Technical Assistance in Africa: How It Works and Doesn't Work

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Introduction

The recent history of economic development in the Africa region is replete with examples of projects that have failed to achieve their institutional development objectives. The story is repeated time after time, and from sector to sector, as attempts are made to assist national institutions in the management, operation, and maintenance of the infrastructure necessary to support the basic elements of a viable economy. While there are many factors (such as lack of physical and financial resources) that impact upon institutional development, it is universally accepted that a critical mass of competent managers, technicians, and skilled workers is one of the most essential elements to achieving both short term success and long term sustainability of project operations. Yet despite the recognition of, and importance attached to, the development of this critical mass of managers and workers, and despite more than three decades of effort, little success has been achieved in this area. Although the reasons for failure are many, one of the most glaring aspects of this issue has been, and continues to be, the inability of technical assistance to transfer knowledge and expertise in such a way that the recipient institution attains and sustains a higher level of operational capacity.

The use of technical assistance arose from the quite logical assumption that if a country lacked a critical mass of managers, technicians, and skilled workers, this gap could be temporarily filled by foreign experts who would carry out job functions and train staff until such time as local cadres could take over. Although extremely expensive, the cost of technical assistance was justified by the expected improvements in efficiency and productivity that would result from its implementation. It was an assumption that had worked in other regions and there was no reason to assume that it would not work in the newly emerging countries of Africa.

Experience has shown however, that the logical assumptions and expectations concerning the use of technical assistance, were overly optimistic. Despite decades of exposure to foreign expertise, thousands of man-years of technical assistance, and billions of dollars invested, many African countries are still unable to manage, operate and maintain their infrastructures efficiently, economically, and most importantly, on their own. This fact is substantiated by the continued (and often increasing) dependency of many African institutions upon foreign expertise to carry out even the most basic operational functions. In many cases, Bank operations staff find themselves in the position of supporting technical assistance for line management positions in

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1. From 1980 to 1987, the Bank alone had financed over US$2.7 billion for technical assistance within the framework of various projects in Africa. Similar financing and grants by other bi-lateral and international donors would certainly raise this figure much higher.
institutions that had previously received extensive management and technical inputs which should have reduced the need for foreign experts by this time. In this regard, while it is relatively easy to analyze the problems and failures, it is not so easy to recommend and implement solutions. To do this, requires perhaps a more simplistic and human look at the dynamics of technical assistance, and the myths and realities that pervade this issue.

Starting with sector studies and the identification of the need for project investments, there is usually a tendency for the borrower, consultants and donors to focus on the policies, strategies, and physical aspects of a project with much less emphasis on the ability of the indigenous workforce to achieve project objectives. Usually, by the time of project appraisal, it has become apparent that there are serious shortages of managerial and technical skills needed to implement the project and to provide the basis for substantive institutional development within the sector. By then, it is almost always too late to reverse the momentum of the project, or to scale it down to a more realistic level commensurate with local workforce capabilities. At this point, Bank staff experience the pressures of maintaining project integrity, while at the same time proceeding with ambitious schemes that have little chance of success based upon the limited absorptive capacity of the institution. From there, it is but a short step to the justification of technical assistance, at any cost, in order to achieve project objectives. This justification is usually based upon a combination of assumptions and wishful thinking that primarily focuses on getting the project implemented, but not necessarily upon sustainability afterwards. As noted in the following paragraphs, these assumptions are often proven ill founded due to a wide variety of human factors that impact heavily upon the use of technical assistance.

Technical Assistance in Practice

Assumption: The foreign expert will be qualified to carry out tasks with a high degree of expertise and efficiency.

In principle, and in most cases, foreign experts are well qualified to carry out their job assignments. In practice, however, their tasks can be complicated by many extraneous factors such as limited prior experience in developing countries, ability to perform in a difficult work environment, applicability of home country experience to local conditions, recruitment and contractual arrangements, motivation, and ability to interface with local counterparts. In most cases, experts without prior foreign experience will not be recruited, but it is seldom that the quality of that foreign experience is examined vis-a-vis the successful transfer of expertise to local counterparts, or their general achievements while in previous posts (it is not uncommon to see expatriates who have performed poorly on one project, being hired for another project somewhere else). Also, the ability of foreign experts to perform well may be totally different in their home countries than in the African environment.
With the lack of equipment and materials, poor communication, lack of decision making and delegation of authority by local managers, institutional politics and corruption, the experts are soon reduced to crisis management and carrying out mundane tasks that severely constrains their effectiveness. In other cases, partly due to overly sophisticated physical and system design parameters, foreign experts try to achieve operational levels on par with their home countries. The resulting mismatch between operational design objectives and the capacity of the local workforce to achieve these objectives, often leads to the deterioration of expatriate morale and with it, a downward slide in effectiveness.

On the administrative side, recruitment methods and contractual arrangements can also impact upon the effectiveness of technical assistance. When a consulting firm sends its own employees to the borrowers work site, there is usually a reasonable level of responsibility and accountability between the client, the expert in the field, and the consulting firm. In many cases, firms are not able to keep experts available for foreign assignments on a continual basis, and are thus forced to recruit outside experts as the need arises. This approach frequently takes on a more mercenary appearance as the firm seeks to provide any individual with acceptable qualifications to fill a field position. The extreme case is with consulting firms who maintain a minimum home office operation and whose main function is to search the expatriate job market to provide whomever they can in what is referred to as "body shopping". Thus, while the foreign expert may be qualified on paper in the technical sense, these other non-technical factors can, and often do, impinge upon his/her effectiveness in the field. Obviously, this does not mean that all foreign experts are unqualified, but rather that some are to varying degrees, and most importantly, that technical qualifications are only part of the measure of the potential effectiveness of technical assistance in meeting project objectives.

Assumption: There are no national managers or technicians to perform the tasks for which foreign experts recruited.

Twenty years ago, this would have been a valid assumption with perhaps a few exceptions. During the past two decades however, thousands of African managers, engineers and technicians have been trained locally by technical assistance, sent overseas for advanced degrees, exposed to advanced technologies and management systems in developed countries, and have been supported by a never-ending flow of professional and technical inputs from international and bi-lateral sources. The question today is, not whether competent African managers, engineers and technicians exist, but rather, where are they? To answer this question, we must look at three groups who have benefitted from the above training and career development activities (in the majority of cases, paid for by government and/or donor funded

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2. In Ghana alone, roughly 50,000 Ghanaians have received university degrees during the past 25 years. Of these, roughly 20,000 attended overseas universities.
fellowships). These groups include those who finished their training and remained overseas, those who obtained employment in the private sector, and those who returned to the public sector.

The exact number of African nationals working overseas is difficult to ascertain, but they are a sizable community and are probably among the best and the brightest of Africa’s new generation of professionals. Being able to successfully compete in the overseas labor markets, they are often qualified to replace foreign experts working in their home countries yet they remain abroad to earn higher salaries and to receive greater professional recognition. Those who return from overseas training, have gained overseas work experience, or have been well trained locally, usually seek employment in the private sector where they will be compensated anywhere from two to five times what they might earn in the public sector. Those who return to their jobs in the public sector, while comprising the largest numbers among the three groups, often lose their motivation and gradually become the least productive of this new generation of professionals. In all of the above cases, it is evident that trained, qualified and experienced Africans do exist, but that they somehow are not recruited to positions for which technical assistance has been prescribed.

Assumption: Counterparts will be provided to work with the foreign experts and will gradually take over expatriate functions as they acquire appropriate knowledge and skills.

In many cases, this assumption has never come close to achieving the results intended. Here, project managers often face a variety of constraints and contradictions in trying to accomplish the "transfer of expertise" that is, or should be, the primary objective of all technical assistance. Usually, the appointment of "qualified" counterparts is a condition of one sort or another, to be met by the start of a project. Yet in practice, foreign experts often begin (and sometimes complete) their assignments without their counterparts in place. This can be due to a genuine unavailability of qualified individuals, reluctance on the part of local management to re-assign qualified personnel, and reluctance on the part of individuals to be re-assigned. Frequently, when individuals are located, they are sent for overseas training (usually early in the project cycle, and often for long duration) at precisely the time when they could benefit most from the

3. In terms of economic cost, for every national who would return to replace an expatriate worker, African economies could save on average anywhere from US$100,000 to US$150,000 in annual technical assistance costs.

4. This is less a reflection on the calibre of the individuals, than on the many constraints and shortcomings of working in the public sector.

5. While seldom clearly defined in project documents and/or terms of reference, a qualified counterpart should have at least minimum job entry requirements in terms of education, skills and experience necessary to perform his/her job assignment, and most importantly, to facilitate the transfer of expertise associated with the technical assistance.
presence of the foreign expert. Also, it is not uncommon to find unqualified
and/or unmotivated counterparts appointed through internal and/or external
politics, seniority rules, and quite frequently, because overseas training and
study tours are associated with the appointment.

In these situations, there is seldom any motivation for the
counterpart to actively participate in the transfer of expertise process. Adding
to the confusion, is the fact that neither the borrower (who is paying large
sums for technical assistance), nor the Bank (which has attached great
importance to the process) have shown sufficient commitment to the provision
of counterparts, that either side would delay the arrival of foreign experts until
qualified counterparts are identified, assigned, and in place. Under these
conditions, it is difficult to achieve the development of trained cadres which
are so vitally needed in African institutions.

Assumption: The counterpart and the foreign expert, with the support of
management, will work towards the eventual phasing out of the technical
assistance position and the full assumption by the counterpart of the
responsibilities related to the job position.

On the surface, this would seem to be a logical objective that all
parties would be committed to achieving. In practice however, there are many
factors working against the local counterpart eventually assuming full
responsibility for the job position. As noted above, the counterpart may not be
the ideal choice for the assignment, may not be professionally qualified, and
may not be motivated to work with the foreign expert.

Psychologically, the counterpart may feel his/her inadequacy
compared with the experience of the expert, may resent the assertiveness and
efficiency of the expert, and more than anything else, will resent the
tremendous difference in wages paid to the expert.\footnote{It is not unusual for the expatriate to earn 100 times the salary of the local counterpart, in addition to having a new car, luxurious living quarters, and other benefits.} These feelings can be
exacerbated when the counterpart feels that he/she is professionally equal to,
or better than, the expert.\footnote{This situation is sometimes imagined, but is also sometimes real when the expert proves to be poorly qualified for the assignment.} As a result, the relationship between the
counterpart and the expert becomes strained, with the counterpart withdrawing
from the sort of close working relationship that is needed for this type of
endeavor. What follows, is poor attendance, a physical distancing between the
two (typically working in separate offices, and sometimes in separate
buildings), and political and professional undermining of the expert by the
counterpart and/or vice versa.

Much of what is experienced by the counterpart is mirrored by
the foreign expert. The expert may not be the ideal choice for the assignment
due to recruitment difficulties, logistics, and language barriers. He or she may disdain the apparent incompetence, lack of motivation, and lack of commitment of the counterpart. There may be resentment of political interference in carrying out the assignment and of the need to "do it yourself if you want it done" for even the most simple tasks. These feelings are compounded by the overall feeling of helplessness in trying to achieve project objectives under extremely difficult conditions and the erosion of one's professional standards as time passes. In many cases, foreign experts sooner or later become totally occupied with crisis management. They perform even the most simple tasks because others are considered unreliable, and are resigned to seeing their efforts compromised by political and/or unsound local management decisions taken against their best professional advice.

Another factor impacting upon the effectiveness of technical assistance is the reward and incentive structure whereby foreign experts can earn two to three times their normal incomes in addition to enjoying living standards much higher than they might have in their countries of origin (ie, villas, servants, and international travel). In this regard, the overseas assignment takes on a mercenary nature with the expert having a vested interest in extending the assignment for as long as possible. This problem is even more noticeable among consulting firms who provide teams of experts and charge lucrative overhead rates for their services. In this type of environment, it is easy to understand the reluctance of the experts and the consulting firms vis-a-vis a true transfer of expertise that would permit local staff to carry on without external assistance.

The interests of politicians and local management can also work at cross purposes to the use of technical assistance. In cases where consulting firms and/or individual experts have had a long term presence in country, profitable relationships become a hidden aspect of contractual agreements as local staff are invited on overseas visits and are provided with other forms of personal benefits. Perhaps the most common situation is where local management develops a dependency upon the foreign experts to carry out any and all tasks that are the responsibility of the local managers. Thus, while the local managers are free to devote their time to extra-curricular activities (ie, entertaining, conducting personal business, overseas travel, etc.) the expatriate staff will see to it that the necessary work gets done.

In this sense, technical assistance becomes a sort of "security blanket" whereby local managers can concentrate on political matters and their personal affairs, while the experts get on with the work at hand. In this regard, it is the exception rather than the rule when local managers take a sincere interest in seeing that there is a true transfer of expertise and that the expatriates are "phased out" in the shortest time possible. The fact that many

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8. In some cases, individuals have remained on the same assignment for more than ten years, while some consulting firms have maintained their presence for over twenty years without achieving any measurable transfer of expertise.
African managers consider technical assistance to be forced upon them by donors and that expatriates are paid huge sums for their work, makes the reaction of local staff partially understandable.

Assumption: Technical assistance is the only way to ensure successful project implementation.

As stated earlier, the logic of using technical assistance to compensate for skill shortages within the African workforce is hard to refute. Yet the evidence is overwhelming that this method has not succeeded in producing a critical mass of managers, engineers and technicians capable of replacing the very costly foreign experts that operate behind the scenes in almost every African public sector institution. Nowhere is this more evident than when reviewing sequential World Bank projects (i.e., Highway I, Highway II, Highway III, etc.) carried out within the same sector over a period of years. In these cases, one can find management studies and appraisal reports dating back to the 1960's which identify the management and capacity weaknesses constraining institutional development, and which proposed the same technical assistance solutions that are being proposed today. Thus, after decades of assistance including thousands of man-years of inputs, African institutions are still considered by the donor community to require as much, and sometimes more, expert advice and services as was needed just after independence.

In view of the lack of expertise in earlier days, there is no question of the validity of the concept at that time. But in today's labor market, when thousands of African managers, engineers and technicians have been exposed to overseas training and have had the benefit of long term exposure to foreign expertise, it is apparent that the heart of this issue lies in the implementation of technical assistance rather than the concept itself. One must accept that there are thousands of trained and competent African managers and technical specialists existing somewhere, but that they are not being mobilized and motivated to function efficiently and professionally in the public sector. It is therefore essential that we re-examine the relationship of technical assistance to the development and utilization of competent African nationals in the public sector.

Re-thinking the Role of Technical Assistance

In the past, emphasis was place primarily upon the use of technical assistance to guarantee successful project implementation with only vague assurances of long term institution building or workforce development. Today, there is hardly a World Bank project prepared, appraised or implemented, where foreign experts are not considered essential to the management and supervision of project activities despite, in many cases, decades of previous assistance to the project institution. In this context, one must ask why, with all the past training and exposure of local personnel to
foreign expertise, are so many foreign experts still needed? After all, the foreign experts must function in the same environment as local personnel. They must work with the same local workforce, use the same equipment and materials, and are constrained by many of the same factors as local managers and technical specialists. Yet the dependence upon these foreign experts is as strong as ever and it is difficult to envision that this trend will be reduced or reversed in the coming decades.

Will it really take several more generations to create a critical mass of African managers, engineers and technicians, or have African governments and the donor community become impotent in addressing this issue? Are there better ways to design and implement projects so that local managers and technical personnel can assume full responsibility within their own professional lifetimes, or do we accept the notion that they will never be completely competent to manage the public sector?

As noted earlier, there are many factors that impact upon the efficiency and productivity of the African workforce. These factors (ie, lack of resources, lack of motivation, local corruption, etc.) are present for both the expatriate and the local counterpart and must be dealt with at the highest levels of government and the donor community as part of an overall strategy for resolving public sector workforce issues. If changes in the approach and commitment to resolving these issues are not forthcoming, then it is safe to conclude that technical assistance will continue to be a solution that does not work. Changing the approach to this issue involves nothing more than some common sense applications of the same methods that have been used in developed societies to transfer knowledge and skills from one generation to another. Changing the commitment to achieve this will be much more difficult because it will require a departure from ingrained attitudes about workforce development, the willingness to accept project risk to achieve sustainability, and the many vested interests in keeping technical assistance as a "way of life".

Changing the Approach to Technical Assistance

Given that the public sector work environment will not change overnight, it becomes necessary to develop a strategy for using technical assistance in such a way as to avoid the pitfalls of the past and maximize those factors that are most conducive to achieving institutional development. To do this, it is essential that closer attention be paid to the entire range of factors involved in a true transfer of expertise within a reasonable time frame. The

9. In response to frequent complaints by local counterparts that expatriates are well equipped with vehicles, computers, telephones, and other means to permit them to perform better, it is interesting that these resources are financed by the African governments in one way or another. In effect, governments (and the donors) are willing to spend whatever sums are necessary to provide foreign experts with the means to perform, but are somehow less able or willing to do the same thing for their own employees.
major objective in this regard, should be the full assumption of responsibility by local counterparts in conjunction with the phasing out of foreign experts. This approach can be made more achievable through a stricter application of the factors described in the following paragraphs.

Analysis of Institutional Capacity

Without exception, project preparation and appraisal analyses of institutional capacity have historically indicated weaknesses in management and technical operations. These weaknesses were usually attributed to both a lack of resources, and a shortage of managerial and technical skills among institutional personnel. Extensive efforts were then made to define and deal with the problem of resources, while the issues of workforce composition and competence were only addressed in a superficial manner. Staff were not performing well, therefore they needed the assistance of foreign experts to show them how to do their jobs. There were shortages of qualified staff within the institution, therefore foreign experts were needed until qualified individuals could be found locally. As a rule, these analyses were vague in defining the precise nature of workforce constraints, and were equally vague in prescribing corrective actions. The most important questions that should have been raised at this stage of project design were generally ignored. These centered around the capability and commitment of senior staff and the workforce in general, to ensure that the institution could carry out its mandate in an efficient and effective manner? Thus, inadequate analysis of workforce capacity predictably led to more doses of technical assistance and staff training without any guarantee of genuine capacity building.

The first step to achieving better institutional analysis requires the inclusion of more management expertise in the analysis process. Typically, management specialists are a rarity on project preparation and appraisal missions carried out by donor organizations. As a result, management analysis capacity is severely weakened in the effort to determine just how capable an institution and its managers are in carrying out project objectives and strengthening the institution in general. It is evident that if a more knowledgeable assessment were made of institutional capacity, many project investments would be greatly reduced in scope and in some cases, rejected as viable endeavors. In this regard, the key questions to be asked are:

10. In this instance, let us leave other remedies such as training and incentives aside in order to focus on the application of technical assistance.

11. As defined here, management experts should have extensive first hand knowledge and experience in managing operations in a given sector. These individuals should be able to recognize intuitively, the problems impacting upon an institution, and should be able to recommend from experience, the kinds of corrective actions that can be realistically carried out under existing conditions.
a. What functions and tasks are local staff capable of performing to an acceptable level within the existing institutional environment?

b. What functions and tasks cannot be performed by local staff for which foreign experts are absolutely needed?

c. Which constraints to productivity and efficiency can realistically be removed or alleviated, and which cannot?

d. What kind of staff development program will ensure a phased reduction in the need for technical assistance, and can that program be realistically implemented?

e. Is it possible to design and implement an institutional development program that is realistic and that can be monitored closely enough to ensure some chance of success?

f. If local management capacity is below the minimum threshold needed to ensure project success and sustainability (even with liberal amounts of technical assistance), will further investment at this time make sense in the longer term?

**Project Size Versus Absorptive Capacity**

There should be a direct correlation between the nature and complexity of any given project design, and the ability of local personnel to achieve project objectives. As noted earlier, there has been a historical tendency for borrowers and donors alike to focus more on the perceived need for grandiose schemes, than on the prospects for success. Frequently, desire outweighs common sense in the search for solutions to very complex human and institutional issues. Given the fact that almost all project investments during the past three decades have had little measurable success in building institutional capacity, it is evident that neither money, re-organizations, technical assistance, nor any other tactic, can of themselves solve these endemic institutional problems. In this regard, it is apparent that project design needs to be conducted with a different perspective than in the past.

Project design usually begins with the identification of a perceived need for investment in a particular sector. The project then becomes captive to this need (i.e., so many kilometers of road to maintain, so much clean water to produce and distribute, etc.) with the result that the constraints posed by limited institutional capacity are downplayed in an effort to “sell” the project to the donor community. It is at this time, that project designers incorporate significant amounts of technical assistance in order to compensate for the lack of institutional capacity, and to convince donors that the project has a reasonable chance of success. Under these conditions, the physical aspects of the project will be successful in varying degrees (i.e., infrastructure
will be built, equipment will be procured, systems will be installed, etc.), but
the ability of the institution to deliver mandated services will seldom be
strengthened. In a very short time (sometimes even before the end of the
project), the physical improvements will have deteriorated and will need to be
replaced and/or repaired (often through a subsequent project) primarily due to
continued institutional weakness.

It thus becomes incumbent upon project designers to seek a
more effective matching of project complexity, scope and size with the local
capacity to implement, despite a perceived need which may be greater than
that local capacity. That this will ultimately result in a reduction of project
investments is almost certain in many cases, and is an issue that must be
addressed if governments and donors are truly serious about institutional
development and capacity building. The question to be dealt with here is: at
what point does further investment in an institution become meaningless if that
institution cannot improve its efficiency and productive output beyond an
acceptable level?

How is this question applied to the use of technical assistance?
At the operational level, project designers must give greater weight to the
degree of a project’s dependence upon technical assistance. Instead of letting
the need for policy changes and physical improvements become the overriding
factor in determining the size and scope of a project, they should also focus
project design upon the capacity of the local workforce to deliver the necessary
outputs. If it is felt that the project cannot be implemented without technical
assistance, then perhaps this should be taken as a sign that the project is too
ambitious. Why procure equipment, build or re-build facilities, or set up new
management systems, if these things cannot be properly operated and
maintained by the local workforce? Any investment program that ignores or
downplays the absorptive capacity of an institution will be sure to fail in
achieving even limited sustainability.

In this context, it becomes essential that project designers begin
with a definition of what is possible to achieve with the local workforce. This
in turn can then be used to determine what minimum amounts of technical
assistance will be needed during a transition period that clearly defines the
point at which local staff will be competent to assume full responsibility for
institutional performance. By taking smaller, but hopefully more successful
steps, and by limiting the role of technical assistance, it may thus be possible
to build the confidence of public sector managers and workers alike, that they
can indeed do their jobs without outside help.

Contracting for Technical Assistance

It is clear that the process of reducing the role of technical
assistance will take time. One of the first steps to be taken in this regard, is a
change in the way technical assistance agreements are drawn up and
implemented. Once the need for technical assistance has been determined in connection with the factors stated above, it is essential that the overriding objectives of transferring expertise and responsibility be incorporated into every aspect of the agreement. It must also be clear that the phasing out of technical assistance will be a primary criteria by which the success of the technical assistance will be measured. In this context, the following points can serve as parameters within which the technical assistance will function:

a. The precise tasks and functions of the foreign experts must be clearly defined in the terms of reference with target dates for completion. Vague terms such as; "will work with", "will assist", "will coordinate", are to be avoided as these cannot be accurately measured. Instead, definitions such as; "will produce a revised accounting system by (date)", "will produce a vehicle maintenance program by (date)", etc. should be used. The key criteria here, must be the ability to measure technical assistance outputs as defined in the agreement. Leaving these definitions for the technical assistance to prepare after project start-up (a common approach) is an invitation for little or no accountability afterwards, and is an indication that the project was designed without a clear idea of the work to be done.

b. The provision of qualified local counterparts must be clearly defined and strictly adhered to within the terms of the agreement. It must be clearly understood that the foreign experts will not be brought to the work site until and unless their counterparts are in place. Provisions for the overseas training of counterparts should be planned in such a way that the counterparts and the foreign experts are not separated more than 20 to 25 percent of the period of assistance (ideally, this should be done before the expert arrives).

c. The transfer of expertise must be clearly defined and in such detail as to permit adequate evaluation both during, and at the end of the process. This is accomplished by establishing a list of tasks, skills and functions that the counterpart must be able to perform in order to replace the foreign expert (ie, prepare monthly operational summaries, prepare annual budgets, schedule unit work assignments, prepare supply and material lists, etc.). A schedule is then established for the counterpart to assume responsibility for each of the tasks and functions by specific dates. When all the tasks and functions have been mastered by the counterpart, it is assumed that the technical assistance is no longer needed. If the counterpart is unable to master a majority of the tasks and functions, then a review of the technical assistance/counterpart relationship must be made at the earliest possible moment to determine the causes and corrective action to be taken. Leaving this kind of situation to
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The use of technical assistance as a means to develop institutional capacity has had very limited success within the African public sector. Instead of transferring expertise, this approach has created a dependency upon foreign experts that has not diminished over the years. If this trend is to change, and if technical assistance is to become a useful tool in the development of viable public sector institutions, then it is obvious that a new mind-set must take over the traditional ways in which this tool has been used.

First and foremost, governments and donors, expatriates and counterparts alike must rid themselves of the ingrained attitudes and concepts about the lack of competence within the African workforce. Tens of thousands of Africans have received training in all the essential occupational categories. Tens of thousands of Africans have been exposed to all forms of technology and management techniques, and many have been successfully employed in developed countries. Yet governments and the donor community alike, continue to assume that the indigenous workforce does not have the ability to function effectively. A true analysis of the public sector work environment is more apt to show that the real problems of productivity and efficiency lie with the many constraints that are beyond the control of the African manager,
technician or skilled worker, and that these problems cannot be solved through technical assistance and/or training.

It is time therefore, to recognize that the African workforce is capable of doing much better than it has in the past, if it can only be provided with the means and motivation to perform accordingly. To continue the extensive use of technical assistance while doing little about these other factors, is to send the wrong message to all concerned. That message is; "When critical skills are needed, one must go outside Africa to find them". With this attitude, how is it possible for African workers to ever feel confident enough to take full responsibility for their actions?

Secondly, there must be a clearly stated strategy to reduce the need for technical assistance. Except in a few isolated cases, milestones should be established for the phased elimination of technical assistance over a three to five year period. If this length of time is considered to be too short to achieve this objective, then one must conclude that there are more serious institutional problems that are not being properly addressed and/or, that the institution is not viable in the first place. Cases where technical assistance has been on site for ten or fifteen years, or even more, must be critically reviewed in terms of human and financial investments made (ie, numbers of man-years and cost) to determine the reasons why the institution is still dependent upon foreign experts. When preparing technical assistance terms of reference and contracts, the primary questions to be asked are "when will local managers and technicians be able to carry out their job assignments without foreign experts looking over their shoulders?", and "how long will it take the experts to certify that local counterparts are fully qualified for their job positions?".

When the focus of technical assistance is shifted from the present emphasis on crisis management and damage control to true institution building and sustainability, it will become evident that the sooner African managers and workers are given full responsibility, the sooner they will develop the self-confidence and professionalism so essential to any work culture.

Finally, the question of resources, incentives and motivation must be addressed as an integral part of the technical assistance issue. Why is it that African governments and the donor community will support monthly rates for technical assistance as high as $10,000 to $20,000 per month, yet refuse to pay reasonable wages to local senior staff with equal or greater responsibilities than the foreign experts?12 Why is it that African governments and the donor community will finance the provision of resources (ie, transport, communication, computers, etc.) and living amenities (ie, the best available living quarters, personal vehicles, generous living allowances, etc.) for expatriates, while these resources are unavailable to local managers

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12 Cases abound where senior African managers have primary responsibility for multi-million dollar projects, yet are paid only a few hundred dollars per month, while their foreign advisors receive extremely huge salaries. In one particular case, the Principal Secretary of a Ministry was paid about $250 per month while being responsible for a project costing over $800.0 million (in addition to other duties). Expatriate salaries on the same project ran from $12,000 to $15,000 per month.
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and counterparts working alongside them? If African governments and the donor community continue to ignore the effect these conditions have on the African workforce, then it is safe to predict that the need for technical assistance will continue unabated into the next century. If on the other hand, they are willing to match the size and complexity of sectoral investments to institutional capacity, and have the courage to delay and/or downsize politically attractive (but operationally unsound) projects to be more compatible with local management and technical capabilities, then one can envision a genuine growth of institutional capacity and a diminishing need for technical assistance within the foreseeable future.