is not done with due care for the different human, financial and legal systems that are needed to use and maintain the asset, it can often fall into disuse (or in some cases even worse: they do deduct capacity of local actors to develop because they do allocate -even in an insufficient amount- limited budget to try to cover the related running costs of those assets).

Capacity building (when used to mean “Training”) A form of capacity development that is usually focused on technical/operational skillsets that can be taught in a classroom or other time-bound, output-oriented interaction.

Capacity Development is the process whereby people, organisations and society as a whole, unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time. The term should be read as synonymous with *capacity strengthening* but not as equivalent to *capacity building*, *augmentation* or *substitution*, all of which may be seen as smaller actions that can contribute to a wider capacity development process.

Capacity Development Practitioner describes individuals working privately or in or on behalf of a facilitating organisation to interface with local actors on the design and delivery of a capacity development engagement.

Capacity Development Support refers to what outside partners (e.g., facilitating organisations) can do to support, facilitate or catalyse local actors to develop their capacity(ies).

Capacity substitution involves doing a task for someone else. E.g., responding, embedding a technical specialist, conducting analyses). It seeks to temporarily “inject” external capacity to fulfil functions on behalf of the local actor. This can be for free (e.g., during a response), or costed. The key distinction here is that the capacity in question is a responsibility of the local actor, as distinct from a *service* that the local actor needs, but does not need to undertake itself (e.g. outsourcing of fleet management).

Capacity substitution: Where an organisation experiences a lack of suitable skillsets or has insufficient people, and this is addressed by Facilitating organisations undertake an activity on behalf of that Local actor.

Capacity strengthening: Synonym for *capacity development*.

Cluster approach: builds on IASC *principles* and uses a sectoral approach with clear roles and responsibilities, promotes collaboration between organisations to leverage relative strengths and resources, nominates a single lead agency to facilitate continuity, and defines specific deliverables and accountabilities in preparedness and response.

Cluster: a mechanism comprising the agencies and organisations accountable for *implementing* a Cluster approach.

Contextual Capacity is the capacity to understand the local context and the existing capacities and needs. It complements the ideas of processual technical capacity, described elsewhere (Hagelsteen et al., 2021, p. 5). Unlike technical capacity (ability to ‘do’), and processual capacity (ability to ‘enable’), contextual; capacity is the

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knowledge and ability to tailor actions to the local context, whether social, political, financial, geographic, etc. See also [Processual Capacity](#) and [Technical Capacity](#).

Core support Core funding or support is usually defined as financial support that covers basic “core” organizational and administrative costs of an organisation, including salaries of non-project staff, rent, equipment, utilities, and communications. It is sometimes called indirect funding, cost recovery, administrative cost, overhead, or unrestricted funding. Core funding should be understood as covering expenses that are required to keep the organisation functioning independent of any projects being implemented.

Enabling is used through guide in the sense of *making possible*. In the case of the PEG, this enablement occurs through the *partnership* between the local actor and facilitating organisation.

Engagement describes the series of actions operationalised under the partnership between local and facilitating organisations. The word aims to reflect a ***flexibility and evolution of process*** that sees all parties participating actively. It is used *in contrast* to the idea of a “project,” but may be used interchangeably with the term “programme” given the longer-term impact-oriented philosophy that underpins the latter.

External organisation refers to any organisation outside the national/capacity development context that *does not yet* have a capacity development agreement with a local actor. An external organisation becomes a *facilitating organisation* only after they, and the local actor, have agreed to undertake a capacity development engagement together.

Facilitating organisation describes those organisations engaged by the local actors as a partner to help facilitate the change process.

Hard capacities have a clear physical output, such as the roll-out of a computer system, delivery of Training of

trainers, roll-out of research and evidence generation exercises. Unlike ***Soft capacities*** (below), hard categories usually involve the procurement of materials / equipment procured. For example, the local actor’s processes to “quantify and procure tangible assets, platforms or infrastructure ... through internal institutional mechanisms and in line with institutional procurement and contracting practices” ([FBPP Guidance, Entry-Point & Process Milestones Compendium](#)).

Humanitarian logistics preparedness is the implementation of processes, structures, and systems connecting local community, national and international actors by designing, planning and training for efficient, effective, and responsive mobilization of material, financial, human, and informational resources when and where needed. This encompasses a range of activities, including needs assessment⁹, procurement, warehousing, transporting and distributing, waste management, and performance measurement for the purpose of alleviating the suffering of vulnerable people (Jahre et al., 2016).

Humanitarian Preparedness. “[t]he knowledge and capacities developed by governments, response and recovery organisations, communities and individuals to effectively recognise, anticipate, respond to and recover from the impacts of likely, imminent or current disasters” (UNISDR, n.d.).

Informed Consent (of a local actor to participate in capacity development) consists of two distinct parts. First, ***informed*** means that the local actor fully understands the process of capacity development, and how it differs from more ‘traditional’ approaches., including (longer) timelines, (slower process toward) visible results, and greater impact on local actor resources. ***Consent*** means that, based upon a strong understanding, the local actor agrees to proceed with the engagement. Unlike formal written documents (as with an MoU) that speak to an agreement between organisations, informed consent relates the ***individuals*** that will be engaged with the process. This means that

⁹ E.g., Assessing available infrastructure (ports, roads, service providers, etc.)

informed consent must be sought at each level of the engagement: at the executive, managerial and operational/technical levels within the local actor. It also means that the staff of the facilitating organisation that have been assigned to support the engagement must also be informed about and consent to working in this manner. Without the informed consent of the individuals, an engagement can fail in spite of having a 'watertight' MoU.

Institutionalisation means fully integrating a behaviour or a practice into the daily attitudes, knowledge and practices of the people working to fulfil a mandated function in an organisation or institution. Like a daily habit, things that are institutionalised are not questioned, they are just done. (PEG Authors)

Isomorphic Mimicry describes the importation of "implementation models and designs ... [that] may be seen as effective elsewhere, but have not necessarily been validated within, or adapted to, local context" (Andrews et al., 2017, p. 31). The concept describes the conflation of form and function – that is, "'looks like' substitutes for 'does'" (ibid). Examples include: "Passing a labour law is counted as success even if lack of enforcement means it never changes the everyday experience of workers" (ibid); regarding the *provision* of trainings as a success, "even if no one's practices actually improve" (Watkins & Swidler, 2013) (quoted in (Andrews et al., 2017); or regarding the development of "Appealing budget documents [as a success] ... even if [those documents] don't determine spending outcomes" (ibid).

Isomorphic mimicry is frequently regarded as an attractive organizational strategy as (1) "public sector systems are often closed to novelty — [and can be] particularly closed to the *appearance* of novelty via new organizations" (ibid) and (2) "developing country public sector systems often evaluated novelty strictly through whether the *novelty aligns with agenda conformity* rather than enhanced functionality" (ibid).

Local actors include those *government* stakeholders and/or other national/sub-national organisations who are *seeking to introduce change* within their own contexts e.g., institutional policies, practices,

procedures and structures, to achieve objectives of their own setting. The **ownership** principle is critical here. In practical terms, this can include national state actors, civil society – including, whether formally or informally incorporated: National and local NGOs; National Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies; Community-based organisations; Faith-based groups; National academia & specialist organisations; Local media (traditional and social), private sector, academia, media, faith-based groups, local market actors, communities and individuals. It can also include local branches of international organisations.

Logistics: the *transport and delivery element* of the supply chain e.g., the physical handling, storage and movement of commodities (and the planning needed to support this).

Partnership: a voluntary and collaborative relationship between various parties, both public and non-public, in which all participants agree to work together to achieve a common purpose or undertake a specific task and, as mutually agreed, to share risks and responsibilities, resources and benefits. (Source: [Partnerships for the SDGs](#))

Preparedness – or the state of being prepared – is a very broad term that can include, for example, the financial preparedness of individuals (having sufficient funds to cover potential emergencies), organisations' business continuity plans, or the motto of scouts seeking to 'be prepared'. To be meaningful, clarity on **preparedness in which field, for what purpose, by whom** is essential. The PEG operates under this general umbrella definition.

Project describes an individual or collaborative enterprise that is carefully planned to achieve a particular aim. In the development sphere it is often involves pre-planning, assumptions of linear cause and effect logic, limited or short timelines for completion, fixed budgetary and/or other resource investments and expectations of tangible and demonstrable results. Projects may be perceived as rigid in their implementation and may be grounded in implicit imbalances in power relations.

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Processual Capacity is the capacity to drive the engagement forward, and to facilitate capacity development processes. This can be thought of as having 'functional' and 'facilitating' components. The *functional* aspect of processual capacity (sometimes called [hard capacities](#)) includes organisational and project management skills, such as the capacity to assess, plan, formulate, implement and evaluate visions, policies and strategies and manage resources. The *facilitating* aspect of processual capacity (sometimes called [soft capacities](#)) incorporates the social, relational, intangible and invisible, such as leadership, learning, self-reflection, conflict resolution, intercultural communication, change management, problem solving, negotiation and relational skills (Hagelsteen et al., 2021, p. 5). Unlike technical capacity which is the ability to 'do' something, processual capacities allow imparting of that technical knowledge to others – it is the *enabling* component. See also [Contextual Capacity and Technical Capacity](#).

Soft capacities generally result in behaviour or policy change rather than the acquisition of goods and services (see [Hard capacities](#) above). For example, local actors undertake policy revision, articulation of procedures, strengthening of coordination mechanisms, and advocacy for financing ([FBPP Guidance, Entry-Point & Process Milestones Compendium](#)).

Supply chain is the end-to-end system from supply planning (market analysis, needs analysis, forecasting and pipeline management) to procurement, transport and delivery ([logistics](#)) and distribution/allocation of commodities to the final recipients.

Sustainability: the quality of being able to continue over a period of time¹⁰

Technical Capacity is the capacity to perform the required technical activities, capacity for performing a risk assessment or preparedness planning (Hagelsteen et al., 2021, p. 5). In the case of a capacity development engagement, this is usually the area of specialisation that triggered the local actor's interest in partnering with the facilitating organisation. In other words, this is

the ability to "do" something. See also [Contextual Capacity and Processual Capacity](#).

¹⁰ [SUSTAINABILITY | meaning, definition in Cambridge English Dictionary](#)

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