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Item Type	Article
Authors	Danquah, Joseph K.;Analoui, Farhad;Boampong, Boakye;Amenshiah, Ambrose K.
Citation	Danquah JK, Analoui F, Boampong B et al (2022) Developing sustainable capacity for urban assemblies: Case study of a World Bank project in Ghana. Journal of International Development. 34(8): 1587-1605.
DOI	<a href="https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3657">https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3657</a>
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Download date	2025-04-30 12:57:54
Link to Item	<a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10454/20083">http://hdl.handle.net/10454/20083</a>

# Developing sustainable capacity for urban assemblies: Case study of a World Bank project in Ghana

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## Abstract

Donor partners have been supporting developing economies in capacity development through donor-funded projects to enable them to achieve sustainable development. To understand the effectiveness of such projects, this paper adopted a mixed-methods approach to study a capacity development project funded by the World Bank and implemented in 46 metropolitan and municipal assemblies in Ghana. The study employed the European Centre for Development Policy Management's core capabilities model (5Cs) to examine the World Bank project. The study recommends that, to ensure sustainability, capacity development projects should be embedded in Ghana's development programmes. We also propose an alternative model for the implementation of capacity development projects to achieve sustainable development.

## KEYWORDS

capability, capacity development, human resource development, international development and Ghana

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## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Governments and the international community have pledged renewed efforts to build human resource in developing economies (Wubneb, 2003), mainly because of the weak results produced by technical assistance (Morgan, 1998; UNDP, 2008). The sustainable development goals (SDGs) build on the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to extend efforts into the future. The UN Agenda advances 17 SDGs; Goal 8: Decent work and economic growth and Goal 9: Industry, innovation, and infrastructure are relevant to the field of human resource development (HRD) (Zarestky & Collins, 2017). HRD is linked to knowledge management and the development of skills. These activities remain key to competitive advantage for both organisations and countries (Garavan et al., 2018). The concept of national HRD advocates for investment in the human capital of a country, and this enhances the national capacity to supply the skills needed for economic growth and productivity.

Capacity weakness is arguably the most challenging limitation in achieving sustainable development (Abdel-Malek et al., 2011; Venner, 2015). The types of capacities that are important to improving performance and how capacity can be translated into better performance remain less understood than HRD (OECD, 2009). The underlying philosophy and principles of HRD and capacity development (CD) may be similar, but the approaches are different. Therefore, this paper contributes to how CD is implemented using both the HRD philosophy and principles in a donor-funded project in Ghana.

The project local government capacity support provides support for 46 selected urban local governments in improving management capacities in five areas: reporting and auditing, asset management, budgeting, revenue management and social accountability. This captures the dynamics of capacity, as described by the UNDP (2010); capacity is the ability of individuals, organisations and societies to achieve, solve problems and set goals in a sustainable manner. Capacity, therefore, can be viewed as a collection of individual competencies, capabilities and practices that permits countries to achieve their development goals. CD forms the central focus of World Bank development assistance (Baser & Morgan, 2008). This study examined the World Bank's capacity project in Ghana to strengthen capacity at the local assemblies' level. The result suggests that local government capacity is critical for sustainable economic transformation in developing economies. For example, local, institutional and human resource capacities are central to achieving sustainable development (Hope, 2006).

This paper critically examines the implementation of the CD project. The intention is to further assess and examine the contribution of the CD to the enhancement of performance management, organisational development and leadership, moreover, to determine whether the HRD principles and philosophy are essential in the implementation of CD programmes. The World Bank project is adopted; this provides the best way to generate ideas, share good practice and learn from experience. The World Bank supports projects that examine policies, programmes and practices that improve capacity in developing economies.

The World Bank provides development financing and services to governments to support the governments of low- and middle-income countries to better manage development goals and improve development outcomes. In 2011, the World Bank awarded Ghana US\$1750 million to provide capacity support for local government. This project was split into four components, but this study focused on the second component—enhancing decentralised urban service delivery. The specific project objective was to improve management capabilities in the identified key areas of reform through targeted capacity support to participating assemblies. Understanding the uniqueness and dynamics of the World Bank project cycle, the researchers adopted the five core capabilities (5C) model reported by Baser and Morgan (2008), which is based on five core capabilities: commit/engage, adapt/self-renew, to relate, achieve coherence and generate development results. This helped to analyse the project and to capture the geographic peculiarities.

Thus, this paper examines the validity of the core capacity model as an analytical framework for understanding CD in the Ghanaian context and proposes a model for sustainable CD. We present here the paradigm shift required to build effective systems towards the attainment of sustainable capacity using both national HRD and HRD policy

to address the SDGs (Zarestky & Collins, 2017). The use of the World Bank project aims to illustrate the challenges and successes of CD implementation.

To date, no empirically tested link has been established between CD and the HRD perspective. Therefore, this study adds new knowledge and understanding of international development, especially in the context of HRD. More importantly, studies on CD and HRD have mainly focused on the organisational context (McLean & McLean, 2001). This study explores the inherent links between CD and HRD.

Previous studies have failed to provide a comparative understanding of these concepts. The present study addresses this gap by adopting the five core capabilities model (5Cs framework) to determine the effectiveness of the CD project in Ghana. Two research questions led to this study: (a) What is the level of the HRD system implemented in the CD project? (b) What are the characteristic features of HRD used in the implementation of the CD project in Ghana?

## 1.1 | The concepts of capacity, capacity development and HRD

The concepts of capacity and capacity development have dominated development thinking for the past four decades. As Lusthaus et al. (1999) aptly contend, improving the lives of citizens in the 21st century remains a difficult dream. Arguably, there are improvements in citizens' lives across all sectors, but, in terms of how this applies to the general prosperity of people, much is still left to be desired. The international community recognises that development assistance has not adequately transformed the lives of many people in society (Szent-Ivanyi & Tetenyi, 2013). The central purpose of development assistance is to help develop economies develop enough human resources capable of managing their other resources in an effective and efficient manner so that they no longer rely on external support and to ensure better lives for their population (Szent-Ivanyi & Tetenyi, 2013).

A substantial proportion of current development assistance projects refer to CD in their description. CD is considered as an umbrella concept under which several approaches to development are included (Kuhl, 2009). Of more than 19 000 development projects listed in 2014, almost half (8757) referred to as 'capacity' (Venner, 2015). Capacity is not the same as CD; the former necessitates the latter (Baser & Morgan, 2008). Therefore, before CD commences, a needs assessment must be carefully conducted to determine the existing and the desired output, hence the 'gap' in capacity (Analoui & Danquah, 2017). Despite the recognition that CD ought to be central in all development assistance, there is no consensus on the philosophy of capacity and what it means to develop capacity.

Developing economies invest in development of skills, which is linked to investing in their future. Generally, training, learning, education and development are considered as a division of HRD (Analoui & Danquah, 2017; Szent-Ivanyi & Tetenyi, 2013). HRD aims at maximising people's potential to contribute to the community and national development (McGuire et al., 2007). Individuals, groups and society can strengthen their abilities through CD processes. In general, national HRD is a broad term used to categorise HRD that informs national policy. Evidence indicates that developing economies invest in HRD to help achieve sustainability. Human resources contribute to a nation's economic development and provide the capacity to supply the necessary skills for sustainable development (Baek & Kim, 2014).

Collins et al. (2017) argue that the field of HRD has tremendous value in helping developing economies achieve SDGs. The context of the current international development is the need for a variety of expertise in HRD specialisations. HRD opens opportunities for sustainable change and delivers processes that underpin transformation. However, in a broader context, the implementation of HRD on a large scale to benefit multiple stakeholders, and contribute to both economic and social development, which is embedded within complex institutional and social structures, is termed as national HRD. The human capital theory supports the implementation of national HRD (Becker, 1964). CD and HRD concepts are about change, and, due to the proliferation of agendas relevant to MDGs and more recently SDGs, the organisational landscape in most developing countries has changed (Belda et al., 2012).

HRD is directly linked to SDGs, especially Goal 8.3, and this policy lies within the purview of HRD (Zarestky & Collins, 2017).

Goals 8.5 and 8.8 emphasise inclusiveness and diversity; Zarestky and Collins (2017) argue that critical HRD values promote ways of relating, learning, changing, organising and advocating for inclusivity in the workplace. HRD focuses on the development of human capital, especially intending towards economic sustainability (Rana et al., 2017), whilst national HRD places emphasis on societal transformation focusing on enhancing and supporting the people at both the organisational and societal levels (Ekuman, 2019).

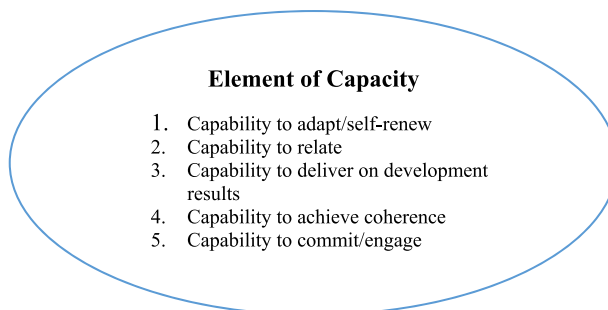
There is a need for a serious effort to revitalise public administration and service (Belda et al., 2012; Farazmand, 2009). Developing sustainable capacity helps to develop skills, systems and capabilities of groups or organisations through the transformation of skills and knowledge to enhance organisational capabilities (Belda et al., 2012). In the context of development, Baser and Morgan (2008) argue that capacity at the organisational level is about the ability of an organisation to function as a resilient, strategic and autonomous entity. It can be concluded that capacity ought to be viewed at different levels, including individual, organisation and society.

Individual competencies and collective capabilities are both needed in a system. Moreover, it is further contended that ability is the cumulative skill of an organisation to perform a function either inside or outside the organisation. Baser and Morgan (2008) identified five core capabilities. These contribute to the overall capacity of an organisation (see Figure 1). The existence, effectiveness and interrelationship of collective individuals are critical for organisation to function as a system condition.

## 1.2 | CD as project

Projects come in different sizes, scope, cost and time frame, from mega international projects costing millions of dollars implemented over many years to small domestic projects with a low budget taking just a few hours to complete. Arguably, a project is a temporary endeavour of change with a transparent state to the definite ending. There are several conceptualisations of CD, which can be viewed as an instrument for change, an objective, approach, strategy, development process and methodologies, as well as a development tool (Analoui & Danquah, 2017).

The World Bank regards CD as a change process that should be owned or led by countries to catalyse institutions to achieve development goals (World Bank, 2009). The World Bank project captures the relevant aspect of the elements of capacity relating to the core capabilities. The project had a moderately satisfactory overall outcome, a satisfactory performance by the Bank, and the monitoring and evaluation was substantial. The project was implemented to bring about change and address the identified capacity deficit; which determine the question of,



**FIGURE 1** The five core capabilities (5C) of capacity

Source: Adapted from: Baser and Morgan (2008, p. 26)

what is the implementation strategy? This is one of the main purposes of this paper. Several World Bank projects are delivered in the form of a project; they are aimed at improvements in citizens' lives, for example, enhancing education, health, good governance and agriculture (Diallo & Thuillier, 2004, 2005).

### 1.3 | The five core capabilities (5C) model

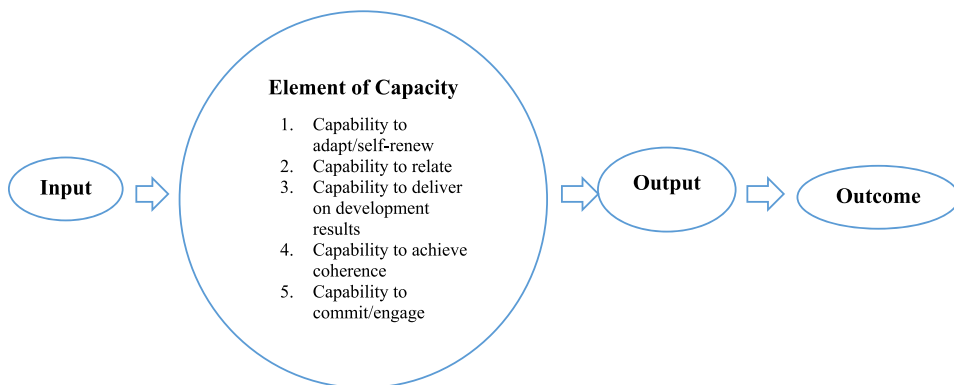
Capacity at the organisational level provides structural instrumentality for achievement of strategic goals (Farazmand, 2009). CD projects are critical for organisational development, whether in the private or public sector. Evidently, in recognition of the importance of CD, some developed countries have gone so far as to regulate in-service training providing legal provisions to oblige governments to recognise the rights of civil servants to in-house training (Wafa, 2015).

According to Farazmand (2009), managing public governance and administration is complex and challenging. We acknowledged this and commenced with adapting the 5C model, which conceptualises capacity as an endogenous process and considering internal organisational endowment and organisational links to their surrounding environment to assess the impact of the project (Thomas, 2007). The model takes a critical view of organisations as a system embedded in a specific context that influences their capacity, both constraints and limitations, and of opportunities and synergies; however, it also has its shortcomings which will be delineated later. The framework adopted is shown in Figure 2.

Public administration must be revitalised, and their organisations, processes and values re-institutionalised. This can be achieved through appropriate legislation and laws, and for government, the need to recovery its role as the guardian of society in domestic and international affairs (Farazmand, 2009). Organisation is seen as a coordination of set of planned activities, a process and a structure through which collective action takes place.

Organisational CD and enhancement are the capacity to organise (Farazmand, 2009, p. 1015). An organisation's development cannot be predicted and involves several processes, either formal or informal; local government organisations are embedded in the culture, politics and history of a country, and it comprises ethnic groups, traditional leaders, relations and the inner circles of party-political groupings. The elements of capacity combine and interact over time to create a greater whole (Morgan, 1998).

Thus, in the conceptualised model, organisations are viewed as an open system (Analoui, 2007). The system perspective is summarised and illustrated in Figure 2. It recognises that the assembly's capacity to deliver support to



**FIGURE 2** Conceptual model for the study.

Source: Adapted from: Base and Morgan (2008, p. 26)

Ghanaian democratic system depends on their abilities and resources. In enhancing performance, there are numerous combined factors, including the World Bank project; this serves as a partnership incorporating neighbouring institutions, geography and social factors. For example, the study adopted the 5C model within this framework because of the unique nature of the model, and CD is mostly judged alone (Baser & Morgan, 2008).

The 5C model underscores that organisations are open systems with boundaries that can adapt to complex circumstances. Organisations are entrenched in more comprehensive systems that go beyond local, national and international levels and can therefore respond to a variety of contextual factors. The 5Cs are closely related and interlinked and together contribute to an organisation's capacity to achieve its objective to bring social change. Capacity is viewed as an endogenous process. The conceptualised model is viewed in three levels (input, output and outcome). The **input** includes funding and expertise that encompass already existing capacity and the organisational structures and processes. Capacity cannot be developed through a linear process; thus, the interplay of factors such as project contribution, the conditions it imposes and the structures of the partnership with the assemblies affect the local capacity to deliver the needed service enhancement.

The **output** (also known as transfer and utilisation level) is short-term results produced by various activities. The product and services provided are based on CD core issues. These are not directly linked to *deliver on development objectives* as per the 5C. There is a difference between an output and an outcome. There is no absolute association to suggest that outputs and outcomes have a linear relationship. Thus, outputs and outcomes do not necessarily have a cause-and-effect relationship.

The intended change or outcome is to achieve strategic organisational objectives. The outcome can include increased capacity to deliver services, effective implementation of the service delivery, infrastructure development and management of human settlements and the environment in urban centres in Ghana. There is the recognition that an organisation's capacity is not an end in itself, but rather a means by which an organisation may achieve its objectives. The outputs achieve possible outcomes, and outcomes are defined as changes that enhance the advancement of society. The assessment of the 'outcomes' is beyond the scope of this study. Capacity is considered at three levels (individual, organisation and society/country), and a viable assessment should consider these issues. There are several frameworks available to assess the CD project, and we adopted the 5C model because it has been used in many policies and programmes, which gives enough confidence that it provides valid information. The study focuses on the implementation of the CD project and how the CD project contributes to sustainable development.

## 1.4 | Methodological approach

This study adopted a mixed-methods approach. The methodology was inevitably influenced by the multiple dimensions of the capacity concept and many actors in the local services organisational setting. The adaptation of the 5C model from the literature helps the researchers to access the effectiveness, efficiency and interplay of collective capabilities of the World Bank project, which in effect illustrates the various skills and how they relate to ability (Baser & Morgan, 2008). The study aims at identifying the implementation strategy for a CD programme in localised setting using the World Bank project.

We adopted a mixed-methods approach to generate knowledge on CD implementation and develop universal principles for development practitioners. There is no universally accepted framework for assessing capacity needs. CD programmes are designed and implemented based on various organisational cultures and philosophies (World Bank, 2009). The qualitative method helped our understanding of the CD process in a dynamic setting and was also employed to complement the quantitative method. The nature of CD does not permit the use of a single method because the phenomenon under study is in a dynamic environment and mixed methods can help capture different activities (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009). Quantitative data were collected and analysed first, followed by qualitative data, which were analysed to help explain quantitative data (Shuck et al., 2019).

The quantitative data were collected in the form of a questionnaire. The questionnaire had six sections. Section 1, demographic profile, consisted of seven questions. Section 2 asked respondents about their organisation and its effectiveness and consisted of nine questions. Section 3 asked respondents about managerial practices within their organisation and consisted of 23 questions. Section 4 asked respondents about the relevance of CD and consisted of 14 questions. In Section 5, respondents were asked to ascertain the usefulness of CD programmes. This consisted of five questions, and in Section 6, respondents were asked to compare different CD programmes. The items were captured on a Likert scale with anchors 1 = *strongly disagree* and 5 = *strongly agree* and Cronbach's alpha = 0.88.

The limitation of the quantitative method was compensated for by a qualitative method, realised through a semi-structured interview. The interview questions covered the same areas as the quantitative (questionnaire). Both sources strengthened the analysis and provided a snapshot of activities and events as they occurred. The method provided an opportunity for us to focus on deduction, confirmation, explanation and prediction (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2009).

The World Bank CD project covers 46 local assemblies. Our study used stratified random sampling where the assemblies were divided into four geographical zones. The researchers placed a threshold value for the criteria for participation that those assemblies that were still active in the project would participate in the study. Based on these criteria, four assemblies were selected from each zone. The 16 assemblies were selected based on their activeness on the project. Upon reviewing the literature, we found that each assembly had five departments. From the project description and documentation, all the five departments were involved in the project, and participants selected for the study were involved in a managerial role.

In August 2019, the researchers distributed eight self-administered questionnaires to each department. Forty self-administered questionnaires were distributed to each of the four selected zones. In total, 160 questionnaires were distributed, of which 105 were returned, representing 65.63% of the total. Table 1 shows a cross-tabulation of respondent age and years of experience.

Qualitative data were obtained through document analysis and semi-structured interview. To reinforce and strengthen the quality of data, 22 semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals associated with the project. In each assembly, there was a project coordinator specifically for the World Bank project, and all the 16 coordinators were interviewed to understand their perspectives on the project. The World Bank and the local government project coordinators were all interviewed. Purposive sampling was used in selecting four respondents, and the selected interviewees were based on completion of the collected questionnaire. Specific emphases were placed on the quality of responses to descriptive questions and where clarity was needed. Interview sessions were conducted on a one-to-one basis, and on average, they took approximately half an hour.

The semi-structured interviews were face-to-face; 'key persons' in the 16 local assemblies were interviewed to seek their views and 22 senior public officials and managers. All the data sources were combined in a triangulation fashion. The qualitative analysis took the form of transcribing recorded tapes and content analysis of interviews and documents, whilst quantitative analysis took the form of descriptive statistics to answer the research question. Figure 3 bring together the summary details of the sources of data, the organisations covered the respondents' selection and the actual coverage.

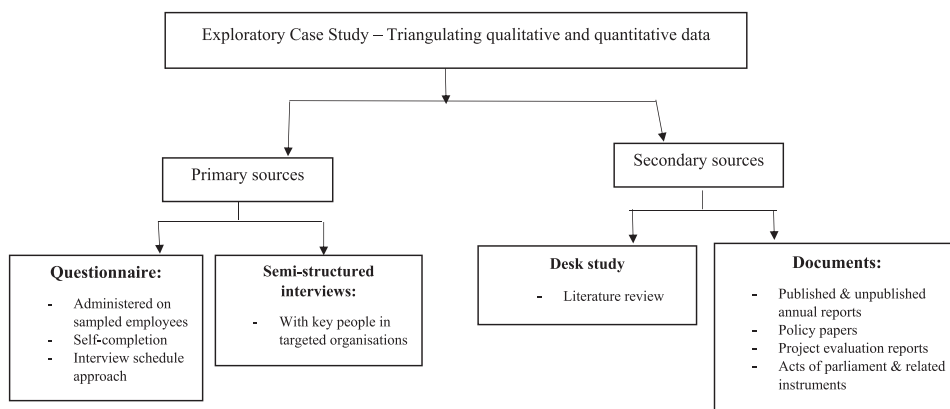
We used respondent validation to check the validity of the interview transcripts—thus the transcribed interviews were sent to respondents to validate their responses. Once transcribed, using the 5C model (see Figure 2) as a guide, the approach for data analysis was inductive content analysis; the process includes open coding, creating categories and abstraction. Concepts were grouped into condition categories to identify the most common to the questionnaire. A consensus on the coding was made through careful revision of categories and determination of how a text passage could be coded to a category, thus ensuring trustworthiness or reliability of the coding. We adopted the process described by Weber (1985) in developing the coding scheme. See Appendix A for the rating of capacity elements.



TABLE 1 Cross-tabulation age of respondents and years of experience

Age of respondents		How many years have been associated with CD programme						Total
		1-5 years	6-11 years	12-17 years	18-22 years	23 years and above		
21-30 years	Count	35	8	3	0	0	46	
	% within age of respondents	76.1%	17.4%	6.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
31-40 years	Count	17	11	5	0	1	34	
	% within age of respondents	50.0%	32.4%	14.7%	0.0%	2.9%	100.0%	
41-50 years	Count	3	7	4	0	0	14	
	% within age of respondents	21.4%	50.0%	28.6%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	
51 years and above	Count	1	1	6	3	0	11	
	% within age of respondents	9.1%	9.1%	54.5%	27.3%	0.0%	100.0%	
Total	Count	56	27	18	3	1	105	
	% within age of respondents	53.3%	25.7%	17.1%	2.9%	1.0%	100.0%	

Source: Data Analysis.



**FIGURE 3** Data sources and methods.

Source: Authors' compilation (2021)

**TABLE 2** Contribution of the World Bank capacity development project building local assemblies capacity based on the 5Cs

	Individual level	Organisational level	Societal level
Five core capabilities (5C)			
Four or more	65 (61.90)	46 (43.81%)	-
Three or more	24 (22.86)	33 (31.43)	49 (46.67%)
Two or more	16 (15.24)	26 (24.76)	56 (53.33%)
Total	105 (100%)	105 (100%)	105 (100%)

Source: Data Analysis.

The interview statements were coded based on the structure of the questionnaire, the role of the respondent and their geographical zone. For instance, if a respondent was from Zone 1, they were coded as Z1N1. If Z1N1 mentioned that the capability to commit and engage was critical to the achievement of the project, Z1N1's statement was coded to C.1.1. (see Appendix A). The total numbers of respondents who mentioned each element were then added together, giving a cumulative percentage referencing the model. Note that results are not cumulative.

## 2 | FINDINGS

In the following, the study examined the relationships amongst the factors identified in the conceptual model (see Figure 2); inputs link intervening variables and intermediary outcomes to answer the research questions. Our analysis is based on the findings from the questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. First, we focus on change in capacity and output at the individual and organisational levels.

### 2.1 | Changes in capacity and outputs

*Capacity:* The completed responses comprised 105 questionnaires and 22 semi-structured interviews from all the four zones; respondents indicated the desired levels of capacity change. Respondents claimed to have strengthened

their capacity over the last 3 years of implementation. Table 2 shows respondent responses regarding the contribution of the World Bank project in building local assemblies' capacity using the five core capabilities. For example, of these, 61.90% of respondents had strengthened four or more of the five core capabilities, as suggested by several semi-structured interviews conducted for this study, such as the following. 'Since I engaged in this project, I know how to manage the composite budget, develop a comprehensive development plan' (Respondent 1). A further 22.86% had strengthened three or more of the five core capabilities, and the other 15.24% just one or two. These achievements were at the individual level, and the following were the specific core capabilities: commit and engage, balance diversity and coherence, adapt and self-renew and complete technical tasks and deliver on development objective, as evidenced by this quote from one interviewee: 'The project has brought us together from different assemblies and learn from each other. For the training, we had strengthened my skills, knowledge and ability to take appropriate decision for my area' (Respondent 3).

At the organisational level (see Table 2), 43.81% of respondents indicated that they had strengthened four or more of the five capabilities, 31.43% of respondents had strengthened three or more of the 5C, and 24.76% had just managed one or two capabilities. Most frequently, organisations had strengthened their capabilities to commit and engage, balance diversity and coherence, relate to external stakeholders and complete technical tasks and deliver on development objectives. The core capabilities to adapt and self-renew were not common in all cases, the main reason being the assemblies' work with the legislative instrument that restricts their working powers but cannot be changed.

At the societal level (see Table 2), 46.67% of respondents indicated that society had strengthened three or more of the five capacities in the 5C model, and 53.33% indicated they had just managed one or two capabilities. The following capabilities were frequently observed: relate to stakeholders, adapt and self-renew and balance diversity and coherence. Core capabilities to commit and engage and complete technical tasks and deliver on development objectives were observed in all cases at the individual, organisational and societal levels, and interestingly, both core capabilities were often run in parallel as evidenced in the following quote from one interview. 'This is to help them improve on their planning and budgeting system, auditing and reporting system, revenue collection management, asset management and social accountability. An appraisal study was undertaken to determine each assembly's capacity' (Respondent, 20).

Individuals seemed to benefit more from the project and the changes in capacity. For example, participants indicated that the knowledge acquired and the experiences gained were enormous. Teaching methods were grounded in the development paradigms which hold that developed countries have the necessary knowledge and skills that developing countries need and that training is seemingly the best method to transfer them. This training is not stand-alone but incorporated with other related learning activities and delivered at all three levels: individual, group and society. The ability to learn is both a capability and an essential, underpinning capability for other aspects of sustainable development.

The core capability to *deliver on development objectives* is generally an organisation's priority and is linked to an individual's core capabilities. In specific assemblies where an individual's capabilities were weak, there were no positive changes in this core capability. A comparison of assemblies with 'good' and 'poor' performance indicated that strong and motivating leadership which worked closely with project participants across zones and the national coordinator's level reduced this inhibiting factor.

Assemblies' failure to sustain capabilities is the result of several key factors: the ever-dynamic environment within which the project operates, their weakness, the World Bank's conditionalities and administrative procedures. Many of the assemblies are fundamentally influenced by the environment within which they operate. Political decisions influence the project, individual decisions must be taken—which have no bearing on the positive change in the assemblies—and their economic factors are fixed realities incapable of being influenced at the grassroots level, but sometimes political factors need to be addressed to achieve sustainable development.

Out of the 16 assemblies that were involved in the present research project, 13 had improved their output as a result of the capacity development through individuals and the organisation of internal structures and regulations. In

some cases, the evidence was not as clear although positive changes had occurred in one or two core capabilities. From the individual perspective, some participants were also involved in a similar CD programme, so it was difficult to assess the actual output. Nevertheless, respondents still attributed any success to the World Bank project. For example, civil society development, improvement in income generation, improvement in budget planning, finance and administration and improvement in the relationship between the assembly and community opinion leaders were all attributed to the World Bank CD project. Through an inductive and iterative analysis of the case study, the identified nature of capacity and its linkage with the successful implementation of the project, common indicators for processing core capabilities for individuals and assemblies, were found to be training, education, learning and development, as was also expressed in this interview: 'We believe that if we had not had these programme things would have been difficult. We started without knowing certain basic things in the industry [the project has been helpful]. Staffs were working without clear vision/mission [the World Bank project provided a clear understanding of our roles]. Effectiveness of the department is low. And these were administered through training, education, learning and development' (Respondent 15).

## 2.2 | What factors accounted for the change?

Different factors are associated with the variation in performance which largely results from the degree of alignment between the assemblies, the ministry of local government and rural development and the team of World Bank personnel. A broad range of approaches to capacity development were adopted, the provision of core funding was essential, and local consultants provided the advisory services. Local consultants were employed to determine the needs of each assembly and sectoral capacity, but previous familiarity with an institutional, social and geographic context. This contextual knowledge appeared to be as crucial as the technical qualification for the project. Performance benchmarks were used to determine the selection and onward release of funds.

The consultants' findings were used by the Ministry to secure funding from the World Bank. Although each assembly had gone through a pre-assessment exercise, the Ministry worked with the consultants' recommendations and assessment. These recommendations fit into the total development objectives of the assemblies because the consultants worked closely with the Ministry and the assembly during the implementation stage of the project. The project's objectives required close collaborating with the local government, the World Bank's team and project coordinators. This collaborative strategy helped the assemblies to share ideas and experience, and those that lacked experience with the institutional context were motivated. One respondent expressed this as follows. 'As a budget officer, the last training we had on procurement, exposed us to the global best practices on procurement' (Respondent 19).

The effects on organisational and individual performance have been cumulative. Individuals that faced difficulty in achieving the objectives were programmed for seminars, workshops, training and short courses, although some staff were called on to assist in the implementation and where their expertise was needed, for example, with the composition of the composite budget for all the assemblies. In specific assemblies, for example, in Zone 4, there were well-structured and well-coordinated activities which tended to have a positive impact on the project. Assemblies possessing relevant institutional, social and geographic experience performed well by drawing on existing strengths such as leadership, teamwork, planning, mobilisation and ownership whilst adapting to the new strategy of the consultant's interventions. This is what one respondent said: 'This is the harmonisation of development projects to the assemblies; the World Bank only provides supervisory [support]. I have utilised the knowledge, skills and values acquired after the programme' (Respondent 1).

The best-performing assemblies embraced community participation where chiefs, opinion leaders, stakeholders and non-governmental organisations were part of the decision-making process in the areas of revenue mobilisation, security, street naming and development planning and social interventions (UNDP, 2008). They offered no barriers to the system and were able to map out comparative benefits to stakeholders and to explore their energies to use

and improve the development of the assembly. This meant that more communities were involved in programmes and activities. Such community involvements were observed across all the selected assemblies.

Leadership was viewed as necessary, wherever it was weak; there was a negative impact on the project. Staff members noticed when leadership was slapdash and inadequate; thus, it resulted in underperformance. The performing assemblies adopted the leadership style involving a consultative and participatory approach to achieve results through staff motivation, reducing staff attrition and linking with other agencies for support. Leadership is an essential ingredient for the development and prospects of the modern organisation (Glamuzina, 2015). Organisations with poorly developed leadership experience find it difficult to cope with changes in the environment, making leadership critical for an organisation's competitiveness. Also, the bottom-up approach was used in communication and participatory methods to solve problems and ensure that work got done. Teamwork emerged as an active attribute arising from leadership style. Below are some of the opinions expressed by one of our respondents.

We believe that if we had not had these programme things would have been difficult. We started without knowing certain basic things in the industry [support]. Staff were working without [a] clear vision and mission. Effectiveness of the department is low. Leadership was a problem, and we were taken through some leadership style modules and characteristics. We have been playing our [role] not enough due to finances. Our staff strength is about five hundred. We collaborate to prevent, arrest, and detect crime. Also work with another department. Nobody takes unilateral decision. (Respondent 20)

The project delivery mechanism was premised on the belief that enough endogenous capacity existed amongst local organisations to deliver on their mandate. To strengthen society's systems and domestic players, an important consideration is to query which local assemblies are more relevant. It is, therefore, assumed that assemblies fit into the broad strategic development agenda of Ghana whose capacities contribute to country's advancement. The findings suggest that all assemblies should not be homogeneous entities. Management effectiveness and efficiency are critical in all capacity development projects, as inefficient and ineffective management can cause a failure of sustainability in capacity development projects (Glamuzina, 2015).

### 3 | DISCUSSION

The research was designed in alignment with the World Bank's approach to capacity development, HRD and national HRD as one part of strengthening country ownership of development and to sustain the progress for the future. This is echoed in SDG 17.

Capacity development is not considered to be a linear process but one that emerges under complicated circumstances. The use of the model aims to assess changes in the capacity of assemblies over 3 years. Capacity development ownership is based on the assumptions of the ability of organisations, individuals and society to provide high-quality development result, building on existing capacities and demanding the use of existing local expertise.

The findings suggest that donor-funded projects aimed at increasing capacity at the individual, organisational and societal levels will be more effective if such projects are incorporated into the long-term development agenda and do not only address the short-term capabilities that are closely linked to the project objectives. Donor assistance policy—driven by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)—and other conversions agree that capacity development programmes must focus on promoting country ownership, channelling aid through country systems and working with local organisations (Wetterberg et al., 2015).

Donor-funded projects must give their full attention to a wide range of capabilities like the 5Cs model, which are associated with sustainability. The experience also shows that the World Bank project relies on local capacity to develop other capacities; for example, local consultants were hired, and local organisations were expected to

implement certain aspects of the project. This is one of the basic principles for donor–country partnership by the OECD.

The findings supported the view that the core capabilities were exhibited in some levels—individuals and organisation. The 65 individual respondents had changed in terms of core capabilities in four of the 5Cs, which resulted in the perception that output is more relevant for achieving their objectives. Amongst these, 24 individual respondents demonstrated changes in three or more core capabilities which had resulted in outputs more relevant to achieving their development agenda, and the 16 individual respondents who had changes in two of the core capabilities were linked to achieving their objectives.

The above suggests that the project contributed to positive changes in core capabilities in more than half of the individual participants. The factors and circumstances that helped to contribute to this development largely resulted from internal organisational operation led primarily by leadership and a well-structured project vision linking to individual assemblies' development agenda. The findings support the general statement that capacity is the ability of individuals, organisations and societies to perform functions, solve problems and set/achieve objectives in a sustainable manner (UNDP, 2010).

The project's delivery mechanism relied on the premise that enough endogenous capacity existed amongst local organisations to deliver development results effectively in the locality. The assemblies had relevant knowledge in areas such as development issues and technical skills. The local government system empowered all assemblies with the development agenda of the area. However, the assemblies could demonstrate well-rounded competencies. The World Bank, realising these capacity gaps, has renewed its efforts to increase support towards capacity development in developing countries.

In such situations, consultants, experts and human resource personnel are called on from the national office to assist. Although some assemblies demonstrated a high level of capacity, these could not be coherently grouped under the identified 5Cs. Eight assemblies demonstrated four or more of the core capabilities because of the endogenously driven nature of the project, and they owned the project with little influence from the national office. Five of them experienced strength in only three of the core capabilities; this was because of weak organisational internal operations. Three also realised that these projects do not meet their organisational long-term development objectives and felt they were not consulted during the planning stage, and little attention was paid to their concerns. Moreover, they saw the project as one of the donor's 'usual conditional ties'. More importantly, the project was designed to enhance local government capabilities to serve independently and sustainably. The project can be classified within the international development projects outcome as either government benefits or promotes macroeconomic resilience (Arvanitis et al., 2015).

An important point to note is that the project was designed to strengthen the country governance system through urban development and participation, but it was discovered that there were some 5Cs that were associated, specifically the capability to adapt and renew and the capability to balance diversity and coherence in three assemblies. Baser and Morgan (2008) assert that the 5Cs model, which is associated with this dynamic change comprise: (a) individual and organisational learning; (b) internal dialogue; (c) repositing and reconfiguring of the organisation; (d) integration of new ideas; and (e) planning a growth path. They also argue that the capability to achieve diversity and coherence comprise (a) communication; (b) able to build connections; (c) diversification; and (d) to manage complex situations.

However, gains were pronounced in specific capabilities necessary for successfully providing communities with some needs, but a few were skewed towards the achievement of the objectives of the project, rather than building balanced capabilities for assemblies to sustain themselves over time without depending on donor support. This is contrary to the assertion that developing capacity is a long-term process, and it cannot be done solely by the donor; it must be owned and led by the very people that benefit from it, though they can be assisted (OECD, 2013).

Assemblies are responsible for the development at the local level as their primary responsibilities. However, perceptions are that it is a government responsibility to provide resources for such development. Notwithstanding some assemblies that engage non-governmental organisations and community-based organisations for assistance,

most of these organisations provide little assistance which reduces the pressures on the assemblies. The bureaucratic nature of the assemblies makes it challenging to engage donors in development unless the central government approves it. The study confirms the statement that capacity challenges have limitations on development because all assemblies faced the challenge of achieving their mandate, but this project has helped in the areas of planning, revenue mobilisation, accountability, financial management and community mobilisation (Abdel-Malek et al., 2011; Venner, 2015). Assemblies that achieved three or more of the core capabilities remained resistant in meeting their development objectives; moreover, they also sustained them for a more extended period. The findings suggest that strengthening of assemblies' capacity can contribute to the development of the country as a whole, and these are achieved if the project objectives are embedded in the assembly's long-term development plan.

The project is centred on proven service delivery for assemblies in its catchment areas, although the case study was framed as standard in the scope of work, time frame and the restricted budget. This approach made sense from a service delivery perspective but did not consider the diversity of the assemblies and individual learning differences. The project life cycle made it difficult for individual assemblies to achieve designated scopes of work, and adjusting performance targets, schedules and budget to reflect individual capabilities would have prolonged project deliveries (Burke, 2010).

Consideration must be given to capacity development goals in combination with donors supported projects. The unrealistic time frame and tight budget do not help the weaker assemblies to meet deadlines; however, they do encourage accountability. Some assemblies had drawbacks regarding capacity goals, as some selected individuals did not have the requisite knowledge to lead the project. Therefore, some consultants faced multiple unfamiliar aspects when trying to work in the assemblies. The recommendation is that programme designers should prioritise capacity goals over other objectives but urge equal consideration of assemblies' dynamism, multiple goals and recognition of possible overlaps and contradictions, and these must be considered in the design.

### 3.1 | Effects of the capacity development project

The project was designed to strengthen Ghana's democratic governance systems through enhancement of the assemblies' capabilities. The crucial issue is whether implementing capacity development as a project can build the capabilities required to function independently and sustain development goals. Whilst the World Bank policy is moving forward, for example, with an emphasis on reduced dependency and increased self-reliance, the core capabilities that are associated with independence and sustainability (the capability to adapt and renew, the capability to balance diversity and coherence) are mostly enhanced by implementing the project.

The findings indicate that there is a functional overlap between the core capabilities needed for high performance and the core capabilities improved by working with the project. Three assemblies were often weak in terms of several of the core capabilities necessary for successfully helping them meet their core mandates. These projects are managed by using management tools to assess their impact on beneficiaries, for example, project cycle management and logical frameworks. These management tools have a set of activities coupled with time and budget, which indicate that due to the geographical disparities and individual capabilities, they inhibit the progress of the assemblies.

The case study was focused on replicating proven service delivery reforms, for which all assemblies were given a standard scope of work, time frame and strict budget. This principle set the foundation for assemblies to follow suit. However, the individual learning curve and assemblies' geographical differences were not taken into consideration, notwithstanding that some individuals were taken to an unfamiliar environment which might also have contributed to the problem. Interviewees also noted consistently that the time for the activities was insufficient to achieve the targeted scope of work. Capacity development is a learning process that requires enough time and space (World Bank, 2009). The project was based on a 1-year life cycle after a cycle performance appraisal was carried out to determine and select assemblies that could join the next phase. This strategy limited an assembly's core capability to

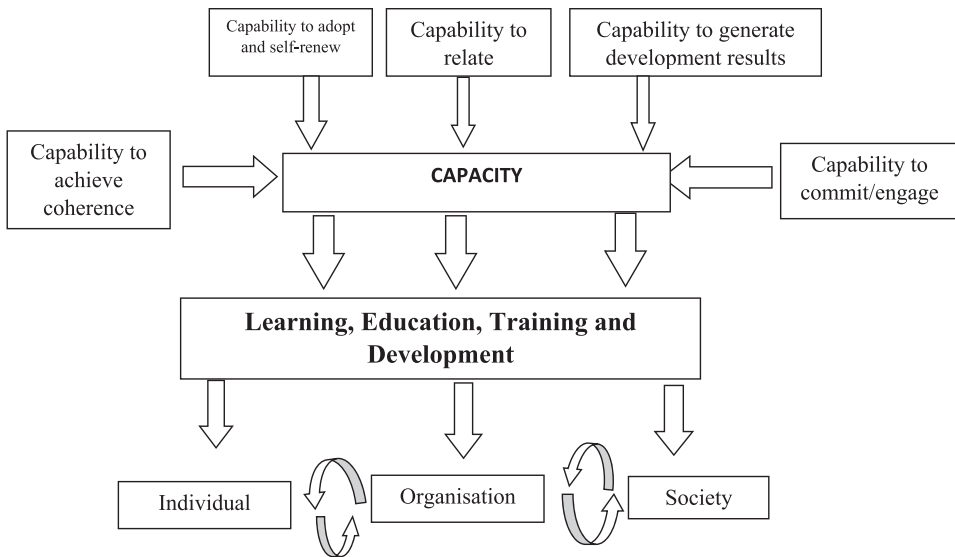
adapt and self-renew, and the ambitious project target was only in line with the World Bank's unrealistic capacity development expectations.

Strengthening Ghana's democratic and local assemblies' system is essential to achieve development objectives. The project grouped all assemblies into one broad category as 'urban' organisations whose capacities contribute to the country's development. The findings suggest these capabilities are needed, but each assembly has its own dynamics and should be treated separately.

Several issues related to the implementation of the project have been raised. The capacity development project was undertaken with the intent of strengthening individuals, organisations and societies to perform functions, solve problems and establish and sustainably achieve objectives. The strategies adopted for capacity development include learning, education, training and development to deal with the perceived limitations of existing operational capacities. The HRD principles in this model are considered as the activity level, where the strategic nature of these activities occurred. This serves as a medium through which the core capabilities are transmitted; an effective capacity development strategy involves the five core capabilities delivered through learning, education and training and development to individual, organisation and society (see Figure 4). The beneficiary stage is also known as the transfer and utilisation level, where achieving strategic organisational objectives is the outcome level. The model can be adapted/adopted in any situation (local, national and international levels).

We have developed a holistic CD strategy that can be adopted/adapted by different groups but can fit all situations. Training is typically used for CD and HRD processes that include learning, which is anchored in the belief that developed countries have the requisite skill and knowledge that can be acquired through training by developing economies. Learning changes attitude and improves understanding, information, behaviour, value, knowledge and skills. The capability to learn is an essential tool for development; learning is employed to build an employee's capacity to achieve organisational objectives through information and knowledge.

Training does not only focus on individual capacity needs but also on organisational and institutional needs. Development is related more to learning and education by providing individuals with the choice; these factors alone are not enough to perform the task. A CD strategy requires several capabilities and can be administered through education, learning, training and development to individuals, organisations and society. CD strategies are delivered



**FIGURE 4** Capacity development strategy. Source: Compiled by authors (2022)



through HRD core principles and philosophies. These are interrelated, and development practitioners should synchronise HRD principles and philosophies into development agenda (see Figure 4).

## 4 | LIMITATIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

This study provides insight into sustainable CD and HRD for assemblies. Training and skill development are worthy investments for individuals, organisations and society. This fits neatly into the concept of enhancing local capacity in contributing to national development, and national development is implemented using HRD strategies. Also, the study suggests that each assembly should be considered differently because of individual learning curves and geographical disparities. The study suggests that in achieving sustainable development in developing countries, there should be a full complement of local capacity and continuous capacity assessment to enhance long-term sustainability and adapt the above-proposed model.

The above framework described in this article (see Figure 4) is a useful tool to build human resource/capacity and can be achieved through HRD (training, education, learning and development measures). Beneficiaries' CD should be fully supported rather than prioritising the donor's project objectives. However, our findings indicate that, although the 5Cs model provides some insight into the CD process, it fails to recognise or acknowledge these CD could be achieved in a situation where learners are unable to learn. The proposed capacity development strategy is built on the assumption that learning is the foundation for all sustainable capacity development projects.

The theoretical implications are as follows. The study concludes that the World Bank support for CD in Ghana explicitly provided for CD in terms of strengthening the capacity of individuals, organisations and society in situations where donor support for CD and the support for assemblies are synchronised into an endogenous project. For capacity development to be sustainable, donors must organise their support in a way that encourages ownership, helping beneficiaries to mobilise local resources and accountability. Moreover, a bottom-up approach should be at the centre of the donor's policies and practices.

The study has led us to believe that specific capacity development process prescriptions can readily provide sustainable capacity for development, such as extensive participation of beneficiaries. This creates better understanding and promotes ownership which leads to long-term development. It is believed that the proposed model has the potential to be used at both at the local and national levels.

The current study has several limitations, which provide opportunities for future research. We focused on how CD is implemented in developing countries to achieve sustainable development using a World Bank project. Ghana provides a narrative that supports the implementation of CD projects. However, many limitations and questions need to be addressed.

First, we should keep in mind that our study was undertaken in Ghana, a country that shares some characteristics with other developing countries but is also unique in some contextual elements that provide insight for the advancement of theory. In this regard, future research could be directed at exploring CD project implementation in other developing or developed countries taking different donor project as cases. This would permit us to ascertain the extent to which our findings are different from findings in other contexts. Second, we used a mixed-methods approach which helps to avoid over-reliance on one method, specifically using the thematic approach (Jogulu & Pansiri, 2011). Moreover, triangulation strengthens the results and philosophically allows the combination of theory generation and hypothesis testing. However, reducing qualitative data to dichotomous renders them single-dimensional and immutable (Driscoll et al., 2007). This challenge was encountered, particularly, during the analysis, coding and integration of both qualitative and quantitative data. Finally, we focused on how CD is implemented using both the HRD philosophy and principles in a donor-funded project in Ghana, adopting the 5C model to understand the uniqueness and dynamics of the assemblies. This might have restricted or narrowed our understanding of this perspective. Therefore, we suggest future studies could use a different model that seeks to capture different

dynamics. Despite these limitations, the findings in this study show that the World Bank CD project in Ghana contributes to CD at both individual and organisational levels, contributing positively to sustainable development.

## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Not available.

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**How to cite this article:** Danquah, J. K., Analoui, F., Boampong, B., & Amenshiah, A. K. (2022). Developing sustainable capacity for urban assemblies: Case study of a World Bank project in Ghana. *Journal of International Development*, 34(8), 1587–1605. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jid.3657>

## APPENDIX A: RATING OF CAPACITY ELEMENT

Elements of capacity Interview code	Zone 1					Zone 2				
	Z1N1	Z1N2	Z1N3	Z1N4	Z1N5	Z2N1	Z2N2	Z2N3	Z2N4	Z2N5
Capability to commit/ engage	4	3	5	3	5	5	3	4	5	4
Capability to achieve coherence	5	5	4	3	3	5	4	4	3	4
Capability to adapt/self- renew	5	5	5	5	4	3	5	3	5	3
Capability to relate	3	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	4	5
Capability to generate development results	4	5	5	4	3	5	3	5	4	5

Note: Results are not cumulative.

Source: Data Analysis.

Elements of capacity Interview code	Zone 3					Zone 4				
	Z3N1	Z3N2	Z3N3	Z3N4	Z3N5	Z4N1	Z4N2	Z4N3	Z4N4	Z4N5
Capability to commit/ engage	4	4	4	5	3	5	4	5	4	3
Capability to achieve coherence	5	4	5	5	4	5	5	5	5	4
Capability to adapt/self- renew	5	5	3	4	5	5	5	5	5	5
Capability to relate	5	3	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	5
Capability to generate development results	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5

Note: Results are not cumulative.

Source: Data Analysis.