

DRAFT FOR DISCUSSION

"A VERY FUZZY ISSUE"

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR POLICY IN AFRICA

by

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"It used to be called manpower development, then it became institutional development and is now a combination of both called 'Capacity Building'. No doubt some new jargon will succeed this."

"Donors want something very well-defined in the capacity building area, but it is a very fuzzy issue."

Introduction

The Assignment

In January 1992, I was hired to work on an Oxford University programme concerned with "capacity building for policy making" in Africa. I came to it after several years' experience of corporate planning with a major multinational company, usually on issues related to their business in the Far East. I had, however, done my PhD field work in Cameroon and worked briefly in the late 1970s on a USAID project in Niger. In picking up the Oxford assignment, not only was I returning to aid and Africa, but I was also hoping to see how lessons I had learned in international business planning might function in the public sector.

However, as the opening quotations show, not only is capacity building the latest jargon in a profession marching on jargon rations, it is a very ill-defined and nebulous concept. As an idea it is the logical prescription following an analysis of Africa's difficulties during the 1980s which concluded that part of the responsibility for failure lay with the promulgation of bad policies. Therefore, to improve policies one needed to increase "the capacity for [good] policy-making." But what does this really mean? The office files in Oxford suggested that a programme based on building up analytical skills in African universities and research institutes would go a long way to improving policy. But was that really appropriate and even if appropriate, was it sufficient? How is the problem of poor policy defined and in that definition what remedies are suggested?

What also alarmed me more about this phrase, was the assumption that "capacity building" was considered necessary at all. After thirty years of development assistance to independent Africa, why was more assistance needed and what kind of assistance was required? More radically, to what extent had assistance so far actually interfered with the development of sound policy and policy implementation?

A Few Preconceptions

Both of these questions came out of a collection of prejudices and preconceptions I had carried over from earlier work. One of these comes from experience in corporate planning. Namely, that any organisation, large or small, private or public, finds it extremely difficult both to understand the world in which it operates and to design sensible plans for flourishing in that world. A number of factors can get in the way: A bad mixture of personalities in an organisation can make it difficult for people to talk to each other and share their perceptions and ideas, or a weak organisational structure may make it difficult for good ideas and good people to be heard. Alternatively, a business which has made good profits for years may fail to notice when circumstances have changed -- like the man making buggy whips who thinks the automobile is just a passing fad. There are also issues which are just too perplexing to contemplate -- such as the impact of motor cars on global warming -- so we prefer not to confront them at all. Finally, there is the powerful inertia of day to day duties, which are gluttons for our attention, distracting us from considering the future and whatever that may require. So thinking about "policy" -- whether it

is government policy on a public issue, corporate policy concerned with strategic survival, or a personal decision about looking for work -- is always troublesome and difficult. And because it is troublesome, most of us prefer not to think about these things at all, but just let events unfold as and when they may.

A second prejudice of mine, as an over-educated and underemployed geographer with a PhD, is that academic research skills and analysis can help organisations work through the dilemmas they are facing. This takes place in two ways: first by doing research that throws new light on the issues, and second by explaining as simply as possible the results of that research to those who need to use it. In my own experience, the explanation, presentation and resulting discussions have been as important as the initial analytical findings. This is so largely because no group likes to accept advice from "outsiders" until they have been able to take control of the information and its implications in the context their own circumstances and ideas. In the planning and consultancy professions this process is referred to as the need to establish "ownership".

"Ownership" raises a third issue. In any organisation whether public or private, the process of establishing ownership of analysis and building a consensus about policy is at least in part a political exercise. As such, it has at best an ambiguous relationship to the analytical work which is meant to inform any policy decision. My own instinct has been to bring the analytical and the political process into greater alignment, but this is never an easy or obvious task and "political" factors unrelated to analytical conclusions can often shift policy in unexpected directions.

In the context of public policy in Africa, the need to establish ownership uncovers an additional perplexing dilemma: namely that most funding for policy analysis and for many of the analysts themselves has come from international aid. That being the case, what ownership can be established in the African organisations themselves? As people repeatedly told me over the past several months, "He who pays the piper calls the tune," and so far most policy analysis in Africa has been paid for using non-African funds and very often non-African analysts. That being the case, what stake in resulting policy are African governments likely to have?

This brought me up against a much older prejudice, acquired after my brief assignment in Niger in the late 1970s: that aid, in spite of its good intentions, can have a very deleterious impact on development. There is now considerable research which documents some of the disasters of aid projects, but I was thinking in more general terms of the importance of establishing sound political foundations before a country can begin to grow. I see these foundations as having three important components: first the capacity for political agreements which creates political stability; second the ability of the leadership to think in terms of the whole population rather than in terms of their own special interests; and third the ability of the leadership to take a long term point of view. All three foundations are essential if good policy is to be formulated and implemented. Aid, it seemed to me, had weakened all three for several reasons.

Taking the last point first, cycles of project funding which only last two to three years have meant that there was little chance of developing a twenty-year time horizon. Second, an over-dependence on international aid, can allow a government to ignore its own population. This not only helps narrow interests to dominate government, it also reduces the need to create political agreements which would be the basis for political stability. In addition, the heavy use of foreign advisors in many branches of government has meant that local bureaucrats effectively lost responsibility for their own departments and, not surprisingly, any interest in designing policies for which they had no effective responsibility.

So these were my prejudices as I began the task of understanding capacity building for policy in Africa: 1) that policy thinking is inherently difficult in all societies and organisations, 2) that academic research skills can make a useful contribution and 3) that making and agreeing policy is a political process and 4) that foreign aid and foreign advisors have often weakened the ability of African governments to confront their own policy dilemmas from sound political foundations.

As a set of assumptions these preoccupations have informed my approach to "capacity building" and can be reduced to two broad questions. First, how is the problem of policy-making defined and what remedies are implied in that definition? Second, what is the relationship between aid and policy, both in the past and in recent years, and how can that relationship be redefined to strengthen capacity for sound policy, rather than weaken it?

The Approach or "Method"

In answering these questions I have benefitted from interviews or meetings with about sixty people in the UK and East and Southern Africa during the first three months of 1992. About half represent members of the donor community, with most of the rest being citizens of various African countries. The balance are people associated with Oxford University who stand in a middle group between these two. Some of the meetings and interviews took place in the course of developing project proposals. Most however were directed to understanding the policy process and how it might be improved. During all interviews I took copious notes which were typed up within a few days of an interview and reconstructed the conversation that took place. When I began writing this paper, the remarks people made to me were categorised according to subjects or issues and which have been analyzed here.

I have chosen not to identify the people who spoke or the countries they were speaking about. I am keenly aware of the differences between different countries, but did not want to cause trouble for any of the people who helped me and feel the issues they raise are of considerable general interest in their own right. Finally, the quotations that appear are, as I have indicated, quotations from my notes, as I was not using a tape recorder. While the exact wording may not always be accurate, I don't believe I have altered the meaning of anything that was said.

Report of Interviews

In analyzing the material from the interviews, five different subjects emerged: 1) the question of demand for policy analysis; 2) the use that is made of highly trained people; 3) the nature of the policy-making process; 4) signs of change in the process; and 5) ways of encouraging evolutionary change. Running through all five subjects are my two questions: what is the problem, what is the role of aid? I will return to these issues at the end of the paper, but will begin here by simply presenting the interviewing findings.

The Question of Demand for Policy Analysis

One of the first observations that was made to me came from someone in one of the donor agencies who had been thinking about capacity for policy in Africa for several years. He felt that the biggest problem in building capacity for policy making in Africa was that there was no demand for policy analysis coming from African governments. The question was first raised in Oxford, by a man who had been working on capacity building for several years: *"Why is the demand for policy analysis not coming from African leaders?"* The question puzzled me, so when I began travelling two weeks later, I took the question along and put it to the people I met and interviewed. Not surprisingly, there was a considerable variety of views in their answers. Above all, the bald statement that there is no demand for policy analysis from African governments was rejected by Africans who were in or working with their own governments. As one said, *"It is not true to say there is no demand for policy analysis. The demand is there."* However, the way demand has been changing suggests that the original question was not entirely misplaced, although the situation clearly needs to be redefined.

Good People Are in Place

While maintaining that the demand for policy analysis existed, many people could frequently describe difficulties in the delivery and use of policy analysis which might be interpreted as killing off any demand for policy thinking. This led to several comments concluding that there were good people in place, but they were not being used, or were being used badly. A few quotations illustrate the point:

"We train people, but nothing happens. They sit in offices."

"There are institutions and individuals who are effective and committed, but hard-pressed and functioning imperfectly at the best of times."

"The good people become too busy and quality suffers."

"The pockets of good analysis are constrained by a shortage of like-minded people and a lack of necessary data."

"There is a lack of middle cadres in government. The middle gets discouraged. They are not given either responsibility or the tools to do their job."

"Analysts get tired and frustrated, so they leave government or go for further education."

This record led an African working on capacity building to be quoted as saying, *"the problem isn't capacity building, but capacity retention,"* on the grounds that there has been a tremendous amount of training of Africans over the past thirty years, but many do not return, or do not stay in government, or are unable to function effectively.

Nature of the Process

Many people went further and tried to understand the nature of the process itself. A number of themes came out in these remarks.

Narrow Interests and Bureaucratic Confusion

For some, it was the dominance of narrow interests that made policy analysis and formulation difficult. In other remarks, bureaucratic confusion and bad design caused mismanagement as well as conflicts of "turf" and control.

Narrow Interests

"In the 1970s and '80s, decision-making was narrowly-based: the President, the [ruling party], parastatals and cooperatives. These form the core of resistance now."

"There is more interest in their own villages than in national policies."

"Studies are not used because of vested interests."

"Policy becomes a free-for-all struggle for resources."

"The state has been hijacked by narrow interests, so that policies that guide the resources of the state have been driven by shorter term interests. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that these are closed political systems without clear accountability."

Design of the Bureaucracy

"Now there is a Presidential Committee on parastatal reform, but why is a new structure needed? There is already an Office of the Prime Minister, an Office of the President and a Cabinet."

"There is no basic framework for thinking about problems."

"[There is] a framework for action [the extension service] ... but there is no framework for deciding how to use it. And solving a crisis always comes first, so there is no commitment to policy."

"Policy ... is more influenced by the political process than the bureaucratic process. The Party is very important."

"[The country] is in the process of structural adjustment, but there is no Presidential Council, no advisory structure in government, no obvious university to government links on policy."

"There are six or seven ministries concerned with agriculture ... How can you possibly develop a coherent strategy with this number of agencies?"

Intellectuals, Expatriates and Traditions

More broadly, some people felt there was a mistrust of intellectuals in African governments, consistent with the political repression which has been the norm until recently. One person linked this mistrust of African intellectuals to the role of expatriate advisors, which was more generally criticised by others. Both donors and Africans tried to understand the influence of African traditions.

Mistrust of Intellectuals

"Trained [people] are in place, but the government is not hospitable to intellectuals."

"[The] inclusion of academics on parastatal boards and in government was not really a sign of respect for intellectuals, but an attempt to buy off academic criticism."

Role of Expatriate Advisors

"For the ministries, the expatriate advisor is also someone who is seen as politically neutral, who can be sent packing relatively easily, thus minimising the opportunity for political opposition within an organisation."

"The international advisor is gone once his advice is given, so there is no chance to go back for more information or correction. In the end, the local minister gets all the blame."

Traditions

"There is no tradition of long-term strategic thinking after years of living in 'subsistence mode' where there is no perceived utility to long term thinking. It is hard to institutionalize it."

"I notice that the interaction [between researchers and policy-makers] is very much between individuals; not between institutions." (Remark made in the context of a discussion about the role of prophets in traditional society.)

"There is a need to develop local policies organically [consistent with local traditions]. We have to initiate organic change, not impose it."

Crisis Thinking, Lack of Data and Accident

Still others blamed a permanent preoccupation with crisis for the lack of good analysis, although several thought that even if there was time and opportunity to consider policy options dispassionately, the data for the exercise would be lacking. One man, in a remark that could have been made about strategic planning in any corporate context, noted the accidents of the policy process.

Crisis Thinking

"There are good people in the planning commission with good skills. But questions come as emergencies, so that I end up doing the work myself. There is no time to get others involved, which means there is no training for the rest of the staff. ..."

"Crisis planning overrides any framework for research."

"Decision-making is fire fighting. Leadership lacks vision."

"In the government there are several different kinds of policy analysis. (1) There is first of all the long term thinking which gets written up as sessional paper ... what do we want to do for the next 10-15 years? (2) Then there will be the development plan which takes a five year horizon and is the government blue print to get aid money. (3) More immediately, there is the ad-hoc fire fighting -- day to day reactions to small problems ... where the crisis gets solved at the expense of the long term plan. (4) Then there is a fourth form of policy making. It is not a day to day thing like fire-fighting, but a result of someone in government thinking about a sector or a commodity or a specific problem. He might then ask for a policy paper to be produced in a week, or a quarter-hour, so you can imagine how much research and thinking goes into it. But this paper will not be integrated into the long term or medium term plan. What this means is that both the individual thinking and the fire fighting contend with the medium and long term thinking. That may be helpful; it also may be a conflict."

Lack of Data

"Policy is not made because the data is not there."

"Good policies follow from good data, but data often is not collected or, if collected, is not used. Analysis that is done is often fragmented and uncoordinated."

Accidents and Conventional Wisdom

"To say there is no demand is not correct, but analysis may not be fully utilized. A lot depends on where the analysis lands. If the minister can read and understand the issues, and has not already made up his mind, then the analysis will carry some weight. But the reaction also depends on the conventional wisdom of the times."

Not a Failure of Analysis, but of Implementation

Finally, there were several statements which said that policy formulation was not the problem, but rather policy implementation.

Implementation

"Capacity building is not the problem. There is plenty of analysis around. A lot of policies are there, but all collapse on implementation. Why?"

"Implementation is a problem. There are no funds to do anything. Government pays salaries only. [Extension] agents can't go to see farmers because there is no money for transport."

"When I was travelling, I saw that all the District Officers had a copy of the 1986 Sessional Paper in a drawer, but it had never been used. The District Officers had different views of what was required and the national view was lost."

"Decisions are not implemented. There is a huge forest called government which is full of invisible trees. If you go to collect wood, you can't find any."

"How do you measure success? In one case it was measured by the amount of money that was spent. But when I went to see a project, said to be 90% completed, it was just bush and a few buildings."

Summary: Views of the Process

As these quotations from my notes show, there is considerable variety in how people in East Africa see the policy process itself. What has been of interest in organising these notes, is to see the different emphases given by Western expatriates in the region and by the Africans who are inside the bureaucracy or local universities. With one exception, all of the comments about the dominance of narrow interests and the poor design of bureaucratic authority and policy have come from expatriates. The observations about the dominance of crisis thinking, the role of accidents and conventional wisdom and the failures of implementation have nearly all come from African speakers. Quotations about the other issues came from both groups.

To some extent this reflects a physical difference in where people stand. To someone working inside government, coping with the pressures of day to day duties, it is inevitable that the immediate impact of crisis thinking, ministerial personalities and the failures of implementation should be most apparent. However, for those who sit on one side, watching the process and participating on occasion, it is possible to discern larger structural failures that the mechanics of day to day coping have hidden. This suggests that if improvements are to be made to the policy process in these countries, means need to be found for using the overall design and management of policy process to ameliorate the kinds of difficulties individuals in the system are confronting.

Signs of Change

These descriptions of the policy process, on their own, give the impression of a system that is ineffective and likely to remain so. But the interviews in East Africa also revealed a number of signs of change in the way government people are thinking and responding, and in the way university people are reshaping their role in society. There were two significant driving forces for these changes: 1) the financial negotiations between donors and African governments and 2) political changes and democratisation.

Negotiations between Donors and Governments

An American who had spent several years working on capacity building in Africa said that at the end of the assignment,

"Demand was still a genuine issue. The only answer we came up with was that structural adjustment would create the demand for analysis in African government."

Notes from a number of interviews suggest that this expectation has been at least partially born out in some countries. Several people described the evolution of demand for policy analysis as beginning with the World Bank using expatriate consultants, but gradually broadening to include requests for analysis from the government using local government and university researchers. One person gave the example of an alternative computer model of the economy, which had been developed by local people in order to negotiate with the World Bank. "I have a lot of respect for people in the World Bank, but you must have something to challenge them with," said the man who funded the project. While the requests for analysis were said to come principally from the "technocrats" in the government and not the politicians, the requests themselves were seen as a significant change.

An observer in another country, however, was less sanguine about developments there:

"[This country] has a better capacity [than others] to adapt to reforms, but less need of loan money and so is less susceptible to outside pressure. So it is less liberalized than [elsewhere]. There is a better bureaucracy and better analytical capacity, but less change."

Structural adjustment, however, is not the whole story. There was a sense that a more general dependency on aid and aid projects was making it both more difficult and more necessary for government to set its own priorities. This theme was repeated by both expatriates and Africans. In addition, the Africans expressed a degree of exasperation and scepticism about the aid relationship as a whole, not always shared by expatriates.

Expatriates

"Competent people are overburdened by donor requests; there is no time to think of their own policies."

"The government has no sense of its own priorities. Donors should put pressure on [local people] to define their own goals."

"[Local] institutions should develop their own priorities and then coordinate donor assistance."

Africans

"Most African governments have not had their priorities clearly defined so they can talk with donors. Therefore we need capacity for policy analysis."

"We have no control of our own agenda, the topics come from outside: women in development, the environment ... there is a need for African governments to set their own priorities ..."

"Donors don't realise the kind of pressure they put on the government or that it can be extremely irritating. If you don't accommodate you miss the money."

"Donor support helps build a base for independence, but donors also offer support so they can support themselves."

"Most international organisations are not what they claim. Their people benefit more than the intended beneficiaries."

Some donors were, though, sceptical of these criticisms. "Donor pressures are not the whole story," said one, while another person observed that "There is no setting of priorities here, but that is largely deliberate. The government has chosen to be opaque."

Nonetheless, the dynamic and difficult relationship between governments and donors does seem to be creating a greater understanding of the need for policy analysis in African governments. As a senior member of one government said in thinking about the consequences of economic reform, "There is a need for a planning system that is cost-effective, efficient and which delivers."

Political Redefinitions

As important as the pressure of donor aid and structural adjustment have been the popular demands for greater government openness and accountability, which have accompanied calls for great democracy in several countries.

Popular Dissatisfaction

"Structural adjustment is creating a little more demand for analysis, but political democracy is likely to create more. ... [The people] themselves are completely fed up. The level of popular disgust is so high, that people are ready for any change. The only thing holding them back is a real fear of instability."

"With one party government and no free speech, the government has been too free to do as it likes. But with the change, we can start to have more objective policies. ... I am very happy about what is going on. In a bad system, people do things of no benefit to the country."

The sense of a government facing an active formal opposition was less evident in another country where one disillusioned described multiparty democracy as simply the *"The old party bosses in new clothes."* Another donor, however, described four separate debates in this country, which were largely running independently of one another:

- a) *Political debate, largely in the ruling party, with only tenuous connections with the people;*
- b) *Technical debate, amongst bureaucrats led by the ministry of finance, the national bank and the donors, particularly the World Bank and the IMF;*
- c) *Scientific debate, involving university research;*
- d) *Common man's debate, which had some interaction with the political debate in the Party at the local level.*

In his view, these four debates needed to forge links with each other, if policy changes were to endure. What his remark suggests, however, is that arguments about the details of the reform process are the heart of the present political debate in the country. This view was shared by another expatriate who had been involved in one of the privatization exercises where there had been *"a big political fight"* over the sale of one of the state businesses. The fight itself was described as *"an important exercise in institution building"*, which involved village shareholders in the policy decision whether to sell or not sell the state business.

More generally, this process of political redefinition is a process that has increased popular participation in defining the role of the state in the life of the nation and its social and economic development. This participation is probably as important a

development for improving policy analysis in Africa as any other change in recent years. As a Nigerian working in Nairobi said,

"A lot depends on Africans' perception of the state. It has been seen as an artificial set up, so records could be burnt and decisions ignored. Why should a technician [a policy analyst] want to make a recommendation if it is just irrelevant?"

Increasing Government Demand

With more legitimate government, and with the public pressure that comes from "a political opposition, public scrutiny, more letters to the editor, etc.", the need and demand for seriously argued public policy has become more evident. Some speakers linked this change to the ordinary turnover of generations and the greater sophistication of government people.

Increased Demand

- *"The demand for academic research has come from donors, but is increasingly coming from [Africans]."*

"The demand for analysis is low, but rising, beginning with the need to inform the technical debate. Government is commissioning more."

Generational Change

"Demand will grow with generational change and the number of people [in government] with technical skills."

"Pressure for reform is coming from younger people who are not politicians yet and may never be ones. Now there are enough educated people in some of the higher civil service positions so that they can have some influence."

"Government now has enough experience to see what works and what won't work. They are no longer naive. They have learned something after 27 years of schooling. They are better able to listen."

"The great aura around foreign advisors is no longer there. Many [Africans] have the same training as the foreigners do. There is a new pride coming up, a self-independence. National independence has become self-independence."

Increased Use of Local Consultants

With these changes, there has been a renewed emphasis on the role of local consultants, many from the national universities. This has led the university people to redefine their own worth and role in the policy process.

"There are now two generations in politics in Africa - two generations since independence. In the second generation, 80% are people with university degrees. This generation has a strong sense of where they belong and see the university as a resource centre."

"The demand of agricultural economists is increasing with the economic reforms and changes."

"Local consultants are no longer dismissed because they are local, but are engaged in debate and argument with both sides learning a lot. ... It is a more participatory process."

"There is better government acknowledgement of the role of intellectuals ... policy is now depending more on what intellectuals say."

Some of this improvement has been traced to the donors' role in commissioning local researchers. *"Donors have helped by developing and recognising the local talents,"* said an African analyst. This not only increases the incomes of underpaid university staff, but enhances their reputation for good work, something one donor saw as essential for encouraging local institutions.

"Governments need policy analysis and the advice it provides. An outside consultant never has the necessary depth, while local institutions still need to build up a reputation that they can provide the thinking."

Summary: Signs of Change

Overall, what this section of remarks shows is that despite considerable criticism of the policy making process, and a perception among some donors that there is no African demand for policy analysis, there are powerful forces reshaping both process and demand. Some of these stem from the difficult negotiations of international aid, while others are following generational change and popular political pressure. The effect has been not only to encourage local intellectuals to develop a role in advising and informing public policy debates, but to also encourage government bureaucrats and departments to make better use of the talent that is available. As the earlier comments on the nature of the process suggest, there is still considerable room for improvement, but the relatively optimistic climate should not be ignored.

Encouraging Evolutionary Change

Not surprisingly, both donors and Africans had suggestions for encouraging the kind of evolutionary changes surrounding policy analysis and development that can already be seen. Their remarks were addressed both to the sources of the analysis and the way it should be integrated into government thinking, as well as touching briefly on the political processes which have in part been responsible for the change of climate.

Support for "Good Governance and Democracy"

One of the contradictions of aid work to assist policy analysis is that policy and politics are intimately intertwined, but politics by definition is "off-bounds" to expatriate activities. However, the temptation to encourage better policy through changes in the political system is still there and surfaces in seminars about good governance as well as in donor comments like the following:

"We cannot support interest group politics, but we can support good government: an independent judiciary, a free press, etc."

"Donors can't influence the social and political agenda, although they did force the pace of democratisation. Now they are trying the same pressure in economic reform with structural adjustment. But it is an imperialist approach."

"The most beneficial contribution would be 10-15 years of intensive education. Educate, create a population that will demand good government."

Support for African Universities

At a level of greater detachment, it is argued that donors and outside agencies, like the Food Studies Group in Oxford, should concentrate on improving the quality and quantity of analysis that is available from local universities and research institutes.

"Making policy has two aspects: political and technical. Outsiders cannot influence the political system. But there is also a need for policy options. If these do not exist, politicians cannot be blamed."

"We should build up the 'intellectual bank' in universities, create the capacity for policy analysis even when demand for it is low."

In the comments on how capacity for policy analysis can be improved, there was a unanimous view coming from people in African university departments I visited. Above all, the right financial and intellectual conditions needed to exist to attract and keep talented staff. Here it was widely recognised that salaries, usually paid by government, were insufficient to meet ordinary expenses. As a result, staff were spending considerable time doing consultancy work for donor agencies and government. While most people valued this work and while it doubtless improved the links between government and university, it also has had the effect of straining staff resources and reducing the time for teaching, supervision and independent research. Such strains were further exacerbated by efforts in university departments to ensure that all staff had an opportunity to study for a PhD abroad. This policy has been questioned by several donors, but is one to which the university departments are firmly committed. Not only is it one way to attract good people, it also reduces the isolation of working in young African universities with poor libraries and meagre facilities.

These conditions are so widely shared that it is possible to list the most common requirements for retaining good staff, all of which reflect the brute fact that university departments, research institutes (and government departments) are under-funded and under-resourced.

- a) Good salaries;
- b) Good facilities and opportunities to do research;
- c) Consultancy work to improve incomes and participate in public affairs;
- d) A strong, diversified financial base.

This led one donor working in capacity building to suggest somewhat cynically,

"Donors are still not able to think the unthinkable: that the quickest way to build up capacity would be to make a contribution to good salaries and the equipment to function and then withdraw."

More realistically, it has led university leaders to look for ways of diversifying their sources of funds, which is best exemplified by this list of funding ideas presented at one of the agricultural universities:

- a) Cost-sharing via student fees;
- b) Research consultancies for the public and private sectors;
- c) Lobbying for increased government support;
- d) Increase private sector support;
- e) Function as farmers, earning a profit from university lands;
- f) Lobby donors to support quality research and public policy work.

Overall, he concluded, *"We need to rethink what we are doing financially."*

Reorganising Government Departments

Similar attempts to rethink the organisation and financial basis of government departments (as distinct from university departments) were picked up during the interviews. According to one donor,

"Departments are funded according to the number of people employed, so there is little incentive to trim staff or control spending. It is also a very centralized system. Does this mean they should decentralize to give local control of staffing and budget?"

This same line of thought has led both donors and government people to question the best administration arrangement for policy thinking. One African was reported to be recommending that his government's ministries have autonomy on salary structure and funding. Elsewhere, a government minister suggested that an analytical unit should be placed outside government structures.

"My conception of what we need is some kind of research, a think tank, an analytical unit to analyze policy options ... but I am not sure government can do this. I have been in government since 1961 and I have my doubts, since in government people want power, and it becomes a question of power."

The Minister's thinking was echoed by one of the donors:

"There is a need for research institutes which are free of government, but able to do government work."

To some extent, that movement outside the walls of government is already taking place. One person observed that as first degree graduates were having trouble finding work in government they were moving to the private sector, setting up their own institutes and consultancies.

What comes out of these comments, more than anything else, is a desire to look for a different institutional setting for policy work -- one that is financially viable, intellectually independent, but able to contribute effectively to government thinking. Whether such a setting can best be created within existing government structures or outside of them is no doubt a matter for debate in each country. The desire to address the issue, however, should not be ignored.

The Question of Training

By far the most common response to the need to build up capacity -- increased training -- was one that was rarely mentioned in the interviews. This was no doubt partly my own fault for structuring the conversations first towards the broader questions before asking what skills are lacking, what skills are needed, and how can they be acquired. However, an interview with a woman who specialises in training tended to support this broad approach. In her view,

"Training needs to take the whole system into account, not just look at specific aspects in isolation. ... I see training as consultancy, involving the whole organisation and the way it functions. ... For training to be effective, first identify the needs of the individual, the department and the organisation."

She also identified a need for training in presenting the results of policy research --- an observation that could be applied to many business organisations as well.

"I need to train civil servants on how to collect the ideas of others, and then present the thinking to more senior management and politicians. ... People can often define an issue, but do not know how to present it or communicate new thinking without upsetting senior people."

The lack of emphasis on training in the interviews did not mean that people were satisfied with the level of skills in their organisations. On the contrary, many people mentioned the need for greater analytical experience and exposure to techniques. But there was a deeper recognition that without broadly supporting structures, all the training in the world would be wasted.

Regional Innovations

There were, finally, two other innovations that are worth noting. Both of them are regional organisations which bring people together, outside the context of their own national concerns, to discuss professional issues in a neutral surrounding. One is a specialist organisation, based in Nairobi: the African Economic Research Consortium. The AERC was mentioned several times as an outstanding example of a good supportive institution serving African professionals.

"The AERC is an encouraging development. It set a high standard of work and is really tackling the problems of young economists."

The other notable institution is the East and Southern Africa Management Institute (ESAMI) based in Arusha, Tanzania. Here they have been using "sensitizing seminars" which bring together top level bureaucrats from various countries to share their experience in an area like food policy. Such seminars would include, for example, a person from a marketing board, the person deciding foreign exchange regulations, and another from the Ministry of Agriculture. Participants work together to see the interaction of their various decisions, and understand the links and limitations of their own actions. The fact that the seminar is at a regional institution allows participants to look objectively at the issues in a neutral environment and compare notes with countries in a similar position. In this way, it provides a forum for discussion among African leaders while also working to improve understanding and analytical skills.

Summary: Encouraging Change

What is striking about all these ideas for encouraging change is that they represent thinking among both donors and Africans to look at the broader structures supporting policy analysis and creation, whether it is the encouragement of a more open society or the financial base of universities and government departments. This theme was also apparent in the earlier remarks about the nature of the policy process and the ways in the process in changing. Above all, it is clear that simply supporting increased training in specific policy skills will not be enough to encourage greater production and use of analytical work. Management, organisation and continued open dialogue and discussion will all be important factors.

A Few Final Conclusions

In conclusion, it is useful to return to the two opening questions of this paper: 1) How are the problems of policy-making defined and what remedies are implied in the definition? 2) What is the relationship between aid and policy, and how can that relationship be redefined to strengthen capacity for sound policy, rather than weaken it?

Defining the Problems with Policy-making in Africa

Although I have not included specific quotations on the question of skills, it was an underlying assumption everywhere that there continues to be a shortage of analytical skills in the service of public policy. However, the shortage of skills was seen as considerably less important than the fact that those skills which did exist were not exploited. "*Good people exist, but are not being used.*" Supporting this was the clear message that unless analysts were adequately paid and given valued and stimulating work, little useful analysis or policy would result. The lack of pay and appreciation can in turn be traced to issues of management, organisation and financial strength, both within the government bureaucracy and within academic departments and research institutes.

The lack of management, organisation and incentives reflects, however, several deeper issues which have been simplistically described as "a lack of demand". Amongst those, the use of foreign advisors for the past thirty years has obviously put local people at a disadvantage. Not only have African institutions been unable or not allowed to compete effectively for aid financing, but the donor (and government) preference for expatriate advisors has probably demeaned the value of local advisors in the eyes of government officials, which may have contributed to the lack of investment in local universities and research institutes; if advisors from abroad were always available, indeed required, why should local analysts be trained and encouraged? This situation also fed into government's unwillingness to encourage the development of intellectual opposition, the "*mistrust of intellectuals*" that several people have mentioned.

It is also clear, however, that this situation is beginning to change. First, the mistrust of intellectuals and deterioration of universities is being confronted directly as public debate widens with press freedom and greater openness in general, and as intellectuals themselves develop their own policy institutes. Second, it has also been true for several years that more and more conditions are attached to international loans and aid, of which the difficult negotiations over structural adjustment are just the most visible instance. These conditions have not only been used on occasion to press for democratic reforms, but have also created the desire in government for an independent analysis of its own. There is also among African colleagues a more general irritation with the degree to which aid has taken the initiative away from Africans themselves. This irritation, combined with the perceived mistakes of aid investments, is encouraging people to look at ways of establishing greater intellectual and even financial independence and control over their own institutions, both within and outside government.

So there are several processes which are reshaping policy-making in Africa: There are the political changes which have followed popular protest and international pressure. There is the recognised need for greater academic strength and financial self-sufficiency which is being discussed in the universities themselves. There is also a willingness in government to look at bureaucratic management and organisation, as well as skills, in order to improve policy analysis and discussion. There is, finally, the fact that the links between policy research and policy development are always

difficult, whether in the context of African governments or Western institutions. So that a lot depends not just on the strength of the thinking, but the ability to present ideas in an absorbable way.

The Dilemmas of Ownership, Policy and Aid Assistance

Within this general definition the evolving policy process, there is the critical question of reconciling local "ownership" of policy ideas with international aid and assistance. There is a saying that "*Good deeds seldom go unpunished*", a sentiment Tallyrand must have shared when he asked, "*Why does he hate me so much when I never did him a good turn?*" Both of these quotations evoke the equivocal psychology of charity which, together with the colonial past, underlies some of the conundrums of aid in Africa. It also defines the dilemma of international assistance for capacity building in policy. What assistance can be offered without depriving local people of responsibility for their own thinking and their own decisions? How can the need for that responsibility be reconciled with the financial dependence of African governments? How can foreign assistance be used to increase the involvement of local intellectuals, rather than replace them? Can new structures of local consultation be developed so that any aid is the result of a constructive dialogue of equals, rather than the possibly misguided charity of outsiders? How can the timing of project financing encourage consultation, analysis and a review of long-term implications? How can the need for local responsibility be squared with the needs to account for aid spending and its results?

The work here did not address these issues, but many of them are at the heart of the dilemmas surrounding international assistance and local ownership of policy choices. What was overwhelmingly clear in talking with African colleagues was a sense that they were facing a "second independence" -- a redefinition of the relationship between their own governments and populations, and between their governments and the international donor community. It was a mood that donors also reflected, as they in turn looked for ways of directing their resources to more effective activities that might increase local analysis and local responsibility. Very few people had a straightforward idea of how to proceed, but the search for new solutions is in its own right perhaps the greatest contribution to capacity building being made in Africa right now.