CAPACITY BUILDING UNDER REIMBURSABLE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS: THE CASE OF OMAN’S EDUCATION SECTOR

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Introduction: A World Bank team worked closely with the Ministry of Education (MoE) on the Oman Education Sector Study which was launched in October 2012. The Minister of Education expressed, at different occasions, her appreciation for both the product of this collaboration and its process. It was a very rewarding experience for the World Bank team and the following is an attempt to summarize the main lessons learned from this project.

Under the Reimbursable Technical Assistance (RTA) program, the Bank provides knowledge support to a range of countries in the MENA region and beyond. The report *Education in Oman: The Drive for Quality* is a product of a RTA project, which provides a comprehensive review of the Oman pre-tertiary education and offers policy recommendations in light of international experiences.

There are certain key steps in ensuring that the World Bank delivers a quality product and transfers knowledge to our partners, including:

1. **Clear Roles and Responsibilities for the Bank and Government Teams:** The success of an RTA project relies not just on the Bank team but also on the government. The establishment of a government counterpart team, led by a very high-level and committed official, should be agreed during the project design stage. Clear roles and responsibilities for the government and Bank teams should be specified at each phase of the project. Although the Bank team leads the technical aspects and brings in international experience, the government should be in the driver’s seat and clearly articulate its vision and expectations. Needless to say, the quality of the final product is a shared responsibility between both teams.

2. **Close Collaboration between the Teams:** The Bank and government teams should be true partners working closely throughout the project. For this Oman project, the MoE and Bank teams worked closely on every step of the study, starting with conceptualization, through preparation, completion, and dissemination. In-depth discussions between the teams were held on data collection, data analysis, stakeholder consultation, report writing (including revisions), and the development of policy options.

3. **A Focus on Capacity Building:** Capacity building took place throughout the project, mainly through a learning-by-doing approach. Each Bank team member worked with a small group of MoE members (3-6 people) on specific areas (there were a total of 6 sub-groups), which resulted in in-depth discussions and skill transfer. In addition, members of the Bank team delivered workshops, mini-courses and made broad presentations to the whole of the counterpart team or with subgroups presenting to the government counterparts on education issues and looking at the analytical methodology that was being utilized. Through these exchanges, the MoE teams gained substantial knowledge in the subject areas related to their on-going job responsibilities. The MoE team members learned key aspects of policy analysis, an experience which prompted the Ministry to recognize specific areas in need...
of further development and to seek additional capacity building support following the completion of the study.

The skills and international knowledge gained by the government staff during these activities gives them the capacity to go on and lead similar exercises within their respective departments in the MoE as well as passing on their skills and knowledge to others. For MoE the capacity building efforts appears to have contributed to a sense of ownership and motivation, and a commitment to follow through on the findings of the study. In short, emphasis on capacity building brought added value that was deemed unique to the Bank.

Budgeting for Capacity Building and government team’s full involvement - Since capacity building takes time, especially when the counterpart team has little experience in the methods to be used, it is advisable to budget additional months in the contract. In our case, the counterpart team felt a strong sense of responsibility and took long periods of time to carefully review and comment on each draft of the report. The Bank team remained supportive and encouraged the counterpart team to spend time to digest, to reflect, to question and to make useful suggestions for revisions.

(4) A Skillful, Dedicated, and Cohesive Team. Given that the project required a comprehensive review of the Oman education sector, we selected a number of high-caliber consultants for the team to cover the main areas of expertise needed and a couple of excellent younger consultants to support the quantitative analysis needed. As a result, we had a strong technical team with mixed skills which, by virtue of experience and expertise, was well equipped to provide policy advice, carry out difficult technical discussions, offer capacity building, and help produce high quality products. The team had to be flexible in its approaches and was required from time-to-time to adjust its approaches based on the quality of available data, information gathered from stakeholder meetings, and in some instances, the government’s changing priorities. The Team had a high level of professionalism to deal with expected and unexpected demands.

(5) Focus on Results. In the final analysis, the quality and relevance of the study and the validity of its findings are the most important considerations. The Oman project produced a main report (in both English and Arabic) and a stand-alone summary report (also in both languages) that took stock of the state of education in Oman; presented a diagnostic analysis; and proposed policy options to address key issues. The report included a detailed matrix of policy recommendations for the MoE showing: an outline of the policy recommendation, the rationale, the responsible agencies, and the time frame. The Bank team also participated in a formal project launch in October 2012 and responded to questions raised by some of the over three-hundred educators in attendance, as well as a number of ministers. Subsequent communications with the MoE indicated the high value that it placed on the study’s approach, its technical soundness, and its practical recommendations.

Full report available in English, along with summaries in English and Arabic.

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