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**Enhancing the monitoring and evaluation of
Capacity-building through the Durban Forum**

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ACADEMIC YEAR 2014/2015

Table of contents

Preface.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
List of Figures.....	viii
List of abbreviations.....	ix
Dedication.....	x
1. Introduction.....	1
2. Capacity-building and the Durban Forum.....	9
2.1 History and definitions of Capacity-building.....	11
2.2 A new model.....	16
2.3 Role of the NGOs.....	24
2.4 The Durban Forum.....	31
2.5 Capacity-building for climate action in the UNFCCC process.....	32
2.6 Further steps towards the Forum until its creation.....	37
3. Enhancing the monitoring and evaluation of Capacity-building.....	46
3.1 What monitoring and evaluation means.....	47
3.2 Performance indicators.....	54
3.3 Discussion at the UNFCCC about performance indicators.....	61
3.4 New impulses in 2015.....	70
4. Rethinking monitoring and evaluation.....	80
4.1 Participatory dialogue and share of knowledge.....	81
4.2 Examples of lessons learned and shared experiences.....	89

4.2.1	Session 1: youth participation.....	90
4.2.2	Session 2: gender and climate change.....	91
4.2.3	Session 3: enabling environment.....	93
4.2.4	Session 4: Intended Nationally Determined Contribution on.....	94
	Climate Change	
5.	Conclusion.....	98
	Annex I.....	107
	Annex II.....	110
	Annex III.....	113
	References.....	117

Abstract

Successful operations of Capacity-building require good strategies of Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E), but appropriate methodologies are not easy to be identified. The scope of this thesis is to investigate if the Durban Forum of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is effectively enhancing the M&E of Capacity-building activities.

Capacity-building means improving performances of developing countries in a sustainable and efficient way. It has a *cross-cutting* nature because many fields are covered, for instance health, education and climate change. Additionally, each area is composed of various dimensions that the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) divided in three levels: systemic, organizational and individual. Capacity-building has long history of both failures and successes and its origins are rooted in both intellectual thoughts and political attitudes that have shaped the meaning of Capacity-building over the years. It has been possible to identify three main stages in the evolution of the approach: the first one started in the 1980s, when United Nations (UN) agencies were pursuing short-term results by assisting central governments to strengthen their institutions and services. The second term happened by the end of the 1980s, when, after the Cold war era, new political beliefs arose. *Democracy* and *good governance* were the new key words and non-state actors, promoting ‘bottom-up’ approaches, acquired notable relevance.

Lastly, in the mid 1990s, it emerged the need to renovate the attention towards institutions and central governments: the awareness of the strong interlink among Capacity-building components led to the conclusion that it was necessary to harmonize the work of institutions with all the other related fields. A simple donor-driven relationship resulted to be ineffective: it was necessary to strengthen capabilities and promote *local ownership*. As a matter of fact, a good partner has to teach national actors how to go ahead autonomously.

The Durban Forum was conceived as a tool to enhance M&E of Capacity-building

Three different approaches of Capacity-building have been adopted until today. The last one aims to promote local ownership and flexibility

Developing countries, mainly in Africa, were actively welcoming this new attitude with innovative national strategies and openness towards external interventions. On the behalf of donors, recognizing the failures made them critically analyse their previous approaches and elaborate new procedures of self-assessment. For example, between 1980 and 1995, the UN analysed its own aid programmes in six developing countries and results showed that Capacity-building is such a complex concept that outcomes always depend on the specific environment where actions are taken. Additionally, it was understood that the rule of law, the legal system, the social capital, the economy of a country, could have equally deep effects on Capacity-building. Specific strategies were drawn for each country and the division between the three levels became more flexible and interchangeable.

Evidence showed that areas affect each other and programmes always need ad-hoc strategies

In the 1990s, the term *Capacity building* was remarkably acquiring relevance, especially after the Rio Earth Summit (1992), which marked the establishment of the UNFCCC. One of the major concerns of the Framework Convention refers to the support for developing countries in their climate change activities through the share of technology and the establishment of funds. Throughout the years, many conferences and workshops were held in order to discuss this theme. Finally, in the Panama Climate Change Conference (2011) Parties engaged an in depth-discussion on Capacity-building and some months after, at the Durban Climate Change Conference, it was adopted the decision text on the Durban Forum. It was established that the Durban Forum would have met every year as an occasion to share experiences, lessons learned and good practices to enhance the monitoring and implementation of Capacity-building in developing countries. Several actors take part to the meetings: Parties representatives, UN organizations, researchers, non-governmental organizations, academia and the private sector. The same Conference marked a great turning point for the international community about climate change because, after years of negotiations and disagreements, it was finally decided to draft and adopt a legally binding agreement by December 2015, in Paris.

The Durban Forum was established in 2011 as a tool to share experiences and enhance the monitoring of Capacity-building

Since the Forum was launched as a tool to “further enhance the monitoring and review of the effectiveness of capacity building”, the core of this work is enshrined in the assessment stage of Capacity-building activities, which is the evaluation resulting from a long process of monitoring. Monitoring is defined as a continuous observation process, which gives results while the project is still ongoing. Whereas, evaluation is the final stage that defines the quality of the project. Monitoring and evaluating allows keeping track of processes and progresses in order to better orientate interventions. However, it remains controversial how to monitor achievements because they depend on many different aspects that hardly permit to elaborate a unique method. In developing countries there are two reasons why enhancing assessment methods is a priority: firstly, most of the hosted organizations tend to report only their results rather than general outcomes, secondly, information are not always complete and reliable.

It is impossible to develop a unique method to monitor activities, but general guidelines can be identified

Researchers accepted the new call with enthusiasm, but, while some experts believe in quantitative standardized techniques, others argue that generalization in developing countries is not possible. On the basis of what evidence showed, it is possible to state that inflexible parameters do not permit to understand the environment and its complex nature, leading to the development of inefficacious evaluating systems. Only good practices could be identified, as the need to compare results in different groups, or analogous programmes in diverse countries. Several authors formulated useful general principles and, in the same way, organizations, as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), designed specific steps addressed to monitor Capacity-building.

A very relevant aspect of M&E strategies is related to indicators: tools that help in the identification of capacities, weaknesses and in the establishment of achievable goals. Indicators are meant to measure achievements and reflect changes derived from an intervention. Like Capacity-building, indicators can be divided in three levels: individual, organizational and institutional. Indicators give information about the reaction of the whole country, or part of it, to a project. It is important to stress that, while only a small amount of project-level data could influence global indicators, global feedback is able to provide trends that improve national and local performances.

Two main difficulties are encountered when building indicators. Firstly, reciprocal influence of each Capacity-building level, which means that the organizational level could be easily affected by the individual level and vice versa. Once again, evidence shows that ad hoc indicators could give good feedbacks, while generalizations should be avoided again. Aggregation of data to trace generic indicators is not possible: there is a high chance of dispersion and distortion. Secondly, the influence of the context, which makes results change from one country to the other, despite the project is identical.

The UNFCCC held two workshops, respectively in 2007 and in 2008, to share experiences and challenges in programmes assessment and in developing performance indicators. It was concluded that no single approach towards M&E could be applied and the designing of methodologies has to be country-based. Additionally, there was general agreement on the complexity in the identification of common indicators and in their use, because making generalizations is not feasible. Indicators have to be tailor-made; they are subjective tools of a nation.

Discussion meetings took place at the UNFCCC to develop common indicators. Conclusions resulted unsatisfactory

Since the adoption of the legally binding text of Paris is approaching, in June 2015, Least Developed Countries (LDCs) made some important considerations about the development of performance indicators and added observations on their vision of the Durban Forum. The LDCs submitted a document where they call for common baselines and indicators that a single body should use to keep track of activities and achievements. It was suggested the establishment of an *International Capacity-Building Mechanism* (ICBM) and a *Capacity-building Coordination Committee* (CBCC) created under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol to monitor and evaluate national and international activities of Capacity-building. Additionally, the Committee should overview the organization of the Durban Forum and its success, which means verifying the outcomes of presented programmes and checking the information provided by Parties. The LDCs delineated a very precise vision of the Durban Forum and they insist on its formalization and qualification to actively intervene in Capacity-building

New attempts in 2015 and wish to formalize the Durban Forum in its action

projects.

The mandate of the Durban Forum concerns monitoring and evaluating capacities in developing countries through dialogue and asking for formalization would undermine the mandate of this workshop. In the text adopted in Geneva in February 2015 for ‘Paris 2015’, are listed some possible changes to improve Capacity-building activities, including the *Capacity Building Mechanism*. Chances that the ICBM is created are quite high and in this case, the role of the Forum might need a little rethinking. Anyhow, it is necessary to remember that the action of the Forum cannot be completely institutionalized, since its undeniable nature is informal and could only provide food for thought to the Committee. It would surely be incorporated under the umbrella of the mechanism and could have new functions, but what has been contested to the Durban Forum insofar, depends on erroneous perceptions. Claiming that the Forum is not playing the role of institutional arrangement is somehow correct and erroneous at the same time because this event was never conceived as an institutionalized body.

It is necessary to rethink the role and the nature of the Forum

This work aims to demonstrate that M&E do not necessarily entail pre-established guidelines: comparison through dialogue, as the establishment of the Forum proves, might be effective as well. Scholars remarked that many times direct interaction is more effective than documents exchange. In this network era, interaction could also happen through common platforms that many times support live forums in the enhancement of developing countries’ inclusion. Thanks to new technology systems, transnational cooperation is increasing and there is a consistent flow of information among experts, researchers, governments and societies. The transfer of knowledge can be addressed as *knowledge sharing*: a learning system related to innovations that are communicated and then applied locally. Anyway, knowledge sharing is not a linear process of communication and given its length and complexity, it is necessary to make sure that the receiving country is able to appropriately elaborate knowledge. Once knowledge sharing happens, local re-creation has to be enacted.

Knowledge sharing permits comparison through dialogue and forums are valid tools to realize it

There are some necessary requirements to guarantee a good level of internalization, for example *ownership*: recipients that feel a sense of belonging are more likely to be committed and put all their efforts in the project.

Nowadays, there are different kinds of networks to share knowledge, as electronic networks, informal linking activities, workshops, and formal conferences with clear purposes. Taking part in international networking permits to relate local actions with global realities; it triggers mobilization of every layer of the society and involves non-state actors in very important contexts.

In the case of workshops, the scope is to bring people together to discuss common concerns and endorse ‘brain storming’ activities. Several studies showed that in-group discussions focus more on shared ideas rather than information that only some members possess. Exposing groups to other people ideas is a way to share knowledge that leads to the formulation of very innovative concepts. The inclusion of governments, organizations and civil society in national forums of knowledge sharing, enhances local accountability and creates an important bridge among people and institutions. It is also a way to transparently monitor the implementation of plans. That is to say that workshops could have a valid function of assessment, based on the provision of new impulses for questioning and investigating.

***There are limits
in measuring
impacts on
participants***

Nevertheless, measuring the impact of discussion meetings is as complex as monitoring Capacity-building. The challenge lies in the difficulty to obtain quantitative results about the effectiveness of physical and virtual meetings. This means, once again, that looking for precise quantitative data is not the appropriate approach towards Capacity-building. The Forum facilitates the share of information about assessment methodologies, but also about projects that could entail gender issues, youth inclusion and Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) development. It is an occasion to monitor and compare reciprocal results but it will never produce strict guidelines or measurable results. The limits of

***Anyway,
knowledge sharing
can be an optimal
tool for reciprocal
assessment***

the Forum depend on both its informal mandate and the general barriers that international agencies are still unable to overcome. When adopting the right perspective, the Forum can provide one of the best feedbacks about international reality of Capacity-building.

Simply by recalling four presentations delivered during the Durban Forum, it is possible to prove that answering questions as: “Where are we?” “Where are we going?” “How can we get there?” is just another, and maybe better, way to monitor and evaluate Capacity-building.

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