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Knowledge, innovation and re-inventing technical assistance for development

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Abstract

This paper traces the evolution of Technical Assistance to Technical Co-operation, Knowledge Management and (perhaps) Innovation Systems. Originally conceived as transfer from a knowledge-rich North to a knowledge-poor South, the later terminology represents a more co-operative and dialogic conception. In this it has been driven by persistent issues concerning capacity and knowledge-in-context and by changes in thinking about development practice generally. Do, however, these terminology changes represent reframing of practice? The paper argues that a further epistemological turn is needed that conceives of co-operative learning as 'learning with', and of difference as a resource rather than a problematic divide.

Key words: Technical Assistance, Technical Co-operation, Knowledge Management, Innovation Systems, learning, difference.

1 Introduction

Antecedents can be traced throughout history (Keenleyside, 1952; Morgan, 2002: 1), but technical assistance (TA) for international development was formally invented, along with the United Nations (UN), at the end of World War 2, and given impetus in the inaugural address of US President Truman in 1949 (Owen, 1950). Conceived then by the UN as furnishing expert advice to member nations which require assistance, a technical assistance programme was launched with great fanfare and a modest budget.

Subsequently a special agency of the UN – the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) – was established to deliver TA (Mathiasen III, 1968). Multilateral and bilateral agencies of Overseas Development Aid also set up Programmes, but TA soon ran into sustained criticism as it often failed to deliver on promises (Ibid.; Blase, 1968; Berg, 1993; Morgan, 2002). The nature of TA thus changed in response to these criticisms, particularly those that pointed to the difficulty of transferring and absorbing knowledge across socio-cultural contexts.

TA is now also known as technical cooperation (TC), perhaps signalling a more equal, interactive relationship between giver and receiver. It has also responded to changing ideas about development practice generally. For example, stakeholder 'participation' is used to help address issues of context. Since the 1990s its aims have been distilled as 'capacity building'(UNDP, 1997). This century there is a sense that TA/TC is eliding with 'knowledge management' (GTZ, 2006; UNDP, 2005). Meanwhile, 'innovation systems' has entered the development literature where the idea of innovation as knowledge for productive use (Chataway et al, 2005) has much similarity with the basic conception of TA/TC. UNDP still exists, however, with an annual income of US$4billion in 2005 (UNDP, 2005) but uses the term less and less. The term TA/TC might, therefore, be falling out of general use among development agencies. It needs asking, however, whether the practices that are signalled by the new language are becoming reframed and are finally getting to grips with issues that plagued TA/TC for so long.

The argument of this paper is presented principally in the context of UNDP and its predecessors in the field. This is not to ignore other major actors, such as the World Bank, the European Union and the German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), nor the numerous bilateral and NGO initiatives that might come under the heading. Rather, it is in recognition of the wealth of literature, much of it self-

generated, which exists on the UN Programmes. While also recognising the differences between UNDP and other agencies, it is nevertheless suggested that the broad trends that I describe below have been typical of the TA/TC movement as a whole.

The paper starts with the early and recent histories of TA/TC since those optimistic days following World War 2, tracing the claims, critiques and responses to the critiques. In so doing it also locates the evolving conceptualisation within changing dominant ideas about the means and ends of development intervention. It then examines TA/TC within knowledge management and innovation systems frameworks, assessing their potential contribution to a reframing of development practice..

2 The early history of TA: from optimism to criticism

The beginnings of TA as an instrument of development assistance have been described by David Owen (1950) who, as head of the then UN Economic Affairs Department and senior officer principally concerned with 'the organisation of technical assistance for economically underdeveloped countries', was well-placed to offer insights. His 1950 paper traced the original initiative to the first ever session of the UN General Assembly in 1946 which instructed its Economic and Social Council to 'study ways and means of furnishing, in cooperation with the specialised agencies, expert advice to member nations which desire assistance'. Justification for this resolution and instruction was sought in the UN Charter, especially Articles 55 and 56 in which Member nations pledge themselves to joint action to promote 'higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development'. Owen, however, provided further justification in terms of the 'overriding duty' of the UN to 'promote peace and security throughout the world', a justification which resonates with contemporary debates. As he articulated:

> Clearly, it would be a short-sighted attitude to assume that all that this requires is for the United Nations to act as a kind of world policeman. If we are to have real and stable peace, genuine security, we must attempt to eradicate the conditions which lead to international unrest and friction. In short we must seek to create a healthy international society. This necessarily implies long-term effort in the economic and social fields as well as the political field.

Through 1947 and 1948 the term 'technical assistance' came to be used to describe the help offered and the General Assembly instruction came to fruition at its Third Session in December 1948. For the UN, TA contained four basic components:

> To arrange for the organisation of international expert missions to underdeveloped countries
>
> To provide fellowships abroad for training experts from underdeveloped countries
>
> To send international experts to underdeveloped countries to train local technicians
>
> To disseminate technical information, including publications and seminars.

In terms of operation it was stressed that technical assistance was not to 'be a means of foreign economic and political interference in the internal affairs of the country concerned and… not be accompanied by any considerations of a political nature'. It was only to be given to and through governments, provided 'so far as possible in the form in which the country desires it' and 'of high quality and technical competence' (ibid.).

Owen also recorded that during 1949, the first full year of operation, $300,000 was disposed of, and that the budget for 1950 was $700,000. In 1949, however, US President Truman's inaugural address raised the stakes when, as his Fourth Point, he 'outlined a great program of technical assistance to the underdeveloped world', to be operated 'where practical' through the United Nations and its specialised agencies, though Owen also noted that 'it was well understood that there would be great expansion of bilateral programs of technical assistance directly administered by the United States'.

Nevertheless it fell to Owen as the chief UN person concerned with technical assistance to organise this impetus into an 'expanded program… to be operated by all the Members of the United Nations and of the specialised agencies working together'. To this end he was organising a 'great Technical Assistance Conference… at which some 73 countries were expected to inaugurate the Expanded Program of Technical Assistance to underdeveloped countries'. From this conference he expected the UN TA budget to rise to $20-25 millions (ibid.).

Owen's account of the origins of TA is useful in that it gives insight to the underlying epistemological assumptions that underpinned the conception. This was to be essentially a programme of linear knowledge transfer from the developed world where expertise resided to countries where expertise was lacking. It was moreover intended to be apolitical in content and process, and a major contribution to a modernising project for the 'underdeveloped countries'. He ended his 1950 paper as follows:

> … the program of technical assistance is a practical, business-like way of preparing the ground for great projects of capital development which will be necessary in the future if the standards of life of the underdeveloped countries are to be raised. It is a scheme which will teach people at a low level of technical culture some of the elements which will have to be mastered if great economic problems are to be solved. It is a means of educating the people of the world regarding the hard realities which must be faced and overcome if their standards of life are to be sensibly raised.

Nevertheless, Owen (ibid.) also highlighted three fundamental issues, or conditions for success, which anticipate later critiques:

> Firstly, the charge that TA may be perceived, 'no matter how benevolent the intentions', by 'popular groups' in receiving countries as having the purpose of 'foreign economic domination'. Allied to this point, Owen stressed the need to have 'genuine cooperation between the nations of the world to provide help and to receive help'.

> Secondly, 'the danger of a one-sided approach to the solutions of the technical problems which the [expert] mission encounters… which have proved successful in their own country, though in many cases these solutions are not necessarily compatible with the social and political structure of the recipient'.

> Thirdly, the danger of taking a short-term view: 'It is a scheme which will not produce sensational results in a short period of time… this is a scheme that will take decades rather than years to reach fruition.'

For Owen, however, the UN was well-placed to meet at least the first two of these challenges because of its international nature, in contrast to bilateral TA which

would be more prone to charges of developed country ulterior motives. Also bilateral TA would be poorly positioned to accommodate underdeveloped country socio-cultural contexts because it could only make available a limited range of techniques, representing the providing developed country's own particular technical culture. Owen clearly saw the international UN, on the other hand, as having a box of techniques from a range of countries where 'it is possible to pick and choose those techniques which are most suited to the peculiar conditions in the social heritage of the recipient countries' (ibid.).

The challenge of accommodating TA-recipient social context was enthusiastically taken up from an anthropological perspective by Métraux (1951), Head of the Division for the Study of Race Relations at the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO):

> Contacts between a team of technicians and a community with a different tradition and holding different values may be difficult to establish, and may provoke misunderstanding of all kinds. The expert must learn to respect past traditions, and be ready to work through existing patterns, utilizing to the full inherent potentialities. It will often be well to present a new idea as improvement on an older method, not only because this is psychologically sound, but also because such improvements may be better than an entirely new method.

Métraux thus made a call for the full involvement of social scientists in the technical assistance effort. Cultural anthropologists particularly, he stated, were essential for exploratory and advisory missions to provide the necessary background for any development project. In short they were needed for finding out about the receiving population. Also, evaluations of the results of a development scheme would fall upon social scientists generally, 'as far as general living conditions are to be assessed'.

Another UN insider, Keenleyside (1952) had a different take, however, on the challenge of providing context-appropriate technical assistance. He felt it required finding the right experts. Indeed the 'gravest problem' lay in finding enough qualified people:

The men and women who are selected to carry the knowledge of the scientific, industrialised, socially progressive world to the governments and peoples who desire this form of aid belong to a very specialised category. They should be persons of distinguished reputation [to give them legitimacy in the eyes of recipient countries]… In addition to technical competence, the UN expert must be a person of unusual human qualities… a person of broad human interests, and infused with some measure of the missionary spirit…

For Keenleyside, these special qualities would also help deal with 'senior members of a [recipient] government service who, in general, will be sensitive and perhaps a little suspicious'. Echoing Owen's concern two years earlier, he stressed that no ammunition should be given to 'those who profess to see in the present programmes merely a disguised form of economic imperialism'. In terms of personal behaviour, this meant the expert definitely not showing 'any suggestion of impatience, any indication of a feeling of superiority, or any assumption of authority'.

Keenleyside also had the temerity to suggest that technical assistance programmes were driven less by altruism and more through enlightened self-interest on the part of the 'great industrial and commercial powers', with a view to expanding markets in the underdeveloped world. His main point, however, which set him aside from the other early commentators quoted, but which again anticipated later critiques, concerned the weak capacity of underdeveloped countries to receive and assimilate TA:

There is… the exceedingly difficult situation that is created by the administrative weakness of many of the governments of the underdeveloped countries… This weakness may be the result of inexperience, corruption, the general backwardness of the national economy, the primitive cultural structure, personal incompetence, or any combination of these. (ibid.)

These early concerns did not stop TA from taking off. In 1962 the definition was sharpened by the 12th International Congress of the International Institute of the Administrative Sciences in Vienna which explicitly emphasised technical assistance as the 'transmission of learning, knowledge and techniques' (quoted in Mathiasen, 1968). In 1965 the Expanded Program of Technical Assistance which at the time had 1500 projects in 130 countries, and the smaller UN Special Fund were merged

to form the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) which survives to this day. The main difference between the Expanded Program and the Special Fund was that the former gave assistance to any member country that asked for it, whereas the latter concentrated on UN-determined priority projects.

The early concerns had not gone away, however. On the contrary they sharpened as programmes persistently fell short of expectations. By the late 1960s there was a significant chorus of complaint according to Mathiasen (ibid.) who noted that while programmes 'continue to grow… persistent questions are raised about their effectiveness by practitioners and academic observers'. The early concerns were also crystallised by Mathiasen (ibid.), where he:

> Emphasised the difficulties of accommodating local context within the knowledge transfer framework, referring to a 'growing sense that knowledge and ideas cannot be quickly – or usefully – transferred across cultural and scientific boundaries'. Practitioners of TA were thus exhorted to become learners themselves through 'experimentation, evaluation and research' which would enable them to meet the challenge of institutionalising TA within diverse local settings.

> Suggested that where suitable local institutions did not exist they would have to be built. Institution-building would also have to go hand in hand with human resource development if recipient countries were to develop the capacity to articulate their own priorities and assimilate TA.

> Argued that the results of TA were always in the first instance intangible, such as new methods of thinking and improved skills, which made problematic evaluation through measurable outcomes of the huge variety of largely short-term projects that comprise TA.

> Further argued that the UN Expanded Program especially continued to comprise short-term projects directed at targets of opportunity, without any consistent thread. 'Gap filling' entered the lexicon to describe this situation.

Demanded that agencies engaged in TA take 'more seriously the selection, training and assignment' of their staff, as well as provide proper career incentives.

The theme of institution-building was common in the late 1960s, with some authors being less circumspect than Mathiasen. Thus, Blase (1968) put most of the blame of TA's poor performance at the door of the 'host institutions' of the recipient countries, who needed to mobilise will, opportunity and means, what in the 1990s came to be known as capacity. He also cautioned about paying too much regard to 'national value systems', suggesting that 'some customs may be straw men which will melt when subjected to dramatic results as a consequence of change initiated by technical assistance personnel'. And if there was resistance to TA from recipients, this called for (unspecified) 'new tactics, if not new strategy'.

Despite the difference in tone of their papers, Mathiasan and Blase never questioned the premise of technical assistance which remained, as at the time of its inception, conceptualised as linear transfer from a knowledge-rich developed world to a knowledge-poor underdeveloped world. The literature was overwhelmingly still about how best to improve the effectiveness of this transfer, where there were two major problems to crack. Firstly, the knowledge elite of the developed world had also to become a learning elite (Wilson, 2006) in order to find out how to transfer their knowledge across cultural and societal boundaries. Secondly, institutions had to be built in the underdeveloped world so that recipient countries could both articulate their needs and develop the capacity to assimilate technical assistance. Attempts to address these two problems have continued to the present day.

3 The recent history of TA: from assistance to cooperation and further critique

How to find out effectively about local context became an important influence on the growth and eventual mainstreaming in the late 1990s of participatory approaches to development intervention. According to Morgan (2002: 9) 'the value of participation [in TA] was recognised in the 1970s and 1980s'. This was the period of early work on participation, where finding out about local context through engagement between 'outsiders' and 'insiders' was explicitly recognised by Chambers (1994) in the creation of his 'Rapid Rural Appraisal' tool for development workers. With respect to TA, there were complementary calls for 'new approaches' which increase interaction

between Research and Development institutions and Users (Gamser, 1988), while the German Agency for Technical Co-operation (GTZ) introduced its Goal Oriented Planning Tool (ZOPP) in the 1980s, which emphasises community participation (Hill, 2002).

Such an operational view of participation, however, has always been in tension with its 'radical roots' in empowerment (Cleaver, 1999), roots which can be found in the work of Freire (1972). The tension is also apparent in the recent TA literature that refers to participation. Thus Pratt (2002: 106) comments on the 'instrumental' approach to participation to 'ensure the better delivery of externally designed and managed programmes' while Singh (2002: 57) states:

> Stakeholder participation, by itself, however extensive and successful, does not lead to empowerment. Very often stakeholder consultations are just that: stakeholders are consulted and their views noted, but then the consultants and managers get on with designing and implementing the TCI [technical cooperation initiative].

Whatever the arguments, a participation-informed approach to finding out about context , along with other measures put in place from the1970s to 1990s, made little difference to the performance of TA on its own terms (Morgan, 2002: 10). During the 1990s, however, a general shift in development agency thinking about the purpose of participation emerged. Rather than being a means for finding out about local context, it became a mechanism whereby aid-recipient countries found out for themselves in order to take ownership of their own priorities (Stiglitz, 1999; Wilson, 2006). Nowhere has this been better illustrated than in the World Bank/IMF inspired Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) that these agencies require aid-recipient governments to prepare, their fundamental aim being to foster country ownership of policies (Brown, 2004: 237-51). As one Managing Director of the IMF has stated:

> We don't impose conditions on governments… If a program were to be imposed from outside, its chances to be fulfilled, to be implemented, would be minimal. For a program to have its chances, it has to be seen as really the program of the country, elaborated by the country. (cited in Woods, 2000).

The issue of ownership is highlighted in the specific context of TA by Morgan, who describes it and country motivation as remaining the 'greatest single determinants of TA effectiveness' (2002: 8). Later he describes an emerging approach to TA that involves 'restructuring of organisational relationships to encourage country ownership of its own development interventions and those of IDOs [International Development Organisations]' (ibid: 17). This and other related measures he refers to as collaborative or pooled TA (ibid.), while Ajayi and Jerome (2002: 36) invoke another word that has established itself in the development lexicon in recent years – 'partnership':

> Enabling the country to assume this 'driver's seat' implies strong partnership among government, civil society, the donors, the private sector, the international development agencies and other development actors.

The language of cooperation and partnership (Hill, 2002) and the extension of partnership to ownership (Ibid; Fukuda-Parr et al, 2002: 14) have also led to a change in nomenclature, from technical assistance to technical cooperation (although the original term is still widely used) to denote a claimed more equal relationship between giver and receiver.

The second problem that emerged from the 1960s -- the ability of underdeveloped countries to identify their own problems and assimilate technical assistance -- combined with the issue of ownership into a generalised critique of TA/TC in the 1990s. In this it was informed by another general development trend – that of capacity-building. Thus, Sagasti (1997) wrote of a capacity divide in relation to knowledge, and its corollary, the need for capacity-building:

> The capacity to acquire and generate knowledge in all its forms… has been the most important factor in the improvement of the human condition… The great divide between those peoples who have the capacity to generate and utilize knowledge and those who do not could become an impassable abyss.

Within UNDP, reports have been produced, taking as their starting point a book (Berg, 1993) that sought to 'rethink' TA/TC in terms of capacity building. Thus a 1997 UNDP report claimed that 'Capacity development is becoming the central

purpose of technical cooperation in the 1990s', with the overall aim of supporting long-term self-management (UNDP, 1997: iii).Then, between 2001 and 2003, a UNDP initiative 'Reforming Technical Cooperation' alone resulted in three books, all of which had capacity building as a central theme. The initiative has since culminated in 'Capacity 2015' where UNDP engages in partnerships to build local capacities in order to help meet the 2015 Millennium Development Goals. Away from the UN, meanwhile, Martin (2002) has called for a move towards 'capacity building' TA, while critiquing a World Bank Programme in Cambodia for being stuck at 'stage 1' or 'substitution' TA, which creates a vicious circle of dependence.

Emanating from the post-development school, however, is a critique that posits a far less benign purpose for TA or TC, a purpose that the language of capacity building, partnership and ownership attempts to disguise, but nevertheless promotes. The critique can be traced back to the earliest days of TA and the concerns of Owen and his contemporaries discussed earlier that TA might be perceived as a form of foreign domination or economic imperialism. For Owen and his contemporaries, these concerns resulted from understandable sensitivities of recipient countries but had no substance and the debate was about how to allay them. These senior UN officers were witnessing an era of mass decolonisation and of course newly independent countries would have such concerns and suspicions. But they could be addressed by a truly international body (the UN) taking charge of technical assistance (Owen, 1950), by ensuring that cultural anthropologists were included in expert missions (Métraux, 1951) or by choosing the right kind of chap as your expatriate expert (Keenleyside, 1952).

For post-developmentalists in the 1990s, however, these attempts to allay fears were, and still are, the issue. The real purpose of TA/TC was to present deeply political and ideological issues as politically neutral technical problems, and in so doing keep them within a hegemonic framework of a neo-liberal capitalist view of the world. In this they were led by Ferguson's (1990: 256) analysis of international development agencies in Lesotho, while writing directly about TA a few years later in the Post-Development Reader, de Senarclens (1997: 195) commented, 'Attempts are still being made to present technical assistance as if its purpose transcended ideological and political options… This assistance mentality derives from the technocratic bias of those in power'. TA/TC has also been taken up by Cooke (2004: 607) within his claim that the term helps Development Administration and Management to represent itself as 'technocratically neutral, with the words

"assistance" and "co-operation" implying a non-existent parity of power between the technical helpers and the helped'.

While recognising these arguments, they present a depressing view, failing to recognise the opportunities for learning and agency that arise out of human interactions, even those that are labelled technical assistance or co-operation. Before progressing this point, however, I will explore briefly a related idea of some contemporary fashion in development, that of knowledge management (KM) which suggests parallel issues, but also potential ways forward.

4 Knowledge management and TA/TC

Although I have argued above that TA/TC has always been about knowledge, the word did not take centre-stage in development discourse and social development policy until the 1990s (Fisher and Holland, 2003), a decade which McGrath and King (2004), while ignoring the preceding 40-plus years of TA, have described as the decade of 'knowledge-based aid'. McGrath and King further argue that a new account of knowledge for development has emerged, led by the World Bank, whose annual report for 1998/99 'Knowledge for Development', began with the now much quoted words:

> Knowledge is like light. Weightless and intangible, it can easily travel the
> world, enlightening the lives of people everywhere. Yet billions of people
> still live in the darkness of poverty – unnecessarily. (World Bank, 1999: 1).

Thus today, discussion about knowledge for development is common-place. For example, in 2001 the UNDP annual report mentioned the word three times, in 2002 there were 11 instances, 14 in 2003, 19 in 2004, and 26 in 2005. The UNDP 2005 report also contains a section titled 'Knowledge: a world of shared solutions'. Meanwhile, GTZ is highlighting 'Knowledge powers development' as its 2006 theme. Within the literature, the Journal of Knowledge Management devoted a special issue to KM and development in 2002 and followed up with a further special issue in 2004 on knowledge cities and development. Owen's 1950 original justification for technical assistance in terms of world peace and security is also echoed in KM language in the 2002 special issue by Malone and Yohe (2002).

The 1998/99 World Bank report followed its opening statement by identifying two types of knowledge problems in developing countries: *knowledge about technology*

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or technical knowledge or know-how; and *knowledge about attributes*, such as the quality of a product or the diligence of a worker, or the creditworthiness of a firm, which the World Bank called *information problems*.

This classification, and indeed the report's opening statement, was soon critiqued for treating knowledge as a commodity that could be bought, sold, given or transferred. Instead, it was argued, that knowledge is not a 'thing', but has dynamic tacit properties that are context specific and which make simple notions of transfer problematic (e.g. Chataway and Wield, 2000). This inherent difficulty of transferring from one context to another of course echoes the concern with technical assistance from its earliest days and the same point has been made in the KM literature. For example, in the special issue of the Journal of Knowledge Management referred to above, Mansell (2002) has argued, in the context of information and communication technologies, that information (which can be codified) must not be confused with knowledge and that information must be applied in the context of user experiences if it is to contribute to relevant knowledge.

The issue of capacity in developing country institutions to make use of TA/TC also has its parallels in the same literature. Pavitt (2002) for example argues that all countries don't have equal knowledge and there must be deliberate investment in activity to improve knowledge deficits. Arghyris and Schön's (1996) much quoted paper that argues that organisations need to learn how to learn is an early conceptualisation of this issue in terms of organisational learning. Again in the special issue of the Journal of Knowledge Management, Escribá-Esteve and Urral-Urbieta (2002) quote Argyris and Schön while Laszlo and Laszlo (2002) make the general statement that the wealth of nations depends on the abilities and intellect of their citizens. In the 2004 follow-up special issue of the same journal, Ergazakis et al (2004) state that to succeed in their aim, 'knowledge cities' require political will, clear strategic vision, technological level and capability. In each paper, the basis is that the knowledge receiver needs to put in conscious effort to be able to absorb, assimilate and create knowledge.

Turning to the KM frameworks that have been developed, the evolution in TA/TC from the 1950s has its parallels in first and second order knowledge management described for example by McElroy (2000), and extended into third order KM by Laszlo and Laszlo (2002). First order knowledge management is a technical process of sharing existing knowledge. This might be likened to the early conception of TA,

although with respect to the latter it was in even more limited form as the knowledge sharing was one way. Second and third order knowledge management, however, focuses more on human relations in a process of knowledge innovation, that is creating new knowledge for what 'could be' (second order KM) or 'should be' (third order KM). The need first for TA experts themselves to learn about local context, and second for TA/TC recipients to learn in order to take ownership can be seen as a half-way house towards second or third order KM, where the primary stakeholders are learning *from* their engagements. This isn't quite, however, what McElroy with his emphasis on continuous learning and enhancing conditions for creativity, or Laszlo and Laszlo with their evolutionary knowledge through co-operation, had in mind. Their implication at least was that different stakeholders would learn *with* each other and hence create new knowledge together. This raises the issue of whether a further movement is possible in TA/TC.

5 From 'learning from' to 'learning with'

Generally, the literatures on knowledge creation and second and third order KM through stakeholder engagement do not distinguish between 'learning from' and 'learning with' each other. In the former, the stakeholders are likely to learn things that are already known by those they are learning from, whereas in the latter their learning jointly creates knowledge. Learning 'from' and 'with' are not, however, mutually contradictory and both processes can occur simultaneously, and indeed feed each other, in the same engagement. For example, Johnson and Wilson (2006) have studied Uganda-UK municipal practititioner-to-practitioner partnerships that were conceptualised as technical cooperation. They found that UK officers learned from the Uganda officers about how things are done in a cash-strapped environment and about 'another culture'. The Ugandan officers learned from the UK officers various technical skills and broader skills related to 'best practice' (e.g. time management). However, there were also instances where the two sets of officers learned with each other – one prime example being to learn together the importance of public engagement in proposed activities such as traffic management schemes.

The notion of 'learning with' stems from Habermas' 'ideal speech situation' (1990), with its emphasis on genuine dialogue between actors, where different knowledges are valued as a source of creative learning and hence new knowledge (Wilson, 2006). This isn't to play down the well-rehearsed point that difference also signifies a power relation between actors, but, like Young (cited in Harvey, 1993: 105) the challenge is to develop institutions that promote respect for group differences

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'without oppression'. In other words, rather than as a problematic divide between, for example, 'western' and 'indigenous' knowledge, that precludes dialogue (Briggs, 2005), difference is approached as a resource for learning and knowledge creation.

The 1960s TA/TC critics got it right therefore in their general call for institution-building, but wrong in their primary focus on underdeveloped country institutions. Building institutions that are capable of assimilating TA/TC might be necessary, but is not sufficient in two areas. Firstly, the 'providers' of TA need also to develop institutional norms that value and reward a mindset which is concerned with collaborative behaviour and which is not rooted in claimed superior knowledge. Secondly, equally needed are institutions that are concerned with the relation between TA stakeholders which promote norms of dialogue and more generally the conditions for knowledge creativity for which McElroy, cited above, calls.

Much of the more recent TA/TC literature does indeed refer to dialogue as the key process, for example Singh's call for 'constructive dialogue' (2002: 57) and Morgan's statement:

> Achieving effectiveness derives critically from trust, open dialogue and the transparency of information and actions… Hopefully incentive patterns will start to reward IDOs [International Development Organisations] for inclusive rather than individualistic behaviour. (2002: 17).

The same sentiments are also expressed by McGrath and King (2004), although, as noted above, these authors refer to 'knowledge-based aid' rather than TA/TC.

Common themes in the above and other accounts are those of trust and incentives. Neither can be assumed nor expected. The former is often seen as the basis for dialogue, because only when there is trust between them will actors be able to explore openly their differences and ideas together (Wilson, 2006). Elements of trust might exist a priori in certain characteristic-based relationships (Zucker, 1986), such as relationships through family or ethnic ties, but in general, including in Technical Assistance, it has to be worked at, through repeated engagement between actors, developing shared values and assumptions -- what Habermas (quoted in Fischer, 2003: 199) calls a 'background consensus' – and through joint activity.

Both networks and partnerships feature as the institutional forms for the relations between stakeholders that foster repeated engagement, shared values and dialogue in contemporary development practices, including TA/TC. Thus the preamble to the 2005 UNDP annual report states:

> UNDP is the UN's global network, advocating for change and connecting countries to knowledge, experience and resources to help people build a better life.

Page 10 of the same report states that UNDP will help countries seize their opportunities:

> … by developing capacity, sharing knowledge, working in partnerships and advocating that we work together to reach the MDGs.

Partnerships and networks are not mutually exclusive forms. Neither does either guarantee norms of dialogue and creative behaviour. Many partnerships or networks are not even set up for such purposes. Whatever names are accorded a relationship, these norms still have to be developed, otherwise the names remain abstractions divorced from the reality they attempt to describe.

Institutions are also about incentives for behaviours to match the norms and this is another area that has received attention in the TA/TC and knowledge-for-development literatures. McGrath and King (2004) argue that the fundamental nature of aid bureaucracies and the aid mentality acts as a disincentive for other behaviours and makes any notion of transformation impossible. Smith (2005) suggests that there is a powerful incentive towards 'technical fixes' in the expectation that they will provide quick, simple solutions to problems. In terms of attempted positive actions, there have been some moves to supplement salary levels among civil servants engaged in TA in receiving countries, although this is seen as distorting and probably doing more harm than good (Ajaji and Afekhena, 2002: 39). Morgan (2002: 13-14) considers professional ethos and development to be a significant incentive, a point also made by Johnson and Wilson (2006), quoted above in relation to their empirical work on Uganda-UK practitioner to practitioner municipal partnerships. Hauge (2002: 73-94) links incentives to effective accountability and ultimately governance structures.

So, despite all the criticisms, is TA/TC worth re-inventing as a third generation, value driven, dialogic process of 'learning with' for the purpose of 'what should be'? Some critics within UNDP itself would rather the word 'technical' were dropped. Fukuda-Parr et al (2002: 3), for example, state that 'technical' refers to transfer of skills and systems, adding that it would have been useful to find a substitute because of its science and technology connotations, when most TC is in non-technical areas such as education, governance and judicial reform. 'Technical' in the sense of Fukuda-Parr et al. might be defined therefore as a body of institutional routines for getting a job done. It is about 'know what' and 'know-how' but has little sense of 'know-why'. This is a meaning that is shared by the post-development critique of TA/TC in that it then becomes a mechanism for an instrumental approach to development intervention that de-politicises an essentially political process by closing down options.

The original meaning associated with 'technical', however, is the art of practical application (*The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, 1998), and can apply to any arena of development intervention. 'Art' is a fluid, creative process, moreover, that potentially opens options. Perhaps a re-invented TA/TC should reclaim this meaning, especially as a collaborative art that involves knowledge creation through 'learning with' alongside 'learning from'. TA/TC, after all, always has been an engagement between actors. Originally conceived as a relationship for linear knowledge flow from knower to learner it had limited value, but the more recent ideas of dialogue and collaboration have loosened the 'rules' of this engagement which becomes less predictable as a result. In the micro-dynamics of TA/TC stakeholder engagement, there is thus a space for active agents to 'make and shape' (Cornwall and Gaventa, 2000) relevant knowledge creation through their differences (Gould, 1996: 173). TA/TC, moreover, is also ultimately about practice, a further potential source of joint and evolving learning. Practice is the one sure way of interacting tacit and explicit knowledge as a learning process (Smith, 2005), and a similar point is made in relation to iterative, participatory practice (Sanderson and Kindon, 2004). It is not too far-fetched to claim any of this as an art.

The learning approach that is associated especially with second and third order knowledge management and which now finds its way into the framing of TA/TC has been a key theme for development practice through the 1990s and into the current century. It resonates with Van der Velden's (2002: 34) 'generative learning' through sharing different knowledges, Rihani's (2005) application of complexity theory, in

which development is an 'uncertain process of exploration [involving] adaptability, survival and learning', and with Cole's (2005) interdependent social individuals for whom reflection and learning are key. Wenger's (Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al, 2000) concept of communities of practice for collective learning has also started to spread beyond its original business domain.

A learning approach may mean many things, however, from short-term outside-expert evaluations to more collaborative and long-term processes. We should, therefore, heed Owen's (1950) warning that (reinvented) TA 'is a scheme that will take decades rather than years to reach fruition' and Mathiasen's (1968) view that the results of TA up to that point had been always in the first instance intangible such as new methods of thinking and improved skills (a view also supported empirically by Johnson and Wilson (2006) referred to above). Both Owen's and Mathiasen's comments suggest that standard evaluations of measurable outcomes that are demanded by donors are inappropriate and what is required is a more continuous process of learning, challenge and re-learning. As Rihani (2005) notes of development itself, this is not a 'sprint to a preordained destination'.

Moving towards a 'learning with' conception, therefore, might indeed be a fruitful way of reinventing TA/TC, despite there being indications that it is becoming reinvented out of existence as a term, at least in UNDP (the World Trade Organisation, however, appears unreconstructed in its use – see ICTSD/iisd, 2005: 43). As reported above, knowledge is now a common word in UNDP annual reports, and 'knowledge management' even makes its first entry (on two occasions) into the 2005 report. Technical Assistance, however, has hardly been referred to at all in the annual reports of this century – once in 2001, nothing in 2002, twice in 2003, once in 2004 and nothing in 2005. Technical Co-operation does make an entry into the 2005 report (there are no entries in the 2001-2004 reports), but only as the English translation of the German Agency GTZ. It could be that TA/TC as a label is quietly dissolving, already re-inventing itself in the major agencies as knowledge management or 'something-else'.

6   Beyond knowledge regimes

What might this 'something else' be? A strong candidate is 'innovation systems'. The resonance of innovation generally with TA/TC is strong and is not new (e.g. Gamser, 1988). It has been reinforced, however, by the more recent interest in innovation *systems* and development. Ayele and Wield (2005), for example, argue

that knowledge generation and application is non-linear, inter-connected and multi-agency, hence the term 'innovation systems.' Similarly, Hall (2005) refers to innovation as putting knowledge to productive use and notes the many sources of knowledge and of knowledge creation. Examining agricultural biotechnology in developing countries, he concludes that there are many innovation 'systems' in the arena that include for example a network of international research centres, pro-poor participatory groupings of farmers, agri-business and development agencies. The challenge is to complement and integrate their ways of producing and using knowledge.

In this, Hall (ibid.) is keen to counter criticisms that innovation systems is a theory of 'everybody working with everybody on everything', and therefore not sufficiently policy relevant in science, technology and innovation planning. Recognition that there are complementary systems, he argues, helps break out of unhelpful dichotomies, such as old and new, insider and outsider, participatory/partnership- and science-led knowledges. More, the point is to achieve synergy.

The innovation systems literature in general, and Hall in particular, is useful in that it alerts us to the challenge of scale and of working across scales. The TA/TC literature, in contrast, has generally limited itself to how experts or expert teams can assist/transfer to/learn from and with people in a single institution, which for UNDP has been usually government. Such a boundaried approach misses an important dimension of how knowledge and its application are created by a plethora of interlocking institutions and people.

Each of these institutions will, to greater or lesser extent, have established its own background consensus which at one level informs the values, rules and behaviour that make it an institution, but at another level enables dialogue between its members, and learning from and with each other. When institutions interact with each other, however, whether horizontally with another Government department or vertically with, say, a citizens' group, a different background consensus will need to be established that enables them to function together. Sometimes there might exist a basis for this: the people from the different institutions might all be scientists, for example. In the case of Johnson and Wilson's (2006) Uganda-UK municipal partnerships, they were all local government officers sharing a problem-solving mindset. Equally, however, there might not be such a basis and the background consensus must be built from scratch, but a starting point must also be respect for

each constituent stakeholder group and its way of thinking. The premise of respect for difference is fundamental to operationalising it as a resource.

Conclusion

Technical assistance (and later technical cooperation), knowledge management and innovation systems are each at root concerned with marshalling knowledge. With TA/TC this has been, since inception in the 1940s, explicitly for development. For KM in the 1990s and to the present day it has been for whatever purpose might be defined, including development. Innovation systems, meanwhile, concern marshalling knowledge for productive use, which again includes development.

So what's new? The early writers on TA asked questions about the difficulty of transferring knowledge across context, about the capacities of clients to receive, and about the 'soft' skills required of donors to deliver, knowledge. These questions are still with us, in the later iterations of TA/TC and in the current interest in knowledge management and innovation systems.

What has changed is that we know much more about these questions and the problem itself has also been reframed. Marshalling is no longer about collecting together a 'thing' that we call knowledge and passing it from knower to ignorant. Rather, it is more about a complex process of hard slog learning, where the nature of engagement between stakeholders is all important. Later TA/TC, 2nd and 3rd order KM and innovation systems all tell us that.

Once we start to think in terms of processes of learning, one line of inquiry inevitably shifts to capacities. For the early receivers of TA, capacity was conceived in terms of their administrative and governmental systems to receive the knowledge 'thing'. Borrowing from KM, later TA/TC has put more emphasis on absorptive capacity, which concerns ability and motivation to learn – in a cultural sense – as much as administration and government.

A different capacity is claimed, however, of those who have been historically the providers of knowledge. They are now expected to have capacity to manage contemporary processes for learning through stakeholder engagement, requiring competences in collaboration, partnership formation and dialogue. Thus the 'Is' have been dotted and the 'Ts' crossed for Keenleyside's (1952) 'unusual human qualities' that he demanded of the early TA providers. In one sense this might be conceived of

as 'putting the first last' (Chambers, 1997). In another sense, however, and despite the connotations of equality and mutuality of the current language, such a capacity requirement reinforces the divide between those whose job it is to manage and those whose job it is to absorb knowledge.

The most clearly articulated issue identified by the early TA literature – that of marshalling knowledge for development across context – remains whatever the terminology. For the early literature the issue was the recurring binary context divide between the Northern-based knowledge-giver and the Southern-based receiver. More recent accounts, particularly those in the innovation systems literature, point to the complex of knowledges at play in development practice, and that fundamentally, the difficulties are often ontological – these different knowledges are about different ways of being, mindsets, of seeing the world (Leach et al, 2005: 4). Thus an international network of scientists might see the world in broadly the same way wherever their physical location, similarly an international network of problem-solving local government practitioners. The ontological difficulties arise when, for example, scientists and locally based civil society groups, or problem-solving and participatory process-oriented practitioners, attempt to relate to each other.

The innovation systems literature, as it relates to development, is forced to confront these issues because of the institutional scale at which it analyses. Thus it does recognise that many knowledge 'systems' are at play in a particular innovation arena, that need integrating, but how to do this when their ontological bases might be very different? Starting from the basis of accepting these different systems, the call is for synergy between them (Hall, 2005), in short the conception of difference as a resource rather than a problem.

7664 words excluding references and Abstract.

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