Learning from Afghanistan and Somalia: How to improve capacity building in fragile situations.

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Résumé

The Arab spring raised the challenge of transforming the governance system in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region. This change put under strain the institutional system of the region, in which fragility indicators have soared since the early 2011. In such a context, programmes of individual capacity building and institutional development acquire strategic importance in successfully accompanying the transition of the public sector towards a system of good governance. This paper presents two case-studies of capacity building programmes in highly fragile contexts: one in Somalia, and the other in Afghanistan. The authors analyse the project activities and emphasize good practices as well as structural weaknesses in planning and implementing operations. In conclusion, the paper offers four lessons learnt from direct experience in working on capacity building in the public sectors to help plan and implement improved programmes in post-Arab spring countries, or in other fragile situations.

Key Words

capacity building, fragility, institutional development, Somalia, Afghanistan.
Introduction

a) The Arab Spring: reforming the public sector in weak governance countries

As a result of the so-called Arab spring, large portions of the Arab world came under exceptional pressure. From Tunis to Sana’a, Arab crowds stood up against some of the world most long-standing regimes to get away with illiberal, corrupted and unresponsive systems of governance. Nonetheless, this quest for radical reforms did not happen without a high price to pay. For some countries, i.e. Libya, reforms entailed war-scale fights. For Tunisia or Egypt, instead, some days of turmoil and civil disorder proved sufficient to close an old chapter and to open up a new one. Whatever duration or intensity the violence had, the Arab spring provided a unique window opportunity - for the international community and the internal constituencies alike - to push for the democratic and economic development of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region. To this end, a robust process to support transition towards good governance needs to be put in place with urgency before the window opportunity shuts down.

Recent figures from FFP (The Fund for Peace) portray a very complex situation in the Arab world.1 Four Arab countries are ranked in the top ten of the failed states index (Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and Iraq). Two more Arab countries, namely Syria and Egypt, qualify for the highest level of alert. All other Arab countries are ranked as critical (with the exception of oil-rich UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman). The FFP study encompasses twelve different indicators, such as deterioration of public service, rise of factionalized elites, massive movement of refugees or internally displaced people, vengeance-seeking group grievance. Thus, the index takes into consideration societal, political, military and economic distress.2 But even more worryingly, FFP figures forecast a negative outlook of the Arab region, which is in contrast with the rather positive world trend. As the table below shows, the heroes of the Arab spring are ranked at the six highest world positions of the most deteriorated public apparatuses in 2012.

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2 Ibid, p.12.

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Thus, in post Arab spring countries the process of reforming public sector and administrative systems – which is normally a complex process itself - builds upon an additional layer of complexity, that of weak governance and fragility. According to the World Bank, weak governance is a function of: i) low capacity in the form of human, social or physical capital for proper oversight and control of state resources, which might result in conflict or state failure; ii) low willingness on the part of the governments to provide public goods, security or basic social services; iii) low legitimacy because governing officials are not competitively selected through democratic processes or on the basis of merits and do not reflect the views of the governed.

The concept of fragility, instead, embraces weak governance as well as additional socio-economic indicators. Both concepts apply – although to a different extent – to post Arab spring countries undergoing a complex process of institutional transition.

The World Bank and the OECD share a specific policy which guides their engagement to working in fragile situations. The policy endorses the universal principles of engagement in contexts that are not classified as fragile, but it requires – in addition – a more “intense approach”. This “approach” considers additional problems like the legacy of conflict, the massive schooling and infrastructure backlogs, the constituencies that require urgent attention (e.g. child soldiers...
refugees/returnees, demobilized or alienated youth) and other demands on the education system issues (e.g. peace-building, vocational training, psychosocial support).\(^8\)

b) Research methodology

Looking at the needs of the Arab countries in terms of support to transition towards good governance, the paper aims at sharing lessons learnt from previous experience in Somalia and Afghanistan. Somalia and Afghanistan are probably the most representative - although not necessarily successful - examples of support to a transition process towards good governance in highly fragile situations. In doing so, the authors point out the two following methodological specifications that apply to the analysis below:

- The authors acknowledge the social, economic and institutional differences amidst post Arab spring countries. For this reason, the findings of this paper might not be entirely relevant for the situation of one country specifically, as they refer – in fact – to the whole process of building capacities and developing institutions in weak governance and fragile situations.

- Within the process of radically reforming (re-structuring) the governance system, this study considers capacity building programmes as the most relevant form of support for the international community to accompany the transition process. The authors give an extensive definition of capacity building programmes including individual and institutional capacities alike. In the range of these activities, authors consider technical assistance, training, tutoring and mentoring, study trips, etc.

Drawing on personal experience, this paper briefly describes two governance programmes in which the authors displayed an active engagement, either as project managers or as consultants. For each case study, the paper provides a critical assessment about the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. This qualitative analysis is based on a comparison between the process and outcomes reported by the project documents and the key quality indicators highlighted in the theory of development cooperation. These indicators are drawn mostly from the “Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda on Aid Effectiveness”, and they are occasionally complemented with additional parameters to explicitly take into consideration the level of

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\(^8\) See World Bank web site, section “Education in Fragility”.

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satisfaction of the beneficiaries.⁹ The result of the analysis is a synthesis of 4 lessons learnt that have been identified as commonly repeated mistakes in delivering capacity building programmes in fragile situations.

Finally, the authors acknowledge that a paper based on only two case studies cannot claim to provide exhaustive recommendations. Further studies on the matter could certainly serve the purpose of corroborating these findings with statistically relevant figures and additional examples. Nonetheless, this paper looks at two case studies which could be as representative as possible of the complexity of capacity building programmes in weak governance countries. As a consequence, the choice fell on two examples standing at the opposite side of the developmental programmes. On the one hand, the case of Somalia refers to a long term large multilateral programme implemented by a UN agency. On the other hand, the case of Afghanistan analyses a short to medium term bilateral programme, decently budgeted and implemented by an Italian University.

Case Study 1: the Somali Institutional Development Project

1. Background

The first case study presents a large-scale multilateral programme in the governance sector of Somalia. Since the beginning of the nineties, the country emerged as one of the most flagrant examples of a failed state. Enduring conflicts and societal divides eroded the institutional set up of the country along with the feeling of national identity. Still today, it is difficult to look at Somalia as a unitary institutional reality. Throughout the last twenty years, Somaliand, Puntland and South Central Somalia have all been developing parallel public sectors and systems of governance. In the light of this stark contrast, it is still a matter of debate in the international community whether these three areas are doomed to definitively break away, or reunite in a loose federal framework.

The international community followed attentively the upheavals of the Somali public sector. The United Nations Political Office for Somalia (UNPOS) coordinated the last attempt of developing a coherent and stable institutional arrangement for Somalia known as the Gibuti Process.¹⁰ This process confirmed legitimation to the internationally-supported transitional federal government (TFG) and outlined a road map to achieve multiple goals in the governance sector of Somalia. The international community supported the TFG and the Gibuti Process with a generous

¹⁰ See AMISOM web site, section Somali Peace Process.
envelope for the governance programme of the UN agencies. This envelope financed the Somali Institutional Development Project (SIDP) under the direction of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Within SIDP, the UNDP gave specific emphasis to enhance capacity building activities and create knowledge and expertise for public systems and processes across the different Somali jurisdictions.

2. SIDP contribution to capacity building activities

SIDP is a framework project first conceived in 2009 to support the Somali federal government. The step came under the auspices of the international community which pledged for the rationalization of the fragmented actions in the governance sector of Somalia. To this end, SIDP merged four smaller UNDP projects promising a long term engagement, a considerable financial investment and a coherent framework of action. The project composed one of the three governance milestones of UNDP Somalia along with the JPLG (on local governance) and the Constitution Programme (which aimed at developing a federal constitutional Chart for Somalia).

According to the needs on the ground, SIDP held a focus on capacity building which was essentially resting on institutional development. Three out of the four project-focuses dealt explicitly with institutional capacity building: i) developing policy and legislative systems and processes; ii) improving public administration through support to the public financial management system and accountability; iii) developing physical infrastructure and operational support. Finally, the fourth priority – iv) developing human resources capacities - referred to the traditional process of individual capacity building. Hence, from a methodological standpoint, SIDP planned to fund several types of capacity building activities – both institutional and individual - which can be grouped in five clusters as follows:

a) **Mentoring and tutoring (on the job training)** – One of the most ambitious projects within SIDP was the Qualified Somali Technical Support Project (QUEST). QUEST aimed at bringing qualified or highly qualified members of the diaspora back to the Somali institutions. Experts provided technical assistance to the head of units and departments and helped them work with SIDP to define and implement the overarching public administration reform process. Their terms of reference included several deliverables such as the definition of institutional values, missions and goals, organizational charts, legal frameworks and policy proposals were the most recurrent deliverables.

b) **Training courses** – In terms of budget, the most considerable component of SIDP was the Somali Institutional Capacity Development Project (SICAD). SICAD was meant to provide assistance to develop in-house technical capacity for the Civil Service Commission and the Civil Service Institute. The Commission is responsible for taking the lead on the civil service reform process, while the Institute is in charge of providing life-long learning opportunities to the whole body of public employees. Activities financed under this chapter included all sorts of training courses (short, medium, long-term), also in the framework of external partnerships with other higher education providers (i.e. national and international universities or institutes).


c) **Study Trips** – As a result of a negotiation with the Somali partners, SIDP included a large number of travelling opportunities. Study trips were mostly thought as a tool for ministers, director generals and other high-ranked officials to look at best practices in terms of building institutions and processes. Targeted countries were mostly those of Eastern Africa (i.e. Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia).

d) **Physical Infrastructure** – A key feature of war-torn Somalia is an enduring lack of investment in physical infrastructure. For this reason, the scope of SIDP capacity building activities was stretched to encompass physical investments in the public sector. For instance, the construction of an institute with training rooms in Hargeisa (Somaliland) was one of the first activities to be accomplished by the project. Under this same heading, funds were made available for the equipment of training rooms (e.g. computers) and other “hardware” expenditures (e.g. vehicles for the trainers to reach civil servants in the institutional peripheries).

SIDP designed activities according to the capacity of the different Somali regions. Reflecting the *de facto* Somali internal divides in three macro-areas, the project aimed at identifying specific objectives and strategies for each public sector reform and institutional development process. Despite the very high expectations on SIPD, the programme proved highly inefficient and failed to deliver on the expected outcomes. Several independent monitoring and evaluation reports bashed the operational implementation processes of SIDP, as well as the design of its baseline project.
documents. Only after two years from its inception, UNDP called for a robust internal re-design process of SIDP as a result of inadequate outcomes and widespread frustration from the donors and the beneficiaries alike.

3. SIDP facts and figures

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4. Assessing SIDP: strong and weak points

The performances of SIDP in the first two and half years of life have been poor to the level that it is difficult to highlight purely positive elements. Security concerns can be raised as a partial justification for the failures of SIDP. The tragic events of 2008 – bombings in the UNDP compounds of Hargeisa and Garowe - imposed restrictions and constraints on the presence and movement of expatriated staff in some areas of the country until appropriate security measures were restored. Still, the fact that UNDP reconsidered the very essence of the project through a structural re-design process is itself the evidence that problems could not be re-conducted to this issue alone. In the following paragraphs, the paper highlights as strengths those elements

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14 Facts and figures are drawn from the official project documents.
15 The budget refers to the 2010-2013 contract for three years activities.
16 It is calculated as the percentage of budget execution on the expected expenditures from the beginning of the contract to August 2012.
17 In 2011 DFID ceased to be one of the SIDP donors.
that were at least partially or conceptually well-designed and as weaknesses the most outstanding problems of SIDP in terms of process and outcome.

a) Strengths

Alignment with local priorities and key institutions – A good thing about SIDP is that it was extremely careful to the political environment of the country. With UNPOS playing a pivotal role in supporting – or rather guiding - the transition of Somalia towards stability, UNDP received clear instructions on how to develop the Somali institutional capacities in the framework of the overarching governance support process. A clear example of this internal UN cooperation is the transition road map for South Central Somalia which entrusted SIDP to pursue some key objectives in the governance sector. However, despite the fictitious creation of a transitional federal government and parliament in Mogadishu, it must be acknowledged that the national priorities and key institutions were designed under the guidance of the international community, and of UNPOS in particular. Therefore, it would be awkward for SIDP or the UNDP to refuse a full endorsement of the UNPOS-led policy and institutional framework.

In Puntland and Somaliland, the local institutions are less receptive to external interferences, although they are largely dependent on foreign aid (i.e. SIDP) to develop their public sector capacities. Also in these cases, SIDP showed a good degree of alignment to the priorities outlined by the local governments and institutions, with few (although relevant) exceptions.

All in all, the fact that the UNDP got Somaliland and South Central to cooperate on a unitary governance programme on institutional development despite the conflicting views over their institutional set-up, it can be read as a sign that SIDP displayed good will to dribble sensitive political issues and to pursue coherent action.

Ownership of project activities – The main system of implementation for SIDP activities consisted of mediated and time bound deals between the partner institution and the UNDP. The system was referred to as “Letters of Agreements” (LoA). With the LoA SIDP accorded funds to the Somali partners for specific activities – to be certified with monthly reports - over a time span of 1 year (renewable for one more year). The rationale of the system lied in giving SIDP the possibility of exerting a tight control on the expenditures while allowing the Somali partners for some project ownership. In theory, the system combined the need for financial soundness with the developmental goal of empowering targeted institutions.

19 Despite progress was tracked on the civil service reform process of Somaliland, divergences between SIDP and the Civil Service Commission management led to a suspension of SIDP support to the reform process.
Although conceptually well designed, the LoA system wrecked nonetheless. The main reason for the failure is mostly the poor implementation strategy of the system which neglected, among others, two important factors:

1. With way too many partner institutions involved in SIDP, the administrative burden of producing LoA, analysing reports, approving financial requests and executing payments became cumbersome. The UNDP constantly ran behind the schedule and most of the LoA entered into force months after the beginning of the project activities.

2. The implementation strategy was uniform across macro-areas. As a consequence South Central received the same treatment of Somaliland. But in highly fragile contexts like the Mogadishu region, the principle of ownership should have been blended and planned through progressive objectives and milestones to reflect the institutional backlog.\(^{20}\)

\(\textit{b) Weaknesses:}\)

Financial management, cost-effectiveness and budget execution – The financial management of SIDP has been a reason of concern for many of the donors. The sum of the available funds for SIDP - currently 9 million EUR - was highly insufficient to cover the budget proposal of UNDP amounting, instead, to 42 million EUR over three years. This structural discrepancy persisted ever since the beginning of the project activities and, given the circumstances, it cast a negative light on the future sustainability of the project and on its capacities to fully achieve the goals it was set for.

Of the money allocated for SIDP, the EU provided 50% of the funds.\(^{21}\) But the leverage of the Union on the UNDP was partially watered down by the fact that the money only accounted for 11% of the overall budget presented by SIDP when applying for grants. In terms of accuracy, the UNDP estimates for expenditures can only be deemed reasonable when clear and measurable objectives are identified by the re-design process. But as far as the first two years of activities are concerned, the assessment must be highly critical. The high number of problems encountered with the LoA system led to a minimal level of accomplishment of project activities and, inherently, to a disappointing progress in the project objectives. As such it is worth noticing that:

\(^{20}\) OECD, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.

\(^{21}\) In the latest available figures EU accounts for 56% of the total contributions, US is second with 20%, Italy is third with 13%.
1. While the operational costs have been frozen as a result of the project incapability to deliver on its objectives, other running costs (personnel and office above all) composed the bulk of the project expenditures;

2. In turn, the level of the budget execution for SIDP soared to a double negative record. On the one hand, SIDP failed to give execution to the funds received by the donors. On the other hand, SIDP Somali partners often encountered problems in spending the (little) money allocated by the LoA. Or even worse, SIDP proscribed further budget execution for some partners as a result of lack of trust on money management.

3. A framework contract concluded by the UNDP and the EU prevented the donor to audit the implementing agency. Therefore donors were left with no choice but to trust SIDP management that funds were spent according to the highest principles of cost effectiveness even when no result was shown.

Results (dis)oriented action – SIDP project documents did not represent a good exercise of project writing. The absence of consolidated baseline studies, the lack of a logical framework connecting objectives with activities and the disregard for measurable indicators made of the SIDP project document a shallow piece of work. Regrettably, SIDP management did no adjustment to cover the gaps for over two years, despite many of the donors (including DFID and the EU) voiced disappointment about the lack of management oversight. In this sense, the fact that SIDP was born as a merge of several other UNDP projects in the governance sector can only be used as a partial justification for the lack of a thorough re-structuring of the multiple project components.

For over two years, SIDP operated on a very broad and blurred mandate in three different Somali regions and in partnership with more than twenty institutions. According to the quantity of available input (financial and human), it was clear that the project was overly ambitious, and thus set for failure. Following this pattern, the project insisted on connecting available input with expected output. The scheme found large scale application with the formulation of LoA. For any given amount of funds (input), the LoA expected the partner to deliver a list of expected activities (output). But an output alone is by no means sufficient to pave the way to an outcome (or a result). For example training twenty staff members in one Ministry on computer literacy, it could not be a guarantee for the improvement of the performances of the target institution. As pointed out in the evaluation reports, the difference between output and outcome was substantial and SIDP failed to understand the logic.22

Frustration of the partners - SIDP blurred and undefined focus opened potential forms of cooperation to a plethora of partner institutions in the three Somali regions. Unremarkably for SIDP, of the dozens potential partner institutions across Somalia, not a single one evaluated the

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22 SOFRECO Governance, op. cit.
relationship with the project as a smooth one. The problems were of a multiple nature, but it is possible to identify two main recurrent issues.

The first problem relates to SIDP unresponsiveness to local input and delays in the communication. The decision to centralize UNDP Somalia project activities in Nairobi for security reasons responded to the post-attack concerns but left the partners without a credible and easily reachable interlocutor. In addition, SIDP displayed a system of internal governance in which the most relevant positions were all located in Kenya and little decision-making power was delegated to the sub-offices of Garowe, Hargeisa and Mogadishu. So SIDP management staff ended up flying in for a very limited number of days, holding a rather short meeting with Somali partners and then fled off with little that was heard of until the next visit several weeks later.

By the same token, the internal system of SIDP for monitoring and evaluation always lied at an embryonic level. Although the frustration about SIDP was not difficult to perceive, the fact that no official system of capturing this feeling was in place led partners to grow even more unsatisfied and to lose the remaining trust in SIDP efficacy.

Case Study 2: The Italian support to the Afghan public sector

1. Background

The other case study refers to a small to medium-scale bilateral programme in the governance sector. As a key member of the NATO alliance, Italy played a pivotal role in the reconstruction of the Afghan system of governance, especially in the Western Province. In particular, the international community acknowledged to Italy a specific expertise in the field of the rule of law, training and education. The Italian support to the Afghan public sector followed the lines of the Afghan National Development Strategy to ensure a high degree of coherence with the national development policies and with other sources of financial support to the Afghan institutions.

The aggregate investment of the Italian civilian cooperation in the public sector of Afghanistan bypassed EUR 50 million a year for ten consecutive years since 2001. Of this money, the sectors receiving the biggest envelope were traditionally the rule of law and agriculture. However, when the objective of empowering Afghan institutions came to top of the agenda of the international community, capacity building programmes in the governance sector acquired a

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23 Reference needed
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strategic importance. Italy followed up shifting part of the global investments towards the governance sector with the government calling for proposals of capacity building projects. This process led to the genesis of a number of capacity building activities operated by a consortium of higher education institutions led by the University of Rome Tor Vergata (UTV) in partnership with the Italian National School of Public Administration (SSPA).

2. The UTV-SSPA capacity building programme in the Afghan system of governance

The UTV-SSPA capacity building programme ran in the framework of the Italian support to the Afghan institutions from 2010 to 2011 and was closed unexpectedly (and regrettably) just when it started producing some interesting results. In the strict development jargon, it is hard to qualify the project activities of the Italian consortium as a proper development programme. The UTV and SSPA activities were never framed into a coherent master-plan identifying long-term goals, enduring commitment and financial perspectives. Rather, the activities escalated from the organization of a simple training course to a fully-fledged capacity building programme thanks to the satisfaction of the beneficiaries and the availability of funds. Therefore, the design of capacity building activities followed a pattern of incremental complexity. The threshold of developmental objectives was put higher, step after step, to pursue objectives of better quality and quantity. These steps can be grouped in the following four progressive phases:

1) **Sectorial training course** – in the beginning of 2010 the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded a deal with the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs for a pilot training course on international relations and public management. The course targeted 18 employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (including 2 of the Herat office), and it focused on the domain of international relations, diplomacy and public management.

2) **Public management training course** – in the fall 2010, following the success of the sectorial training, the Afghan Civil Service Commission asked the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to extend the purpose of the capacity building activities to the whole range of civil servants. As a result, a new training course was organized for 24 selected civil servants (half of whom coming from the Western Province). The course focused on public management and multi-level governance, including study trips, workshops and interactive learning games.

3) **Scholarship for master courses** – with the first training course on public management, UTV inaugurated a system of awards for the best trainees. The most productive
students of the training course were awarded a six months scholarship to extend their stay at UTV and complete a whole master programme in public management and development studies.

4) *Training of trainers* – In the fall 2011 UTV presented a plan to renew and extend the previous engagement vis-à-vis the Afghan partners. The new project included the proposal of a partnership with the University of Herat to develop in-house the capacities of trainers to deliver training courses on public management. The project held a long term perspective and proposed a wide array of activities: training of trainers, study trips and scholarships for lecturers, tutoring and mentoring, etc. 26

The whole programme was suspended till further notice in the fall 2011 (with activities ceasing in spring 2012). The reason for this decision is double. To begin with, the Italian government had to commit to a considerable public spending review while being under the harshest financial speculation attack ever since 1992. As a consequence, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (main donor of the project activities) failed to confirm its commitment to move from step three to step four of the programme, as step four required increasing budget resources. Few months later, the whole Italian government stepped down. The programme lost the support of the Foreign Affairs Minister Franco Frattini, one of the main sponsors of the UTV-SSPA consortium. Under the unfavourable economic circumstances, the new Italian government decided to suspend all activities of the programme, including training courses, study trips, scholarships, etc.

3. UTV capacity building programme facts and figures

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<td><strong>Duration</strong></td>
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26 The project is currently in stand-by as the main donor (the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs) suffered a sudden and decisive budget cut.  
27 Facts and figures are drawn from the official project documents.  
28 The figure represents the aggregate budget of all the approved programme activities.
4. **Assessing the UTV capacity building programme: strengths and weaknesses**

It is difficult to undertake a fair assessment of the outcomes of a programme which gets suspended prematurely. However, at the end of the two years of activities it is still possible to draw some conclusions on the proposed capacity building activities, both in terms of outcomes and processes. As a *caveat*, it is must be noticed that encouraging signs of improvement correcting initial weaknesses can be traced in the development of the project activities. However, the assessment can only take into consideration those activities that were effectively carried out and that produced concrete outcomes.

   a) **Strengths**

*Alignment with national priorities and key institutions* - The capacity building programme for the Afghan governance sector responded to the needs highlighted by the Public Administration Reform (PAR) process and by the Afghan National Development Strategy (Governance Cluster). The PAR process aimed at reducing the fragmentation of government structures across regions and ministries, and to reinforce procedures and accountability in the public service. Bearing this in mind, the design and development of the programme was conducted as a collective exercise. Representatives of the Afghan institutions sat together with the staff of UTV and the Italian Embassy in Kabul to provide decisive input. The main local institutions involved were the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (for the sectorial training), the Independent Administrative Reform Civil Service Commission (for all the other activities), and the Governorate of Herat (for the Western province activities). All in all, the main strength of the public management programme was to align its objectives to those of the national development policies and to be respectful of the role that national and local institutions were given in the institutional set-up of Afghanistan.

*Satisfaction of the beneficiaries* – Afghan trainees abroad can be very demanding and hard to satisfy. Yet, after an initial adaptation phase to different uses, customs and habits (in training and learning as well as in lifestyle and culture) both the trainers and the trainees considered their experience in the programme as satisfactory or highly satisfactory. A vast majority of the

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<td><strong>Type of Activities</strong></td>
<td>Training courses (study trips, lectures, workshops), Scholarships</td>
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<td><strong>Length of the Course</strong></td>
<td>8 weeks (training course), 6 months (scholarships)</td>
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<td><strong>N. of Beneficiaries</strong></td>
<td>55 civil servants (15 of whom from the Western Province)</td>
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<td><strong>N. of Local Partners</strong></td>
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beneficiaries evaluated the goals of the training course as being met and admitted to have improved their capacities to work in the public sector.

In their evaluation forms of the project activities, the beneficiaries stressed at least three main points of satisfactions:

1. The quality of the trainers. UTV staff worked to secure some of the best national and international trainers in the market. The Afghan trainees got the chance to learn from high ranked diplomats, prominent professors and experienced professionals of the public and private sectors alike.

2. The hands-on approach. The training activities always dedicated a considerable size of time to putting theoretical information into practice. Trainers were asked to prepare tailor made simulation games, workshops or interactive presentations to provide a continuous stimulus to the trainers’ attention.

3. The inter-cultural added value. Being away from their social and cultural context, most trainers (especially women) felt they had fewer constraints to interact with the trainers and the staff of the project on an equal basis with their colleagues.

_cost-effectiveness and budget execution_ – Although the average cost of EUR 20,000 per trained person might suggest otherwise, the money of the project activities was spent with caution for operational purposes. Most funds were spent to secure logistical arrangements for the trainees (board and accommodation during the course) and to recruit high level trainers from all over the world. Running costs (personnel and office costs), instead, had a negligible impact on the overall budget, especially if compared to those of SIDP or of other programmes run by expatriates in weak governance countries. Cost-effectiveness of the project activities was further confirmed by the absence in the budget lines of pocket money and sitting allowances for partners and beneficiaries. At odds with most of the international capacity building programmes in Afghanistan, the UTV programme refused to grant any monetary benefit to the trainees other than the training course itself. Finally, the project maximized the impact of available money with excellent budget execution rates. For all of the project activities the projects always reached levels between 85% and 100%.

b) Weaknesses

*Fragmented planning* – In highly fragile contexts, there can be many justifications for poor planning. In the case of this programme, at least two logical explanations can be found. First, pressure on delivering quick results arose as the whole international community insisted on the need to expedite the transition process and let the Afghan institutions be the masters of their national destiny. Second, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and government agreed to

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commit only to a short-term vision of development cooperation in Afghanistan, at least in the governance sector. The shortage of funds and the unstable financial perspectives of the Italian government did not allow for the construction of a consolidated programme document identifying baseline indicators, long-term timeframe, financial resources and expected results over time. With none of the donors of the programme committed to a financial support of above six months, planning operations always suffered from short-sight and chronic readjustments.

_Lack of project ownership_ – The underlying idea of a capacity building programme should be that by transferring capacities to the Afghan public sector, this latter would progressively grow capable of managing projects and associated resources. The proposal for training the trainers of the Herat University (step four) represented the first endorsement of a progressive ownership process including the following steps:

- Preparing selected trainers to give in-house courses
- Transfer teaching and training activities directly in the field
- Preparing administrative staff to run and report about project activities
- Transfer the majority of project management activities directly in the field

With step four remaining on paper, the programme failed to pursue any of the goals above. Although Afghan institutions have been consulted for the design and development of the programme since the beginning, all of the activities have always been run from remote (Rome). By the same token, the budget of the programme was never reported in any of the official figures of the Afghan government.

_Weak aid coordination amidst donors_ – The Italian support to the governance pillar of the ANDS was only one of many sources of international cooperation for the Afghan government. In such a crowded donor community, a good mechanism of aid coordination is a vital requirement towards achieving greater objectives. With this regard, the UTV capacity building programme had only limited interactions with other like-minded projects. The first sectorial training for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for instance, ended up targeting individuals who had already participated in international trainings or that were eligible for a wide array of internationally-funded programmes.²⁹

As such, the proliferation of similar activities duplicated the training offer without providing much of an added value. Sidelining the training on international relations and diplomacy, and

²⁹ Malaysia, India, Germany, Korea they all have or had capacity building programs extended to the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
adopting a narrower focus on public management and on the Western Province, the programme progressively reached out to unexplored areas of the Afghan public sector. Thus, only little time before suspension the programme was complementing, and not duplicating, the activities of the international community in the field of capacity building.

Weak follow-up and change management process — Training individuals in an unreceptive institutional context meets the only objective of putting someone capable in a highly dysfunctional environment. For this reason, good capacity building programmes do not end with the delivery of a training course certificate. Linking the individual’s acquisition of new skills to the possibility of putting them in practice is an essential pre-requisite to drive authentic change in the targeted administration. With this regard, the public management programme failed to set up a virtuous follow-up and change management process. Examples of activities that could have been run with a larger planning horizon include:

- Agree with partner institutions that the best trainees would get benefits (salary top-up, promotion, higher responsibilities) upon completion of the training programme;
- Organize de-briefing sessions with trainees sharing their lessons learnt with the members of the same unit-department upon come back;
- Help to re-profile positions within the unit-department to match the authentic skills of the staff with the working needs;
- Organize on-the-job training to assist people directly on their work site;
- Use trained individuals as liaison agents between the international community and the local institutions to implement international cooperation programmes;
- Raise awareness on the importance of lifelong learning programmes for civil servants.

To a small extent, the Herat component of the capacity building programme tried to set-up a follow-up plan for the trainees of the Western Province. However, the plan came late and had a negligible impact on the development of the budgeted programme activities.

Lessons Learnt

A famous quote from a Latin author says that making mistakes is human, but persisting in wrongdoing is diabolic. For this reason, the process of learning from past experience acquires crucial importance when looking at new areas of intervention. The experience of Somalia and Afghanistan certainly does not fully correspond to that of any other country specifically. Nonetheless, most of the problems encountered in developing capacities of fragile public administration systems will certainly have an impact on how new governance projects are drafted and managed in the Mediterranean region after the Arab spring.
To this end, it is worth to point out that sharing teachings from previous experience does not provide tailor made and ready-to-use solutions in new scenarios. On the contrary, the aim of this paper is to warn policy and decision makers about commonly repeated mistakes in planning and implementing capacity building programmes in fragile situations. In doing so, this paper concludes that building up successful programmes to stir change management processes in weak governance countries is an exercise of high complexity which demands, among others, more attention on the following 4 elements:

1. **Getting the phase of planning and management process right**

Getting the planning and process phase right is one of the main requirements in the guidebooks on project design and management. Planning is the activity which initiates the project cycle and, as such, it directly affects (positively or negatively) all the successful steps: implementation, evaluation, follow-up, etc. In the planning phase, a good project defines its objectives from short to long term, describes the project activities to achieve intermediate goals, gives precise estimates of necessary human and financial resources, provides indicators to monitor and evaluate the evolution of the project activities, etc.

The set-up of a management process can either be associated to the planning activities, or it can be part of a pre-emptive phase in which the partners of the project sit together and outline the rules of the game. A good project management process defines – among others – standard operating procedures (SOP), a responsibility assignment matrix (RAX) of the project partners and of the key figures involved, and the change management mechanism for both the SOP and the RAX. Planning a new intervention requires specific knowledge of the context in the target country. The project activities must be relevant to the national development priorities. As a consequence, project planning must be integrated with national and regional development plans and, possibly, be coordinated with other complementary or concurrent developmental programmes.

In the cases of Somalia and Afghanistan, the negligence on planning and management processes was one of the factors that negatively affected the capacity of the project activities to deliver on the expected results. SIDP, for instance, operated for over two years in the absence of a clear logical framework in which activities were linked to specific and measurable project objectives. By the same token, the operations of the UTV capacity building programme started in the absence of a scientific needs assessment of the targeted institutions and individuals. The fact that UTV has worked without a baseline study, and that the UNDP could live without a logical framework shall not indicate that the implementing agencies lacked the capacity of developing

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such tools. Rather, it is the sign that they did not pay enough attention to a key phase, that of planning and management process.\textsuperscript{31}

As a recommendation for further action, especially in large scale programmes, it could be noted the following: in the crowded world of consultancies, some of the biggest companies (Deloitte, McKenzie, etc.) can offer advice and support in planning and managing corporate processes. Without letting consulting companies take over the whole management of the project, it could be useful to recur to the services of specialized consultants when planning project activities or setting up management processes. Similarly, if sufficient information is not available for the planning phase, it is advisable to contract a specialized firm to carry out baseline studies providing comprehensive and scientifically valid needs assessment and project indicators. These preliminary steps are likely to require extra time before the project can move on from the planning phase to the following one. Yet, if there is a real interest in delivering qualitative performances, the planning phase and the management process cannot be neglected.

2. Moving from top-down to bottom-up perspective

The primary objective of the public sector – even in fragile situations - is to serve its citizens and to provide them with improved public services. In weak governance countries, with few exceptions, the people demand to their public sectors access to better services in the domain of education, health, justice, etc. In addition, while the central governments strive to improve national macro-economic indicators, households – especially in rural areas - seek protection and support for their livelihood activities (farming, livestock, and small businesses). The engagement of the international community in capacity building programmes for the governance sector takes into consideration all the demands of the people, who are (although indirectly) the real beneficiaries of interventions in the public sector. Still, the focus of governance programmes continues to rely mostly on developing responsive and efficient systems of governance and public administration.

The UTV capacity building programme, and even more SIDP, operated in the public sector of Somalia and Afghanistan from a top-down perspective. A top-down perspective puts at the centre of the project objectives the public institutions instead of the people. SIDP business, for instance, focused a lot on talking to politicians, ministries, directors general of the central government and very little to the periphery of the country where the people needed as many services as those in the centre. In Garowe, Hargeisa or Mogadishu, the civil society had no clue of why SIDP had been set up for. Even in many key ministries (Health and Education for instance), SIDP was unknown to the top managers. The UTV programme had a similar problem in the Kabul component of the project as the activities represented a drop in the ocean of development programmes. On the contrary, the Herat component of the project gained more

\textsuperscript{31} (probably due to the external pressure to move to the implementing phase too rapidly).
visibility and reached out to institutional and societal groups which would be have been unfairly neglected otherwise.

For further action, this paper recommends, especially in large scale programmes, to seek legitimization for governance programmes adopting a grassroots bottom-up perspective. For instance, involving NGOs, CSOs or traditional leaders in the definition of the project objectives and in the implementation of some of the activities would help linking the level of the civil service and the public institutions (direct beneficiary) to that of the people (indirect beneficiary).  

3. Enhance aid coordination and harmonize political agendas

There is a stark contrast between a political objective and a developmental one. For example, when a donor refuses to develop portions of the public sector because they are associated to a political foe, it is following a political logic. But developmental programmes, even in the governance sector, should keep away – to the largest possible extent – from political entanglements. Some donors, instead, have tendency to push for political agendas driven by national constituencies. This is a source of multiple problems:

- The donor engagement to the project activities might be volatile and conditional on the realization of the national interests (which might, in turn, be detrimental to the achievement of the developmental objectives);
- Donors could compete to impose their national interests by pursuing conflicting developmental policies and failing to coordinate on their aid interventions;
- Governance programmes can be looked at tools to satisfy high ranked politicians and public officials in exchange for other favours or benefits. In this case, the credibility of developmental objectives would be harmed along with the reputation of those in charge of managing the process.

SIDP was clearly the object of elevated political pressure from the donors. Brussels, for instance, insisted that SIDP had to support the TFG through provision of stipends to hundreds of politicians in Mogadishu, regardless of their productivity. London, instead, agreed to be one of the SIDP donors only if SIDP agreed, in exchange, to bind DFID funds to project activities in Somaliland. Rome, instead, agreed to similar conditionality clauses, as long as emphasis was put

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32 In Somalia, for instance, the capacity building activities of the international NGO Interpeace received a higher appreciation from the beneficiaries and local communities.

on Mogadishu. In sum, SIDP was seen as a sort of a “cash cow” to pursue nationally driven – often conflicting - developmental policies.

On the other hand, the UTV capacity development project did not fall victim of direct political interferences. Nonetheless, project activities suffered from another typical distortion effect that politics and mass-media bring into developmental policies. Following periods of deep crisis or war, some countries (like Afghanistan) got in the spotlight of political forums. As a consequence, large chunks of money are poured on the country regardless of its absorption capacities and reception structures. By the same token, money is withdrawn and programmes are shut down as soon as the political priorities of the donor have changed.

In this case, the suggestions are multiple. First of all, donors should try to pool resources to the highest possible extent to avoid fragmented action towards a common goal. Then in case of like-minded or complementary projects, it is crucial for donors to hold regular meetings, exchange information and, possibly, coordinate action. Aid coordination meetings, especially in fragile situations, should not be limited to useless talks. Instead, donors need an actor which displays leadership, pushes for a proper developmental agenda and follows up on action points to enhance aid productivity. With this regard, multilateral partners like the UN or the EU are better placed than the traditional bilateral donors as they provide natural frameworks to pursue coordinated action. Unfortunately all donors – including the UN and the EU – are subject to political pressure, but coordination forums are the best suited contexts to understand which donor is authentically committed to pursue a common goal, and which one is not.

4. Strike a balance between institutional and individual capacity building activities

Building capacities of an individual can be a straightforward endeavour. Very less so, it is to develop capacities and improve performances of civil servants in the context of a dysfunctional working environment. In order to make sure that capacity building steers virtuous mechanisms of change management in the target institution several factors – individual and institutional – have to be addressed at the same time. 34 In weak governance countries especially, the dimension of building and consolidating institutions needs to play a large role in the package of the proposed capacity building activities.

SIDP, at least in theory, had a considerable component of institutional capacity building activities. 35 But the theory was either badly put into practice, or not implemented at all. Therefore only minimal progress could be tracked in terms of institution building in Somalia. The UTV capacity building programme, instead, focused exclusively on individual capacity building. Being a smaller project mostly run from remote, the Italian programme lacked resources to take into consideration the larger institutional scenario. The trainees received teachings on how to

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35 See points a, d and e, at page 6 and 7.

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drive change management processes in the institutions, on how to organize devolution systems from the centre to the periphery and on how to improve their communication and leadership skills. Nothing else happened to facilitate the application of what was learned to real institutional processes.

All programmes, although small, can give their contributions to the institutional development of a country if well framed in the overall support and policy process. However, as a recommendation, capacity building programmes should always look at the global picture and strike a balance between individual and institutional activities. If the focus lies on one side only, then another complementary programme is needed to make the first programme effective.
Bibliography

a) Background documents


b) Case Study on Somalia


c) Case Study on Afghanistan


