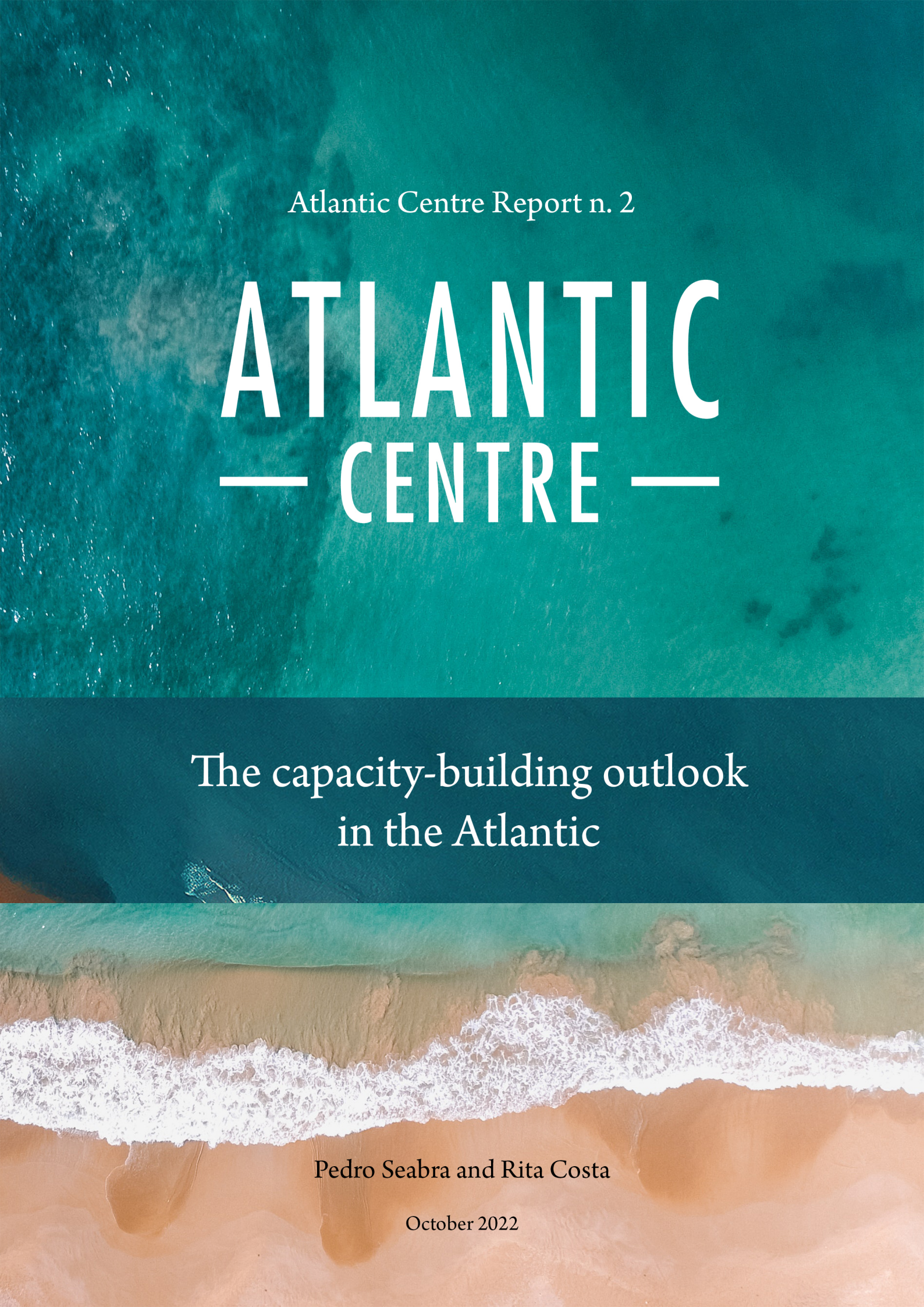

Atlantic Centre Report n. 2

ATLANTIC CENTRE

The capacity-building outlook in the Atlantic

Pedro Seabra and Rita Costa

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List of acronyms

AC – Atlantic Centre

CRP – Cocaine Route Programme

ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States

EEZ – Economic Exclusive Zone

ENC-VR – *École Nationale de Cybersécurité à Vocation Régionale*

ENVR – *École Navale à Vocation Régionale*

EU – European Union

GGC – Gulf of Guinea Commission

GCCP – Global Container Control Programme

GIFP – Global Illicit Flows Programme

GMCP – Global Maritime Crime Programme

GOGIN – Gulf of Guinea Inter-regional Network

ICC – Inter-regional Coordination Centre

ISMI – *Institut de Sécurité Maritime Inter-régional*

ISR – Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance

IUU – Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing

KAIPTC – Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre

MDA – Maritime Domain Awareness

MMCC – Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres

SEACOP – Seaport Cooperation Project

SSR – Security Sector Reform

UN – United Nations

UNODC – United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

VBSS – Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure

YARIS – Yaoundé Architecture Regional Integration System

WPS – Women Peace and Security

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1. Introduction

Capacity-building has become a *bona fide* buzzword in policy circles. Imbued with the promise of incorporating local demands while fostering international engagement through limited but valuable technical expertise to regions and countries in need, the concept has been quickly elevated to the forefront of debate. This, in turn, has contributed to shift "the emphasis towards more fluid approaches to solve societal problems, relying on technology, knowledge and expertise rather than clearly stated objectives, one-size-fits-all solutions, and top-down approaches" (Bueger & Tholens 2021, p. 22). At the same time, it has led to an increase in the number of organisations and platforms seeking to implement what is often enough a loosely-defined playbook.

In this context, new multilateral initiatives have purported to assume a role of their own in the capacity-building domain[1]. However, how to better translate such goals into practice remains open for discussion. This report seeks to build upon a set of key lessons learned from previous endeavours in order to best depict and summarize the challenges that the current Atlantic outlook provides in the capacity-building domain. The ensuing work is grounded by two key goals: (1) to link existing debates over the perils and potentials of the capacity-building concept with practical needs, while retaining a focus on the Atlantic space; (2) and to ensure that valid entry-points are identified for further action by interested parties, while grounded in existing assessments over the effectiveness of capacity-building programs.

By design, an exercise of this nature needs to resort to a combination of varied sources. That includes an extensive literature review of the main contributions in the field but also of multiple open sources, including action plans and mid-term reviews of previous capacity-building initiatives that have been previously made available to the public in general. In addition, a short questionnaire was designed and sent out to officials in major capacity-building providers in the Atlantic, with the purpose of obtaining first-hand insights into contemporary activities. Replies from Portugal, France, Denmark and Spain helped to inform the content of this report.

[1] The Atlantic Centre stands out as the latest example in this regard.
See, for example, Roadmap for the Atlantic Centre 2022-2024, 20 January 2022. Available at: https://www.defesa.gov.pt/pt/pdefesa/ac/doc/Paginas/default.aspx

A measure of thematic delimitation was also warranted. The analytical focus was *a priori* set on maritime capacity-building, in accordance with current priorities found in the context of Atlantic maritime governance. Maritime capacity-building has become an important field in recent years, following the rise of piracy and armed robbery at sea worldwide. But the topic remains, for all intended purposes, an emerging research area, which only reinforced the need to draw upon parallel research on Security Sector Reform (SSR) and development studies. On the other hand, other hotspots (e.g., the Western Indian Ocean region) have warranted far more insights on these matters in recent years. In order to provide a more complete assessment of overall best practices in maritime capacity-building, we therefore sought out key non-Atlantic takeaways that could potentially match corresponding Atlantic dynamics.

The remaining of the report is structured as follows. We begin by framing the context of the Atlantic region and its own dynamics, with a specific focus on what has been carried out throughout African shores, by depicting the current maritime security outlook and existing initiatives led by key actors, all aimed at providing capacity in some form. Afterwards, we provide a systematized overview of previous assessments that have identified key shortcomings and lessons learned when pursuing capacity-building in practice. We conclude by summarizing a listing of findings that could be considered by any new initiative that seeks to provide a sizeable contribution of its own in this domain.

2.Framing the Atlantic

2.1 The maritime security outlook

The Atlantic context is marked by multiple competing interests and perils that often intersect in exponentiating the regional security context. The increasing overlap of issue areas, from law enforcement, to economic development, and environmental protection, has been accompanied by sustained concern with more traditional security threats, from pollution and illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, to smuggling of narcotics and illicit weapons, human trafficking, illegal migration, or piracy and armed robbery at sea, all taking their toll on Atlantic shores. The geographic focus of these dynamics has also come to find an expressive focal point in West Africa and the Gulf of Guinea, as the key hotspots that best evidence the need to build up and support local and regional capacity.

Framing this type of needs can be achieved through varied ways, from more heuristic tools to more systematized approaches. For the purposes of this report, however, a particularly useful tool can be found in the **Stable Seas Maritime Security Index**[2]. The Index draws data from multiple sources to measure nine interrelated maritime security issue areas – International Cooperation, Rule of Law, Maritime Enforcement, Coastal Welfare, Blue Economy, Fisheries, Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea, Illicit Trades, and Maritime Mixed Migration – and considers threats that States face as well as their capacities to address them[3]. The overall score equals the average of all issue area scores, ranging from 0 to 100, with 0 indicating the worse conditions that each country faces and 100 the best possible conditions. The most recent version of the Index (2020) covers 71 countries and territories in Africa, the Middle East and the Indo-Pacific. Even though it does not encompass all Atlantic states, it assesses all 23 countries alongside African Atlantic shores.

As evident in table 1, the best positioned African Atlantic countries are **Namibia (73), Cabo Verde (70), Senegal (67), South Africa (66), Mauritania (65) and Morocco (65)**. These countries rank high across all issue areas, with only five scoring below 50.

[2] Available at: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1YIXxv5o8rjn_fI3ebMeIcySGqD07_bIB7d80VSlwcDo/edit#gid=0
[3] See Bell & Glaser (2020) for the Index's full methodology.

Table 1 *– Stable Seas Maritime Security Index score for Atlantic African countries (2020)*

Country	Overall Index Score
Namibia	73
Cape Verde	70
Senegal	67
South Africa	66
Mauritania	65
Morocco	65
The Gambia	63
Angola	59
São Tomé and Príncipe	59
Ghana	58
Republic of the Congo	57
Gabon	56
Guinea-Bissau	55
Sierra Leone	55
Côte d'Ivoire	54
Guinea	54
Benin	50
Liberia	50
Equatorial Guinea	48
Togo	47
Nigeria	46
Cameroon	43
Democratic Republic of the Congo	43

Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on the Stable Seas Index 2020

The group of states with the highest marks has one major trait in common: none displays low scores in terms of Piracy and Armed Robbery at sea. In fact, three out of the four worst positioned countries overall – Equatorial Guinea (50), Togo (47), Nigeria (46), and Cameroon (43) – tend to also be the ones more affected by piracy and armed robbery, as seen in table 2. The only exception is the Democratic Republic of Congo, which scores relatively high on the piracy issue area (75), but scores below the 50-threshold in seven out of the remaining nine issue areas. Regardless, states in the Gulf of Guinea, including **Gabon, São Tomé and Príncipe, Togo, Ghana, Benin, Equatorial Guinea, Cameroon and Nigeria, unsurprisingly score the lowest when it comes to Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea, in reflection of the high number of incidents in the region**. The latter three, in particular, stand out as the most affected states, scoring below 10.

***Table 2** – Lowest scores of African Atlantic countries per Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea issue area*

Country	Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea Score
Gabon	32
São Tomé and Príncipe	24
Togo	23
Ghana	16
Benin	14
Equatorial Guinea	8
Cameroon	4
Nigeria	0

Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on the Stable Seas Index 2020

Maritime Enforcement is here understood "as each country's capacity to effectively patrol its territorial waters and EEZ for the purposes of investigating illicit activity and enforcing maritime law", while focusing on the "difficulty of managing a state's specific maritime space, its capacity to perform constabulary duties in that space, and the development and regional integration of its maritime domain awareness systems" (Bell & Glaser, 2020, p. 8). As seen in table 3, only five countries score above 50. Four of these are in the Gulf of Guinea as well: Nigeria, Cameroon, Ghana, and Equatorial

Guinea. Nigeria, in particular, proves an interesting case, given the mismatch between its scores on Piracy and Armed Robbery at Sea (0) on one hand, and on Maritime Enforcement (75) on the other. Although this could be potentially explained by measurement options of how to best interpret the difficulty of governing a given Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ), a closer analysis shows that is not the case. All the above-mentioned countries score above the 50-threshold for the sub-component 'Naval Capacity Assessment' of this issue area. This seems to suggest that **even though capacity-building efforts in the region have been paying off in terms of helping to increase local operational means in recent years, in most cases, it is still not enough to comprise an effective response against the threat of piracy at sea**.

***Table 3** - Highest scores of African Atlantic countries per Maritime Enforcement issue area*

Country	Maritime Enforcement Score
Nigeria	75
Morocco	62
Cameroon	60
Ghana	57
South Africa	52

Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on the Stable Seas Index 2020

The Blue Economy area, on the other hand, also stands out as particularly lagging, with only seven countries scoring 50 or above: Morocco, Cabo Verde, Angola, Nigeria, South Africa, Namibia, and Gabon. As observed in table 4, even the highest score, attributed to Morocco (61), indicates that **the exploitation of the economic potential of maritime resources can still be greatly optimised, which, in turn, could lead to an improved overall performance across the board** due to functional interconnections with most issue areas. This interdependency also means that other underperforming scores in domains such as Coastal Welfare and Fisheries could entail additional underlined maritime security concerns as the physical and/or economic insecurity of coastal populations easily correlate with unchecked illicit activities.

***Table 4** - Highest scores of African Atlantic countries per Blue Economy issue area*

Country	Blue Economy Score
Morocco	61
Cape Verde	59
Angola	55
Namibia	51
Nigeria	51
South Africa	51

Source: Elaborated by the authors, based on the Stable Seas Index 2020

A common element permeates this brief attempt at portraying parts of the Atlantic, namely that despite occasional positive cases, it is still far more likely to register significant local needs across multiple sub-domains of maritime security than the other way around.

This, in turn, begs the question of what is being currently provided by the international community at large to try and fill those same needs.

2.2 A capacity-building snapshot

Considering the maritime security context depicted in the previous section, **multiple actors have unsurprisingly ramped up their capacity-building efforts in recent years, either by investing on stand-alone initiatives or by contributing to existing multilateral programs.**

Based on open sources and on the abovementioned short questionnaire sent out to capacity-building providers in the Atlantic, it is possible to affirm that the bulk of this support has come to evidence preferential axes of engagement. That includes **fostering closer collaboration with key multilateral actors** such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the Gulf of Guinea Commission (GGC), but particularly with the Inter-regional Coordination Centre (ICC) and national agencies. This also entails zeroing on **ensuring proper regional coordination with**

regard to legal aspects of operational response at sea, while strengthening the legal basis for the existing Multinational Maritime Coordination Centres (MMCC) under the overarching framework of the ICC and the Yaoundé architecture. But more recurrently, it entails **manifesting material tokens of presence in the region**.

Spain, for one, deploys a ship in the Gulf of Guinea for four months per semester, with the purpose of strengthening the capacities of coastal states. The same procedure tends to apply to other countries. Italy, for example, deployed frigates ITS *Luigi Rizzo* and *Antonio Marceglia* under Operation *Gabinia*, as part of international efforts to enhance maritime security and provide training in night-time patrolling and surveillance operations. The UK, on the other hand, deployed the HMS Trent throughout 2021, while paying port visits to Cape Verde, Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal and The Gambia to foster ties and train local forces, and equipping them in the fight against illegal activities, by means of a team of Royal Marines. The UK also has a longstanding defence cooperation engagement with Ghana, which includes capacity-building through the Ghana Armed Forces Staff College on EEZ management, and training of Ghanaian Navy officers in the UK. Similarly, the country has supported capacity-building activities in Sierra Leone and in The Gambia.

In 2021, Brazilian frigate *Independência* was sent to Cameroon, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Nigeria and São Tomé and Príncipe under Operation Guinex-1, for similar purposes. Indeed, Brazil has been developing its defence cooperation with GoG states over the past decade, namely with Portuguese-speaking Cape Verde and São Tomé and Príncipe, and it has signed defence cooperation agreements with both states, leading to the establishment of local naval mission centres that have focused on capacitating local navy and coast guards through training courses and the donation of equipment.

The US, for its part, has assigned considerable centrality to the Africa Partnership Station (APS), which was launched in 2007, with the deployment to the GoG of USS Swift and USS Fort McHenry, and which has been a key component of maritime capacity-building in the region. This program comprises the chief framework through which most US ships are deployed to the region. In 2021, expeditionary Sea Base USS Hershel "Woody" Williams, the first warship permanently assigned to the U.S. Africa Command area of responsibility, led combined exercises of maritime interdiction

operations, Visit, Board, Search, and Seizure (VBSS) scenarios, fleet manoeuvring, and helicopter insertion and casualty evacuations. All these different military capabilities were equally deployed with the purpose of leading and/or participating in major multilateral exercises, from Obangame Express to Grand African NEMO, together with local navies and coast guards. The US also has an additional program dedicated to maritime security – the Africa Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership (AMLEP). This five-phased program aims to capacitate law enforcement capabilities of African partners. The first phase of the program closed in June 2018 with the execution of Operation Junction Rain, which brought together the US, Cape Verde, and Senegal.

Meanwhile, France has favoured a multi-pronged strategy that goes beyond its longstanding Operation *Corymbe*, in support of several key regional institutions. For example, since 2015-onwards, France has provided €1.6 million in financial, logistical and pedagogical support to the *Institut de Sécurité Maritime Inter-régional* (ISMI), which offers specialised training and capacity-building to states in the Gulf of Guinea. A further €2.7 million has been provided since 2010 to *École Navale à Vocation Régionale* (ENVR) in Tica, Equatorial Guinea, which trains officers and naval officers from the Gulf of Guinea states in navigation, mechanics, and manoeuvring. The *Académie Internationale de Lutte contre le Terrorisme*, in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire has also received an overall investment of €1 million, while the *École Nationale de Cybersécurité à Vocation Régionale* (ENC-VR), in Dakar, Senegal, has begun offering short internships dedicated to cybersecurity since 2018 onwards, at a cost of €1.1 million.

Some actors like Portugal, have equally built upon their defence cooperation programs with countries on the Atlantic shore, namely Angola, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau and São Tomé and Príncipe. This support was budgeted under a total of €1.4 million in 2021 alone, and ranges from training opportunities in Portuguese military institutions, support for local military training facilities and the development of the capabilities of each respective branch of local Armed Forces, including brewing naval, marines and coast guard capacities. It is also noteworthy the deployment of the NRP *Zaire* since 2018-onwards in joint inspection and maritime operational training missions with the São Tomean Coast Guard, operated by a mixed garrison of Portuguese and São Tomean personnel.

Other countries have come to develop specific strategies with a focus on sub-regional dynamics. Denmark, for instance, has devised a tailored-designed Gulf of Guinea Maritime Security Programme. The first version (2018-2021) focused on such activities as Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) and operational response (€2 million); the placing of maritime law enforcement advisors within national maritime law enforcement agencies in Ghana and Nigeria (€1.7 million); support for the Global Maritime Crime Programme (GMCP) of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (€800.000); and development of a mechanism to identify and promote national and regional response to maritime crime through the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) (€1 million). Additional funding was also earmarked in 2021-2022 for support in establishing permanent VBSS Training Centres in Ghana and Nigeria, with a bilingual (French and English) approach (€10 million).

More recently, Danish officials pushed for a significant budgetary increase for the 2022-2026 program. That includes supporting MDA, sustainable force generation and operational response activities with Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Togo (€10-20 million); maritime law enforcement and prosecution in Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Nigeria, and Togo, including Women Peace and Security (WPS) training, through UNODC (€20-30 million); the development of existing capacities and addressing identified gaps through hands-on mentorship, analytical support and operational activities, by means of INTERPOL (€20-30 million); and the promotion of regional research and policy formulation capacity to enhance institutional and practitioner skillsets to respond to maritime challenges, through KAIPTC (€10-15 million).

This brief snapshot, while invariably incomplete, points to a number of key traits that seemingly characterise the current Atlantic context in terms of active providers: the (1) **presence of multiple initiatives led by a varied assortment of actors**; the (2) **considerable reliance on military means** as privileged venues for operational capacity-building provision; the (3) **shared emphasis on short-term yet renewable missions/activities**; the (4) **occasional partnering with international agencies** in order to offset costs and expertise; and the (5) **discursive support for regional structures that might capitalize on existing efforts** and therefore abate common security needs.

3. Lessons learned from previous capacity-building initiatives

This section unpacks the experience of previous maritime capacity-building activities in order to draw key lessons that could be potentially replicated under new formats in equally pressing hotspots. Three main issues come across as transversal in this exercise. First, the **emphasis on ownership** and on the need to create projects specifically tailored to local contexts while ensuring continuing engagement with local stakeholders. Second, **the need for projects to be adaptable and flexible** so that they can maintain their respective relevance in light of changing circumstances. Third, **the importance of cooperation and coordination among external and local actors** so as to prevent instances of duplication and overlap. We explore the connections between these different elements by first providing a brief overview and subsequently focusing on the traditional stages of a standard project cycle (initial assessment, project design, project implementation, monitoring and evaluation).

3.1 Overview

When considering maritime security, it is essential to highlight the main feature that sets it apart from land-based security, namely its inherent transnationality. Unlike (mostly) well defined land borders, the maritime space is open and vast. As a consequence, maritime issues often take place across territorial waters of states and/or on the high seas, over which no state is sovereign (Bueger et al., 2021). Additionally, maritime threats can include a large range of issues, such as piracy and armed robbery at sea, illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, trafficking, and pollution. Most of these issues – often interacting with each other – have their roots in land-based development issues, such as poverty, inequality, and societal grievances, bringing into focus the security-development nexus. These characteristics make maritime capacity-building an extremely complex endeavour, involving numerous stakeholders and actors from across diverse issue areas. This also means that capacity-building actors are often faced with difficult choices in terms of priorities, allocation of resources, and coordination (Bueger et al., 2021, p. 8).

In that sense, due to different national contexts and interests, the prioritisation of maritime security issues will understandably differ across states – for instance, while international actors tend to

prioritise issues that affect commercial interests, such as piracy, local actors will emphasise the development of a sustainable blue economy (Bueger et al., 2021, p. 8; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, 2013, p. 25; Bueger 2014, pp. 9-10). Moreover, oftentimes in states without a strong maritime past, the visibility and awareness of the maritime sector remains limited. This, in turn, translates into some degree of 'sea-blindness', in the form of diminished political attention and allocation of resources to the maritime domain (Bueger et al., 2021, pp. 8-9; Safeseas, 2018, p. 6; Ukeje & Mvomo Ela, 2013, p. 23).

As such, it is essential to recognise that, first and foremost, **capacity-building is *per se* a political process** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 9; Sandoz, 2012, p. 2; Bueger et al., 2021, p. 13; Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011, p. 18; Denney & Valters, 2015, pp. 35-36), as the decision of capacity providers is, in itself, motivated by the prioritisation of the issues that they mean to tackle in the first place (Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011, p. 18). Likewise, capacity-building projects invariably imply some degree of change among local power dynamics, with a corresponding political dimension (Denney & Valters, 2015, pp. 35-36; Safeseas, 2018, p. 9). Hence, **these activities should not be understood as technical, one-size-fits-all endeavours, but as context-specific iterative processes, which require the engagement and support of local officials in every stage of each project** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 10; Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 236; Brinkerhoff, 2007, p. 26; Denney & Valters, 2015, pp. 36-38; Gerspacher et al., 2017, p. 12). Bearing in mind these general considerations, we now turn our focus to the different procedural phases.

3.2 Initial assessments

The first mandatory step in the design of viable capacity-building projects goes through amassing a sufficient grasp of the targeted needs. In other words, an in-depth knowledge of the local context is required to ensure effective resource allocation towards sustainable capacity-building projects (Safeseas, 2018, p. 23; Jacobsen, 2017, p. 4; Brinkerhoff, 2007; Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011, pp. 12, 27; Lucas, 2014, p. 5). This calls for a **comprehensive initial assessment of the field**. In order to do so, it is essential to look beyond formal governance mechanisms and also consider immaterial elements such as practices, power relations and political priorities (Bueger et al., 2021, p. 12; Safeseas, 2018, p. 9; Gerspacher et al., 2017, p. 9; Lucas, 2014, p. 5; Jacobsen, 2017, p. 4).

Ideally, in order to promote local ownership and sustainability, **the needs assessment should be prepared by the countries where the activities will take place or, alternatively, by local experts** (Edmunds et al., 2018; Bueger, 2014; Safeseas, 2018, p. 22). However, this also requires some degree of existing expertise, which is sometimes lacking (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 234; Ismail, 2019, p. 9). A way of fostering such kind of local capacity implies investing in research and education as "a longer-term form of capacity-building and device for ensuring ownership" (Bueger, 2014, p. 11). This could entail, for instance, the development and strengthening of local networks of think tanks and research centres[4].

However, when faced with situations in which local governments and institutions do not possess sufficient resources or expertise of their own to conduct the necessary needs assessments, **capacity-building actors should strive to involve all stakeholders and to develop a common understanding of issues and needs as well as their solutions** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 22; Gerspacher et al., 2017, pp. 5, 10; Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011, p. 46). For example, in order to ensure that assessments portray the local context as accurately as possible, local staff and individuals with extensive knowledge of the country (Brinkerhoff, 2007, p. 27; Lucas, 2014, p. 5), as well as experts such as historians and anthropologists (Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011, p. 26) could be potentially involved. In sum, capacity-building strategies need to respond to the priorities of both providers and partner countries. The absence of the latter from the onset of the capacity-building project cycle undermines their legitimacy and local ownership, which in turn, hinders the sustainability of the expected results after the end of the external support (Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011, p. 26; Gerspacher et al., 2017, p. 10).

Since issues and needs are everchanging, **assessments should also be dynamic and subject to recalibration** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 22). This requires considering ways in which capacity-building activities might influence the local context, namely power dynamics and existing social practices (Jacobsen, 2017; Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011; Gerspacher et al., 2017). Such a process inevitably requires trust-based relationships, which will ultimately be fundamental for the success of a project (Safeseas, 2018; Sandoz, 2012; Gerspacher et al., 2017). An adequate assessment can promote an

[4] See Hauck & Young (2015) for an analysis on how to effectively support the development of knowledge networks.

efficient allocation of resources by setting expectations, stipulating realistic goals and preventing inadequate project design[5].

3.3 Project design

Following an initial assessment, the priority should be set on achieving an appropriate design of a given project. Accordingly, we now turn to the importance of choosing the most adequate approaches for capacity-building delivery, by analysing the most recurrent options: training and education, and provision of equipment and/or infrastructure. Afterwards, we focus on the tension between adhering to the formal dispositions of a project and the comprehensiveness rhetoric of capacity-building actors.

3.3.1 Capacity-building approaches

In terms of project design, it is necessary to **consider the strengths and disadvantages of different modalities of capacity-building delivery** so as to select the ones more adequate to the context in question, with the resources made available (Safeseas, 2018, pp. 26-27). For instance, while training and education programmes tend to strengthen capacity in understanding, planning and executing maritime security efforts, their impact on local organisations as a whole is usually limited by a focus on a selected pool of officers that end up receiving the training (Safeseas, 2018, p. 26; HTSPE Limited, 2013, pp. 34-35). This impact is also generally time-limited as the trained staff in question will eventually leave their posts, thus compromising the long-term envisioned goal of the original efforts (HTSPE Limited, 2013, pp. 34-35; Safeseas, 2018, p. 26).

The question of how to transition from these 'islands of capacity' to a more comprehensive embedded form of institutional capacity remains one of the more discussed issues in policy circles (Brinkerhoff, 2007; Ismail, 2019). Possible solutions range between adopting a more holistic

[5] Two instances serve as testament of a poor initial assessment leading to the inadequacy of a project to local needs. First, in the case of the EU's civilian mission EUCAP-Nestor, the assessment was carried out during a fairly short period (i.e. one month) and was executed by external experts with insufficient local knowledge, which led to the need for changes shortly after its deployment (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 233). Another example concerns the case of Nigeria, whose navy rejected external proposals to set up an autonomous coast guard, with whom it would rival for resources and responsibilities. This case in particular highlights the need to properly assess power dynamics and local practices, so that the capacity-building initiatives does not worsen existing tensions (Jacobsen, 2017, p. 9).

perspective of capacity-building focused on improving the processes of the organisations and institutions as a whole (Gerspacher et al., 2017; Weijer & McCandless, 2015), or including **components meant to ensure sustainability, such as train-the-trainers programmes and long-term mentoring** (Safeseas, 2018; UNODC 2020). The European Commission already identified the potential behind such kind of programs as a crucial lesson learned in the framework of the Seaport Cooperation Project (SEACOP)[6]. The same applies to the **need to involve high-ranking officials in training activities and ensure that the tools and approaches are adequate to meet local expectations** (European Commission, n.d.b, p. 10). This type of assessments tie in directly to the prevailing acknowledgement that training approaches often bypass local conditions and practices (Denney & Valters, 2015, pp. 27-28; Gerspacher et al., 2017, pp. 11-12)[7].

Similar obstacles can be found when considering the **provision of equipment and infrastructure**. On one hand, it represents a more discernible token of capacity and tends to be widely appreciated by partner countries; on the other hand, it can also have a limited impact if the targeted organisations lack the resources needed for their proper use and maintenance (Safeseas, 2018, p. 27; Denney & Valters, 2015, pp. 29-30). Consequently, equipment and infrastructure need to **be recurrently complemented by adequate training for its use, maintenance and management** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 27; Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 232).

This reasoning is particularly relevant when considering the recent attention attributed to MDA projects. The prioritisation attributed to developing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) capacities mirrors the recognition that knowledge of incidents at sea is more complicated and requires further resources than land-based awareness alone (Bueger et al., 2020; Moss, 2020). The recent launch of the Yaoundé Architecture Regional Integration System (YARIS) in the Gulf of Guinea – co-developed by the EU's-backed Gulf of Guinea Inter-regional Network (GoGIN) and the Yaoundé Architecture maritime centres – proves an example in this regard. Particularly given how training on the use, IT administration of the platform, and tailored support for teams of the maritime

[6] "A dedicated training facility may bring more sustained results and is more cost-effective than short term funding of non-key experts where there is little continuity between trainers (ultimately looking to sustainable national training capabilities)" (European Commission, n.d.a, p. 10).

[7] This was found to have occurred in the early stages of SEACOP: "Training takes no account of the needs of beneficiary agencies and is driven entirely by the project" (HTSPE Limited, 2013, p. 35).

operational centres were also provided as part of the overall project (Gachie, 2021). However, the fact that YARIS has yet to transfer to local officials the maintenance of the servers sustaining the IT platform in question – despite ample training provided across the region – serves as a cautionary tale in terms of overblown expectations with year-long complex projects and multiple technical components in tow.

3.3.2 Project rationale vs comprehensiveness

A second major issue that emerges amid the project design phase concerns the limitations imposed by abiding too closely to the so-called 'project logic'. Indeed, "programmes are conceived and funded around specific goals and often rather rigid and time-limited criteria for judging success" (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 233). This rigidity raises problems as it encourages the focus on short-term objectives, measured by quantifiable indicators (e.g., the number of trained officers), to the detriment of wider institutional change that increases quality of performance (Denney & Valters, 2015; Gerspacher et al., 2017). Additionally, this hinders adaptation in the face of changing circumstances. **Projects should therefore be designed to be flexible and adaptable from early stages**, since the conditions on the field can change quickly, particularly in fragile or post-conflict settings, either due to shifts in the political, security or organisational context, or as a consequence of the capacity-building activities themselves (Safeseas, 2018, p. 24; Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011, p. 46; Gerspacher et al., 2017, p. 9).

One way to prevent excessive inflexibility entails leaning on operational level staff, who will have the closest relations with intervening stakeholders and a better understanding of the local context. In order to enhance the potential of these field-level outputs, **short-term contracts of implementation staff should be avoided** (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 233). Meanwhile, the headquarters of the organisation/state promoting the capacity-building activities ought to be "**open to proposals from the field, and allow for autonomy to local staff to de-conflict and define the content of projects**" (Safeseas, 2018, p. 24) – a lesson that has also been identified in previous SSR initiatives (Denney & Valters, 2015, p. 39; Eckhard, 2018, p. 70).

Failure to compensate for the rigidity of the dispositions put into place by project design often leads to hollow implementation rhetoric. This is particularly evident in the field of

maritime capacity-building, where key root causes, particularly in the development-related domain, are often neglected. This reflects a longstanding contrast between the comprehensiveness discourse adopted by capacity-building actors[8] – rooted in the understanding of a security-development nexus – and their implementation practices, in which comprehensiveness is limited to dealing with legal and judicial capacity matters (Jacobsen, 2017, pp. 7-8).

According to Jacobsen (2017, pp. 11-12), this disparity is based on three main explanations. First, tackling complex issues – such as poverty, unemployment, inequality, and societal grievances – requires a long period of time. In contrast, the bulk of existing project funding is provided on a short-term basis, leading to a narrow and specific framework planned for a few years at most. Second, the coordination between capacity-building actors leads to the impression that other initiatives are addressing other important key issues that do not fall into their mandate. Consequently, actors tend to have a false idea of comprehensiveness in the field that does not necessarily match reality. Finally, capacity-building alone cannot effectively address all the dimensions of maritime insecurity, namely issues such as poverty. These obstacles illustrate how the complexity of maritime insecurity and the need for a holistic and context-specific response that involves local actors, contrast with, on the one hand, the "narrow, specialist or organizationally specific demands of capacity building projects which neglect local circumstance" (Edmunds et al., 2018, pp. 232-233), and, on the other hand, the lack of coordination between external and internal actors.

3.4 Cooperation and coordination

The importance of cooperation and coordination is paramount to increase the effectiveness and added value of capacity-building projects. **Significant tensions, overlaps, duplication and, in some cases, competition between different actors working in the same region have been recorded in the past** (UNODC, 2020; HTSPE Limited, 2013; Bueger, 2014; Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011; Denney & Valters, 2015; Gerspacher et al., 2017). Understandably, these dynamics generate frustration among local stakeholders (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 232).

[8] See, for instance, in the case of the EU, the Council Conclusions on the Integrated Approach to External Conflict and Crises (2018), the European Union Global Strategy (2016), and the European Union Maritime Security Strategy (2014). In the case of the UN, the Report of the Secretary-General on Peacebuilding and sustaining peace (2020), and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015, p. 9).

For instance, overlaps were identified between the early stages of the EU's SEACOP and UNODC's Global Container Control Programme (GCCP) in West Africa (HTSPE Limited, 2013, p. 23). In this situation, due to staff shortages, officers received training from both programmes and were employed in teams of both projects (to search ships, in the case of SEACOP, and containers, in the case of GCCP). These projects were in fact initially seen as competitors by the UNODC staff and local national agencies (HTSPE Limited, 2013, p. 23).

Cooperation and coordination issues tend to become more pronounced in contexts where a considerable number of projects is already taking place (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 232). To prevent these situations**, projects should be preferentially designed in a way that aligns with other existing capacity-building projects in the region** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 25). Trust-based and transparent relationships with other actors and projects in the field should also be pursued, and information sharing encouraged (Safeseas, 2018, p. 10; Bueger, 2014, pp. 7-8). Additionally, informal **coordination mechanisms** may stand out as **useful venues to encourage the effective coordination between projects** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 10; Bueger, 2014; Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011, pp. 34-35).

However, **coordination and cooperation can also be hampered by lack of an internal streamlined process within providers themselves.** For instance, between different agencies, levels (political, strategic operational and tactical) (Bueger, 2014, p. 8), and even between existing projects led by the same actor (HTSPE Limited, 2013, pp. 48-50).

This issue has been previously identified in assessments of projects led by both the EU and the UNODC.[9] In the former case, overlaps were identified within different projects executed in the context of the Cocaine Route Programme (CRP), which in 2019, became the broader Global Illicit Flows Programme (GIFP) (European Commission, 2016, p. 124). Such projects were found to be squarely focused on delivering separate intended results, to the detriment of the wider objectives of the CRP (HTSPE Limited, 2013, p. 48-50). Moreover, in the context of SEACOP, it became clear the

[9] For a detailed analysis of EU capacity-building projects see the Atlantic Centre Report n.1 'Mapping EU Maritime Capacity Building in the Atlantic' (2021), available at: https://www.defesa.gov.pt/pt/pdefesa/ac/pub/Documents/Atlantic-Centre_Report_01.pdf

need to "ensure closer cooperation with and potentially implementation by EU Justice & Home Affairs agencies that have a direct interest in expanding direct cooperation with counterparts in Latin America, West Africa and the Caribbean" (European Commission, n.d.a, p. 10). Regarding UNODC, the GMCP was also found to have "insufficient identification and cooperation with non-UNODC entities including other UN Agencies and relevant national NGOs or CSOs and regional IOs or ROs" (UNODC, 2020: xi).

By preventing overlaps and competition, inter and intra-coordination can lead to fewer capacity gaps, with overall gains in the efficiency and sustainability of a given project. Since partner countries often have a limited capacity to absorb every external offer, coordination between providers can also facilitate active engagement from local partners (Nilsson & Zetterlund, 2011, p. 34) and prevent overstretch of resources (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 232).

3.5 Project implementation

In the implementation stage, a key lesson identified concerns the fact that **projects should be ideally managed on the ground by regional organisations or national agencies**, in order to foster ownership as well as an adequate distribution of benefits and sustainability (HTSPE Limited, 2013, p. 30). However, at least in the case of EU projects, this has hardly been the case: out of the 22 maritime capacity-building projects in the Atlantic that were brought forward between 2010 and 2021, only 6 were implemented by local or national organisations (along with other organisations, agencies or the private sector), while 16 projects were implemented by government agencies of EU member states, the private sector or international organisations (Seabra & Costa 2021, pp. 30-33). This can be best explained by weak institutional capacity of existing local organisations, which are unable to provide the logistical and managerial services required for this kind of tasks (HTPSPE Limited 2013, p. 34). Nonetheless, concerns remain over the substantive number of projects implemented by the agencies of member states, as the respective officials tend to have an inherent bias towards the interests of their own countries (HTSPE Limited, 2013, p. 29). These issues can bring up unintended tensions among all parts involved, with subsequent consequences for the execution of projects.

To avoid unnecessary tensions and enhance ownership, local stakeholders must actively take part in the implementation phase (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 236). **Projects should therefore have a strong field presence**, so as to build up consistent network relations and a good knowledge of local dynamics (UNODC, 2020, xii). In order to maximise the potential of these interpersonal exchanges, **external field officers should have the necessary sensitivity and skills** – such as local expertise, proficiency in local languages, and adequate professional experience (Denney & Valters, 2015, p. 38) – and be allocated for longer periods of time (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 233). Equally important is to have **external staff** not be **seen as** experts who will implement international standards, but instead, as **facilitators, working in close partnership with local staff to develop common solutions** (Weijer & McCandless, 2015, p. 85; Gerspacher et al., 2017, p. 12).

To increase the sustainability of projects and further reinforce local ownership, **it is also important that countries receiving capacity are the ones guiding and coordinating initiatives in some form** (OECD, 2005, p. 3; Safeseas, 2018, p. 17; Brinkerhoff, 2007, pp. 25-26; Gerspacher et al., 2017, p. 8). To guide the projects, **planning documents, namely maritime security strategies, are key**. These strategies should be developed through broad consultative processes and be both detailed and problem oriented (OECD, 2005, p. 3; Safeseas, 2018, p. 12). They should include a maritime security assessment, a needs assessment, and an investment plan, as well as review processes and an accountability mechanism (Safeseas, 2018, p. 12). Moreover, maritime security strategies should be communicated to the general public in order to gain additional societal legitimisation (Safeseas, 2018, p. 12) and promote awareness on the importance of the maritime domain.

External providers should align their projects with the strategies of local actors in order to improve their operationalisation (OECD, 2005, p. 3), while **partner countries should themselves seek to understand the working procedures and interests of providers, so that they can best negotiate the final terms of each project** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 17). Coordination committees have similarly proven a valuable tool in this regard (Safeseas, 2018, p. 17).

On the other hand, the successful steering and coordination of capacity-building projects requires sufficient awareness over the costs at a local level (Safeseas, 2018, p. 19). These costs are often related to human resources: for instance, the allocation of staff to training courses means that they

cannot perform their regular tasks or assignments. Hence, to avoid reaching a saturation point and/or external dependency, **partner countries must properly evaluate their aid absorption capacity and coordinate projects for their maximum benefit** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 19). However, guiding and coordinating projects also requires dedicated resources, which many countries might not possess. These **financial obstacles stand out as recurrent hurdles for project sustainability and ownership** (Edmunds et al., 2018, p. 234; Brinkerhoff, 2007, pp. 25-26).

3.6 Monitoring and evaluation

Lastly, the importance of proper evaluation and monitoring after the end of each project cannot be sufficiently emphasised. Impact assessments are essential, given how that information can lead to improved future efforts (Moss, 2020). Moreover, **capacity-building projects need *ex-post* monitoring in the long term**, in order to assess their real impact and sustainability (European Commission, 2016, p. 126). More investment in rigorous aftermath assessments is a recurrent need raised in both the capacity-building (Gerspacher et al, 2017) and SSR literature (Denney & Valters, 2015, p. 46). These evaluations should seek to go beyond the standard indicators foreseen in the mandates of the project and **assess the adequacy and impact of the adopted methods and approaches** (Denney & Valters, 2015, p. 46).

The outputs from these evaluations must be taken into consideration for future projects for increased efficiency, and they should be "consolidated through mechanisms for preserving institutional memory and continuity of effort" (Safeseas, 2018, p. 24). In order to maximise their utility and to best inform initiatives of other actors, these **outputs should be made available in shared repositories, along with information on needs assessment as well as ongoing and planned capacity-building activities** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 24).

Moreover, these evaluations must also be properly contextualised, for two reasons. First, the projects are often not as extensive and lengthy as it would be necessary to generate substantial impacts (Edmunds, et al., 2018, p. 231; Brinkerhoff, 2007, p. 14). This translates itself into instances of projects being "evaluated positively, despite the reforms they introduce subsequently foundering due to their over-dependence on externally-sponsored programmes, or due to their isolation from the evolving

security challenges and governance patterns of which they are a part" (Safeseas, 2018, p. 10). For this reason, **the success of capacity-building activities ought to be determined by their contribution in the long run, instead of limited evaluation benchmarks** (Safeseas, 2018, p. 10). Second, when considering that these projects frequently take place in fragile environments, the success or failure of the projects is often dependent on unrelated shifts in local circumstances (Edmunds, et al., 2018, p. 231), like *coups d'état* or natural disasters. Without sufficient follow-up, it can therefore become difficult to untangle developments arising from contextual factors from those directly linked to the support previously provided.

3.7 Main takeaways

- Capacity-building is inherently political. Capacity-building activities should not be understood as technical, one-size-fits-all endeavours, but as context-specific iterative processes, which require the engagement and support of local authorities at all stages of a project in order to create meaningful and sustainable change.
- Trust-based relationships are the foundation of effective and sustainable capacity-building.

Initial assessments

- Initial assessments must be comprehensive, go beyond material structures and consider immaterial factors such as social practices, power relations and political priorities.
- Building a common understanding between external actors and local stakeholders over issues and needs and how to address them is essential for the legitimacy of projects and their sustainability.
- Assessments need to be dynamic and subject to recalibration as the context can rapidly change.

Project design

- The strengths and disadvantages of different modalities of capacity-building must be weighed carefully and selected according to the structures, practices and needs of partner countries.
- Limited 'project logic' should be avoided, as it encourages the focus on short-term goals in detriment of wider and more sustainable institutional change.

- Projects must be designed to be flexible and adaptable, benefiting from local knowledge and relations between staff and stakeholders.
- Training activities will have limited impact if they do not include components meant to ensure sustainability, such as train-the-trainers programmes.
- Equipment and infrastructure provision must be complemented by training on the use of the equipment as well as on its adequate maintenance and management capabilities.

Coordination

- Projects must be designed in alignment with other existing projects and, when existent, the maritime strategies of partner countries.
- Coordination and information-sharing with other actors must be encouraged in order to prevent counterproductive effects.
- Informal coordination mechanisms are useful to encourage effective coordination, especially in contexts where a considerable number of projects are taking place.
- Partner countries should take the lead in guiding and coordinating capacity-building activities in their own territory so as to avoid a saturation point or external dependencies.

Project implementation

- Programme management should ideally reside with regional organisations or national agencies of partner countries.
- Operational level staff should display an adequate set of skills and sensitivity, while functioning as facilitators in close partnership with local officials.
- A strong field presence and trust-based relations are essential, hence why projects should avoid short-term operational level staff allocation.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Long term *ex-post* monitoring is necessary for proper assessments of the impact and sustainability of capacity-building activities.
- Evaluations should seek to go beyond standard indicators and assess the adequacy and impact of the adopted approaches.

- Lessons learned and best practices must be shared between every relevant actor.
- The success of capacity-building activities ought to be determined by their contributions in the long run, instead of limited evaluation benchmarks.

4. Conclusion

Despite its relative novelty, the field of capacity-building is already characterised by prevailing assumptions. The most striking claims that a provider of capacity-building should be measured or assessed by the amount of equipment distributed or the size of the budget assigned to a given initiative. However, providing capacity does not necessarily require from the offset large initiatives in either resources or scope, rather the ability to be effective and match the needs of local actors with the willingness of the international partners in tackling such kind of scenarios. In that sense, the current context in the Atlantic does not require more capacity-building *per se*; instead, it requires better planned and better designed capacity-building that is able to affect a longer-term impact on maritime security-related predicaments, while taking into account previous key lessons in the field.

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