



## Civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict – a case study of OPEN

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**No state can function without an operational civil service. In the context of fragile states and countries emerging from conflict, the need to develop and strengthen civil service capacity is always urgent. Yet developing civil service capacity continues to be a challenge of daunting proportions.**

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In the United Nations context, the issue of civilian capacity re-emerged as a priority when the UN Secretary-General's 2009 report on 'Peacebuilding in the Immediate Aftermath of Conflict' concluded that "a review needs to be undertaken analysing how the UN and the international community can help to broaden and deepen the pool of civilian experts to support the immediate capacity development needs of countries emerging from conflict". The final report, known as the 'CIVCAP review' published in March 2011, proposes a framework called OPEN designed to "enable national Ownership; work in global Partnership; deliver with Expertise; be more Nimble in the face of turbulent transitions".

The World Development Report 2011 as well as recent OECD reports have made similar calls for the need to focus on providing suitable civilian capacity to support transitions. In this context, South-South organised 'coaching and mentoring for capacity' has emerged as a new approach to support civil service capacity development in fragile states.

### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The international development community should openly acknowledge and address the difficulty of ensuring genuine local ownership and leadership in situations with severe local capacity shortages. The g7+ New Deal for engagement in fragile states confirmed this principle but provides little advice as to how.
2. The international development community should initiate and facilitate research into past and on-going capacity development initiatives to derive reliable and nuanced lessons learned.
3. The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) should serve as an example of how the ambitious goals of the New Deal are implemented in the countries signing up for it.

Security Council Resolution 2086 (2013) on multidimensional peacekeeping "(...) encourages national governments, the United Nations, regional and sub-regional organizations to continue to use existing civilian expertise and also to broaden and deepen the pool of civilian capacities for peacebuilding in the immediate aftermath of conflict, including from countries with relevant experience in post-conflict peacebuilding or democratic transition, giving particular attention to mobilizing capacities from developing countries and from women (...)"



## THE IGAD INITIATIVE FOR CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT IN SOUTH SUDAN

The IGAD Initiative is one of the most remarkable capacity development experiments in state building of recent times. As part of the initiative, Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda have seconded (by April 2013) 199 Civil Service Support Officers (CSSOs) to nineteen South Sudanese ministries at the state and national level for two-year terms. The stated aim is to support capacity development in government agencies through rapid secondment of CSSOs from IGAD member states. The stated strategy for implementing this objective is to provide 'coaching and mentoring' of South Sudanese civil servants by the CSSOs. The seconding states retain their CSSOs on payroll during the full deployment. UNDP manages the programme and Norway provides funding to cover administration and allowances for the CSSOs. The accumulated costs so far are approximately US\$ 18 million excluding the salaries for the CSSOs, which are paid by the sending countries, making this initiative one of the largest triangular South-South capacity development interventions to date.

The initiative is thus an example of triangular South-South cooperation for capacity development utilising long-term coaching and mentoring – or 'twinning' as they call it in context of the IGAD Initiative – through on-the-job training as its key operational modality. It is an attempt to address the crippling capacity gaps in South Sudan while accommodating calls for culturally and technically appropriate capacity, local ownership and regional cooperation.

The IGAD Initiative without doubt faces a lot of challenges, many of which are context dependent. However, the initiative also offers important lessons to be learned for the international state- and peacebuilding community, not least because the initiative embodies many of the recommendations found in recent the UN and OECD recommendations regarding the provision of civilian capacity in the aftermath of conflict.

## THE OPEN FRAMEWORK

Enable national **O**wnership; work in global **P**artnership; deliver with **E**xpertise; be more **N**imble in the face of turbulent transitions

**NATIONAL OWNERSHIP.** The IGAD Initiative demonstrates high levels of national ownership. Within the government, it is the South Sudanese Ministry of Labour, Public Service and Human Resource Development, which directs the implementation of the project.

During the project's start-up phase, the ministry chaired consultations with the group of under-secretaries, the Cabinet and the Parliament. The CSSOs are administratively managed by the Ministry, which hosts the Programme Management Unit. UNDP plays an important role in supporting the Programme Management Unit, but the actual work done by the CSSOs was requested and is guided and approved by the ministries themselves.

Many of the CSSOs took several months, sometimes even more, to settle into their new work environments. Various challenges at times forced them to choose somewhat different work areas than those defined in their initial job descriptions. The process of identifying relevant work areas was mostly undertaken in cooperation with Under-secretaries or supervisors, and the bottom-up process provided for a largely needs-driven engagement.

The IGAD Initiative thus provides a good example of how core governance functions of host institutions may be nurtured, developed and consolidated from within. In addition, the initiative promoted a strong role for women. The presence of female CSSOs in the ministries reduced the gender gap, supported female ministers and civil servants, and provided role models for younger female civil servants.

**PARTNERSHIPS.** The IGAD Initiative demonstrates partnerships and cooperation on the diplomatic level, practical cooperation between the participating nations' civil services as well as individual partnerships qua the twinning models. The Initiative is above all a regionally organised cooperation between four states. It reflects Ethiopian, Kenyan and Ugandan interests in a resilient South Sudanese state, with whom they share borders and numerous positive and negative spillover effects. The partnerships may be aiming at capacity development but the political message of mutual dependency and partnership is strong, and the diplomatic representations of the participating countries in Juba meet regularly in the IGAD project board to discuss the progress of the project.

The close cooperation between the four participating states makes the IGAD Initiative appear more as a regional partnership arrangement than traditional South-South cooperation between two individual states.

As experiences between the respective civil services are exchanged, so are personal professional experiences through

the day-to-day twinning of individuals and groups. The partnership dimension of the IGAD Initiative has thus unfolded at the micro-level as everyday capacity development.

In addition, the 'capacity centres' developed by the CSSOs may provide natural entry points across host institutions for building additional partnerships with a variety of development engagements – from agriculture to health care.

**EXPERTISE.** A major asset of the IGAD Initiative has been the quality of its CSSOs. With 199 CSSOs deployed to date, skills, professionalism, motivation and personalities of CSSOs evidently vary. However, the high professional calibre of the deployees has generally been noteworthy, demonstrating the genuine commitment of the seconding nations, for which the IGAD initiative represents a significant investment, to identify and deploy high-performing staff.

In addition to the professional fit, the cultural affinity and regional dimension also added positively to building trust and easing knowledge transfer.

Leveraging the mix of professional and cultural experiences and competencies to facilitate knowledge transfer and induce behavioural change, may be viewed as 'experience-based capacity development' as the sending countries have been through societal transitions resembling those facing South Sudan. In addition, many skilled South Sudanese civil servants have spent years as refugees in the neighboring countries. Finally, the long duration of the deployments also provided better time to identify and respond to local needs in an appropriate manner and thus to respect the principle of local ownership.

**NIMBLENESS.** While the CIVCAP Review's concept of nimbleness primarily focusses on the UN system's ability to react in a flexible and dynamic manner, it makes sense to look at the IGAD Initiative as an example of a very nimble project.

The Initiative has demonstrated a high level of elasticity and flexibility in terms of continuously adjusting to the social, institutional and political realities in South Sudan. A key asset has been the flexibility of the CSSOs to respond to the (ever-changing) circumstances on the ground. The CSSOs had fairly flexible Terms of Reference when they arrived in their designated institutions. This allowed them to adapt to the context and needs of their host institutions and twins. It allowed them to allocate their time and resources based on contextually defined comparative advantages instead of being constrained by detailed objectives defined a priori in the Terms of References.

The IGAD Initiative has also survived the austerity measures put in place by the government since oil production ceased in January 2012, by finding new forms of engagement and cooperation with South Sudanese counterparts.

In fact, few of the accomplishments achieved by the CSSOs had been defined in advance. Many of the CSSOs found themselves undertaking tasks they had not signed up for but nonetheless took on as a result of their own ongoing needs assessments and desire to have an impact. This appears to have happened more by default than by design.

Norway, the 'triangular donor' involved in the IGAD Initiative, should also be commended for its innovative approach to this project. Norway embraced the flexibility and risk-taking needed to effectively engage in post-conflict state-building and accepted that there were few tangible objectives defined ex ante. This has paid off.

## CHALLENGES

The IGAD Initiative – or 'experiment' – constitutes an ideal case to empirically study a project applying the OPEN framework recommendations. Yet the challenges to the project are manifold. Human resource management (HRM) has been particularly challenging. It has been demanding to match the CSSOs with relevant twins and tasks, and to balance attitudes and expectations of both the CSSOs and the ministries they are deployed in. It has also been difficult to secure the well-being of so many individuals working on their own in a foreign country under harsh conditions. HRM is of critical importance to a project which relies on the development of trustful and positive human relations as the fundamental premise. The constant change in the operating environments of CSSOs adds an additional layer of complexity to HRM. The climate of the austerity measures has had a significant negative impact on the IGAD Initiative. The Initiative suddenly found itself trying to build capacity in institutions lacking the basic finance to operate, procure, recruit, and implement activities.

The most interesting aspect of the IGAD Initiative is perhaps how it has managed to achieve good results in spite of this incredibly challenging backdrop. Overall, the IGAD Initiative provides empirical backing to the relevance of the principles captured in OPEN and supports further exploration of post-conflict programming that adheres to these principles.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Notwithstanding the multiple challenges, the IGAD Initiative seems to have got quite a few things right. It is a promising opportunity for South Sudan and the region, as well as for the broader international agenda on capacity development, to enhance their models for providing civilian capacity to countries emerging from conflict (and beyond). The following recommendations and issues derive from the IGAD Initiative but should inform other attempts to apply the OPEN concepts:



- **Design.** A key challenge in a programme such as the IGAD Initiative is the art of balancing the need for a 'top-down' general project design with the requests for locally oriented, 'bottom-up' approaches to ownership and nimbleness.
- **Preparation.** Serious attention should be paid not only to the selection and preparation of CSSOs, but also to the identification and preparation of and continuous dialogue with the offices of deployment in the ministries. CSSOs could also be prepared to explain and negotiate their roles better with recipient ministries.
- **Human Resource Management.** The challenges of HRM in the IGAD Initiative provide commanding lessons learned for similar future initiatives. With 199 CSSOs deployed in individual positions, the range of individual HRM needs is overwhelming. Proper HRM could be a 'force multiplier' for a project like the IGAD Initiative.
- **Well-being.** The well-being of the CSSOs is of critical importance and should be a key focus for projects similar to the IGAD Initiative.
- **Incorporating training.** A 'reverse exchange programme' whereby South Sudanese civil servants can do embedded traineeships in one of the IGAD countries should be established. Experiences from current initiatives between South Sudan, Kenya and South Africa have been positive.
- **Partnerships.** The centres of capacity developed by the CSSOs in the ministries, and the needs they have identified could offer natural harbours or entry points for other development partners to engage.
- **Expertise preservation.** It is of critical importance that the expertise built up by the CSSOs is captured, nurtured and continues to be utilised. Some experiences are highly contextual but others have a general validity and may be applied to other environments as well.
- **Resilience.** In future programming there should be more focus on how to enhance the resilience of capacity development projects in order to make them more adaptable to the situation on the ground.
- **Expertise-sharing.** The IGAD Initiative is not the only capacity development initiative that has used coaching and mentoring as a capacity development methodology. Unfortunately there has been very little knowledge sharing between these projects to date.
- **Knowledge capturing.** There is a need for the United Nations to facilitate a comprehensive lessons learned exercise to funnel the many experiences into actual guidance and documentation of lessons learned.
- **Research.** The international state building policy community needs to connect much better with the experiences on the ground and the academics working on mapping these experiences. Better integration between the United Nations and the academic research milieu is needed.

*This policy brief recaps on some of the main findings from a recent field study of South-South organised 'coaching and mentoring for capacity' in South Sudan and relates these to the OPEN framework. It builds on 101 interviews with more than 140 interlocutors from all levels of the IGAD Initiative, including CSSOs, twins, donors and UNDP staff.*

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## FURTHER READING

- Felix da Costa Diana, Søren Vester Haldrup, John Karlsrud, Frederik Rosén & Kristoffer Nilas Tarp (2013): "Triangular cooperation for capacity development in South Sudan", *Policy Brief*. Oslo: Noref
- (2013): "'With a little help from my friends': cultural affinity in regional support for capacity development in South Sudan", *Policy Brief*. Oslo: NUPI
- (2013): 'Friends in Need are Friends Indeed. Triangular cooperation and twinning for capacity development in South Sudan', *Report*, NUPI

*The opinions expressed in this policy brief are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily reflect the official opinion of the Danish Institute for International Studies.*