



**POLICY TRANSFER OR POLICY LEARNING:
INTERACTIONS BETWEEN INTERNATIONAL AND
NATIONAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
APPROACHES TO POLICY MAKING
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

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ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress
ASGISA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
BMZ	German Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development
DED	German Development Service
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
DST	Department of Science and Technology
DTI	Department of Trade and Industry
ESDA	Employment and Skills Development Agency
EU	European Union
FAS	Irish Training and Employment Authority
FET	Further Education and Training
GENFETQC	General and Further Education and Training Quality Council (now called Umalusi)
GOPA	Gesellschaft für Organisation, Planung und Ausbildung mbH
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
HDI	Human Development Index
HET	Higher Education and Training
HRD	Human Resources Development
HSRC	Human Sciences Research Council
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ITAB	Industry Training Advisory Body
IVETA	International Vocational Education and Training Association
KfW	Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau
JIPSA	Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition
LMSDP	Labour Market Skills Development Programme
NBFET	National Board for Further Education and Training
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NQF	National Qualification Framework
NSA	National Skills Authority
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
OFO	Organising Framework for Occupations
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SDPU	Skills Development Planning Unit
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SESD	Support to Education and Skills Development
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TOP QC	Trades, Occupations and Professions Quality Council
UK	United Kingdom
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

1. CURRENT CONTEXT

Before 1994, South Africa was governed by a state that used race to keep the labour of the majority of its citizens cheap. Black people, who constituted more than 88 per cent of the population in 1994, were forced to live in separately demarcated (and very restricted) areas. These were the areas where social services were inferior or entirely absent, and where the costs of reproduction and retirement were largely carried by the communities themselves. This system grew up on the back of the mining industry where cheap black labour enabled the highly profitable extraction of deep-level gold. It was adapted to serve the interests of manufacturing from the 1930s and evolved into 'pure apartheid' after the Second World War. However the post-war boom years precipitated critical skill shortages and together with external shocks this 'cheap labour' model of growth faltered in the seventies – a crisis compounded by worker and student militancy internally, and anti-apartheid movements abroad.

When democracy was finally won, and Nelson Mandela led the African National Congress (ANC) to electoral victory in 1994, there were tremendous backlogs of housing and services (including education and training) in the 'townships' and 'homelands' where black people had previously been forced to stay. The negative effects of this discriminatory policy are still clearly evident today, despite comprehensive structural reforms over the last fifteen years. For example, even after a decade of democracy, approximately 64 per cent of the white minority had obtained degrees, diplomas and certificates awarded by public universities and technikons, whilst only 36 per cent of the black majority had achieved a similar education status¹. These issues remain high on the political agenda.

The levelling of the social wage across all citizens, together with global competitive pressures, has led to widespread restructuring in industry and in the service sectors. This has led to good growth rates of up to 5.1 per cent² until the recent global crisis hit but it also spawned an informal economy that was previously outlawed. The informal economy encircles the formal economy in ways that help the latter to absorb cyclical changes and maintain a layer of much lower paid and unprotected labour. It also provides a chilly refuge from destitution for many. But unemployment remains the reality for 23.5 per cent who are actively seeking work and up to a further 12 per cent³ who have given up the search. The state, as principal service provider, remains the largest employer in the country.

On April 22nd 2009, South Africa held its fourth democratic election. The election heralded the single greatest political shift since the advent of democracy in 1994. Whilst the ANC has continued to hold power, it has itself undergone an internal 'revolution' – with the previous President, Thabo Mbeki, having been replaced by Jacob Zuma. The change has created the space for a significant redefinition of the skills development agenda but it comes at a time when the global financial crisis will make progress difficult. The successful navigation of these challenges and

¹ South African Institute of Race Relations (2006): South Africa Survey 2004/2005, Johannesburg, page 311.

² Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2008): Economic Assessment of South Africa 2008. Drawn from website www.oecd.org/document/63 on 18 May 2009.

³ Statistics South Africa (2009): Quarterly Labour Force Survey, Quarter 1, 2009, Statistical Release P0211, Pretoria.

opportunities will be enhanced by a careful appreciation of lessons from the past – including the matter under discussion here: ‘Policy transfer or policy learning’.

Drawing on two key questions formulated by Borhène Chakroun (2008:11), this paper attempts to provide answers to questions about policy transfer or policy learning in South Africa’s skills development system:

- What can be learnt from attempts to put policy transfer or policy learning into practice? and
- To what extent does policy transfer or policy learning lead to policy change?

This paper attempts to pick up where the study by Azeem Badroodien and Simon McGrath (2005) left off at the end of 2004. When these authors wrote their paper there were two ‘skills development’ policy agendas in South Africa – one under the Minister of Education and the other under the Minister of Labour – with Education having responsibility for the public provider institutions – the schools, colleges and universities – and Labour having responsibility for learning in and for the labour market with provision extensively drawn from private providers. The Badroodien and McGrath paper focused principally on the Labour thread, but they highlighted that the ‘disarticulation’ between the two was ‘a real danger’ (2005:8). This paper begins by tracking the evolution of this ‘disarticulation’ and then follows its predecessor in focusing on developments and lessons drawn from the Labour community – this being the world in which both authors have worked.

2. THE JIPSA WAKE-UP CALL

Although the ‘disarticulation’ was evident from before 1994, the most recent flagging of the problem came in 2006 when the then Deputy President launched her Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) drive together with its partner programme, the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA). These were rooted in the 2004-2009 government’s electoral mandate to halve poverty and unemployment by 2014. JIPSA aimed to find quick, effective and practical solutions to critical skills shortages needed for economic growth and social development. The question however, is why JIPSA was needed at all, given that there was already a National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) under the Minister of Labour, which purported to address the identical issues? The short answer is that the NSDS was a closed system, whose implementation reach was circumscribed by the scale of levy funds collected and the inability of these funds to reach those public providers principally responsible for training in many of the critically scarce skill areas, such as engineers. On the reverse side, public provision was still predominantly supply-led, without nuanced leavers to respond to demand. The disarticulation between the two had also hampered the delivery of apprenticeships resulting in a critical shortage of craft skills. The result was that key skill needs, including those for social development (such as civil engineers for local government) were being critically ‘under-supplied’.

The JIPSA initiative promoted a number of short-term interventions – such as those focused on ratcheting up the number of apprentices and engineers-in-training but consciously did not address the system rupture. It deliberately focused on the full supply chain needed for the provision of identified scarce skills and identified the

responsible implementers. It handed over to them the task of addressing such blockages as constrained the meeting of targets. It hoped in this way to highlight system ruptures without engaging in the contestation of system revision. This approach led, in 2007, with assistance from the Deputy President, to a joint statement between the Ministers of Education and Labour which ‘formalised’ their respective authorities, although it did not clarify their interface (DoE/DoL, 2007). This agreement was heralded as somewhat of a victory by the Labour’s skills development community who had for some time faced considerable pressure to accept absorption under the Education umbrella. However, it was widely accepted that the problem had not gone away.

3. THE HRD RESPONSE

This problem triggered a revisiting of an earlier initiative to establish a Human Resources Development (HRD) umbrella framework to embrace both Education and Labour and to bring improved alignment between them. The first such initiative had taken place in 2001 but it failed to achieve articulation. So, on the back of the JIPSA initiative, in 2008, a new HRD Strategy process was begun (Department of Education, 2008). This process culminated in the publication of a second draft HRD strategy at the end of 2008 to which the public were invited to respond over the December holiday period – an urgency clearly prompted by the impending April 2009 election.

The 2008 draft HRD Strategy begins by drawing on international lessons from the United Nations – quoting from the 1989 General Assembly resolution 44/213:

‘... human resources development is a broad concept ... requiring integrated and concerted strategies, policies, plans and programmes to ensure the development of the full potential of human beings ... so that they may, individually and collectively, be capable of improving their standard of living (United Nations Programme in Public Administration and Finance, 1995, p.5, cited by DoE, 2008, 8).

It then proceeds further to cite at length the overview of the evolution of perspectives on HRD within the United Nations General Assembly from the same source. By so doing it clearly seeks authority as well as guidance for its proposed Strategy. It also cites the UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI) as widely used to compare the level of human development between countries: “This index provides a useful measure of progress toward achieving greater levels of development within a country” (DoE, 2008:18). It then proceeds to analyse the detailed decomposition of South Africa’s 2005 HDI using the UNDP (2007) and UNESCO (2007) data – although given the composition of the HDI they did not then proceed to align proposed interventions with these measures – a matter which the international community may consider addressing by developing an HRD specific index, with skills development overtly referenced.

This draft HRD strategy goes on to identify a twenty-year strategic framework, with associated indicators of improvement and a five-year Medium Term Strategic Framework with eight commitments each associated with a set of targets for monitoring and evaluation purposes. Whilst these targets reach towards improved levels of articulation, they do not build *inter-dependency* between Labour’s labour market and Education’s institutional mandates, as the following target illustrates:

Commitment Two: We will increase the supply of appropriately skilled people to meet the demands of our current and emerging economic and social development priorities.

Strategic Priority 2.1: To ensure that skills development planning is credible, integrated, coordinated and responsive to social and economic demands

- a. To ensure that enrolment planning for Further Education and Training (FET) / Higher Education and Training (HET) is guided by a coordinated master scarce skills list ...
- Lead responsibility: Department of Education
- b. To ensure that planning for Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) skills development is based on a coordinated master scarce skills list ... - Lead responsibility – Department of Labour. (Government Gazette No 31646, 28 November 2008, p. 37)

This parallelism is evident under many of the indicators. So whilst leaning in the right direction, the draft strategy still falls short of driving an ‘integrated, coordinated and responsive’ system⁴.

4. THE “SKILLS DEVELOPMENT” AND “EDUCATION” CO-ORDINATION CHALLENGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCE FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

There have been various attempts to explain this dysfunctional feature of the South African system, including recently six doctoral theses on related subjects (listed in SAQA, 2009:vi) an evaluation of which goes beyond the scope of this paper. But whatever the reason, donors facing this situation have been forced to take sides. The Paris Declaration requires donors to ‘respect partner country leadership and help strengthen their capacity to exercise it’ (clause 15) but it does not seem to have anticipated a situation, such as in South Africa, where the ‘partner country’ was internally divided – with different departments each having their own ‘results driven national development strategies’ and where, as a consequence, harmonisation in the Paris Declaration sense, was only possible on either side of the divide. There was no, or very little, middle ground. This is illustrated with regards to intermediate level skills development below:

4.1. Department of Education

The Education Department established an early partnership with an employer funding/support agency known as the Business Trust. Together they looked principally to British models for the strengthening of the Further Education and Training (FET) colleges because it was felt that the British colleges, unlike other countries with strong, stable college systems, had recently undergone significant restructuring along the lines needed in South Africa. Using South African Business Trust money, they entered into an agreement with the British Council and teams of senior people drawn from various FET colleges underwent training in the UK.

The Department of Education, advised by its own social partner body, the National Board for Further Education and Training (NBFET), also entered into partnerships

⁴ The final version of the HRD Strategy had not been announced at the time that this paper was prepared, and it is possible that these concerns will have been addressed when it is presented.

with external donors such as AusAid and Danida. The Danida project was known as “*The Support to Education and Skills Development (SESD) project*” (2003:15)⁵. It was initiated in 2002 and later extended in 2006 with a second support phase up to 2009. The SESD project consists of two components: (1) Supporting the documentation and sharing of best practices for development of FET Colleges; and (2) Assisting FET Colleges with a number of strategic and innovative interventions to establish best practices for the development of FET College programmes. The SESD project has played a rather limited role on the policy level but was successful in the transformation process of the FET Colleges on the micro level through the support for seven pilot FET Colleges in the provinces of Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and North West.

4.2. Department of Labour

The Badroodien and McGrath paper (2005) outlined the extensive support the Department of Labour, in partnership with the multi-stakeholder National Skills Authority, received from the EU under the Labour Market Skills Development Programme (LMSDP). This programme was a single framework under which several donor agencies worked. The programme included structured donor co-ordination meetings, which whilst informative challenged the management capacity of the Department of Labour. This resulted in donor agencies themselves often having to take responsibility for co-ordination under the LMSDP framework.

Beyond the LMSDP the Department of Labour has principally worked with GTZ, given its comparative advantage in the field of workplace-based occupational learning. This experience is elaborated later.

4.3. Working across the divide

Attempts were made by donor agencies to work across the Education / Labour divide, as the following two examples illustrate:

In 2003 the German and South African governments entered into a framework agreement in the area of skills development. There were a range of parties on both sides: on the South African side there was the Department of Labour (DoL), the Department of Education (DoE), the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI); and on the German side there was the German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), German Development Service (DED), and InWent and Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW). These parties entered into an agreement to speed up implementation and facilitate joint monitoring of progress. To this end they signed a joint strategy paper⁶ that embraced these objectives. A steering committee was set up to ensure a coherent and unified implementation approach as well as effective co-ordination of all joint skills development and labour market programs, projects and initiatives on all government tiers. For the South African side,

⁵ Danida – Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark: Country Strategy for SOUTH AFRICA – Strategy for Danish-South African Development Co-operation, Copenhagen, February 2003.

⁶ Department of Labour (DoL) & Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung (BMZ): Skills Development: An Active Labour Market Framework and Strategy, Pretoria, October 2003.

the Department of Labour (DoL), and for the German side, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) were appointed to act as coordinators. In reality, the Education Department on the supply-driven side rarely attended the steering committee meetings coordinated by the Labour Department and no active steps have been taken to coordinate the donor contribution on both sides.

A second such attempt to bridge the divide was with the Provincial Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal. The GTZ and Danida joined forces in a project to build the institutional capacity of FET colleges through building quality management systems in all nine Public FET-Colleges of the province to deliver training programmes for different target groups such as DoE-funded broad based and generic National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programmes for school leavers *and* SETA-funded workplace-based ‘learnerships’ with a strong focus on occupations for already employed workers and active work-seekers. Attempts were made to elevate the learnings from this work to the policy level, but they were largely unsuccessful.

Instead of moving closer to each other, the Education Department initiated the Further Education and Training Colleges Act (Act No. 16 of 2006) followed by the Labour Department initiating the Skills Development Amendment Act (Act No. 37 of 2008). The Acts do not compliment one another in any systemic way.

4.4. Past learning failures

The cleavage between the two departments reflects past failures on the part of the South African government to learn lessons from those who, whilst facing similar tensions between demand and supply, had evolved systems and strategies to straddle these two domains – most notably Germany with its widely respected dual-system which does precisely that. Ironically both departments received assistance from Australia and visited that country on numerous occasions. But the Labour community learnt principally from this country’s Industry Training Advisory Bodies (ITABs) experience and the Education community learnt from the Technical and Further Education colleges (TAFEs) and neither learnt about their inter-relationships and interdependency – illustrating very graphically what Dolowitz and Marsh (2000:17) refer to as ‘incomplete’ transfer. This experience suggests that this colloquium has correctly identified this issue as a matter for international foregrounding. Enhanced dialogue on the issue might help to strengthen national and international learning. A consideration of a more coherently structured international HRD measure against which country progress might be measured might also assist in this.

4.5. Future opportunities

Having said this, South Africa is grappling towards its own resolution of this problem. The recent developments in the HRD arena signal that these lessons were not completely lost. Also the Zuma government has taken this issue on board with the splitting of the education ministry into two, with one department overseeing higher education and vocational training and the other devoted to primary and secondary schooling. The ANC stated that the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) will move from the Labour department to Education. “We need to have one

coordinated training ministry in the country that will focus on the provision of skills”, the ANC’s Collins Chabane recently told the press⁷. Following this announcement a Minister for Higher Education and Training has been appointed to the Zuma cabinet and the Skills Development programme of the Department of Labour informed of its wholesale transfer to the new Department. And whilst it is true that a new governance architecture does not itself resolve the tension between labour market and educational actors, it does open the door to a new phase of dialogue on the subject – and heralds new opportunities for international learning and partnerships, hopefully informed by past failures.

In this new phase, lessons from the past do not cease to be useful even though they will have to be considered in the light of new circumstances. It is to these lessons that we now turn, with a focus on the post-2005 phase not covered in the earlier paper. The following reflections, as with the earlier authors, focuses on the lessons learned in the Labour environment.

5. THE DOL POLICY / STRATEGY LEARNING PROCESS POST-2004

Skills Development policy learning under the auspices of the Department of Labour has revolved around two key areas: the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO). These are considered below.

5.1. National Skills Development Strategy II

The skills development agenda under the Department of Labour has, since its democratic inception, been organised behind five-year National Skills Development Strategies (NSDS). The first of these was launched in 2001 and culminated in March 2005, and the second one commenced in April 2005 and is due to end in March 2010. Discussions on a third NSDS are currently underway, but its alignment to the HRD Strategy under the new departmental architecture has yet to be settled. Essentially these NSDS determine against what priorities the national skills development levy is to be spent. The priorities are negotiated between five of the social partner groupings represented in the National Skills Authority (NSA): employers, trade unions, civil society (youth, women, people with disabilities, rural and urban community groups), government, and education and training providers. The NSDS is expressed in the form of a limited number of objectives, each associated with measurable success indicators (both output and impact).

The *process* whereby these priorities have been determined has provided a critically important vehicle for policy reflection and learning.

Process followed to arrive at NSDS II

- Each year a conference was held where all organised social partners met. An Implementation Report was prepared for each conference in which progress against the set targets were published. (These were aggregated from SETA and provincial reports.) These reports also

⁷ ‘Splitting Ministries’, Mail and Guardian, April 24-29 2009, p. 24.

highlighted areas where special interventions were required if targets were to be met (for example in 2003 it seemed unlikely that the ‘learnership’ target would be met, so a special campaign was successfully launched).

- Then as the five-year period drew to a close, each of the five NSA constituencies was asked to reflect and report on the lessons they had learned from the implementation of the 2001-2005 NSDS. These documents were shared between constituencies; and special research projects were commissioned on different elements of NSDS I.
- These were then shared at a specially convened NSA / Department of Labour workshop. At the workshop, a number of presentations were also made by government officials who signalled future priorities. International agencies, such as the International Labour Organisation, were also invited to present international lessons in challenging areas (such as training for sustainable incomes in rural communities). These presentations were then followed by proposals regarding possible future priorities for the next five-year strategy. These were formulated into a draft strategy, which was circulated to constituencies for their consideration.
- This process was followed by a very formal negotiation process between the constituencies, where they effectively bargained on an interest basis although collectively committed to finding a national consensus.

The second National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) for the period 1 April, 2005 to 31 March, 2010 was adopted by the Minister of Labour after the stakeholder-driven National Skills Authority (NSA) had arrived at agreement.

Due to lessons learnt from the first strategy, the NSDS II introduced two new priority areas to which skills development levy income was agreed to be allocated: the first (*Objective 1: Prioritising and communicating critical skills for sustainable growth, development and equity*) promoted the gathering and distribution of information about critical skill needs for career guidance as well as sectoral growth targeting; the second (*Objective 5: Improving the quality and relevance of provision*) encouraged the building of partnerships between SETAs and sectorally specialised providers. The former addition was a consequence of the late appreciation by the Department that it had seriously erred when it had excluded this issue from the Labour Market Skills Development Programme (LMSDP) funded by the EU in the 1999–2004 period. The failure to appreciate the critical importance of these questions was due to the skills development focus of the Department at the time and their inexperience with regards to employment services – this in spite of some committed staff and energetic efforts by Irish Aid, Danida and GTZ to educate them otherwise. The second addition arose from an appreciation that the *quality* of the supply-side was critical to the achievement of targets.

The NSDS allocated the delivery of each outcome to one of two possible funding disbursement agencies: the objectives linked to the formal economy were allocated to the SETAs (who received for that purpose 80% of the levy income) and those for the informal economy to the Department of Labour’s Provincial Offices (which received 20% of the levy income - the respective percentages having been set at the time that the enabling legislation was first passed in 1998). Both were then required to prepare plans in which the skill priorities within their sectors or provinces were to be met using the funding windows created by the policy priorities identified in the NSDS. This planning process was strongly influenced by the Irish experience conveyed under the GTZ/GOPA⁸/FAS⁹ consortium within the LMSDP and has been a positive lesson

⁸ The German acronym GOPA stands for Gesellschaft für Organisation, Planung und Ausbildung.

⁹ The Irish acronym FAS stands for Training and Employment Authority.

although quality improvements in the plans still need to be effected and capacity constraints hinder progress. Many SETAs are now outsourcing this function to either the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) or to private consultants.

This architecture provided a legitimate framework for international co-operation (IC) actors to partner with specific funding disbursement agencies – so for example many donors engaged with particular SETAs to pilot different specific programmes or projects directed towards the achievement of targets – from institution strengthening to beneficiary targeted projects.

For the GTZ, the NSDS provided a framework within which it contributed to strengthening and implementing systems and institutions in the labour-market for skills provision both in the formal (first) economy, but also, with at least the same effort, in the informal (second) economy. GTZ therefore focused on supporting the following sub-strategies:

- To enhance the institutional strength of the DoL on the macro level, labour market institutions including the SETAs on the meso level as well as public and private education and training providers
- To support the implementation of occupational learning programmes such as workplace-based learnerships and apprenticeships and to take this initiative to scale to ease youth unemployment and scarce skills.
- To develop and implement targeted strategies and action plans for vulnerable groups surviving in the informal economy such as learning programmes for emerging entrepreneurs with the DoL provincial offices.

Other donors, whilst not having the long-term, strategic partnership with the DoL that GTZ had, were nevertheless able to use this framework too. For example, when the learnership target appeared as if it would not be met, AusAid assisted the Department to learn about Australia's group training schemes. The model was adopted and has been successfully piloted. They are called Employment and Skills Development Agencies (ESDAs) in South Africa. But the learning has not been problem-free as the Department has struggled to find an appropriate funding model to sustain them, signalling perhaps a case of 'incomplete transfer'.

5.2. Quality Council for Trades and Occupations

In July 2001 the Ministers of Labour and Education jointly appointed a Study Team to investigate how the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) could be streamlined and accelerated. The team comprised seven South Africans and three international specialists – from Britain, Australia and New Zealand – whose learnings were fed into the Study Team's debates. Faced by the tensions between the Departments of Education and Labour, the report proposed that 'discipline-based' and 'occupational context-based' learning be recognised as separate learning modes, although they qualified this by saying that 'the terms are related to one another and are frequently co-dependent. In fact they might be likened to lenses at either end of the learning telescope.' (DoE/DoL, 2003:11) They proceeded to recommend three

Quality Assurance Councils under the umbrella of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA): The Trades, Occupations and Professions Quality Council (TOP QC); the General and Further Education and Training Quality Council (GENFET QC) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) (DoE/DoL, 2003:31).

The proposal for a TOP QC had been put forward by the Department of Labour – the name having been derived from the country’s constitution¹⁰. The other two quality councils were already in operation under the Department of Education. The Study Team completed its work in April 2002 and its final report was published after public consultation in 2003. It took a further four and a half years, and the JIPSA prompt, for this process to culminate in legislative amendments – which signals the intensity of the contestation surrounding these issues.

One of the most intensive contestations took place around the position of the professions – which the higher education community felt should fall under the HEQC not a TOP QC. Their view prevailed and when, in 2008 two laws were amended to embody the agreements reached¹¹, the TOP QC had become the QCTO – the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations. Under the QCTO the participation of the professions was to be a voluntary not legislatively prescribed matter. This outcome was influenced by the professional bodies themselves. Their preference to remain with the higher education community was influenced by a long-standing partnership with the universities and an international culture whereby such partnerships are sanctioned by multi-lateral accords, such as the Washington Accord for professional engineers.

Even though the policy terrain had not yet settled, between 2003 and 2008 the DoL undertook pioneering work to develop its policy and implementation plans for a QCTO. It did not have the capacity to undertake much of this work alone due to its internal capacity constraints – largely the result of high levels of staff mobility both between government departments and into the private sector, into SETAs or into consultancies of their own – so it turned to its long-standing partner, the GTZ. A joint DoL/GTZ steering committee and four working groups were established – led by the DoL and consisting of members drawn from the department and local experts/consultants funded by or employed by the GTZ.

Building on the proposals that had been formulated in 2004, the working groups focused initially on the development of an Organising Framework for Occupations (OFO) – a derivative of the ILO’s International Standard Classification for Occupations, which the Labour-affiliated team felt would give a common *language* for labour market learning (in contrast to the wide array of qualifications that had been generated by the SETAs which had resulted in much duplication and variable levels of aggregation – from ‘job’ to ‘occupation’). They came to learn of similar work in Australia and New Zealand and in the ILO itself – from which they drew on extensively and most helpfully. This was informally mediated by GTZ experts through international policy networks. Once the working groups had settled on the OFO, they designed an institutional architecture to oversee the setting and continual

¹⁰ South African Constitution, Bill of Rights, Section 22: ‘Every citizen has the right to choose their trade, occupation or profession freely. ...’

¹¹ The Skills Development Amendment Act (No. 37 of 2008) and the National Qualification Framework Act No 67 of 2008.

review of occupational standards and their quality assurance by bodies of expert practitioners (informed by the practice of professional bodies). This major programme of support culminated in a model¹² which bridges the education / skills development divide and updates the language in which the economic sectors can articulate their needs to the education and training world (2005:3). This work laid the basis for legislative reform and the drafting of regulations, and culminated in the promulgation of the Skills Development Amendment Act (No 37 of 2008 on December 1st, 2008).

GTZ enriched this process with input on the German notion of occupations (*Beruf*) based on its experience with the dual apprenticeship system in which occupations are seen as a common and organising principle, around which both employers and education and training institutions identify relevant skills and knowledge, the associated qualifications and the learning interventions required to achieve occupational competence.

Throughout this process the GTZ has ensured DoL leadership and ownership. It is a model of what might be called *capacity support*, which complimented its *capacity development* drive, and which responded to the DoL's needs at the time. Certainly some in the country have publicly argued that the process has been 'consultant-driven' whilst those involved describe it as having mobilised expertise outside the Department. This problem is not restricted to DoL alone – most South African government departments are facing similar challenges. Political parties in the recent election have also spoken extensively about the skills constraint underpinning much of the country's inadequate service delivery and the need to urgently address this problem – indeed this informed the JIPSA intervention already described.

In this context the DoL/GTZ partnership model has enabled the DoL to stay abreast of the policy challenges it has faced and enabled it to be a full partner in the HRD discourse. The success of the model for the Department is premised on the level of trust between it and the GTZ, its full ownership of the process and the success of its outcomes. However the caveat signalled by the Badroodien and McGrath paper (2005), that continual vigilance is required to ensure that such interventions do not crowd out more participative processes, or, one might add, internal development processes, needs to be flagged. Whether this model is or should be replicated in the new HRD environment is a question that will need answering. It is assumed that indeed extensive partnerships will be required to launch and sustain this ambitious programme.

6. THE CONTRIBUTION OF RESEARCH TO POLICY LEARNING

There is currently no comprehensive, system-wide research and knowledge production strategy or capacity with regards to HRD in South Africa. There is also no strongly embedded culture of evidence-based policy development. However, this does not mean that research has not taken place. And in particular there is one local agency, the Human Science Research Council (HSRC), which has played a particularly active role in this area. In general however each department, institution or

¹² GTZ (Santa de Jager, Ellen Hüster, Christopher Vorwerk): The Integration of Education and Training to Achieve Occupational Competence. South African – German Development Co-operation, Skills Development Research Series, Pretoria 2005.

sector has undertaken its own initiative, with the focus of each commonly being at sub-system level. Two examples are considered below: that of DoL and that of the HSRC.

6.1. The DoL experience

Monitoring of the NSDS has been undertaken on an annual basis to inform the annual NSDS Implementation Reports, as indicated above. In addition evaluation studies have also been undertaken, although generally across a longer-term timeframe. This practice was first initiated under the LMSDP, and the experience of preparing reports against ‘log frames’ was clearly an instructive, if painful, experience.

In July 2006 a major research partnership was established between the DoL and the publicly subsidised HSRC. Under this partnership a range of publications were prepared (see HSRC critical research projects for DoL). Similar projects were first pioneered under the LMSDP. One of the principle challenges in the preparation of such studies has been the alignment of the findings of such studies to the policy planning and reporting cycles.

Initially there was a problem that independent researchers insisted on the right to set the research questions. This led to findings which could not inform the impact of policy interventions and hampered learning. However increasingly joint oversight committees are helping to remedy this problem. (Clearly the case for fully independent research still stands, but must compliment and not replace such impact focused research.)

Here is one example where much independent evaluative work has been done:

NSDS Objective 2: Promoting and accelerating quality training for all in the workplace
Success Indicator 2.8: By March 2010 at least 125 000 workers assisted to enter and at least 50% successfully complete programmes, including learnerships and apprenticeships, leading to basic entry, intermediate and high level scarce skills. Impact of assistance measured.

Both the GTZ and the HSRC have undertaken studies in this particular field¹³.

The work on the OFO described above provides a different example of research in South Africa leading to new international partnerships. These partnerships have helped South Africa accelerate the pace at which local progress could be achieved. This work has fundamentally re-framed the skills debate in the country and will probably help to strengthen the labour market component of the new integrated Higher Education and Training Department.

6.2. HSRC experience

The HSRC is a publicly subsidised agency with a long history in undertaking research to inform public policy on skills development. Its capacity to contribute to the policy debate was given a significant boost when it was awarded, with the backing of the

¹³ GTZ (Claudia Mummenthy), 2009 and HSRC (Renette du Toit & Glenda Kruss), 2006-8.

Departments of Labour and Education, and a major grant from the Department of Science and Technology to undertake the country's first system-wide review. The "Human Resources Development Review" (2003), was a pioneering piece of work, which brought together high level inputs from a range of universities across the country, in particular the Development Policy Research Unit (DPRU) at the University of Cape Town and the Sociology of Work Programme (SWOP) at the University of the Witwatersrand. A second volume was published in 2008 (Kraak and Perold (eds)). These volumes are backed up by a knowledge warehouse of data intended to support other researchers in the field – and together constitute a major step forward in this field of research. A growing list of issue-specific publications is also available from the HSRC.

The HSRC's HRD Reviews (2003 and 2008), highlighted the need for 'joined up' government and so contributed to shifting the policy terrain which has resulted in the second draft HRD Strategy and re-aligned state departments. These shifts will lay the basis for renewed engagements with the international community – framed now by this new policy framework.

The work of the HSRC has been significantly strengthened by a number of partnerships with international agencies and foreign-based researchers. The work of Simon McGrath stands out as an excellent example of this. Based in the UK, he has nevertheless spent extended periods of time in South Africa at the HSRC and has worked collaboratively with locally based doctoral and post-doctoral researchers. This has helped to boost the quality and visibility of this field of study. Such long-term partnerships, of which there are further examples in the Education camp, have helped to deepen many policy propositions and widen the scope of their frame – with the researcher's familiarity with the policy discourse in South Africa helping to overcome misunderstandings common amongst those who have briefer sojourns in the country. Whether these engagements have nuanced understandings further afield is for these individuals to answer.

6.3. New initiatives

GTZ has recently conducted an investigation into the most appropriate terms of reference for a Professional, Vocational and Occupational Education & Training and Research Development Centre¹⁴ in the light of the lack of capacity in the country and the urgent research and high level training needs that have been outlined in this paper. The proposed centre would be located at the University of Witwatersrand. This university was selected because of its interest and research track record. The work of this centre would entail facilitating and bringing together the knowledge and skills about the professions across the university for the improvement of intermediate skills. Even though the University of Witwatersrand has been identified as a good location, the centre would have to draw on the expertise vested in, and build the capacity of and interest in, other higher education institutions in the country as well as from universities in those developed countries which have strong and longstanding knowledge and research expertise in workplace-based learning such as Germany,

¹⁴ GTZ (Kraak A.), 2008: Mapping the Terrain for the Establishment of a Centre for Occupational and Vocational Education Research and Development (COVERD) at the University of Witwatersrand Johannesburg.

Austria and Switzerland. The centre at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits) would furthermore complement the work of other centres or institutions engaged in similar or related fields of research and development.

Shorter partnerships, too many to name, have taken place on a wide spectrum of issues, and with a wide range of individuals and organisations. For these shorter exchanges the specificity of the project has framed the discourse. The IC actors have a significant role to play in identifying expertise that can be paired with local interests and assisting in the formalising of these partnerships in ways that build local understandings and international discussions. Shared exchanges of topics of mutual interest will also be valuable.

7. POLICY LEARNING AND TRANSFER LESSONS FROM THIS EXPERIENCE

7.1. Lessons from a South African perspective

Behind the recent reorganisation of government departments stands a body of research and reflection, which was largely undertaken outside of the responsible implementing departments. The change was principally spearheaded within the political party, the African National Congress, and supported by a swathe of studies commissioned from the Office of the President before the election. This highlights an important point – that disjunctures can often best be healed at a level above that where the interested parties compete for influence. Clearly, support for these higher-level processes could help to accelerate the pace at which such dysfunctions are addressed. However it also begs the question whether the same principle might not apply internationally and whether there might not be a case for an international framing of an HRD measure to which countries seeking to remedy such problems can refer.

It has already been shown that in South Africa the architects of the recent draft HRD Strategy made extensive reference to the UN's Human Development Index (HDI) and to supporting texts. However, they were unable to extrapolate indicators of success from the HDI for their HRD strategy, as the two were ill-aligned. Would it be possible to explore the adoption of a new international HRD measure – based on aggregate (ie. both Education and Labour) participation and success rates in post-primary education and training (including what is commonly called vocational training not included in the HDI), disaggregated by targeted beneficiaries and levels, and juxtaposed to labour market occupational profiles (such as is already available on the ILO database) and productivity measures to which national states could refer, to advance improvements in system alignments? The work of Peer Ederer at the Lisbon Council is instructive here. GTZ supported a presentation by Ederer on his Human Capital Index¹⁵ work at a South African conference; it was very well received and has often been referenced in presentations on the QCTO.

The South African DoL experience also suggests that policy learning is greatly facilitated by the joint construction and shared monitoring and evaluation of a national

¹⁵ Ederer, P. (2007): *Innovation at Work: the European Human Capital Index*, The Lisbon Council, Policy Brief. Paper presented to Qualification-Africa Conference, Midrand, South Africa, November 23rd, 2007.

vision and supporting strategy by social partners and government. In an unpublished report prepared for the ILO comparing the experience of four countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Australia and South Africa) it would seem that the creation of shared goals – at a level of aggregation that focuses principally on beneficiaries (i.e. not in the first instance on implementers, institutions or programmes) – is helpful in identifying gaps and overlaps between implementers and provides a basis for building collaboration behind common goals.

This can compliment the approach proposed by Castillo and Elvir (2009)¹⁶, i.e. the necessity to understand the realities on the ground (as the recommendation at the end of the paper suggests). Such a shared vision and strategy also provides a framework in terms of which the different contributions of various international cooperation actors can more readily be managed without the texture thereof necessarily being lost. It also facilitates decentralisation of implementation towards such goals without this translating into fragmentation. Arguably, without such a framework, inappropriate policy transfers are more likely to remain unchallenged – as their impact will not necessarily attract the attention of policy planners at a sufficiently influential level. And inversely, more targeted searches for appropriate lessons will also be stimulated.

Whilst not wishing to over-emphasise the point, the South African experience also suggests that a systematic research agenda to support more evidence-based policy learning is surely supported by such a strategic approach – in so far as it provides an avenue for policy planners to absorb what are otherwise potentially complex and confusing research findings. This should not, however, be interpreted as replacing more independent work which may challenge existing paradigms and discourses, as there is always place for such work too. In South Africa the need for a central, well-networked and resourced research agency, which undertakes quality work and supports the development of future researchers, is evident. Support for such an agency by international cooperation actors, both financially and in the form of structured partnerships with other research agencies in other countries, would clearly be very helpful.

South Africa's 'experimental' work on occupations is as yet untested. It aims to provide a common *language* which can be spoken by employers, growth and development strategists, and be understood by educationalists and trainers as well. It is too early to claim that lessons can be learnt from this, but it may be an initiative worth monitoring (and evaluating) – for if it is successful, it has the potential to contribute to the bridging of the 'education' / 'labour market' divide. It was, after all, developed with that purpose in mind.

South Africa, like other countries at similar stages of development, faces severe capacity constraints in the implementation of many of its policies and strategies and a central lesson it is learning is that implementation needs to be based on institutions, systems and procedures developed with this constraint in mind. Courses and programmes have their place, but the *way the work is done* is the best developer of capacity and ensuring that these are appropriate to the agreed goals is critical.

¹⁶ Castillo and Elvir (2009): *The relationship between skills development, education and labour policies within a wider cross-sector context: Evidence from Nicaragua*, Paper prepared for NORRAG Conference, 25-26 June 2009, p. 16.

As regards to its partnership with international cooperation actors, the skills development actors within the Department of Labour have had wide experience and have generally taken a firm lead in these matters. The Department has valued the contribution of many such actors and would hope to continue these into the future. However, it is true to say that its long-term partnership with the GTZ, and the character it has taken (of agreed funded support for capacity development rather than funding transfers), has given the GTZ a special place in relation to skills development work and enabled it to inject policy ideas and lessons learnt in different contexts, into ongoing discussions in ways which short-term or hands-off partners simply do not enjoy.

7.2. Lessons from a GTZ perspective

The Paris Declaration enshrines capacity development as a key objective of development assistance and emphasizes the importance of the relationship between capacity development and aid modalities. A Technical Cooperation approach to capacity development builds upon long-term relationships and an intimate understanding of the local context coupled with technical expertise to develop solutions to problems jointly with the partner organizations. Policy recommendations are based on first-hand local expertise as to what really works and what does not.

Despite its importance in international development, there is no single agreed upon definition for capacity development. The OECD itself has used several in recent years, including: capacity development is the process whereby people, organizations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain capacity over time¹⁷. The GTZ, in a similar vein, defines capacity development as a holistic process through which people, organizations and societies mobilize, maintain, adapt and expand their ability to manage their own sustainable development¹⁸. More specifically related to the field of policy transfer, Dolowitz and Marsh (2000:5) define the knowledge about how policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting are used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting.

The term capacity development itself implies that some individuals and organizations have more capacity than others. These varying levels of capacity can be arranged on a continuum from none to high capacity, with intermediary levels in between. Individuals and organizations can be considered as having capacity which falls somewhere along this range. Since one of the objectives of Technical Cooperation is to develop capacity, efforts should support the movement along the spectrum from lower levels to higher levels of capacity. If an organization has virtually no capacity, then efforts need to be made to get it to minimal operational capacity, low capacity in other words. Likewise, organizations that have low capacity should target moderate capacity and then from moderate to high capacity.

Learning, as the core function of capacity development, clearly has a time dimension. It is not only a long-term process, the intended capacity itself may be ahead of its

¹⁷ OECD/DAC, 2005: The Challenge of Capacity Development: Working towards Good Practice, page 12.

¹⁸ GTZ (Proksch, A.), 2007: Das Verständnis der GTZ von Capacity Development, Eschborn.

time. Lusthaus et al.¹⁹ cite research that implies that capacity development is influenced by time and the stage of development of the unit whose capacity is being built. At various stages of their evolution, countries, sectors, organizations and institutions may be capable of some types of change and incapable of others. The implication is that trying too much change too fast will not have positive results.

Just as capacity development can be arranged along a continuum, so too can aid modalities. At the one extreme is the “*Do It Yourself*” approach where donor agencies do the work themselves with a view to achieving concrete development objectives as quickly and efficiently as possible, a process that normally bypasses government systems and procedures. This means the donor agency plan, implement, monitor and evaluate interventions themselves. The partner organization (if there is one) has no significant role to play. This modality is common in emergency or reconstruction interventions where national organizations are very weak or simply non-existent and skilled nationals are a scarce resource, such as in ‘post-conflict and fragile states’. Capacity development does not play an important role in this approach due to the virtual absence of partner organizations; the emphasis is on getting the job done.

Next on the continuum is the “*Direct Contribution*” which is more participatory than the “*Do It Yourself*” approach. Policy development, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of an intervention are, to varying degrees, conducted jointly. Donor agencies provide resources and remain in charge of the intervention and any capacity development processes it may include. Typically, this approach often includes on-the-job training and coaching as capacity development measures.

Third on the continuum is the “*Indirect Contribution*” in which donor agencies are much more in the background. Policy development is primarily done by national organizations and national systems are increasingly used for implementation. National organizations are in charge of the change process and donor agencies more or less facilitate the process due to the level of capacity available in partner organisations. Typically, this approach often includes the strengthening of institutional capacity such as quality management development as well as participation in international policy networks as capacity development measures.

Finally, at the other end of the continuum is the “*Hands-Off*” budget support approach, where policy development, planning, implementing, and monitoring of activities are done solely by the partner organization. The donor agency’s role is restricted to monitoring of agreed-upon success indicators and sometimes on generic policy advice. Continued support is contingent on progress towards the agreed-upon success indicators and targets. National systems are used to the fullest extent possible. Capacity development is often not specifically addressed; the implicit philosophy is that of learning-by-doing.

“*Hands-Off*” budget support from donors has been growing over recent years. OECD donor countries now channel about US\$ 5 billion – some 5 per cent of their aid – directly to the budgets of developing country governments. An independent study into budget support has been done recently by the University of Birmingham on behalf of

¹⁹ Lusthaus, C., Adrien, M-H. & Perstinger, M., 1999: Capacity Development: Definitions Issues and Implications for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation. Universalial Occasional Paper Nr. 35, New York.

more than thirty donor and partner countries²⁰. There is evidence from the evaluation that the partner government must want to engage in budget support and must have a fundamental ability to engage with international partners. This kind of partnership approach makes particular demands on donor capacity as well. It enhances the importance of work-in-country, allied to a thorough understanding of the political and social context, and of the machinery of the partner government.

The evaluation points out that budget support is not a panacea. Donor agencies should continue to pursue a mix of mechanisms to deliver aid, and introduce budget support only gradually considering the capacity available on the partner government's side. Emphasis should be given primarily to areas of consensus between donors and partner governments and, not least, donors who embark on budget support should be prepared for a lengthy engagement.

The four approaches to capacity development described above are archetypes; many variations exist. Nonetheless, these definitions are useful benchmarks along the continuum. GTZ's current approach to the DoL and the skills development system is a mix of direct and indirect contributions and depends on the level of capacity available on the particular partner's side. "*Hands-Off*" budget support in the form of local grants is frequently used by GTZ in cases where local partner organizations on the macro, meso or micro level have shown ownership and accountability. Basic trust between the donor agency and the local partner organization has been pivotal and constituted a precondition for budget support.

Long-term local presence and sound knowledge of partner structures allowed GTZ in South Africa to apply a multi-level approach during the development and implementation of strategic interventions such as the development of the Organizing Framework for Occupations (OFO), the development of a conceptual framework for the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and the Basic Entrepreneurial Skills Development methodology for emerging entrepreneurs in the informal economy to name a few. The multi-level approach permits horizontal and vertical scaling-up of interventions and involves interlinking capacity development and/or support interventions at the macro, meso and micro levels, and occasionally at regional and international levels e.g. active participation in international conferences and networks such as Qualification Africa and International Vocational Education and Training Association (IVETA) Conferences. The generic lessons learnt here can be summarized as follows:

- Successful policy transfer combined with social learning is the result of a permanent open-result process of searching, negotiating and learning by all stakeholders involved. Details of this capacity development process cannot be planned in advance, and the overarching goal of policy transfer and learning must be the impact achieved on the end-beneficiaries level.

²⁰ University of Birmingham (Amis P., Batley R., Hubbard M., Nickson A.), 2006: Joint Evaluation of General Budget Support (1994 – 2004). The study draws on the experience of seven countries over ten years: Burkina Faso, Malawi, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Uganda, and Vietnam and funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID). The research was initiated and supported by the OECD's Development Committee's Evaluation network.

- It is of vital importance in facilitating this process to create mechanisms for involving stakeholders such as employers and trade unions from the private sector in the field of skills development programmes for the formal economy as well as civil society in the field of informal economy. Strong focus has been given to help partners to acquire and develop negotiating skills.
- Steady support for complex reform processes depends on the long-term presence of GTZ experts. The proximity of long-term experts to the partner organisations enables them to mediate between local partner and international donor logic by facilitating negotiating processes and promoting mutual understanding.
- GTZ's contribution to the local partner organisations comes in mainly as direct and/or indirect contribution. This means that advisory and support services are pledged to the partner organisations as opposed to funds being transferred. Direct and indirect contributions offer maximum protection against misappropriation of funds and corruption and are a good basis for mutual accountability, both between the donor agency and local partners.
- Ensuring that this engagement has taken place under the watchful eyes of organised social partners has supported participative and democratic processes of consultation and leads to greater ownership.

8. CONCLUSION

There are a number of generic lessons on the planning and implementation of future policy transfer and learning (capacity development) suggested by this paper. These are grouped under the four key challenges identified by Chakroun (2008:15):

1. Who are the policy learners?

From a generic point of view, policy transfer and learning takes place when people in partner organisations adjust their knowledge and understanding of policy development and modify policy in the light of knowledge gained from past experience (Stone 2000:1). The precondition for such transfer and learning to take place is social dialogue between a wide range of multi-level stakeholders. For this to happen not only the individual representatives need to learn, so too do their mandating constituencies. In addition, the institutional collectives in which they congregate need to be trusted and productive. The capacity of government officials and their departments are especially critical if learning is to be ongoing.

In South Africa national (DoL, NSA), sectoral (SETA) and geographically defined (DoL provincial) institutions embrace the voices of the traditional social partners (employers and unions) as well as civil society, private and public providers of skills development and, as supporters of their engagement namely local experts and researchers. The measure of the trust that these partners have demonstrated in the outcomes attained is one measure of the success of the policy learning the institutions have enabled. The impact of the policies for final

intended beneficiaries is another. The process of strengthening beneficiary outcomes has underpinned recent governance changes in the country which will now require those engaged in skills development to interact more closely with those associated with the HRD Strategy in general and post-schooling public institutions in particular. The different traditions that these communities bring will require further learning if the beneficiaries are to enjoy rising benefits – and constitute the major challenges that lie ahead.

2. What is the content of learning?

The content of policy transfer and learning can vary considerably. It ranges from minor adjustments in the precise setting of policy instruments up to re-tooling, experimentation and introduction of new policy measures and techniques. An excellent South African example here is the changes that occurred during the development of the NSDS II 2005-2010 as part of “normal policy making” (Stone 2000:8). The new HRD Strategy further illustrates the range and depth of issues which the learning impacted upon and which need now to be embraced in the next cycle of learning.

More complex policy responses are needed for strategic interventions when new conceptual frameworks and instruments are developed to guide major policy changes. These tend to be more radical when they follow failed policies of the past. For instance, the review of the South African National Qualifications Framework between 2001 and 2007 triggered such a new strategic orientation and led to the development of the Organizing Framework for Occupation (OFO) as well as the re-conceptualization of the quality assurance system for skills development. If overall systemic coherence is to be attained, the next phase of learning will require the OFO to be aligned to the qualification frameworks associated with the public provider institutions.

3. What are the key actions or processes of learning?

Social dialogue on the success or otherwise of key policy measures is a vital feature of policy learning in the South African experience. The focusing of this dialogue on the development of a strategy (NSDS) with agreed success indicators has greatly assisted South Africans to concur on the agenda for discussion and to manage sharp differences on priorities. It has also assisted local and international partners to contribute to the process of learning.

The establishment of statutory and non-statutory bodies where such learning takes place in a structured and transparent manner has been a key enabler of this dialogue of learning. The governance architecture of the South African skills development system ensures all relevant stakeholders are on board. The composition of the South African National Skills Authority, the SETA boards in each economic sector, and DoL provincial structures has ensured that collaboration between different stakeholders has taken place and has encouraged them to solve problems and to reflect on necessary policy changes. In this way lessons have been learnt through managed contestation in the quest for consensus. As a consequence too, the mandating of representatives has assisted to diffuse learning to a wider community.

Where required by the complexity of policy challenges, statutory bodies have been augmented by more engaged working groups. For instance, the DoL/GTZ steering committee and its associated working groups developed the conceptual framework for the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and promoted collaboration and sharing of experience between different stakeholders. The process employed followed the action-orientated learning approach and clearly allowed the stakeholders to participate actively in problem solving and reflection.

Given the nature of the different vested interests voiced within the consultative processes between the various stakeholders the policy learning process has inevitably experienced similar kind of tensions described by Chakroun (2000:18):

- Between the process and the anticipated end result;
- Between the time needed for learning and the urgent need to develop the new policy; and
- Between GTZ's role as "policy entrepreneur" (Stone 2000:1) with its role as facilitator and advisor.

Key actions and processes of learning have had to be agreed upon as a result of a permanent open-result process of searching, negotiating and learning by all stakeholders involved. Details of this capacity development process cannot be planned in advance and must be implemented and monitored, evidence-driven, step-by-step by the partner organisations.

The research undertaken in support of such policy reflection and development has been central. The South African experience suggests that agreement between researchers and policy drivers on the formulation of research questions has improved the capacity of those engaged in policy dialogue to learn from the findings generated by research.

4. What is the impact of policy learning on resulting policies?

Recent skills development policy transfer and learning under the auspices of the Department of Labour has resulted in the NSDS II 2005-2010 and its planned successor strategy NSDS III 2010-2015 (or a variant of this under a new HRD Strategy) as well as the development of a policy framework for an occupational learning system as part of the restructuring of the National Qualifications Framework. Policy transfer and learning laid the basis for a legislative reform and culminated in the promulgation of the Skills Development Amendment Act 2008 and the National Qualifications Framework Act 2008. South Africa's work on the establishment of an occupational learning system still faces the challenge of full implementation. It is too early to claim successful lessons learnt from this on the end-beneficiary level. However the new policy framework does describe major changes in the way the skills development policy has been progressed.

The impact of policy transfer and learning is difficult to measure. The whole value-added chain from experience and advisory inputs towards policy change and finally to tangible outcomes on the end-beneficiary level is multi-layered,

multi-faceted and time consuming. Results-based monitoring and evaluation systems are roughly in place in South Africa, but in strong need for further refinement and development. Nevertheless the South African experience of a strategic approach with embedded policy learning and transfer capability has enjoyed considerable success and hopefully offers a useful case study for international debate on skills development policy learning.

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