To demonstrate an effective strategy for capacity building, I shall tell you a success story from Africa.

A World Bank study on the education policy in Sub-Saharan Africa identified key factors deemed to be holding back development of education in Africa, one of which was the lack of relevant statistical data and analytical capacity. In response, within the framework of the Task Force of Donors to African Education (DAE), a Working Group on Education Statistics, consisting of representatives of the funding agencies, was formed.

During the first two years, as one member, Edward Heneveld, the World Bank, recalled, the agency members were debating on issues inherited from "thirty-years of failure." It represented “thirty years of failure” of package deal consisting of mostly computers, study visits and project cars, brought about by mutual dependency between aid provider and receiver. The past efforts in this area were fragmented, inconsistent and often conflicting, relying heavily on foreign consultants to deliver the technical solutions, just as it is today in some countries of Asia. The failure of North-to-South resource-transfer, skill-transfer and blueprint approaches was glaringly evident in the graveyard of collapsed, abandoned and outdated systems, largely irrelevant for strategic resource planning and management. They left behind very little, if any, enhanced capacity for national policy makers to lead and manage, indigenous specialists and technical teams to design and develop the systems,
and training institutes to regenerate knowledge and skills needed for development. All these approaches were generally discredited.¹

As its first activity, twenty-two countries of the WGES conducted a systematic diagnosis of their national education statistical information systems. The diagnostic findings revealed that the bottlenecks were located, not only at the MOE statistics unit, but all along the data chain, starting from school records, procedures in data collection through district and provincial offices, to MOE’s data processing, production of statistical information products and services, to the delivery and use of statistical information for policy and management. The lack of capacity along this chain pertained to the organisation, staffing, technical and operational aspects. The most fundamental cause was the lack of capacity in the functions of leadership and management.

In contrast to the traditional "technical assistance" approach, a new strategy focussed on forming partnerships for country leadership and ownership of the development process as part of their own education sector reform. To facilitate country formulation of policy-anchored national action plans, a task force consisting of a policy advisory committee and a technical implementation team was created.

There are now over 40 countries participating in the activities of the NESIS programme. For the EFA2000 Assessment, the NESIS network was mobilised and 47 countries completed their national

assessment reports. Based on these findings and recommendations, Johannesburg Declaration and Framework of Action in Sub-Saharan Africa were delivered at the Dakar conference on World Education Forum.

What distinguishes the successful cases from the failures? A summary of the critical factors of success and failures in the African experience can serve as a checklist for us to consider in formulating an appropriate strategy.

Learning from the failures of donor-dependency and imported blue-prints, the successful cases practice the principles of country leadership, ownership and partnership in innovative ways. Some of these are:

- organisation for mutual support and cost-sharing
- in-house function for continuous renewal, R&D, technical assistance and staff training
- flexibility to reconfigure technical teams and production factors in response to changing demands
- standardised records system, data-collection instruments and processing software
- multi-tiered, vertically distributed data collection and processing
- quality control procedures at all levels

The long-range vision of the NESIS strategy is to

*Years of Aid to the Sahel: past record and ideas for the next generation*, March 1997.
• establish a demand-responsive and self-sustainable education management information system,
• based on integration of decentralised and distributed sub-systems,
• guided by partnership of stakeholders at both national and state or provincial levels, and
• supported by technically competent bodies.

To be self-sustainable, the most important part of capacity-building in the long-run is not the training of individuals, although it is essential at the beginning. One must build an in-house capacity for continuous renewal and development in the areas of systems design, technical assistance and staff training.

The most important critical factors of success are

• Political commitment to mobilise and authorise financial, material, human and institutional commitment to implement the adopted strategy and manage the operations

• Good governance and management through
  • Partnership between stakeholders, major consumers and producers at various levels, through policy advisory council, empowered to exercise oversight function and issue guidelines and standards, and
  • Advised by a working group of experts and institutions, resourced and mandated to co-ordinate and ensure professionalism, accountability, quality, efficiency, competence and consultative decision-making
By sharing responsibilities, developmental and operational costs, facilities and resources, everybody gains more achievement than acting alone. This does not necessarily mean transfer of resources from one to another. It means more commonly, that all work toward the same goal in joint and coordinated activities, assuming resources and costs for one’s own area of responsibilities.

A well-orchestrated network of collaborating training institutions, resources centres and experts and agencies working in alliance and exchange of ideas and tools do not only foster unity among members, but the combined resources and efforts greatly contribute also to capacity building.