

Helpdesk Research Report

Institutional partnerships & twinning between civil service organisations

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Question

What findings can be drawn from a review of theory, practice and evidence in relation to developed country-developing country institutional partnerships/twinning between civil service organisations – focusing on capacity development and sectoral outcomes; institutional relationships and bilateral partnerships; and people-to-people links?

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1. Overview

‘Twinning’ typically entails a form of formalised partnership between similar institutions in the North and South for an indefinite period (Jensen, 2007; Baud et al., 2010), with the aim of strengthening the capacity of partners in developing countries (Jones and Blunt, 1999; Ouchi, 2004). Institutional twinning inherently implies that the primary focus of the capacity development initiative is at the organisational level (above individuals), providing a possible strategic entry point for sector strengthening. This does not mean that there will be no work at the individual level, but that any such work will be part of a wider range of inputs and interventions (J.P. expert comments). Thus, donor agencies and other organisations may adopt a different mix of twinning activities, including: short- or long-term placement of experts, study tours and missions, systems development, advisory services, training events and workshops (Ouchi, 2004). More extensive cooperation also occurs, based on reciprocal relationships between entities, such as municipalities, aimed at forming broad development partnerships (Grupstra and van Eerd, 2017).

This rapid review highlights findings on developed country-developing country (or North-South) twinings/institutional partnerships between civil service organisations in the following three areas:

- Achieving sustainable capacity development outcomes and contribution to broader sectoral objectives.
- Building institutional relationships to strengthen the bilateral partnership to benefit both country's national interest.
- Enhancing people-to-people links to develop closer ties, collaboration and influence.

There is a paucity of literature on institutional partnerships and twinning. Of the literature available, there is discussion of capacity development and sectoral outcomes, but less on building institutional relationships and enhancing people-to-people links. This report reflects this. In addition, due to the limited available resources, some of the literature drawn upon extends to partnerships outside of the civil service.

Capacity development and sectoral outcomes

A large proportion of the limited literature that exists involves twinning initiatives set up by donors in Scandinavia. They point to varying degrees of success in achieving capacity development and sectoral objectives. Older studies find that while partnerships had a positive impact at the operational and technical level, there was less evidence demonstrating impact at the institutional level (Askvik, 1999; Jones and Blunt, 1999). Subsequent studies of national bank, audit office and police partnerships have found effective contributions to capacity development, leading to positive sectoral outcomes.

Outside of Scandinavia, a World Bank review of twinning initiatives finds that Bank-funded projects within which twinning was a key component were effective in promoting institutional capacity development (Ouchi, 2004). A Dutch-Namibian project aimed at improving human resource policy management capacity in Namibia and civil service learning was generally considered a success and to be sustainable. The Civil Service College Uganda/Ministry of Public Service-Government of Ontario long-running partnership was also considered successful, particularly in matching curriculum design to needs (Ort et al., 2016).

Institutional partnerships and twinings in the water sector (LOGO South, ADB programming, Dutch sub-national partnerships) have also demonstrated successes in capacity development and sectoral outcomes. In addition to North-South partnerships, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) initiative has emerged as a successful South-South twinning initiative, providing on-the-job coaching and mentoring, which has been effective in addressing capacity gaps in South Sudan.

Key issues

- *Cost effectiveness*: The costs of twinning were seen in some studies to be a disadvantage, whereas other studies find that twinning initiatives are good value for money.
- *Budgetary concerns*: Initiatives can be weakened by limited budgets, undermining motivation to take part (da Costa et al., 2013).
- *Flexibility versus clarity*: While flexibility can be a benefit of twinning arrangements, much of the literature identifies the need for focus and clarity in order to achieve results. In the absence of clarity, twinning could amount solely to a series of training events or to misunderstandings of roles that undermine the goals of institutional partnerships.
- *Needs assessment*: Improper needs assessment could also lead to poor focus and a mismatch of expectations.
- *Entry points and involvement of management*: Sequencing, whereby cooperation first begins on a technical level and over time moves into management issues, could serve as an answer to the dilemma about the degree to which twinings should focus on technical interventions or more on institutional, longer-term capacity development. It is, however, considered necessary to address management issues for sustainability.

Institutional relationships and bilateral partnerships

Much of the literature cites that one of the key benefits and aims of twinning partnerships is to move away from a one-way technical assistance instrument to a shared commitment and relationship based on equality (Ajeti, 2016; da Costa et al., 2013). Moving toward a partnership of greater equality and sustainability also requires paying greater attention to the benefits gained by the expert institution, frequently situated in the North (Johnson and Wilson, 2009). Benefits to the North can include gaining: Knowledge of unfamiliar contexts; Greater cultural awareness, reduced prejudices and stereotypes; Tools and competencies for working with minority communities in the North; Exposure to different practices and ways of thinking; and Job satisfaction and branding.

Mutual benefits can also include economic opportunities, business and other joint ventures. Country visits as part of twinning can reveal opportunities. In the case of city twinnings, a key benefit can be the development of economic relations (Wu et al., 2016).

A way in which greater cross-cutting links can be established between institutions and partnerships is through 'group twinning' (involving a critical mass of staff in initiatives). This helps to achieve more sustainable knowledge transfer in the context of high staff turnover, and allows for a stronger relationship between the twinned countries as the initiative spreads to other government institutions (UNDP South Sudan, 2002)

Key issues

- *Sustainability*: Sustainability of twinning initiatives can be considered more challenging than other types of projects as it may extend to efforts to establish the basis for future collaboration. This can be particularly challenging if there is a lack of attention to identifying and promoting benefits for Northern partners (Jensen et al., 2007).
- *Hierarchy*: Despite the notion that institutional twinning is designed to foster greater equality of relationships, there are often still a sense of hierarchy, particularly in placing greater value on the knowledge coming from Northern partners.
- *Political stability*: A key aspect of successful twinning relationships and positive outcomes is political stability and political backing.

People-to-people relations

Peer-to-peer relations allow for mutual understanding, mutual learning, equality and reciprocity (Grupstra and van Eerdt, 2017; van Ewijk, 2013; da Costa et al., 2013). A longer-term approach, often a feature of peer-to-peer relations, is considered to be a key success factor as it helps to foster a solid relationship and a state of continual learning. Peer-to-peer relations also allows for empathy with local cultures and comradery, which, in turn, can contribute to changing attitudes and countering prejudices (VNG International, 2011; da Costa et al., 2013; Ajeti, 2016; Bregeon et al., 2015). Commitment on the part of both peers within each institution to contribute time and knowledge and to learn is considered a key success factor (ADB, 2014).

Key issues

- *Sustainability*: Embedding development initiatives in networks of personal links can lead to more motivation and greater sustainability than time-bound projects and programmes (Baud et al., 2010). In addition, the extent to which the peer-to-peer approach is integrated within a larger institutional framework can influence the extent of sustainability (Grupstra and van Eerdt, 2017).

- *Fostering interactions*: Networks of peer groups may not emerge independently, but may require structured knowledge exchanges (da Costa et al., 2013).
- *Role confusion*: Lack of clarity can affect perceptions of the peer role (considering coaches and mentors as additional workforce), undermining the effectiveness of the peer-to-peer approach. A facilitator could help to avoid confusion and support the process of developing peer-to-peer relations (ADB, 2010).

2. Capacity development and sectoral outcomes

A large proportion of the limited literature that exists on twinning and institutional partnerships involves **twinning partnerships set up by donors in Scandinavia**. They point to varying degrees of success of twinning partnerships in achieving capacity development in institutions in developing countries and sectoral objectives.

Two older studies on twinning experiences of the Swedish International Development Co-operation Agency (SIDA) and the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) find that the initiatives contributed to professional/technical upgrading, primarily at the operational level (Askvik, 1999; Jones and Blunt, 1999). The study on SIDA (Askvik, 1999) involves two twinning arrangements between a) the National Statistical Centre of Laos and Statistic Sweden, and b) Namibia's Office of the Auditor General (OAG) and the Swedish National Audit Office (SNAO). The NORAD study (Jones and Blunt, 1999) presents a comprehensive review by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on Norway's twinning practices, including case studies on institutional development projects in Namibia, Tanzania, and Mozambique in the oil, fish and research sectors. The conclusion in both studies is that while the partnerships had a positive impact at the operational and technical level, there was less evidence demonstrating impact at the institutional level, in terms of institutional sustainability, organisational learning, and development of accountable leadership. The institution-building impact on management and strategy was less prominent (Askvik, 1999; Jones and Blunt, 1999). Askvik (1999) emphasises, however, that institution building should not be rigidly interpreted as achieving managerial and strategic changes. The transfer of technical competence remains an important end. For example, the enhancement of scientific research capacity for the Institute of Marine Research in Mozambique, partnered with the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research, has been critical for the sustainability of the former (Askvik, 1999).

A study of a Danida project that twinned Malaysian and Danish institutions within forestry research and education to promote sustainable forest management, finds that capacity development has taken place. This is in terms of transfer of capacities from the Danish to the Malaysian institutions, in involving the Danish resource base, and in fostering ownership of activities in Malaysia (Jensen et al., 2007). Interviewees from the Danish and Malaysian institutions listed numerous supporting examples, including the learning of tools and techniques like training needs assessment, cognitive mapping, and economic evaluation (Jensen et al., 2007).

Swedish support to public administration in Namibia has also involved provision of financial and technical assistance to the Bank of Namibia (BoN) and the Ministry of Finance. Management at the BoN improved with the pairing of top-level posts with expatriate expert advisors on central banking with management experience. The role of a Swedish advisor as Governor for a period, providing an example of bank manager performance, also contributed to positive outcomes (Bergström, 2009). After six years, the BoN functioned in good order with Namibian management, and their Swedish counterparts were no longer needed (ibid). With regard to auditing, the OAG's capacity also improved during the cooperation period. These developments are considered to be sustainable due to improvements in funding and staff resources,

availability of adequate office space of good standard, current training structure and improved relations with audit clients (ibid).

The partnership of the SNAO and the National Audit Office of Tanzania (NAOT) is also considered to have been integral to the growing success of the NAOT (Vaillant et al., 2012). This twinning of professional peers demonstrates that long-term technical expertise can help to support institutional capacity development through a range of activities, including producing audit manuals, training and strategic advice. The NAOT has successfully computerised its audit process, adopted new audit methodology and delivered audit reports to the President in time (Gerdén, 2014).

A twinning arrangement between the Kenya Police and the National Police Board in Sweden, involving the placement of a Swedish advisor in Kenya with the mandate to support police reform with strategic guidance, is considered to have achieved progress with sectoral reform (Carneiro et al., 2015). This includes enhanced competencies of police officers and improvement of curricula. The study finds, however that the absence of clear performance indicators and weak monitoring and evaluation has rendered it difficult to determine the degree to which progress has been achieved (ibid).

A recent study of NORAD's capacity development support to the public sector, of which twinning is the dominant model, finds strong evidence that Norway's support had contributed, across the majority of interventions reviewed, to national partners improving the technical competencies of their staff, and strengthening wider systems and structures (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2016). This in turn was deemed to contribute to stronger and more credible organisations, better equipped to deliver their missions. Changes in capacity, in some interventions, have enabled organisations to make clear improvements in their performance and contributions to development objectives (ibid).

Twinning initiatives aimed at capacity development in the public sector have also occurred **outside of Scandinavia**. A **World Bank review** of twinning initiatives finds that Bank-funded projects within which twinning was a key component were effective in promoting institutional capacity development (Ouchi, 2004). The twinning of state-owned commercial banks in Poland with other banks in Europe, for example, was found to be successful as a first-state pre-privatisation institutional capacity development exercise. Specifically, most Polish banks involved achieved the initially planned goals, including developing a sound strategic plan, strategic planning skills, and budget and performance targets for branches and head office units and implementing modern credit, treasury and asset/liability management processes (ibid). The twinning of commercial banks in Mongolia and Norway and the implementation of various programmes of institutional strengthening is also found to have improved skills across the recipient bank in Mongolia, reflected in better performance. The twinning of the Mauritius Standards Bureau (MSB, recipient) and the South African Bureau of Standards (supplier) aimed at strengthening MSB's infrastructure of services is considered to be successful in transforming the MSB into an effective institution and member of the International Standards organisation (ibid).

A Dutch-Namibian project, aimed at building government capacity in Namibia, adopted a twinning strategy as means of institutional capacity development. In-country training in policy management for senior public officials was complemented by off-the-job training and programmed visits by Northern and Southern partners (Olowu, 2002). In addition to trying to address the immediate problem of improving human resource policy management capacity in government, there was also an effort at longer-term capacity development aimed at the University of Namibia (UNAM) – to enable continued civil service learning. This involved a partnership with the International Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in the Netherlands. As ISS's involvement declined, UNAM's staff involvement increased proportionately (ibid). The initiative is generally regarded as successful and the infrastructure for sustaining the programme is in place, in terms

of physical space and programme structure. A key challenge, however, was finding participants at UNAM, as staff were already over-burdened with work and young people were not easily drawn to university employment (ibid).

The Civil Service College Uganda (CSCU) had a long-standing twinning arrangement (2006-2014) with the Government of Ontario (GoO). Strong working relationships between the GoO and the Ministry of Public Service officials in Uganda, stemming from repeated engagements over time, facilitated joint needs assessment and joint curriculum design. Courses were then delivered to Ugandan civil servants in Ontario. These civil servants then became the core trainers at the CSCU (Ort et al., 2016). Ort et al. (2016) find that the close and long-running partnership between the GoO and the Ministry of Public Service played an important role in ensuring that the programme was well adapted to the needs of the civil servants.

Partnerships in the water sector have also demonstrated successes. They can involve multidisciplinary teams of experts with different fields of specialisation, aimed at enhancing technical competencies at operational, tactical and strategic levels (Tsbani, 2005). LOGO South is a programme involving local governments, local government associations, water companies, and water boards in developing countries, with the aim of strengthening their capacities to provide services and combat poverty. For example, the programme gave South Africans the platform for exchanging experiences with colleagues from the Netherlands, a country with extensive experience in water management. On a national level, the South African Department of Water Affairs worked with the Dutch Association of Regional Water Authorities (Baud et al, 2010). The programme also includes municipal international cooperation (MIC) as a means of strengthening local governance in the South, capacity development of staff of local governments, and strengthening of organisations (ibid). Baud et al. (2010) find that sustainability of MIC is generally high as the programme is based on working with existing organisations; projects are linked to the administrative side of municipalities; and project partners are not dependent on project salaries. As such, continuity is secured at the organisational level, although subject to staff turnover. Research findings indicate that LOGO South projects contribute to poverty alleviation through better solid waste and water management (ibid).

The **Asian Development Bank** adopts a twinning arrangement in its water initiatives, pairing a stronger water utility (expert) with a developing utility (recipient), with the aim of improving service coverage and delivery and financial sustainability in the latter (ADB, 2010). The partnership involves regular visits, workshops and the presence of an experienced mentor, who is considered to impart confidence to the recipient utility. A recent ADB (2014) report concludes that there is sufficient evidence demonstrating that twinning is effective in building utility capacity and improving the performance of recipient water utilities. In Cebu, Philippines, for example, performance benefits from twinning with Melbourne-based City West Water, has materialised through a reduction in non-revenue water from the baseline of 39 percent to 11 percent (ADB, 2010). It has also been particularly beneficial to learn how experienced water operators have dealt with water losses in their system (ADB, 2014).

Institutional twinning partnerships have also begun to emerge **within the South**. A prominent example is the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Regional Initiative for capacity enhancement in South Sudan (2011-2018). Supported by **UNDP**, the project promotes regional collaboration and South-South linkages through the placement of qualified Civil Service Support Officers (CSSOs) from Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda within various government institutions in South Sudan, at national and state levels (including ministries and hospitals). The aim is to promote long-term institutional capacity development in core government functions and transfer of knowledge to South Sudanese civil services through on-the-job mentoring and coaching (UNDP South Sudan, 2012; da Costa et al., 2013). The CSSOs use a range of approaches in their coaching and mentoring, including guided or supervised work based on continuous

interaction between the CSSO and his/her twin (da Costa et al., 2013). The IGAD twinning approach focuses less on immediate outputs (e.g. service delivery) and more on the development of long-term institutional capacity (ibid). Thus, while it is already considered to have had a considerable impact, more positive effects are likely to materialise later (ibid).

A UNDP assessment of the project finds that twinning has been an effective strategy for capacity development and that on-the-job coaching and mentoring is helpful in addressing capacity gaps by focusing on practical experience and being hands-on (UNDP South Sudan, 2012). Key results within participating government institutions include: new policy frameworks and the capacity to develop rules and regulations; improvements in basic administrative systems, standard operating procedures and quality management systems; increased levels of learning, motivation and positive attitudes towards service delivery; a better understanding of what it means to be a civil servant; and improved service delivery (ibid; da Costa et al., 2013). In the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Juba, for example, bookkeeping, budget management and accountability of ministry spending has improved: payment of salaries is now done through vendor claim forms, reference numbers and account codes (UNDP South Sudan, 2012). In Torit State Hospital, Eastern Equatoria, CSSOs have standardised a process of prioritising patient treatment based on the severity of their condition (triage). Efficient and effective response to diagnosis of malaria has also drastically reduced the cases of malaria-related deaths in the hospital (ibid).

Key issues

Cost effectiveness

The costs of twinning were seen in some studies to be a disadvantage, amounting to more than other cooperation methods (Askvik 1999; Jones and Blunt, 1999; Ouchi, 2004). In addition, a review of Norwegian capacity development initiatives found that there were a number of cases where national partners were locked into receiving all their capacity support from the twinning partner even when local or international actors could in some instances deliver support at lower cost (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2016).

Other studies find, instead, that twinning initiatives are good value for money. The Swedish-Kenyan partnership to improve the police force in Kenya, for example, was considered to have improved the systems, structures and competencies of community police using reasonable resources (Carneiro et al., 2015). The LOGO-South programme is also seen to be an efficient use of resources, as the programme builds on existing organisations and staff that it aims to strengthen, financing only additional activities to this end. This is considered to be less burdensome than the costs of expatriate staffing, project offices and other overhead of other types of aid programming (Baud et al., 2010). An evaluation of IGAD in South Sudan also finds that the use of CSSOs is a significantly more cost-effective approach to capacity development than the use of international staff or consultants (da Costa et al, 2013).

Budgetary concerns

Despite findings of cost effectiveness in some reports on twinning, initiatives in some cases are still weakened by limited budgets. In the case of water operating partnerships for example, while the general intention of Dutch-sub national public actors is to develop long-standing partnerships with their counterparts in the South, this is often not realised in practice due to limited budgets. As such, they often have to resort to short-term interventions or to cooperate with private entities (Grupstra and van Eerd, 2017). In the case of IGAD, austerity measures and the lack of resources to implement policies drafted by CSSOs and their twins has undermined tangible outputs to demonstrate the benefits of such twinning

arrangements and evidence of their work (da Costa et al., 2013). This can have a de-motivating effect on those involved in the partnership (ibid).

Budgetary constraints on the part of Southern partners are also a concern in terms of undermining the long-term sustainability of capacity gains (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2016). There were various examples of organisations struggling to develop resource models that would enable them to sustain capacity after donors leave (ibid).

Flexibility

Twinning arrangements have the potential to provide greater flexibility in institutional capacity development and improvements in service delivery (Tsbani, 2005; ADB, 2014). ADB (2014) finds in the case of water operating partnerships that an advantage of the twinning programme is its flexibility to respond quickly and effectively to operational problems and shortcomings, by finding the right mentor to help the utility to improve its performance. For example, a partnership between Yangon City Government, Myanmar, and the Australian mentor Hunter Water was quickly set up to address operational problems with Yangon's central wastewater treatment plant (ADB, 2014).

In the case of IGAD in South Sudan, flexibility in terms of loosely defined mandates and terms of reference of the CSSOs has been a benefit of the project (da Costa et al., 2013). CSSOs in the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Finance, for example, emphasised that such flexibility allowed them to arrive in their host institutions with open minds – and to flexibly identify and address the particular needs and capacity deficits of the institutions at that particular moment (ibid).

Focus and clarity

While flexibility can be a benefit of twinning arrangements in particular contexts, as discussed above, much of the literature identifies the need for focus and clarity in order to achieve results. Askvik (1999) emphasises that a twinning relationship in itself does not result in institutional capacity development. Rather, the extent to which capacity development and change processes are an important goal of the partnership needs to be clarified along with articulation of the way in which to operationalise it. Donors facilitating such partnerships should go beyond finding appropriate twins to supporting the development of general missions and goals and clarification of policies and objectives (Askvik, 1999; Jones and Blunt, 1999). The parties involved must have a mutual understanding of expectations and goals. A key success factor for the Mongolia-Norway commercial bank twinning partnership, discussed in a World Bank study, is that the recipient partner had clearly defined expectations and a good idea of what they wanted out of the arrangement (Ouchi, 2004). An evaluation of an adolescent reproductive health twinning project, involving an Indian Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) and a Swedish NGO and facilitated by SIDA, finds that respective roles, focus, scope and contributions were vague and that greater clarity is a must (Tamm et al., 2002). In the absence of clarity, the twinning played out primarily as a series of issue-oriented training events. The lack of perception of how the Swedish NGO could go beyond such training sessions resulted in failure to develop of a capacity development strategy (ibid).

In addition to lack of clarity, lack of focus can also undermine capacity development. In the case of a Canadian-South African programme on governance (involving partnerships between six South African and six Canadian provinces and between the national Departments of Public Works of the two countries, special advisors, study visits, diagnostic visits, longer country assignments and workshops), there were a few instances where visits by participants in both directions became ends in themselves, rather than a basis on which to build systematically and to achieve their ultimate objectives (Provost, 2000).

Needs assessment

The lack of or inadequate needs assessment can also lead to poor focus and a mis-match in expectations. A review of Norwegian capacity development finds that in nearly half of the interventions reviewed, the types of capacity support did not fully align with needs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2016). This resulted in either too much focus placed on training and insufficient attention to wider organisational issues, or the pursuit of long-term capacity development strategies where gap-filling technical assistance would have sufficed (*ibid*). In the case of IGAD, a UNDP review finds that the lack of a comprehensive capacity needs assessments prior to deployment of CSSOs resulted in problematic twinning and ad-hoc, fragmented individual capacity development, rather than a systematic demand-driven training framework at the institutional level (UNDP South Sudan, 2012). Twinning projects have a better chance of success and positive long-term impact if in-depth assessments on the recipient country's mode of governance, political economy, organisational culture, needs and other key issues are conducted prior to projects being agreed upon (Ouchi, 2004; Askvik, 1999; Jones and Blunt, 1999). These factors can then be taken into consideration in design and implementation.

Bregeon et al. (2015) emphasise that the most successful projects are those where the partner in the South decided the priority of the project, resulting in the support offered being demand rather than supply led. In the case of the Canadian-South African governance initiative, Provost (2000) states that a factor crucial to the success of the programme is that South African partners largely determined the areas of focus and activity. Mapping out both the needs of municipalities in the North and potential municipalities in the South, and determining whether what the former can offer resembles the needs of the partner in the South, can also foster sustainability (Bregeon et al., 2015).

Entry points and involvement of management

Various studies have emphasised the need to articulate the degree to which twinnings are to be characterised by technical interventions and training initiatives or by more focus on institutional, longer-term capacity development. Sequencing could serve as an alternative. In the case of Dutch regional water operator partnerships, for example, the strategy of Wereld Waternet is to initiate cooperation by means of technical interventions, gradually learn to understand the institutional environment, and only at a later stage in the relationship get involved in governance issues (Grupstra and van Eerdt, 2017). Bergström (2009) also finds that there is evidence that it is practical to start cooperation in twinning arrangements, focusing on relevant technical skills, and only later continuing with more sensitive areas such as management issues.

On the other hand, the importance of management issues and the involvement and commitment of senior level staff can be essential at the outset to the success of twinning initiatives. A key success factor identified in the case of the Mongolia-Norway commercial bank twinning and the twinning of state-owned Polish banks and other European banks was the commitment of senior level staff (Ouchi, 2004). Their commitment to change and involvement in the programme contributed to developing their conceptual thinking and refining working approaches and methods (*ibid*). When addressing management performance, training programmes are insufficient and should be adopted alongside other measures (Bergström, 2009).

Regardless of the stage at which management issues are addressed, it is increasingly acknowledged that they need to be addressed in order to achieve sustainability. If initiatives focus solely on technical skills training for individuals, they may not be sustainable if management support to adopt and use them is absent (J.P., expert comments).

Human resource management can also be an issue in twinning initiatives. In the case of IGAD in South Sudan, the Government of the Republic of South Sudan was accorded responsibility for the professional management of the CSSOs. However, the Programme Management Unit (PMU) lacked the capacity and mandate to carry out hands-on human resource management of individual CSSOs (da Costa et al., 2013). UNDP South Sudan (2012) recommends that improvement in project implementation requires greater involvement of senior and middle-level managers at the institutional level in planning, monitoring, decision making and implementation of the project.

3. Institutional relationships and bilateral partnerships

Much of the literature cites that one of the key benefits and aims of twinning partnerships is to move away from a one-way technical assistance instrument to a shared commitment and **relationship based on equality** (Ajeti, 2016; da Costa et al., 2013). In the case of EU twinning initiatives, they allow member states to share practices developed within the EU and to promote productive and long-lasting relationships between administrations of current and prospective EU countries (Ajeti, 2016). CSSOs and their South Sudanese colleagues preferred the concept of ‘twinning’ as it was considered to be ‘power neutral’ and to connote an equal relationship (da Costa et al., 2013).

A twinning agreement between two Dutch and Peruvian municipalities, aimed at strengthening municipal finance and environment and waste management in Villa El Salvador, Peru, is seen to have fostered a high level of mutual understanding based on having the same characteristics, activities and roles in communities (Bontenbal, 2009). This, in turn, enabled the initiative to, at least partly, overcome inequalities (real and perceived) in North-South cooperation (ibid). The ADB (2010) also finds that a key success factor in its water operating programmes is having a true partnership between the operators, rather than a relationship in which the recipient takes on a subordinate role and is dictated to.

Such partnerships based on equality can in turn contribute to **increased confidence in the Southern partner**. In the case of the twinning between Statistics Sweden and the National Statistical Centre in Laos, increased organisational confidence was reported in the latter (Jones and Blunt, 1999). This was considered to be a key advantage specific to twinning (ibid; Askvik, 1999). The ADB (2014) also finds in the case of water operating partnerships that the presence of an experienced mentor is a valuable asset as it imparts confidence to the recipient utility.

Moving toward a relationship of greater equality also requires paying greater **attention to the benefits gained by the expert institution, frequently situated in the North**. Baud et al., (2010) finds that learning effects in twinning initiatives are strong not only in the direction of North-to-South and South-South, but also in terms of South-to-North learning, although the latter is often neglected. Johnson and Wilson (2009) argue that in order to foster effective and sustainable partnerships, based on mutuality as a value and as an incentive, investigation and promotion of Northern learning is necessary. Making such benefits known and achieving them, even if more intangible and difficult to measure than benefits in the South, can foster commitment to and interest in the process on the part of the expert twin (ADB, 2010; Bregeon et al., 2015).

Benefits to the North can include:

- **Knowledge of unfamiliar contexts:** Grupstra and van Eerdt (2017) find that while Dutch sub-national public actors possess considerable technical expertise, they have limited knowledge of the institutional context and governance issues in target countries. Canadian special advisors, who had extensive experience at senior levels of Canadian public services, gained new insights from the

Canadian public servants who visited South Africa in the course of twinning (Provost, 2000). Sutherland (1999) also finds that indirect benefits flowed back to Canada in the form of knowledge. Similarly, Johnson and Wilson (2009) find that a key benefit for UK Council officers participating in twinning initiatives is to learn about an unfamiliar context as an end in itself and as a means of becoming 'global citizens'.

- **Greater cultural awareness:** participation in a municipal international programme was found to deliver intangible benefits to Northern participants, in terms of greater cultural awareness, reduced prejudices and stereotypes, and awareness of global equity (Bregeon et al., 2015).
- **Tools for working with minority communities in the North:** working closely with institutions and peers in the South can give a better understanding of the background of citizens of migrant origin in the North and competencies in working with minority communities (Bregeon et al., 2015). It can also stimulate dialogue and build bridges between different groups in society (ibid).
- **Exposure to different practices and ways of thinking:** in the case of Logo-South municipal partnerships, Baud et al. (2010) find that learning processes also occur from South to North (particularly in terms of participation processes, out-of-the-box thinking and creativity). However, Dutch municipalities were slow to recognise the lessons from the South that they could incorporate into their own strategies (e.g. relying on SMEs for economic empowerment, rather than large construction companies) (Baud et al, 2010). In the case of the Canadian-South African government twinning, Canadians identified areas in which South African practice appeared to be stronger than their own (Provost, 2000). The ADB (2010 and 2014) finds that in the initiatives that they reviewed, some Northern water operating partners were keen to understand the practices of the recipients that could also help to improve their own operations.
- **Job satisfaction and branding:** Providing the opportunity to work in an international context is considered as a strategic tool to be an attractive employer, particularly for young people, and to foster personal development of employees (Grupstra and van Eerdt, 2017). Half of the Dutch municipalities (with more than 50,000 inhabitants) engaged in international twinning initiatives mentioned international activities as a means of strengthening their own organisation (ibid). Baud et al. (2010) states that participation in international programmes is a way for water boards to strengthen their image. The ADB (2010 and 2014) also finds that international twinning partnerships are a means to provide greater job satisfaction.

Mutual North-South, South-South, South-North benefits can also include **economic opportunities, business and other joint ventures**. In the case of the twinning between Polish state-owned banks and other European banks, unexpected outcomes included the development of long-term commercial banking relations between the twinned countries, established through formal and informal assistance; and the encouragement of foreign direct investment in Poland (Ouchi, 2004). In the Canadian-South African programme on governance, collaboration between the twinned departments, including country visits, revealed many potential joint ventures (Sutherland, 1999). In the case of Dutch regional water authorities, institutional twinnings – in the form of Water Operator Partnerships that involve long-term structural and formalised cooperation with water management authorities in developing countries – have fostered international relationships via personal contacts. In addition to knowledge exchange and capacity development, such twinnings can illuminate opportunities for the Dutch private sector (Grupstra and van Eerdt, 2017).

City twinnings have also increased in recent decades. Sino-British twinning relations, for example, have started to proliferate since the 1980s, beginning with the twinning of Cardiff, Wales, with the Chinese city, Xiamen. For British cities, creating twinning partnerships with Chinese cities has largely been a means to

develop economic relations, whereas for Chinese cities, governments are keen to gain knowledge about particular fields and technologies (Wu et al., 2016). More recent twinning relations, specifically those established in the last decade, have been unable to achieve their economic aims. This indicates that more time and interaction is needed for a deeper collaboration to occur. In contrast, cities that have long established twinning partnerships and are involved in various twinning activities such as educational exchanges, joint Sino-British research degrees, and country visits tend to be more economically successful. Such findings indicate that a successful economic partnership needs to be based on a foundation of traditional values of hospitality, trust and reciprocity (ibid). In addition, long-term partnerships allow local companies greater opportunities to assess the key strength of each other's market and to identify relevant market needs. It also allows for better relations to develop between key decision makers in the two cities, which can be of great help to foreign companies seeking to enter the market. In the case of the Shanghai-Liverpool twinning relationship, for example, formed in 1999, Liverpool was the only British city (aside from the UK pavilion) allowed to open a pavilion during the Shanghai Expo in 2010 (ibid).

A way in which greater cross-cutting links can be established between institutions and partnerships is through '**group twinning**' or '**team twinning**'. A key success factor identified in the case of the Mongolia-Norway commercial bank twinning initiative is that all staff throughout the recipient organisation were involved in skills development activities, thereby reaching a critical mass. This increases the likelihood of project sustainability as the organisation is less vulnerable to changes in key management positions (Ouchi, 2004).

In the case of IGAD in South Sudan, one group of CSSOs were twinned on a one-to-one basis, whereas another group were twinned with larger groups of individuals or with whole directorates (da Costa et al., 2013). Some CSSOs work across different directorates with multiple twins, allowing for wider coverage of knowledge sharing, coaching and mentoring (UNDP South Sudan, 2012). This helps to achieve more sustainable knowledge transfer in the context of high staff turnover, by institutionalising knowledge transfer among groups of people and across departments. It also allows for a stronger relationship between the two twinned countries as the initiative spreads to other government institutions, with growing requests for CSSOs as South Sudanese civil servants in other departments learn of the initiative and request to take part (ibid).

Key issues

Sustainability

Sustainability of twinning initiatives can be considered more challenging as it may encompass not only efforts to maintain knowledge transfer, institutional capacity development and formed relationships, but also the establishment of a basis for future collaboration (Jensen et al., 2007). In the case of the Danish-Malaysian twinning project on multipurpose forestry, the long-term goals of establishing a platform for continued cooperation after termination of project funding has proven difficult. This is due in part to continued focus on Southern partners as receivers of new capacities and lack of attention to identifying and promoting benefits for Northern partners (ibid).

Hierarchy

Despite the notion that institutional twinning is designed to foster greater equality of relationships, there are often still issues concerning mutuality and a sense of hierarchy. Partnerships between local government councils in Kampala, Uganda and Huddersfield, UK, and in Iganga, Eastern Uganda and Northamptonshire, UK, were promoted by individual champions in each council, who met several times prior to establishing a

formal institutional link. Their partnerships focused on a range of concerns, including environment (or public) health (Johnson and Wilson, 2009). The partnerships were undermined, however, by the different values that were placed on different types of knowledge. The Northern partners' knowledge of professional 'best practice' was more highly valued than the Southern partners' knowledge of context, even though both were necessary to the success of joint projects (ibid). This and other inequalities can lower incentives for participation. Repeated engagement could potentially help to overcome such inequalities (ibid).

Political stability

A key aspect of successful twinning relationships is political stability. In the case of the Canadian-South African programme on governance, there were periodic disruptions in the relationships, due to elections in either South Africa or Canada, the movement of senior South African officials in different jobs, and/or political and other forms of crisis (Provost, 2000). In the case of city twinnings, e.g. the Sino-British partnerships, if local leaders change after electoral cycles, it can take time for new decision makers from both sides to get to know each other (Wu et al., 2016). Different local leaders may also have different visions for the economic development of their city (ibid).

Political backing of the project/institutional partnership is also an important factor in achieving successful outcomes (Baud et al., 2010; Bontenbal, 2009). A review of NORAD capacity development programmes finds that in the case of the Oil for Development Programme, for example, that twinning with environmental institutions has been the least successful part of the initiative due to limited political backing in this area (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2016). Similarly, the evaluation of Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative, reform was most successful in countries where there had been significant political support.

4. People-to-people links

Peer-to-peer or colleague-to-colleague relations is found to be a cost effective and simple way of achieving positive results (VNG International, 2011). Peer-to-peer relations are unique because of their long term character and reliability (Baud et al, 2010). Baud et al (2010) finds that twinnings can reach greater levels of success if there are ample opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, with all relevant peers are on board. **Commitment** on the part of both peers within each institution to contribute time, knowledge and to learn is considered to be a key factor in the success of the partnership (ADB, 2014). The Canadian-South African programme on governance included country trips, bringing together Canadians and South Africans through shared experiences (Provost, 2000). This interaction was welcomed on both sides and helped to create a learning environment and network of South Africans and Canadians who continue to work together (ibid). Ajeti (2016) also finds in the case of EU twinnings that one of the key benefits was the development of structured long-term working relationships and professional networks.

Dutch sub-national public actors advocate for peer-to-peer approaches, with the view that they have similarities and 'speak the same language' with corresponding public institutions in the South. This allows for **mutual understanding, equality and reciprocity** – and greater possibility for achieving lasting impact (Grupstra and van Eerd, 2017). An important aspect of the LOGO-South programme, involving water sector partnerships, is the direct personal peer-to-peer relation, maintained through mission visits, email and frequent phone calls. Through this platform, South African and Dutch colleagues, for example, had the benefit of continually sharing experiences. An evaluation of the programme finds that there was frequent contact between Southern colleagues and Dutch partners, and that the **trust and fluidity** developed in

these exchanges have led to important changes and impact in South Africa, Benin and Indonesia, with greater sectoral knowledge within and across organisations (Baud et al., 2010). Joint project implementation also promoted much learning. Contact continued after the completion of specific project activities and advice was also sought from Dutch peers for issues not directly covered under the project. This was considered to be a great benefit of the peer-to-peer approach, in contrast to reliance on short-term consultants (ibid). Further, a peer-to-peer exchange approach has the benefit of promoting **mutual learning**, drawing on lessons from both sides (van Ewijk, 2013).

A **longer-term approach**, often a feature of peer-to-peer relations, also **allows for the development of a solid relationship, based on mutual respect**. In the case of IGAD, the constant presence of the CSSOs, who were on the ground for long duration, provided continual additional professional capacity and experience on hand (da Costa et al., 2013). This allowed for the furthering of relationships and a state of continual learning (ibid). The duration of the deployment also facilitated dialogue and understanding between the two groups – and a greater willingness on the part of South Sudanese twins to reveal individual and institutional weaknesses and to aim to address them (ibid). Norway’s long-term commitment to capacity development and long duration of support is also seen to allow for strong, trusting relationships – and productive, ongoing conversations on evolving and emerging capacity needs (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2016).

In the case of the institutional partnership between the SNAO and the OAG in Namibia, the SNAO project team provided **continual on-the-job training** and encouraged a questioning environment. This paired well with the new, young staff of the OAG in Namibia, who were articulate and had a questioning nature (Bergström, 2009). This peer-to-peer relationship contributed to the positive progress the OAG made in becoming a learning organisation (ibid). Allowing longer time for partners to get to know each other and deepen their interaction has also been a success factor in the National Audit Office Development Project, which twinned the SNAO and the NAOT. The project reported progressively increasing rates of implementation and budget utilisation figures over time, as the relationship solidified (e.g. originally 48 percent utilisation, then 69 percent after an additional 9 months. In the subsequent phase, utilisation rose to 89 percent) (Gerdén, 2014, 72).

Additionally, VNG International (2011), which works on LOGO South, finds that instead of dictating expertise, peer-to-peer relations allows for **empathy with local cultures**, respect for the parties involved, smoother collaboration and potentially greater motivation to complete the project and to maintain it afterwards. There can also be a sense of **comradery** with repeated mutual visits and longer country missions, which does not necessarily exist with the use of international consultants and in more hierarchical mentor-student relationships (da Costa et al., 2013). In the case of IGAD, where CSSOs from neighbouring countries came to live in South Sudan and work with their peers, South Sudanese respondents stated that the shared living and working conditions seemed to have created a solid foundation for building trusting, egalitarian relations (ibid). Both CSSOs and South Sudanese twins emphasised the importance of the day-to-day interaction and the considerable length of time in which CSSOs were present on the ground (CSSO posts lasted two years) (ibid).

Long-term relationships at the peer level, and the development of empathy, comradery and greater cultural awareness, can also contribute to changing attitudes and reducing prejudices and stereotypes among countries (Ajeti, 2016; Bregeon et al., 2015).

Key issues

Sustainability

Embedding development initiatives in networks of personal links, such as through peer-to-peer relation in twinning initiatives, can lead to more motivation and greater sustainability than specific time-bound projects and programmes (Baud et al., 2010). Grupstra and van Eerd (2017) find, however, that the degree to which a peer-to-peer approach delivers sustainable results and sustainable change at an institutional level depends in large part on whether it is integrated within a larger institutional framework.

Fostering interactions

Networks of peer groups may not necessarily emerge independently and spontaneously. Rather, structured knowledge exchanges may be required (da Costa et al., 2013). In the case of IGAD, the assumption that networks would emerge on their own materialised only partly. Most CSSOs found that a more frequent and structured exchange with their peers, would have been beneficial (ibid). The Project Management Unit subsequently organised townhall type meetings, which were much appreciated (ibid). Such structured knowledge exchanges among professional groups, nationalities and CSSOs performing similar functions could have been more thoroughly developed in the project design (ibid).

Role confusion

Issues of clarity, discussed earlier, can also affect perceptions of the peer role, undermining the effectiveness of the peer-to-peer approach. In the case of IGAD, only the upper levels of ministries appeared to have been informed adequately about the purpose of the initiative. The failure to create proper awareness of project objectives at the working level within receiving institutions resulted in the initial perception that CSSOs were additional workforce rather than coaches and mentors, which can impede opportunities for creating an enabling environment for learning (UNDP South Sudan, 2012; da Costa et al., 2013). The confusion resulted in scepticism and suspicion from South Sudanese counterparts toward those placed in the institutions, particularly when they involved 'sensitive ministries', such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (da Costa et al., 2013). There were also concerns on the part of local staff that the CSSOs had come to take their jobs or were being paid by the South Sudanese government to fill positions that could have gone to South Sudanese nationals (ibid). The lack of awareness and ensuing misperceptions required considerable efforts on the part of CSSOs to become accepted by the local staff (ibid).

In other instances, inadequate human resources in the South Sudanese civil service also created pressure on CSSOs to function as additional workers for the institutions, rather than as peer coaches and mentors (UNDP South Sudan, 2012). This pressure was attributed in large part to the lack of understanding of the project, which led a number of ministries to request personnel to fill staffing gaps rather than placing a CSSO in an area where South Sudanese staff was already present and could benefit from coaching (ibid). As a result of these issues, many CSSOs experienced an unnecessarily long start-up phase (da Costa et al., 2013).

A **facilitator** could be helpful in avoiding confusion and to support the process of developing peer-to-peer relations. The ADB (2010) finds that twinning attempts without the use of a facilitator proved difficult and slow. It has now adopted a facilitator approach, relying on a twinning facilitator to introduce the twins to one another and to jointly develop an agreement, work plan and targets.

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