Application of acquired skills

Monitoring and Evaluation Report
Public Investment Capacity Building Project
October 2011

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1.0 Executive Summary

This monitoring report focuses on the effect of training on participants and on the beneficiary institutions. The Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant, Walid Madhoun, undertook a number of activities to measure the level of individual and institutional benefits derived from the training delivered through the Public Investment Capacity Building Project (PICBP).

The overall assessment of the training programs is positive. This is based on the trainers’ reports and training evaluations conducted at the end of each training session. Trainees are interested in the subjects offered and have a high level of engagement and participation during the training sessions. The trainers, material, logistics etc. have all been rated very good. This demonstrates the effectiveness of the PICBP team and the effort that goes into selecting trainers and preparing training activities. However, there is also evidence to suggest that trainee engagement and participation wanes upon returning to the workplace as they confront structural barriers in the application of newly acquired skills beyond the personal sphere.

1.1 Summary of findings and recommendations

What follows is a brief summary of findings and recommendations. Detailed discussions of findings and recommendations are found in section 6.0 of this report.

Finding A: Personal and Institutional Benefits

The primary finding is that the training activities of the PICBP are having a positive impact on employee performance but only within each employee’s sphere of work and little to no impact can be observed on the institutions. This is caused by the ad-hoc nature of trainee selection, absence of formalised gap analysis and absence of long term capacity development strategy.

Remedial recommendation:

1. The beneficiary organization would benefit from systemizing the processes of engagement with the PICBP including:
   • Better screening of trainees
   • Engaging employees in gap analysis and choices of training subjects
   • Requiring trainees to present the material to their colleagues upon return
   • Requiring trainees to produce capacity building plans

Long term recommendation:

2. Reinforce and upgrade the Human Resources departments to apply modern international standards not only in hiring and management but also in long term capacity building planning and staff performance appraisals.

The beneficiary organizations wishing to implement this recommendation may be able to request technical assistance support from the PICBP to initiate the process.
Finding B: Method of Capacity Building delivery

There appears to be a trend towards building specialized schools to develop the capacities of staff at some of the beneficiary organizations. This is not an efficient method of using resources. An important lesson learned from the PICBP is that up to date effective training can be delivered at a reasonable cost and with great effectiveness and at a much lower cost than establishing and operating a specialized school.

Long term Recommendation:

3. Taking into consideration recommendations Nos. 1 and 2 above, the beneficiary organizations should consider allocating from its own resources a capacity development budget for financing the training of its staff. This budget should be approved within the context of capacity building plans built on effective gap analyses. An international benchmark of such a budget is 1.5% of the gross staff salaries.

Though this is noted as a long term recommendations, some beneficiary organizations such as Joint Stock Companies, may be able to introduce this practice in the short term.

Finding C: PICBP actions

The project has performed very well in responding to the needs articulated by the beneficiary organizations. Its procedures and processes are effective and efficient. However, some adjustments to the processes may help enhance trainee and beneficiary organizations’ engagement.

Remedial recommendations

4. When possible ensuring greater lead time between trainee registration and delivery of training.
5. Ensuring that training providers deliver to trainees introductory readings prior to the training sessions to help familiarize the trainees with the subject matter.
6. Ensuring that training providers deliver to managers of trainees an executive level briefing material or verbal briefing prior or during the training sessions.
7. Where possible, ensuring complete trainee information is available to the training provider prior to the training to help the training organization develop relevant examples and practical works.
8. Increasing the interaction with managers prior to and following training – this is already planned through the Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant.
2.0 BACKGROUND

This examination is timely because the project plans to emphasise institutional engagement in its remaining years. While evaluating the effect of training on the trainees’ performance in discharging their duties one must also look at the institutional opportunities and obstacles to the application of the newly acquired skills by these employees and examine the institutionalization of these skills in the form of new approaches and systems. The reason for this is that personnel performance is highly dependent on the capacity and the willingness of institutions to absorb and allow the application of newly acquired skills and to make institutional improvements.

The primary finding is that the training activities of the PICBP are having a positive impact on employee performance but only within each employee’s sphere of work and little to no impact can be observed on the institutions. In fact, there is evidence that there are internal and external structural barriers to personal and institutional application of newly acquired skills. This report provides the evidence for this summary statement and offers some suggestions for improvement.

The recommendations in this report are complementary to the project team’s intentions and efforts to more deeply engage the beneficiary institutions in the remaining time of the project to ensure the sustainability of results beyond the life of the project. It is worthy to note that a number of the recommendations in this report echo recommendations made in trainers’ reports particularly those related to trainee selection and screening, sustainability and the generational divide between the trainees.

3.0 METHODOLOGY:

The Consultant undertook a document review consisting of core project documents and routine reports. These were:

- Project Appraisal Document,
- Second and third quarterly reports of 2011
- End of training reports from training organisations
- The official project web-site

The document review provided the basic information for a review of outcomes and indicators, a view of the general performance of the project and detailed information on past training.

The Consultant also undertook face to face interviews with 15 trainees, 3 managers and 2 training providers. It is also important to note that many of the trainees interviewed were Section Heads or Head of Program. A questionnaire was prepared for these meetings as an aide to the interview process. In addition, one focus group meeting was held with 23 trainees. The sample size at this point is small relative to the number of persons trained, but this is mitigated by the fact that the sample size will grow in subsequent visits thus reducing the margin of error to an acceptable level. There was no disaggregation between the thematic and specific training components.
Four interrelated issues were explored:

1. Method of trainee selection
2. Extent of pre-training briefing and preparation
3. Extent to application of new knowledge (opportunities and obstacles)
4. Perceptions and comments on improvement

4.0 Project Training Data

A full report on training activities is delivered quarterly by the project team. For the purpose this monitoring report we note only the summary data to demonstrate the level of momentum and reach of the project.

It is evident that the project team has been extremely active in promoting and delivering training. In April 2011 the project reported that training was delivered to 450 trainees, merely four months later, as of the end of the September 2011, the project has almost doubled the number of trainees benefitting from the PICBP. As of September 2011, 872 trainees participated in training activities with various durations from five days to three weeks. Four of these trainees were trained abroad: two in France and two in Singapore.

There was an acceptable mix of sector specific training and thematic training. The number of participants is balanced along all training programs except for Monitoring and Evaluation which delivered training to 117 persons, almost doubling the nearest program.

5.0 General Observations

The beneficiary organisations need to become more active inside their own organisations in the selection, preparation and re-induction of trainees upon their return. This is the start of the systematisation process of long term capacity building planning. We have observed that trainee involvement in the decision process on the choices of training is mostly passive on one hand and mostly reactive on the part of beneficiary organisations on the other hand. This means that the trainees have little to no input into the choice of training or choice of participation whereas the beneficiary organisation will request specific training that responds to current needs or current trends without a clear process of long term capacity development needs or system needs.

Capacity building carries with it the underlying understanding that we already know what the required, intended or aspired performance should be. Capacity development is therefore about closing the gap between the actual performance and the desired performance. This means that there are individuals working in a situation where a particular performance is needed and where these individuals lack certain competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) to be able to perform according to expectations.
In the current model of capacity building at the beneficiary organisations, we simply do not know the desired performance or the expectations – we know that there is a gap, we know that capacity development is necessary but we have not identified the desired performance or its context.

**Current Capacity Development Practice (simplified):**

```
| Capacity Building (Training) | System options & decisions | Performance expectation | Operationalization |
```

**Ideal Capacity Development Practice (simplified):**

```
| System options & decisions | Performance expectation | Capacity Building (Training) | Operationalization |
```

Although knowledge acquisition is never a waste of resources, the current approach is not sustainable, nor does it result in the long term institutional performance improvement envisioned by the project. This matter needs further examination and we offer a number of workable recommendations in this report to encourage the longer term capacity development planning.

As noted earlier, the beneficiary organisations must step up their internal activities to ensure that the PICBP meets its expected outcomes in a sustainable way. As we have seen, the project team is dealing very well with a growing demand for training. It is unreasonable therefore to expect the project team to lead on executing the recommendations presented here. To implement the recommendations containing in this report and sustain the gains made through this project, the beneficiary organizations will need to have effective Human Resources Departments. The project can provide Technical Assistance to the development and growth of Human Resources Departments at beneficiary organizations provided that they request this within the framework of a strong development plan.

### 6.0 Detailed Discussion on Findings and Recommendations

#### 6.1 Method of trainee selection:

**Findings:**

Several factors affect the decision on trainee selection but ultimately, the decision is made by the manager. There is no evidence of a systemic approach to capacity development within the beneficiary institutions and therefore, no evidence to suggest that the trainees are involved in the decision making process on participating nor in the subject matter.

The decision on the selection of trainees or the type training does not appear to be based on a long term institutional strategy nor a formal training plan for employees within career path considerations but on other factors such as work load and ability to accommodate being absent from the office as well as relevance to current functions and responsibility. While these are valid considerations, they are limiting in that they place importance on immediate needs only and not on longer term strategic development needs.
Respondents claimed that their involvement in the training activity was directed by their manager but some were given the choice to participate or not to participate. In essence the employee was not part of the decision process, his/her professional development needs were considered in so far as they pertain to the current job description and not to long term employee or institutional needs. However, in only one instance, the employee pointed to a relationship between the training and his recent promotion to Head of Department. Of all the respondents, only one stated that he actively sought and continues to seek training. But when pressed on the matter regarding why and the utility of the training he provided only general responses related to the importance of self-improvement.

Despite the lack of employee involvement in participation and subject selection, the training organisations interviewed reported that there were limited problems with commitment and absenteeism. This reinforces the initial impressions that trainees have demonstrated a high level of engagement during the training delivery.

There is empirical evidence from scientific research suggesting a direct correlation between the method of trainee selection and the level of interest, engagement and commitment demonstrated by trainees. In one such study “207 trainees were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: (a) no choice of training; (b) choice of training–but choice not received; (c) choice of training–with choice received. A pilot study was used to create a unique training context whereby trainees could be differentiated on the three conditions of choice, while all ultimately received the identical training module. Results indicated that, after controlling for cognitive ability, those trainees having a choice of training did have greater motivation to learn, provided they were given the training of their choice.” (Baldwin et al, 1991, The Perils of Participation: Effects of Choice of Training on Trainee Motivation and Learning. Personnel Psychology, 44: 51–65)

These findings are not unique to the cited study. Other studies have consistently shown a connection between motivation and choice. Interestingly, the motivation is increased not only during the training activity but at all stages of the capacity building cycle including pre-training preparation and post training commitment to application of skills.

**Recommendations on trainee selection:**

1) There is a need to systemise the selection of trainees who participate in the PICBP training programs. The processes could be eventually internalised as part of the operational processes of the beneficiary organisations. Below is a description of some simple methods that can be applied to the systemisation of trainee selection, these can be discussed with HR departments and managers:

   a) Engage prospective trainees in determining training needs. This can begin by having trainees submit lists of training needs to their respective HR departments or managers (on predetermined forms). HR and Managers review and analyse the submitted training topics and select topics most often requested by staff as well as those that meet long term organisational needs. This is not ideal, but it is acceptable in the absence of a comprehensive performance evaluation and capacity development system.

   b) Screen prospective trainees to ensure that those attending a course will a) draw maximum benefit from the training program; b) are likely to share lessons and apply new knowledge;
and c) likely to benefit the organisation during the long term. Screening can be as simple as random interviews to slightly more complex requirements such as requesting personal training plan from trainees as a pre-requisite (see recommendation 4 below).

2) The beneficiary organizations should consider developing and reinforcing the Human Resources Departments’ practices and processes. At this point, HR departments are acting as staffing units but they must be more engaged in long term capacity building strategy development within the context of institutional goals and strategies. They must be better at measuring gaps in performance so that the training targets these gaps in an effective manner.

   a) Beneficiary organisation should consider reaching the international benchmark of 1.5% of total gross salary for a budget for capacity building. However, this must be allocated within a clear and defined plan and process within effective HR departments.

6.2 Extent of pre-training briefing and preparation

Findings

There are two matters for review in this section: A. the material received by trainees prior to training and B. the level of preparation for the training at the beneficiary institution.

Training material

All respondents recognised the completeness of information provided by the project team including the availability of training material on the project website. None of the respondents attempted to locate on their own any additional complementary material pertaining to the subject matter of the training they are about to attend. In other word, the trainees had not shown initiative to undertake any familiarisation on the subject matter prior to the actual training. Questioned on whether they would accept receiving reading material to review and prepare for the training before the training began, all but one of the trainees agreed that this would be more beneficial to the training and its outcomes.

Training organisations interviewed confirmed that there is merit in providing some pre-training preparation material. The training organisations suggest that if they are provided with the contact information of trainees they would be willing to provide such information directly to the trainees prior to the training. However, it is worthy to note that detailed trainee information is not available prior to the training.

The project team keeps the official project web-site well stocked with up to date material. The project team invites participants to visit the site. Almost all respondents claimed to have visited the site but only to find the address of the venue and the start time of the sessions and following the training, to download pictures of themselves and their colleagues. Only two respondents claimed to have reviewed the trainers’ CV or other background information.
Recommendations on pre-training material

3) Trainers should provide no more than 5 pages of introductory reading material related to the specific subject to help the trainees become more familiar with the subject matter. Furthermore, it would be beneficial to instruct the trainer(s) to hold on the first day of training a short discussion on the pre-training material. This material can be placed on the website and its availability could be communicated to the trainees' through their organisation or if possible directly by the training organisation.

4) Beneficiary organizations should provide complete trainee information at least two weeks prior to the training (electronic format). Information should include: name of the trainee, title, department and contact information to allow the training organisation to provide some preparatory material. The information should also include the name, title and contact information of the manager to whom the trainee reports.

Level of preparation at beneficiary institution

The responses to questions about this topic conflicted from institution to institution and within a single institution. This suggests that the level of pre-training preparation taking place at beneficiary institutions is dependent upon the specific departmental manager/supervisor and his/her interest and style and not on institutional policy and practice.

It is worthy to note though that only five respondents claimed to have had preparatory meetings with their manager prior to participating in the training. They were all from the same department at AZERYUL. The discussions at such meetings ranged from providing the manager with information on basic details of the training to discussing expectations upon the return of the trainee. Again this appeared to be localised within discrete pockets within beneficiary organisations and not within the whole of the organisation.

All respondents stated that their managers had little to no knowledge of the content of the training program prior to the training activity except for the title of the training program.

Recommendation on pre-training preparation at the beneficiary institutions

5) Beneficiary organizations should request that the trainees write a plan for their capacity development. Importantly, this short plan should show how the trainee intends to use the newly acquired knowledge upon completion of training. This plan should be countersigned by management and/or HR department. This need not be a complicated plan it can be done on a pre-set form. The key is to engage the trainee and the manager to reflect on longer term capacity development needs for the individual and the institution.

6) Trainers should provide an executive summary of the training program and its potential benefits to the organisation. This abstract should be provided to management of the beneficiary institutions with employees attending a training session before the start of the course.
6.3 Extent to application of new knowledge

As noted earlier in this report, the majority of respondents have confirmed a high level of personal impact. These respondents have also confirmed that the level of impact is localised to their personal sphere only and has not reached colleagues sharing the same offices.

Those respondents that noted no personal enhancement in their performance following the training provided various responses from lack of relevance to their work to a reluctance to attempt any alterations to personal activities for fear of contravening rules, regulations and directives. This is a very instructive statement that reveals the structural barriers to application of newly acquired skills whether at the personal or institutional level.

It is important to note that only 5 respondents noted that they have made specific reports on the training and its utility to their managers along with specific recommendations. However no such reports were produced for examination. 5 of respondents from AZERYUL stated that presentations to their manager and colleagues are a requirement in their department for any training whether with PICBP or other initiatives. Only 2 of the 23 respondents at the focus group held during the training sessions stated that intend to make a presentation upon returning to work after the training sessions. 2 of the remaining 21 training stated that they would like to make a presentation and recommend changes but that they will likely not be allowed to do so.

Furthermore, a small number of respondents willing to expand on the subject of structural barriers explained that they have reported one level up but have had no feedback relating to their report or recommendations. This information is instructive as it confirms the waning engagement of the employees following the training. Without feedback and management engagement, the employee will quickly relapse into the pre-training operational context and even the personal benefit gained will be lost.

The lack of management interest may be caused by the glut of training available and the operational demands faced by these managers.

Therefore it is imperative that effort be exerted to ease some of these structural barriers to maintain the personal employee benefit and to permit some outcomes at the institutional level. It is evident that some issues are beyond the scope of the PICB Project, but if the Project can help develop an enabling environment in some beneficiary organisations while going deeper with other organisations prepared to take the challenge of attempting adjustments to their existing systems, as will be seen below in the Tamiz Shahar section of the report.

Recommendations are offered in this report to establish some processes to help engage beneficiary organisations.

**Recommendations on Extent to application of new knowledge**

7) The PICBP project coordinator and/or the International Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant should develop regular meeting with managers of Beneficiary organisations to review applicability of newly acquired knowledge. The International Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant should provide feedback to the employee and also update the PICBP project coordinator and/or the International Monitoring and Evaluation Consultant.
### Application of acquired skills

Consultant will produce prepared questionnaires.

8) Beneficiary organisations should require trainees to make detailed presentations about the training and its applicability to the institution following the course.

   a) As part of the detailed presentation, the beneficiary organizations should require the trainee to detail how the new skills will be used at a personal level and how they can be applied at the organizational level.

#### 6.4 Perceptions and comments pertaining to the training courses

Perceptions of respondents regarding the training programs were generally positive but there were some comments worthy of consideration. These are listed below with recommendations for relevant comments found in the recommendations box below.

- The training was too long and that it could be spread out over a number of weeks to allow for better absorption. While the validity of this observation can be argued, in practical terms it is very difficult and costly to implement.

- The examples given during the training were not relevant to all participants. This is a valid observation and a recommendation is made below.

- There should be more time devoted to practical exercises. This is valid but difficult because it could either lengthen the duration of the training or compromise the important theoretical aspects. However, a recommendation is made below.

- Follow up and on-the-job support would be helpful to application of newly acquired skills. This is a valid and important observation. It is not possible to undertake a comprehensive response to this observation but a measured response is possible. However, no recommendation on this is made at this point because such a measure is already underway at Tamiz Shahar on a pilot basis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendations on Perceptions and comments pertaining to the training courses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>9)</strong> The trainers should become familiar with the work of the various trainees and provide examples relevant to their work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10)</strong> Trainers should consider the integration of theory into the practical work so as to increase the amount of practical work. In other words, deliver theory through practical work rather than just lecture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### APPENDIX 1 QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Group*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you decide to participate in the training</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you discuss your training needs with your manager?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you receive other than basic information? (Basic inf: date, place, subject, duration)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you seek additional information</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think information to familiarise you before training would be helpful</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you discuss the training with your manager prior to the training?</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did the training sessions meet your expectations</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>discuss training with colleagues and manager after completion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you apply any of the new knowledge in your work?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did you observe any improvement in your performance?</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Was your manager open to changes you suggested if you made any</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* note: the group was on its first day so some of the questions were posed as "do you plan to" while other questions were omitted altogether given the circumstances.