

G-RAP in its early days

Transcript of an Interview

with

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Introductory Remarks

Hans: This is an interview with David Kuijper of the Dutch Embassy on the occasion of David's departure from Ghana. David and a few other people have been quite important to the evolution of the G-RAP concept: its early stages, the development of its concept from initial ideas and vision around the programme. I believe that at this moment, David is one of the few individuals at the donor side who still know what happened at the early stages when funds were pooled from four embassies to start the programme. Today, we have the opportunity to interview David. Let's see what the initial ideas were, where we are now and how we will go on with the further development of the concept on the basis of the initial vision behind G-RAP.

Elvis: David, we are basically going to go through four areas around G-RAP. We first want to look the conceptualisation of G-RAP, the start up and implementation of the programme, the long term plan and expectations that you had of the programme. Now onto the conceptualization, what prompted the idea of G-RAP?

David: I think it's the external environment that we need to analyze first to see what incited G-RAP. The regime change in 2000 and the fact that Ghana was actually preparing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy and going HIPC, incited development partners to change their aid modality to bring their aid straight into government budget. That move actually necessitated an analysis of how strong the accountability mechanism around government's budgets are, how strong does the government ensure accountability through the budget, its implementation and are we as development partners in any way able to support the accountability structure? That is when we had the spontaneous idea of G-RAP. A lot of the development partners had already worked with policy think tanks present in Accra. We noticed that a lot of the think tanks were not geared towards checking the budget process itself, checking the executive or influencing parliament. We thought it will be good to increase the capacity of these organisations to perform better on evidence based influencing of government policy.

Elvis: Was the idea inspired by an existing model, had it been done somewhere before or was it primarily a test case for Ghana?

David: The idea was very much original, in the sense that we did not have an example of this been done anywhere else. But, the mechanism itself of creating a pooled fund is of course very much inspired by the Multi Donor Budget Support (MDBS) , where a pooled fund was created to support government in the form of core funding, that is basically what inspired us. There was a direct link and inspiration of an existing pooled human rights fund in Kenya [Karijn de Jong, who was with DFID-Ghana, had initiated the fund in Kenya]. We borrowed a lot from the structure of that fund.

Elvis: You said one of the key things was to strengthen accountability in the policy process. One would ask why you didn't think of strengthening institutions like CHRAJ and other constitutional bodies that are supposed to keep the government on its toes?

David: At this stage, we thought the missing link was the think tanks themselves. Surely, it is government that has the responsibility for CHRAJ and it is parliament for keeping up the power of the state and making sure they are sufficiently resourced. With general budget support we are hoping that government focuses its budgetary efforts on these constitutional bodies. Government has no responsibility whatsoever - and rightly so - to support think tanks. But, we see a better linkage between these think tanks and the three arms of government, the judiciary, legislature and executive.

Elvis: Let's move on to the objectives you had at the conceptualization stage. What were the key objectives you had for G-RAP as a programme and are they reflected in the current objectives?

David: I think the original general objectives still stand. The objective was surely to create more evidence based research that will feed much better into public policy making. The intermediate objective was to create more financial independence for these organisations that are eligible for funding from G-RAP. The support was to enable the RAOs set up strategies that would improve their functioning and find their competitive advantage within the arena of Ghanaian NGOs, CSOs, etc.

Elvis: Who would you say were the key personalities in the planning process?

David: It was an idea that sprung up between DFID and me in the first six months of budget support at that time. The person from DFID had just come from Kenya and had the idea of pooled funding

for human rights issues in Kenya. We brainstormed and wrote a paper which we shared with some of our colleagues and RAOs. The idea turned out to be very much welcomed by everybody, we felt as if we had found a niche in the market. The timing was right, it was two years after the new government had taken office, we had decided to go for budget support and the GPRS had also been published in January 2003. We gave the paper to a group of directors and eminent people in the RAO community to review. They developed the ideas further and changed it to reflect Ghana's situation.

Elvis: Can you name some of these personalities?

David: Dr Yao Graham of Third World Network, Dr. Emmanuel Akwetey of the Institute for Democratic Governance, Mrs. Bernice Sam of Women In Law and Development Africa, Dr. Joe Abbey of the Centre for Policy Analysis, Prof Gyimah-Boadi and Dr. Bafour Agyeman Duah of the Centre for Democratic Development, were all involved in looking at the paper and trying to fine-tune it. From there we went on to consult people who had been involved in setting up the pooled funding for the human rights project in Kenya to write an outline for G-RAP. A year later, we went to tendering using their guidelines. They've come back and forth and talked to RAOs and we had two or three retreats where we discussed the structure of G-RAP before it was actually published for tender.

Elvis: Why did you decide to call this project the Ghana Research and Advocacy Programme, you could have been named it something like the Ghana Civil Society Strengthening programme?

David: We didn't want to focus on the vague and confusing term, civil society. We didn't want to solve all of Ghana's civil society problems. We saw that with all the problems there are, we could actually add some extra value to civil society if we could support the think tanks. We wanted to support evidence based research and which could be fed into advocacy to influence public policy making. That is why we decided this needed to be focused on just a small sector of what you may want to call civil society. It focuses on research and advocacy groups. We didn't design it to solely cater for organisations engaged in research and advocacy but it turned out many of the groups here focus on both. We wanted to overall strengthen the link between research and advocacy and between research and policy making.

Elvis: Did the government of Ghana play any key role in developing G-RAP?

David: Not really, the current deputy minister of finance, Dr. Akoto Osei who used to be working with CEPA played a role in the development of G-RAP. I personally solicited his opinion on the programme, but it was personal intervention. Individual members of government like the minister played a role but there was no formal position by government and we didn't want them to be involved anyway. As it is, there is no formal link between these organisations and government. There are no financing issues as we do not channel our funding through government. What is important to mention here is that government has been supportive of the idea. In terms of hinting on how best we could set it up, in terms of understanding that this is important. I must add that the majority in parliament played a good and constructive role in setting up G-RAP. The MPs saw the need for having access to better information from evidence based research. The majority leader participated anytime the chairman of the finance and public accounts committee [This position is always held by a minority member of Ghana's parliament] came to our meetings.

Elvis: *Still on the conceptualisation, how did you perceive the program will be funded? Let's look at it in terms of the immediate funding and the medium to long-term financing.*

David: We have always perceived that the programme will be hundred percent donor funded for core activities. But we hope that through the programme, beneficiary RAOs will be able to attract funding from elsewhere. The mechanism itself will remain donor funded.

Elvis: *Is it true that in the initial thinking, the architects had in mind to support only six organisations and now it's almost twenty.*

David: We never had in mind six organisations; we did not have any organisations in mind at all. We noticed that core funding would only be possible if we picked organisations with a certain track record and we did do an inventory of which organisations will be eligible straight away. It was more than six I believe. In order to reach the objectives of the programme, of research and advocacy better linked together and to policy, we needed to have a wider group of organisations who will benefit from G-RAP. That is why the consultants and the other RAOs came up with the other window for capacity building, the idea of nurturing fledging organisations to become central think tanks in Ghana. G-RAP is focused on creating networks among the organisations themselves and with other CSOs not funded by G-RAP.

Elvis: *How would you describe the start up of G-RAP?*

David: It was a difficult start because of the innovative mechanism of the programme; it was quite difficult to bring the PMT into a legal forum in Ghana. The PMT is not a RAO but a team. I think the programme itself in terms of the call for proposals and the applications that came in went very well. We had issues with the pooled funding. We had set up a mechanism for ourselves as development partners but we were not able to harmonise our financing mechanism to such an extent that we could ensure a smooth flow of funds. That gave a lot of problems in the start up phase.

Elvis: *On the management of G-RAP itself, in the thinking phase did you have in mind to have a program management team as we have it now? Was it planned to have it run by a consortium, such as LTS International and Ernst & Young?*

David: Yes, that was the innovative mechanism. We assumed there won't be a consultant that can do this kind of work alone.

Elvis: *You had some expectation of the consortium that should win the bid, how has this consortium lived up to expectations?*

David: I think we are still quite close to the memorandum of understanding and the joint programme framework that we agreed on. I do think there is a risk of bureaucratizing the PMT too much. I do think the PMT needs to continue working with a small team of three to four people. The PMT must ensure that their position in the programme is not too overwhelming; it needs to play a facilitating role. I do think it is not only the PMT which has the risk of deviating from the joint program framework; the funders committee itself is at risk. The funders committee may need to improve on its communication with the RAOs and not leave that role to the PMT.

Elvis: *In the management of G-RAP we see a commercial entity running G-RAP. Was it conceived at the beginning that this should be the case? Ernst and Young and LTS are commercial entities and they are running a programme which is non-commercial, how did this mix come about?*

David: I see LTS as a consultancy firm that has the expertise to run this programme. The programme itself or the RAOs can never become commercial entities. There can however be a commercial element in their work. The arrangement we have is supposed to build the capacity of RAOs to look for other sources of funding based on their services and products. It will ensure sustainability of

RAOs, when diversifying funding sources instead of only depending on donor funding or public funding.

Elvis: We have three key funding portfolios, the core funding, technical assistance and institutional capacity building. Is the PMT defining these portfolios in the same way as was thought of by the initial designers of G-RAP?

Core funds are funding attached to the long-term strategies of the organisations. The capacity building funding is to ensure organisations are going to be able to undertake strategic actions in the future, run their organisations on the bases of a work plan and stuff like that, so that they become eligible for core funding. And these grants can also further strengthen organisations already eligible for core funding. The capacity building fund was meant for organisations that are fledging and promising enough to become eligible organizations for core funding.

Hans: Now we see organizations that we took through the ICB process, that are working with much smaller funds. We could come to a situation where you have core funds of say a hundred thousand to seventy thousand per year which is considerably lower than the budget for a typical think tank, what will be the consequences for core funding such smaller organisations?

David: It doesn't depend on the quantitative size of its budget but what proportion of the budget is meant for core funding. So if an organisation's total budget is hundred and twenty thousand and sixty thousand is for core funding, then you already have a certain guarantee for sustainability for the next three years. It may not be necessary for an organisation to grow; smaller organisations can be quite meaningful, even with a small budget. It's about the proportion of core funding to the overall budget. I think that that is the issue. There is no point in giving core funding to an organisation when it's only 10% of the budget.

Technical assistance is needed to improve organisations not only on financial management issues but also on monitoring and evaluation, how to improve the skills of their people to make them good advocates or researchers. The TA is important as a tool box to specifically cater for the needs of organisations. An organisation in the course of running its strategy comes up with a problem and the TA can help in addressing that problem. So, it's a much more flexible type of assistance.

Elvis: You might have noticed that in the actual running of the grant we have added something to it that we call the project grant. Basically this is along the lines of the TA, which is given to

organisations that are promising but could not access core funding from us. How do you feel about that?

David: I think that is not a good idea. These organisations are still capable of going to individual development partners if they want to and I think donors will have to be quite clear in asking if organisations are already getting core funding from G-RAP. Donors can still support specific projects. For G-RAP to also become a project grant administrator means there may be too much on its plate.

Hans: We use the project grant as a stepping stone since some RAOs are not eligible for three year core funding. It is to give the organisations the opportunity to have its systems in place as well as all the pre-conditions so they will eventually go into core funding after a year or two. It's not really a project grant but something like a one year core grant.

David: Here comes the question of how many organisations does G-RAP want to make eligible for core funding? You must keep the programme manageable. You do not want to carry on the programme all the problems of Ghana. You want to have a certain arena in which organisations that have already proven their usefulness in Ghana's policy making can be helped. There is no point in having an infinite number of CSOs coming in, or in transforming all sorts of CSOs into huge ones. Growth of these organisations should not be an objective, quality should be the objective.

Elvis: *How close do think we are to the original idea of G-RAP?*

David: The structure is still there, but do we make sufficient use of it? Is the funders committee discussing the issues we expect? I think the funders committee is focusing too much on administrative issues, it focuses on the PMT. I think it should go beyond that and look at what the RAOs are actually doing. We don't have meaningful communications between the funders committee and the RAOs. There is more dialogue between the PMT and the funders committee. It is the same with the advisory board. Are they producing advice in strategic moments? I think they are all functioning but not as we expected. The joint framework and MOU gives the structure but not the expected output. The joint framework has been written on certain assumptions. The level of performance may also be due to the availability and time of people involved in G-RAP. The people involved in G-RAP are also involved in all sorts of things in Ghana as well and cannot dedicate their time to just G-RAP. I think the mechanism functions but the output could be better.

Elvis: *Have the RAOs worked with the programme to your expectations?*

David: They showed interest in the funding much to our expectation but not as massive as we thought. We were afraid there will be an avalanche of proposals. What happened was a good classification of what RAOs there are and the one issue kind of organisations. What the programme hasn't showed is the cohesion between RAOs themselves and CSOs. We do see that there is a core group among the RAOs that is very dedicated to G-RAP. They really want to work to make the mechanism productive. But I also see the factors outside G-RAP that could harm its effectiveness. One of the factors is that human resources of the organisations are limited and some of the people that are working with RAOs are too close to government. The problem may be the critical mass is not there. But I see that G-RAP will be able to let these organisations grow to include new people, to add to the capacity of the organisations so that it may become a critical mass or at least generate a critical mass to be a counter to failing power.

Elvis: *The PMT in its facilitating role wants the programme to be demand driven. We perceived that the RAOs will make certain requests of the programme to give capacity to a certain class of people within their organisations, but we hardly see this kind of demand coming from the RAO community. In your position as a key member of G-RAP at its planning stage, did you perceive that RAOs at some point will make demands of the program such as M&E training?*

David: We thought there was a demand for support in financial management but for M&E we didn't. The data environment in Ghana is extremely weak and G-RAP cannot change that. The government needs to invest more in data management for monitoring and evaluation.

Elvis: *What are your long-term expectations of G-RAP?*

David: I hope that G-RAP will last about ten to twelve years from now (2006).

Elvis: *What do we do after the first three year programme ends?*

David: You need to renew the contract. I think you should use the evaluations to see if there is any need to make changes to the core funding. You need a longer term support of these issues that you have mentioned, i.e. the data issue, the old boys network (lack of critical mass), there is the need for

an entire new generation, new staff to be recruited by these RAOs to see the effect of the core funding and capacity building grants. After ten years, I hope at the exit of G-RAP RAOs will be strong enough to continue writing their own strategies and to be able to generate third party funding.

Hans: Do you see the RAOs as offering an attraction to young academics from universities in Ghana?

David: The RAOs need to be attractive to young students. It will be interesting if students will fight for research places for one year traineeship with Ghanaian RAOs. The great foxes in RAOs are all capable of transferring what they know to young academics that have a broader experience than they did in their own younger days. I hope that much more of the Diaspora comes in to work for the RAOs.

Hans: Will it be a natural process that students find their way to RAOs or will RAOs have to facilitate the process to invite young scholars.

David: RAOs need to be attractive enough for young people to want to work with them and that's what core funding does. Core funding ensures that RAOs are working on interesting fields. G-RAP doesn't need to give new grants for that, but ensure that whatever funding RAOs are receiving will strengthen them enough to make them attractive.

Hans: What we see now are university departments seeking to become G-RAP grantees. Would the funders committee stimulate that? Would the selection committee choose university departments that want to engage in a process of emancipation?

David: I don't think so. We have chosen institutions within universities but not departments and faculties. I think we should apply to centres within the universities the same criteria we applied to ISSER. If they are fully funded by government, I don't think G-RAP should fund them. But if they are semi-autonomous (like we have in Holland), then we should consider them as think tanks. Then it is interesting to see if students from those faculties want to work in those institutions. The purpose of having students linked to G-RAP is to create a new generation of researchers. To do research you need to have evidence. To make research meaningful you need to have the capacity to advocate and bring the issues into the policy arena, either yourself or through engagement in a network of CSOs.