# Capacity Development for the Future:
## *Insights from a Consumer Landscape Survey on Capacity Development*
### *Undertaken by The Global Knowledge Initiative*
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How adequately do trainings and other methods of capacity development equip individuals, institutions, and networks to address complex challenges? Capacity development, particularly in the form of trainings, supports the continuous learning process needed to tackle complex, global challenges be they in agriculture, health, energy, or other critical international development and social impact sectors. While capacity development does not solve such challenges directly, it plays an integral role in the process by enabling stakeholders to apply their skills and resources to tackling global challenges.

To more effectively support and collaborate with partners seeking to improve their capacity development efforts, we interviewed capacity development experts who have experienced multiple trainings, served as trainers themselves, and/or who have sponsored trainings for others. Determining the adequacy of today's capacity development efforts guided this inquiry. We asked experts from over 15 different institutions, including USAID, Aga Khan Foundation, The University for Peace and the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa a series of 26 questions that explored such themes as the

> **DEFINITIONS**
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> **Capacity Development:**
> The support provided to individuals and organizations to develop strategies, build critical skills, and apply tools to infuse effective collaboration at every stage of innovation, from idea to impact.

role of facilitators/trainers to a successful training; measuring impact and the importance of monitoring and evaluation; and the future of capacity development. Consulted experts included participants from four continents and various sectors including government, foundations, and the private sector.

As expected, many of the experts interviewed face similar challenges and identified shared feelings about the role and future of capacity development. Our interest lies in areas of divergence, where capacity development practitioners—particularly individuals focused on social impact—may do well to collaborate and find innovative ways of addressing shared challenges and opportunities. Much of the survey synopsis offered below presents information that is not new; however, the way we consider moving forward with the information can and should be. The Global Knowledge Initiative hopes the results of this inquiry will provide insight on how we can work together to better meet the capacity development needs of the social sector.

### Divergence of Opinion
Throughout this inquiry, three key topic areas revealed significant divergence in response: (1) the role and importance of online training, (2) the importance of facilitation, and (3) training mode and style. Each area of divergence follows, supported by quotes from participants.

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## (1) THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF ONLINE TRAINING

GKI asked participants the question, "How appealing are online courses/trainings to you?" 47% of respondents stated that online trainings are "very appealing" or "appealing" while 35% of respondents affirmed they are "not at all appealing". Those who found it "appealing" or "very appealing" felt that the ability to engage in asynchronous learning at their own pace elevated online learning in a way that time-bound, location specific, in-person trainings could not. Those who identified online courses as "not at all appealing" highlighted the inability to engage with other individuals face-to-face and the inability to interact directly with other participants (not just the trainer) as limiting factors.

### What could be done to improve online trainings?
- Provide resources prior to the start of a training: *"Share materials ahead of trainings and allow for more interaction and more time with classmates and the instructor."*
- Include requirements and deadlines: *"One thing we learned over time [is that] you need to provide tests or exams—a "stick" approach rather than a "carrot". If you want people to get/stay engaged, if they know they will be evaluated and [the evaluation] ties to a certificate or whatever it is they are aiming for, it will help them become more engaged."*
- Collaborate with other organizations: *"There is just too much out there. I encourage organizations to start partnerships that then certify or authenticate online trainings and guarantee a stamp of quality that is lacking."*

## (2) THE ROLE OF A FACILITATOR

There was strong agreement that facilitation (i.e., the role played by trainers themselves in the learning environment) is critical to a good learning experience. However, opinions differed when it came to identifying the skills needed to lead an effective training. Several respondents pointed to a level of expert fatigue that has reduced some trainings to minimal content and lots of "hype". Others highlighted that while there seems to be a consensus that a purely lecture format is not ideal, it continues to be the most common form of in-person training structure, particularly at large institutions.

### How do facilitators play an impactful role in capacity development?
- Practical coursework: *"You need to have practical training kits (handouts, resources, etc.) with you. You can't train adults with theory, you need to be practical. Adequate kits and getting participants to do the demonstrations themselves is very important."*
- Theory leads to understanding [i.e., supporting theory-focused learning vs. providing specific examples]: *"If you explain concepts in the abstract well enough, then participants will understand and can go apply it. We try to build metaphors more than examples, where people can abstract where patterns are. Decision making is a pattern-based process, you relate to what patterns you've seen before."*
- Slow it down: *"It's better to have less content but allow people to learn it well rather than shovel a lot in and not give space to explore [the topic] the way they need to."*
- Strong commitment to participant-centric trainings: *"MSI (Management Systems International) did a meta-analysis of the USAID Capacity Development efforts. Their results indicated that it's very hard to do HICD (human and institutional capacity development) right and if you get it wrong, it makes it even harder to do the next time.* Suggesting trainings are hindered by a "one teacher, many learners model: *"Trainings that are 'dictated on high' are a kiss of death."*

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## (3) Training mode and style

Participants had varying opinions around ideal training duration but divergence was most prominent when it came to which medium is most effective (i.e., training mode) and how information is best shared (i.e., training style).

### What are the most effective approaches to training? Least effective?

- The role of conferences: *"[At] huge conferences with a ton of workshops going on in-parallel, it becomes very fragmented. Rushing around a cold, mega hotel with a 120-page conference book and suddenly a cocktail hour at the end…it's a missed opportunity. You are never sure you're at the 'right session.'"*
- Just-in-time trainings: *"The future is a drip/drop approach. Knowledge will become more disintegrated, just-in-time, and tailored to a particular problem at a particular point in time. Knowledge will be shaped in a way that's [offers] an à la carte menu."*
- Feeling of Purpose/Incentives: *"Tailor the process so that everyone can work on something that is applicable to them but they also have a sense of shared purpose and collaboration among a supportive group. [It gives the sense that] 'We're in this together but I know why I am here.'"*

## Biggest Gaps in Capacity Development Today

> **What types of trainings do you think are currently missing?**
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> *"We're missing a good old understanding of social science. I'm not sure organizational capacity development is anything new, especially in the international development community; we run the risk of thinking we have something shiny and new. There is a long history of research and writing and organizational learning theories. We are missing research expertise and knowledge, we try to recreate the wheel."*

Technology has enabled us to access and utilize more information than ever before but that has created its own challenge: how do we capture and share information effectively? A strong agreement emerged from our consulted experts that trainers themselves are integral to the learning and information immersion process and that "Smart Trainers", those able to bring both research and soft skills to an experience, are most successful. Participants stressed there is a gap in trainings led by Smart Trainers but several outstanding questions emerged:

1) What is the skillset required for optimum instruction?
2) What is considered best practice for "Smart Training"?
3) How much investment should be made in **who** shares the information vs. **what** information is shared?

## Forward Thinking: What's Next in the Field

From the increased emphasis on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to the push to harness technology to amplify the power of teaching, experts considered several trends that are shaping the future of capacity development.

First, participants in this survey overwhelmingly highlighted a need for improved efforts in M&E, notably to refine their trainings and provide more value to participants (as opposed to M&E strictly for evaluative purposes). The international development sector has increased expectations around outcomes attached to investment in capacity development. Organizations able to demonstrate impact over longer-time horizons will see more opportunities for funding and sustainable impact. Such an ability, however, will require measuring long-term outcomes: tracer studies, longitudinal analysis, and other approaches that enable curriculum designers and developers to assess how substantially

> **What evidence do you track over time to demonstrate impact?**
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> *"Right now, it's very anecdotal, I look to their performance. If they're still in their positions and are getting promoted, I would use that as positive impact. At a broad level I don't see a structure that allows us to do that [demonstrate impact]. I haven't seen data to properly monitor [performance] over time. We don't collect the data to see if CD programs end up performing better. "*

capacity development efforts appear to translate to measurable and meaningful outcomes.

Second, technology will also play an increasingly prominent role in capacity development and training delivery and with it, an augmented role of online education. With expanding opportunities to magnify impact—reaching larger audiences and quickly rolling out new processes and concepts—challenges are magnified as well. For example, one might come across cultural issues including tone and formality of trainings; misuse and/or inappropriate use of technology, such as introducing new technology without proper training; diverse resources, having expectations that all participants have access to the same materials across different regions; and multiple time zones are all unique barriers to effective outcomes. Investing in the right technology and facilitators with an ability to connect with an audience in multiple formats is critical.

Third, a multitude of experts touched on the idea that well-crafted trainings cannot simply introduce powerful concepts or techniques. Rather, they need to directly relate to the needs of participants. If the intended outcome is to support participants in taking concrete, actionable steps toward addressing a specific challenge, trainings must be customized and practical.

### Where do you see capacity development heading within your area of work?

- Long-term, blended approach: *"We are moving away from isolated trainings to longer-term capacity development, adding coaching and advice over the long-term. Systems change is not learned in a 3-day training, it's an apprenticeship. It takes a long time to develop intuition and skills."*
- Cross-sector, experiential trainings: *"I think the real enriching opportunities will be for trainings that allow people to have important experiences and build relationships in cross-sectoral contexts. [We will see] cohorts curated to represent different types of institutions and places people are coming from [to] better match the dynamics of the real world."*
- Knowledge curation: *"The information is out there, for any degree, any discipline. The question is: Who is out there curating the information so I get the answers I need, whether it's building a career around the knowledge or a subset [of the knowledge]? You're going to have to offer a broad set of things for newbies to experts."*

Looking across these perspectives, GKI foresees future capacity development models that blend in-person training with smart use of technology-enabled, virtual support. More than training, however, the capacity building of tomorrow is a concept wedded to shared experience, relationship cultivation, and real-world application. Trainings will be rooted in the delivery of specific solutions to real-world problems of relevance to learners. Increasingly, the future will require trainers to customize material and adapt it to the needs of participants in real-time as well as integration of new technology with a pedagogical framework that fosters both individual and collective learning success.

## More about GKI

The Global Knowledge Initiative (GKI) is guided by a mission to build, facilitate, and sustain problem solving networks that tackle the world's most pressing challenges. We've worked with partners in 70 countries to date, and have a particularly large footprint in East and Southern Africa and the Asia/Pacific. GKI's strengths lie in facilitation and design of networks, Social Innovation Labs, systems research and evaluation, policy & strategy, and—the focus of our interviews and consequent follow-up—capacity development.

Capacity Development experts participating in the Consumer Landscape Survey highlighted numerous strategies for developing their training acumen. GKI asked participants to identify external resources used most to improve curriculum design, further teaching pedagogy, develop online modules, and build presentation and facilitation skills. Below are the resources most frequently cited.

**Top 3:**
1. TechChange
2. Tony Robbins
3. Harvard (case studies, course curriculum and design, delivery method)

**Consulting Groups**
- McKinsey & Company
- Accenture

**Universities**
- Case Western Reserve University
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (Practical Impact Alliance)
- Harvard University
- University for Peace (Centre for Executive Education)
- Stanford University
- University of Waterloo

**Foundations**
- Robert Woods Johnson Foundation
- Bosch Foundation
- The Rockefeller Foundation
- NESTA

**Organizations**
- Echoing Green
- Apple
- Creative Associates (organizations capacity assessment tool)

**Non-Profits**
- Royal Society for the Arts
- The Global Knowledge Initiative
- Academy for Systems Change
- Santa Fe Institute

**Other**
- Management Case Studies
- Social Innovation Exchange
- John Cotter's Book, Accelerate
- Trainingmagnetnetwork.com
- Farnum Street Blog

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