

# SSN learning on capability strengthening

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## Executive Summary

The concept of capacity development has evolved significantly since the mid-twentieth century. Within SouthSouthNorth (SSN), learning from the past 20 years has led to an evolution in thinking of this concept, from capacity building to capability strengthening. The capability strengthening approach of SSN acknowledges that capacity already exists within local partners, and focuses effort on breaking down the barriers that prevent the full potential of these capacities to be brought to bear on the complex development challenges in the Global South. Drawing on experiences from the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN), the Southern African Climate Finance Partnership (SACFP), Support to the African Group of Negotiators, Mitigation Actions Plans and Scenarios (MAPS), the Africa LEDS Partnership (AfLP), and Future Climate for Africa (FCFA) programmes, this paper provides an overview of the approaches that SSN has found to be most effective in strengthening capability, and provides relevant principles that other organisations can apply to achieve capability strengthening.

SSN's practice draws from the capability approach put forward by Amartya Sen together with experiential learning and reflection. It rests on four key points to acknowledge at the outset of a capability strengthening intervention:

1. **Recognition of the deep and rich expertise to be found in the Global South:** Experience shows that when local expertise is applied to a problem, local decision makers are more likely to take forward suggestions as the nuances within the context are better understood.
2. **Appreciation of the time needed for capability strengthening efforts to be effective and successful in the long term:** To adequately harness potential and overcome limitations of local experts and institutions, activities to improve capabilities need to be built iteratively over time. They should furthermore focus on institutional capability to avoid having to restart the process due to staff turnover.
3. **Emphasis on respectful relationships based on trust:** Effective collaboration and sharing of knowledge can only occur when trust and respect is present. This allows for increased uptake and course-correction should interventions not be suitable.
4. **Acknowledgment of the barriers and power imbalances that exist:** Power imbalances may be at play within projects and it is key to identify and actively manage power dynamics to effectively give experts and institutions in the Global South the autonomy to address these.

## 1 Introduction

SouthSouthNorth (SSN) is a non-profit company based in Cape Town, South Africa. SSN supports national and regional responses to climate change through partnerships and deep collaboration that connect people and information and mobilises resources to respond innovatively to the complex challenges posed by climate change. Its position in the global South affords it a deep understanding of, and connection to, the climate and development challenges facing the region.

There are commonalities between all of SSN's projects that have helped to ensure success. Firstly, they are implemented in partnership with government and other institutions, in a collaborative manner - mostly in the form of a network or alliance. Secondly SSN tries to ensure continuity by sequencing interventions so that one project always feeds into another. All projects are implemented by a team (rather than depending on individuals) to ensure institutional capacity is retained. Lastly the relationship and partnerships with governments and other institutions are located across the institutions (not solely in one contact) and are built over time.

The brief begins with an introduction to the origins of the term 'capacity building'. It then moves to a theoretical introduction to the capability approach and how this has informed the way in which SSN implements capacity building which prefers a 'capability strengthening' approach. Lastly, highlights from SSN's project experience are discussed in the form of key learnings.

## 2 From capacity building to capability strengthening

### An evolving concept<sup>1</sup>

Capacity building as a term emerged in the 1950s (Sagar, 2000) soon after development programmes began to focus attention on supporting newly independent African states to develop (Martinussen, 1997). At the time the objective of development work was largely focused on developing countries achieving a "state of modernity" (with the assumption that developed countries had already reached this state) and therefore that developing countries were to become more like developed countries (Humphrey, 2007). Capacity building efforts were focused on the design and operation of institutions, with little attention paid to the political or cultural aspects of the societies towards which they were targeted (Sagar, 2000). From this starting point capacity building efforts moved towards the inclusion of human capacity as well as an integration with political aspects, and have seen a broadening of the range of institutions that are involved in these processes to include NGOs and community organisations (Sagar, 2000).

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<sup>1</sup> The following two subsections: 'An evolving concept' and 'Recognising the South' are largely taken from Du Toit, M. (2019) Assisting Africa: A critical analysis of technical assistance in low carbon development practice. [M.A. thesis]. University of Cape Town.

There is a myriad of approaches to capacity building in international development (Virji et al., 2012). Nonetheless capacity building support is typically performed through workshops and training, and in the form of expert technical advice. It generally encompasses development related to expert change, process change and organisational change. The majority of investments in capacity building have been approached as technical processes of transferring technology, knowledge and organisational models from the North to the South – often termed ‘Technical Assistance’ within climate change practice. Consequently, there has been more support for technological innovation, which has given little consideration to political and institutional context (Woodhill, 2010) although this is now changing.

### Recognising the South

Various goals, agreements and protocols have been formalised that stress the need for capacity development. The 17<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal is ‘*to strengthen global partnerships so that all individuals, communities and countries would have the opportunity to live in sustainable societies.*’. This assumes international cooperation is needed to ensure that ‘*sufficient means of implementation exist*’ (United Nations DESA, 2019). It furthermore infers mutual learning and processes of change across institutions, disciplines, and geographical boundaries, in particular that increased dialogue, knowledge exchange and collaborations between the South and North is needed (Blicharska et al., 2017). For instance, the Sustainable Development Goal Target 17.9 is subject to capacity development through South-North, South-South and triangular collaborations.

Capacity building in developing countries has been identified as a key means of implementing the 2030 Agenda and other pathways for sustainable development (e.g. the Samoa Pathway). And Article 11 of the Paris Agreement sets out an ambitious vision for the role of capacity strengthening to ‘*... enhance the capacity and ability of developing country Parties, ... to take effective climate change action, ...*’ (Paris Agreement, 2015: art 11.1). It recognises any party regardless of their respective status as developed or developing, as a potential provider of capacity building support. This moves towards a less binary distinction between developed and developing, and the more inclusive evaluation of capacity opens up the possibility of cooperation between developing countries (D’Auvergne & Nummelin, 2017).

The shift towards country-owned models of capacity building is further evident in the Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) (Booth, 2011). These documents urge countries to define their own development priorities and to design and lead the programmes that promote them (Goldberg & Bryant, 2012). This approach has not necessarily been implemented. Literature on capacity building within development research indicates that support activities still often originate in the North, are driven by Northern actors, and use knowledge arising from the North. This results in the origin and flow of knowledge being largely unidirectional; from Northern experts to Southern recipients (Du Toit, 2019).

There is thus a need to relook at the largely technological, unidirectional and Northern-based capacity building approaches that have been implemented to date. Whilst technological innovation has led to progress according to certain metrics, a complex and wicked problem such as climate change requires a rapid and widespread *socio*-technological transition.

It also requires a process approach that looks at existing power dynamics, national priorities and regional expertise (Du Toit, 2019). Development priorities in the South include social justice and poverty reduction, whereas in the North environmental priorities such as low carbon innovation technology and carbon emissions reductions are more common (Urban & Nordensvärd, 2013). When capacity building activities are not country-driven an imbalance of

priorities can occur, often financially benefiting Northern institutions and/or consultants (Du Toit, 2019). This reaffirms the need to have developing country stakeholders involved in the design, evaluation and implementation of capacity building projects (Sagar & VanDeveer, 2005). And in order for true involvement of stakeholders there needs to be the development of the so-called 'soft' capacities like building relationships and trust, facilitation and networking skills, leadership and communication, which typically take time to develop, are invisible, and have impacts which are difficult to measure (Woodhill, 2010).

#### Towards capability

**SSN recognises that a different approach is needed. So too a more appropriate term that better recognises and brings to the fore the substantial knowledge, expertise, experience and ability that exists in individuals, communities and institutions within the global South.**

Bearing in mind the history of the term 'capacity building', its use to date and the implicit assumptions within the term, SSN recognises that a different approach is needed. So too a more appropriate term that better recognises and brings to the fore the substantial knowledge, expertise, experience and ability that exists in individuals, communities and institutions within the global South. This emerging approach to capacity building within SSN draws on the capability approach.

The capability approach put forward by Amartya Sen in 1979 and later revised in 1999, takes a holistic view of human development and well-being. It is defined by Conradie, 2013 as: *'The different structural opportunity sets open to an individual, within which she would be able to exercise choice and agency, thereby increasing their functionings, or beings and doings.'* The approach recognises the various opportunities and capital; be they structural, personal or social, that a person has at their disposal to achieve wellness and brings these to bear on development activities (Bourdieu, 1986; Ashley and Carney, 1999). In the capability approach circumstances are shifted in order for individuals to accomplish what they are capable of and in so doing achieve freedoms.

The focus on capability as opposed to capacity puts more emphasis on individuals' freedoms and choices, and the ability to be able lead the kind of life *they* value rather than a quantified concept of what information is needed in order for people to perform functions. According to Sen, 1999: *'With adequate social opportunities, individuals can effectively shape their own destiny and help each other. They need not be seen primarily as passive recipients of the benefits of cunning development programs.'*

Thus, in order to achieve or strengthen capabilities, it is crucial to consider those factors in an individual's environment that act against this achievement and to understand that capability is not solely dependent on knowledge and training of individuals. Constraints to capability can take the form of social and political relations that individuals have with other community members as well as have an institutional component (Nambiar, 2013). What has become increasingly significant for SSN's work are these institutional factors in addition to (and combination with) social, personal and environmental factors that can affect individuals' and societies' capabilities. SSN has therefore been focussing efforts on institutional as well as individual capacity building work. By facilitating the unlocking or further strengthening of capabilities, individuals and institutions within the global South are better able to face the multiple challenges of climate change in innovative, accepted and appropriate ways. Some of the actions that support this is through the unlocking of finance, peer learning between actors within a region, and supporting existing initiatives and collaboration with experts across the

globe in a collegial and collaborative manner. In this way the ability to use existing skills, knowledge, expertise and experience is supported and its use within group, institutional and grassroots settings is facilitated.

With this in mind SSN uses the term ‘capability strengthening’ in the place of ‘capacity building’. This is defined as follows:

***Capability strengthening is a medium to long-term process that seeks to collaboratively reduce barriers and provide opportunities for individuals, groups and institutions to achieve their stated goals.***

Capability strengthening within SSN recognises the existing social commodities of knowledge, experience, expertise and social capital that exists within the global South. It is less focused on training, qualifications and the one-way dissemination or communication of information and focuses more on improving the ability to effectively apply and adapt commodities and functionalities to different situations in order to achieve specific outcomes within existing structures.

The next section looks at some of the experiences and learnings from SSN’s programmes that have informed this emergent and aspirational approach to capability strengthening.

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### 3 Learning from SSN’s programmes

Over the lifetime of SSN numerous methods of designing and implementing capacity building activities have been tried and practiced. Increasingly those that place local knowledge, expertise and experience at its centre, and those that are implemented with a ‘learning by doing’ approach over the medium to long-term have been favoured. SSN has learnt that building relationships based on trust and respect with project partners and key stakeholders is essential to capability strengthening activities. This has led to the increased usage of a capability strengthening approach over time.

Collective learning from project implementation to date has revealed four areas that are key for delivering a capability strengthening approach: recognition of existing expertise; commitment to a medium or long-term process; the necessity of relationships based on mutual respect and trust; and the acknowledgement of barriers that thwart capability. These are elaborated on below.

#### Recognising existing expertise

Rich knowledge, expertise and ability exists within the global South and this should be utilised in capability strengthening activities. SSN has been championing the use of local expertise and regional knowledge in project implementation as early as 2006 with the Long-Term Mitigation Scenarios process in South Africa. Here local energy and economic modellers, facilitators and key stakeholders collectively developed mitigation scenarios for the country which were subsequently used as input for the South African government’s ‘peak, plateau and decline’ emissions trajectory.

The practice of using local experts and endogenous knowledge was however not deeply embedded across all projects within the organisation at the time. This was evident in a 2014 mid-term evaluation of the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN) which revealed a reliance on consultants and experts from outside the region of focus. Furthermore, the report noted that this was causing challenges in the implementation of capacity building activities within the programme's focus countries. This insight, combined with demand from government partners for the use of local experts, and increasing awareness throughout the programme of the disadvantages of using predominantly Northern experts, encouraged SSN to re-evaluate the role of international consultants in capacity building activities in the Africa programme and to shift focus to local experts. An outcome of this change in approach was seen in the use of Ethiopian experts for a technical assistance project within CDKN which resulted in Ethiopia successfully gaining accreditation with the Adaptation Fund and Green Climate Fund (GCF) which was then followed by successful project proposals to both funds.

Subsequent programmes such as the Southern African Climate Finance Partnership (SACFP) have acknowledged the existing expertise within the southern African region in accessing climate finance from the GCF. This was integrated into the design of the partnership with regional expertise being used to strengthen the capability of other southern African countries that are trying to access climate finance. In the Mitigation Action Plans & Scenarios (MAPS) Programme, national energy and economic modelling experts were used exclusively in the development of medium-term mitigation scenarios development in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Peru. Each process was mandated by government and was wholly nationally led. This reliance on local expertise greatly increased the credibility and legitimacy of the programme outputs.

Overall SSN has found that local experts and practitioners are well versed in national and regional contexts, often have relationships with key stakeholders (or know who to contact and how), have a deep understanding of the politics and socio-economic situations of the country or region and have insights into institutional workings. Consequently, they can more easily highlight both the barriers and opportunities to capability strengthening. Research has shown that when using local experts, their expertise stays within the country as a resource - ensuring sustainability (Du Toit, 2019). This has been backed by experience within SSN where in CDKN the benefits to government partners became evident through the continued use of local experts for future work and less reliance of the 'fly-in-fly-out' consultancy model. Furthermore, those local experts' capability was further increased through continued job experience and growth in social capital<sup>2</sup>.

Local partners are more than just a contextual and social entry point. Their knowledge (technical, contextual, social, political and institutional amongst others) is critical to relational and peer-support functions as well as in technical excellence and innovation. This high level of technical understanding is often not acknowledged within the climate change community with an assumption that capacity needs building in technical areas through Northern knowledge and by Northern consultants (Du Toit, 2019). Within SSN however the contributions of local partners in crafting, managing and sustaining key relationships has been clearly seen in the Future Climate for Africa (FCFA) programme (Araujo et al., 2020). The Future Resilience for African Cities and Lands (FRACTAL) consortium forms a great example as it is fully southern led and based in the South, with a focus on skills and capacity building of both researchers and

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<sup>2</sup> A cautionary note is that a diversity of local expertise should be used in order to not contribute to the use of only a few experts which then become the elite.

stakeholders through mutual learning processes. Future programmes within SSN should ensure that this role is given an adequate profile and enough resourcing. SSN should continue to acknowledge the high proficiency and rich knowledge that exists within regions and use a collegial and collaborative approach with partners to brainstorm, share and co-create with experts in the field, that becomes increasingly endogenous over time.

### Strengthening capability is a medium to long-term process

Across the programmes implemented by SSN, experience has shown that capability is not strengthened with once-off events which are typically modelled on a one-size-fits-all approach. Even week-long training workshops can fail to deliver the outcomes desired by government partners and other key actors. Instead medium to long-term processes are required. This is particularly true when one considers a capability strengthening approach which looks to remove barriers and provide the circumstances and opportunities that allow existing capabilities to be realised to their fullest potential.

#### Thorough Scoping

Substantial time is needed in order to identify and understand, together with project partners and key stakeholders, the capabilities within a given situation as well as the barriers to the fulfilment of these capabilities. Furthermore, a deep understanding of the context is needed including knowledge of the existing processes and institutional landscape in which capability strengthening processes can and should be embedded. In short implementation must be demand-driven and propelled by full institutional buy-in and this takes time.

When insufficient scoping is done into the existing capabilities and technical knowledge of the partners, capacity building activities such as training or workshops can cover aspects where high competency already exists (Du Toit, 2019). This can be perceived as disrespectful and breaks trust. It also wastes time and resources. SSN looks to assist individuals and institutions with what they know they need, rather than enforcing what it thinks is needed. In this way capability is more likely to be unlocked as individuals and communities best understand the barriers that they are facing.

During 2020, SACFPIII completed a three-month capacity needs assessment process with its core stakeholder group. The benefit of this thorough scoping was that it allowed for the identification of a sound benchmark of the perceived capacity gaps within the select focus institutions and individuals accessing climate finance within Southern Africa. Moving forward this benchmark will serve as one measurement of movement to see if knowledge brokering in this sector can have a meaningful benefit for the community of practice assembled. Part of the scoping work was the facilitation of learning exchanges across institutions which helped uncover what individuals 'didn't know they didn't know'.

The second phase of CDKN the programme undertook a substantial scoping period during the first year of programme implementation. This delayed implementation of activities which subsequently delayed the production of outputs. However, the progress to outcome achievement has been strengthened and possibly accelerated by this work. Relationships with key actors have been entrenched and a deep and rich understanding of where SSN is useful (and where not) has been developed

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leading on to more work being requested in certain areas building on what has been done before. This leads on to the value of an iterative, learning-by-doing approach.

### Iterative processes

Capability strengthening becomes more successful and more strongly institutionalised when activities build on each other over time. The CDKN Phase II Ethiopian country programme work in mainstreaming gender and climate change reveals this. Gender was a priority agenda for the government and CDKN was able to offer assistance via a local climate and gender expert on how best to improve mainstreaming of this cross-cutting issue in climate change priority sectors, institutions and projects. An initial scoping report explored the current situation across the main federal government institutions. This report was then used as an input to a workshop. The workshop brought together several ministries of government as well a number of departments within ministries that did not engage frequently, for instance the gender and planning departments. This led to improved communication with parties intending to improve coordination. It further served as a launch board to the development of a gender coordination platform, which CDKN is using as an entry point to develop a gender resource pack that responds to the capacity building need for government. This resource pack will be tested in November 2020, on a training of trainers' event that the Federal Government has organized with its Provincial government counterparts. The event will train government staff who will then cascade learning to provincial level using a range of tools and games developed by the CDKN programme team. Learning (and capability strengthening) from this engagement will be further consolidated through a third CDKN workshop in early 2021.

Whilst ostensibly this work will take place over 1.5 years and shows plainly how activities build on each other (only the first two activities were originally planned). The actual duration of this work is much longer and builds upon work implemented and relationships and trust formed during the first phase of CDKN which ran from 2012 to 2017 in Ethiopia. The long-term understanding of the institutional dynamics in Ethiopia, based on the relationship built over time, also helped choose a relevant government partner for this work. Interestingly, instead of doing this work with a more 'natural' government partner, such as the gender ministry which would not have the coordination mandate to bring together the main government actors working on climate change, the main government partner in this project was the national climate change fund - the CRGE Facility, which is hosted by the Ministry of Finance. Considering that gender is also a cross-cutting/cross-sectoral issue, the CRGE Facility has become a more natural home for this work due to its strong mandate to coordinate climate change actions from across different ministries and departments of government, and its proactive gender department that has been an proactively engaging in best practices such as gender responsive budgeting.

### Mentoring

On the job training has proven an effective form of capability strengthening within SSN activities, unlocking leadership within individuals and strengthening capability within institutions. Mentoring is however time (and energy) intensive and should be embedded within existing processes, policies, and institutions which takes further time to identify.

The capability of junior negotiators within the African Group of Negotiators (AGN) of the UNFCCC is being strengthened through mentoring activities. The objective of the project is to build the capacities of junior negotiators, and to ensure the continuity, consistency, and progressive enhancement of the capacity of the Group, through experiential learning and

hands-on working with experienced negotiators. Importantly, the mentorship is tailored to the specific interests of the junior negotiators recognising the need to facilitate independent and demand driven capability strengthening. Through engagement with the AGN members and lead coordinators, the junior negotiators have the opportunity to engage with National Focal points and other negotiators within the multilateral climate change environment enabling them to build relationships and grow their networks. By involving young negotiators in the multilateral process, it provides the basis for understanding multilateral agreements which influence the development of policy at the national level. This builds leadership while also strengthening capability over time.

Similarly, early career researchers were earmarked for mentorship programmes within FCFA. Through the programme the researchers have had significantly greater and sustained access to world leading researchers (as mentors and collaborators), exposure to disciplines other than their own, and are able learn from different contexts. As a result, there has been a significant increase in capability noted by the majority of early career researchers within FCFA (Mackay et al., 2020). The collaborative environment that the researchers have been exposed to has helped to build their capacity while delivering excellent research.

Recognising the importance of building climate leaders, the SACFP embarked on an internship programme in partnership with a GCF Direct Access Entity in order to facilitate learning and capability strengthening of young climate leaders. In this instance, there was a direct request from a Direct Access Entity for young environmental economists and practitioners to join to strengthen institutional capacity on a short-term basis with the view to absorb promising talent into the organisation's ranks when work opportunities opened up. To date, two interns have been absorbed into full time employment subsequent to their internship. Importantly, the organisation concerned deployed staff members to mentor the youth interns and assign diverse work tasks that matched the interns' skill sets. All of the day-to-day management of the interns' work was overseen by the mentor. This institutional buy-in was integral to the success of the initiative, without it, it would be difficult for similar successes to be replicated.

### Relationships based on trust and mutual respect are essential

The third key and consistent learning arising from the implementation of capacity building projects within SSN has been that strong and respectful relationships are shown to strengthen capability across SSN projects. In particular collegial partnerships based on trust and mutual respect. Within the FCFA programme it has been found that leadership is tied to collaboration and that collaboration is enabled by a distributed model of leadership and capacity. The drivers of this are harmonious *and well-managed partnerships* as opposed to individual excellence (Araujo et al., 2020). Within CDKN Phase I it was found that the main contribution to capacity development was likely not through its specific orchestrated capacity building projects, but more implicitly through its overall approach to partnership. By focusing on creating the conditions for healthy partnership (client ownership, local suppliers, on-going engagement and multi-stakeholder collaboration), capacity may have developed naturally as a positive by-product.

Building partnerships and particularly trust partnerships where individuals *want* to engage and where knowledge is freely and frequently shared does not happen per chance. Concerted effort needs to be made in connecting people and nurturing burgeoning relationships. Innovative and creative ways to do this needs to be sought. In the second phase of CDKN the Asian regional programme used such innovative means. They implemented local government training as a means for city officials from across the region to meet each other, form relationships and begin collaborations outside of formal intervention by the CDKN team. This relationship forming was

the primary objective of the activity with the ostensibly key activity of training being secondary. In this way peer to peer learning was established.

Peer to peer learning activities rely strongly on trust relationships and are increasingly being requested and implemented within SSN. Demand for peer learning has come from African mitigation practitioners in the Africa LEDS Partnership (AfLP), from energy and economic modellers in MAPS, Ministry officials in CDKN Phase II and from GCF Direct Access Entities in SACFP. These activities take place in workshops, in bilateral exchanges and continue in informal communications on a regular basis as a bi-product of the strong relationships that have been formed. Within the SACFP, creating a safe space for peer to peer learning allowed participants to be candid in their experiences, which has led to a better learning experience for all participants.

A low-ego approach has been found to be most effective in creating an environment of trust that facilitates the development of relationships. Trust and collegial relationships allow for honest responses to activities which result in more effective capability strengthening. In the case of CDKN Phase II the strong relationships built over the first phase of the project together with the use of local experts allowed for an inappropriate character card in a gender card game to be spotted at early stages. This was rectified ensuring that the ensuing output would be more culturally appropriate and accepted by the target audience allowing for better progression towards outcomes.

### Barriers exist that thwart the achievement of capability

The fourth and last key learning from project implementation in SouthSouthNorth has been that numerous barriers and power dynamics exist within the climate change community of practice (and indeed within the world at large) that prevent Southern partners from capability achievement (Araujo et al., 2020). These often-tacit power imbalances and hierarchies need to be acknowledged and addressed so that they can progressively flatten over time.

**Numerous barriers and power dynamics that exist within the climate change community of practice (and indeed within the world at large) that prevent Southern partners from capability achievement (Araujo et al., 2020).**

It takes a committed capability strengthening approach that focuses on improving the working environment of Southern partners in research consortia, such as financial mechanisms, norms, governance, internal and external relationships, to maximise the existing capability of these research partners to achieve project outcomes (Araujo et al., 2020). Learning on the FCFA programme has further revealed that access to leadership opportunities for local partners is often impeded due to barriers and power dynamics. These need to be seen, acknowledged and mitigated to identify, accommodate and encourage emerging leadership especially as capability is strengthened over time. Building on this project and programme design should be flexible to allow for emergent leadership over time. Learning revealed that if programmes are serious about increasing the capacity and skills of African scientists' that the distribution of roles, including leadership roles and pathways for emergent leadership must be examined. Critical analysis of who has played formal leadership roles, the distribution of authorship on publications, and how finances are shared within partnership must be a part of this reflection process (Araujo et al., 2020).

Experts from the global South typically do not have the same access to networking opportunities as do their northern counterparts. For instance, participation in global conferences and workshops is often prohibitively costly. Funding for attendance is mostly

available for developing country government actors and not regional consultants from smaller local consultancy agencies. This results in relationships being established with Northern consultants who then get used regularly (Du Toit, 2019) and results in more time being needed to find local experts who do not have the same exposure. Furthermore, there is a tendency to value qualifications, excellent written and spoken English and highly specific job experience when contracting experts. This is linked to long-standing biases around institutional prestige, disciplinary orientation and intersectionality for instance rather than other skills that are equally if not more important (Araujo et al., 2020). These barriers should be noted and active steps taken to challenge prevailing assumptions and tendencies in hiring experts. It should also be acknowledged that finding and hiring (and getting sign-off) of local experts may take more time and effort given the current tendencies and biases in consultant contracting and this should be factored into project planning.

A further barrier that prevents individuals and institutions from achieving their goals is the use of inappropriate financial models. In the FCFA programme, analysis revealed that financial models created unintended systemic barriers to leadership and capacity development. These findings are being used internally to improve the working environment and to maximize the research consortia's ability to deliver outputs based on the impact pathways and legacy strategies (Araujo et al., 2020).

### **3 Conclusion**

The theory, history and learning on capacity building reveal that a new approach to this work is needed if we are to face the complex challenge of climate change in an inclusive, equitable and effective manner. As such SSN has reflected and engaged deeply with the successes and learnings arising from project implementation over its two decades of operation within the global South. This together with the integration of the capability approach into its capacity building work as has resulted in a capacity building practice that is rooted in the Southern context and experience. It has resulted in SSN adopting a capability strengthening approach in its project conception, design and implementation.

Key to capability strengthening is a recognition of the expertise, strength and resolve found in individuals, institutions, communities and governments of the global South to face the challenges that climate change poses. It furthermore recognises that barriers exist that prevent these capacities from being used to their full potential and that these need to be actively addressed. SSN thus works closely and respectfully with its project partners and collaborators to understand how best to approach these barriers together in medium to long-term, collegial and iterative processes.

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