



“Aid Effectiveness: ISO 10015 - The Missing Instrument for Capacity Building in Development applied to EU Aid”¹

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Summary

Capacity building and strengthening of management systems are crucial for the implementation of the Paris Declaration aiming at improving aid effectiveness. It has been recognized in the Paris declaration that capacity building is a key element for improving development results, as well as for achieving objectives of ownership, aid alignment and mutual accountability.

ISO 10015 is a robust and verifiable training quality management system. Its principles are aligned to the Paris Declaration and can be flexibly implemented in different national contexts. The authors suggest its adoption as a complementary instrument to the existing programming and quality assessment tools that are at the EU disposal for training-based capacity building (CB).

ISO 10015 system offers a process architecture that configures existing decision making tools and guidelines throughout the phases of the EU's external assistance projects, ie., programming, identification, formulation, implementation and evaluation and audit. ISO 10015

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system also generates documented process data at different phases of the cycles of operation and allows for continuous improvement and institutional learning for all partners.

Rationale

Urgent problem recognized

As underlined in the recent OECD report titled “the Challenge of Capacity Development, Working Towards Good Practice”, there is a need for ‘a fundamental change in development practice, including focusing on capacity as an endogenous process, agreeing at country level on capacity objectives and monitoring outcomes from the perspective of the beneficiaries’².

Many developing countries currently lack appropriate and adequate tools to effectively manage their own capacity development processes thereby jeopardizing the sustainability of the development assistance (DA) programmes and projects and also the attainment of stated goals. The lack of strategic management tools in partner countries often causes suboptimal project design and implementation, which in turn leads to reactive donor-driven evaluation studies which shed insufficient light on what went wrong and how the system could be improved. The partner country in this scenario remains dependent on the good will of the donor country.

As stated in the DAC Evaluation Quality Standards on quality assurance and quality control:

Quality control is exercised throughout the evaluation process. Depending on the evaluation’s scope and complexity, quality control is carried out either internally or through an external body, peer review, or reference group. Quality controls adhere to the principle of independence of the evaluator. (p.7)

While these post project evaluations with proper quality control and their findings can be informative and can offer significant insights for future project design and implementation, these studies offer no immediate remedial actions for the projects that have already been completed, nor reiterative courses of action for self-correction and continuous improvement.

² OECD (2006). The challenge of Capacity Development, Working Towards Good Practice, p.3.

Hence, the quest for *self-sustaining* projects in DA programmes remains elusive and offers low return on investment.

A more proactive approach could be envisioned, which emphasises on-going self-regulation and continued improvement by partner countries. This new approach could create the right conditions for workplace behavioural change, productivity gains and service quality improvements. A proactive approach would initiate a more sustained endogenous change dynamics within partner countries, which in turn would lead to real institutional development and continuous performance improvement. Applying such a proactive approach could turn CB/DA in training into an investment for the future rather than a mere expenditure of the past.

Myth of training based capacity building process

The assumption underlying many capacity building efforts in the form of training has been that “individual learning would automatically lead to organisational and institutional performance improvement and that consequently, no additional actions are needed to ensure that individual learning translates into strengthened organizational practices”. The operating logic is that individual learning and on-the-job performance/productivity improvements are synonymous and that individual learners automatically apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge to their work. This assumption is most of the time erroneous, not supported by evidence from the field.

Impact studies of traditional capacity building efforts at the institutional level provide a different picture. Individuals participating in training based CB programmes and projects have in general benefited from such learning opportunities and enhanced their professional competences, employability and mobility. However, many studies also document that the organisations, which were supposed to benefit from training based DA programmes, do not show improvements in productivity or service quality. This assumed automatic transfer of newly gained skills and knowledge from individual to organisational realities did not take place in practice and the expected transfer of newly acquired competencies from individual learner to the job site did not occur either. Lack of support in the work environment and lack of change leadership capacity within the individual erode whatever enthusiasm the trained

participants might have gained during a training programme but lost upon return to his job site. The bottomline is “business as usual” for many training based CB projects.

Efforts by the donor community should ensure an acceptable and sustainable return on investment of training and education based CB/DA activities through building up reliable management systems and common procedures or arrangements as enshrined in the Paris Declaration to guide the training based CB projects. A robust training management system, which empowers the partner country to effectively manage its capacity building processes, is needed in order to achieve tangible results. .

This can only be achieved if the partner/beneficiary has the means to analyse his own performance needs, to document his analysis and implementation steps and to conduct organisational learning in real time. Partner countries require an integrated training quality management system guaranteeing that investments made in their people will also improve organizational and societal effectiveness of their country. Such a training quality management system needs to be managed by the partner country actors themselves with periodic third party verification.

Quality assurance (QA) for the whole process of training based capacity building

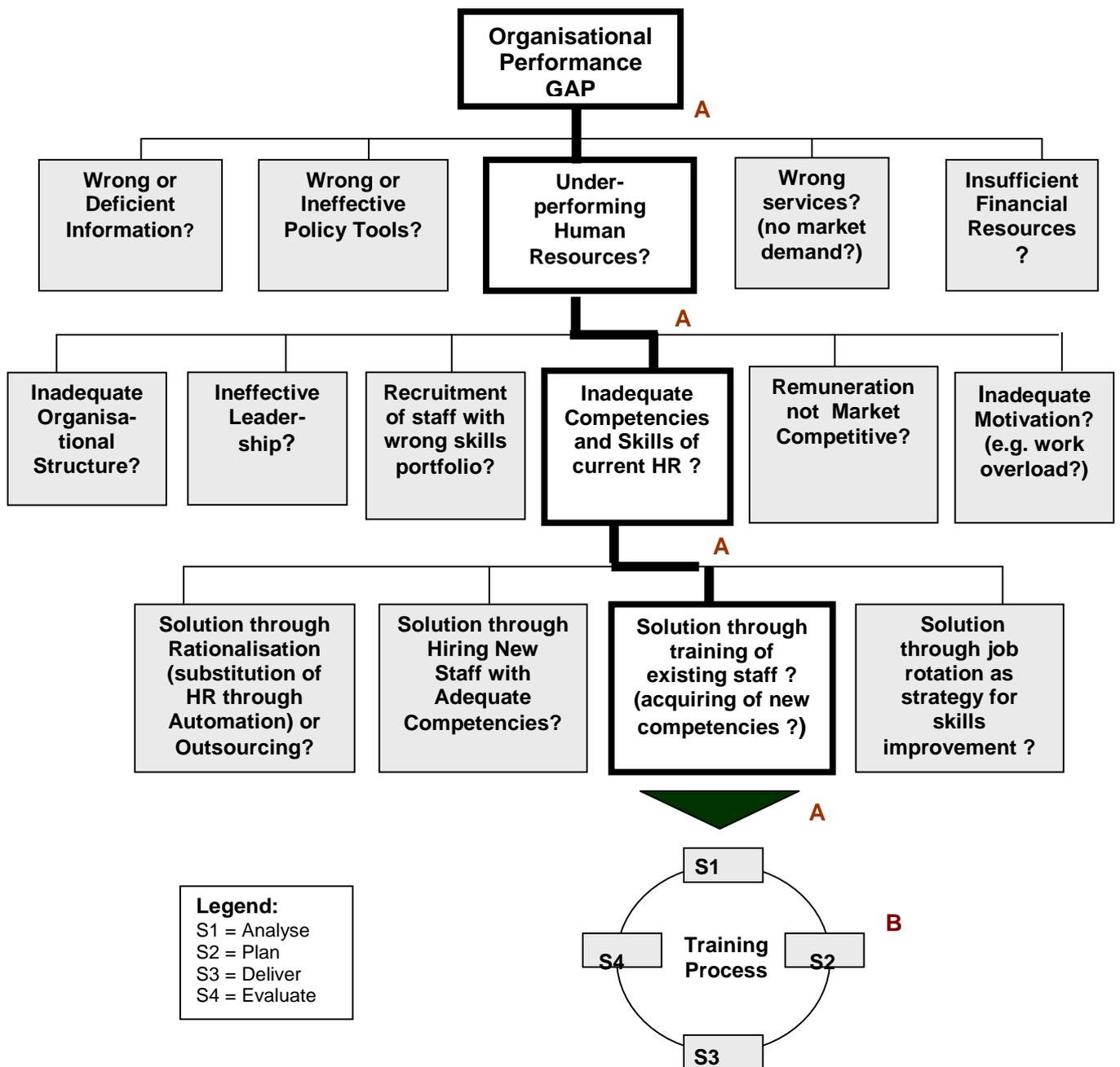
When investing in people as means to achieve improvement in organisational performance, what matters most are self-sustained results, not simple input-output indicators, such as the number of persons trained or the amount of money spent on training. To be effective, efforts to build individual skills and knowledge must be embedded within an overall framework to ensure that workers can apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge at their job sites otherwise individual competencies might improve, while organisational and institutional performance stagnates or declines.

Traditional input-output evaluations tend to take an external, reactive (end-of-pipe) approach, which neglects the importance of both the capacity building process itself and the integration of human development initiatives in overall enterprise or government strategy, which is often the norm today. As an alternative to this traditional approach, we recommend that both providers and recipients of capacity building inputs implement professional training

management systems and quality assurance standards such as ISO 10015 to ensure that results-based strategic management tools ascertain success of the capacity building efforts.

State-of-the-art training management quality systems

The ISO 10015 quality standard, available since 2000, offers the most succinct quality assurance criteria for adult training to date and is available for use by private and public organisations interested in improving their return on training investment. The main features of the ISO 10015 quality standard for training are illustrated in the following chart:



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Figure 1: Linking Training Cycle (“B”) with Organisational Performance Needs

While the monitoring and evaluation of most training programmes is often end-of-pipe and restricted to the training programme itself (Cycle B of the training process), the impact of the training intervention on performance objectives at the “macro” level (Path A) is rarely given serious consideration. Linkages to the EU CSP (Country Strategic Plan) and PRSP (Poverty

Reduction Strategy Plan) needs to be articulated in greater detail during the identification phase of the assistance cycle requiring a stable and coherent system within the partner country. The ISO 10015 standard provides a systematic and transparent framework for determining how training programmes can actually contribute to the overall performance objectives of an organization/institution, while simultaneously identifying other necessary interventions for performance improvement. Such a comprehensive training management system, once installed in the partner countries and recipient organisations, would thus lead to better project design *ex ante*, capture process data for continuous improvement and serve as the basis for on-going organisational learning and innovation within the partner countries.

Transparent and Performance Based Approach

Application of a quality assurance management tool such as ISO 10015 would bring additional benefits besides optimal use of training resources and greater capacity building impact. The adoption of an external verification process and quality assurance instrument within training based CB programmes would be in line with the stated goals of the Paris Declaration and the stated development assistance objectives of the EU. The key targets of the Paris Declaration set for 2010 consist of the following³:

1. 75% of developing countries should have effective poverty reduction strategies of their own;
2. At least 40% of donor country missions in poorer countries should be jointly organised to cut costs;
3. Two-thirds of all country analytical work should be joint, drastically cutting the number of duplicative pieces of consultancy
4. The number of developing countries who improve their own financial systems (budgets linked to policy priorities such as poverty reduction) should be increased by half
5. The proportion of countries without transparent and monitor-able performance assessment processes should be reduced by one third.

ISO 10015 system would be a natural vehicle for achieving this 2010 target list and could make specific contributions to achieving the 2010 target 3 (country analytical work) and 2010

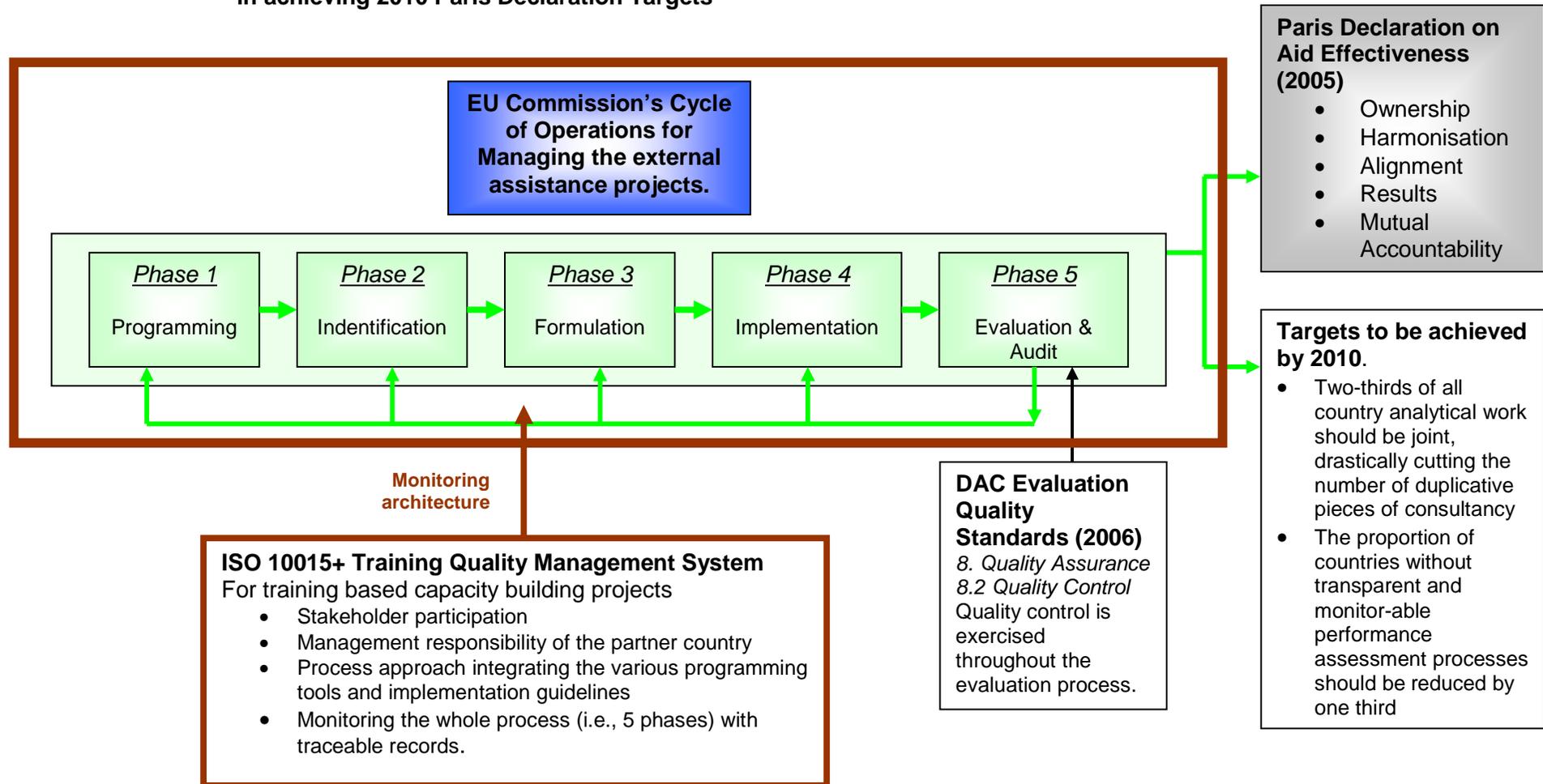
³ Indicators of Progress: to be measured nationally and monitored internationally. Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness, March 2005. <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/57/60/36080258.pdf>; OECD Civil Society, May 2005, "Why the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness Counts", OECD Observer, http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/2072/Why_the_Paris_declaration_on_aid_effectiveness_counts.html, accessed on 3 September 2007.

target 5 as a common framework to manage training based CBs. Once installed either within a country assistance programme or adopted by the aid management unit of the developing country, ISO 10015 would provide transparent and monitor-able performance data for assessment and for continuous improvement.

Quality assurance and its third party audit procedure would enable partner country actors to assume fully management responsibilities and to become accountable for the outcomes of training investments offered by donors for developing countries or other partner countries without the feeling of being overruled or misrepresented. At the same time, an ISO 10015 system could provide the donor community with the necessary control over the use of its resources without necessarily adding more workload to its already overextended implementation arm.

Figure 2 provides a conceptual overview of ISO 10015+ training quality Management system in relation to the EU cycle of operations and Paris Declaration..

Figure 2: Complementarities of the Commission's Cycle of Operations and ISO 10015 Training Quality Management System in achieving 2010 Paris Declaration Targets



Application of ISO 10015 Based Training Management System

ISO 10015 could greatly contribute to making quality control be based on transparency, accountability, predictability, consistency and coherence while enabling evaluation and the management of DA/CB in general to be more sustainable and successful.

The Centre for Socio-Eco-Nomic Development (CSEND, www.adequate.org) has since February 2003 offered its services as an accredited certification body for training systems, training programmes and training providers in the private and public sector based on the ISO 10015 Quality Standard for Training.

CSEND suggests that this state-of-the-art approach be applied to capacity building for sustainable development aid. ISO 10015 is a user-friendly and beneficiary-oriented management system. It could provide timely and transparent information on capacity building processes and can empower implementation partners to continuously improve their approach and methods based on facts and valid data.

The Enterprise Management Development Section of the International Trade Centre (ITC) in Geneva has applied for certification of its training programmes through AdeQuaTE. In addition, the UN Department for Peace Keeping Operations (UNDPKO) is using ISO 10015 as the basis for its training policy.

Application of ISO 10015 to training based capacity building projects and programmes would be timely and useful for all parties concerned, be they donor, beneficiaries and experts alike.

Conclusion

This short discussion paper outlines a capacity building proposition for DG-Development to enhance its project management capability and quality assurance of aid delivery. More concretely, the ISO 10015 quality standard is put forward as the monitoring framework and instrument for managing training based capacity building projects and for providing the necessary architecture to achieve sustainable capacity within partner countries while promoting the ownership of development capacity initiatives as articulated in the 2005 "Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness".

CSEND recommends that ISO 10015 be incorporated in training based capacity building projects to enable self-regulation by the partner countries and to ensure more effective project evaluation and feedback. Third party verification of QA would facilitate continuous improvement of project performance and ensure project sustainability *after* the termination of financial support.

This same instrument of quality assurance may be utilised by donors and development agencies for overall programme management and review function. A real-time tracking and documentation system is an integral part of the ISO 10015 training quality management system. It could provide the donor community with timely and robust information for crosscutting programme review and performance enhancement. ISO 10015 also helps bring about consolidation of collaborative partnership between donors and partner countries. In particular, partner countries become actively engaged in the diagnostic and strategic planning phase of the capacity building process.

Specifically, if DG-Development chooses to adopt ISO 10015 as its project management tool for training based capacity building projects, CSEND could provide its services in the following areas: stakeholder awareness workshops, training of project managers and/or training managers in developing countries to utilise an ISO 10015 based training management system and training of consultants who could assist in the establishment of a quality assurance system as part of the project management structure.

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