



Building Civil Servant Capacity in South Sudan

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'Coaching and mentoring for capacity' has become a popular approach to civil servant capacity building in fragile states. In South Sudan, the 'IGAD Initiative' is currently deploying 200 coaches and mentors to South Sudan from Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. This brief recaps on some main tenets of the initiative and presents a number of policy recommendations.

EIGHT MILLION SOUTH SUDANESE YEARNING FOR A STATE

There is widespread acknowledgement that ensuring the stability and security of the Republic of South Sudan following its celebration of independence on 9th July 2011 is of the utmost importance. Eight million South Sudanese, living with some of the worst human development indicators in the world, yearn for a state capable of delivering security and basic services. The functioning of the South Sudanese state depends on the emergence of a relatively viable state apparatus staffed by civil servants capable of, and willing to, provide governance and facilitate service delivery; a resource which is extraordinarily scarce after decades of devastating conflict which has claimed around 2.5 million South Sudanese lives. The capacity gaps and challenges are dire. Basically, there is not a single government office in South Sudan that does not face critical capacity gaps – from the President's office to the local administrators. Thus, building and strengthening state institutions remain top priorities of the current government and the international donor community.

THE INITIATIVE FOR CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT IN SOUTH SUDAN

The Initiative for Capacity Enhancement in South Sudan is a civil service capacity building programme established by the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) and the Government of South Sudan (GoSS). It is supported by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). Under the IGAD initiative, three of South Sudan's neighbouring countries who are also IGAD mem-

bers, namely Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, will second and place 200 civil servants in key functions identified by GoSS ministries themselves. Kenya will deploy 80, Ethiopia 60 and Uganda 60 personnel. They will serve as an immediate capacity enhancement and they will also work on developing local capacity through 'twinning' with South Sudanese counterparts in peer-to-peer coaching partnerships. The initiative builds on bilateral agreements, while IGAD provides the political framework and regional legitimacy to the project. UNDP provides support to all aspects of the project and serves as the technical partner for the involved actors. Norway funds the (comparably small) allowances for the civil servants as well as the costs of project support and management. The deployed civil servants will remain on payroll in their sending countries for the entirety of

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an urgent need for accumulative, *in media res* 'knowledge capturing' during donor supported civil servant capacity building projects in South Sudan based on South-South cooperation. Compared to the cost of running projects this size, collection and dissemination of knowledge would be well worth the investment.

Further recommendations can be found inside this brief.



the project, which would appear to make the individual contributions among the largest examples of South-South assistance for post-conflict state building to date.

COACHING AND MENTORING – A NEW APPROACH

In the context of various governance assistance programmes, the Initiative for Capacity Enhancement in South Sudan stands out as a novelty. It is an example of triangularly organised, donor supported South-South cooperation on coaching and mentoring for civil service capacity – a model that has become increasingly popular in fragile states. It builds on the assumption that involving neighbouring countries is the most suitable approach to capacity building because of cultural and linguistic similarity, similar value and administrative systems, and knowledge of local and regional conditions. With an average price tag of around USD 50,000 per Civil Service Support Officer – so-called CSSO – per year including all project costs, the initiative is a cost-effective model compared to traditional technical assistance. Furthermore, the international state building community's turn towards coaching and mentor-

ing is also a response to decades of unsuccessful 'North to South' technical assistance.

- It is a move away from (sometimes quite literally) 'helicopter in and out' classroom sessions and towards long term projects which aim at socialised learning and character shaping on a very individual level.
- It is a turn towards personal capabilities and belief systems as the basis of any reform.
- It is a focus on 'public sector ethos', incentives, and human relationships.
- It represents a focus on self-reflexivity and the reinvention of a sense of subjectivity.

'EXPERIENCE-BASED CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT'

The concept of coaching and mentoring as a capacity building tool has proved tricky to translate into strategy and practice. Programmes typically lack clear ideas about what coaching and mentoring is all about. Regardless of the obvious and daunting challenges, all involved actors believe

RECOMMENDATIONS

Notwithstanding the multiple challenges, the IGAD initiative seems to have got quite a few things right and appears to be a promising opportunity for South Sudan as well as for the region. The following issues proved to be of concern for many of our interlocutors. They should be taken into account by donors when engaging with the IGAD initiative or similar projects.

Operational issues

- *Coordination and management.* In an initiative involving a GoSS with limited capacity to lead and manage complex processes, and several sending countries with different recruitment and screening processes, coordination is no mean feat. Possible future phases must invest in identifying and prioritising suitable areas for coaching and mentoring which requires a carefully managed process with a number of GoSS counterparts. So does the matchmaking with capacities in other countries.
- *Quality assurance.* We found that quality assurance emerged as a natural component, given the sending countries' interest in providing high calibre capacity to South Sudan. For the most part, the highest levels of government had been involved and had enforced a rigorous selection process. For future initiatives, donors must ensure that similarly meticulous quality assurance is applied while recognising that the processes for doing so may differ from country to country.
- *Absorptive capacity.* Interlocutors emphasised how future initiatives must continuously take stock of the absorptive capacity on the South Sudanese side. Twinning requires a counterpart willing and capable of inducting CSSOs. It needs an enabling environment and mutual investment in the partnership. This also includes the ability to find living quarters for all the CSSOs and for other logistical challenges to be resolved.

Conceptual issues

- *Planning.* Partly because of donor demands, United Nations institutions apply project models and templates that reflect rather rigid demands for a priori identification of priorities, objectives, and working modalities. In the context of fluid and unpredictable realities on the ground, objectives cannot be defined a priori. Planning and evaluation must reflect that donors essentially invest in people and their ability to harvest the fruits of trustful and productive

that the IGAD initiative is the way to go. Interlocutors across the GoSS and among CSSOs confirmed the appeal of a model where capacity is sourced from regional and comparable, but more advanced, public sectors. Besides the match in terms of skills and competencies, interlocutors stressed the importance of cultural similitude and defined the initiative as “experience-based capacity development” as the sending countries have been through societal transitions resembling those facing South Sudan.

A GENUINE DESIRE TO HELP AND SUPPORT

The IGAD initiative had a fairly prudent start. An oft-voiced concern about South-South cooperation and the reliance on individuals not vetted by renowned international organisations is whether the quality and motivation of such individuals are up to the mark. Our research showed that the deployed civil servants generally were highly skilled (at least those we interviewed). They articulated profound reflections upon their role as coaches rather than ‘doers’. They expressed appreciation and humility towards the task at hand. Interlocutors univocally stressed a genuine desire to help and support South Sudan

in the critical first years after independence as the primary reason for deploying. There were no significant economic incentives for them built into the IGAD initiative. The quality of the 200 CSSOs will of course vary. The involved countries do, however, seem to have invested heavily in identifying CSSOs with appropriate professional and interpersonal skill-sets.

THE CATCH-22 OF LOCAL OWNERSHIP

Another common concern is that the national actors are expected to define goals and means but lack the capacity to do so. This may stall the local ownership paradigm in a Catch-22 type situation. The IGAD initiative was, from the outset, determined to avoid such an obstacle by applying a thorough consultative process. Interlocutors seldom referred to UNDP despite its important behind-the-scenes role. Hence, the oft-encountered scepticism towards internationally-driven state building was, so far, absent. After almost three months of operation, some twin relations work well while others struggle with trust building and divergent expectations. This is similar to experiences in other countries.

human relations. Norway’s ‘risk-embracing’ funding of the IGAD initiative here represents a welcome departure from typical donor behaviour.

- *Monitoring and evaluation.* To understand processes of socialised learning, evaluation must be flexible, qualitatively focused, embedded and process-oriented. Ideally evaluations would (also) be used as a learning opportunity rather than a control mechanism. They need to draw on disciplines such as anthropology, critical pedagogy and private sector capacities within coaching and mentoring. In this respect the IGAD initiative presents an interesting and accessible laboratory for generating new knowledge about coaching and mentoring for capacity in post-conflict countries (and beyond).
- *Utilising capacity build-up.* It is crucial to explore how the United Nations system and donors may utilise the skill-sets that the CSSOs develop while in South Sudan. Post-conflict governments and actors on the ground often request capacities that combine specific professional skills with cultural aptitude and capacity building experience from post-conflict settings.
- *Coaching and mentoring as a productive idea.* Despite lacking a clear definition, the idea of coaching and mentoring as a capacity building tool generates plenty of activity on all levels – from the regional level to the ‘twins’ within the GoSS. More research and reflection is needed to address how various actors embrace the concept and what kinds of agency and activities it produces.
- *Terminology.* Any productive cooperation depends on shared terminology. Our research showed that the narratives constructed around the IGAD initiative differed distinctively from those normally observed in capacity development projects. Efforts need to be invested in strengthening the terminology of coaching and mentoring. This is critical for configuring the interaction between governments, institutions and individuals.

In sum, in our opinion, one of the most important tasks is to fashion some form of ‘knowledge capturing’ mechanism in South Sudan. There is an urgent need for accumulative and *in media res* collection and dissemination of knowledge about how the IGAD Initiative, and other similar initiatives in South Sudan, progress. When compared to the cost of designing and implementing state building projects, we feel that such a mechanism would be well worth the investment.



OTHER POSSIBLE ENTRY POINTS FOR DONORS

A growing number of donor countries are engaged in, or are considering engaging in, 'triangular cooperation'. Against the backdrop of the many failures of 'North to South' technical assistance, the deployment of Southern – often regional – expertise seems to represent a compelling, efficient and cost-effective way of supporting countries emerging from conflict (as well as non-conflict developing countries). In terms of supporting South Sudan, prospective donors could consider the following entry points:

- While the South Sudanese Cabinet has currently only signed off on the current project scope, the GoSS seems interested in possibly expanding the project to other sectors. A number of sectors, such as central banking, justice and education, seem equally in need of capacity development as those covered by the current initiative. Moreover, the initial deployment of civil servants is expected to lead to the identification of further capacity gaps. The IGAD initiative represents an established mechanism for sourcing capacity from the neighbouring countries. However, if the initiative is to be expanded, the sending countries would likely need to be reimbursed.
- Several interlocutors suggested the establishment of a 'reverse exchange programme' through which GoSS civil servants could do an embedded 'traineeship' in one of the IGAD countries. Experiences from existing initiatives between the GoSS, Kenya and South Africa have been positive.
- South Sudan is currently engaged in a regional capacity building initiative initiated by South Africa through which Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, South Africa and South Sudan will create institutional partnerships between their public administration training centres (South Sudan is planning to establish one). The idea is that this group of countries will be able to learn from each other at their respective levels of development and across sectors where some are more advanced than others. The Canadian International Development Agency will provide the initial funding.
- Many interlocutors highlighted the need for a programme enabling the recruitment of qualified members of the South Sudanese diaspora to the civil service. There was widespread acknowledgement of the inherent challenges of such programmes as seen in other countries. In spite of some resentment among non-diaspora, most believed that the pros would significantly outweigh the cons.

The findings in this DIIS policy brief are based on field research throughout participating countries and institutions as well as in South Sudan conducted in May and July 2011 including interviews with the deployed civil servants and the South Sudanese 'twinning' counterparts.

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FURTHER READING

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