Assessment of risk for the sustainability of Staff Development Centres (ADRCs) in Ethiopian public universities

Mike Cantrell

Abstract

The ambition to create staff development units in nine of the Ethiopian public universities is a vision shared by both the Ministry of Education and the universities themselves. With Dutch donor support through the four-year long EQUIP project (Educational Quality Improvement Programme), short staff training courses have been written, staff have been trained to deliver them and equipment and other resources have been provided to create a good training environment. Now more than half way through the project and with this level of progress, one might imagine that the success of the venture is assured. However, the process of institutionalization: ie embedding these centres called Academic Development and Resource Centres (ADRCs) as permanent features in the each university’s structure, is a complex task which is at risk from a number of factors.

The paper uses force field analysis to summarise evidence about threats to sustainability. Information is derived from field visits to ADRCs, data collection during workshops, quarterly reports to the Project Coordination Unit and a recent internal mid-term review. Various factors are found to jeopardize the long-term future of ADRCs. Chief amongst these are staff mobility, lack of career and incentive structures, lack of physical facilities for staff development centres and insufficient recognition for those actually attending ADRC courses.

Given these obstacles, the task of advocacy for ADRC recognition and support, currently provided by the project’s coordination office, needs attention even after the end of the project. This and other roles of a national coordination office for staff development are highlighted.

Project Development

In late 2004, at the request of the Ministry of Education, a consortium of Dutch Universities\(^2\) began a project to create staff development centres in Ethiopia’s nine established universities.

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\(^1\) This paper was read at the National Pedagogical Resource Centre’s Conference in Addis in December 2007.

\(^2\) Centre for International Cooperation (CIS), Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, in partnership with the Faculty of Behavioural Sciences, University of Twente and Van Hall Larenstein University of Applied Sciences.
These included Adama University which was in transition from a technical teacher training college. The project was one of several to support Higher Education funded by the Dutch Government through the Netherlands Organisation for International Cooperation in Higher Education (NUFFIC). The objective was to improve the quality of teaching and learning in the expanding public higher education sector. Called the ‘Educational Quality Improvement Programme’ or EQUIP for short, this capacity building initiative was designed to take four years until November 2008.

The approach taken was to involve stakeholders at every stage. After an initial meeting with university presidents and senior staff in Addis Abeba, fact-finding missions by members of the consortium took place to all nine public universities. Linkages were also established with related centres such as the National Pedagogical Resource Centre (N-PRC), the Higher Education Relevance Quality Agency (HERQA), the Higher Education Strategy Centre (HESC) and the Higher Diploma Programme (HDP) co-ordination team. These proved valuable allies as the programme developed.

The first half year was designated an Inception Phase where stakeholders created detailed plans for the project implementation. During this time, a three-week visit took place to the Netherlands of 18 newly appointed EQUIP staff (2 from each HEI) to investigate good practice and develop master plans for the establishment of the staff development centres at their universities. Concurrently, they were joined there for one week by their Academic Vice Presidents to review and support the master plans when they are submitted for institutional approval. The initial progress was impressive, a fact noted by the project’s desk officer in the NUFFIC newsletter:

“It is quite exceptional for an NPT project still in its inception phase to reach such concrete results. We expected this Ethiopian visit to result in a shared vision on ADRCs in Ethiopia, to progress from that. But now that partners have been able to draw master plans at university level - actually meant to be one of the project outputs - valuable time and efforts were saved. It is up to parties to reflect on how these unexpected gains can best be spent.” (Langeveld, 2005).

What follows is a description of the design of EQUIP in two distinct phases with an analysis of progress towards sustainability and threats to this process. Information is derived from a number of sources such as field visits to ADRCs, data collection during workshops and quarterly reports to the Ministry’s Project Coordination Unit.
The paper also draws on a recent internal mid-term review: the contributions of the review team and of the nine ADRC coordinators to the evidence presented are acknowledged.

**Model of Development**

Following a protracted inception period, plans were approved for the project to be implemented. The consortium and stakeholders conceptualised the objective of ‘improvement in the quality of teaching and learning’ as a cycle (Figure 1). The cycle starts at with quality and relevance assessment and leads to interventions as shown in the figure. The project design was therefore based on activities that would allow elements of the cycle to be realized. Not all aspects of the design were the responsibility of the northern partners. For example, for staff development centres to become a reality, from the start, each HEI was asked to provide physical facilities for the ADRC as well as staff time and suitable financial incentives. As will be demonstrated in what follows, the southern partners’ contribution is critical to the issue of sustainability.

*Figure 1*: The internal quality improvement cycle. The cycle starts with an assessment of quality and relevance.
Phase 1: The Establishment Phase
Starting with the master plans, the project conceptualized an ‘establishment’ phase as shown in Figure 2 (with a vertical time line):

Various activities needed to be undertaken before the ADRCs could open and deliver training (the middle line of boxes in Figure 2). First, a number of questionnaires were developed and trialled to assess quality at course and programme levels, including the views of alumni. This is the first step in the quality cycle to determine where remedial action is necessary. Secondly, with the assistance of Dutch facilitators, a number of courses were written on topics including instructional skills, gender awareness, programme design and review, and ICT in education. Thirdly, staff development was undertaken, either during the course-writing workshops or formally in Masters studies in the Netherlands. Finally, equipment for operating the ADRC and for loan to academic staff to improve teaching was ordered and distributed on the understanding that universities would provide the physical facilities for staff development. This phase was expected to be completed by about December 2006.

Figure 2: The establishment phase over a 2-year period showing the steps and activities needed to create the staff development centres.
Phase 2: The Delivery Phase

With the various components of phase 1 complete, the ADRCs would move into ‘delivery’ phase in January 2007 when they would open and provide a number of short courses and advice for academic staff (Figure 3). Northern partner involvement would be restricted to further training and support until the end of the project in November 2008.

Figure 3: The delivery phase during which a number of short courses would be organized at the ADRC.

Included in the vision was the provision of facilities for other staff development initiatives such as the Higher Diploma Programme and the English Language Improvement Programme. It was felt more efficient to organize staff continuing professional development ‘under one roof’ than to set up separate disconnected units, particularly when physical space was at a premium.

Threats to Sustainability

By the end of the project the ADRCs should be ‘institutionalized’ – ie sufficiently grounded in their HEIs that they are able to function and prosper for years to come without further support. Mindful of this goal, the donor requires the project to complete a table annually called a ‘sustainability barometer’. This assesses progress towards sustainability under four headings – institutional, technical, financial and academic (NUFFIC, 2006). By reviewing these annually, trends, progress and obstacles can be monitored (Table 1).
Table 1: NUFFIC’s sustainability barometer showing 4 categories and requirements within categories. Those in italics are largely the responsibility of the project, while the HEI itself is responsible for the rest.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Requirements</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional Sustainability</td>
<td>1. Institutionalization of project activities in the academic environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Adequate number of staff available for continued implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Local ownership of the project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Sustainability</td>
<td>1. <em>Appropriate equipment and software installed</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Adequate number of technical staff available for use and maintenance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Sustainability</td>
<td>1. Good financial management and administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Adequate and timely funding of staff salaries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Sufficient demand for products and services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Realistic pricing of services/products offered for cost recovery</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Cost recovery mechanism in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Sustainability</td>
<td>1. <em>Academic improvement (staff courses developed and printed)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Demand for the developed courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. <em>Qualified academic staff</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Outward orientation</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

This is a generic list for any project, with minor modifications for the EQUIP project. Some of these requirements are the responsibility of the project (shown in italics), though the table emphasizes more the responsibilities of the southern partners (and in reality the HEI senior management). On many issues, the project can only have an advocacy role. This implies that strong links must be created between:

1. ADRC staff and their senior management
2. EQUIP project and senior management

As indicated previously, senior management and their two ADRC coordinators created the master plans together.
Further, the academic vice presidents formed an EQUIP advisory committee during the Establishment Phase of the project, though this was suspended when it became clear that most were too busy to attend.

Each barometer category will now be evaluated in turn:

1. Institutional Sustainability

**Instutionalization**
To what extent is the ADRC embedded in the university organograms with appropriate policies? All but one of the ADRCs has an approved master plan while approval of the last one is expected shortly. The picture is less positive for a quality care policy which defined the role of the ADRC’s Quality Care Unit: only one HEI reports that this important policy is approved which explains the confusion about internal audits explained later.

**Staff**
Clearly, adequate numbers of committed staff at various levels in the institutions are essential for both steering and developing any initiative. High staff mobility threatens any project.

In EQUIP, the attrition in top management at the academic vice president level, the original ‘champions’ of our project, has been substantial with a 78% loss (Table 2). Although replaced by other colleagues (in some cases by several in succession), this loss of support from project instigators has been a major factor threatening sustainability as will be shown later in force field analysis. For the ADRC-associated staff ( coordinators, their deputies and those who will deliver courses), the attrition varies between 0 and 55% depending on the institution.
Table 2: Mobility of senior management and ADRC personnel between April 2005 and November 2007. * 1 still away on an EQUIP scholarship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Involved</th>
<th>Still Active</th>
<th>% Loss</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership (AVP)</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>Varied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adama ADRC</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>3 studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addis Ababa ADRC</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arba Minch ADRC</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>2 left, 4 studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bahir Dar ADRC</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>3 studying*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gondar ADRC</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>2 left, 3 studying*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jimma ADRC</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>1 promoted, 2 studying*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haramaya ADRC</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>1 left, 1 studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawassa ADRC</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mekelle ADRC</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>1 left, 4 studying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals &amp; % Loss</strong></td>
<td><strong>116</strong></td>
<td><strong>82</strong></td>
<td><strong>29%</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the losses are to further studies abroad (both Masters and PhDs). Only three of these are on EQUIP scholarships; the rest have departed on other schemes. These are all recorded as losses since these lecturers not available to provide courses in the delivery phase. Note that well over 100 staff has been involved in EQUIP’s development, but of these, 29% had been lost midway through the project.

**Ownership**

Force field analysis has been used to discuss ownership and institutional sustainability further. This is a graphical way of displaying factors that either hinder or promote a process (Bruce & Langdon, 2000) – in this case the process of sustainability. It also allows the relative size of the factor to be shown on a scale (1-5, though this is subjective). Through visual assessment of the ‘driving’ and ‘resisting’ forces it is possible to predict whether sustainability is likely (Figure 4).
Resisting forces
Immediately apparent in Figure 4 is that the balance of resisting forces is greater than driving forces. Analysing these in more detail, one finds that these are principally ownership issues which lie within the responsibility of senior management (allocation of facilities, policies on staff incentives and promotion). ADRC staff frequently cites their relationship with management as problematic, so ‘inadequate management support’ is also included as a resisting force. Inevitably this is an oversimplification as some senior management are more supportive than others. Indeed, all give verbal assurances, but often these are not translated in action such as the allocation of adequate facilities. Recent visits to all nine ADRCs reveal that only two have adequate training, storage and office facilities more than two and a half years after the project started.

Driving forces
A major force for the development of the ADRC has been the external influence of the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency which required institutions to conduct internal audits and produce a self evaluation document as a prelude to HERQA’s external audits. Having just established a Quality Care Unit within each ADRC, senior management at most HEIs required this unit to take a lead in conducting the internal audit and the experiences gained will no doubt be used again in the future. Whether this task is appropriate for the ADRC’s unit (as defined in the quality care policy) will be discussed later.
Of the other driving forces, two of the three are project-related: scholarships abroad and local workshops. As indicated previously, 18 staff were awarded EQUIP Masters scholarships and spent a year in the Netherlands. One PhD is also offered. Over 100 more received training at workshops inside the country which proved popular and well attended.

It is important to note that neither HERQA nor EQUIP are intrinsic driving forces, but external to the HEIs concerned. The project is also temporary. Both might therefore be considered risks, rather than benefits. The only field which can be considered ‘intrinsic’ is the possibility of a new career for ADRC personnel in staff, rather than student development. However, such a career hardly exists until it is supported by better incentives and promotional policies, both of which are lacking. ADRC coordinators report that they do receive small allowances equivalent to heads of departments’ and most have some workload reduction. Trainers providing courses also receive some payment for services rendered. However, all complain this is inadequate. No debate has started on the incentives for trainees and there are no staff development policies. In the long term one wonders whether staff will attend courses unless there is some reward for continuing professional development.

In time it is hoped that ‘demand for courses’ (part of the academic component of NUFFIC’s sustainability barometer) can be added as a long bar to the driving forces. However, it would be premature to do so at this stage.

The three other NUFFIC fields will be considered in less detail:

2. Technical Sustainability

Large quantities of equipment have been delivered to ADRCs using NUFFIC funds such as computers, beamers, overhead projectors, flip charts, television and other audio-visual equipment. A similar provision from World Bank funds is expected soon. One exciting installation will be a networked computer lab with 27 workstations linked to a large server containing a digital library called eGranary with millions of resources (http://widernet.org/digitallibrary/). HEIs are still recruiting technicians to maintain this equipment and most have not allocated a suitable dedicated staff training room to house the networked laboratory. Since the eGranary system arrives in the country in January 2008, this is another matter of concern.
3. Financial sustainability

Here I focus on budgets for running the ADRCs. Only one of them reports that it has been allocated a budget in the 2007-2008 financial year. However, several of them must have received ‘ad hoc’ funding since six of the nine report that they have offered training, some several times. The lack of budgets may not be serious and merely reflects their late budget requests. The project is helping ADRCs prepare budgets for the next financial year and these are expected to be granted.

4. Academic sustainability

Staff courses developed and printed
Editing of courses written in a host of workshops is time-consuming and has been delayed, though several courses are nearing completion and printing. However, to their credit, most of the ADRCs are using first draft materials to deliver courses, so the absence of a finished product does not affect sustainability. Indeed, working on imperfect drafts increases the ownership of the courses by the ADRC trainers.

Demand
It is too soon to assess the demand for courses. Several ADRCs report a disappointing attrition from those eager to sign up; in some cases less than 30% of these completed the offered course.

Qualified Academic Staff
In addition to the large number of Masters, PhD and workshop-trained staff, another cadre is emerging due to loss through mobility. Since the workshops remain popular, new staff makes up at least 25% of those attending special interest groups which have been set up as successors to the writing teams since the materials now need further trialling and revision.

Outward Orientation
It is premature to assess whether ADRCs will provide training not only to colleagues, but also to the wider community. However, there are promising signs that this will be done and at least one ADRC has helped run staff development courses for the new universities in its region. When ‘outreach’ becomes a reality, the opportunities for income generation will help sustain the ADRCs in the long-term.
Discussion

In the space of just 10 years (1996-2006), the number of universities in Ethiopia grew from 2 to 9 and the student enrolment from 6,400 to 36,500 (Yizengaw, 2007). Twelve additional universities were established in 2007. It is easy to forget how young the HE sector is, with the majority of the universities being under ten years old. Inevitably, this means that there are many day-to-day challenges facing senior management and important policies such as those for staff promotion and staff development are yet to evolve and be implemented. Staff is often lacking qualifications and experience and are faced with high work loads (Assefa, 2006). Under these conditions, staff development through an established ADRC is essential.

At present, HEIs are characterized by vertically orientated and bureaucratic organisation (Yizengaw, 2007). For this reason, the senior management has pivotal role in the quest for sustainability of the staff development initiatives started by EQUIP. This conclusion is not intended as a criticism of their current performance; the high mobility of academic vice presidents during the time of the project illustrates what challenging positions they hold.

The current Dutch-funded projects were designed in isolation with little thought to a coherent programme of support for Ethiopian Higher Education (NUFFIC, 2007). With hindsight, the Leadership and Management Development Project might have taken the lead, with others like EQUIP subsumed under it (effectively a programme for HEI development with various subcomponents). This would have ensured that senior management were helped to develop policy, while at the same time taking a closer interest in their implementation in areas such staff development under EQUIP and ICT development under a sister project.

The management’s request that the newly established ADRC Quality Care Unit takes responsibility for coordinating an internal audit prior to HERQA’s external audit is another example of a policy vacuum. Two joint EQUIP-HERQA workshops (in 2006 & 2007) prompted HEIs to set up quality management systems with appropriate quality committees at senate, faculty and possibly department level. However, in the absence of this quality assurance system, the ADRCs, which first and foremost are staff development units, were required to take the lead. The risk is that the ADRC is now seen by the university as a quality assurance unit and not a training base for improving the quality of teaching and learning through the quality cycle (Figure 1) as intended. This role was clearly defined in the draft quality care policy, another policy which is remains only in draft form in eight of the nine institutions.
The future seems brighter with the draft revised Higher Education Proclamation proposing a third System Support Unit (SSU) alongside HERQA and HESC to enhance university staff performance. A permanent structure would be better able to coordinate both pedagogical and management training and advocate staff policy development alongside HESC. The new SSU would be a natural home for donor-funded projects such as LMDP and EQUIP, and would probably need donor assistance to become established (as was the case for HERQA and HESC).

In the meantime, the EQUIP project itself is addressing ways of sustaining further training in management and pedagogy through partnerships with two Ethiopian universities for new Masters programmes. These will be launched at Addis Ababa (HE Management) and Bahir Dar (HE Teaching) and thus provide opportunities for on-the-job advancement for staff through local Masters (with a blend of on-line and face to face tuition) once overseas scholarships are no longer available. In addition, the effort put into producing good training materials will not be wasted. Not only will these courses be available in electronic and hard-copy form in ADRCs in years to come, they will also be available for staff development in the 12 new universities.

References


