



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE WORKSHOP

An activity of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL)

Main conclusions and lessons learned

San Jose, Costa Rica, May 8, 2007

Content

I. Introduction.....	1
II. Conclusions and lessons learned.....	2
III. Ideas for future training and analysis.....	5

I. Introduction

The Technical Assistance Workshop for the IACML, held in San José, Costa Rica, on May 8, 2007, is part of the activities of the Inter-American Network for Labor Administration (RIAL), which is the cooperation mechanism of the OAS Inter-American Conference of Ministers of Labor (IACML). It was included in the IACML Calendar of Activities 2006-2007, responding to the increasing relevance that the Ministries of Labor assign to the management of technical assistance.

The Workshop was attended by representatives of the Ministries of Labor of 26 countries of the Americas. Also present were representatives from COSATE, CEATAL, the International Labor Organization (ILO), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional (AECI).

The expected outcomes of the workshop were:

- 1) Greater understanding on the part of the Ministries of Labor of the available channels and current priorities of technical assistance (Canada, USDOL, IDB, AECI).
- 2) Greater understanding on the part of the donors of the expectations of the Ministries of Labor when receiving technical assistance.
- 3) Identification of specific problems faced by the Ministries of Labor when interacting with donors.
- 4) Identification of topics or areas of technical assistance where the Ministries of Labor require more training (e.g. design, monitoring and evaluation tools; definition of

- 5) Training in the basic components that a successful proposal for technical assistance must have.

II. Conclusions and lessons learned

The following are the main conclusions and lessons learned that can be extracted from the presentations and discussions that took place during the workshop. They have been divided in three categories including the perspective of the suppliers of TA, the perspective of the developing countries and a summary of the last session about the components of a successful proposal.

II.1 Priorities, trends & challenges from the perspective of suppliers of TA:

- Historical approach to TA prioritized procurement of capital goods and some core funding. Concern arose over sustainability of results and the real impact of TA in capacity building and in contributing to long-term development goals.
- Technical cooperation is complex. There is a need to understand distinct reality of each country & Ministry, recognizing both inadequacies of financial resources & knowledge. Increasingly, TA is serving to transfer knowledge and skills, rather than capital goods, in order to strengthen institutional capacity.
- Priorities need to be defined as basis for determining most relevant initiatives for TA then establish clear procedures and ensure coordination at both ends (donor & recipient).
- Pilot projects are still favored by donors when dealing with new areas of intervention or implementing innovative approaches. However, these projects should preferably be part of more comprehensive national or regional strategies or programs to have more sustainable results.
- **The priorities** that donors are currently emphasizing include: support for trade agenda (preparation, negotiation, implementation); workers' rights; combating HIV/AIDS discrimination; gender equity; accommodating disabilities; eradication of child labor, forced labor and human trafficking; reform of obsolete labor laws & regulations, and drafting of new legislation; strengthening capacity of Labor Ministries, to better undertake their core functions.
- **The criteria** to be considered in developing TA proposals include: identification of a real need for TA; existence of technical capacity in the executing government or agency; alignment with donor priorities; evidence of political commitment and government priority; sustainability; provision for performance measurement (monitoring & evaluation, indicators). Donors highlighted that TA has a greater impact when the issues covered are a

- **Some of the challenges of TA mentioned by donors are:** setting clear objectives with tripartite partners; finding a balance between setting specific objectives and maintaining clear focus (avoid the “scope creep”); ensuring sustainability of results; coordination among donors; adjusting projects after changes in government without compromising their essence; need to strengthen horizontal cooperation to share experiences, models & lessons; securing partnerships with training institutions to enhance quality, coverage and relevance of programs.
- Various speakers mentioned that executing governments or agencies had a critical role in facilitating coordination among donors.

II.2 Experiences & Challenges in managing TA from perspective of developing countries:

- **The main objectives** of TA mentioned by developing countries are: focusing on improved labor relations and strengthening capacity of Labor Ministries to plan, manage, execute, administer, monitor and evaluate labor and employment policies and programs.
- A participatory process of planning and implementation, which incorporates the social actors, is crucial in guaranteeing the relevance and sustainability of results achieved with TA. The dialogue among social actors is mostly needed in the following areas: rights, economic openings in era of globalization, labor justice, technology, inspection and conciliation.
- **The priority areas where Ministries of Labor request TA** include: professional training; policy and strategy development; follow-up to previous TA; labor inspection techniques; labor market information systems; survey design & execution; labor policy and employment standards; employment services; and labor provisions of free trade agreements.
- TA is increasingly being sought for making diagnosis of information management requirements, undertaking labor market information system modernization efforts, and improving labor inspection systems. All of these respond to the fact that Ministries of Labor are increasingly using new information and communication technologies (ICTs).
- Achievements in TA developed within subregions or under the scheme of South-South cooperation were highlighted. Particular mention was made to the efforts carried out by Mercosur countries, including the strengthening of labor justice in accordance with international labor standards. Accordingly, a need to enhance emphasis on cooperation and exchange among countries within sub-regions and to further analyze opportunities for South-South cooperation was identified.

- **The specific problems/challenges faced by the Ministries of Labor** when interacting with donors include: Need to customize projects/programs, with due consideration for country specific culture & traditions; setting realistic timelines; guarantee flexibility in control over disbursement of funds, taking into account variances in fiscal years; and verify that all parties share the same definition of terms.
- Additional challenges identified in designing and managing TA projects include: Need to guarantee stakeholder involvement at the conceptualization and planning stage, which would facilitate better results and an uninterrupted execution; verify that mechanisms that could ensure sustainability of a project are in place wherever possible (e.g. Project Advisory Board and commitment of local funds and resources); evaluate overall impact of the project, which goes far beyond the measurement of specific outputs.
- The concern for sustainability of results was largely emphasized. Creating dependency on TA should be avoided always and this is a responsibility of donors and recipients of TA. To assist in guaranteeing sustainable results, executing parties need to undertake a careful analysis of local budget requirements for ongoing operation and maintenance beyond the termination of the TA.

II.3 Key components of a successful proposal:

- Preparing a technical assistance proposal entails much more than filling out application forms. It demands a methodological effort to guarantee a unifying continuity and logical coherence from the design stage up to project execution, monitoring, and evaluation. For that reason, the Results Oriented Management method provides an ideal framework for the success of a proposal.
- The mere submission of a proposal to a donor agency does not guarantee that it will be approved. Executing agencies must understand and pay attention to the particular features of each donor organization.
- Communication between the executing agency and the donor organization is one of the key factors in guaranteeing a proposal's success. In particular, once a proposal has been submitted, a communications vacuum between the parties often arises, but this can be resolved through adequate communications.
- Interruptions in the time-frames for project execution frequently occur once the initiative has been approved by a donor. Executing agencies must see the project as a proposal for transformation that they themselves have put forward, and not merely as a formality requiring documents to be lodged with the donor organization.
- The executing agency's ensuring the sustainability of project actions once it has been completed is one of the key factors in securing success. For this to be possible, the project must be an integral part of an institutional vision, thus reducing the level of dependency on donor organizations.

III. Ideas for future training and analysis

- Further analyze the impact and benefits of TA within subregions or under the scheme of South-South cooperation.
- Capacity building to measure the impact of public policies, not simply of TA, is needed.
- Training in project planning and management is required in many Ministries of Labor.
- International cooperation units within Ministries of Labor need to identify common institutional deficiencies and priorities, in order to better plan TA. They also need to assist other units or areas of the Ministries in defining their TA needs.
- Within the CAFTA-DR Labor Cooperation, the IDB will carry out some training on international cooperation. It will be advisable to follow-up on this initiative in order to plan future activities of the RIAL in this area.