MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK
Danida

FEBRUARY 2020

EVALUATION STUDY
RECENT TRENDS AND ISSUES IN USE OF PERSONNEL AND PARTNERING FOR DEVELOPMENT

Updated synthesis of Evaluations on Technical Assistance Personnel

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Production: Evaluation Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, February 2020

Graphic Production: OTW A/S

ISBN: PDF: 978-87-93760-30-1

ISBN: HTML: 978-87-93760-31-8

This report can be downloaded through the homepage of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs www.um.dk or directly from the homepage of the Evaluation Department http://evaluation.um.dk.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DDD	Doing Development Differently
JPO	Junior Professional Officer
MFA	(Danish) Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MLA	Multilateral advisers
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
TA	Technical Assistance
TAP	Technical Advisory Personnel

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation study synthesizes trends and issues in use of technical assistance personnel (TAP) for development assistance, with emphasis on Denmark and the period after 2007, when a similar synthesis was done.[1] The study reviews data on Danish use of bilateral advisers, multilateral advisers, sector counsellors, and company advisers, and distills key messages of the post-2007 documentation on lessons on TAP.

The 2007-synthesis pointed to TAP's special role as "highly people oriented [...] and building of relations and influence", and this study's **overall finding is that TAP – in various forms – remains a significant instrument in the toolbox of Danish development assistance.**

200+ Danish-funded advisers are the coming years appointed to work with partner institutions, multilateral agencies, and programme units at country- and headquarter-levels globally. They cover a broad range of themes, countries and institutions, probably with some concentration around Danish priorities, but the exact focus and coherence is difficult to establish. Yet, they represent a substantial human resource base in support of Danish development aid priorities and agendas.

Normally between 55-65 **bilateral advisers** are appointed each year to work in advisory roles and capacity development inside partner institutions. A large share of them, however, also perform programme management work linked to the implementation of Danish-supported programmes. While this may deviate from the purpose, the tasks they perform are critical for programme delivery, administration, and accountability. The trend is indicative of the significant role of personnel in running development programmes on the ground. As Danish development assistance continues to target difficult contexts, such needs will remain.

Fewer appointments through the bilateral adviser mechanism may be expected ahead, if MFA shifts to recruiting of personnel for programme management functions directly. This may make it timely to consider both how to best organise the recruitment of a reduced number of bilateral advisers, and how bilateral advisers may best be used in the future for institutional development.

1 "Synthesis of Evaluations of Technical Assistance, Evaluation Study", Danida, 2007.

A highly prioritized instrument, around 98 **multilateral advisers** (MLAs) – senior advisers, JPOs, and special assistants – are now posted with a mix of institutions, with about 30-50 appointments each year. There is every indication their time spent with the organisations is productive, but no information exists of whether the intended effects, such as influence, knowledge transfer and competence development for Danish MFA, are achieved in practice.

Moreover, few MLAs subsequently end up staying with the organisations, whether as permanent or project staff. As most Danish senior staff in the institutions first started as JPOs, and many are expected to retire soon, more needs to be done already now to increase the intake of Danish staff in the organisations.

The **sector counsellors** are used in a variety of ways, often with challenges in defining expected results clearly (a separate review will assess this in-depth) – though their broad mandate and flexibility is also seen as opportunities. The use of **company advisers** for long-term capacity development support has been reduced, with fewer contracts in recent years.

Overall, the use of TAP in its conventional role as capacity development of partners seems to have declined in Danish development assistance, as fewer TAP work directly with partners in advisory positions for institutional development.

Yet, adoption of "doing development differently", with iterative adaptation of interventions on the ground, driven by problem-analysis and feedback, may place new requirements on the human resources in Danish development assistance. Personnel will have to be mobilized in much more flexible ways, responding to needs arising. Their competences may often need to include strategic and change management skills, networking, process facilitation, and similar. Here the adviser-instrument (possibly adjusted) could become a key part of the toolbox to deliver personnel with the right profile at the right time and location.

The post-2007 documentation reconfirms the lessons for successful institutional development of partners – but also finds these often are not adopted. Fundamental challenges remain with weak ownership, lack of grounding in context, weak consideration of existing capacity, and often supply-driven TAP, which hamper results and sustainability of TAP's interventions. Yet, to address "complexity" and make more use of problem-driven iterative adaptation, it will be important to adopt such lessons as summarized in the box below.

ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Key words that portray the proper design of TAP and institutional development support include: i) case- and context-specific design, ii) holistic and multiple tools in the face of complexity, iii) demand/supply-approaches depend on supply-side capacity and interests, iv) Flexible and adaptive, v) step-wise development of interventions, not "over-designed" programmes, vi) combine quick wins with long-haul vii) good monitoring and evaluation.

An approach needs to be defined for how best to monitor results and have real-time feedback of interventions using TAP (and other instruments) to address development problems showing "complexity" – for instance, as part of a problem-driven iterative approach, or tools of other Doing Development Differently. That approach needs to balance two concerns, namely having flexibility and composite results measures versus specificity of results for accountability and planning.

1 INTRODUCTION

This evaluation study aims to synthesize trends, approaches and experiences of donors, including Denmark, using technical assistance personnel (TAP) for official development assistance.[2] The study is a follow-up to the “Synthesis of Evaluations of Technical Assistance, Evaluation Study” done in 2007 (henceforth, the 2007-synthesis). For this purpose, it presents findings on main themes from the post-2007 literature on TAP, examines overall trends in Denmark’s use of TAP – and on this basis identifies certain key questions for Danish development assistance to consider for the use of TAP going forward.

As the 2007-synthesis asserts, technical assistance is one of several instruments in the toolbox of development assistance. Donors give it special attention since it is highly people oriented and associated with intercultural exchange and building of relations and influence. In addition, practice shows TAP’s importance is very much about the needs and roles for human resources in development assistance. The 2007-synthesis predicted the “special importance of TAP” would gradually diminish – but, as it turns out, TAP still plays a special role in Danish development assistance, only in new ways.

The study’s scope is broad, and it has expanded during the study process. This reflects the diversity of the TAP-instrument in practice, with its multiple forms, roles and goals, which became apparent in the early study phase. Since 2007, Danish-supported TAP includes bilateral advisers, multilateral advisers, the hybrid “sector counsellors”, and company advisers. To identify all main relevant issues, it was decided to do a broad sweep of the full variety of TAP applied.

The study has been based on: 1) desk reviews of post-2007 evaluations and studies on TAP and capacity development, 2) simple quantitative analysis of data on Danida’s use of advisers, 3) Interviews with staff mainly in the MFA, and 4) consultations with donors (mainly Sweden and Norway). A mid-stage meeting followed by individual follow-up meetings with MFA departments were made to verify and substantiate issues.

2 The study is commissioned by Danida’s Evaluation Department and prepared by Thomas J. Thomsen, TJT Consulting.

The report is organised around the following main questions:

a) What trends, patterns and issues characterize Danish use of TAP the past decade?

b) What issues on effective use of TAP emerge from post-2007 studies?

c) How do selected likeminded donors use TAP?

d) Based on what emerges from such questions, what issues arise MFA’s future use of TAP?

2 TRENDS IN DENMARK'S USE OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PERSONNEL

2.1 Bilateral advisers (Danida advisers)

The bilateral advisers (formerly, Danida advisers) have been part and parcel of Danish development assistance the past three decades, linked traditionally to programmes in Danish supported sectors and thematic areas, placed within national partner institutions, and formally with the roles of advising and facilitating capacity development of these partners. Traditionally, the main discussions about the role of bilateral advisers have centered on the requirement that they sit inside partner institutions and focus their dialogue towards the partner, as opposed to the Danish embassy.

Today, the bilateral advisers officially continue to be seen as part of the collaboration with the partner countries in Danish development assistance, linked to the programs and projects agreed with them. There exist short-term (below two years) and long-term bilateral advisers, with different conditions. Resident advisers have also been introduced recently, being national staff on fixed-term contracts, who manage the phasing-out of Danish programmes in countries where the embassies are closed; however, no more resident advisers are envisaged.

Generally, the bilateral adviser positions are defined in response to requests from Danish representations or departments in MFA with particular needs. Whereas short-term advisers can be recruited directly by the embassy or department, long-term advisers are recruited through Mercuri Urval. Mercuri Urval has (after having won four tenders) for several years been managing the recruitment process on behalf of the MFA for all long-term advisers and some short-term advisers. Mercuri Urval's role is to professionalize the recruitment process and provide a neutral and human resource-based perspective on needs of the given positions and eligibility of candidates.

A procedure exists for annual performance dialogue for the individual advisers, and they prepare end of duty reports which are reviewed by the embassies. At overall level, there is no mechanism or events to get a consolidated feedback or knowledge sharing for the bilateral advisers as a group. No pre-departure preparation events exist for the bilateral advisers. In earlier periods with far more advisers, MFA organised thematic development seminars in Copenhagen which served to bring advisers from various postings together with MFA staff and Danish networks.

According to MFA, 1,111 long- and short-term bilateral advisers were hired over the past 17 years (2002-2018), with 65 per year, 26% being women (37% were women during the past five years since 2015). The number of advisers contracted varied between 55-86 per year during 2008-2018. In 2017 and 2018, new contracts were 53 and 55, respectively.

By the first half of 2019, around 80 bilateral advisers were posted in a large variety of countries. Among these, 53 are long-term advisers, 12 are short-term and 15 are resident advisers (including four resident and one long-term in Nepal, which however ended in June 2019).

The long-term bilateral advisers typically belong to a pool of international candidates, often non-Danish and not necessarily with prior Danida-experience. The candidates often circulate between programme management/adviser positions at country level, with work experience from a range of donors, and often with substantial developing country-experience and deep expertise in their field of work (in line with the commission, Mercuri Urval assists in recruiting through open application processes as opposed to "search and select"). A mix of technical skills, soft-skills, and access to networks matter for the short-listing of candidates. This pattern reflects a professionalization of the selection process over time, also with Mercuri Urval's involvement. The effect is that fewer bilateral advisers see themselves as representing any special notion of Danish development assistance or know, in advance, Danish systems and priorities well. A challenge exists with getting more women and more new (and younger) candidates for the positions.

More short-term than long-term advisers tend to be hired every year. For instance, in 2016, 46 versus 14; in 2015, 50 versus 22; 2013, 54 versus 17. Moreover, four in 10 short-term advisers have been posted to just five countries: Tanzania, Denmark, Ukraine, Afghanistan, and Kosovo. Certain countries receive only short-term advisers, typically fragile states, neighbourhood countries and hosts of multilateral institution (like USA, Switzerland, and Belgium, and Denmark). The trend reflects how short-term advisers are used to fill difficult postings or very distinct tasks, where the concerns for ensuring the right profile for the job are extraordinary.

Every year, the new appointments of bilateral advisers tend to concentrate in a handful of countries, but the composition of the top-10 list has changed over the years. Table 1 shows the 2008-ranking as dominated by Danish priority-countries at the time, with large sector-programmes (Vietnam, Tanzania, Mozambique, Uganda, Ghana, Benin, Bangladesh, and Mali). By 2018, top-10 new appointments were dominated by "exit-countries", headquarters of multilateral institutions, and neighborhood countries (Mozambique, Ukraine, Nepal, Denmark, USA, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Turkey, and Switzerland). It should be noted that the positions in Denmark, USA, and Switzerland are advisers with multilateral institutions.

By first half of 2019, the snapshot picture of the total on-going postings showed the largest host countries to be Mozambique (10), Uganda (8), Ukraine (7), Kenya (6), Tanzania (4), and USA (4) (However, by end-2019, Mozambique was down to six advisers).

TABLE 1: BILATERAL ADVISORS, TOP-10 RECIPIENT COUNTRIES, SELECTED YEARS

2008		2017		2018	
Serbia and Montenegro	3	Tanzania	2		
Georgia	4	Turkey	2		
Mali	4	Denmark	3	Turkey	2
Bangladesh	5	Ethiopia	3	Kenya	3
Benin	5	Somalia	3	Tanzania	3
Ghana	5	Uganda	3	Uganda	3
Uganda	5	Bolivia	4	Denmark	5
Mozambique	9	Mali	4	Nepal	5
Tanzania	12	Mozambique	4	Ukraine	9
Vietnam	12	Ukraine	4	Mozambique	9

The sectoral composition of the bilateral advisers has changed continuously over the years, as Table 2 shows. For instance, in 2006 the new advisers were allocated with 12-19% to each of the sectors of agriculture, environment, and public management/governance, while 7% went to education and 8% to health. By 2010, health expanded to 12%, education to 15%, and public management/governance had risen to 32%, while environment declined to 9% and agriculture to 4%. By 2018, public management/governance was at 33%, while health and agriculture stabilized at around 11%, but "other" had risen to 16%, and environment declined to 5% and education to 2%. The table also suggests a need for a more clearly understandable definition of the sector categories, if the categorization is to be of any use.

TABLE 2: SECTORAL COMPOSITION OF BILATERAL ADVISERS, SELECTED YEARS

Sectors	2006	2010	2014	2018
Other	3%	10%	8%	16%
Humanitarian assistance	0%	3%	0%	0%
Agriculture	14%	4%	10%	11%
Environment	12%	9%	16%	5%
Multisector	10%	0%	2%	11%
Public sector management/governance, Civil Society	19%	32%	45%	33%
Health	8%	12%	4%	11%
Education	7%	15%	0%	2%
Water	4%	6%	7%	0%
Economic infrastructure	10%	6%	6%	11%
Other productive sectors	7%	3%	2%	0%
Other social infrastructure	6%	0%	0%	0%
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**	**100%**

Partly, the sectoral shifts reflect the changes in priority sectors and themes of Danish development policy and a general shift away from sector programmes as the important modality of support. Importantly, however, the trends in countries and sectors above also reflect a major shift in how bilateral advisers are used.

A large share of the bilateral advisers appointed in recent years are placed in decentralized management units. Established in a number of Danish partner countries, such units manage programs funded by Danish development support (in cases jointly with other donors) and are staffed mainly with bilateral advisers who assume the roles of leading and managing implementation of the programmes. Some units have existed for years, others for shorter periods, but MFA uses these typically in contexts where implementation through national partners is particularly difficult (Middle East, Somalia, Uganda, Ukraine, etc.). Some of the units exist to manage the phasing-out of Danish development assistance and are staffed with bilateral and resident advisers (Mozambique, Nepal, Bolivia). The resident advisers are local, ex-embassy staff.

The bilateral advisers in these units perform core management and administrative tasks of Danish development assistance that are critical for programme delivery, administration, and accountability. In some cases, programme implementation depends on inputs from national project staff, both professional and unskilled staff, who are essential for day to day running of the programmes. The bilateral advisers then have the roles of leading and managing such national staff employed by the units, in some cases amounting to quite many people.

From MFA's perspective, this has over time given rise to concerns that bilateral advisers carry out such core management/administrative tasks of Danish development assistance without the formal mandate and access to systems that MFA-staff would have. Consequently, discussions are now underway to remove these inconsistencies, possibly by shifting to MFA directly recruiting the personnel needed for programme management, instead of relying on advisers.

From a wider perspective, the trend is indicative of the significant role of personnel in running of the development assistance on the ground. The adviser-instrument essentially helps in meeting a human resource need in programme management – performing a variety of tasks without which implementation could not take place, such as planning, budgeting, staff management, and implementation responsibilities, both to ensure progress and delivery, manage fiduciary risks, and deliver on standard reporting and accountability procedures. That need will continue to exist, especially as Danish development assistance targets ever more types of contexts and situations where working through national partners is difficult.

In addition, the trend also suggests that bilateral advisers seem less often to be used for the classical purpose of institutional capacity development. This may be indicative of another trend, namely a reduced emphasis on capacity and institutional development in Danish development assistance. The study has no firm evidence to conclude this, but clearly only some of the annual approximately 60 bilateral advisers are placed in advisory roles focused on developing partner capacity, i.e. being placed inside partner institutions, such as ministries, agencies, trusts, funds (as documented later, even advisers embedded in partner institutions may have split roles which combine a mix of advisory, gap-filling and controlling tasks).

Overall, any shift by MFA towards recruiting personnel for programme management directly, rather than rely on bilateral advisers, would have the effect to reduce the demand for bilateral advisers. That would also lower the pull on the bilateral adviser mechanism. This study is not in a position to estimate exact changes to expect in numbers of bilateral advisers requested. But considering the current high number of appointments for programme management positions, the anticipated change is large enough to justify that MFA takes the initiative to estimate the future demand for bilateral advisers, and on that basis, consider the organisation for hiring the bilateral advisers.

2.2 Multilateral advisers (senior advisers, JPOs, special assistants)

The MLA instrument has multiple formal goals, including strengthening the work of the organisations, provide information and learning about the organisations to the MFA, expand the Danish human resource base for international development work and to integrate more Danes into the organisations. Linked to these formal goals is the desire to have influence in the organisations. There has also existed the intention to combine Danish core-funding for certain organisation with the placement of a senior adviser or Junior Professional Officer (JPO) as a mechanism to follow-up on the support provided. In addition, secondments are seen as a channel to develop the competences of MFA staff as they return home with new experiences and skills.

The MLA categories include senior advisers, expected to play strategic roles and provide Danish influence in the institutions; JPOs, expected to be a base for future recruitments of Danish staff to the institutions; and special assistants to UN Resident Representatives. The positions are decided through an annual hearing process, where MFA departments request and propose specific positions with the organisations, based on MFA's predefined thematic priorities (between 2014 and the end of 2019, human rights and gender; peace and stability; and green growth). Unlike for bilateral advisers, the understanding is that MLAs must be Danes, in order to be able to ensure representation of Danish interests and knowledge-building.

A total of around 123 MLAs are currently posted with the different institutions. About 30-50 new MLA appointments are made each year, but the numbers fluctuate significantly. MFA's budget for MLAs is set to increase, with the expected number of MLAs on the rise.

Around 5-6 senior advisers are typically contracted every year (2007-2019), but individual years stand out. For the entire period since 2007, the largest recipients of senior advisers have been the EU, IBRD, and UNDP, with other organisations each receiving 1-3 advisers per year. Two-thirds of the senior advisers have been placed at the respective headquarters. Looking at the recent five-year period only, Table 4 shows EU and IBRD to remain the largest recipients. 1-3 special assistants have been appointed annually, primarily to UN Resident Representatives (administered by UNDP) or to World Bank Country Offices in coordination roles.

The data available does not make it possible to clearly determine the sectoral composition of the senior advisers, beyond the thematic focus of the organisation.

TABLE 4: TOTAL NUMBER OF SENIOR ADVISERS BY ORGANISATION 2014-2019

Organisation	
EU (Danida)	35
IBRD	19
UN	7
UNFPA	5
UNDP	5
Hudson Institute	2
UNICEF	2
IDH	1
IOM	1
OCHA	1
UNEP	2
UNWOMEN	2
UNHCR	2
World Economic Forum	2
OECD	2
Global Green Growth Institute	1
World Resources Institute	1
NATO	1
Total	**91**

No in-depth, systematic information is available on the lessons and results related to the senior advisers. But the general message emerging from the consultations is that senior advisors are used in very different ways across the organisations. There are cases where senior advisors are seconded for positions with specific, clearly defined tasks and deliverables in advance, for instance when they are attached to certain UN processes where Denmark has a high profile. More generally, the senior advisers often enter positions with roles and expectations that are not clearly defined in advance. A typical model is to place a senior adviser positions with an organisation that receives Danish earmarked or core contributions, however, the specific expectations for the senior adviser's role in these cases may not always be clear.

In some cases, prospective senior advisers have a direct hand in defining the positions they subsequently are recruited for, rather than the organisations taking the lead. Meanwhile, the opinion expressed was this model is not viewed as ideal.

The JPO appointments have fluctuated highly, ranging from 11 to 40 per year during the entire 2007-19 period: 15 were appointed in 2019 compared to 37 in 2018 and seven in 2017. For the period since 2007, the largest recipients of Danish JPOs were UNPD (51), UNHCR (26), UN (33) UNOCHCR (17), and WFP (21), and UNICEF (21). Two-thirds have been placed at country-level, with a large spread, though Tanzania and Mozambique stand out as large recipients. Table 5 shows roughly the same pattern when looking just at the recent five-year period.

TABLE 5: TOTAL NUMBER OF JPOS BY ORGANISATION 2014-2019

Organisation	JPOs
UNDP	30
UN Secretariat	22
UNHCR	17
WFP	16
UNICEF	12
UNOHCHR	14
UNFPA	11
EU (Danida)	10
UNODC	7
IBRD	5
FAO	4
UNWOMEN	3
OCHA	3
IFAD	3
UNRWA	2
WHO	2
IOM	1
UNAIDS	1
UNCDF	1
IMO	1
UNIFEM	1
ILO	1
Total	**167**

An issue that emerged from the consultations, is the dilemma arising from the difficulty of documenting in concrete terms the exact benefits of the MLA instrument for Denmark. On the one hand, few doubts exist that the MLA instrument provides value. For instance, the clear impression is that the JPO instrument helps expand the Danish human resource base for international development at the lower tier level, from which many later moves into positions either with Danish NGOs, MFA, or the international host organisations. The record whereby Danish senior level staff in the UN-system first started as JPOs is indicative of that instrument's value. On the other hand, overall evidence is lacking on the exact value the MLAs bring, how they perform during their postings, and if the instrument exactly meets its stated aims. There is also a scope for more reflection on concrete ways the instrument could be used more effectively to support the intentions of influence and knowledge transfer for MFA.

It is an open question how in practice the aim of influencing the multilateral organisations should work. Formal limitations exist for how senior advisers can act when working for the organisations, and they are limited by clauses to keep information from the organisations confidential. Usually they do not have permission to sign documents and take decisions on budgets and activities (they are hired normally as "expert on mission"). Restrictions like these limit the influence MLAs realistically can have in practice.

No consolidated picture exists of MFA's level of contact and interaction with the MLAs. MLAs with the UN and World Bank are bound by rules of confidentiality which prohibits sharing of information with the financing donor. With MLAs at EU, the contact is more on-going. Overall, any contact is reported to be mostly informal, with no systematic channel or activities for knowledge and information sharing between MLAs and MFA – but the perception is the contact is now "more frequent than earlier". An annual seminar or meeting for MLAs was suggested during the discussions as a low hanging fruit for improving knowledge sharing.

Views were expressed that too few MLAs – senior advisers and JPOs – are recruited into the organisations, after ending their secondment- or JPO-periods. Several reasons could explain that few JPOs take up permanent employment with the organisations. The JPO-period happens during a formative stage in their lives and careers, with fundamental questions about returning home or staying abroad; and they may find positions in Denmark more attractive – especially with the MFA which recruits many ex-JPOs.

Meanwhile, in the coming years, many of the Danish senior staff with the multilateral organisations are expected to retire, which makes it even more critical to have more Danes enter the organisations to replace these. Many of the Danish senior staff within these organisations started as JPOs. It implies even more JPOs are needed to fill the upcoming future gap in Danish senior staff within the UN system.

2.3 Sector counsellors

The sector counsellors together with the Strategic Sector Cooperation projects are main elements in the Strategic Sector Cooperation-facility, which works in support of three objectives, with a broad span, focused on 1) strengthening of framework conditions for SDGs (essentially developing institutional and policy frameworks to develop particular sectors), 2) strengthen Denmark's bilateral relations, and 3) engage the Danish private sector in solutions for the SDGs. Established in 2014, the Strategic Sector Cooperation has evolved over the years, with slight adjustments in the definition and understanding its intended focus and approach. The facility is currently being reviewed in-depth.

Posted at Danish embassies, the sector counsellors are intended to be a link between Danish and local authorities in sectors regarded as strategically important, and where Denmark is seen to have special experiences with public-private cooperation. The sector counsellors should provide knowledge and expertise to Danish companies and authorities in such sectors, and they are expected to support and build on networks, government contacts and demand for Danish solutions.

There are presently 35 sector counsellors posted abroad, with the number expected to reach about 50 by 2019-2020. The Strategic Sector Cooperation projects support partnerships between the Danish public authorities and counterpart institutions for institutional development, limited to three years and a maximum budget of DKK 6.5 million. The SSC-projects have TAP-input in the form of short-term inputs by experts from the Danish partner authority.

About one-third are placed in lower middle-income countries and the remaining in middle- or high-income countries, many in Latin-America and China. The sectoral spread is wide, but with some concentration in themes under a broad heading of climate, energy, and environment. Themes include: Climate, wind-power, energy, waste, environment, water systems, urban development, food safety and agriculture, marine affairs, statistics, intellectual property, occupational health and safety, health, and digitalization.

Many sector counsellors are recruited from outside the Danish authorities, and often the candidates form a pool of experts with mixed Danish and international experience.

The Strategic Sector Cooperation project formally defines the focus of the sector counsellors' work in each case. They should also comply with the 80/20%-rule on the split between "the project" and "other activities" at the embassies they are posted. The message received is that, in practice, sector counsellors' focus and roles vary significantly from case to case, and the balance of emphasis between the three objectives varies (the on-going review is expected to explore this further). Various factors were reported as influencing their focus and role in each case.

The sector counsellors in practice show a great diversity in competences, some with broader institutional-development skills, others with more narrow, technical skills. As in many types of positions, the competences of the individual sector counsellors often have a role influencing the ultimate focus and approach of the partnership, within the framework of the projects. The diverse competences also mean there is variety from case to case in the work they do for the embassies under the “20%” of their time for “other” work.

The match between sector counsellor profile and the partner's needs and demands is key for the relevance and value of the support provided. It was reported that the Danish and partner authorities may sometimes have different priorities for the type of profiles fielded under the projects. Normally the profile – for instance, a generalist, institutional development specialist, technical expert, or other – is decided as result of a dialogue process between the Danish authorities and the partner. In some cases, the Danish authorities will have an inclination to focus on sectors/themes with more readily commercial potential for Denmark. Ultimate the balance between such priorities contribute to influencing the role of the sector counsellor.

A possible limitation reported is that Danish authorities may be about to reach the limit for the short-term experts they are able to provide, including how readily they can release staff for the projects. It was reported that the share of time spent by the Danish officials in the recipient country has reduced slightly over the years. The target balance between time spent with the partner and “home” is 50/50%.

Although sector counsellors are linked to a certain public partner institution, they are reported to have some flexibility to network and engage with partners broadly. That flexibility is seen to provide opportunities for using the sector counsellors proactively in support of Doing Development Differently. It was also expressed that it can at times be challenging to establish expected results of the sector counsellors clearly within the broad mandate.

2.4 Company advisers

Danida's contract office enters many contracts with consultancy companies each year, but only some of these directly target the development of beneficiaries and involve use of technical assistance personnel.[3] These include for instance standard technical assistance assignments, fund-management assignments (which typically includes technical assistance for capacity development), and implementation management contracts.

Recent years has seen a downwards shift in such company contracts that have a direct developmental focus. During 2005-2007, around 10-16 such contracts were signed each year, as opposed to three in 2018, five in 2017, and nine in 2016. 2017 included a new modality in the form of "implementing partner"-contracts, mainly for MENA (and Myanmar), typically Danish NGOs/think-tanks.

There seems to be a shift towards "outsourcing" of development support, especially in contexts too weak or difficult to work in for the MFA system, with fewer cases where it appears companies are used because of their special knowledge or solutions for capacity development (buying delivery vs. buying solutions and knowledge).

3 Not procurement of goods, management/evaluation support to embassies, evaluations, and others that target Danida's deliver of its support.

3 WHAT MESSAGES EMERGE FROM RECENT STUDIES ON TAP?

The search for relevant post-2007 evaluations showed that very little new documentation on technical assistance personnel has been produced. The relevant recent documentation mainly addresses TAP from a broader perspective of capacity development and institutional reform. Much of this documentation is in the form of lessons-learned, guidance notes on TAP and capacity development, and literature that rethinks the conceptual approach to institutional development.

This documentation was reviewed to identify the main themes and messages emerging. Overall, the review showed that the main themes can broadly be divided in two sets:

- One set of reconfirmations of "old truths" and lessons, concerning questions on TAP-roles, demand-responsive TAP, and roles of ownership, context, existing capacity, system-focus, use of "best practice", and ingredients of "good" TAP and capacity development design.
- Another set of a few, but important, agendas and perspectives that changed since 2007, concerning development assistance, institutional development and reform, and results monitoring. These have in some respects changed how TAP is and should be applied.

In what follows, the first set of pointers (1-8) summarize the "old truths" and experiences with their adoption, before turning to pointers 9-11 that describe the changed agendas.

3.1 Clarity of roles, approaches, and goals of technical assistance

A first recurring theme emerging from the documentation is about the clarity of TAP roles and how TAP roles in each case match the goals, functions and approaches applied for the TAP. Table A represents an attempt to provide an overview of these (the table builds on Land, 2007). The lesson is that getting roles and goals clear and aligned is key to the TAP's success, as summarized in the message to always ask "for whom" and "what" the TAP is for.

TABLE A: OVERVIEW OF TAP ROLES, APPROACHES ANDF GOALS

Roles/function	Approaches			Goals (speculative)
	Do: Do the work	**Direct:** Participatory and joint capacity development Donor lead	**Indirect:** Counterparts in charge Support locally lead/defined ideas Facilitate learning	
Gap-filling: To help an organisation carry out its work in lieu of locally available personnel	X			Progress in implementation Achieve results on the ground
Advisory: To provide expert advice to client on a defined area of specialisation that is not locally available		X	X	Enable organisations/institu-tions to deliver on mandates and expectations, despite specific knowledge gaps
Capacity development: To assist individuals, organisations and systems in developing capabilities and enhancing performance			X	Enable institutions/organi-sations to set and achieve goals
Shape/influence norms and institutions: Check growth advisers and Norwegian setup				Institutions/organisations adopt certain desired forms, procedures, regulation, or practices.
Financial control/project management: To ensure that external resources are used efficiently and transparently and to ensure accountability	X	X	X	Lower fiduciary and pro-grammatic risks

The dilemma arises from the observations that TAP typically comes in many shapes and sizes that don't answer these questions clearly, and that TAP frequently has multiple, unclear objectives, functions, roles, and approaches: Capacity development, gap-filling, financial control, project-delivery, and increasingly building donor-partner bilateral relations. A mix of roles may in fact be justified and simply reflect the intervention logic. However, often the mix is not transparent, intentions are not clear, or donor-partner expectations differ, which may create problems. The modalities used for the provision of TAP also influence how it can work and what it may achieve, so these are also important to consider[4].

3.2 Context is everything

The role of context, and the importance of tailoring TAP and capacity development measures to context, are well-established.

The post-2007 documentation reconfirms the importance of considering all levels, not just the overall country-level, but the individual institution, organisation with focus on the functions to be strengthened. A "system-wide" assessment should be the starting-point for deciding what makes up the "best-fit" design of TAP, ensuring it is relevant and responds to real institutional capacity-needs and political realities on the ground (Hyden et. al., 2016). The dimensions to consider include capacity, partner ownership, power and politics (Lucas, 2013, p. 3; Niras/Indevelop, 2016), all of them well-known topics to be discussed below.

When it comes to the adoption in practice of this lesson, the post-2007 evaluations find "much programming is still not well rooted in context, and capacity assessments are not done systematically and rigorously". Designs overstate existing capacity and commitment, power and politics is often overlooked, interventions focus mainly on technical aspects, or address only parts of the system, not considering how functions are actually performed (Denney, et. al. 2017). This, it is found, has negative effects on the TAP interventions' effectiveness (Niras/Indevelop, 2016).

4 Modalities can include: Short-term or long-term; company-contracted or donor-contracted (like Danida-advisers; donor government-officials, or a hybrid (for instance, the Danish growth-advisers, contracted by Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and placed in Danish embassies); or donor-seconded advisers in multilateral institutions; institutional partnering between donor-country and recipient-country public (or private) institutions (twinning).

3.3 Ownership

Ownership is another recurring theme for the post-2007 literature. The literature addresses ownership not for its status as a Paris Declaration-principle, but as factor in making TAP and capacity development effective and sustainable (Niras/Indevelop, p. 41, Lucas, 2013, p. 8; Timmis, 2018, p. 5).[5] The considerations are:

- capacity development is an "inherently political process" which cannot be led by outsiders
- partners themselves best know their needs and what works in their context and culture, especially as many elements of capacity development are invisible or intangible (Timmis).

Ownership requires that partners take lead roles in capacity assessments, planning and management of TAP. Yet, in practice partner ownership in TAP and capacity development interventions remains a challenge (Timmis, 2018; Niras/Indevelop, 2016; Lucas, 2013). Donors' accountability requirements favour short-term, quick results, driven by donor priorities and the push for change often comes from donors. Ownership is a special challenge in reforms involving many stakeholders, typically the most transformative reforms involving multi-actor/multi-sector coordination, such as climate, human rights, green growth, etc.

3.4 Matching technical assistance with demand

The TAP's responsiveness to demand remains an area of attention and is seen as critical for ensuring that TAP generates value to the beneficiary. There are often factors that undermine linkages to the partner's demand:

- there may be divergence in donor-beneficiary interests,
- the partner's exercise of leadership for the TAP may be weak or absent,
- the alignment and fit with the partner's plans and efforts may be weak.

5 Ownership is also emphasized by Danida's guidance note on capacity development, Addressing Capacity Development in Danish Development Cooperation. Guiding Principles and Operational Steps (2011).

The "free good" syndrome of TAP presents a special challenge. The hidden costs of TAP for the partner "discourages critical appraisal" and ownership of its use. The suggestion is that donors should be transparent about the financial costs of TAP.

In terms of adoption, evidence indicates that TAP continues to be weakly linked to actual demands. It is frequently supply-led, and TAP-providers are often not appropriate to the partner needs (Niras/Indevelop, 2016; Land, 2007).

3.5 Existing capacity

The role of existing capacity is a recurring topic as well (Land, 2007; Niras/Indevelop, 2016; COWI, 2014), and three main messages stand out:

- a certain capacity level must exist for the capacity development effort to have an effect; this is for managing the capacity development process, put new capacities to use, and invest the necessary time and resources in the process (Niras/Indevelop, 2016, p. 42). The finding is that organisations with some capacity achieve better and more sustained capacity results;

- roles and goals of TAP should be tailored to the capacity-level. Complex transformational reform processes require strong leadership capacity, but simpler "transactional changes" or routine activities may not;

- where capacity is extremely weak – such as fragile contexts – TAP for capacity development may not be warranted; here TAP's role may necessarily have to be ensuring delivery of services and basic state functions through a "direct", hands-on approach.

The literature finds that hardly any interventions are designed based on capacity baseline studies and/or needs assessments, and those few with an attempt tend to be inadequate (for instance, Niras/Indevelop, 2016, p. 31).

3.6 Developing systems – or train individuals?

Capacity development can happen at individual, organisational or institutional levels. By convention, TAP intervention must assess what appropriate level to target given the aim and consider linkages between levels.

The documentation shows that few TAP interventions build on a systems-wide perspective. Most TAP and capacity development focus on the individual level (Niras/Indevelop, 2016) or individual organisations in isolation. ODI concludes “training is the default capacity development activity” and capacity developments remains a “modular exercise” focused on organisations and individuals (ODI, p. 21). Often training interventions are not aligned with organisational and institutional needs, hence limiting their capacity development effects.

3.7 “Best practices”, ”best fits” – or every case is special?

Several evaluations address the soundness of following “best practice” and “best fit” approaches. The interest is to be able to prescribe the solution based on some category of cases (fragile, stable, etc.).

The consensus is to reject “best practices” and blueprint-solutions which “will inevitably be unresponsive to the contexts they are applied to and are consequently unlikely to work” (Land; 2007-synthesis; Hyden, Harvard). There is however an interest to look for “best fits” (seen as contrasting to “best cases”) – i.e. to ask what TAP-solution is likely to work best in a given context, based on a typology of country context, for instance, “fragile states need direct/hands-on support”; “stable/aid-dependent states need more conventional capacity development” (2007-synthesis). The special needs in fragile contexts is the focus of several evaluations (Lucas, 2013).

Others reject any idea that TAP-solutions may be predetermined, whether by context or other. Niras/Indevelop (2016) finds no general relation between types/levels of TAP effort types of context: “What works will always be highly case specific”.

Meanwhile, most interventions are found to not make any attempts to tailor the TAP or capacity development support to context.

3.8 Appropriateness of TAP

Several evaluations underline the critical role played by the quality and appropriateness of the personnel carrying out the technical assistance. First, the technical qualifications and substantive knowledge of the personnel for the task at hand. Secondly, “soft skills” like personal sensitivity, approach, attitude, cultural sensitivity, process skills, and in some cases political astuteness and diplomatic skills to communicate effectively with counterparts (COWI, 2014).

The common challenge is to find personnel who combines both technical/substantive and process skills (Land, 2007). TAP is often hired mainly for technical skills (ODI, 2015, p. 25).[6]

3.9 Changing norms and practices in development cooperation

The post-2007 period has seen major shifts in the normative frameworks and policies of development assistance.

The Paris Declaration (2005) introduced highly specific principles for aid to ensure its effectiveness (ownership, alignment, harmonization, results). These were the order of the day when the 2007-synthesis and its messages on TAP were developed.

With the Busan High-level Forum (2011), the aid effectiveness principles were already less prominent, and emphasis turned development towards a shared task for rich and poor countries, and public and private actors (development effectiveness). By 2015, the UN Sustainable Development Goals further shifted the focus towards development "goals" (rather than instruments and "how"), with emphasis on joint responsibilities, especially with the private sector, and on SDG financing. The broad implication of these shifts is a focus away from "aid and how aid should be provided", towards partnerships, roles and financing.

Alongside the normative shifts, donor policies and practices have also changed. Aid budgets have declined, and modalities have shifted away from use of country systems (general/sector budget support) and pooled/basket funding. A smaller share of aid is now allocated for programming at country level and donors more often add goals to the development assistance for self-interest, for instance for commercial priorities and immigration.

The implications are that normative framework for how to provide TAP have become less important. Also, the interest primarily with financing and measurable results have crowded out the attention to (long-term) capacity development, hence also less emphasis on TAP.

6 Some suggest donors should invest in developing the skills of TAP in coaching, process facilitation, action-learning design, change management, policy management, leadership development, and multi-stakeholder processes (GSDRC, p. 10).

3.10 From "linearity" to "complexity": Evolving perspectives on institutional change

A paradigm shift in the understanding of how institutional development happens and is best supported has also occurred since 2007; such understanding in turn determines the assumptions that TAP-designs build on.

Conventional views assume that institutional development happens in linear ways. If objectives are set and outputs, activities and inputs (like TAP) are identified and implemented correctly, in accordance with a logframe or theory of change, the planned results will materialize as expected. The results-based approaches, developed over the past two decades, are a variation of the linear view. They assume with clearly defined objectives and results, properly designed performance incentives (likely with TAP support) will drive the change to achieve the planned results.

In contrast, "complexity" proponents (emerging around 2005[7]) argue that change processes are always messy and unpredictable. This is caused by[8]:

- distributed capacities to implement,
- diverging goals among, often many, key actors, and
- inherently unpredictable pathways of change.

In parallel, proponents of "working with the grain" argue donor-supported reforms have failed, since donors have imposed forms and "best practices" for institutions that don't match actual capacities and needs on the ground. For these reasons, interventions should build on capacities already in place ("the grain") and they should focus on what makes intended functions work, rather than promoting specific institutional forms. Proponents of "political settlements" add to these perspectives, arguing that support to be successful must inevitably build on a realistic stock-taking of the prevailing power balance (Hyden et. al., 2016).

7 The focus on "complexity", working with the grain, and political settlements (and problem-driven iterative adaptation) has been developed and driven by think-tanks, like ODI and Harvard University, with Doing Development Differently being defined as umbrella for these concepts and tools by a wide set of think-tanks and development agencies. DFID has adopted DDD, as described by ODI (2017).

8 Managing complexity and uncertainty in development policy and practice, ODI, 2015.

The paramount implication of the complexity perspective is to use adaptive and flexible approaches *as opposed to* “linear”, log frame-based and results-based approaches.[9] A number of these slightly varying perspectives have been brought together under the heading “Doing Development Differently” (DDD) with its own manifesto.[10] While a donor such as DFID has adopted DDD as approach (though selectively), the concept and tools were developed by think-tanks, such as ODI and Harvard University.

The post-2007 evaluations support the complexity proponents’ description of the basics for institutional change. In 2019, the MFA decided to start integrating the DDD-principles in Danish development assistance.

3.11 Monitoring and focusing on results of TAP

Finally, the perspectives on results monitoring have seen some changes, partly in response to the “complexity” thinking. Well-defined results and monitoring of TAP are critical for clarifying its purpose, and to adapt during implementation in response to progress results and lessons in real time, learning on what works, and enable performance monitoring for accountability.

Yet monitoring of TAP has inherent challenges. Outcomes are typically societal, multi-facetted, intangible, and difficult to measure, often calling for composite outcome definitions. Capacity development processes supported by TAP may be non-linear, long-term and marked by complexity and difficulties in tracing attribution (Timmis, p. 8).

Generally, results frameworks for TAP interventions are found to be weak, which presents a major evaluation challenge. The dilemma is how to reconcile a donor’s needs for data for accountability, requiring specific, detailed, pre-defined results monitoring, with an open-ended, flexible monitoring, best suited for situations of complexity.[11]

9 Some have defined the approach “Problem-driven Iterative Adaption” as way to work in the face of complexity.

10 https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/events-documents/5149.pdf. Also, see “Putting Theory into Practice”, How DFID is doing Development Differently”, ODI, 2017.

11 The debate on monitoring of capacity development is said to mirror the debate between results-based/linear approaches and “complexity” (Pearson, 2011 in Lucas, 2013): Results-based management requires easy-to-measure, highly specified goals and results; but highly specified results-matrices make little sense in face of change-processes marked by complexity, and the most transformational interventions also tend to most difficult to measure (Lucas, 2013).

4 OTHER DONORS' USE OF TAP AND PARTNERING

Norway, Sweden, UK, and the EU have all been in the process of rethinking and working to innovate their approaches to use of TAP in development assistance.[12] Especially in Norway and Sweden, a main driver is the concern with how – in a reduced landscape of development professionals – human and institutional resources may be re-organised to create new platforms and mechanisms with critical mass to effectively support and manage development agendas. There is also, like in Denmark, an interest in extending the set of domestic public partners engaged in development work.

These donors do not have distinct adviser mechanisms, such as Denmark's bilateral advisors or MLAs. Sida has a program for secondments to the multilateral institutions, and there are known cases of Sida advisers posted with partner institutions, but these are of limited magnitude. Norway and Sweden explain this as reflecting their shift in modalities from programme/project-support towards core-funding support for partners (NGOs, ministries, etc.).

Meanwhile, they continue with TAP-type support in their "new" modalities that build on technical assistance through institutional partnering. **Norway** has established the "Knowledge Bank" ("Kundskabsbanken")[13], a fairly large department in Norad that merges earlier separate development-activities of Norwegian state-institutions in areas of oil, fish, tax, research, energy, and gender. This currently forms eight programmatic areas that combine programming budgets with twining with Norwegian institutions[14]. It targets long-term institutional and human resource development (above 10 years), with technical assistance as an integrated part. The idea is to combine the sectoral expertise of Norwegian state institutions, departments, and agencies with Norad's development expertise.

12 Brief telephone interviews and review of think pieces by the doors have been conducted.

13 https://norad.no/knowledgebank

14 Oil for development (OfD) • Fish for development (FfD) • Tax for development (TfD) • Cooperation on statistics • Higher education and research • Innovation • Gender equality for development (LIKE) • Institutional cooperation within clean energy.

Sweden's main instrument for TAP-based assistance is twinning (company advisers play only a very small role today). Most Swedish support is provided as grants to partners and NGOs and is designed with inputs of technical assistance. Sida currently has fairly extensive twinning-arrangements with SATTE-institutions (tax-authorities, statistical institutions, etc.). Sida is in process of reconsidering its approach to work with capacity development, and are looking to Norway (Kundskabsbanken), OECD (GovNet), and UK (Government Partnership International) for inspiration. Sida is furthermore establishing a platform for development actors around the SDG-2030 agenda, with the idea to gathering capacity development, innovation, TAP (mainly through twinning). The intention is to stimulate the Swedish development resource base which has been significantly reduced.

The **UK** relies to a large extent on consultancy companies to implement its development assistance programmes, some of which also function as think-tanks. DFID's Partnerships for Development Programme (PDP) is similar to Norway's Knowledge Bank. Started in 2016, it focusses on peer-to-peer partnering between UK and national public authorities and will be managed by the National School of Government International. It will act as a form of incubator and facilitator of partnerships, through several instruments, also acting as supporter to UK agencies not familiar with international development assignments.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND ISSUES ARISING

Technical advisory personnel (TAP) in its various forms remains a significant instrument in the toolbox of Danish development assistance. In the coming years, 200+ Danish-funded advisers will be actively at work with public partner institutions and multilateral agencies at country- and headquarter levels globally. They cover a wide range of sectors and themes, countries and institutions, probably with some concentration around Danish priority themes, but the degree of focus and coherence cannot readily be determined. The advisers represent a substantial human resource base in support of Danish development aid priorities and agendas.

TAP is used in a broad variety of ways, and often roles differ from the expectations. For instance, many bilateral advisers, with roles of advising partners and developing capacity, do programme implementation and management functions. In case of the MLAs, they appear to contribute in valuable ways to the work of the organisations, but it is not clear if the intended effects for the MFA, such as influence, knowledge transfer and competence development are achieved as expected. Working within a broad mandate, the role of the sector counsellors seem to vary from case to case, and it can sometimes be difficult to define their expected deliverables clearly.

The multilateral advisors (MLAs) remain a highly prioritized instrument – but too few subsequently stay on with the organisations. This is despite the large number of MLAs over the years. This presents a challenge to Danish priorities about securing influence and gaining knowledge, especially as many Danish senior staff currently employed with the organisations are expected to retire the coming years.

The use by Denmark of TAP in its conventional role as capacity development of partners seems to have declined. While the number of bilateral advisers has remained roughly stable, still fewer of them work directly with partners in advisory positions for institutional development. This raises questions about the emphasis put in Danish development assistance on the institutional development of partners.

Human resources play a more critical role in implementing Danish development assistance than it immediately may appear. The use of bilateral advisers to address human resource needs in the management of Danish development assistance underscores how important personnel on the ground is for delivering expected results, administration, and accountability. It points to the need for stronger emphasis on clarifying and making visible the human resource needs, and to revisit the ways for providing the necessary human resources at programme delivery level. Such needs of personnel for "hands-on" management may only increase as even more of the Danish support targets difficult contexts.

Adoption of "doing development differently" may place new requirements on human resources in Danish development assistance. This is in addition to adjusting programming approaches, budgeting, planning, and accountability procedures. The personnel will be expected to support implementation on the ground, using iterative adaptation, driven by problem-analysis and rapid-cycle feedback. This requires not only personnel with the skills, competences, and aptitude to work in exploratory, responsive, and strategic ways. It also requires flexibility in the mechanisms for mobilizing personnel to respond to needs and opportunities arising. The competences may often need to include strategic and change management skills, networking, process facilitation, and similar. The adviser-instrument – possibly adjusted – could become a key part of the toolbox to deliver personnel with the right profile at the right time and location.

The post-2007 documentation reconfirms the lessons for successful institutional development of partners, but it also finds that these often are not adopted. Fundamental challenges remain with weak ownership, lack of grounding in context, weak consideration of existing capacity, and often supply-driven TAP, which hamper results and sustainability of the TAP interventions. This raises challenges especially for the many development challenges characterized by "complexity" – precisely what marks the priority issues in Danish development assistance, such as climate change, human rights and fragility.

There are questions to address on how to best monitor and evaluate TAP-intensive support, especially under "complexity". There are basic inherent challenges in defining sound and measurable results and indicators for TAP-supported capacity development. There also exists the dilemma between two concerns. One the one hand, under complexity and iterative adaptation, fully defined and specified results frameworks up-front make little sense. On the other hand, for accountability and manageability, there remains a requirement to define, follow-up on, and measure results achievements. The work ahead to define results-monitoring approaches for TAP-supported and iterative approaches would need to balance these concerns.

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EVALUATION STUDY RECENT TRENDS AND ISSUES IN USE OF PERSONNEL AND PARTNERING FOR DEVELOPMENT

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ISBN: PDF: 978-87-93760-30-1
ISBN: HTML: 978-87-93760-31-8