

Why is public – private cooperation an enabler in international capacity building projects?

As outlined in Misha Belkindas' abstract, the advent of Sustainable Development Goals and the incidence of Covid have presented significant statistical challenges for many developing countries and increased their demand for technical assistance and related funding. At the same time, those developed NSIs that have customarily provided technical assistance from their own resources are facing greater demands on internal resources through the combination of new national requirements to measure and report on Covid and the need to exploit administrative data and other sources through technical innovation. Moreover, some NSIs are now facing budget reductions in light of the state of their economy. In these conditions, technical assistance needs to be delivered in the most cost-effective ways to meet the world-wide demands. Public-private partnerships can help achieve that goal. By this we mean donors making all tenders open to both public and private sector organisations, and public sector organisations (NSIs) electing to work in combination with private sector organisations. Eurostat and the World Bank already tender most of their technical assistance projects through this open approach and my company has worked successfully on several projects with different NSIs. We can call this format “twinning plus” as it comprises the best from existing “twinning” schemes plus the benefits of drawing on private sector capabilities.

Benefits from the “twinning plus” approach include:

- blending the best competencies from each of the partners on both administrative and technical activities and providing the client with the widest choice of experts. Typically private sector organisations will be strong in project and financial management whereas NSIs may bring the latest technical expertise;
- providing the flexibility to regulate fixed NSI staff input and to cover contingencies in staff availability;
- enhanced financial flexibility from the private sector organisation to pre-finance leading activities;
- enabling the NSI or NSIs to mobilize innovative solutions;
- potentially enabling South – South cooperation between NSIs of the same region by covering project management tasks;
- greater efficiency in time and resources as it allows the private sector organisation to deploy inputs at different cost levels to meet the requirements.

There are a number of preconditions to the successful “twinning plus” approach:

- it is more suitable for projects of larger volumes to enable the formation of a joint venture group between private sector companies but can also be applied in smaller targeted cooperation projects;
- all partners are expected to play an active part in the project;
- the private sector organisation is expected to bring to the project both up-to-date methodological expertise and the latest business techniques such as change management.

The public – private cooperation in international capacity building projects between NSIs and those private sector companies that are providing services to the official statistics sector can be a solution to the current needs for technical assistance on the demand side of the official statistics community.