Strengthening Training Institutions: Towards a Common Agenda of Action

1. Background.   Training institutions are key actor in supporting the capacity development of government authorities – both at national and local level alike. Interestingly though, comparatively little attention has been paid to strengthening them and understanding the unique opportunities and challenges related to them. But herein lays the first problem: the very term 'training institutions' is actually misleading as such institutions are not a homogenous group. Indeed their mandate, scope and status vary widely. They can work at the national or regional levels, address different issues or have different specialties, be private or public institutions, have different business models (private funding, public funding, mixed, fixed budget, fee-for-service arrangements), and vary greatly in size. But linking them all is the aim to build the capacity of national and local government actors and civil society. By having 'the capacity to build capacity" training institutions thus play a key role in promoting and fostering sustainable capacity development, and strengthening key actors who contribute to the achievement of the MDGs. Additionally, for many bilateral and multilateral agencies, training institutions are essential in taking normative or pilot capacity development initiatives to scale. Yet the training institutions themselves are not well understood – some endure, some collapse, others are bypassed completely. In short, the potential of training institutions is large, the successes exist, but a more detailed understanding and common platform of action to support training institutions is lacking.

2. What does this event aim to achieve? This event is a starting point for a longer term process of understanding the factors that constrain or promote the sustainable and effective functioning of training institutions and subsequently addressing such constraints through a coordinated, multi-actor plan of support. A phased approach is taken as there is recognition that one event can not unpack all the issues surrounding training institutions; thus this event is a modest attempt to convene a group of like minded organizations to begin discussions and set an agenda for further investigation and – ultimately – support. At the outset, the event will examine issues from a global perspective with an understanding that future work will proceed along more specific lines of inquiry (geographical, thematic, etc) as determined by the event participants.

3. What questions will the event try to answer? The event organizers are posing several questions to participants, realizing that none have an easy answer and only initial exploration of them can occur within the time available. These questions will guide the event and serve as structure for discussions

- **What are the factors of an enabling environment for training institutions?** More specifically, what policy and legislation lends to or constrains an effective training institution? Is it legislation that provides for dedicated training budgets of local authorities? Or provides for a budget for the training institution itself? Or do budgets mainly come from project funds, and how dependent are those projects from donor funding? What about clarity of mandate vis-à-vis other similar bodies in Government? How does political leadership and politics influence the effectiveness of the training institutions?

- **What are different institutional arrangements that are utilized by these training institutions?** What is the different institutional positioning of the training institutions such as whether they are attached to Ministries or independent organizations, and the mandates they have. Are they 'lean' institutions in that they have a pool of consultants that they draw on? Or do they have larger pools of staff that are specialized trainers? What collaborative arrangements do they have with Universities, private sector or other actors that support their operations? What elements favor sustainability and effectiveness? What successful modalities of dedicated cooperation with local authorities do we know? What elements favor sustainability and effectiveness? Which institutional arrangements are perceived as constraints by training institutions?

- **What are the different business models that have lent to the sustainability of these training institutions?** Public funding, private funding, different fee-for service arrangements, mixed models and others. Have training institutions changed from one model to the other over time? And if so, why and how?   What are the pros and cons to the different approaches?

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- **How have these training institutions moved towards becoming 'learning institutions" and why did they do so?** Significant dialogue has taken place regarding the possibilities of training institutions to become more diverse in their service offerings to include capacity assessments, networking and linking to learning opportunities in other countries, and offering more varied learning programmes. Underpinning this shift is a fundamental change in pedagogical approach and thus attention must be paid to how training institutions have improved their pedagogical methods, how they have made a shift towards becoming learning institutions, and understanding their rationale for doing so.

4. Who is this event for? First and foremost, this event is for the training institutions themselves – specifically training institutions that focus on local authorities or their related national actors. The event will aim to provide a venue for training institutions to share experiences, learn from one another, develop links, and to chart a course ahead for future action. A second group of stakeholders are the national and local authorities who both receive support from training institutions and create or influence the environment in which they operate. The third group for whom this event will be of interest are the bilateral donors and training institutions and multilateral organizations whose own policies and funding decisions can strongly influence the effectiveness and sustainability of training institutions of the south. Overall this event is designed to be small – with not more than 15 representatives in total attending.

5. When and where will this even take place? While a specific date has not been set, the event is being planned for the first quarter of 2011. The event will be hosted by UN Habitat, the Danida Fellowship Center and the Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies (IHS) at the UN headquarters for Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. It will take place over 3 days. This even will be bracketed by another which may also be of interest which is the review of a methodology on training needs assessment and training impact evaluation for utilization by training institutions that is being developed by UN Habitat and IHS (2 days)

6. How can I get involved? If you are a counterpart in a training institution, government body, bilateral or multilateral partner or other interested organization, please send an email to joe.hooper@unhabitat.org and so as to be kept informed and updated as the event itinerary develops and logistical information is available.

7. What is the agenda? A draft agenda is included on the following pages. It is evolving on a regular basis and thus you are encouraged to be in contact with Joe.hooper@Unhabitat.org to get the latest version or provide your inputs/comments to the one below.