Technical Cooperation and Stakeholder Ownership

Shekhar Singh

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by Shekhar Singh

Ownership is the acceptance of responsibility through the process of stakeholder participation, empowerment and consensus. The author draws upon field experience in programmes for environmental regeneration at the grassroots level to ask who truly has a stake. He seeks to define ownership by identifying all the groups involved, including those whom an initiative affects adversely. He presents profiles for owner-friendly modalities of TC design and delivery ranging from the donor to the displaced, including governments and groups earlier over-looked in TC, among them, women and the marginalised groups, and urges greater participation by all those involved.

Stakeholders and Ownership

This study assumes that the desired end of technical cooperation is an appropriate level and type of ownership by all stakeholders. For this reason, it seeks to synthesise, rather than polarise stakeholders. Although TC modalities[1] cannot promote ownership by themselves, inappropriate ones can often retard it. What makes the critical difference is stakeholder inclination and commitment to moving towards wider ownership and a fruitful balance of owners for the purposes of each TC initiative.

Ownership implies empowerment and responsibility (parallel to the legal notion of rights and obligations). In the context of technical cooperation initiatives (TCIs),[2] the term denotes a "sense of ownership" applicable to processes or entities of which the "owner" is a part,[3] rather than the narrower sense in which one "owns" a possession.[4]

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[1] The modality of a TCI is understood to be its structure and the processes involved in its conception, design, implementation and evaluation. Ordinarily, the subject matter of a TCI is not seen to be a part of its modality, though it might influence the choice of modalities.

[2] For the purposes of this study, Technical Cooperation Initiatives (TCIs) are understood to be projects, programmes, or other types of initiatives that seek to help develop capacities inherent in systems, institutions and individuals through a sharing of expertise and/or know-how.

[3] This is akin to the "sense of ownership" one has towards one's country and unlike owning an object.

[4] Brautigam (2000) quotes Johnson and Wasty (1993), who use an alternative definition of "ownership" that is based on four dimensions: [1] locus of initiative, [2] level of intellectual conviction among key policymakers, [3] actions and speeches in support of the reforms by top leadership, and [4] visible efforts toward consensus-building among various constituencies (4-5). Each dimension of ownership was rated according to four-level scale intended to capture the intensity of ownership. For example, at the highest ownership level for 'locus of initiative', 'the initiative for formulating and implementing the adjustment program was clearly the borrower's.' At the lowest level, 'the program was prepared by the Bank and funding extended, despite governmental disagreement and reluctance to implement some aspects of the program'(4).

The level of responsibility inherent in ownership does not necessarily mirror empowerment at all times. Donors, for example, may have a very high level of responsibility towards a TCI, especially towards facilitating the empowerment of other stakeholders, but need not exercise power in the overall design and implementation of the TCI. Similarly, local communities may need to be significantly empowered to make decisions, but may have much less responsibility than their government to create the conditions that permit the TCI to evolve and function fruitfully.

Universal stakeholder ownership is easier for TCIs that have no losers (if that is possible) or where few "losers" exist in comparison to the "winners". It is relatively difficult where the opposite is true. In addition, where TCI benefits are immediate and focused and the costs are long-term and dispersed, ownership potential grows. Similarly, where a TCI is culturally and socially appropriate, and easy to understand, justify and accept, it is ownership-friendly. Finally, where the process of stakeholder empowerment has started from the beginning and the design and implementation of the TCI are not only an outcome of such empowerment, but also a consensus of views and opinions of the various stakeholders, much greater potential for widely-based ownership develops.

The path to ownership necessarily moves through stakeholder participation and involvement and through building stakeholder consensus. However, stakeholder participation or involvement in a process does not by itself imply or lead to ownership. Neither does stakeholder consensus.

It is easier to invoke participation than to empower, and easier to empower than to build consensus. However, empowerment without consensus can lead to chaos. And if consensus, along with participation and empowerment is to result in stakeholder responsibility for the process, it must be genuine. A forced or artificial consensus often results in stakeholders' abdicating responsibility, but retaining the right to interfere and criticise while refusing to contribute to the process or the outcome.[5]

Ownership, therefore, is the acceptance of *responsibility* through the process of stakeholder *participation, empowerment* and *consensus.*

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[5] This, of course, poses a problem when "unpopular" or "hard" decisions need to be taken. Whereas in the short term and in emergencies, there may be merit in taking such decisions, sustainability lies in doing all that is necessary to forge genuine consensus, though not unanimity, among critical stakeholders even about such decisions. Another approach is to have a consensus about the fundamental principles involved and then take hard decisions that follow from such principles, even if they are unpopular. This is a necessary to safeguard the interests of a group that is in a numerical minority. However, transparency and the credibility of the decision makers go a long way in making such decisions "stick".

Who are the Stakeholders?

One way of classifying stakeholders is to divide them into external (non-national) and internal (national) stakeholders. However, it may be useful to distinguish among:

- *Intended direct beneficiaries:* those for whose benefit the TCI is designed and implemented, including the national, sub-national and local recipient governments, but especially the recipient population.

- *Intended indirect beneficiaries:* typically the people and governments of the donor countries, and the world population in general – if TCIs help make the world a better place.

- *Unintended beneficiaries:* including intermediaries, consultants, agencies and enterprises supplying goods and services for the TCI. This includes "rent seekers" among both the donors and the recipients.

- *Intended direct losers:* mainly those in recipient countries whose illegitimate power or gains a TCI seeks to curb – for example the corrupt or exploitative individuals and agencies.

- *Unintended direct losers:* mainly those inadvertently and adversely affected by the project, like those displaced by irrigation projects or those whose access to natural resources is curbed due to conservation projects. These are the innocent victims.

- *Unintended indirect losers:* including those who pay an opportunity cost, because the money their government is using to fund TCIs is, consequently, unavailable to meet their own felt needs. Also included are those possible recipients who were passed over in favour of the actual recipients.

Advantages of Expanded Ownership

Expanded ownership, especially ownership by recipient local communities and governments, brings with it five broad categories of advantage: political, epistemological, psychological, implementation- and sustainability-related.

a) Political Advantage

With the emergence of self-determination, self-reliance and decentralised and participatory democracy as widely acclaimed values, the ownership of TCIs by local stakeholders, especially local communities, brings immense political prestige to donors.

On the other hand, centralised or donor-controlled TCIs have earned various bilateral and multilateral agencies a reputation of being manipulative and undemocratic, vulnerable to charges of pursuing hidden agendas in the guise of TCIs. This has not only tarnished their image abroad but also, over time, weakened support in their own constituencies.

Broadening of the ownership base also allows for the formation of strategic alliances that could significantly strengthen TCI design and implementation and help neutralize disruptive political and commercial interests. The involvement of beneficiary communities could help counteract self-serving tendencies both in donors and in governments. Similarly, the involvement of potential losers could ensure that neither donors nor governments cut costs at their expense and work hard to optimise the benefits of the initiative. The involvement of the beneficiary private sector could not only weaken other disruptive commercial influences, but also help neutralise regressive influences among donors and recipient governments.

b) Epistemological Advantage

Local involvement is usually the best and often the only way to ensure that TCIs are designed and operated in a manner that is appropriate to local realities. Detailed knowledge of local conditions within which TCIs have to function, especially micro-level peculiarities and variations, cannot be adequately captured without the involvement of local stakeholders. Often TCIs designed with the best of intentions and the highest levels of professionalism do not deliver because local realities are not adequately understood or appropriately weighed and taken into consideration. What is acceptable and what is not, what works and what does not, and what is the best way of making things work, are questions best answered by people who live and work in the host environment and have a major direct stake in the initiative. Outsiders, national or expatriate, whatever their experience, rarely have such detailed and updated knowledge. Local communities also have a wealth of traditional knowledge, which is mostly ignored mainly because few non-locals understand or appreciate its value.

c) Psychological Advantage

TCIs that are not appropriately owned by national stakeholders promote the mentality of dependence on donors. Many countries and societies are plagued by such a mentality and have lost both the ability and the will to take responsibility for their own situation and problems.

d) Implementation Advantage

Where local stakeholders own a TCI, the national government as well as the affected community assumes greater commitment and responsibility for its success. If local stakeholders support the initiative, they can often pressure the government for early and effective implementation. They can also play an important role in informally monitoring its implementation and providing feedback, thereby promoting efficiency. This increased efficiency makes the TCI more economical.

Moreover, an initiative that is owned by all major local stakeholders is much more likely not to face major opposition and obstruction from within and outside the government. Many TCIs are inordinately delayed, even abandoned, because of strident and persistent public protests against its objectives, impacts and methods. These protests take place not only within the country, but are often supported by international NGOs, the press and even groups within donor countries.

e) Sustainability Advantage

Where an initiative is not appropriately owned, it exists only as long as the donor can finance it. The moment the donor disappears, it collapses and its gains, if any, are lost forever. Also, as "project funds" dry up, local communities refuse to shoulder the financial burden of sustaining or carrying forward the gains. This happens when major in-country stakeholders do not subscribe to the objectives and/or the methods of the TCI. This also happens when nations and their people start believing that meeting even their own felt needs is the responsibility of the donor. In some cases, the establishment of aggressive TCIs can destroy the initiative and incentive of communities, and even governments, to continue to do even what little they were doing on their own to solve their problems. Over time, a sort of transference takes place and what was initially a local agenda starts being considered a donor agenda. In perverse cases, after a donor has left, there is even a tendency to destroy what has been achieved, because it is seen as the agenda of a donor who will no longer present protect "its own interests".

Ownership Profile

Very often, national ownership is understood to mean ownership by national governments. Sometimes, this is restricted to a formal endorsement by the national government to the TCI. In any case, governments do not always speak for all their people. Therefore, it is important to hear and involve all the various categories of stakeholders listed earlier.

Perhaps the most important stakeholders are those communities directly affected by the TCI. Among those directly affected, it is not only the intended beneficiaries, but the unintended direct losers that one needs to hear and involve.

An inclusive process of formulating and implementing a TCI is as important for making TCIs ownership-friendly as are its objectives and strategies. Therefore, it is important to involve all stakeholders from the start, whether they are potentially supportive or in opposition. However, the weight that each stakeholder's views and opinions should have differs from issue to issue and stakeholder to stakeholder.

Each category of stakeholder should have an appropriate ownership profile.[6]

The appropriate notion of ownership for *donor agencies*[7] and *donor countries* could include:

- A responsibility to ensure that the people of recipient countries are appropriately involved and empowered, especially in the process of TCI design and implementation.

- A commitment to participate in this process, when invited, but a responsibility to ensure that participation is aimed at helping partner nations to identify their own needs, formulate their own objectives and decide upon what are the best methods for them. It could extend to advising the countries and bringing to their notice experiences and options.

- The obligation to help set up appropriate mechanisms for facilitating stakeholder ownership, where the capacity or inclination to do so is missing in host countries.

- The responsibility to help governments achieve their stated and explicit agendas, insofar as these were democratically arrived at and were not dictated by any specific interest, including donors.

- The responsibility to ensure that the implementing authorities are meaningfully accountable to their own people. Where such a process is not in place, the donor has the obligation to insist on its being set up and, until that time, to take on some of the monitoring responsibilities.

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6   The notion of ownership involves, to varying degrees, the notion of control. Therefore, as different stakeholders have different ownership profiles, they also have different types and levels of control. Similarly, ownership also involves both being accountable and being accountable to – again different types of accountability for different stakeholders.

7   Donor agencies also have obligations to the governments and people of their country and to the international community. However, insofar as these run counter to their obligations to the recipient country, their legitimacy is questionable – for example, where the need to be answerable to their governments, or to cater to the inclination of their larger constituencies, leads them to force TCI objectives or modalities onto partner countries.

- The obligation to see through what it has started and not leave things half done – unless it is clearly in the interest of the partner country to not pursue it further.

- The obligation to share some of its wealth and expertise with those less fortunate.

For the *intended government beneficiaries* the appropriate notion of ownership would include:

- The right to insist that donors can come in only on the basis of national consensus, as described below.

- A responsibility to ensure that TCIs are received and utilised in a manner consonant with the will of its people, their expressed needs and priorities, and their preferred methods for addressing them.

- Consequently, the responsibility to ensure that adequate mechanisms exist to involve and empower the people, especially the historically disempowered ones, including women.

- It also entails the obligation to ensure that fair and transparent methods of conflict resolution are developed and applied, where necessary.

- The responsibility to ensure that the people have the information and support that they need to make the relevant decisions.

- The responsibility to ensure that the implementation of the TCI is done in a manner that ensures accountability to stakeholders, especially the local ones.

- Where governments do not have the capacity to fulfil any of these responsibilities, the donor has the responsibility to help develop such a capacity. In the meantime, it can take temporary responsibility for ensuring that these functions are performed, until indigenous capacity is developed.

For the *intended local-community beneficiaries,* the appropriate notion of ownership would include:

- The right to be involved and empowered in the process of making decisions that are likely to affect their lives (positively or negatively), the weight of their opinion being in direct proportion to the impact that the TCI will have on them.

- The right to have their needs addressed in the manner and with the priority that they themselves determine or that has been determined as a part of a consensus to which they were a party.

- The obligation to take responsibility for the TCI by monitoring it and doing all that is necessary and possible to ensure its success.

- The responsibility to ensure that the capacities developed through the TCI are not frittered away once the TCI is over.

The appropriate notion of ownership for *those adversely affected* would include:

- The right to participate in the decision-making and conflict-resolution processes.

- The right to suggest, and have appropriately considered, alternatives that could minimise their losses.

- For those who are innocent victims, the right to receive appropriate compensation/rehabilitation for their loss such that:

  · It does not impoverish them economically, socially or culturally.

  · It leaves them at least no worse off than before.

  · It ensures that their compensation is at least at the same ratio to their loss as the initiative's benefits are to its costs.

Ownership-Friendly Modalities

To move towards more appropriate TCI ownership, some of the modalities that need to be established are discussed below. There are, nevertheless, many real and imagined constraints to fuller ownership that are discussed later.

For Stakeholder Participation and Involvement

TCI design and implementation modalities must encourage and facilitate appropriate levels of participation. Some of the tasks such modalities must facilitate include:

a) Identifying Stakeholders

Though the relevant categories of stakeholders have been detailed above, the actual identification of who falls into each of the defined categories is not always easy. This is a problem particularly at the design stage, when the various parameters of a pro-

posed TCI are not yet clear and, therefore, the direct losers and beneficiaries cannot be identified with any level of certainty. However, any participatory exercise becomes meaningless without the involvement of these critical stakeholders.[8]

Even where the scope of the proposed TCI has become clear, the identification of those directly affected is not simple. Depending on the objectives and methodology proposed, backward and forward linkages have to be worked out to see whom the TCI would affect.

Further breaking down stakeholder categories and ensuring that all the groups within each category get a voice is critical. It is especially important to clearly identify the disempowered sections of each category of stakeholders, including women, indigenous people, and those economically disadvantaged.

GENDER SENSITIVITY

Though they pay lip service to gender sensitivity, most TCIs do not have any modalities specifically designed to involve women in their planning and implementation or for making the design sensitive to women's concerns. The problem starts with the collection of data that are gender-insensitive or, at best, gender neutral. This leads to an understanding of problems and solutions from a male perspective that tends to exclude women as potential beneficiaries. In some cases, such insensitivity results in making women's situations worse than they were before the TCI.

A study of various dams and irrigation systems done for the World Commission on Dams revealed that water distribution systems were often designed to make water available to farmers at night. This enabled systems to use the surplus power available at that time. However, in many societies, women farmers could not work the fields at night. They were therefore excluded not only from the benefits of the irrigation system but, in comparison to their male colleagues, became economically worse off (Singh and Banerji 2002).

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b) Disseminating Appropriate Information

Participation cannot be meaningful unless it is informed. Therefore, prior to involving stakeholders, each must be given access to relevant data in a comprehensible manner. Where there are illiterate stakeholder groups, this is a special challenge.

There is an Indian saying which, loosely translated, reads:

"You cannot keep your mouth and your mind open at the same time".

Also, to make the discussions meaningful, it is not enough to provide information on the proposed TCI alone; alternative designs and alternatives to the TCI itself must also be analysed and the information disseminated.

c) Invoking Stakeholder Participation

Persuading the critical stakeholders to participate appropriately is no easy task. Many stakeholders may be unable or unwilling to participate, or simply uninterested in the process. TCI modalities must deal with each of these types of situations.

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[8]   See UNDP 1998, p14, for an alternate but less satisfactory classification of stakeholders that totally leaves out those adversely affected.

Stakeholders are sometimes unable to participate because they do not have the time or even the minimal resources required. Social structures may not allow them to participate. This is especially true of the most critical of stakeholders, those historically disempowered, especially women and weaker segments of the society. Stakeholders may also be unwilling to participate because they are cynical about the value of such participation, about the usefulness of the proposed TCI or about TCIs in general, or suspicious of the donor or the government agencies involved. They may also be unwilling to participate if they feel inadequate or unprepared.

Lack of interest and apathy can also arise from a sense of hopelessness and a belief that nothing and no one is ever going to help.

d) For Facilitating Stakeholder Participation.

Even after identifying all the stakeholders, disseminating relevant information and arousing enthusiasm, TCI initiators still face challenges in the actual modalities of participation. In many TCIs, especially those intended for widespread impacts, the number of stakeholders can be very large. Their geographical spread can also be huge. How does one effectively disseminate information and engage so a large and dispersed a stakeholder community?

It is important to distinguish, in such cases, between those stakeholders who would be directly affected by the proposed TCI and those who would only be indirectly affected. Although the latter will be far more numerous, they may be only reactive, whereas those who are directly affected must be pro-active.

In other words, for the larger group of indirectly affected stakeholders it may be appropriate to use the printed and electronic mass media to disseminate information, and acceptable to await their response. The donors and other project proponents can afford to react to their comments, suggestions and objections without having to actually seek them out. Of course, modalities designed to arouse their interest must be used. Also, for special interest groups among them, like experts, influential groups and individuals, the press, etc., a more direct approach may be prudent.

On the other hand, directly affected stakeholders must be approached more vigorously and efforts would have to be made to ensure their participation rather than simply await it. Here again, the literate and educated ones can be approached through written material, letters, e-mails and even linked to Internet discussion groups. However, for many of the less educated, especially rural stakeholders, direct contact would have to be made through public meetings and perhaps through traditional systems of information dissemination and interaction.

In any case, the focus must be those who are directly affected and, among them, those who are ordinarily not heard, including women and other disempowered sections, and those likely to be adversely affected.

Reaching out to all stakeholders is only the first challenge. Ensuring a free, frank, informed and constructive dialogue itself poses many others. Fortunately, many tried and tested methods are available today (for example the participatory rural appraisal approach) to break through the many linguistic and cultural barriers that inhibit a constructive and open exchange of views. These need to be included in the participation modalities. Special care has to be taken to ensure that the process of involvement is culturally appropriate.

The success of such a process depends on appropriate human resources. It is usually difficult for outsiders, foreigners or nationals, to access the community. Therefore, local intermediaries have to be identified and trained for the task. They must have the ability to listen and to encourage others to think and talk. They must have the ability to hear and understand everything with an open mind and to keep their own preconceptions out of the way. However, as local intermediaries may carry with them local biases, a system of checks and balances has to be put in place.

For Stakeholder Empowerment

Stakeholder participation by itself, however extensive and successful, does not lead to empowerment. Very often, stakeholder consultations are just that: stakeholders are consulted and their views noted, but then the consultants and managers get on with designing and implementing the TCI. This is especially – and often – the case when things are first decided before stakeholder consideration.

Apart from not leading to empowerment, such a process dissuades stakeholders from participating further in this or other similar processes. Therefore, the dangers of consultation are twofold if it does not lead to empowerment: not only is there no commitment for the specific TCI, but stakeholders will resist future consultations.

To lead to empowerment, the rights of each stakeholder have to be made explicit and respected from the very beginning of the process. They must know where their views count and to what extent, and this must be demonstrable. They must also feel empowered to participate in the process of conflict resolution and consensus-building and feel confident that the consensus so arrived at would determine the nature of the TCI.

> Participation is a bit like antibiotics. If you do not do the full course, stakeholders can develop an "immunity" to participation.

a) Decentralised Decision-Making

Stakeholder empowerment is possible only if the process of decision-making is decentralised and flexible. Flexible and decentralised decision-making also allows for easy mid-term corrections in the process of TCI implementation and thereby makes the TCI responsive to changing local perceptions and needs.

After prolonged discussion the Bank accepted the concept of an indicative plan, which was to be prepared on the basis of detailed and participatory planning exercises in a small sample of the villages. The overall budget would be based on the extrapolation of per-village costs, as determined from this sample of villages. The project would therefore have an eco-development fund that would not be tied to specific activities in specific villages at a specific cost. What would be stipulated was the method to be used in determining the activities to be taken up in each village and their cost (Singh and Sharma 2001).

b) Transparency

Transparency at all stages of the TCI: design, implementation and evaluation, is essential to win public trust. It is also an important precondition of informed public participation and an effective method of ensuring probity. Where TCIs are designed and implemented in secrecy, most intended beneficiaries and other concerned people never learn what has been planned, why, and how it is to be implemented. Therefore they cannot demand accountability from their governments and other institutions.

Consequently, TCI modalities must include effective measures to make all information public. Many methods are available today, including the use of the media and Internet, and by organizing public hearings for the affected communities. All these need to be appropriately used to ensure that those who are affected by a TCI know exactly what to expect and can object if something less or something different is delivered.

c) Answerability

The openness with which TCIs are planned and implemented and their responsiveness and answerability to stakeholders have a profound impact on their ownership-friendliness. A critical precondition for the active participation of stakeholders in a TCI is that the TCI management must be answerable in some effective way to the stakeholders, especially to those directly affected. Transparency, as discussed above, is one method of ensuring broad answerability. However, while this may be appropriate for most categories of stakeholders, for those directly affected, some more pro-active form of answerability has to be institutionalised.

d) Monitoring and Evaluation

The involvement of stakeholders, especially the local stakeholders, in the process of monitoring and evaluation, is an important modality for ensuring answerability and empowerment. It is also important to share the findings of such monitoring and evaluation with all the stakeholders.

For Building Stakeholder Consensus

As more voices are heard, more discordant notes are sounded. Some discord may be illegitimate or even vicious, but some has a legitimate basis. They are a result of genuine differences of opinions and perceptions. If all these are not respectfully heard and dealt with, there is antagonism and alienation. Where people feel that they have been heard non-judgmentally and with adequate respect, they are far more likely to participate in the TCI processes, even if it does not fully meet their expectations, than if they were not heard at all. It is not only their absolute (veto) power that empowers them; the opportunity to persuade other stakeholders to accept their point of view also empowers them. Though consensus cannot be built and conflicts cannot be resolved unless there is a spirit of compromise and the acceptance of the principle of "give and take", the fact that the most disempowered segments of the society have an opportunity, through this process, to ensure that they don't just "give" but also "take" a little, is itself an empowering experience.

PUBLIC HEARINGS

Sometimes the best solutions to social problems emerge from society itself. This is what happened in the Indian state of Rajasthan where the villagers, fed up with corruption in the Panchayat (local government) system, decided to do something about it. Under the banner of the Mazdoor Kisan Shakti Sangathan (MKSS-Labourer, Farmer Empowerment Society) they started demanding copies of bills, vouchers and muster rolls relating to expenditure incurred by the panchayats. Because of a sympathetic bureaucrat, the vouchers and muster rolls for the few village panchayats were made available. The MKSS then organized jan sunwais (public hearings) between December 1994 and April, 1995, where these muster rolls and vouchers were read out to the whole village. The results were startling. Village after village discovered that many of the works that were supposed to have been undertaken in the village and for which vouchers existed had never actually been carried out. They also discovered that many of the names on the muster rolls were false, some even belonging to fictitious characters or to individuals long dead.

As news of this spread rapidly, more and more villagers started demanding access to muster rolls and vouchers. There was, understandably, panic among the panchayat functionaries who protested and the Gram Sevaks (village level government functionaries) of Ajmer District even went on strike. However, this only strengthened the determination of the local people to demand and exercise a right to information about their money. The slogan they adopted was: Hamare Paise, Hamara Hisab (our money, our accounts). The movement has spread today to many parts of the country; some states have even enacted laws that support of the demands of the people, legally ensuring their access to such information. (Singh 2001)

There are many stages in the design of a TCI when conflicts can occur. Some of these are discussed below.

a) While Setting Broad Goals and Objectives

Usually this is the least controversial stage, as the basic explicit goal of all TCIs can be considered the promotion of human welfare[9] or poverty alleviation. The broad objectives are usually also non-controversial. They could be the protection of the environment, the empowerment of women, improvements in health and sanitation, raising of incomes, increasing agricultural or industrial productivity, or eradicating illiteracy.

b) While Prioritising Among Objectives

Given the desirability of these various broad objectives, different stakeholders often have differing priorities. Donors usually have priority focus areas partly determined by their own perceptions and partly by the perceptions of their constituents. However, these perceptions tend to change over time, as do the related priorities.

In some cases, donor priorities are explicitly imposed on recipients and TCI grants are offered as inducements. For example, much greater support is currently available for AIDS prevention programmes than for the prevention of dysentery and diarrhea, even though many governments may consider the latter two higher priorities. However, on other occasions governments may seek support for areas they consider important, but competing demands and political realities inhibit their own ability to support it adequately. This is often the case with biodiversity conservation. National governments also have their own priorities that do not always match those of the donor. Sometimes governments seek additional support for their priority areas, which may or may not match the priorities of the donors.

There can be similar differences of perceptions and priorities between and among all the other categories of stakeholders. Most notably, different sections of the civil society (both within the donor and the recipient countries) may have serious misgivings about the priorities implicit or explicit in a TCI or in a portfolio of TCIs.

c) While Deciding on the Scope

Once the objective has been decided, the scope (coverage/location) needs to be determined. The coverage can be geographical or could include one or more categories of potential beneficiaries and exclude others. Here, again, there can be differences between the donor and the recipient government, and within and between other stakeholders, including the sub-national governments, the civil socie-

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9   Some stakeholders may be concerned about ensuring that human welfare does not ignore animal welfare.

ty in general, the people directly affected by the programme or project, and by those who are excluded and therefore pay an opportunity cost.

Location is relevant to site-specific projects and programmes and can again be much debated, especially by those who suffer adverse impacts or those who lose out on potential benefits, because of the proposed location.

d) While Selecting Strategies

Even sharper differences of opinion can arise in determining the strategies to be adopted for achieving the chosen objective. Take, for example, the goal or objective of poverty alleviation. The first level of debate can be on whether poverty should be alleviated by creating more wealth or by redistributing the wealth that already exists – or by doing both.

At the second level, if the decision is to create more wealth, then the debate can concentrate on whether this should be done through the enhancing agricultural productivity, industrial productivity or some other means.

If the focus becomes agricultural productivity, then the debate shifts to whether this should take place through dryland farming or irrigated agriculture. And if it is to be irrigated agriculture, then should enhancement be achieved through conserving and better using the water already available or should water supplies be enhanced. If enhancement is thought necessary, then should this be through small irrigation structures or large dams. A similar debate can occur for any other sector or issue.

Of course, most processes of designing a TCI skip most of these steps, coming straight to the operational step of building a dam. Though it may not be possible, each time, to debate all the preceding issues fully, the lack of a debate and consensus-building on these issues often becomes a basis of criticism and alienation. But they are least common in efforts where there are no direct losers.

For Ensuring Stakeholder Responsibility

Though all the steps outlined above may ensure that stakeholders take responsibility for *the process of TCI design*, something more needs to be done if they are to accept responsibility *for the TCI itself*, especially through its implementation phase.

a) Fighting Donor Dependence

One unfortunate outcome of donor support has been the development of a dependence syndrome. Such a mindset is a critical barrier to the owning of responsibility for

TCIs.[10] The adage of resisting doing the thing right but, instead, trying to do the right thing is particularly relevant here. Barring emergencies, short term, "efficient", donor-driven interventions must be resisted for long term, perhaps less dramatic, local initiatives. The quantum of aid and the size of TCIs, as discussed later, are also of particular relevance here.

b) Addressing Felt Needs and Priorities

The TCI must address the felt priorities of the stakeholders or reflect a consensus to which they were a party.

c) Ensuring Real Benefits

The TCI must be seen as likely to result in actual benefits rather than notional or elusive ones. TCIs are often focused on outputs rather than on outcomes and impacts.[11] People are trained, institutions are strengthened, expertise is transferred or developed, but little effort is made to determine whether the training, the institutions or the expertise is actually delivering the goods and services intended.

Where TCIs do not have real impacts, the intended beneficiaries lose interest and stop considering it their responsibility. Once they have seen many TCIs go this way, a general skepticism about TCIs develops and it becomes progressively more difficult to involve potential beneficiaries and generate any great enthusiasm about the next.

d) Ensuring Cultural, Social and Economic Viability and Optimality

The benefits of each initiative have to be balanced against its financial, economic, social and environmental costs. The initiative also has to be assessed in terms of whether it involves non-negotiable costs; in different cultures and at different times, some things cannot be priced or "traded off"; they are held sacred.

Every cost benefit analysis must be supplemented by a "class benefit" analysis that shows which groups benefit from the initiative and which have to pay for

> **ENTRY LEVEL ACTIVITIES**
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> Often rural initiatives are prefaced by what are known as "entry level" activities. These are described as activities designed to give "an entry" into the rural community. In fact, they reflect a compromise and consensus reached with the local communities. For example, if a TCI is seeking to raise adult literacy levels in a village or a region plagued with acute water shortage, a compromise often reached with the villagers is that the TCI would help them dig wells if, in return, they helped in promoting adult literacy. However, reaching such a compromise requires local-level decision-making powers and flexibility are required.

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[10] For an excellent discussion on aid dependence, see Braugtigam 2000.

[11] There is an admitted problem with the measurement of outcomes or impacts. However, this is partly because TCIs are originally designed to deliver outputs and their milestones and timeframes are oriented accordingly. It therefore becomes difficult to retrofit an outcome or impact based evaluation system. Also, adequate outcome or impact indicators have not yet been developed and tested and it seems too early to abandon the approach.

it. Often, TCIs may contribute to economic growth, but adversely affect equity, benefiting the rich at the expense of the poor, the strong to the detriment of the weak or the influential at the cost of the marginalised.

Similarly, one must determine if the initiative is the best possible way to achieve the desired results. Other options must be considered. Past experiences and their lessons must be examined in relation to specific proposed strategies and assessed appropriately in the context of the field reality.

e) Pacing for Assimilation

The time frames for planning and implementing TCIs, especially the time available to consult and involve various stakeholders, often determines their "ownership friendliness". Rigid timeframes, coupled with large amounts of funding, often lead to wasting funds, as panic sets in to spend all the money before the initiative closes.

One critical element in managing change is the difference in the ways that cultures look at time. In western cultures, which most of the donors represent, time is seen as an adversary and efforts are made to do things as quickly as possible. In other cultures, especially in Africa and Asia, time is often regarded as an ally; the longer you can afford to take to do something, the better it will be assimilated. Rushing into things or through them is considered uncultured; even conversations and discussions take – and are designed to take – weeks and months rather than hours and days. Donors must therefore take the time to ask themselves not how quickly they can complete a TCI, but how slowly they can afford to do it. Nonetheless, making haste slowly does not include bureaucratic delay – which usually serves only to exacerbate misunderstanding.

f) Designing for Sustainability

Sustainability is both a benefit of stakeholder ownership and a precondition for it. Unless TCIs are designed to have a good chance of sustaining themselves over time, stakeholders hesitate to accept responsibility for them.

i. Appropriate Institutional Structures, Staffing and Funding

The structure and staffing of TCIs influence their long-term viability and sustainability. In general, the greater the integration of these structures into the existing social and governance systems, the greater their chances of persisting over time.[12]

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[12] "Low levels of ownership are only partly related to the rise of adjustment lending in the 1980s, which legitimised an unprecedented degree of external ownership of policy decision normally made by the political leadership of a country (Brautigam and Botchwey, 1998). The widespread use over the past three decades of enclave project implementation or management units, and offshore, off-budget "Special Accounts" for projects also exacerbated this problem. Although these practices have been condemned by many donor studies, they persist. A recent OECD and UNDP study of the aid system in Mali showed that between 1985 and 1995, the majority of donors used project implementation units rather than working through the regular bureaucracy; some donors, including USAID, the World Bank, and Germany (GTZ) used them for all of their projects in Mali (1998: 37-50)"(Brautigam 2000).

Admittedly, existing systems and institutions may be inadequate or inappropriate to the proposed TCI, tempting implementers to set up a system, removed from existing structures. However, sustainability considerations tend to call for rooting the TCI in existing systems and guiding it to develop and expand them – and the institutional capacities they require – even though this may delay the specific objectives of a TCI. Of course, this kind of option may not be available where the TCI concerns emergency relief or where systems and structures have collapsed, as in failed states. Even then, an explicit and measurable objective of all TCIs should be developing indigenous capacities, even while they carry out their primary tasks.

Similar problems exist in staffing TCIs. Again, as a general principle, TCIs are far more sustainable when staffed by nationals and locals. Where adequate local capacity is not available, one must focus on developing it prior to TCI implementation or concurrent with it.

The domination of TCIs by expatriates can significantly compromise the sustainability of TCIs and raise other problems, among them donor credibility. This often happens when donors prescribe cuts in government expenditure and insist upon greater equity in distributing resources, but send in consultants who are paid 20 to 30 times the national salary. Elliot Berg (1993) quotes an unnamed "high-ranking" official of UNICEF :

> *"I believe that the vast bulk of technical experts and expertise at present provided by the UN and donor system has outlived their usefulness … judged by the criteria for which they have been provided: the provision of specific technical expertise or experience which is not available among nationals of the country … for a limited period until national personnel have acquired the training and expertise to take over the job… (Far) from diminishing, the numbers of technical experts provided has grown decade-by-decade since the 1950s…*

> *"[Costs have] reached extraordinary disproportions. In Tanzania, for example, the total cost of technical assistance in 1988 was some $300 million, of which at least $200 million represented the salaries, per diems, housing allowances, air travel and other direct costs of the 1,000 or so international experts provided as the core of technical assistance. In contrast, the total salary cost of the whole civil service in Tanzania in the same year, including administration, clerical staff, teachers and health workers, was $100 million. [This situation…] is not untypical … The time has come to rethink the purpose of aid and technical assistance within the UN system".*

Expatriate consultants not only seem to take jobs from nationals[13] (Berg 1993), but often have their own ideas of how things should be done that clash with the way their hosts would like them done. This creates friction, compromises the initiative and often raises the questions of ownership – the more so when payment for expatriates strain other elements of the national budget.

The "counterpart" system does not seem to work well. Local counterparts are either not properly selected or not adequately motivated to be recipients of transferred expertise. Nor do expatriate consultants always have the motivation or ability to "transfer" their expertise. He or she is generally selected for expertise rather than the ability to develop counterpart capacity – the hardest outcome to measure under any circumstances.

ii. Appropriate levels of Funding

Modalities of funding patterns also play important roles for sustainability and owner-ship. Many TCIs pump into the system amounts of money totally dissonant with local realities. When donors withdraw and reduce these massive funds, local implementers and even beneficiaries who are used to that amount of funding are not inclined to work within a shrunken pattern. In some cases they convince themselves that even the pre-TCI level of activities can no longer be carried out with the reduced monies available, even when fewer resources supported these activi-ties before the donor's arrival.

> **UNSUSTAINABLE TCIs**
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> In a forest fire prevention project in Indonesia, post proj-ect assessments revealed that forest officers had stopped inspecting the field stations. When asked why, they responded that after the completion of the project they did not have money to maintain or run the vehicles that had been bought under the project. Further investi-gations revealed that, before the project, they had all used public transport for inspection tours, but had developed a taste for traveling in their own vehicles.
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> Credibility of the donor and of the TCI process is critical to winning public support. Contradictions appear glar-ing when the donor claims to work towards sustainability, but sets up TCIs that use levels of resources impossible to maintain through national budgets.

In some cases, too, a TCI results in donor replacements of national funding – which does not reappear after the donor's departure because of additionalities. In a sense, this is an abdication by national governments of their own responsibilities. This "flex-ibility" often defeats the purpose of the TCI by failing to strengthen the sector that was considered a priority. Yet this is common where a TCI does not appear to address a felt national priority. Given an opportunity to secure financial support through a TCI in a non-priority sector, most governments shift their own resources to areas to which they give higher priority and then back to the donor's at a far lower – often unsustainable – level. Perhaps the only answer is setting up a system for restricting the TCI to the resources of the national budget.

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[13] See also 'Principles for New Orientations in Technical Cooperation'. The International Journal of Technical Cooperation, Vol.1, No.1, Summer 1995, pp 1-17.

Just as large-budget TCIs are essentially unsustainable and potentially counter-productive, high operational expenses also lead to undesirable distortions. Adopting frugal norms would not only make TCIs more acceptable to national stakeholders,

> **THE SIZE OF TCIs**
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> A factor in this …. is the size and scale of most multi-lateral donor projects. Large corporations are the beneficiaries of large, expensive engineering projects. Since it costs as much in staff-support services to administer a $500,000 project as a $50 million effort, an MDB will usually choose the larger one (Pearl 1989).

but would also promote sustainability and allow the same amount of money to do much more good. Moreover, building into TCI design the gradual replacement of donor funds by national funds, while maintaining the same level of activities, would not only ensure funding at nationally replicable levels, but guard against other dislocations.

iii. Addressing Root Causes

Should TCIs address the symptoms of a problem or try tackling the root cause? Always an issue in the project approach to development, it continues in the programmatic direction, even where programmes are sector-wide. In fact, neither approach tends to reveal the true inter-linkages between problems and sectors. Though local communities want the symptoms tackled (stomachs filled, shelter provided) and certainly do not think in sectors, most affected populations would like problems solved in a permanent and fundamental way.

Factors Inhibiting Stakeholder Ownership

National Governments

National governments would like to do things their own way and to do it themselves, as long as the donor is willing to pay for it. Where they welcome expatriate consultants, they either see their expertise as critical and not available internally or regard them as extrabudgetary staff that can assist their work without burdening their budgets (Berg 1993).

Donor resistance to allowing national governments to design and handle TCIs by themselves stems from many factors. Most commonly, donors feel that adequate institutional and individual capacity does not exist within the country.

> **FUND ADDITIONALITY**
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> In the 1980s, various bilateral and multilateral donors initiated major community or social forestry programmes, giving financial and technical assisstance for raising plantations that could meet basic rural community needs. Subsequent assessments showed that most such TCIs caused national governments to withdraw their own forestry funds completely. The fact that the TCIs focused exclusively on social or community forestry meant that all other aspects of forestry were seriously neglected, leaving forests worse than they had been.

- They have reservations about the sincerity and/or objectivity of national implementers.

- They believe that the country's procedures are so complex that only those with prior donor experience can handle them.

- The donor has come under pressure to provide employment for its own nationals.

- Culturally, donor personnel feel more comfortable working with people of their own background than with people from different cultures.

Other factors that shape donor decisions include:

- Whether national governments appear to represent a minority viewpoint, as is sometimes the case with military dictatorships, or have an elitist character.

- Whether they have majority support (through elections or otherwise), but seem insensitive to minority viewpoints or issues important to the donor, such as environment or gender.

- Whether the recipient government can make decisions and implement TCIs.

- Whether the recipient government professes political or economic ideologies at variance with those of the donor countries.

- Whether the recipient government seems dominated by a few self-serving individuals.

- Whether the recipient government subscribes to the broad, hidden or explicit, donor agendas, such as nuclear proliferation or international trade regimes, including copyright and patent protection.

Some of these factors stem from underlying cultural differences between donors, differences in defining justice, democracy, participation, even efficiency. Where genuine elements of cultural diversity exist, they are understood as characteristics of what is wrong rather than what is different.

Where donors try to "persuade" recipient governments to do what they consider to be in their best interests, the temptation of additional finances or the threat of stopping existing resource flows usually compromises the possibility of ownership.

Conditionalities: Conditionalities used to induce systemic changes which donors rather than recipient govern- ments consider desirable tend to reflect the political and ideological interests of donor countries. Many pre- scribe how a particular TCI should operate, independent of the larger sys- tem in which the presumed shortcoming exists. While some condi- tionalities seem benign, some end by

> **CONDITIONALITIES**
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> Stung by criticism about the adverse impacts of their assistance on some of the poorest people of the world, many donors have started prescribing stringent procedures for assessing and miti- gating the adverse impacts of TCIs on certain groups, especially indigenous peoples, and apply these strictures rigidly. Recipient countries react by trying to circumvent such measures, even as they appear to observe them.
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> In some TCIs that displace illegal occupants of public lands, the rehabilitation packages have been so liberal that such groups fare better than the remaining legal population. This not only leads to resentment, but encourages others to squat on public land in the hope that some donor will pay for their "displacement".

injuring innocent parties or distorting socioeconomic systems. The structural adjustment programmes of the late 1980s were a case in point. In terms of owner- ship, conditions forced on host governments often endanger not only the TCI they accompany, but others that may follow.

Sub-National Governments

Sub-national governments include provincial or state governments, municipal authorities and local governments, many of which have varying degrees of political independence and direct responsibility for administering national, sub-national and local projects, programmes and policies. Most of the factors that inhibit the involve- ment of national governments apply to sub-national authorities and are supplemented by others:

- A hesitation, even an antipathy, among national governments to allow the direct participation of "lower" levels, duplicated by the "lower" level itself towards subsidiary authorities.

- A danger of creating or aggravating tensions between national and sub-national governments and among various sub-national governments, which may threaten to destabilise the political situation.

- The difficulties in coordinating activities run directly by sub-national governments.

- The inability to persuade national governments to shed bureaucratic structures inappropriate to supervising and coordinating activities at lower levels. This often results in the diversion of TCIs' resources to unnecessary "management" costs.

Beneficiary Communities

Despite many diverse demonstrations of the benefits of decentralisation during the last decade, officials still perceive a number of grassroots groups as being ignorant or adhering to unacceptable political and cultural values. They also hesitate to risk creating political ripples between various levels of the government and between or within various community groups. National governments are even

> **LISTENING TO UNHEARD VOICES**
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> Action Aid, an international NGO, has initiated the exercise enitled "Listening to People in Poverty", which involves teams of experts, volunteers and Action Aid's own national staff moving around and talking to the most marginalised and oppressed groups in society. The current series focuses on conditions of chronic hunger; children who are "left out" of education; women and children in institutions such as jails, juvenile justice and women's rescue homes, and mental hospitals; and poor or corrupt and arbitrary governance.

more apprehensive about letting donors speak directly with communities, community groups and NGOs. Almost all recipient governments reject or try to stage-manage interactions at the community level, sometimes with good reason. As Rajni Kothari (1986), has observed, there are "pervasive and powerful forces that are at work to which perhaps a large part of the present genre of NGOs, particularly those involved in 'delivering development', have themselves unwittingly contributed…..[B]oth world capitalism and important institutions involved in 'development' – the World Bank, IMF, UNDP, various donor agencies and consortia – are discovering in the NGO model a most effective instrument of promoting their interest in penetrating Third World economies and particularly their rural interiors which neither private industries nor government bureaucracies were capable of doing. Besides, they present an image that is far less threatening than the other two".

Other obstructions to community involvement include:

- An absence of institutions through which donors could work with the community.

- The heterogeneity of communities, which complicates hearing the voices of several segments, especially the least empowered.

- The prevalence of priorities or values incomprehensible to outsiders and donor representatives.

- Inappropriate timeframes for eliciting community views.

- Insufficient or inappropriate means of communicating information, especially about alternative TCI designs or intended results and impacts, that allow communities to make informed choices.

Intended Direct Losers

These typically include individuals and organisations/agencies whose activities or influence the TCI aims to curb because they appear to be part of the problem, often corrupt or passive officials. However, involving such people can help reveal what really ails a system – whether lack of incentives, opportunity constraints, external forces, poor training or inadequate remuneration or other rewards – or threats of destitution. Under many circumstances, overcoming these kinds of constraints may become the best means of neu-

> **NATURE RESERVES MANAGEMENT PROJECT: PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA**
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> One of the components of the project was aimed at enhancing people's participation in reserve management. It envisaged participatory planning for the use of resources by local people in designated zones of nature reserves. The planning and implementation of participatory plans for resource use included:
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> 1. PRA training for staff of the nature reserves
>
> 2. Developing community resource management plans with the involvement of local communities
>
> 3. Implementing income generation activities for local communities through community investment grants as a part of the community resource management plans
>
> 4. Various education and awareness activities aimed at local communities.

tralizing obvious potential opposition. On the other hand, involving such people early in the TCI may prove wholly counter-productive, particularly in view of their possible mobilising of opposition to the TCI and/or politicising its substance.

Unintended Direct Losers

The people physically, economically and socially displaced by a TCI are in many ways the most critical stakeholders. If their losses cannot be minimised, the overall gains of a TCI become questionable and may have undesirable impacts elsewhere. Reaching these unintended direct losers may be particularly difficult because they may be wholly unaware of the very existence of the TCI.

In some cases they protest – usually too late. In many cases, they disappear without trace. Those who survive often become candidates for another round of TCIs, having lost not only their material means, but much of their cultural and geographical identity as well. Consequently, whatever the presumed "unproductive" expenditure, TCIs should estimate not only the impacts of their stated objectives, but their potential for incidental (or "collateral") damage and provide for conflict resolution, as well as mechanisms to allow the losers to begin building new lives.

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