

# “Twinning” of institutions

For certain needs, pairing similar organizations may be the most effective means of providing technical assistance

Lauren Cooper

Many factors determine the effectiveness of an international technical assistance program. Problems may arise in the feasibility, design, administration, or implementation of a program and can be compounded by cultural or behavioral factors. One of the keys to avoiding or mitigating these problems is the selection of an appropriate method of providing technical assistance.

This article focuses upon “twinning” arrangements, a means of providing technical assistance that has received greater attention in recent years. Twinning arrangements pair two similar organizations: one a mature entity with solid operational experience (the supplier); the other a relatively young agency or enterprise (the client) that is seeking to increase its management capabilities, train its staff, or improve its operational procedures.

The operational expertise available through twinning can offer distinct advantages over the more common form of technical assistance—the assignment of consultants on a long-term contract basis. It may also offer certain psychological or even political advantages over consultative relationships. Clients may look upon twinning as a cooperative effort between colleagues and may feel more receptive to advice offered in this context. Twinning may also offer advantages to suppliers. For some it may represent an opportunity to obtain or increase their share of the international market in technical assistance services; for others, such as public utilities or universities, prestige and the experience gained may take precedence over profit.

Over the past 30 years twinning has been used in various countries in a broad range of sectors and activities, including railways,

power, water supply, ports, irrigation, universities, research centers, dairy development boards, municipalities, national development banks, mortgage banks, institutes of management, forestry, and agriculture. In recent years twinning has also been used more frequently in the urban sector, where developing country municipalities have paired with local governments in industrial countries and drawn upon their skills in organizing administrative functions and addressing the problems of urban growth. A form of twinning has also occurred in industry, but relationships there are more likely to take the form of joint ventures. Unlike twinning, these entail some degree of equity participation and take place between two parties performing complementary, rather than comparable, functions.

As with any form of technical assistance, a successful twinning arrangement will depend upon the commitment of the client and supplier, the feasibility of the goals to be achieved, and a realistic time frame. (For a more detailed discussion, see *Managing Project-Related Technical Assistance: The Lessons of Success* by Francis Lethem and Lauren Cooper, World Bank Staff Working Paper 586.) In addition to these basic ingredients an effective twinning arrangement is also grounded in the selection of an appropriate supplier. This article examines what, ideally, a twinning arrangement can provide and what may need to be considered in setting up such an arrangement.

## What twinning can offer

**Operating experience.** For the client, the major advantage of a twinning arrangement is that a very credible source, an operational unit that is actively and successfully engaged in the same field, stands behind the technical assistance. A client can expect to draw upon the supplier's resources in relevant functional areas. The supplier's staff in the field will have had practical experience in jobs comparable to

those the client's staff are performing, and problems that can not be readily resolved in the field can be referred to staff at the supplier's headquarters.

**Integrating technical assistance and training.** Twinning can facilitate the integration of technical assistance and training through the variety and flexibility of the services provided. The supplier's staff may, for instance, work at the client's facility as advisors or in operating positions, and they may do so for extended periods or for short visits. The client's management and staff might also visit the supplier's headquarters. Training can be offered for a variety of technical skills and at various levels, and can be conducted at either facility or at both. Instruction can be tailored to meet specific needs or offered as part of a regular training program. In addition, the training can be coordinated with visits to similar facilities in other countries. As part of a twinning arrangement between Ireland's Electricity Supply Board and Tanzania's Electric Supply Company (TANESCO), for example, 20 TANESCO staff were trained in Dublin in 1977–78. After training periods of 3 to 12 months, each of TANESCO's staff had a brief assignment with a utility company in Ireland, the United Kingdom, or the United States. In addition to developing skills, the group experience in Ireland appeared to reinforce the learning process by providing the trainees with a sense of joint purpose when they returned to Tanzania.

Twinning also provides greater opportunities than many technical assistance methods for training through example; in the supplier firm, the client may see examples and practical applications of principles it wishes to put into effect. A relationship with an organization that sees itself as a leader in its field may also, evidence suggests, instill a similar pride and quality consciousness in the client.

**Flexibility.** Depending on the terms of the contract, the supplier and client may

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define and alter their work program over time. A variety of issues can be addressed while a professional relationship is maintained with the same supplier. The resilience and adaptability that characterize twinning relationships may also permit the client's staff to turn to the supplier, often to the same individuals with whom they worked, for information and advice many years after the formal contract has expired.

The flexibility of twinning arrangements can also extend to the cost of the technical assistance. Where consulting services are normally available at international market rates only, twinning arrangements may be set up free of charge, at cost, or at international rates. Municipalities or public utilities, for example, may have no incentive for profit making (and in fact may not be permitted to engage in consultancy for profit) but may have to recoup costs, while many other organizations may be in a position to charge different rates for different services and may be willing to negotiate terms with a prospective client.

### Setting up twinning arrangements

Twinning is no panacea for all needs or for all the problems related to technical assistance. It has not been particularly effective, for instance, as a means of meeting design, feasibility, or other engineering needs. To choose the most appropriate method of providing technical assistance,

the ground must first be prepared for the assignment. This means examining the client's commitment to, and achieving a consensus on, the goals of technical assistance. Once completed, the next step is to design the services. A contract should specify a phasing of the work to enable an initial diagnosis, ensure periodic joint reviews, and allow the work program to be redesigned if necessary. Specifying the tasks to be done in an outline of the terms of reference can help clarify the skills or combination of skills needed to implement the technical assistance. Armed with this information and knowledge about the advantages and disadvantages of various means of providing technical assistance, the client can choose the method (or combination of methods) that would be most effective and responsive to its needs.

As mentioned earlier, twinning does offer distinct practical advantages for assignments dealing with operational and maintenance tasks. It is important to recognize, however, that (1) twinning alone may not satisfy all the project's requirements—an assignment may be most effectively implemented by using several complementary methods of providing technical assistance, either together or separately over time; (2) organizations are not necessarily compatible simply because they are in the same business; and (3) both client and supplier may need guidance in setting up the twin-

ning arrangement and in working together to carry it out with maximum effectiveness.

**Identifying a twin.** If twinning is the technical assistance method decided upon, the next step is to identify and assess potential twins. The client may have had contacts with suppliers through previous work or through conferences or seminars, in which case it can contact the supplier directly. If the client is unaware of an organization that might offer appropriate services, it may wish to advertise the job, indicating that it seeks services provided only (or preferably) by a similar operation, alone or in association with a consulting firm. Clients may also find assistance from professional societies, or national associations of manufacturers. For example, the Committee for Cooperation and Development of the International Water Supply Association will assist clients to find water authorities with which to twin. The International Association of Ports and Harbors publishes the *International Survey of Port Training, Advisory Facilities and Requirements*, which lists ports offering technical assistance and training.

In sectors where such information and assistance is not readily available from an international association, or where it is not practicable to ask for the advice of an international aid agency, clients may contact national trade promotion, development, or professional organizations, or na-

## Things to consider in selecting a twin

To obtain the best possible services under a twinning arrangement, it is in the client's interest to examine the qualifications of prospective suppliers very carefully.

The information needed to evaluate applicants will come, in part, from discussions with the organizations themselves; references are often provided on similar work done elsewhere. Aid agencies may be additional sources of information. And, increasingly, visits to prospective suppliers, often financed by donors, provide firsthand information on suppliers' resources and capabilities and their likely compatibility with clients' needs.

**Motivation.** Why is the supplier interested in doing consultancy work? What is its stake in technical assistance? Exploring the supplier's motivation will help assess commitment and give some clues as to its approach. (Motivation, like commitment, should be checked at both the individual and corporate levels.)

**Using the supplier's skills to best advantage.** What is the supplier's specialty and expertise? Is the supplier being asked, or offering, to perform services outside its areas of expertise? Does the supplier know (and admit) its own limitations?

**Developing institutions.** If institutional development is a goal, how can it best be promoted? Would short-term intensive staffing provided by the supplier be preferable to fewer staff over a longer period?

**Experience in consulting.** Is the supplier experienced in running a consulting operation? Can it provide consulting services—is there added management responsibility in the operating departments, a separate consultancy department, a legally separate subsidiary?

**Appropriate technology.** Is there a risk of inappropriate technical or institutional technology being offered? Does the supplier operate at or is it familiar with various levels of technology? Does the supplier propose to adapt to the client's environment?

**Design of delivery of services.** What choices are available in using supplier staff and in training? Can the design of the services be altered if necessary? What feedback mechanisms are proposed for (1) periodic joint assessment and redesign of the work; (2) staff performance evaluation; (3) resolution of conflicts?

**Selection of supplier staff.** What criteria does the supplier use to select staff for technical assistance? Do supplier staff have relevant experience? How does the supplier ensure that the staff sent abroad are suitable? Can the client interview the key supplier staff proposed for the twinning arrangement?

**Strain on supplier resources.** Is the supplier able to take on (additional) technical assistance assignments without compromising the quality of services it provides to both its home and foreign clients?

**Use of outside staff.** Does the supplier turn to other firms or individuals to staff a contract? (Clients may wish to ensure that the supplier provides the principal services.)

**Links between supplier and client.** At what organizational levels should the two entities be linked? Are special lines of communication needed between the client and the supplier's headquarters? Most suppliers emphasize the importance of having top managers of both organizations committed to the twinning arrangement.

## Ireland and Zambia: a successful twinning experience

In the mid-1960s, in the first years of Zambia's independence, a group of Zambian public servants attended a special 12-month program at the Irish Institute of Public Administration. The Government of Zambia expressed an interest in developing a local capability to provide training in public administration. The IIPA supported this effort by sponsoring three Irish public servants for two or three years as lecturers to the precursor of the Zambian National Institute of Public Administration. Over the next ten years Zambians continued to attend training courses at the IIPA in Dublin.

In the 1970s, the Zambians asked IIPA to help them increase their capacity to provide management training in health administration. Four of the best Zambian trainers went to Ireland and, working in conjunction with the IIPA staff, developed a course in hospital administration that was relevant to conditions and facilities in their home country. When the Zambians returned home to become course leaders, IIPA assigned three of its own staff to provide support on a "visiting expert" basis over the six months that the training course was run. During their visits the IIPA staff provided professional backup, helped make adjustments in the curriculum, and assisted Zambian instructors review and evaluate their students' projects.

Their success reflects several elements of effective technical assistance provided through a twinning arrangement:

- The client's staff were committed to the assistance; they did, in fact, initiate the relationship;
- Goals and tasks were feasible, both in terms of possessing a known, proven methodology to achieve the goal and the necessary time to fulfill the task;
- The supplier had experience in doing exactly what the client wanted to do;
- Cooperation and mutual trust developed over 15 to 20 years, with nationals of both countries gaining experience at each other's facilities;
- The work program was adapted over time as the client's needs and capabilities changed, and good use was made of several different methods of technical assistance delivery available through twinning;
- Appropriate support was provided to the Zambian instructors upon their return. As experienced trainers before they worked on the health program, they did not require constant supervision but did benefit from the periodic support they received from their Irish twin; and
- Continuous funding was available: originally 100 percent of the work was financed through bilateral aid, but the Zambians paid about 10 percent of the costs over the last few years of the contract.

tional aid agencies to help them identify potential twins. Consulting firms may be contracted to do this or to arrange investigative visits to suppliers that would provide clients with an opportunity to identify a potential partner institution. Volunteer organizations may also be sources of contacts.

Clients can also turn to experienced organizations in other developing countries. Indian, Korean, and Tunisian firms, for example, have been quite active as developing country suppliers (see box on examples). Twinning between developing country organizations may increase the likelihood of transferring appropriate technologies, as well as enhance opportunities for collaboration between supplier and client.

**Use of third parties.** Many suppliers, whose primary responsibility is providing services for home country clients, may lack worldwide experience or the personnel and background to extend their services to other organizations. An inexperienced supplier might transfer inappropriate technical or institutional technology or agree to provide

a service outside its area of competence. An organization without consultative experience might find it difficult to set fee schedules, negotiate contracts, establish a realistic work program, or determine the appropriate intervention strategy (e.g., advising, diagnosing, or training).

For some technical assistance assignments, it may be appropriate to involve a third party, such as a consulting firm from either the supplier or client country, or another operating entity (a "triple"), in the twinning arrangement. A client who has expressly sought a twinning arrangement to benefit from a particular organization's expertise may wish to ensure that the supplier, rather than its subcontracted consultants, provides the principal services it seeks, but involving a third party can offer several advantages. The third party can (1) furnish the worldwide perspective or particular local experience that the supplier may lack; (2) provide expertise in substantive areas, such as organizational design, in which the supplier may be inexperienced, or provide professional backup;

and (3) attend to the administrative and logistical aspects of the twinning arrangement.

The Port of Rotterdam, for instance, provides technical assistance but would be unable to advise on dock loading or unloading (stevedoring) matters because these services are not managed directly by the port authority. To complement its technical assistance the Port sometimes calls upon one of a number of private stevedoring companies and management consulting firms with which it has established a working relationship; sometimes the Port serves as the primary contractor and sometimes as the subcontracted party. Likewise, the Westland/Utrecht Hypotheekbank of the Netherlands, a mortgage bank on its first international consultancy, chose to work with two consulting firms when it accepted a twinning arrangement in Indonesia. One, a Dutch firm, had experience in developing management training programs and had worked in Indonesia previously; the other, an Indonesian firm, was familiar with local procedures and was able to facilitate the bank's work in that country.

**Institutional development.** Most institutional development is thought to require a 10- to 20-year perspective. This could possibly be shortened with a successful twinning arrangement, but the structure and staffing of the arrangement often influence the nature of its impact on institutional development. One option is to link the two organizations at many levels but over a short period, thus heightening the impact of skill transfer and strengthening the sharing of experience. There can be disadvantages, however, if this increases the client's dependence and the supplier's staff ends up running the organization.

The other option is fewer staff at any one time but a relationship that extends over 15-20 years. If a longer-term arrangement is desired, contracts stipulating follow-up are one way to extend the association. Postproject financing to keep the relationship going may be available from the same agency, a bilateral donor from the supplier's country, or other sources.



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