

A Snapshot of the Technical Cooperation Reform

EuropeAid is taking a lead with its ongoing improvement of how it delivers technical cooperation, which is briefly summarized in this concise overview of the reform process.

Technical cooperation represents the grey matter in external assistance. It includes international and local expertise, normally referred to as Technical Assistance, studies, research, training and all interventions aiming at developing.

On average technical cooperation represents 25% of overseas development assistance. TC also has a strategic and highly visible role in aid management, being the major aid response to developing local capacities and solid country systems.

TC, funded from all sources, has been under attack since more than 20 years. Reforming TC is at the core of the Aid Effectiveness Agenda. The Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action call for major changes in the way TC is delivered by all donors.

EuropeAid has been a front-runner in TC reform. In July 2008 (before the AAA) it has adopted a comprehensive and ambitious reform of its TC – the so-called “Backbone Strategy on Reforming TC and Project Implementation Units”. This strategy is also a response to an ECA report on TA published in 2007, which alerted AIDCO management on the need to seriously revisit its TC.

Major criticisms on TC and related principles of the Backbone Strategy include:

- Promote ownership and harmonisation: TC has been “donor driven” and fragmented, delivered as a package of broader programs. Partners’ countries involvement is at the heart of the reform including their formulation of clear and informed demand, involvement in the selection of the expertise and control over their performance.
- The result orientation: Previously, TC has been input-driven and produced modest / unsatisfactory results in terms of building sustainable local capacity. It has too often filled gaps and substituted for weak capacity. Going forward, design of TC programmes need to focus on results, in particular on developing sustainable capacities.
- The integration of PIUs: The so called Project Implementation Units – often crowded with international experts in charge of the implementation of donor funded projects - have absorbed significant resources without producing lasting effects in reinforcing public services. Sometime they have generated negative results, creating disconnection and tensions. “Parallel PIUs” need to be replaced by integrated project implementation arrangements.
- Diversify the modalities/sources of intervention: TA has been dominated by costly and northern commercial expertise, with little use of regional/local sources and of public sources including expertise from Member States.

The EC strategy has taken an integrated approach covering hardware aspects including procedures, systems and tools, quality assurance, and so forth as well as software aspects, such as practices, skills, organisational culture. Its

implementation is well on track and is closely followed by EuropeAid management and by the European Parliament as part of the discharge process.

Recently the Council has adopted within the "EU Operational framework on Aid effectiveness" a sort of "EU Backbone" built on EuropeAid work which will hopefully facilitate dialogue and harmonisation of approaches among member states.

EuropeAid recently launched an open portal on the TC reform: www.capacity4dev.eu with a view to enhancing dialogue and learning around TC issues. The platform contains all key documents on the reform.