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Capacity development for sustainable ocean governance

Lessons learned from academia, policy and practice

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1 INTRODUCTION

What are the main challenges of capacity development in the marine context, and what are possible approaches to meet them?

During the first UN Ocean Conference, a consortium of different collaborating institutions representing the scientific community, international development cooperation and civil society invited participants to exchange their experiences on enhancing capacities for the sustainable management and the use of the ocean and its resources.

During the side event *"Capacity development for sustainable ocean governance: Lessons learned from academia, policy and practice",* participants discussed the relevance of capacity development for achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 14 (SDG14 – Life below water). Being practitioners in the field of capacity development themselves, participants contributed valuable insights according to their own experiences.

This document summarizes the main points of the discussion: it briefly introduces the different concepts of capacity development and elaborates the main challenges and possible approaches according to the contributions made during the side event. In a last step, the document summarizes the conclusions drawn from the participants' exchange of experiences.

2 CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT CONCEPTS

We understand capacity development (CD) as the "process through which *individuals, organisations* and *societies* obtain, strengthen and maintain their capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time." (UNDP 2011: 3). In order for a country to achieve its development objectives, capacity needs to be developed at three different levels (UNDP 2011: 13):

1. **at the individual level**
    – people in their roles working within government and civil society;

2. **at the organizational level**
    – government institutions, civil society, community and private sector organisations;

3. **within the enabling environment**
    – political, economic, policy, social, legal and regulatory systems.

For marine and coastal management, various types of CD are relevant at the different aforementioned levels – and all with the aim to build the capacities of individuals, collectives as well as the systems of governance themselves for sustainable ocean governance. The range of measures includes, but is not limited to, academic education, non-academic training and professional development. Practical examples for formats at the individual level include training courses and social labs for capacity development, whereas human resource development and trainings targeting larger, organised groups and collective actors may serve as capacity development formats at the organizational level. Options for improving the enabling environment include the development of policies, legislation and procedures.

This understanding of CD served as the basis for the dialogue platform with participants at the jointly organized side event *"Capacity development for sustainable ocean governance: Lessons learned from academia, policy and practice"* at the 2017 UN Ocean Conference in New York. The dialogue platform considers itself as one (amongst many) contributions to the establishment of a trans-regional space of exchange and joint learning for sustainable ocean governance and in the interest of inspiring according action in diverse local spaces.

3 MAIN CHALLENGES AROUND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT AND POSSIBLE APPROACHES

Throughout the discussion, workshop participants identified several challenges around CD in the marine space. As shown in Table 1, challenges concerned funding, participants, formats, the follow-up phase and aspects beyond trainings:

Table 1 Challenges around capacity development

SUBJECTS	CHALLENGES
Funding	Resourcing successful initiatives in the long-run.
Participants	Identification of the "right" people in organizations who can facilitate change. Engaging with indigenous people and locals on their "own turf". Identify incentives for qualified people to remain in their context to avoid brain drain. Training policy and decision makers.
Formats and tools	Customizing trainings. Avoiding "death by capacity development". Integrating online tools into trainings. Designing and applying webinars and MOOCs effectively.
Follow-up phase	Engaging with participants in the follow-up phase. Defining and measuring the success of a training. Evaluating the quality of a training.
Beyond trainings	Identifying formats other than trainings that can lead to change.

In the following, the identified challenges were clustered in order to discuss possible approaches to address them, considering the different levels of CD that were introduced earlier. The identified challenges comprised:

1. **Formats and tools**
   What are appropriate and effective formats and tools for CD?

2. **The "How-to" of capacity development and impact measurement**
   How can CD be achieved and how can we measure the impact of activities dedicated to capacity development?

3. **For whom – with whom?**
   How can we identify and approach the target group for CD, and who are potential partners or champions to collaborate with in that process?

Formats and tools

Participants highlighted the necessity to work at all different levels in order to ensure that the right people receive CD meaningful for them, at the right time.

At the individual level, detailed knowledge about the target group is required: a thorough needs and capacity building assessment is crucial for customizing CD measures. Training formats should be developed based on a detailed assessment of context-specific needs and requirements.
Positive examples for behavioral change can be most helpful to guide transformative action, as well as making stakeholders understand that changing practices will be beneficial for them and their group of interest. Experiencing these insights out in the field will be more convincing than merely working with theory and literature. In many cases, including business planning into training courses can be crucial to prove that suggested changes are going to work. Building trust among the respective stakeholder group is an essential element for the entire CD process, as people need to feel that the training is in their own interest.
For that purpose, acknowledging cultural backgrounds (values, identity) is crucial and may imply visiting people directly in their homes, as this may be the traditional way to exchange knowledge.

Participants mentioned the cost of CD processes as an obstacle for long-term continuity and success, as ensuring financing in the long-run is crucial. Working with donors on how to spend money most effectively might be an option to ensure that projects are sustained and institutionalized in the long-run. Whereas funds from donors can help to start the CD process, funding should be provided by internal national authorities in the long-run. As soon as local people, especially decision makers understand the benefits of CD, ideally the process ought to become self-perpetuating through voluntary contributions by authorities or by the allocation of government budget. This aspect stresses the importance of including people of higher hierarchy levels in CD processes (see section "For whom – with whom?").

Furthermore, participants stressed the importance of the social dimension: it is not effective to promote change if there are no opportunities for people to shift to new options. For that reason, proposed alternative livelihoods and business models should be carefully assessed within the economical and societal context, and alternative entrepreneurial activities should be promoted. In addition, coordinating different actors is important for ensuring a smooth transition from one kind of practice to another.

Suggestions for CD formats included:

- **Collaborating with for-profit organisations at the community level** – e.g. through subsidies for entrepreneurial skill development, developing alternatives to fishing

- **Providing hands-on experiences** – e.g. joint experimental planting after hurricane Mitch wiped out mangroves, to test and learn about procedures

- **Promoting networks** – e.g. training local scientists to contribute to ocean acidification network and communicate effectively with the public

The "How-to" of CD and impact measurement

Participants emphasized the difference between impact and outcome of a training and suggested the use of questionnaires and feedback to capture the impact of CD measures. However, the group recognized that feedback cannot be provided by all trainees for several reasons (e.g. politicians who might not be willing to reveal certain types of information, or local fishers might not feel comfortable being forthcoming not knowing the long-term consequences of their openness). Participants recommended the use of participatory methods and tools for measuring the impact of CD methods. In order to keep track of impacts at the community level, it is necessary to visit communities to see whether a proposed approach is useful and meaningful to the community, and if it helps to empower people in the long-run. Finding indications for whether trainees are actually using what they have learnt to make a difference may be difficult, and formal monitoring may not be the most efficient way to find out about the impact of CD. Instead, qualitative storytelling and the building of collective narrative might be a more appropriate option.

At the organizational level, it is critical for institutions to have a person in charge for managing change and sharing lessons learned. The so-called change manager may be a person from inside or outside the organization. For managing organizational change, new, regularly reassessed, guidelines are required, including a series of steps that ensure that the organization is on track in the phase of transition.

As for the enabling environment, participants stated that solving a problem and shouldering change cannot be achieved by one single sector, but it has to be managed by several ones. In the initial phases of a CD process, the situation needs to be understood and all stakeholders need to reflect on their needs. Therefore, one recommendation is to "take things easy in the initial phase". Extensive monitoring processes may not be the most effective way to understand the impact of CD measures at the level of enabling environments. Instead, the establishment of transregional, network-based dialogue platforms and

procedures for regular interaction, but also the uptake of trans-regionally discussed narratives between stakeholder groups and sectors may be a relevant indicator for measuring the impact of CD efforts.

For whom – with whom?

In order to design and implement the process right, the purpose of CD measures needs to be clearly defined. Target groups for training measures at the individual level include the trainers themselves, communities that should be directly engaged with, teachers and CSR representatives in private companies. Participants also recommended cooperating with local non-profit organizations which support and prepare individuals for public office.

It is essential to provide for enough time for feedback sessions within a training course, dealing with questions such as: how did people engage? Were there language barriers? Which elements of the training could be improved?

Regarding the organizational level, participants stated the importance of long-term orientation for organizations in order to enable change. Based on that assumption, follow-up trainings are considered more effective than one-time interactions without any kind of follow-up activities or mentoring. Participants acknowledged that changing organizations is hard, hence CD is challenging and will depend on building organizational trust.

In order to create an enabling environment, it is important for external advisors to acknowledge that there might be cultural and political circumstances that are not easy to grasp by external people. Understanding what is best for the stakeholders might be challenging in these contexts. Participants emphasized that identifying champions is important for promoting the enabling environment. Especially the initial stage of a capacity development process should provide people at higher hierarchy levels with basic knowledge and insights into recommended practices as well as potential pitfalls. This is especially relevant in countries where participatory mechanisms for stakeholder participation are not clearly defined and established, and where the goodwill of authorities is a key factor for the actual implementation subsequent to capacity development initiatives. Sometimes, people at higher hierarchy levels might have reservations about lower-ranking experts being trained. Cultural particularities have to be considered: having a pompous opening may help to start the process at the higher level of the hierarchy, whereas technical information might be discussed with experts at a later stage. These processes require good trainers who are ethically grounded and know their subject well.

Participants also mentioned the necessity to reach educators and youth, and to develop new curricula for school and academic institutions in order to change people's attitudes and perceptions from an early stage onwards.

4 CONCLUSIONS

A number of institutions representing the scientific community, international development cooperation and civil society came together and organized a side event at the first UN Ocean Conference to exchange experiences on CD for ocean governance and discuss related challenges. The cooperating institutions have stressed the importance of collaboration among the different actors involved in processes related to ocean governance. It is essential to identify at which

level, for whom and how CD measures can provide the greatest value in a certain stage of a planning process. The three levels considered were the individual level, the organizational level and the institutional, enabling environment.

CD in the marine context faces several challenges. Participants exchanged experiences and recommendations around challenges related to formats and tools, the "How-to" of CD and impact

measurement as well as the target group and involved stakeholders of CD efforts. In addition, the fragmentation of capacity development efforts in the system has been identified as an overarching problem in the marine context.

Despite applying different approaches to CD, the collaborating institutions involved in the making of this paper agree on the following key conclusions drawn from the joint dialogue platform:

1. Main challenges around CD in the marine context include funding in the long run, the selection and motivation of participants who can make best use of acquired knowledge and skills, the use of targeted and appropriate formats and tools, and the design of the follow-up phase of CD measures. Regularly exchanging existing experiences and insights of practitioners is crucial to allow for conscious reflection on strengths and challenges, as well as for developing new holistic and targeted approaches to CD in the marine context.

2. For CD measures to be most effective, understanding the respective context and the different levels of the system is crucial to address the right stakeholders at the right time and with appropriate formats. Ideally, this knowledge is derived in dialogue with representatives of different groups in the training context.

3. It is necessary to think beyond the current target groups and formats of CD in the marine context in order to achieve a shift in people's attitudes and perceptions.

Finally, CD on the individual, organisational and the enabling environment levels offers a significant contribution to reducing the severe levels of fragmentation in ocean governance. Fostering this potential is crucial in implementing SDG 14.

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The COST Action "Ocean Governance for Sustainability - Challenges, Options and the Role of Science" comprises a unique, transdisciplinary network of 27 European countries.
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