

# AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO CAPACITY BUILDING FOR AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS

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*This document provides lessons on an alternative approach to capacity building for African governments based on lessons learned from our work with the Government of Malawi.*

## **What is capacity building?**

Capacity building is strengthening the skills and knowledge of members of an organization to better meet the organization's goals and objectives. In African governments, this may involve training government officers in key skills to make them more effective in delivering services to the general public.

## **Why is capacity building important?**

Capacity building is essential for IDinsight's [learning partnership](#) (LP) model with African governments. Our learning partnerships with governments are open-ended, long-term engagements in which an IDinsight team is embedded in a government office helping the officers answer important questions as they arise using a broad methodological toolkit. We use capacity building to provide our government partners with the tools and skills to make better evidence-based decisions and ensure that they are equipped to sustain the systems we help co-create once our engagements end. Our partnerships' embedded nature enables us to take a different approach to capacity building.

## **How is our approach to capacity building different from the status quo?**

The status quo for capacity building for African governments involves offsite planning and is costly. IDinsight's LP model, by contrast, allows us to conduct capacity building at the government offices. The [Malawi Learning Partnership](#) (Malawi LP) is an excellent example of this approach. The Malawi LP team is embedded in the Social Cash Transfer Programme (SCTP) division in the Ministry of Gender, Community Development and Social Welfare (MoGCDSW) providing the division with technical support, mostly focused on monitoring. We have an office right in the Ministry and work closely with our government counterparts. This proximity to the government puts our team in a good position to identify gaps in monitoring and other skills and select the appropriate government officers to train to sustain the systems we co-create (e.g. data dashboards). We then design a curriculum around these needs, and host capacity building sessions at the government offices over the 2-3 years of our engagement.

The table below describes some of the specific differences between the two approaches:

Table 1: Differences between the status quo and IDinsight approach to capacity building

Theme	Status quo	IDinsight approach
<b>Delivery</b>	<p><u>External team:</u> A team from an external organization delivers the capacity building sessions.</p>	<p><u>Embedded team:</u> The IDinsight team, which has an office within the partner government Ministry or department, delivers the capacity building sessions.</p>
<b>Content</b>	<p><u>Pre-determined:</u> Due to the high cost of hosting the capacity building sessions, the capacity building topics and dates are typically decided and planned for at the beginning of the external organization's financial year. Due to financial protocols, changes can be hard to make once the budgets are finalized.</p>	<p><u>Flexible:</u> The LP model allows the embedded team to adapt the capacity building sessions to changes in the government officers' work plans and thus accommodate their changing needs.</p>
<b>Approach</b>	<p><u>Workshop approach:</u> The external team delivers the sessions in a workshop format that includes group discussion, role playing, and other interactive group activities during the sessions</p>	<p><u>University approach:</u> The embedded team delivers the sessions with a university-like format in which there is intense group discussion and activities and activities for the officers to enable them to practice outside of the sessions.</p>
<b>Location</b>	<p><u>Offsite location:</u> The external team hosts the government officers at offsite locations such as hotels or lodges.</p>	<p><u>Government offices:</u> The embedded team delivers the capacity building sessions at government offices.</p>
<b>Compensation</b>	<p><u>Per diem provided:</u> The external team gives the attendees a per diem to compensate them for</p>	<p><u>No compensation provided:</u> As the embedded team hosts the capacity building sessions at the</p>

	attending the capacity building sessions at an offsite location.	government offices, it is unnecessary to compensate the officers since it is convenient for them to attend.
<b>Timing</b>	<u>Infrequent short course:</u> The external team delivers the capacity building sessions over a period that ranges from a few hours to a few weeks.	<u>Regular sessions:</u> The embedded team delivers the capacity building sessions regularly throughout the length of partnership, which could range from 2 - 3 years.
<b>Cost</b>	<u>High cost:</u> The capacity building sessions tend to be expensive because of hiring the venue and providing per diem (which can include transport allowances, meal allowances, and accommodation allowances).	<u>Low cost:</u> While the cost of embedding in the government for a long-term engagement is high, the marginal cost of hosting capacity building sessions at the government offices is significantly cheaper than hosting at external venues.

### What are the benefits of our approach?

Our approach to capacity building has a few benefits over the status quo. In Malawi, we have found that compared to the status quo, this alternative capacity building approach is:

Demand-driven: Our strong relationship with the government officers allows them to feel comfortable enough to request capacity building sessions on topics that address gaps in necessary skills intended for applied use.

Tailor-made: Our engagement's embedded nature allows us to identify gaps in officers' knowledge and skills first-hand and design curricula tailor-made to the officers' needs.

Flexible: We can provide impromptu sessions that do not need to be planned at the beginning of the financial year because our offices are located in government offices. Our teams can use their broad skill set and IDinsight's toolkit to quickly adapt capacity building sessions to the officers' changing needs.

Collaborative: As part of the support we provide, our teams collaborate with officers on their current projects and so can pragmatically teach officers the skills they need to make their work more effective, ultimately enhancing their productivity.

Cheaper: Our approach to capacity building is significantly less expensive than the status quo because we use the government offices for our capacity building sessions instead of expensive offsite locations that would also require us to provide the attendees with per diem.

## What challenges do we face?

Deviating from the norm is naturally not a smooth process. With this new approach to capacity building, we lose the appeal of offsite locations, the prospect of receiving per diem, and the benefit of being away from the distracting hustle and bustle of the office.

In the Malawi LP, this led to challenges with getting officers to attend the sessions regularly and having frequent disruptions during the sessions. We brainstormed and tested different ways to resolve these challenges. A summary of the challenges this approach may bring and proposed solutions is below.

*Table 2: Proposed solutions to potential capacity building challenges*

Theme	Potential challenge	Proposed solution
Use of learnings	Officers may not use the learnings from the sessions in their day-to-day work because they find them to be too complex or technical.	<p>Align the curriculum to the officers' work plan to ensure that the learnings from the capacity building sessions are directly applicable to the officers' current tasks.</p> <p>Ensure officers' comprehension of the learnings by having one-on-one sessions with them right at their desks as they put the learnings into practice.</p> <p>Set activities for officers to ensure that they practice newly learned skills outside of the capacity building sessions.</p>
Attendance	Officers may not feel incentivized to attend sessions as they will neither travel nor receive per diem.	<p>Make sessions appealing by providing incentives for the officers to attend such as refreshments, prizes, and recognition from their peers and leaders.</p> <p>Use surveys to collect feedback on the usefulness of the sessions and ways to improve to increase attendance.</p>
	Officers may not attend sessions because of competing work demands at the time of the sessions (e.g. travel to offsite locations, ad hoc work requests).	<p>Have consistent, mutually agreed-upon time slots for capacity building sessions with backup time slots if officers miss a session due to travel.</p> <p>Make the sessions short in order to make it easier for the officers to attend without worrying about other work they should be doing.</p>

		<p>Have smaller capacity building sessions with (1-3 officers) to make it easier to schedule sessions around officers' work.</p> <p>Design curricula that align officers' work plans so that the officers see the sessions as productive rather than disruptive to their work.</p>
<p><b>Flow of sessions</b></p>	<p>High priority meetings at the Ministry may interrupt sessions or take over booked conference rooms and projectors.</p>	<p>Have a backup location in anticipation of more urgent matters taking over the booked room, and have a backup time for when a session can take place if officers cannot attend due to urgent matters.</p> <p>Purchase a portable battery-operated projector for capacity building sessions to solve availability issues and have capacity building sessions at any location.</p>