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HUMAN AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (HICD) DESK REVIEW

Recommendations for Improving Capacity Strengthening Approaches

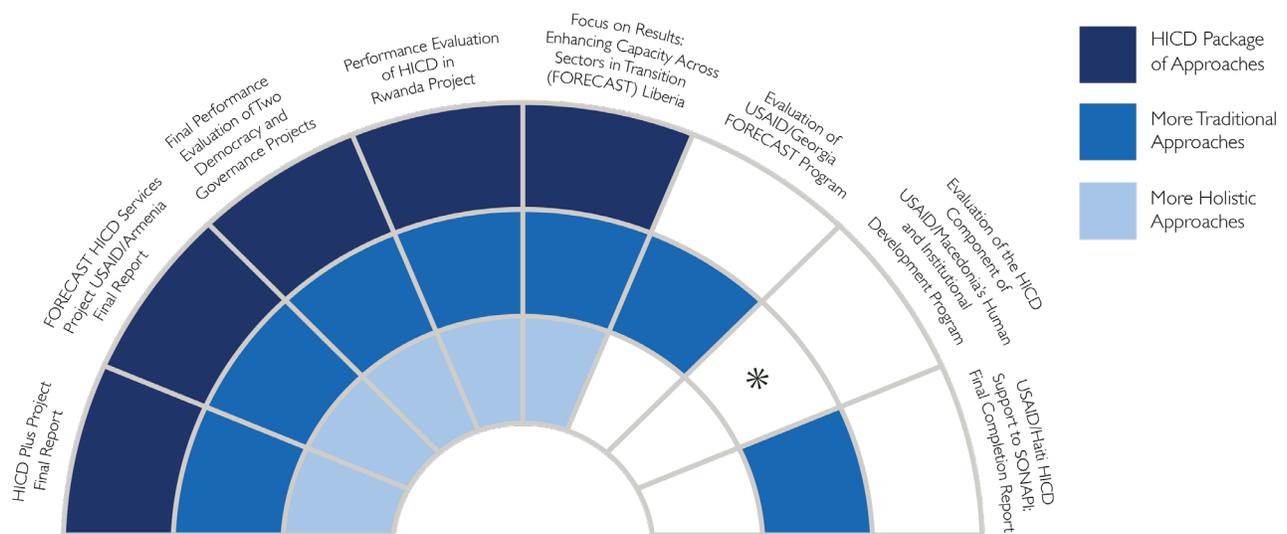
This resource offers recommendations for improving the effectiveness of capacity development approaches drawn from past USAID capacity strengthening experiences. In doing so, it begins to make connections between conceptual lessons found in the development literature and programmatic learning emanating from USAID activities.

This exploratory analysis draws from two loosely interconnected efforts:

- [USAID's Paper Series on Capacity and Capacity Strengthening](#), particularly Inquiry 3 on Approaches to Strengthening Capacity of Local Actors, and
- A synthesis of recommendations from nine evaluations and final reports for Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) activities posted on USAID's Development Experience Clearinghouse.

WHICH APPROACHES WERE EMPHASIZED IN THE HICD EVALUATIONS AND FINAL REPORTS?

As the chart below demonstrates, most of the HICD programs included in the synthesis implemented a holistic set of capacity development approaches largely consistent with the findings of the literature review. Experiential approaches to capacity strengthening noted in the HICD evaluations and final reports reviewed included coaching, study tours, on-the-job training, and small grants. These opportunities were implemented alongside what we might consider more traditional capacity development approaches, such as training and technical assistance. See the [table on p. 3](#) for more details and [Annex I](#) for an alternative version of the graphic below.



*The evaluation only covered HICD assessment process

WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH SAY?

Inquiry 3 of the Paper Series on Capacity and Capacity Strengthening discusses themes found in the literature about how development practitioners should approach strengthening organizational capacity with local actors. Consistent with the HICD model, Inquiry 3 highlights the need for experiential approaches to capacity development, emphasizing that local capacities should be strengthened according to local needs and contextual considerations.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Three particular recommendations from the synthesis of HICD evaluations and final reports aligned closely with themes identified in Inquiry 3:

- Focus on quality and duration, not just quantity of activities.
- Make capacity strengthening efforts integrated and flexible. Be experimental and iterative and tailor approaches to the organization.
- Use active learning approaches - these are more effective at strengthening the capacity of both individuals and organizations.

Below is a list of recommendations from the synthesis of HICD evaluations and reports that align with findings from Inquiry 3 on approaches to strengthening capacity.

HICD Program Design Considerations: Design an HICD program that is integrated or comprehensive and flexible, combining various approaches such as grants, technical assistance, study tours, coaching, training, hands-on experience and other innovative strategies. Focus on quality and duration rather than quantity of activities.

Staffing HICD Programs: Create opportunities to deepen the experience of staff of supported organizations and to strengthen local expertise through mentoring and twinning¹ arrangements.

Appreciating and Leveraging Local Capacity: Be experimental and iterative when establishing and maintaining relationships with local institutions. Tailor support to an institution that focuses on practicing new skills in order to replicate and multiply them.

Management of Time and Financial Resources: Explore flexible approaches to providing material or financial support to organizations to support their progress toward improved performance that may require resources not otherwise available to them.

Performance Measures and Indicators: Work aggressively to convince stakeholders that it may be counterproductive to the development objectives to press for fast and easily quantifiable results. Accept that fewer results can be achieved if there are expectations placed on the program to achieve results in the short-term.

Institutional Buy-In and Commitment: Ensure alignment between USAID's and the target organization's objectives, so that capacity development efforts address the organization's areas of greatest concern. Design the HICD program as a formal partnership between the organization and USAID.

Institutional Capacity and Change Management: Expect less in the short term and expect more lasting results in the longer-term. Consider ways USAID can shift from a more direct role and "project-based outsourcing" to more collaborative roles such as that of broker, facilitator, and convener for ideas and networks.

Considerations for Sustainability After the HICD Program Ends: Integrate sustainability plans into HICD program designs.

¹ Twinning is an approach to capacity strengthening in which two organizations, potentially working in different regions or sectors, intentionally collaborate to learn from each other's experience as they pursue a common objective.

MOST OF THE HICD EVALUATIONS REVIEWED DISCUSSED A RANGE OF HOLISTIC CAPACITY STRENGTHENING APPROACHES IN ADDITION TO TRAINING.

Key

approach discussed in the evaluation/report
not mentioned in the evaluation/report
HICD package of approaches

	More Traditional (capacity 1.0) approaches		More Holistic (capacity 2.0) approaches							
	Technical Assistance*	Training & Workshops	HICD Assessments	Increase Local Capacity to Implement Capacity-Strengthening	Coaching	Study Tours	On-the-Job Training	Small Grants		Other
HICD Plus Project Final Report									business case analysis; change management process; web-based PM&E system	More Holistic
FORECAST HICD Services Project USAID/Armenia Final Report									internships/"partnership brokering", research/analysis/expert consultation	
Final Performance Evaluation of Two Democracy and Governance Projects									expert consultations	
Performance Evaluation of HICD in Rwanda Project									event sponsorship, software purchases, website hosting	
Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition (FORECAST) Liberia									creation of community of practice	Somewhat Holistic
Evaluation of USAID/Georgia FORECAST Program										
Evaluation of the HICD Component of USAID/Macedonia's Human and Institutional Development Program										
USAID/Haiti HICD Support to SONAPI: Final Completion Report									creation of Balanced Score Card	Less Holistic

*e.g. strategy development, HR support, IT support

See Annex II for a description of this chart.

ANNEX

Annex I: Which Approaches Were Emphasized in the HICD Evaluations and Final Reports?

The [spectrum display on p. 1](#) shows which evaluations and final reports reviewed for this document included: 1) an HICD package of approaches, 2) more traditional approaches, or 3) more holistic approaches. The HICD package of approaches included: technical assistance, trainings/workshops, HICD assessments, and an increase in local capacity to implement capacity-strengthening. The table below provides an alternative way to review this information.

Project Name	HICD Package of Approaches	More Traditional Approaches	More Holistic Approaches
HICD Plus Project Final Report	✓	✓	✓
FORECAST HICD Services Project USAID/Armenia Final Report	✓	✓	✓
Final Performance Evaluation of Two Democracy and Governance Projects	✓	✓	✓
Performance Evaluation of HICD in Rwanda Project	✓	✓	✓
Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition (FORECAST) Liberia	✓	✓	✓
Evaluation of USAID/Georgia FORECAST Program		✓	
Evaluation of the HICD Component of USAID/Macedonia’s Human and Institutional Development Program		Evaluation only covered HICD assessment process	
USAID/Haiti HICD Support to SONAPI: Final Completion Report		✓	

Annex II: Most of the HICD Evaluations Reviewed Discussed a Range of Holistic Capacity Strengthening Approaches in Addition to Training

The [table on p. 3](#) provides more detail on which capacity strengthening approaches are mentioned in each HICD evaluation and final report reviewed for this document. The more traditional (capacity 1.0) approaches include technical assistance, such as strategy development, HR support, or IT support, and trainings or workshops. The more holistic (capacity 2.0) approaches include HICD assessments, an increase in local capacity to implement capacity-strengthening, coaching, study tours, on-the-job training, and small grants. Of these, technical assistance, trainings or workshops, HICD assessments, and an increase in local capacity to implement capacity-strengthening are the four approaches included in the HICD package of approaches.

The “more holistic” reports are:

- **HICD Plus Project Final Report:** Included technical assistance, trainings or workshops, HICD assessments, an increase

in local capacity to implement capacity-strengthening, coaching, study tours, and on-the-job training. Other approaches included in the report are business case analysis, change management process, and web-based PM&E system.

- **FORECAST HICD Services Project USAID/Armenia Final Report:** Included technical assistance, trainings or workshops, HICD assessments, an increase in local capacity to implement capacity-strengthening, study tours, and on-the-job training. Other approaches included in the report are internships or "partnership brokering", research or analysis, and expert consultations.
- **Final Performance Evaluation of Two Democracy and Governance Projects:** Included technical assistance, trainings or workshops, HICD assessments, coaching, study tours, and small grants. The report also included mention of expert consultations.
- **Performance Evaluation of HICD in Rwanda Project:** Included technical assistance, trainings or workshops, HICD assessments, an increase in local capacity to implement capacity-strengthening, coaching, and on-the-job training. Other approaches included in the report are event sponsorship, software purchases, and website hosting.
- **Focus on Results: Enhancing Capacity Across Sectors in Transition (FORECAST) Liberia:** Included technical assistance, trainings or workshops, HICD assessments, an increase in local capacity to implement capacity-strengthening, and coaching. The report also included mention of the creation of community of practices.

The "somewhat holistic" reports are:

- **Evaluation of USAID/Georgia FORECAST Program:** Included technical assistance, HICD assessments, and an increase in local capacity to implement capacity-strengthening.
- **Evaluation of the HICD Component of USAID/Macedonia's Human and Institutional Development Program:** Included HICD assessments.

The "less holistic" report is:

- **USAID/Haiti HICD Support to SONAPI: Final Completion Report:** Included technical assistance, trainings or workshops, and HICD assessments. The report also included mention of the creation of Balanced Score Cards.