AFD-funded Resident Technical Assistance

Appraisal Report

Since the CICID (Inter-ministerial Committee for International Co-operation and Development) meeting in 2005, sectoral capacity-building now falls under AFD’s responsibility/remit. At the same time, technical assistance has become an entirely separate intervention modality for AFD.

In 2007, the Evaluation and Capitalisation Division was entrusted with the “Appraisal of AFD-funded Resident Technical Assistance”, with support from the Africa Department. This appraisal was aimed at assessing the situation of technical assistance on the ground and identifying the consolidation work needed for implementing this modality.

This study drew on input from many AFD departments, as well as on the detailed analyses of three countries: Cameroon, Madagascar and Senegal.
1.1. A tool in search of a new lease of life

For quite a while and particularly since the beginning of the 1990s, resident technical assistance has been subject to frequent criticism, basically on account of insufficient local ownership (and over-close ties with donors), of doubts as to whether sustainable results are achieved (notably in capacity-building) and of implementation methods (high cost, lack of flexibility, limited competition).

Moreover, several developments in aid modalities may well affect how technical assistance is used. The priority given to programme aid and budget support determines to some extent the roles, positioning and profiles of one facet of technical assistance involving sectoral dialogue and fiduciary expertise. The strong focus on donor co-ordination and alignment highlights the concern to organise the pooling of technical assistance and facilitate (local) ownership by the beneficiaries. In parallel, the accent placed on capacity-building, especially in fragile States, tends to channel technical assistance towards this objective by combining it with other instruments targeting the same goal. Coupled with the effects of aid gradually being untied, long-term expatriate resident expertise increasingly appears to be one of the means through which partner capacity-building can best be achieved.

Within this new context, the principles of use for technical assistance at development community level have not been formally compiled. Nonetheless, a nascent declaration of “good practices” seems to be emerging from recent studies and debates, based around the following principles:

- technical assistance piloting should be ensured by beneficiaries, particularly job identification, but also management and follow-up in concert with donors;
- capacity-building should be the exclusive focus, which notably means disconnecting from operational objectives for investment projects and avoiding the positioning of technical assistance within parallel structures of the project-unit type;
- technical assistance should be diversified and made more flexible depending on national requirements, in terms both of origin and modalities.

1.2. A new opportunity for AFD

In May 2005, the Inter-ministerial Committee for International Co-operation and Development entrusted AFD with responsibility for “the totality of operations, from the design of sector policy in a given country to the realisation of the resulting programmes and projects,” in seven sectors of co-operation: agriculture and rural development, health, primary and secondary education, occupational training, environment, private sector, infrastructure and urban development.

This “modernisation of the French ODA system” included “technical assistance reforms” to enable AFD to integrate resident technical assistance components into the projects and programmes within its areas of competence. The French Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MAE) remains responsible for technical assistants in six fields (governance, cultural co-operation, French-speaking communities, research, higher education, non-governmental co-operation) and, in all sectors, for technical assistants in advisory positions to the authorities in partner countries, as well as to multilateral or regional organisations (e.g. the Pôle de Dakar in the education sector).

The first consequence of this reform has been the creation of a new modality of technical assistance, initially known as International Technical Expertise
A profession with diversified missions

Technical assistants very often have to work successively or in parallel on a wide range of missions that cannot always easily be categorised. They can however be grouped into six main functions:

- **substitution/implementation**: replacement of local personnel in order to support an organisation in the pursuit of its activities;
- **advisory**: supplying expertise in a specific field;
- **capacity-building**: support for individuals, organisations or systems in order to develop and improve their performance;
- **accompaniment/support role during transition**: functions such as mediation, facilitation, negotiation and protection against external pressures allowing institutions/organisations to be accompanied during their change processes;
- **financial control/project management**: control of donor-provided resources to ensure they are used efficiently and transparently;
- **influence**: support in policy definition in liaison with donor strategies.

(Expertise Technique Internationale: ETI), which applied to technical assistance posts within the framework of projects transferred from the MAE to AFD. This modality depends on a Provision of Services Contract (PSC) that: (i) details the terms of reference for any expert made available to a partner, (ii) is signed between this partner and the employer of the expert concerned (France Coopération Internationale [FCI] for French civil servants), and (iii) comes under AFD funding. This technical assistance modality has become a new intervention tool available to the AFD, which can mobilise it in line with the Agency’s procedures.

The reform is also aimed at strengthening the role of the public interest group France Coopération Internationale in its primary mission of co-ordinating and promoting French technical expertise internationally. It is within this framework that FCI recruits and manages French civil-servant technical assistants funded by AFD.

For AFD, one unexpected effect of the reform has been to raise the question of the scope of technical assistance. Previously, the common understanding of technical assistance was based on a tacit definition: a technical assistant is an expert employed by an aid donor (for France, this is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and made available to a partner. The absence of a direct contractual link between donor and expert, which ensues from AFD practices, extends the boundary of technical assistance to all resident human resources financed within the framework of projects and programmes and employed by consultancy firms, NGOs and research centres, and even by local communities, universities or public interest groups.

- The current appraisal of AFD-funded resident technical assistance is based on the following definition: an expert funded by AFD (at least in part) will be considered a resident technical assistant, if (s)he:
  - lives continuously in the host country for more than 6 months;
  - has high-level technical skills (as opposed to administrative staff working on projects or volunteers who cannot be deemed experts due to their limited professional experience);
  - is involved in capacity-building activities and/or implementing aspects of public policies (as opposed to resident company experts who are employed in delivering goods or services).

This expert can be of French or foreign nationality (from a North or South country). This definition encompasses a large part of the long-term expertise helping to further projects and programmes funded by AFD.

1 The term “technical assistance” is commonly used in countries where most of the experts working on projects and programmes are employed directly by the donor (which was the case for France) or by a public national operator (Germany, Japan, Belgium). It is, however, little used and seen as poorly defined in other countries where it is sometimes confused with the term ‘technical co-operation’.
2.1. Multiple modalities for the same profession

Bearing in mind the above definition, the appraisal has confirmed that two distinct forms of AFD-funded resident technical assistance exist. In both cases, and in line with AFD rules, these technical assistance missions are carried out on behalf of beneficiaries (State, local authority).

The first type, termed technical assistance under an operations contract (OTA) (assistance technique sur contrat d’opérations: ATO), comprises resident experts employed by a consultancy firm (or NGO, research body, etc.) that intervenes under an operator contract or an advisory assistance contract and mobilises diverse resources including services relating to resident technical assistance. Most of the time, the latter enjoys a relative autonomy regarding decisions and means employed to reach the contractual objectives. This type of technical assistance has long been used by AFD and includes a substantial local technical assistance component. This sort of resident expertise makes a variable contribution to capacity-building and, at times, capacity-building is overridden by objectives that are more oriented towards operational results.

The second type, which by analogy can be termed resident technical assistance under an individualised contract (ITA) (assistance technique sur contrat individuelisé: ATI), involves experts who work under a specific services provision contract that covers only their individual contribution. This is the new facility created by the CICID in 2005. Contrary to the first type, these technical assistants are fully integrated into their work environment and have a low degree of autonomy. France Coopération Internationale employed around 80% of these ITAs as at the date of the appraisal (mid-2007).

Over and above their timelines, a distinction must be drawn between these two types of technical assistance for several reasons. Contract arrangements, relations between stakeholders, the experts’ employers (mainly FCI for one and consultancy firms for the other), the experts’ origin and status (these are often seconded French civil servants for ITA, and private-sector workers, including nationals, for OTA) are all factors that make them different tools needing distinct identification, piloting and follow-up modalities.

On the other hand, it is virtually impossible to delineate a clear separation between these two forms of technical assistance in terms of expert skills, positioning and the roles exercised. OTA more often plays a support role in public policy implementation, whereas ITA has more of an advisory and institutional support role, but the inverse is also found. The host country and sector of activity often seem to bear more weight in determining the characteristics of technical assistance than the contractual modality itself. In other words, OTA and ITA are indeed two distinct modalities for exercising one profession: technical assistance.

2.2. Promising innovations

The appraisal assessed emerging forms of technical assistance in which AFD participates to varying degrees. These can be grouped into three categories: constitution of regional poles for sectoral expertise, implementation of multi-donor “pools” of technical assistance for beneficiaries, most often within the framework of programme aid, provision of technical assistance within the framework of institutional partnerships (local authorities, consultancy firms, etc.).

From AFD’s point of view, the particularity common to these forms of technical assistance is that the expertise is funded via a contract with a “third-party” supplier (sectoral pole, multi-donor funds, local authority) and not directly through a bilateral contract with the beneficiary. One can thus speak of indirect technical assistance: AFD acts as a partner in putting together a range of technical assistance services and no longer just as funds provider in a request for expertise.
The arrangements for this category of technical assistance are part of the renewed technical assistance facilities mentioned at the beginning of this report, particularly in terms of donor co-ordination, partnership management, diversification and greater flexibility of expertise. Yet they sometimes reflect donors’ wishes to maintain close links with technical assistance and to assign it an interface role, notably in areas of sectoral dialogue in the context of aid programmes.

These indirect technical assistance modalities are nonetheless very promising: they combine a partnership approach, a mix of resident assistance and short-term support, permanent upgrading of expertise, and a capacity for anticipation and innovation.

2.3. A flexible rather than standardised tool

Mid-2007, AFD accounted for 151 technical assistants operating under its funding, including 101 ITAs, 46 OTAs and 4 indirect technical assistants. However, this figure, sourced from a project information base, should be treated with caution. The 101 ITAs, 82 of whom are employed by FCI, certainly represent an exhaustive census of this technical assistance modality. The number of 46 OTAs identified, on the other hand, is far below the number that are actually in the field. By way of illustration, the missions carried out in three countries (Cameroon, Madagascar, Senegal) identified 56 technical assistants present in the field (according to the definition given above), while only 20 were officially listed as such. This discrepancy arises mainly from technical assistance under operations contract (OTA), and notably – but not exclusively – from the lack of accounting for local technical assistance: 23 experts in the three countries studied. Other forms of OTA are also not very visible to project managers: for example, resident experts sub-contracted by consultancy firms or research centres, yet engaged on missions linked to technical assistance (9 in the countries visited).

The Pôle de Dakar is the fruit of a partnership between the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNESCO, and is a regional skills centre that supplies technical assistance to those Sub-Saharan African countries that require analysis and diagnostic work on their educational systems, particularly with regard to the “Education For All” objectives. In this respect, it provides an interface between the international community’s strategies in favour of the Millennium Development Goal education objectives and national strategies implemented in favour of universal schooling. It permanently employs ten or so international high-level experts (from the North and South) and strives to promote the capitalisation of South/South experiences.

In Cameroon, the AFD and the European Commission are co-financing a capacity-building project for the Ministry of Public Works, in complement to a multi-donor programme for road-building investment. This operation is based on a harmonised approach to pooling diversified technical assistance for local beneficiaries (only one invitation to tender, one contract, identical follow-up methods). The technical assistance contract comprises an extended range of multi-form and complementary tools: long-term expertise, repeated short-term missions over time, specific one-off expertise, training, etc.

In the urban sector in Burkina Faso, AFD is financing a project to open up the fringe quarters of Ouagadougou. This will be integrated within the city’s strategic sanitation programme, and also supported by the city of Lyon. Within this framework, AFD and Lyon have signed a partnership agreement specifying each partner’s modalities for intervention. Lyon is to provide an expert having civil servant status to support the General Secretary of Ouagadougou, and ensure his basic remuneration. Funding from AFD includes the costs linked to the expert’s execution of his mission and to his expatriation. At the end of his mission, he takes up his position again in Lyon.

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Indirect technical assistance is even more difficult to quantify. Six technical assistants of this type, not listed at the outset, were identified during the missions in the three countries. This type of expertise is not very visible. It is often fungible within larger funds (multi-donor pool, trust funds), and sometimes difficult to attribute to AFD (the case with institutional partnerships). It is flagged, however, to occupy a position of growing importance in AFD-funded technical assistance as a whole.

Ultimately, it is difficult to know how many resident experts are working under AFD funding on technical assistance jobs, and this difficulty can only intensify as intervention modalities become increasingly diversified and flexible. This state of affairs is not due to any shortcomings in the information systems. Rather, it is indicative of the place occupied by technical assistance in the AFD system: it is not a standard tool with a contractual mode, a budget and centralised job position management, but a multi-purpose tool—which is more generally the case for expertise, which is used in a flexible and diversified manner for capacity-building and/or implementing public policies.

LESSONS LEARNED

3.1. ITA: a modality to be streamlined

This appraisal has allowed assessment of the way in which the new modality of technical assistance under individualised contract (ITA) extends and strengthens AFD’s means of action for its capacity-building mission.

Furthermore, ITA seems to be a good practice in many respects. The beneficiaries’ responsibility for identifying, managing and piloting this type of technical assistance is one aspect that should be underlined. It is also a modality that is transparent for beneficiaries as far as costs and contracts are concerned. ITA is fully immersed in those institutions being supported and offers optimal conditions for effectively raising local ownership.

However, some ITAs, particularly when host institutions are fragile, lack adequate supervision, which underlines their motivation and their efficiency. The combined actions of the beneficiary, the employer (most often FCI) and AFD sometimes prove insufficient in terms of piloting this type of technical assistant. Stronger involvement from the AFD and, where possible, the employer of technical assistance to support the supervision, follow-up and piloting function assumed by the beneficiary would improve the efficiency of this type of technical assistance.

The broader question of mobilising professional networks that include technical assistance (meetings, information, capitalisation, training) remains unanswered. This important function does not currently appear to be sufficiently ensured.

More generally, the situation of the ITA expert reflects the tension that exists between the extent to which the technical assistant is immersed in local institutions and the conditions required for a satisfactory valorisation of his/her expertise. Close formal relations between the expert and donor or large development institution (direct contracting, frequent high-level contacts, participation in professional networks, contribution to the donor’s sectoral policy, direct encouragement to take responsibility for certain budgets or parts of projects) enhance the professional standing of this expert. Yet, at the same time they can inspire mistrust on the part of the beneficiaries preventing them from assuming full ownership of the intervention. The ITA expert is in the opposite situation: the conditions for raising local ownership are completely fulfilled, but a certain professional isolation can give rise to a low valorisation of skills.

Without detracting from the priority objective of local ownership, the issue of the need to valorise technical assistance must be taken into consideration.
in different ways: rejuvenating expert sources, running sectoral networks, closer three-sided follow-up by donor-beneficiary-expert, etc.

3.2. Demand-led rather than need-driven technical assistance

One aspect of technical assistance responds to a need for secure operations; this is sometimes at a financial level, but more often concerns technical, information processing and procedural security. On this last point, the use of consultancy firms or project units, including national or international technical assistance, is often perceived by the donor, and sometimes by the beneficiary, as offering a procedural flexibility essential for implementing complex operations under good conditions, particularly in fragile states. This use of technical assistance proves similar to substitution, far removed from the “good practices” resulting from international experience, and does raise the question of sustainability. Nonetheless, it often responds to a real operational constraint, and concern about security most often dovetails with a parallel mission of capacity-building. An important part of AFD-funded OTA, mainly comprising local technical assistance, responds to this kind of preoccupation.

With regard to missions for capacity-building in the strict sense of the term, the implementation of technical assistance in development projects and programmes is sometimes hindered in partnership discussions by a lack of distinction between, on the one hand, the need for capacity-building as expressed by beneficiaries, which can be interpreted as a demand for technical assistance, and, on the other hand, the need for technical assistance as identified by the teams responsible for appraising operations. In reality, numerous “capacity deficits” do not give rise to an explicit request for technical assistance from partner institutions. This is because they are not (i) recognised as such by the beneficiary, (ii) likely to be specified and defined in such a way as to be transformed into a “job description”, or (iii) readily open to external resident expertise.

“Immersed” technical assistance modalities, such as ITA, must be reserved for those cases where the beneficiaries express a real demand and will themselves take on the management and piloting of this expertise. This prerequisite for ITA efficiency limits its usage, but also makes it a specific and innovative capacity-building tool.

When the need for partner capacity-building goes beyond the scope of explicitly requested resident technical assistance, other forms of technical assistance or expertise must be mobilised to respond to the individual case: OAT, technical assistance pooling, sectoral centres of expertise, short-term expertise, institutional partnership.

Regional skills centres (such as the Pôle de Dakar, rural hubs or regional healthcare platforms) provide particularly interesting pathways to counter certain capacity deficits. They make it possible to anticipate specialised needs, reconcile valorisation of resident technical assistance with a permanent capacity for short-term expertise, as well as promoting co-ordination between donors and beneficiary countries at regional level.

The case of sectoral aid programmes also deserves mention. Donors often feel they lack the detailed sectoral knowledge that would enable them to conduct an in-depth strategic dialogue. Elements of technical assistance are sometimes proposed in response to this problem, either directly in support of donor co-ordination or, more frequently, under a dual-piloting system (local beneficiary/multi-donor pool), with a view to building the beneficiaries’ capacities (and sometimes even the donors’ capacities) and to enabling a two-way circulation of influence, skills and information.

Technical assistance funded by the AFD and managed and piloted by the beneficiaries is not equipped to meet to this type of need. The AFD must therefore respond by financing short-term expertise or, in the case of multi-donor aid programmes, by participating in specific capacity-building operations or funds.
The AFD is engaged in three dynamics: (i) the development of a new technical assistance modality, termed here as technical assistance under individualised contract (ITA), (ii) an increasing commitment to sectoral capacity-building, (iii) active participation in the international move towards new, more diversified and co-ordinated forms of technical assistance (regional centres of expertise, sectoral networks, institutional partnerships, technical assistance pooling, joint capacity-building funds, etc.)

A first step will be to make this new ITA modality, the model for raising local ownership, an efficient capacity-building tool, which requires improving the conditions for structuring and developing this kind of expertise. A second step will be to orchestrate the use of the different forms of technical assistance available to AFD to satisfy demands expressed by beneficiaries as well as needs identified by the different development actors. This will mean increasing AFD’s commitment to innovative technical assistance modalities, as a partner in building up specialised expertise. This second stage should make technical assistance into a diversified tool that integrates with other forms of action (short-term expertise, network, training, etc.) in capacity-building strategies, rather than it being a monolithic, standardised instrument.

These developments can only occur if particular focus is given to the question of the technical assistance “market”. The analysis of the supply of technical assistance available to AFD and of the policies accompanying this offer has not been undertaken by the present study and remains to be done. AFD’s future technical assistance will need to be structured around the three imperatives of demand/need/supply.

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