

Capacity Building is not only ‘Training’

LESSONS LEARNED ON THE PROVISION OF ADVICE AS ‘CAPACITY BUILDING’ FOR CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATORS

by Benito Müller

Introduction

The Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) has published a Working Paper on [Supporting international climate negotiators: Lessons from CDKN](#).¹ It sets out ‘CDKN’s initial thinking on how climate change negotiators from the poorest and most climate-vulnerable countries can be supported to have effective, influential voices’, and invites readers to share their views.

This Note is written in response to this invitation. My comments are based on my experience of providing support to international climate change negotiators for almost 10 years, through the European Capacity Building Initiative (ecbi).² I have also served as adviser to the Chairs of the LDC and African Group, and LDC members of the Standing Committee on Finance, Transitional Committee, and the Board of the Green Climate Fund.

The CDKN paper includes an exposition of CDKN’s theoretical approach to ‘amplifying the voices of the poorest and most climate-vulnerable countries’, and reveals some tensions between what practice requires and what funding rules permit. These tensions are the focus of this Note.

The tensions between rules and practice

1. The need for ‘bias’ in giving advice

The CDKN Paper lists a guiding principle of CDKN negotiation support: *The negotiating position of a country is a sovereign issue. Thus, it is critical that support is provided in a neutral manner that does not seek to impose a negotiating position on the beneficiary. Negotiators need to own their positions – and the thinking that informs them.*

¹ Stuart Jefford and Dan Hamza-Goodacre, ‘Supporting international climate negotiators: Lessons from CDKN’, CDKN Working Paper, August 2013.

² www.eurocapacity.org/.

There can be no doubt that ‘neutrality’ – in the sense of not following someone else’s agenda, in particular that of the government supplying the financial support for the service – is a *sine qua non* in providing information and advice. But it is important to keep in mind that this is not the same as not taking anyone’s side. If I seek advice from an independent financial adviser, I expect her to not only be genuinely independent of others, but also to be on *my* side. The same holds for the provision of advice to negotiators and negotiating groups: it needs to be biased towards the recipients for them to be genuine ‘beneficiaries’.

Advice, in particular, must be more than just a ‘neutral’ listing of options. For it to be of any real value, advice has to evaluate such options *from the beneficiary’s point of view*. To be able to provide advice, the advisers must be trusted by the beneficiary. This will only happen if they are, and are seen to be, on the side of the recipient. This may on occasion create some tensions with negotiators of other Parties if the advice conflicts with their positions (particularly if the provision of the advice is funded by them), but this cannot be helped if one seriously wishes to engage in giving advice, as opposed to just providing information.

Thus, while the Paper is quite correct in stating that *negotiators need to own their positions – and the thinking that informs them*, this does not mean that negotiators actually need to do that thinking themselves in order to ‘own’ it. Indeed, they should expect their advisers to come up with new ideas that might help them in their negotiations. That is what advisers are for.

The provision of administrative support enhances the negotiation capacity of recipients not by teaching them how to administer, but by freeing time for them to negotiate. The same is true for the provision of genuine advisory support. It enhances the capacity of recipients not by teaching them how to be an adviser, but by providing them with good and trustworthy advice.

2. M&E focus on ‘Change’

The CDKN Paper rightly recognises the importance, in some cases, of keeping things as they are; one of the lessons learnt states that ‘the operation of groups can be improved by ensuring that there is continuity during the handover of key roles between countries and in the turnover of key negotiators’. However, the evaluative paradigm is completely focused on ‘change’.

For instance, the paper states that: ‘Measuring and monitoring the effectiveness of this type of support is not straightforward, and an approach should be identified early. Changes in both capacity and influence should be tracked, but limitations in the ability to demonstrate attribution should be acknowledged’.

This may seem like a somewhat ‘academic’ concern. After all ‘continuity’ can be interpreted as ‘no change’. However, genuine problems can arise in applying these theories in practice, particularly in the context of the provision of advice.

Training someone in order to build their capacity to do something means starting with a certain (benchmark) level of competence, and then increasing it, possibly to a given target level, after which the training comes to an end. Supplying someone with advice, however, is not the same as training them. While it is possible to improve the quality of the advice that

someone receives, it would be wrong to conclude that once the best possible advice has been given, support must end.

Perhaps it would be better in this context to follow Simister and Smith (2010)³ by replacing ‘capacity building’ with ‘capacity development’ as referring to *a more deliberate process whereby people, organisations or society as a whole create, strengthen and maintain capacity over time*. Creating capacity could then include the training of advisers, while strengthening and maintaining it would be ensuring that the negotiators in question could avail themselves of the best existing advice.

As concerns the provision of advice, the lesson should be that there can be cases where the task is not so much capacity building but capacity maintenance, a fact which needs to be reflected in the monitoring and evaluation procedures

3. Travel as a necessity and not a perk

The paper rightly recognises that ‘negotiating groups should be supported to meet and collaboratively agree on their priorities and how best to achieve them in advance of key negotiation meetings’. One of the key elements in capacitating negotiating groups is that they can meet to strategize in between negotiations. This is by no means restricted to LDCs or the Africa Group of Negotiators.

The OECD Climate Change Expert Group (CCXG)⁴ normally meets twice a year. In addition, it holds seminars which bring together government representatives, the private sector, and civil society in order to share information on climate policies and issues and develop papers in consultation with a wide range of developed and developing countries.

The Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate (MEF)⁵ launched in 2009 with the intention, *inter alia, to facilitate a candid dialogue among major developed and developing economies, help generate the political leadership necessary to achieve a successful outcome at the annual UN climate negotiations*. The MEF has been meeting, on average, four times a year.

The EU Council Working Party on International Environmental Issues – Climate Change (WPIEI-CC)⁶ which meets once a month (except in August), is comprised of experts from all member states plus the Commission. It receives input from informal Expert Groups and is charged with developing the EU positions for the UNFCCC negotiations.

All these meetings have inevitably tilted the balance of the playing field against those groupings that do not have the resources to maintain this level of engagement. This is why it was highly appropriate for the CDKN-managed UK Advocacy Fund (AdvF) – which is the

³ Nigel Simister with Rachel Smith, ‘Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building: Is it really that difficult?’, Praxis Paper 23, INTRAC, January 2010.

⁴ www.oecd.org/env/cc/ccxg.htm.

⁵ www.majoreconomiesforum.org/about.html.

⁶ See, for example, Ioana Creitaru, ‘Environmental Security Seen from the European Union: The Case of EU Climate Policy as a Preventive Security Policy’, *Europolis*, Journal of Political Science and Theory, Issue: 3/2008, pages: 87–114, on www.ceeol.com.

main UK funding instrument for supporting capacity building for climate change negotiations – to have the provision of resources to negotiators from the poorest and most vulnerable countries to attend and influence global climate change negotiations in its Theory of Change and Principles of Engagement.⁷

It was particularly unfortunate when, just over a year ago, the AdvF stakeholders were informed that ‘logistics costs’ (all project spend other than honoraria) of new projects would have to be capped at 15 per cent of project costs. This sort of budgetary constraint does not allow any meetings to be organised, and makes it impossible to support the attendance of negotiators at the negotiations. For example, both the ecbi regional workshop series and bursaries for LDC and African negotiators had to be put on hold despite their proven success, as a result of the decision to cap logistics costs.⁸

The drastic constraints on logistics costs have been justified on the basis that UK tax payers’ money should not be used to pay for ‘junkets’. It is true that some of the people (not only from developing countries!) attending the official negotiations may not be essential to the process. However, one of the advantages of the ecbi workshops and bursary schemes was that the participants could be selected on a performance basis, to eliminate ‘tourists’ from the outset.

Having face-to-face strategy meetings to prepare for upcoming negotiations is absolutely key to the negotiating capacity of a group – as recognised in the CDKN paper detailing the AdvF ‘Theory of Change’. The importance of such meetings is also revealed in the practice of the above-mentioned developed country expert groups (CCXG, MEF, and WPIEI-CC), which incidentally are highly unlikely to meet the current AdvF budget constraints. These constraints should therefore be revoked, for they are not only unfair to the envisaged AdvF beneficiaries, but also inconsistent with the AdvF’s own Principles of Engagement, and detrimental to achieving its purpose.

⁷ See Annex A in: ‘CDKN, Advocacy Fund Theory of Change’, available for the authors of the Paper on request.

⁸ See for example: ‘Accomplishments: Testimonials by ecbi participants on Phase I & II: Outcomes and Impacts’, ecbi Report, January 2011. www.eurocapacity.org/downloads/ecbiAccomplishments2005-11.pdf.