

# **Assisting Africa: A critical analysis of technical assistance in low carbon development practice**

Michelle du Toit / DTTMIC010

Supervised by Associate Professor Horman Chitonge

Co-supervision by Professor Harald Winkler

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*Full and heartfelt thanks to my husband Lyndon who held the fort, picked up the pieces, and spent many a weekend lone parenting our two energetic boys. I appreciate it more than I will ever be able to express.*

## **Abstract:**

Climate change mitigation efforts are increasingly forming part of the agendas of African nations, particularly since the inclusion of voluntary targets for these countries within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement of 2015. This focus towards the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, together with the need to achieve development objectives, has become combined in the practice of 'low carbon development' within developing countries. Technical assistance programmes have been set up to support the achievement of low carbon development, and these activities typically flow from the global North to Africa. However the power structures and flows of benefit that underlie these practices have not been the subject of much enquiry and are largely occluded within the climate change mitigation community of practice. With the inclusion of climate change mitigation targets for developing countries together with a direct call for increased capacity building within the Paris Agreement, the volume of technical assistance support focused towards Africa is likely to increase. As such the need to consider what effective technical assistance, that is both equitable and appropriate to the African context, might look like becomes a priority.

This study engages with these issues. By considering the literature arising from decolonial studies and development theory together with bringing to the fore the perceptions of African climate change mitigation professionals, it provides a critical analysis of the tacit assumptions that are legitimated within the technical assistance practice in climate change mitigation. The study finds that current modes of technical assistance practice within low carbon development continues to entrench the hegemonic nature of knowledge of the global North, and perpetuates the placement of Africa in a position of extraversion towards the North, assuming African government and climate change practitioners as lacking in knowledge and expertise. The study advocates for a more equal and bilateral flow of knowledge between the two regions in order for African nations to faster and more effectively reach the twin goals of development and mitigation within Africa. It considers the lack of the critical theories of decolonial studies and development theory in climate change scholarship (particularly the absence of African voices in the debate) and brings these alternative voices and theories into low carbon development technical assistance practice.

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# 1 CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: AN INTRODUCTION

*'Warming of the climate system is unequivocal, and since the 1950s, many of the observed changes are unprecedented over decades to millennia. The atmosphere and ocean have warmed, the amounts of snow and ice have diminished, sea level has risen, and the concentrations of greenhouse gases have increased.'* (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2013:4).

The global warming of the earth and its impact on the earth's climate; climate change, is becoming more apparent and recognised by researchers and the public alike. So too has the cause of this temperature rise. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report: Summary for Policy Makers, states that *'it is extremely likely<sup>1</sup> that human influence has been the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century'* (IPCC, 2013:17). The developed countries of the global North have been responsible for the overwhelming majority of historical and current emissions (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 1992:1), and as such in the early nineties when the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was negotiated to provide a basis for international cooperation towards mitigating climate change and its impacts (UNFCCC, n.d.), the initial bulk of the burden of responsibility in lowering greenhouse gas emissions was apportioned to the developed world. However, the focus of climate change mitigation<sup>2</sup> efforts have broadened as emerging developing countries' greenhouse gas emissions have started to increase significantly. Developing countries are agreeing to voluntary targets to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions whilst still developing (Urban & Nordensvärd, 2013:5). This move towards the inclusion of emission targets for developing countries reached its culmination at the 21st Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC which took place in Paris in 2015 (COP 21). Prior to the conference, developed and developing countries alike were invited to submit Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs)<sup>3</sup> to the UNFCCC secretariat. Post conference these INDCs were ratified<sup>4</sup> to become Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). A global stocktake held every five years will assess the collective progress of contributions and long-term goals, with the objective of providing the opportunity for further more ambitious goals to be set, and for enhancing international cooperation (Paris Agreement, 2015:art14).

In order to meet these contributions as well as other mitigation objectives, it is largely understood that capacity building needs to be provided to developing countries to *'... enhance the capacity and ability of developing country Parties, ... to take effective climate change action, ...'* as is put forward in the Paris Agreement (Paris Agreement, 2015:art11.1). And although there is a call for all Parties to the Paris Agreement to build the capacity of developing country Parties there is a specific directive to developed country Parties to *'... enhance support for capacity building actions in developing country Parties'* (Paris Agreement, 2015:art11.3). This flow of knowledge support from the global North (the North) to the global South (the South) in capacity building activities occurs outside of the Convention as well. This study looks at the technical assistance subset of capacity building activities that occurs between the developed countries of the

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'extremely likely' indicates a likelihood of 95-100% (IPCC, 2013: 4). Emphasis in the original.

<sup>2</sup> The term 'mitigation' will be used in this study in the climate change context, which describes the lowering of greenhouse gas emissions, and not the lessening of negative impacts as it is used within the Environmental Impact Assessment context.

<sup>3</sup> The (I)NDCs are national greenhouse gas emission reduction and adaptation targets submitted to the UNFCCC by national governments.

<sup>4</sup> As of 1 December 2017, 170 of the 197 parties to the convention have ratified their INDCs. A registry containing all NDCs can be found at the UNFCCC website ([http://unfccc.int/focus/ndc\\_registry/items/9433.php](http://unfccc.int/focus/ndc_registry/items/9433.php)).

North and Africa that has the objective of supporting African governments to achieve a transition to a low carbon development future. The study is targeted at climate change practitioners from the global North in order to reveal to them the underlying assumptions within their practice that they may not be aware of. It also addresses climate change practitioners and government officials from the global South, particularly Africa, in order to support and contribute to a burgeoning low carbon development approach and practice arising from the South<sup>5</sup>.

Considering the negative consequences that climate change will have on human populations, particularly those in the developing world, it is imperative that urgent and strong action is taken to halt and reduce this global average temperature rise. The Paris Agreement of 2015 (Paris Agreement, 2015:art2.1(a)) supports this action and aims at keeping:

*'... the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change.'*

The concept of low carbon development arose from the increased focus towards climate change mitigation by developing (and developed) countries. It started being used at the turn of the century, and by the later parts of the first decade was incorporated into language used by donor agencies and others in the development field such as the 2009 White Paper released by the Department for International Development in the UK: *Eliminating World Poverty* (Urban & Nordensvärd, 2013:6). It appeared in climate change mitigation practice at the same time, and was included in the Cancun Agreement of 2010 (The Cancun Agreements, 2010). Low carbon development is purported to sit at the interface of international development and climate change mitigation (Urban & Nordensvärd, 2013:3). It professes to promote development and economic growth, reduce inequality, and provide access to energy and innovative technologies (Urban & Nordensvärd, 2013:5). Furthermore it is seen as an opportunity for developing countries to avoid or 'leapfrog' the high carbon emissions development paths of the already developed countries, thereby delinking development with greenhouse gas emissions. The understanding of what constitutes low carbon development is broad and there is no single definition that is commonly accepted. On one side of the range there is an understanding associated with broader ideals of development, a *'development model that is based on climate-friendly low carbon energy and follows principles of sustainable development... and adopts patterns of low carbon consumption and production'* (Urban & Nordensvärd, 2013:5). On the other side of the range is an understanding of the term that leans towards economic growth *'using less carbon for growth, ... promoting low carbon technology innovation and business models, ... and formulating policies that promote low carbon practices and behaviours'* (United Kingdom Department for International Development, 2009:58). However, despite the stated links with development, low carbon development sits firmly within the climate change mitigation space with mitigation seen as its first priority, and development coming in second, or as an add-on.

Many Northern institutions and programmes have turned their specific attention to supporting low carbon development (including more recent NDC implementation

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<sup>5</sup> See Kane, L & Boule, M. 2018. 'This was different': transferring climate mitigation knowledge practices south to south with the MAPS programme. *Climate Policy*. 1-12. DOI: 10.1080/14693062.2017.

activities) within the South (Sagar, 2000:379). This is often done in the form of expert advice and knowledge products that provide technical assistance and capacity building to governments of the South, advising and supporting them on how to go about developing in a climate compatible way and specifically on how to implement activities that could enable them to reach their NDC targets<sup>6</sup>.

## 1.1 WHY THIS STUDY?

I have been professionally involved in the climate change mitigation sector for twelve years, based in South Africa. During this time I have noted the trend towards the setting of mitigation targets for the South and have become increasingly aware that low carbon development support programmes arise mainly in the North and are focused towards the South. Furthermore I have seen how similar support and advice does not appear to be present for governments of the North<sup>7</sup>. My interest, as an African, was piqued. Why was this the case? Why are the experts used for technical support and capacity building often from the North, including those from private consultancy firms? In what way was the term 'development' being used within low carbon development practice? What were the existing preconceptions about Africa that were being used to design and develop these programmes? These questions and concerns led to me investigating technical assistance practice within the climate change community, ultimately resulting in this study.

Technical assistance within low carbon development is largely viewed as an objective and neutral form of support by those that are providing it. Although the terms 'technical assistance' and 'capacity building'<sup>8</sup> are used in international environmental literature, it is not being reflected upon at a conceptual level, and as practices they are neglected in research (VanDeveer & Dabelko, 2001:26). In addition it must be noted that much of the literature on capacity building related to the environment comes from donors and international agencies and is related to activities that have been funded or implemented by them (Sagar, 2000:379). Humanities professionals are lacking within both climate change knowledge production (Corbera et al., 2015:1) and development studies (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:58–59). Therefore the practice, arising from the humanities, to reflect on the nature of knowledge and power structures embedded within knowledge and knowledge practice is not commonplace among those that provide low carbon development technical assistance. Rather, development (and climate change mitigation) is viewed from a technical perspective with notions of innovation and quantifiable carbon emission reductions being employed (Høyer, 2010a; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:59).

However, reflection on the nature and origin of knowledge, as well as of that of aid, support and assistance, is crucial in order to consider their potential negative impacts. Steve Biko<sup>9</sup>, referring to South Africa's segregated society, highlighted how *'inbuilt complexes of inferiority and superiority ... continue to manifest themselves even in the 'nonracial' set-up of the integrated complex'* (Biko, 2017:21). Although he was referring to racial segregation, his writing brings to the fore the pervasiveness of hegemonic structures within seemingly neutral spheres. A lack of intention does not necessarily equate to a lack of damage as Adams reflects in his work on colonial practices within psychology: *'Regardless of researcher awareness or sincere intentions otherwise,*

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<sup>6</sup> Examples are the LEDS GP, the NDC Partnership, the IKI NDC Support Cluster, the NDC Leadership Compact and CDKN.

<sup>7</sup> The NDC Partnership does mention supporting 'all countries' on its webpage; nonetheless, most of the information appears targeted at the global South.

<sup>8</sup> The terms capacity building and technical assistance are interlinked. The working definition for the purposes of this study are as follows: capacity building will be used as an umbrella term for a wide range of support activities (of which technical assistance is one such support activity) that have the objective of making the recipient more able to perform the task at hand. Technical assistance will be used specifically for technical expert support intervention rather than the broader range of activities that could contribute towards capacity building. To be noted is that technical assistance does not necessarily lead to capacity building.

<sup>9</sup> Steve Biko was an anti-apartheid activist and leader of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa.

*mainstream research practices typically reflect the perspective of the powerful and serve to reproduce forms of domination*' (Adams, 2014:467). Technical assistance within climate change is underpinned by such practices of domination that are not always blatantly apparent, but can be seen in the asymmetrical flow of information from those holding power to those without power.

Furthermore, it appears that an out-dated understanding of 'development' exists within the climate change mitigation community, and even within the development sector itself. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012:49) argues: *'Development Studies continues to suffer from a crisis of ideas dating back to the development impasse of the 1980s'*. There are problems even with the very term 'development', as the meaning of the word depends on the objectives of those that use it and where it is used (Rist, 2007:485). During the first few development decades after the Second World War, development was largely seen as a positive intervention (Martinussen, 1997:35). There was confidence in the ability of the practice to achieve development objectives, in particular to overcome poverty (Humphrey, 2007:15). This positive view of development shifted in later years with heavy critique being levelled at the development practices of the North and the very ideal of Western Modernity being viewed critically (Humphrey, 2007:16). However, in the climate change sector it appears that development as a term and practice is mostly still seen in a positive light and is being used, as Rist notes, *'to convey the idea that tomorrow things will be better'* (Rist, 2007:485). This outdated and heavily critiqued approach to development is being used to promote mitigation and adaptation practices to developing countries as can be seen the work of the Climate and Development Knowledge Network (CDKN), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank<sup>10</sup>. There is a lack of interrogation on what the negative consequences of low carbon development may bring about, or the particularities, contexts and histories that should be considered when imposing low carbon developmental ideals from the outside.

The intention behind much of low carbon development technical assistance support is no doubt honourable and could potentially assist developing countries to develop in ways that are compatible with a liveable climate. However the support programmes are constructed around an assumption: that the necessary capacity, expertise and knowledge appropriate for the task at hand is contained within the North and that the necessary capacity or technical expertise within the South is lacking, inadequate or inappropriate. Local knowledge and context-specific experiential practice, which could be valuable in accelerating climate change mitigation practices, are overlooked and a one-way flow of knowledge ensues from North to South. This hegemony of Northern knowledge is further entrenched through the use of Northern consultants to provide much of the expertise and support to African governments, and by the aims of the projects being largely set by the donor institutions and governments funding the support projects.

The power plays and assumptions embedded within the technical assistance programmes remain hidden and perpetuate the narrative begun in the colonial times of Africa as underdeveloped, pre-industrial and pre-modern. This conception of the North as modern, and Africa as primitive, opens the door for the *'self-appointed mission of evangelising, civilising and developing – Pax Romana, Pax Britanica, Pax Americana'* (Chitonge, 2015:3). It *'reinforce[s] the mystification of African peoples as lacking ability to do things on their own; This has often led to the belief that development has to be done on*

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<sup>10</sup> This may now be changing as research on the practices of low carbon development and Green Growth Strategies are emerging. See: 'Green Growth Ideology, Political Economy and the Alternatives' Dale, G, Mathai, M and Puppim De Oliveira J. Zed Books 2016, and 'The Social Challenges and Opportunities of Low Carbon Development' Nordensvärd. Routledge 2017.

*behalf of Africa - that Africa has to be 'taught' to do development'* (Chitonge, 2015:7). The knowledge project is justified because the knowledge (universal and appropriate to all) can be seen to *'help those cultures that were 'lagging behind' in the march of history and civilization'* (Prasad & Prasad, 2002:62).

Not only could a non-hegemonic knowledge approach be more effective in addressing the challenge of climate change by sharing and building on knowledge and experience that is already existing, but continuing with current practice could result in unintended, negative outcomes for both the Northern institutions involved and the African governments being supported. The Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall protests by students in South Africa calling for a decolonisation of universities in South Africa demonstrate that knowledge, power and oppression are inextricably linked. The protests exposed a deep and justifiable anger that exploded out into the “sacred cathedrals” of knowledge. Similar protests by students took place in Chile between 2011 and 2013. Both events demonstrate that ignoring or overlooking inequalities that are occurring within knowledge practice, albeit below the surface, can result in violent rejection of knowledge practitioners and institutions, and further entrench the divide between North and South. By ignoring power structures within the knowledge transfers that occur within climate change mitigation practice we risk sabotaging the potentially helpful exchanges, synergies and innovations that could arise from broader and more equal collaborations between the North and Africa.

## **1.2 RESEARCH AIMS**

This study looks to reflect on technical support knowledge practices within the climate change mitigation community to ascertain whether, in the race to lower emissions, knowledge practices are being enacted that continue colonial practices of knowledge hegemony, unequal transfer and exclusions. It aims to bring to the surface the tacit assumptions embedded within technical assistance and capacity building knowledge transfers in low carbon development climate change mitigation practice by hearing from the intended recipients of these practices in order to answer the question:

**What do the perceptions of African climate change mitigation practitioners reveal about the implicit assumptions contained within low carbon development technical assistance originating in the global North, and directed at Africa?**

Much has been written on three areas that could be used to reflect upon these knowledge transfer practices: climate change mitigation practice, decolonial<sup>11</sup> theory and development studies. Decolonial theory in particular has been applied to a variety of fields: psychology (Adams, 2014), education (Freire, 2005 (1970); Mamdani, 2008) development (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012), and management studies (Prasad & Prasad, 2002) amongst others. However, neither decolonial thinking nor the body of critical thinking on development and aid between the North and South has moved over in a substantial way to the climate change mitigation world<sup>12</sup>. This study is an attempt to articulate and fill this existing gap in the scholarship and practice.

In broadening the epistemological milieu in which the climate change mitigation field operates and by bringing hidden assumptions to the fore, it is my hope that more non-hierarchical, appropriate and effective knowledge exchange practices can occur that add

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<sup>11</sup> Although postcolonial theory and decolonial theory are separate bodies of theory, the linkages and overlaps are such that I will be using the term 'decolonial' to refer to both postcolonial and decolonial theory and literature.

<sup>12</sup> There have however been references to colonialism within the Just Transition movements and also with reference to monetising the atmosphere through carbon markets. There is also more focus given to development studies within the adaptation community of climate change practice.

value to both the North and the South, and Africa in particular. The move from implicit to explicit allows knowledge practices to be questioned and reflected upon, and opens up the opportunity for the inclusion of alternative approaches, institutions and agents that could be beneficial in achieving the ultimate goals of development and the lowering of greenhouse gas emissions. Moving away from Africa's extraversion to the North could increase agency and belief in the ability of Africans by showing that they have the necessary resources and capabilities to solve the challenges they face in ways most appropriate to their situations. This increased agency and confidence could lead to more effective action in climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as allow for additional practices to emerge that could provide benefit. Furthermore, it is hoped that in addressing practices that could be perpetuating hegemonic knowledge structures, debate and discussion will be opened. This could lead to restorative action without first resorting to more violent protest action which could harm communication and relations between Northern parties and African stakeholders, further slowing effective climate and development action.

As a white South African of Afrikaner heritage I have been a beneficiary of a system in which white privilege is normalised. This has led to many assumptions in my thinking. Often, external action has been required to catalyse the internal reflection needed in order for these assumptions to be revealed. I am consequently sensitive that hegemonic practice can take place without intentional malevolence but rather through ignorance. As such the approach of this study will be exploratory and non-accusatory in order to facilitate reflection, the building of trust relationships, and improved collaboration. The study is premised on the view that a collaborative approach between the North and Africa can be appropriate and effective when considering an issue of the global commons such as is the case with climate change. However, it also acknowledges that given the histories of control and oppression by the North towards Africa, for such an approach to be equitable (and successful) it would need to bring to the fore past imbalances and assumptions, and consciously reflect on knowledge exchange practices moving forward.

By incorporating insights from decolonial studies and thereby considering historical and existing power dynamics, climate change mitigation practice could potentially avoid some of the pitfalls that have been experienced in development aid where intervention from the North has resulted in weakened development such as in the structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s. This is particularly pertinent given the development focus of low carbon development, and therefore the need to be up to date in development practice and critique. However, even within the mitigation focus of low carbon development practice, lessons can be applied. This study provides critical insight and awareness from decolonial and development literature to enable the move from knowledge transfers to knowledge exchanges between the North and Africa.

\* \* \* \* \*

The study commences with a literature review which focuses on decolonial theory and development studies to provide a theoretical framework for the knowledge activities that will be discussed in the study. An outline of the research methodology that was employed follows, after which the case of technical assistance programmes within Africa for low carbon development is described before moving to the findings and analysis sections.

## 2 UNDERSTANDING THE VIEW FROM “NOWHERE”: A LITERATURE REVIEW

*‘Most discussion of planetary environmental challenges continues to imagine that experts from the global north speak for the planet as a whole. Yet as threats to liveability spread across the earth, it becomes increasingly clear not only that varied issues are at stake in varied places, but also that varied approaches will be necessary to address the relevant problems. Scholarly work that tackles the heterogeneity and hierarchy of environmental approaches, alas, is still in its infancy.’* (Tsing, Personal Communication to Lesley Green, 2016 November 01)

This review concentrates predominantly on decolonial theory and development studies to better understand the historical context that led to the hegemonic knowledge structures that exist within low carbon development practice today. From this vantage we can better reflect on the way in which technical assistance from the North for low carbon development both builds upon and feeds into these structures. The literature review also touches upon an emerging epistemological literature on climate change knowledge. Within decolonial theory, this review focuses on the nature and assumptions of knowledge as well as knowledge practices. In so doing, the various cultural meanings, intentions and logics that are embedded (or excluded) within knowledge are brought to the surface. From development studies literature, the review looks at how the idea of development is conceptualised and what is included and excluded within these varying concepts of ‘Development’.

The literature review (and indeed this study) concentrates on issues of the geopolitical over those of body-politics. I use the term geopolitical to refer to reflection on how physical locations, and the histories attached to physical locations, influence their current state in international relationships. By body political I refer in a broad manner to how social and political relationships affect the body, and how these relationships are influenced by the nature of the bodies in question. Thus the literature review, and the analysis in this study, focus on where countries are situated and how their relative positions of power are influenced by their location rather than focusing on issues of the body such as race, gender and class. This focus on the geopolitical within this study echoes an imbalance which can be found in decolonial literature, where the geopolitical is highlighted despite the underlying issues surrounding body politics that exist. As Mignolo indicates, *‘the geo-political argument, ... comes across more forcefully, although the body-politics of knowledge is obvious in all of them’* (Mignolo, 2009:15). Nonetheless, this focus on the geo-political is deemed appropriate for the purposes of this study, which is as an *initial* step to bringing issues of neocolonial practices to the fore amongst an audience unfamiliar with the theory. It is however noted that issues of body-politics are key in understanding issues of hegemonic knowledge practices and epistemicide. The choice of focus is therefore not a reflection of a perceived lack of relevance or import of these issues of the body-political. In this I concur with Mignolo: *‘Body-politics is a fundamental component of de-colonial thinking, de-colonial doing and the de-colonial option’* (Mignolo, 2009:16).

Care was taken during the literature review to ensure adequate representation of authors and researchers from the global South and from Africa in particular, to counter the hegemony of knowledge dissemination and prominence from the North<sup>13</sup>. As

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<sup>13</sup> This literature review encompasses the work of 35 authors. Nineteen authors from the global South are cited, 13 of which are African. Sixteen authors from the global North are included.

Cooper and Morrell reflect: *'The balance of authorial voices in knowledge-production processes depends, in part, on their respective epistemological powers, which in turn, reflect histories of inequality'* (Cooper & Morrell, 2014:5). The concepts emerging from the literature review are arranged into three broad overarching themes: an exploration of the nature of knowledge arising in the North, the hegemony of Northern knowledge, and alternative approaches to knowledge practice and development. The concepts will be used as tools applied to the case of technical assistance within the field of low carbon development in Africa. All the themes flow from, and merge into, each other. The segregation into sections is therefore artificial to some degree and meant solely to form a structural basis to assist the reader with clarity.

## **2.1 THE NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE FROM THE NORTH**

### **2.1.1 The view from "nowhere"**

Numerous decolonial scholars have interrogated assumptions of universal appropriateness associated with knowledge produced in the North: *'... the point of view that assumes having no point of view'* (Grosfoguel, 2012:89). Among them are Prasad and Prasad (2002); Connell (2007); Mignolo (2009); Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012); Go (2013); Grosfoguel (2013); Arowosegbe (2014); Keita (2014) and Mamdani (2017). Their writings reveal that knowledge is far from transparent, neutral and untouched by the geopolitical. Grosfoguel goes back to the origins of much of the knowledge that is used today, particularly within the natural sciences. He demonstrates how Cartesian philosophy produced the thinking 'I', divorced from the bodily 'I', which could then replace 'God' in producing *'knowledge that is truth beyond time and space, universal in the sense that it is unconditioned by any particularity'* (Grosfoguel, 2013:75). Being separated from the body, the thoughts arising from the 'I' were created from an internal monologue that had no dialogue or relationship with anything outside of the 'I' (Grosfoguel, 2012:89), which led Eurocentrism *'... down the path of the disembodied universalism that dissolves all particulars into the universal'* (Grosfoguel, 2012:95). Knowledge arising from the North is taken to stand as universal truth and universal experience; it becomes *'a view from nowhere'* (Nagel, 1986 in Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010:151). This is contrary to knowledge arising outside of the North that is taken to be particular to the region it arises from, and is viewed as area studies (Mamdani, 1998:63–64). Similarly, intellectual traditions arising from the South are seen as historical *'... as truly dead, as history'*, whereas those traditions arising from Europe are not historicised neither placed within a specific European context (Chakrabarty, 2000:5–6).

Although the abstraction of knowledge can be useful as it enables critical reflection on social injustices, it nonetheless *'...produce[s] forms of thought that ultimately evacuate the place of the local'* (Chakrabarty, 2000:254). Grosfoguel argues that the concealment of origin is core to colonial projects (Grosfoguel, 2012:95) which become *'the epistemology of axiological neutrality and empirical objectivity of the subject, which produces scientific knowledge'*. Decolonial scholars have interrogated this disembodied universalism, asking: *'Who and when, why and where is knowledge generated...?'* (Mignolo, 2009:2) and embracing partiality rather than attempting to obscure it through notions of universality and neutrality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:51). This leads us to the concept of the 'Universal Province' put forward by Chakrabarty, which is interrogated in the following section.

### 2.1.2 *The universal province*

Through conquest and epistemicide of alternative forms of knowledge, the dominance of the disembodied Cartesian knowledge within the North became asserted globally (Grosfoguel, 2013:76-77) making Northern knowledge a hegemonic system: '*... colonial history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of modern Europe*' (Mignolo, 2009:16). The colonialism behind the hegemony of Northern knowledge is further asserted by Arowosegbe:

*'From the eighteenth century to the present, Enlightenment thinkers have provided a pattern for intellectuals throughout the world who wish to make their societies rational, scientific, secular and therefore modern. And through Europe's dominance of the world – made possible through colonisation, economic productivity, the deployment of military might and state building – the Enlightenment model has become dominant throughout the world'* (Arowosegbe, 2014:310).

This pervasiveness of the European version of modernity arising from the Enlightenment period is also raised by Chakrabarty (2000:5) who argues that there is no easy way to do away with these universal concepts. Chakrabarty's thought aligns with the underlying power structures noted by Arowosegbe, as can be seen in his statement that '*... the repression and violence that are instrumental in the victory of the modern*' are not emphasised (2000:44–45). They are hidden behind a neutral façade that is found in mainstream knowledge from the North (Madison 2005 in Adams, 2014:468). Dominant perspectives and identities are naturalised, appearing as dispassionate and objective truth (Adams, 2014:469). This link between violence and the idealism of modernity needs to be '*relentlessly*' found, asserts Chakrabarty (2000:45). It is from this dominant position that alternative knowledges are marginalised and are made to be seen as biased or a special case rather than a valid source of general truths (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2012) that can be incorporated into knowledge and technical structures that exist within low carbon development strategies in Africa.

Eurocentric knowledge is presented as objective fact, '*[it] does not limit itself to one area but presents itself as a paradigm or weltanschauung through which the world of the past and the present is viewed*' (Keita, 2014:26). With no time and location attached to it, it becomes applicable to all locations and all times. The Eurocentric approach to structuring knowledge becomes the modus operandi in both the natural and social sciences (Keita, 2014). It is an approach that asserts that '*... the empirical world is knowable if the correct epistemological research criteria are followed*' (Keita, 2014:27). What cannot be measured is excluded, providing a conducive environment '*for the hegemonic neoliberal discourse, as it legitimises the lack of incorporation of insights from other sciences into mainstream economics*' (Næss, 2010:72). However, this knowledge does in fact arise from a specific location and contains embedded within it a history of conquest, extraction and violence that is hidden from view. Chakrabarty calls for a provincializing of Europe: '*Provincializing Europe means decentering Europe: showing how Europe has come to be taken as universal while disclosing how un-universal – indeed provincial - that history is.*' (Chakrabarty, 2000 in Go, 2013:31). Despite the exclusion of context and history within this knowledge, there is an assumption that knowledge from the North is appropriate and relevant for all sites within the South. The provincial nature of knowledge originating from the North is not revealed (Connell, 2014). A question then arises: how can one reintroduce knowledge into a context different to the one in which it arose? If we agree that knowledge is not objective then surely there exists a dependency or link between location and knowledge.

### 2.1.3 *The predominance of the technical*

There is an emerging literature which has started to reflect on the epistemological approach within climate change mitigation practice (Høyer, 2010a; Næss, 2010; Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010; Boyer, 2014; Kane, 2014; Tyler, 2015). Climate change mitigation practice is largely situated within the natural sciences and has been described as an applied natural science by practitioners within the field (Kane, 2014; Tyler, 2015). Nader was one of the first anthropologists to study the culture of energy experts and became of the view that experts could be part of the problem, rather than purely standing outside of the problem (Nader in Boyer, 2014:7–8). This insight is key in understanding technical assistance and the potential role that experts could be playing in furthering certain power structures. A 2015 study that investigates the patterns of authorship within the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) identifies economists, engineers, physicists and natural sciences as dominating the field with *'insignificant participation of scholars from the humanities'* (Corbera et al., 2015:1). Biesbroek et al. describe the development of climate change mitigation strategies as being formulated using mainly technological and economics approaches (Biesbroek et al., 2009 in Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010:155). There is an assumption within the field that the main drivers of change are limited to only a few powerful sectors such as the energy and industry sectors, the economy, and international political frameworks (Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010:155). Institutional arrangements are set up to enable the reaching of targets through the financing of technological development and innovation. The problem is framed and governed by the interest of a particular scientific community and quantitative modelling approaches produce this highly specialised knowledge (Biesbroek et al., 2009 in Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010:155). These disciplinary focus areas have resulted in a framing of climate change mitigation as largely technical and managerial impacting how climate change is understood, and the nature of the solutions ascribed to the problem, largely preventing a deeper social understanding of the problem to be developed (Corbera et al., 2015:1).

The predominance of economics<sup>14</sup>, natural sciences and engineering can result in a technological idealism which can cause the benefits of technologies to be oversold and social issues to be excluded from the discourse (Høyer, 2010b, Corbera et al., 2015). Reflection on power dynamics, in particular the hegemonic nature of knowledge, which occurs within the humanities, is not common practice within the disciplines mentioned above. This becomes particularly pertinent when one considers the democratic challenges that are prevalent in large-scale social and environmental changes. A limited number of perspectives are brought to the problem, and the action of change is restricted to a few powerful sectors. The hegemonic, democratic and communication challenges to be found within society are being excluded from the knowledge being produced within climate change. People are being seen as part of the problem, and not part of the solution. There exists a *'lack of appreciation of more locally embedded forms of knowledge to mobilise populations and communities'* (Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010:155). This approach hampers the implementation of policy as there is considerable difficulty in moving from scientific knowledge to action (Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010). In this regard public ignorance of science gets described as being the main obstacle to successful policy (Irwin and Wynne, 1996 in Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010:153). Following on, the assumption is that increasing knowledge through training will increase action (Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010). Whilst this may be applicable in certain contexts within the context of climate change, knowledge is just one of several factors involved in decision making

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<sup>14</sup> Although economics is a social science, its use in climate change mitigation practice is largely quantitative and based on modeling approaches.

(Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010). There needs to be an interface between science and politics in order to translate scientific and technical knowledge to a form appropriate to the policy context. Practical solutions to climate change must incorporate different knowledge strategies to the ones that were used to identify the problem in the first place.

## 2.2 THE HEGEMONY OF THE NORTH

### 2.2.1 *Modern versus primitive*

There are notions of European technical advantage as being qualitatively superior (Keita, 2014) to that of Africa, and *'the technological knowledge that facilitate[s] the European conquest of control of most of Africa became a kind of template for a claim to a general superiority in all spheres'* (Keita, 2014:24). As mentioned above, Mamdani (1998:63–64) asserts knowledge from the North is presented as universal whilst knowledge from the South is presented as ethnic or area studies. This bifurcation of the world into the North as universal and the South as ethnic is taken further by Mignolo (2009:18), who sees the North as setting up a comparison between their knowledge which is modern, objective knowledge and appropriate to all, and the reverse of this: the local, the idiosyncratic and the primitive. This idea of the primitive is often epitomised in the caricature of Africa as a dark, wild and dangerous place.

Non-Western societies are portrayed as homogenous 'Others' stuck in a distant and primitive past, reserving dynamism, innovation and progress for European societies (Go, 2013). This denies the colonised agency and influence (Go, 2013). These practices entrench the notion of Africa as primitive and in opposition to the modernity of the North. Europe is seen as the present and the future, and Africa the backward past. For the North progress means 'bringing Africa into the European future' (Cooper & Morrell, 2014:10). The binary view of modern Europe/North America and primitive Africa is further entrenched in development theories. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012:50) notes the pervasive influence of enlightenment thinking within development studies. This thinking can be seen in modernist developmental theories such as those of Rostow (1960), outlined in his book *Stages of Economic Development: A non-communist manifesto*. Here he advocated for a five-stage process of development that needed to be progressed through sequentially in order to reach an advanced developmental stage. With specific reference to Africa, the modernist view is that the continent has remained at the initial 'Traditional' state: *'Isolated from the rest of the world from about 5,000 B.C., Africa began to lag behind in material development'* (Kamarck, 1967:3), and that help (from those countries that have already progressed) is required for African countries to achieve a similarly advanced and developed state. Leys (1982:102) sums up this view: *'They assumed that the "backwardness" of the Third World was an "original" backwardness, a primeval backwardness that had once been universal and could be overcome by the transmission of capital and know-how from the industrial West'*. Whereas Africa was placed in a traditional early state, the United States at the time of publishing his research was placed in the second to last stage of 'The Age of Mass-Consumption' (Rostow, 1960). Chakrabarty (2000) notes the prevalence of a transition narrative towards development, modernisation and capitalism in considerations of Indian history too. Together with the narrative of transition there is an assumption of lack, inadequacy and failure. The diversity and varied pasts of India are homogenised into one story (Chakrabarty, 2000:31–32). Chakrabarty (2000:33) follows on by saying that there is an assumption that Indians need to be *'educated'* out of their ignorant state. Although this case applies to India it can be applied more generally to the global South.

Embedded within this modernist drive to become like the North, the actors within the

North assume that society elsewhere operates in much the way as it does in the North: *'Growth and modernisation in this context were taken to mean a gradual change towards greater and greater similarity with the highly industrialised countries of the North West'* (Martinussen, 1997:35). Euro-American plans, activities and approaches were put forward as goals to strive towards, including extensive division of labour and specialisation, and high productivity (Martinussen, 1997:38). Other features noted by Leys (1982:102) were the tendency towards scale and industry, rather than smaller economic units and maintaining the importance of agriculture. The economic analytical focus of Euro-American experiences, in particular the update of capital as opposed to the supply of capital, were made at the expense of the analysis of non-economic features of development such as education and government administrative proficiency (Leys, 1982:101). It was this focus which drove the strategic planning for development by the industrialised countries from the 1950s onwards (Leys, 1982:101). This approach places substantial emphasis on the necessity of economic growth for development within countries which then becomes the means by which to reach the goal of American and European society.

This focus on economic growth has come to dominate thinking on development generally, as well as low carbon development. It can be seen in the movement towards green growth strategies and plans that purport to achieve the twin goals of development and climate change mitigation. To note is that economic growth during the modernist phase was seen as the **goal** of development and not the **means** by which to achieve development. As such the barriers to, and enablers of, economic growth were the focus of development programmes (Martinussen, 1997:36), as was evinced by the Structural Adjustment Programmes that came out of the Washington Consensus. This approach of the removal of barriers to economic growth is still seen today to some degree in the World Bank's statement that the bank will move towards brokering access to finance for developing countries through the de-risking of development projects and countries (Stein & Sridhar, 2017). This despite calls for less *'one-dimensional conceptions focusing on economic growth and replac[ing] them with multi-dimensional notions incorporating non-economic aspects as well'* (Martinussen, 1997:35). Both these foci; economic growth as an end goal, and the progression of countries to reach a state emulating that of industrialised countries, were critiqued in subsequent theories of development, which are outlined below.

Dependency theory, a school of thought originating in Latin America in the sixties, is one such reaction to the modernist view of development (Leys, 1982:103). This school of thought can be useful in understanding the origins of the hegemonic knowledge structures that exist today within the South, and a means by which to argue for the validity of knowledge that arises from the region. It can also alert climate change mitigation practitioners to the influence of modernist development theory within the kinds of technical assistance they promote and implement. Dependency theory puts forward alternative rationales for the state of underdevelopment that many former colonised countries were in at the time. It understands the underdeveloped state of Africa, or "backwardness" as was implied by the modernist texts, as being created as a direct by-product of imperialism, which created barriers to independent development: *'The development of Europe [w]as part of the same dialectical process in which Africa was underdeveloped'* (Rodney, 1982:149). Dependency theorists see unequal exchange, the exporting of raw material at low cost, and import of manufactured goods at high cost, as actively leading to the lack of development of *'internal linkages'* (Leys, 1982:103), which has had negative impacts on developing societies. And Northern modernity was actively created through colonialism and yet Eurocentric knowledge excludes the colonial influences on modernity, *'reserving modernity instead for westerners'* (Go, 2013:31).

Dependency theory moves away from the modernist position put forward by Rostow that ignores external determinants of underdevelopment, to one in which external determinants are seen as the key reasons for a state of underdevelopment. By including these external determinants dependency theory brings a more complex and nuanced understanding of the reasons why African countries have development challenges to the fore. This understanding encourages a move away from the characterisation of Africa as inadequate, backward and primitive. In so doing it recognises that knowledge arising from Africa is valid and not inferior to knowledge being transferred to the continent from the North. It also provides the opportunity to reflect upon the reasons why and how knowledge arising from the North claimed its hegemonic place. Through a dependency lens we can critique that position of power and argue for a more equitable evaluation of, and varied use of, knowledges. Furthermore, rather than seeing economic growth as the goal of development as did the proponents of modernism, dependency theorists understand development as a *means* with which to obtain '*national independence and self-centred economic progress*' (Martinussen, 1997:39). This was why there was a call by these theorists for non-industrialised countries to distance themselves from the North as a way in which to obtain independence (Frank 1967 in Martinussen, 1997:39).

A critique of dependency theory has been put forward by Colin Leys (1982), who asserts that it has moved too far in its reaction to modernist development theory. He provocatively asks: '*What is gained by focusing the discussion around the concept of dependency?*' (1982:105). Leys (1982) asserts that whilst dependency theory brought to the fore the historical contexts pertinent to development, the actual picture within Africa is not as homogenised as is put forward by the theory. He calls for a practical approach that is more focused on the specific (Leys, 1982:107). A less polarised approach such as what is put forward by Leys could consider the destructive impacts of interventions such as colonialism, but move forward in a way that engages with both Western/Euro-American and African knowledges and approaches without the hegemony of knowledge that is often implicit in interactions between these two knowledge systems.

### **2.2.2 Extraversion**

This Northern knowledge hegemony has continued in Africa even after the end of direct colonial rule. Hountondji (1997) reveals Africa's dependency on the North through the practices of extraversion that take place both economically and intellectually. He states that '*in the fields of science and technology, Third World countries, especially those in Black Africa, are tied hand and foot to the apron strings of the West. Of the degree of this dependence we are sometimes only hazily aware*' (Hountondji, 1997:1). This can be seen in the knowledge flow that is set up between the North and Africa where Africa becomes extraverted towards knowledge arising from the North (Hountondji, 1997; Mignolo, 2009; Connell, 2014) and which does not address issues raised by African societies (Hountondji, 1997). These asymmetrical knowledge flows take place across many sectors and many developing countries. For example, Prasad and Prasad (2002:65) describe how training programmes for Eastern European Managers implemented by Northern companies are '*collecting candidates for conversion to Western managerial dogma. Again like the missionaries of colonial times, they also rupture existing cultural identities and sometimes replace them with ones in which the 'converted' always remain beholden to and behind their teachers from the West*'. Those that do not hold the specific knowledge arising from the North become the '*inadequate*' students that need to be taught by the '*dominant*' holders of knowledge from the North (Prasad & Prasad, 2002:65).

Knowledge and power disparities are compounded by the geographical sites of knowledge labour, the locus of enunciation, which mimic patterns of natural resource extraction and commodification. Just as raw materials were extracted from Africa for processing in the factories of the colonisers so too is data being mined from Africa and taken to metropolitan laboratories, think tanks and research centres for processing. Raw data is gathered by Africans with knowledge processing occurring in the North by Northern scholars and consultants (Hountondji, 1997:2–4). This data enriches and advances Northern research work and Northern economies as Africa provides a market for these theories which are processed, packaged and sent back to Africa in forms such as geography textbooks (Hountondji, 1997).

Numerous authors join Hountondji in reflecting on these issues of knowledge labour between the North and the South (Mignolo, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012; Connell, 2014; Chitonge, 2015; Corbera et al., 2015). Connell (2014) raises the practice of data being produced in the South and processed in the North, with knowledge flowing back in the form of methodology. Mignolo (2009) sees 'experts' residing in the North with the South being consumers of the scholarship and expertise that subsequently flows to them. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012:58), quoting Mamdani (2011), highlights how the consultancy culture prevalent within development work promotes the training of Africans in data collection resulting in the collection of raw data which gets processed by Northern consultants into reports and later developmental policy documents. This process further corrals Africans into the category of '*native informants*' (Mamdani, 2011 in Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012:58), as opposed to producers of knowledge that can drive African development. Chitonge (2015) elucidates on the difference between African and Africanist scholars. He notes an asymmetrical division of labour where Africans partake in interviews and complete forms, leaving the Africanists to develop the conceptual work. Furthermore, he notes African scholars not being cited by African scholars, all contributing to placing African scholars in a subservient position (Chitonge, 2015). This is echoed by Mamdani (2017), who calls for the study of Africa through the eyes of Africans and not only through the lens of Europeans and Americans.

What postcolonial and critical development theory does which is of relevance to this study is that it looks to unearth representations and prejudices within knowledge and knowledge structures that are perhaps not immediately obvious. It allows those studying its texts to read between the lines and recognise covert (intentional or not) '*cultural logics attendant with empire*' (Go, 2013:29). Go (2013:38) describes colonialism – '*as a mechanism through which things, practices, and ideas have flowed*'. He highlights how modernity has been made through colonial practices and yet how Eurocentric knowledge excludes the colonial influences on modernity, '*reserving modernity instead for westerners*' (Go, 2013:31). The effect and impact of colonialism is excluded. Reflecting on the importance of the decolonial turn, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012:70) notes that '*making visible the global imperial designs that work to keep Africa in a subordinate position is the beginning of thinking of another world of equality*'. By making imperial designs visible it paves the way for the creation of a world of equality and freedom because of the knowledge and actions by and from the Global South (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:70).

### 2.3 APPROACHES FROM THE SOUTH

There are calls for new approaches to knowledge production and exchange in order to move away from colonial mindsets, and broaden technocratic approaches (Mignolo, 2009; Rommetveit, Funtowicz & Strand, 2010; Go, 2013). Common to these approaches is a focus on intermingling and on bridging gaps, versus a move to a new binary opposition, which can sometimes be encountered within decolonial literature. In *Provincializing Europe*, Chakrabarty (2000:16) cautions against a complete rejection of European Knowledge, arguing that it is '*at once indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the experiences of political modernity in Non-Western nations*'. He further argues that it is:

*'Not that Enlightenment rationalism is always unreasonable in itself, but rather a matter of documenting how – through what historical process – its "reason", which was not always self-evident to everyone, has been made to look obvious far beyond the ground where it originated'* (Chakrabarty 2000:43).

He calls for a renewal that arises from and is focused on the margins (Chakrabarty, 2000:16), asserting that there is an opportunity to approach European history together with a non-European archive and in this way provincialize Europe, which would create more equality between the dominant Northern and the overlooked Southern pasts (Chakrabarty, 2000:42).

The book *African-centred knowledges: crossing fields and world* (Cooper & Morrell, 2014) encourages a move away from the notion of universal truth. It reflects on the processes by which knowledge is made as well as the nature of the knowledge that is being produced. Cooper and Morrell (2014) call for an Africa-centredness which brings awareness to the tools and concepts and politics that are linked to knowledge so that the continuation of oppressive power structures are stopped. Such a knowledge would move away from the binaries that frame thinking about Africa: traditional versus modern, oral versus written, subsistence versus highly productive (Mudimbe, 1998 in Cooper & Morrell, 2014:2). Mbembe (2001 in Cooper & Morrell, 2014:2) further builds on the concept, describing the space as an 'entanglement' – a space counter to binary oppositions. Within the entanglement Mbembe says there are understandings of privilege and poverty. Mudimbe (1998 in Cooper & Morrell, 2014:3) investigates the possibilities of transformation of knowledge, and suggests that knowledges can become Africa-centred despite their origins as long as they get entangled in African contexts. This recalls Julian Go (2013), who drawing on the work of Patel, Magubane and Bhambra, calls for a relational ontology (as opposed to a substantialist ontology) that looks at the interrelations between colonisers and the colonised, investigating overlapping territories and intertwined histories, and interdependencies.

Hountondji (1997) calls for structural changes to existing relationships in scientific work, by promoting a process of inner-directed scientific productivity and creativity in countries of the South. Chitonge (2015) too advocates for African scholars to drive their own transformation, and calls for the creation of an intellectual community where African scholars can engage with each others' work. Both Chitonge and Hountondji caution against blame and exclusions of non-African scholars studying Africa. Chitonge (2015) draws attention to the fact that the production of knowledge should not be the monopoly of a single group and Hountondji (1997:6) cautions against '*the lazy, perennially whining romanticism of the left*'.

A further alternative to current knowledge practices comes from Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012:70), who urges Africans to work through the '*coloniality of power*' towards the future in creative ways, as opposed to dreaming of the past. He calls for strengthened South-South cooperation that works to place the African agenda within global governance discussions and to directly confront the colonialism that is embedded within institutions. He advocates for local epistemologies and knowledges that reflect the particular situations of different African societies to be brought to the fore and merged with initiatives at state, regional, continental and global levels and sees these interventions as '*turning 'ordinary' Africans into drivers of development rather than its object*' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012: 70).

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

*'Who is actually qualified to speak on Africa?'* (Arowosegbe, 2014:309)

This chapter describes and substantiates the case and research methodology used for this study, as well as outlines some of the limitations of the method. The subset of technical assistance for low carbon development in Africa was chosen as a case study because it provides the opportunity to investigate and reflect on the power structures that are embedded in support activities concerning knowledge and expertise between the developed and the developing world. In reflecting on the nature and characteristics of low carbon development technical assistance programmes targeted at Africa, the study is able to investigate the practices and trends emerging from the processes, in particular where power originates and who benefits from technical assistance activities.

A qualitative and primary research approach using interviews was chosen for this study, as the nature of the research undertaken is applied and contextual. The study identifies, explores and describes something that exists in the world, in this case the world of climate change mitigation support, and reflects on its nature; how it *'manifests'* (Ritchie, 2003:27). The qualitative approach allows for the development of a nuanced understanding of practices within climate change mitigation. Ritchie (2003:27) asserts that in describing experiences of interviewees, qualitative research provides an opportunity to *"unpack' issues, to see what they are about or what lies inside, and to explore how they are understood by those connected with them'*. This study focuses largely on the **way** in which technical assistance programmes are implemented, only touching on some of the content that is used within the programmes. As such primary research was a more appropriate form of research to use rather than secondary research, due to the dearth of information on the process of technical assistance in climate change mitigation (as opposed to the substance of technical assistance).

The research method of interviews is a means by which to gain insights into people's perspectives (Ritchie, 2003:35). As such primary data for this study was obtained through interviews in order to uncover the experiences and opinions of recipients of technical assistance on the nature of capacity development initiatives that are implemented by international agencies (largely run from the global North) targeted at African countries. This primary data was then analysed and complemented with insights arising from secondary sources – mainly material from the literature review. By considering the perceptions and opinions of African recipients of technical assistance within low carbon development practice, the practices and trends of technical assistance practice can be revealed. The study brought the voices of African governments and mitigation practitioners to the fore to be reflected upon in order to design and implement programmes that consider all voices engaging with the programmes. As such the study interviewed largely African nationals to refrain from speaking on behalf of Africans but rather to hear from Africans directly (Arowosegbe, 2014). By bringing the voices of Africans into theoretical discussions on low carbon development it counters the predominant mode of analysis on capacity building interventions which is mainly from the perspective of donors and International Agencies (Sagar, 2000:379, 427). It also responds to a call to action from Adams (2011:151) referring specifically to education in South Africa but applicable to the area of climate change mitigation: *'African intellectuals need to become more committed to researching and collecting data on Africa, and this should then be fed into curricula'*.

Specifically, the experiences and perceptions of twelve participants who have been, or are currently involved in low carbon development technical support programmes, form the case for this research. Of the twelve interviewees, nine were African whose nationalities covered the regions of West Africa, Central Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa. Three experts and project coordinators from non-African countries were included to provide additional perspectives and possible counterpoints from the North. These interviewees were British, Australian and Indian; however, all three worked for Northern-based institutions and were based in either the United Kingdom or the United States. Overall, the majority of interviewees were male (eight of the twelve) reflecting the imbalance in gender representation within low carbon development in Africa. Of the four female interviewees, three were technical support providers, two from the North and one from Africa. The fourth female interviewee was a recipient of technical support from Africa.

The interviewee sample is roughly divided into half between those that provided technical support and those that received technical support in order to provide a balanced view between recipient and provider. It should be noted that there were some participants that straddled these two areas; both providing and receiving support. Recipients of support were all African, and were involved in projects for the governments of four countries covering West, Central and East Africa. Three of these interviewees were civil servants within the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Environment respectively. Those that were involved in providing the technical assistance were both African and Northern comprising West African, East African, Southern African, British, Australian and Indian nationalities. A table outlining the roles and region of origin of the interviewees can be found in Annex 1.

As mentioned in the introduction, this research study area arose from my professional practice. I chose to interview professionals that I had met previously within my professional practice as a trust relationship had to some degree already been formed. I hoped that because of this we would be able to have open conversations, building on social connections as put forward by feminist interviewing techniques. I felt this to be particularly important, as the nature of the topic: hierarchies of power and reception of aid in the form of knowledge, is sensitive and not commonly talked about openly and formally within climate change mitigation practice. Two professionals were interviewed that I had not previously met. One was recommended to me by an interview participant to provide more information on a project he had discussed with me, and one professional was introduced to me by a colleague. Both interviewees were based in the North and were suppliers of technical assistance. Although the two interviews that took place with these interviewees did not have the benefit of prior relationships to facilitate conversation, both interviewees knew of and had good relationships with my institution of work and had worked with mutual colleagues. This assisted in forming some basis of trust from which to begin discussions. My prior relationship with the remaining ten interviewees proved useful in arranging interviews and all those I approached agreed to being interviewed. Interviewees were generous and helpful in providing their time despite busy schedules and most interviews were 45 minutes to one hour long.

A 'collaborative encounter model' was used during the interviews. In this model the interviewer and interviewee work together to exchange information (Neuman, 2005:311). Some aspects of feminist interviewing techniques were used, in particular a focus on the subjective experience of interviewees and the use of a largely unstructured and open-ended interview format that allowed for social connections and interactions. In interviews following the collaborative encounter model approach the structure is respondent-orientated versus researcher- or questionnaire-orientated (Neuman,

2005:311), and aims to interview in a way that is non-hierarchical and egalitarian (Doucet & Mauthner, 2008:330). This was important for the study given that the research focus is on hegemonic practices. The collaborative interview approach I was following allowed interviewees to reveal information that I was not aware of, and also allowed them to direct the conversation to areas that they thought were valid and important. This led to my initial assumptions being refuted or questioned on a few occasions. I followed up on specific areas of interest that arose during the interviews with probing questions to obtain deeper and more detailed information in certain areas. Bearing in mind that western or feminist norms may not be applicable in all contexts (Neuman, 2005:446), in particular within an African governmental setting where a more structured approach may be more applicable, I balanced the open-ended approach with a loose guiding structure which is described in the paragraph below. I further sought to establish credibility by having a thorough understanding of my research area and focusing in on the objectives of the research (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003:142). My prior professional relationship with the participants also assisted in the interviewees being accepting of the interview techniques I chose.

Two series of interviews were held. The first few were broad and exploratory and held face-to-face during the Africa Carbon Week in Nairobi in April 2018. The second round of interviews were held via internet-based voice communication technology and narrowed the topic of consideration more pointedly towards the technical assistance approach in low carbon emissions development programmes, rather than a broader definition of support which was investigated in the initial round of interviews. All interviewees were asked to reflect on their broad experience of technical assistance and capacity building activities that occur within their professional life related to low carbon development. Some chose to concentrate on one or two projects as a case or example from which to talk about their experiences, whilst others spoke more broadly on the topic and brought in projects or incidences of technical support as substantiation for their views on the area. No one project was studied in-depth. This aligns with the exploratory nature of study that sought to reveal a wide range of perceptions and activities. These initial perceptions arising from the study can now be used as a basis for further research that delves more deeply into a narrower topic area. A loose interview structure was followed. I first gave an introduction of the research project before proceeding to enquire about the origins of the projects and programmes that the interviewees wished to discuss. The next area of focus was on the nature of the role of the interviewee, before moving in to more detail on the project or programme. The last area of questions focused on the impressions and experiences of the interviewee on the activities they had been, or were currently, involved in.

All respondents completed ethics forms that agreed to the recording and transcribing of the interviews save for one interviewee who did not wish for the interview to be recorded. The remaining 11 interviews were recorded and transcribed before being coded into thematic categories using a qualitative research coding software programme, NVivo<sup>15</sup>. This software allows for categorisation and grouping according to themes that are tagged to the data. An emergent approach was used to categorise the data, and hence codes were created whilst studying the transcripts, as opposed to setting defined codes from the outset. This was a deliberate approach to allow for unexpected themes to emerge, and thereby to mitigate (to some degree) initial assumptions that could direct the findings. These themes were then linked and grouped in sets where trends were becoming apparent. Because the climate change mitigation community is relatively small and this study is a critical reflection on the practice area, the

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<sup>15</sup> For more information on the software package see <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/nvivo-products>.

interviewees will be kept anonymous to prevent any negative impact on their professional practice. For this reason the specific countries or projects they worked on are not mentioned and are omitted from the quotations used in this study.

Three limitations of the research methodology employed for this study are outlined below. Firstly, the nature of the study is broad and exploratory and largely aimed at the opinions and perceptions of African practitioners. Hence numerous support projects were mentioned and discussed at a high-level. This provided a useful and broad range of experiences, but meant that the complexities and fuller set of reasons behind certain actions were not necessarily revealed, as would have been the case if one case study had been chosen for investigation. Nevertheless, the intention of the study is to be an initial step towards revealing the assumptions beneath technical assistance processes and this approach suits an expansive and high-level approach. It is hoped that further studies will delve more deeply into a specific project to provide deeper reflection on some of the initial findings from this study. The research outcomes can then point out whether, and in what area, further information and exploration is needed, and start dialogue around alternative knowledge practices.

Secondly, the very nature of the study - the focus on perceptions and personal opinions of interviewees - resulted in primary data that is highly subjective. During the interviews, interviewees were often asked for examples to support claims made; however, these were not verified and could therefore have been assumed or exaggerated. This, although potentially misleading and inaccurate, is not posed as a significant threat because the research approach used views experience, opinions and perceptions as key to understanding the hegemonic nature and efficacy of support interventions. Furthermore, the data was analysed systematically using the coding technique.

Lastly, this study is informed by a strong social science perspective, which looks behind the technical aspects of technical assistance into hegemonic structures and processes. This is not a common form of enquiry within the climate change mitigation community. As such, interview participants would sometimes dwell on technical aspects of the projects or be guarded in their replies, being reluctant to give their personal opinions on the matter, as they were more familiar with a positivist approach to interviews that guards against subjectivity. On the whole more open opinions were given towards the end of the interview just before final greetings, when interviewees were moving out of the 'formal' part of the interview. If more studies of this nature are done within the climate change mitigation community it could result in research participants being more aware of these practices and being more open and communicative about their personal views on the topic.

## 4 TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR LOW CARBON DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

*'... because the ploughs of the rich can do as much harm as their swords.'*  
(Illich, 1997:94)

As mentioned in the research methodology section above, the case of low carbon development, within the broad field of climate change mitigation practice, is the focus area for this study. Low carbon development practice has been the site of numerous technical assistance interventions and encompasses a broad range of climate change mitigation activities. Climate change mitigation capacity building activities are increasingly seen to be synonymous with transitions to low carbon pathways in nations of the South (D'Auvergne & Nummelin, 2017:271). Within the area of low carbon development this study focuses on capacity building activities, in particular that of technical assistance support.

Capacity building efforts in low carbon development fall within and outside of the UNFCCC and cover a wide range of activities (Dagnet, Northrop & Tirpak, 2015:2). Within the climate change practice area it has been defined by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as the process that provides, strengthens and maintains the ability of individuals, organisations and societies to mitigate and adapt to climate change over time (Dagnet, Northrop & Tirpak, 2015:6). Capacity building support is typically performed through workshops and training, in the form of expert technical advice, and through support for strengthened institutional frameworks. This study focuses particularly on efforts outside of the formal UNFCCC processes (although influenced by them) and is limited to technical advice, training and support. The technical assistance projects raised during interviews and discussed in the study encompass (I)NDC design and implementation, and expert technical assistance support services on a range of subject areas. The project focus areas are largely related to energy, access to climate finance and technology transfer.

This chapter provides a high-level overview of capacity building activities within the low carbon development space. It will start by elaborating on the reasons why capacity building activities are the focus of the study. Thereafter it looks at the emergence of the concept of capacity building within development practice and how capacity building came to be associated with environmental issues such as climate change via the bridge of sustainable development. This context will enable a more nuanced reflection of the interview findings arising from this study that then follow. The findings are grouped into themes that arose from the literature review that have significant relevance to the case of low carbon development technical assistance in Africa.

### 4.1 WHY FOCUS ON CAPACITY BUILDING?

Within low carbon development capacity building programmes, effort is given to the production of knowledge products and direct support via experts that provide technical assistance to governments in developing countries. There are also numerous sessions allocated to the content of technical assistance at workshops and conferences within the low carbon development sector, as well as evaluations of the outcomes of these capacity building programmes. However, there appears to be a lacuna in research on the perceptions and experiences of recipients of these support programmes, of the kinds of technical assistance support they are given, the process by which the technical assistance is provided, and who provides it. This exploratory research uncovered some such perceptions of African professionals involved in low carbon development activities

on the continent, regarding technical assistance that is largely given by international programmes, agencies and consultancies based in the global North. The objective of this study is to uncover the tacit assumptions and power dynamics that underlie these programmes by hearing directly from African recipients. It seeks to bring elements of the social and the lived into a deeply technical field. It then asks that these assumptions are reflected upon, and that the deeper understanding that arises from the study is used to reconsider the design and implementation process of these programmes so that they better align with the objectives and expectations of the African government community.

Capacity building activities are largely driven from outside the regions in which they are implemented. Critiques of this practice have led to calls for more country-owned models of capacity building as can be seen in the Paris Declaration for Aid Effectiveness (2005) and the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) (Booth, 2011:s15–s16). These documents urge countries to define their own development priorities and to design and lead the programmes that promote them (Goldberg & Bryant, 2012:3). It has resulted in terms such as ‘country-driven’ and ‘country-demand’ being much touted within the climate change community of practice. More recently this need to align with national priorities has been foregrounded within Article 11.2 of the Paris Agreement, which states: *‘Capacity building should be country-driven, based on and responsive to national needs, and foster country ownership of Parties, in particular, for developing country Parties, including at the national, subnational and local levels.’* (Paris Agreement, 2015:15). What this study reveals however, is that to date, national needs have not necessarily been foregrounded within capacity building activities, specifically in this case, within technical assistance activities.

Staying with Article 11 of the Paris Agreement mentioned above, the inclusion of capacity building means that such support is likely to increase (D’Auvergne & Nummelin, 2017:284). Regarding *who* gives this support, the Paris Agreement recognises any party regardless of their respective status as developed or developing, as a potential provider of capacity building support. This moves towards a less binary distinction between developed and developing, and this more inclusive evaluation of capacity opens up the possibility of cooperation between developing countries (D’Auvergne & Nummelin, 2017:277). However, Article 11.3 does recognise the flow of support as largely being from the North to the South (D’Auvergne & Nummelin, 2017:276–277). Within capacity building literature there is a further highlighting of the need for capacity building in Africa. For instance Sterner et al. (2012:73) argue that the brain drain from the continent opens up a gap in capacity that needs filling. Furthermore, both outside and within capacity building activities of the Convention, a substantial amount of scientific information and other research is being produced to provide input into policy making for the complex environmental governance issue of climate change, particularly in the South (Biermann, 2002:195). This research has led to an accompanying growth of international scientific cooperation to gather this knowledge and adapt it to forms that are useful to decision makers operating in the area, which has further resulted in an increase in capacity building activities directed at the South (Sagar, 2000:379; Biermann, 2002:195). Many of these efforts have arisen from donors or international agencies (Sagar, 2000:379). It can therefore be assumed that the flow of technical assistance from the North to Africa will continue (and increase). Given the unequal power relationship that exists between the North and Africa, together with the hegemonic structure of Northern knowledge, there is ever more reason to investigate what these knowledge flows mean to both the recipients and suppliers of technical assistance, to potentially prevent unhelpful outcomes from occurring, as well as increase the efficacy of such interventions through a more balanced and equal knowledge flow.

## 4.2 THE ORIGINS OF CAPACITY BUILDING FOR LOW CARBON DEVELOPMENT

To understand the origins of capacity building practice within low carbon development, we must first turn to development practice. This practice emerged after the Second World War and was initially focused on the industrialised countries of Europe after the destruction of the war, and on the creation of a new international economic order (Martinussen, 1997:34). This work in development resulted in the formation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the mid-forties (Martinussen, 1997:34). Following these initial efforts, the focus of attention within development practice came to rest on the newly independent African states (Martinussen, 1997:35). Capacity building as a term started to be used during this time in the 1950s (Sagar, 2000:379). During that initial phase the objective of development practice was largely focused on developing countries achieving a “state of modernity” (with the assumption that developed countries had already reached this endpoint of modernity). Thus, the aim for developing countries was to become more like developed countries (Humphrey, 2007:15). Capacity building efforts were focused on the design and operation of institutions, with little attention paid to the political or cultural aspects of the societies towards which they were targeted (Sagar, 2000:379). From this start-point capacity building efforts moved towards the inclusion of human capacity as well as an integration with political aspects, and saw a broadening of the range of institutions that were involved to include NGOs and community organisations (Sagar, 2000:379).

Within the evolution of development practice, environmental issues came to be included, ultimately leading to the concept of low carbon development. This inclusion of issues of the environment occurred internationally as well as nationally and came to the fore strongly in the early seventies with the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, which led to the formation of the United Nations Environment Programme in 1974 (Sagar, 2000:378). At the time recognition was given to the need to build and maintain a strong link between issues of the environment and issues of development within the global South (Sagar, 2000:378). This link was further asserted in the Brundlandt Commission Report of 1987 (World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED), 1987). This report sought to reconcile the need for developing countries to develop economically, with the concerns of developed countries over the deterioration of the environment (Bluemling & Yun, 2016:116). This bringing together of development motives with issues of the environment was encompassed in the term ‘sustainable development’, which was used in these early stages of the practice to encompass a broad range of environmental issues. This term later gave way to ‘low carbon development’ when addressing climate change mitigation specifically and has now become a common way of talking about this interface of climate change mitigation and international development<sup>16</sup> (Urban & Nordensvärd, 2013:3). Nevertheless it still retains a largely mitigation focus within support and capacity building activities. The findings of this study (elaborated on later in this section) assert that this mitigation focus could arise because of the largely Northern-driven nature of these activities and the unidirectional flow of knowledge that ensues.

Within the UNFCCC process, capacity building has been included since the first COP in Berlin in 1995. In the early COPs of the nineties the focus of capacity building efforts was on the transfer of technology and expertise, but at COP 5 in 1999 a broadening of focus occurred and a recognition of varying degrees of capacity building interventions as well as gaps within the efforts arose (D’Auvergne & Nummelin, 2017:272). Capacity building continued to be raised in the UNFCCC negotiations and the 2007 Bali Action

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<sup>16</sup> Note that in the United States the term ‘low emissions development’ is generally used. For the purposes of consistency within this study the term ‘low carbon development’ will be used.

Plan includes a reference to capacity building and a chapter was dedicated to capacity building within the Ad-hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention in 2009 (D'Auvergne & Nummelin, 2017:271,274). It was however only at the Paris COP of 2015 that capacity building was dealt with in a dedicated article (Article 11) (Paris Agreement, 2015).

In the section that follows, the perceptions and opinions of the interviewees, together with relevant insights from decolonial and development literature, will be described and collated into emergent themes concerning technical assistance practice within low carbon development in Africa.

### **4.3 EMERGENT THEMES FROM AFRICAN TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RECIPIENTS**

Experiences shared during the interview process revealed that technical assistance activities are implemented in a multitude of ways. This is supported by research from Virji, Padgham and Seipt (2012:115–116), who state that *'there are many different ways in which various international development platforms define, approach and facilitate capacity building in their work'*. From the responses of the interviewees it appears there are likewise varied views on capacity building and support interventions by recipients and providers alike. These range from perceptions of success and satisfaction with the ways in which activities have been implemented, to instances where there is significant discomfort and dissatisfaction with both the process and the outcomes. During the interviews interviewees raised numerous points regarding technical assistance practice: the nature of knowledge that was being transferred, the manner in which technical assistance programmes were being implemented, the financial flows out of Africa associated with technical assistance projects, as well as how donor priorities are linked to technical assistance funding. Eight of the twelve interviewees raised the importance of local context or local expertise within technical assistance activities. A further predominant trend that arose was the need to implement low carbon development projects even if all the necessary inputs to the process were not yet fully developed. In this regard interviewees expressed a comfort with the uncertainty and emergent quality of iterative processes. African interviewees were also comfortable to rely on practitioner expertise over and above expert qualifications.

When the interview findings are seen in conjunction with literature on capacity building three overarching themes arise. Firstly, what becomes clear is that there is a divergence of priorities between the North and Africa, and an imbalance in whose priorities are realised – who benefits from these technical assistance programmes? Secondly, there is an entrenched unidirectional flow of knowledge between the two parties. Knowledge arises from the North where it is influenced by the particular Northern context of its origin, and is transferred by Northern parties to African recipients. Reciprocal knowledge and expertise is not expected to arise from African recipients unless it is contextual in nature, and then only on occasion. Finally, technical assistance programmes are being implemented in a manner that is not necessarily useful to recipients. The sections below delve more deeply into these three themes using the findings from the interviews as well as literature on capacity building, development, and decolonialism, in order to identify assumptions underlying technical assistance practice.

#### **4.3.1 Diverging priorities between the North and Africa**

When considering low carbon development from the vantage of decolonial and development literature, as well as from the interview data from this study, the differing priorities between countries of the North and the South become apparent. The promise of sustainable development, and more recently low carbon development, is the bringing together of these differing priorities. These development priorities include social justice

and poverty reduction for the South, and environmental priorities such as low carbon innovation technology and carbon emissions reductions for the North (Urban & Nordensvärd, 2013:preface). However, these differing priorities remain even when brought together under the umbrella of low carbon development. And the priorities of those holding the greater power tend to prevail over those holding less, resulting in a drive towards emissions reductions over a drive towards development objectives.

The demand for capacity building efforts on climate change arising from the South, and from Africa in particular, have historically been prioritised on activities that would enhance the resilience of vulnerable communities to the effects of climate change (Najam, Huq & Sokona, 2003:226). This is largely because the impacts of climate change will be greater within Africa than in other regions, and the past, present and future greenhouse gas emissions from Africa are likely to remain a small contribution to global emissions (Collier, Conway & Venables, 2008:337). However, with the adoption of the Paris Agreement and the ratification of the NDCs of 46 African countries as of 14 August 2018 (United Nations [UN], n.d.), there has been increasing focus from African governments towards low carbon development and mitigation activities. With this has come a renewed impetus in capacity building efforts in the area. Be this as it may, one cannot deny that the alleviation of poverty and the ability of the poor to adapt to climate change remain of paramount importance to African governments as is recognised in Article 2 of the Paris Agreement:

*'This Agreement, in enhancing the implementation of the Convention, including its objective, aims to strengthen the global response to the threat of climate change, in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty'* (Paris Agreement, 2015).

Within this study, African interviewees noted how the priorities of donor countries influenced the nature of technical assistance activities that received funding. In particular it was noted that consultants brought in to provide technical assistance support were often the nationality of the donors funding the work and accordingly not necessarily chosen according to who was best suited to the need within the country receiving the support. An interviewee observes:

*'It really has a lot to do with who the donors are, and where they are coming from. We have seen with most donor-funded programmes if they are donor-funded by Germans most of the consultants will be Germans, if you are donor-funded by Austrians, most of the consultants will be Austrians, same thing applies to the French'* (East African Government A, personal interview, 2018 May 24).

Furthermore, an interviewee noted that priorities varied between donor countries and that these priorities were championed in programmes supported by those donors:

*'And I have to let you know that, especially the European Governments, every country has got its own priorities. Before certain amounts of money or support be it financial or technical is channelled down to the developing country, then the priority of that country is taken into consideration'* (West African TA Recipient A, personal interview, 2018 April 12).

African governments and practitioners involved in technical assistance projects were not able to choose the experts that they would want to have involved, nor were they able to allocate the budget to the activities they prioritised. This lack of influence and allocation further entrenches the hegemony of Northern knowledge and Northern

knowledge providers. The study revealed further differences in the priorities of Northern technical assistance suppliers and African recipients. African interviewees advocate for a move away from text-based report work and a focus on policy and plans, towards support for low carbon development implementation “on the ground”, as can be seen in the interview from a recipient of technical assistance in West Africa who observed:

*‘Most of the technical assistance that has come in has been of capacity building on policy review, policy analysis all those things. I think we have moved beyond that point now. The Ministers are very blunt they say: “Look if you have come to review our policy documents again sorry, enough is enough”. They have had enough of that track. Let’s move beyond the soft issues and do implementation’* (West African TA Recipient A, personal interview, 2018 April 11).

Some interviewees perceived the priorities of technical support providers to be towards the institution for which they worked, or for them in an individual capacity, notably to retain employment. In these cases it was asserted that the process by which technical assistance was provided was negatively affected, specifically that complete training was not given, in order to keep the recipients reliant on the services of international experts. A government representative from East Africa notes:

*‘Their allegiance is more to [their country of origin] and not for me. And that’s the thing. Their job is to do the assignment but not to impart that knowledge because there is a fear that once they impart it to you then they cease to be relevant’* (East African Government A, personal interview, 2018 May 24).

This disjuncture between the objectives of the technical support providers (consultancy fees, income generation) and the needs of African nations is further highlighted in the differing requests for support. From African recipients of technical assistance support in this study, there came a call for direct financial assistance over the provision of technical support activities such as expert advice. When non-financial support was requested it was strongly focused on accessing climate funds, for instance help with climate finance application processes:

*‘Financial support is needed because many of these programmes and activities actually cannot be implemented. We can come out with all the regulations and policies but when it comes to implementation we still need outside support to help us. And that outside support is in the form finance. I don’t think a country like [West African country] right now needs technical assistance in terms of knowledge dissemination from outside for us to do our work ... but needing support we mostly need financial support from outside’* (West African TA Recipient A, personal interview, 2018 April 11).

The interviews revealed instances of those parties holding hegemonic knowledge as well as financial resources, continuing to receive benefit even if those benefits are ostensibly directed towards Africa. African interviewees acknowledged the flow of finance out of Africa in the form of international consultants’ fees and travel expenses. In particular the wasteful expense on international travel, as well as the significant proportion of the budget that was allocated to international experts was noted. This was in contrast to cases when local experts were used. In these cases services tended to be funded internally and as a result of limited budget availability local experts at times did not receive fair recompense for the services tendered:

*'They are putting in their time, their knowledge. What they have put in in terms of time and knowledge is not commensurate to what they are taking home: like a consultant who is going back with \$30 - \$40 p/day. For a consultant that is chicken feed!' (Central African Government, personal interview, 2018).*

The outflow of money from Africa was seen to be especially problematic because of the co-funding by African governments for technical assistance projects. A civil servant speaking of a technical assistance programme coming from the North stated:

*'It is a business for them, you find 70% of a project design is consultancy work, so that is money coming [in] and going back [out]. If the money is coming from the [donor country] Government, then 70% of this is going to be [for the donor country], and all the consultancy work is going to be [nationals from the donor country]. And yet the painful part is, for such a programme to take place, for us to get donor support, our government also gives co-financing. For instance our government will agree to waive taxes for staff, for consumables as their form of co-financing. Sometimes we will cater for their bills of consumables such as telephone bills and accommodation, for instance we host them in our building, and then we also put in our money to invest in these programmes. So if 70% of this money is going back, yet we are giving you, zero taxes, we are paying your bills, giving you free rent, at the end of the day we lose out' (East African Government A, personal interview, 2018 May 24).*

Whose priorities tend to be furthered when it comes to technical assistance programmes, and at what cost to the other party? Data arising from the interviews revealed cases where those receiving technical assistance are receiving it in areas that they may not want to prioritise, whereas those giving the support are receiving benefits in areas they have interest and investment in. The result is that those with more influence and financial resources dictate which areas within low carbon development are prioritised, who provides the support, and how it is done. Who gives the assistance and who receives the assistance is another issue that came to the fore in the interviews. Findings in this regard are elaborated on in the section below.

#### **4.3.2 Knowledge flows in low carbon development technical assistance**

Literature on capacity building within development research indicates that support activities often originate in the North, are driven by Northern agents, and use knowledge arising from the North. Hence the origin and flow of knowledge is largely unidirectional; from Northern experts to Southern recipients. Humphrey (2007:16) notes the:

*'Increasing role of Northern donors in directing development research. It is not 'Northern agendas' per se that are the main problem, but rather the ability of the controllers of development research finance to occupy research space in both North and South'.*

This Northern influence in research becomes especially problematic when considering the differing priorities of the two regions noted in the section above and therefore the mismatch between African country demand and the technical assistance that African countries are receiving. The predominance of Northern experts and researchers can furthermore lead to knowledge from Africa being overlooked, resulting in knowledge largely originating in the North. Data from the interviews undertaken for this study revealed two aspects of knowledge flow within technical assistance for low carbon development: that of the geographical origin of knowledge used, and nationality of

experts and support providers. Both will be discussed in the two subsections that follow.

#### 4.3.2.1 *Origins of knowledge used in technical assistance*

Interviewees noted that the knowledge being used for technical assistance originated predominantly from the North. The lack of local and regional knowledge being used within such programmes was raised as a concern. One interviewee asserted: *'Foreign knowledge doesn't really solve local problems'* (West African TA Recipient B, personal interview, 2018 May 15). The importance of local cultural and regional contexts was a recurring theme among interviewees, with six of the nine African interviewees mentioning the importance of contextual factors in their responses. A Northern technical assistance provider<sup>17</sup> also noted the importance of contextual considerations, stating:

*'We try our best to match the request with an expert who has, you know, experience either working in that country certainly working on that topic, so we are able to provide the best contextual support to that country'* (Northern TA Provider A, personal interview, 2018 May 23).

The benefits of incorporating regional and culturally relevant factors into programme design and in the case highlighted below, into energy modelling design, was particularly noted:

*'If the model is developed by us, within our context, taking our local realities into consideration, it becomes very easy'* (Central African Government, personal interview, 2018 May 22).

Regarding the origin of knowledge, some African interviewees mentioned that the technical assistance being provided in projects was not always appropriate to the context into which it was being placed, and that this could have significant bearing on the relevance and accuracy of outputs and outcomes. In addition, contextually relevant information was sometimes not included in technical assistance projects and outputs. Both these factors contributed to a lack of impact resulting from the technical assistance despite significant financial resources flowing into these activities:

*'So you see all these huge budget lines, the impacts of these can't be found. They are really very minimal unless you introduce that local content or the local element into the picture and then they'll have the problem addressed. But if you don't introduce that in the picture what it means is that, you will have a lot of things that are imported but that do not really answer the local questions that are to be found'* (West African TA Recipient B, personal interview, 2018 May 15).

On the other hand, there was an instance where an African recipient of technical assistance praised the level of contextual input she had received during a training programme she had attended:

*'Most of the trainings are extremely contextualised. You had to work with real key examples. They would give us examples of what happens back in their countries for instance in Europe or England, the US, but then they would actually sometimes ask you to come with a real case scenario, and then from*

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<sup>17</sup>Although working for a Northern technical assistance provider and living in the North the interviewee is originally from the developing world.

*there you start working it out with the trainer and building up the scenario'*  
(East African Government A, personal interview, 2018 May 24).

Continuing the prioritisation on local context and content generally, specific mention was made by an African interviewee of the need to consider cultural practices within technical assistance projects. Referencing biomass cook-stoves, an interviewee stated the importance of understanding cultural food preferences within the region and even sub-regional level as they have differing energy demands and therefore the nature of the energy supply needs to be considered. Knowledge or expertise arising outside the area of cultural context can often not respond to these cultural differences:

*'Address the cultural sensitivity of the people, because when you move from for example [internal region A] to [internal region B] the type of food that people normally eat as their staple food changes. And in that way the preparation also changes, the energy demand for the preparation changes. So when we contacted people from different countries, from different cultural backgrounds, from different tribal backgrounds, from different socio-economic backgrounds, you realise that people are demanding things that are skewed towards their culture'* (West African TA Recipient A, personal interview, 2018 April 11).

It was not only regional information and cultural concerns that were included in discussions around the importance of context. The nationality of the experts used within technical assistance projects was a subject that was also raised by interviewees and is expanded on below.

#### 4.3.2.2 *Who provides the technical assistance?*

A strong call came from African interviewees to include local experts and practitioners in technical assistance projects to counter the existing imbalance of largely Northern experts. This reaffirms capacity building literature on the subject of local expertise, which has been raised since the late 90's, in particular the need to have developing country stakeholders involved in the design, evaluation and implementation of capacity building projects (Sagar & VanDeveer, 2005:14). The demand for local experts over foreign experts remained even if local experts did not necessarily have the high qualifications of their international counterparts. African interviewees justified the use of local experts due to the quality of their outputs, their perseverance to get the job done and their familiarity with local context. This runs counter to the prevailing perception of low knowledge and expertise within Africa described in the literature review.

*'We have some people who have got technical expertise in designing improved cook-stoves, that you will be surprised, they may not have all the CVs, and all the academic achievement to show, but if you look at the quality of work they do! We may not go that high for those people, we may have people in the middle-class, or even down there who will do the same job and do it maybe even better'* (West African TA Recipient A, personal interview, 2018 April 11).

*'Local experts, these are people who live within the programme context. They understand how to juggle around with the proper effort to find the right solutions, rather than importing knowledge'* (West African TA Recipient B, personal interview, 2018 May 15).

Respondents noted the value local experts had in building capacity within their countries, and ensuring that expertise and practical know-how for low carbon

development was retained in-country after project completion. This enables African countries to move away from a state of extraversion and dependence on Northern countries. By using local experts, knowledge arises within Africa and stays within Africa to the benefit of the region. This factor was noted by four of the African interviewees, two of whom are quoted below:

*'The purpose is that at the end, the model that is developed by [Central African Country] for the [Central African Country] context, and since this is done by nationals, at any time you can get back to them'* (Central African Government, personal interview, 2018 May 22).

*'We do the training of the people, let them be good, let them be able to assemble this thing, do all the trouble-shooting then you tell them now go, versus bringing super experts. They come, they do a good job, they walk away and there is no-one who can run this thing'* (East African TA Provider B, personal interview, 2018 April 11).

On the other hand, the study did reveal instances of Africans being employed to provide technical assistance support. Of the six technical support providers interviewed for the study, three were African nationals who had been involved in technical assistance projects for African countries. Furthermore, a coordinator of a Northern technical assistance support service discussed the intention of the programme to source Southern experts and experts with local knowledge.

*'We have several experts in Colombia and in the South and we are actively trying to grow that expert base'* (Northern TA Provider A, personal interview, 2018 May 23).

In some instances (three projects were mentioned in this regard) the drive to have country ownership, project sustainability and the inclusion of regional inputs led African recipients of Northern-funded technical support projects to source expertise within their countries, despite Northern technical expertise being provided, and also in spite of a lack of funds to do so easily. In all three cases Northern experts did not adequately implement the work that was needed within country. One of these cases is highlighted below:

*'We then even had to look for additional funding to get local expertise to provide really good and right training for the people here locally to use the technology'* (West African TA Recipient B, personal interview, 2018 May 15).

The importance of using local experts is such that in some of the African countries discussed in the interviews, policies have been put in place that govern the amount of external expertise that can be used within projects (three countries were specifically mentioned in this regard). In two projects located in different countries that were discussed, local experts were the designated technical experts to the project either because of national policies, or because of direct requests from the government to the donors for involvement in expert selection. This use of local expertise counters the unidirectional flow of knowledge from the North to Africa. An explanation of the reasons why local experts were chosen is given by one of the African technical assistance providers below:

*'The thinking is that, if it is possible to have a [local] to do the job, it will be possible to retain that expertise within the country. We could have hired, you*

*know foreign experts from the North to support the South but that was only needed when the required expertise was not available, then we brought expertise from the North'* (East African TA Provider A, personal interview, 2018 April 10).

In one project where there was no expertise within the country<sup>18</sup>; national personnel worked closely with a team of international experts who were assigned as personal mentors. In this way capacity was transferred in a deep and sustainable way that has resulted in long-lasting benefits within the country. This deep engagement approach to technical assistance was a requirement of the national government to ensure local capacity is built, and this capacity and knowledge is retained within the country.

*'They started recruiting nationals. This was like a shadowing process where you have an international grooming a national. So we would actually work together with an international for a period of one year. The international passed on that knowledge, gave that capacity for a period of one year and then after three years it was fully supported by, [and] was being run by nationals'* (East African Government B, personal interview, 2018 May 11).

However, in all the cases discussed in the interviews the provision of technical assistance arose from the North either in terms of funding, supply of services, or ideas for project topics. And often (though not always) the expertise originated in the North unless specified otherwise by government law or government request. Ultimately financial resources, hegemonic knowledge structures and the use of international experts at the expense of local expertise reinforces the direction of knowledge flow from North to Africa and further entrenches the unequal power relations that exist between the two regions. When expertise comes mainly from a region that has been in possession of power over Africa the balance of power between the two parties is not equal. This power differential should be considered and addressed in the design of technical assistance programmes. A further dominant theme that arose from the interviews was the process by which technical assistance was provided to recipients. This is described below.

#### **4.3.3 The ways in which technical assistance is being implemented**

The manner in which capacity building activities are delivered within climate change practice has been raised in critiques of capacity building efforts, such as those of Adenle, Manning and Arbiol (2017:130), who contend that interventions are often not relevant to what is happening in-country, and are not deep enough to facilitate African countries being active in future climate change mitigation activities. This view is supported by Ndlovu-Gatsheni, who cites Mahmood Mamdani's reflections on consultancy culture that operates within development work on the continent. Mamdani describes the practice as *'shallow technicist prescriptions informed by symptomatic reading of the African development malaise'* (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:58). In the two subsections below we will look at two approaches to technical assistance which came out strongly in the interviews. The first approach was a largely Northern way of implementing technical assistance, and the second a predominantly African way.

##### **4.3.3.1 Generalised training workshops**

Training workshops were criticised by two African interviewees, who substantiated the findings from Adenle, Manning and Arbiol (2017) mentioned above that generalised, high-level information that is not relevant to the situation at hand is being provided. One example mentioned was of a biogas technology transfer project training workshop

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<sup>18</sup> One of the reasons for this gap in expertise noted by the interviewee is the very young work force within the country.

where recipients were hoping for deep and detailed interactions on how the technology could be adapted for their specific context in terms of feedstock to the system. Instead they received high-level and general information which most of the recipients, being experts in the field, already had knowledge of. In this project additional money had to be sought from funders to pay for national experts to work on the calculations and adapt the technology to the specific country circumstance. This example also reveals an assumption of a low level of expertise within Africa and the expectation of a one-way flow of information as opposed to interactive discussion. The interviewee, a participant in the project, stated:

*'Instead of providing training on the specific technology we were dealing with, they came providing general training, text-book information on the use of biogas technology. So most of us raised red flags there and then! People that had more experience in biogas technology were brought in locally to work with these technical experts, to redesign the models that they were using [and] to provide the training for the people that then provided an answer for us on how to use the technology'* (West African TA Recipient B, personal interview, 2018 May 15).

Other instances were raised, similar to that mentioned above of experts coming from the North and sharing generalised technical assistance that was not of relevance to the recipients. A modelling project was described where a Northern expert was brought in to provide technical assistance and yet had no experience in the area. He was providing generalised information that did not add substantial value to the project or address the requirement of the country, which was to develop an energy model.

*'We soon realised that his contributions were looking more abstract to us. Because you have a consultant to develop a model, he himself had not developed the model before. At some point we said this man does not have the mastery of where he wants us to go to'* (Central African Government, personal interview, 2018 May 22).

Another case discussed during the interviews revealed the experience of a project team where a Northern expert was repeating information he had already received from the country team back to them. The in-country recipients were of the opinion that the expert's capacity was being built more than that of the supposed technical assistance recipients:

*'So it got to the point where one of us made a joke. He says: Look these guys, what are they doing? You come and look at my watch and tell me what the time is and you tell me you are building my capacity. What kind of capacity is this?'* (West African TA Recipient B, personal interview, 2018 May 15).

Returning to the example of training workshops, a civil servant raised the issue that training workshops provided too much information to digest in one sitting and that the capacity building activities stopped short of reaching the mark. The interviewee suggested that different kinds of support, over a longer time period, would be more effective in ensuring that knowledge was transferred in a meaningful and lasting way:

*'It was too much information to check in one go. It would have been good to have longer trainings and also support. Not just technical support and capacity building, but **actual** support to set up a system, to run the system together. We needed more. More follow-up training and also financial support to set up the systems'* (East African Government A, personal interview, 2018 May 24).

Returning to capacity building literature we see the issue of incomplete training is echoed. Adenle, Manning and Arbiol (2017:130) emphasise that trainings need to be given over a sufficient period of time in order to build capacity. Goldberg and Bryant advise (2012:3): *'The focus of country-owned capacity building should be to give organisations skills necessary to respond to challenges, solve problems and build capacity independently in the future'*. A reason for the incomplete training may be reluctance on the part of Northern consultants to give up power. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2012:56) quotes John Henrik Clarke: *'Powerful people will never educate powerless people on what it means to take power away from them'* and asserts that experts from the global North are examples of such powerful people. The civil servant quoted above, talking of what she would do if she had free reign to design a technical assistance programme, stated:

*'I would really build their capacity so that they can have the ability to do most of the work by themselves instead of having to keep on going back to get this support. So I want complete capacity building, nothing hidden. Build my capacity completely so that I can even get to the point of designing the actual software for instance. Give 100% complete capacity building, not selective capacity building'* (East African Government A, personal interview, 2018 May 24).

In order for African practitioners to do most of the work themselves, technical assistance and capacity building initiatives should build human and institutional capacity and not just be implemented through workshops, for example the development and implementation of Masters and PhD programmes (Winkler, personal communication, 2018 June 01). The need to focus on capacity building for African institutions is supported by Adenle, Manning & Arbiol (2017:123–124).

On the other hand, three interviewees described technical assistance approaches very different to the “light-touch” training described above. A civil servant from East Africa discussed a deeper and more lasting process that focused on building individual human capacity through a mentorship model. In this project national team members were trained and engaged with on a day-to-day basis by Northern technical support providers, with the view that they should be able to run the project independently without further external assistance after the technical assistance project was completed. His experience was markedly different from those mentioned previously in this section.

*'When I started I actually had an international I was working with. She would support me in terms of doing this work on a day-to-day basis. She would review my work and she provided strategic orientation. This is how it is done. She helped me come up with the templates I am still using up to today'* (East African Government B, personal interview, 2018 May 11).

Another project used an approach where the country government was involved in the selection process of the technical expert, resulting in a country national being hired by the international donor agency. The expert was stationed for a year within the governmental office where she effectively became a member of the team reporting to the head of the section. In this way her expertise and work was integrated into the operations of the ministerial office. Furthermore, the international agency allowed for project work plans to be adjusted in order to be receptive to the needs and demands of the government ministry in question.

*'Yes there was a work plan ... but as time went [on] it became clear that instead of having a separate strategy on its own that it would be more effective to*

*support the government on the things that were already happening'* (Southern African TA Provider, personal interview, 2018 May 09).

An interviewee from East Africa was involved in a project where he worked closely in a technical support role with government counterparts forming a collegial relationship and even being stationed within their office:

*'Once it got traction we were able to have our own office within the [Government Ministry]. Additional persons from the [Government Ministry] were also assigned to support us. So what started out with very small interest ended up being one of the biggest projects within the [Government Ministry] so, it was a good success'* (East African TA Provider A, personal interview, 2018 April 10).

On the reasons for its success:

*'One would be, this thing was handled by local experts, we were talking the same language, and, frankly, we become more like colleagues, ... had it been a project where we checked in and checked out, there would have been no, human interaction ... I would suppose they wouldn't have been much interested'* (East African TA Provider A, personal interview, 2018 April 10).

#### 4.3.3.2 Iterative and messy processes

A further move away from generalised and incomplete capacity building efforts was the call from interviewees for iterative and emergent processes, and projects where local practitioners were used to design and implement projects. Certain interviewees expressed a strong desire to move on from the focus on planning and policy making and getting all circumstances perfect, but rather to go with an idea and get it done – a 'learning by doing' approach to capacity building and technical work.

*'When you want your capacities to be well developed there is what we call "learning by doing"'* (Central African Government, personal interview, 2018 May 22).

The desire for local expertise and a "hands-on" attitude over good qualifications and international expertise became apparent. Persistence, passion and dedication were the qualities that were desired and which brought projects to fruition. Furthermore, an acceptance of messiness and the need to sometimes struggle through situations was voiced:

*'We will hire local people, if these guys are not that good then they will have a steep learning curve, instead of us importing [expertise], which we can do, the money is there but that is not a good idea'* (East African TA Provider B, personal interview, 2018 April 11).

This was in contrast to feedback from a technical assistance support provider from the North who had a strong focus on the need for high quality outputs that would need to withstand public scrutiny and not pose a risk to the institution involved:

*'I knew this was going to be a resource that would be high profile. I knew that it would be something that would provide a basis for a lot of other work we would be doing. ... So I had a very strong sense of it needs to be right. ... If we got it wrong that would be a huge loss .... It had to be spot on there was no way around it'* (Northern TA Provider B, personal interview, 2018 June 06).

In considering process and the ways in which technical assistance is implemented, reference was made across the various categories of interviewees to the relationships that were formed during technical assistance projects and the importance and value of these relationships:

*'I also got some great relationships with a whole bunch of countries and I really hold my relationships with the countries I work with as precious as anything else'* (Northern TA Provider B, personal interview, 2018 June 06).

This focus on relationships was particularly prevalent in those projects where respondents had perceptions of success, or experienced satisfaction with project outcomes. Furthermore, there was often a collegial quality to the relationships within successful projects<sup>19</sup>, such as an element of healthy competition or being invited to share office space. Successful projects had technical experts that became part of a team and where support providers and recipients worked together as equals:

*'You know there were so many things we learnt from them, but after a couple of years, it looks like you have learnt so many things from them and now it becomes more like you are like competing, but in a good way. It is not negative competition but good competition where you try to improve each other. You are all learning from each other'* (East African Government B, personal interview, 2018 May 11).

In successful technical assistance projects there also appeared to be a passion and commitment to the projects by technical assistance recipients and providers alike at the expense of personal gain. In the case of two projects, team members were paid very little, or subsidised their time personally, and yet continued to work on the project:

*'I have worked totally unpaid unofficially to help get the proposal through until it got approved which was this year<sup>20</sup>'* (Northern TA Provider C, personal interview, 2018 May 11).

*'The funding was not enough. The consultants, the university dons and all the team members have just decided that OK since this is a national model that is their contribution to develop something for their country, otherwise what [the funding] was initially intended for the project was quite small'* (Central African Government, personal interview, 2018 May 22).

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The data arising from the research described above reveals perceptions of technical assistance support for climate change mitigation that is inclusive and collegial and that employs the considerable capability that is found within the continent, particularly in the form of local African experts being used as technical assistance providers. However, it also revealed a number of practices that continue the hegemonic practices established during colonialism, such as the overlooking of knowledge and expertise originating in Africa, and the continuing predominance of knowledge from the North. This knowledge largely flows in one direction; that is from the North (in the form of priorities, suppliers, knowledge and funding) to Africa where recipients are envisioned as passive recipients of services. It has resulted in cases where assistance and knowledge is not fit for

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<sup>19</sup> I am noting projects as successful if they are perceived as successful by interviewees or were spoken of in a positive way.

<sup>20</sup> The interviewee was paid for a proportion of the work however the work required far exceeded the paid days. Hence the final period was unpaid, or it could be understood that the work over the whole period was subsidised i.e. not fully covered by the fees provided.

purpose within African countries and in some instances where additional local expertise has to be sought. Furthermore, the use of “light-touch” generalised technical assistance support that doesn’t result in deep capacity building of individuals or institutions has continued the practice highlighted in decolonial literature of African dependency on, and extraversion towards, the North. The interviews also revealed early development assistant practices such as a focus on following a Northern model of development and the assumption of low knowledge and expertise within Africa, which is seen to be at an earlier or lower stage of development.

However, the interviews also showed counter-currents. Instances where the agency, expertise and ability of Africans are foregrounded. National policies put in place by African governments to favour the use of local experts, a “can-do” attitude which results in the development of national energy models and financial instruments and also the use of African experts within technical assistance programmes. These all show the potential of alternative approaches to the technical assistance that is currently favoured.

Building on the findings from the study interviews, and in the context of decolonial and development theory, the following chapter seeks to critically examine the assumptions that underpin technical assistance interventions and to note what impact these assumptions and practices may have on the efficacy of technical assistance activities within low carbon development.

## 5 ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN AFRICA?

*'If I went to a country like Zambia and I want to build the capacity, who am I to build the capacity of say Professor Yamba<sup>21</sup>? They have these young ladies and gentlemen coming from say [Northern Institution], who are very young professionals, coming to build the capacity of Professor Yamba. It just doesn't sit well. It makes some of us uncomfortable'* (West African TA Recipient B, personal interview, 2018 May 15).

This study set out to critically examine the tacit assumptions underlying technical assistance practice within low carbon development programmes to ascertain whether the enactment of power hegemonies occur within climate change mitigation capacity building practice. It assumed that within the process of technical assistance implementation, hierarchies of power are enacted and hegemonic knowledge practice is further entrenched. The experiences of recipients of technical assistance activities described above did bring to the fore these power imbalances and contributed to the identification of tacit assumptions that are made by the providers of technical assistance. With a greater realisation of underlying power dynamics and assumptions embedded within technical assistance programmes, it is hoped that the climate change mitigation community is able to reflect on unhelpful practices in order to work towards sharing and creating knowledge in a more equitable and collegial manner that is more appropriate to implement and progress the goals of African countries, both in climate change mitigation and with regards to climate friendly development.

A range of perceptions was revealed in the interview discussions held with technical experts, government practitioners and project managers that operate within the low carbon development field. From these perceptions four key assumptions underlying technical assistance practice emerged. Firstly, that Africa needs assistance from the North to develop in a low carbon manner. Secondly, that this knowledge arising from outside of Africa is relevant to Africa. Thirdly, that the North knows what is needed in Africa, and fourthly that Africa does not have the necessary expertise to contribute to low carbon development within the continent. These assumptions will be elaborated on below before concluding the chapter with the relevance this has for technical assistance practice on the continent.

### 5.1 AFRICA NEEDS ASSISTANCE FROM THE NORTH

The first assumption brought to the fore is that which underscores the need for technical assistance and capacity building in the first instance. This is the view by the largely Northern-dominated institutions that instigate technical assistance programmes: that African countries need to be helped by the North in order to be capable of following a low carbon development pathway. It suggests that African countries are unable to find solutions to the challenge of low carbon development using local knowledge and expertise. This assumption omits the reasons why many African countries have struggled to reach their development goals. The drivers of the current state of underdevelopment within the continent are not included in an analysis of how Africa as a region can develop in an effective and equitable way in the future. Rather, a lack of knowledge and expertise is considered the main cause of underdevelopment and hence a largely technical and decontextualized knowledge arising from the North is seen as the way in which to support Africa following a low carbon development path.

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<sup>21</sup> Professor Francis Yamba is a highly respected and well-known Zambian academic and practitioner on Energy.

However, given that a lack of knowledge was not the cause of underdevelopment in the first place, knowledge, particularly knowledge arising from the very specific circumstance of the North, may indeed not be the most appropriate way to “help” Africa.

Consideration of the drivers behind Africa’s underdevelopment challenges the perception of a passive Africa that needs help in order to progress put forward in the Modernist Theory of development. In this model of development, movement to a higher stage of development can only be achieved by the transfer of ‘*know-how from the industrial West*’ (Leys, 1982:102). This now much-critiqued modernist view of development continues to have significant influence on how practice areas outside of the development community understand issues of development. The pervasiveness of the modernist concept of development was noted by Martinussen (1997:39) in the late 1990s who stated that ‘*the conception of development as a modernisation process with these characteristics has survived the last 40 years of debates and empirical analysis – particularly outside the research community. The same applies to the idea that economic growth is the core feature of development in the Third World*’. It appears his statement may still be relevant now, over twenty years later, within climate change mitigation practice. This could in part be due to the lack of development professionals within the climate change mitigation sector. This perception of improvement or progression came out subtly in some of the interviews when project implementers referred to technical assistance as increasing the sophistication of questions coming from African countries, or evaluating countries in terms of how advanced they are in certain areas:

*‘If people are asking more sophisticated questions ... then the hope is that some support we provided, or in addition to all the other support in expertise they already have, peer learning etcetera, that there has been some movement towards moving the needle on it’* (Northern TA Provider A, personal interview, 2018 May 23).

*‘... even countries that are quite advanced in terms of policy making’* (Northern TA Provider B, personal interview, 2018 June 06).

Mkandawire (2001:310) writes how the levelling of the political and economic experiences within Africa masks successful development experiences that show creative ways of dealing with challenges and rather ‘*leaves the door wide open for unlimited intervention in African affairs, and ultimately dissipates whatever enthusiasm the locals may have had for development*’. With reference to the involvement of outside actors within Africa, many capacity building programmes focus on gaps, on what appears to be lacking. In donors’ eyes this could for example be the absence of certain technologies. These presumed “gaps” are then filled with activities that have been preconceived by donors or are obvious to donors, but which don’t take contextual factors (or country priorities) into account (VanDeveer & Dabelko, 2001:24–25). This practice has been strongly countered by Adenle, Manning and Arbiol (2017:130), who state that institutional capacity should be built by national and regional institutions that then partner with, and are complimented by donors, rather than being driven by donors.

## **5.2 KNOWLEDGE FROM THE NORTH IS RELEVANT TO AFRICA**

The second assumption relates to the predominance of Northern experts in technical assistance projects. This reveals an assumption by Northern service providers that their knowledge and expertise (arising from a particular Northern context) is appropriate and relevant for African countries. Although the Northern technical assistance providers interviewed for this study did acknowledge that local factors had to be

incorporated into technical assistance activities, there was nonetheless an assumption that the planning and implementation approach towards low carbon development activities within African countries could be transposed in many cases “as is” from the North and that it would be relevant across the region, such as in the project mentioned below:

*‘We were already thinking [of] the INDC [as] the first step, what is implementation going to look like? And is there something that we can offer to countries as a framework or an approach that they can take off the shelf and help to, you know, support them with their journey’* (Northern TA Provider B, personal interview, 2018 June 06).

This assumption of the universal appropriateness of knowledge reveals hegemony through the normalisation of dominance that the knowledge holds. Northern knowledge is seen as an objective and neutral truth (see literature review) and therefore not influenced or tainted by location and is suitable to be transposed to all situations. Furthermore, the originator of the knowledge is best suited to ‘do’ the transposing, as they are understood as holders of universal knowledge. Technical assistance recipients are seen to be lacking knowledge (see Prasad & Prasad in literature review) and therefore not able to do the transposing. Within low carbon development practice this transposing of knowledge takes place in the form of technical assistance, where Northern experts provide support and expertise to the South as a form of aid, paid for by Northern donors (Mamdani, 2008:7). Often in these situations the recipients of assistance don’t know the context of the knowledge producers and thus nothing of how that context would influence and taint the knowledge that is being produced (Hountondji, 1997:3–4). These practices lead Mignolo (2009) to question the appropriateness of an expert speaking on behalf of the Other. He asks how we can work ‘with’ as opposed to having the North work ‘for’ the South (Mignolo, 2009) thereby countering the hegemonic power differential. In low carbon development technical assistance practice, Africa has remained, as put forward by Hountondji, Mignolo and Connell, looking towards the North for assistance. This was the case in most of the projects discussed in the interviews where technical assistance support originated in the North<sup>22</sup>:

*‘Most of the support we have received in climate change has been from international development organisations and through international experts’* (East African Government A, personal interview, 2018 May 24).

*‘We did not play a part in selecting the experts. ... These people are based actually outside of Africa. They are all based in Europe’* (West African TA Recipient A, personal interview, 2018 April 11).

Within these technical assistance contexts, a two-way flow of knowledge and expertise between recipients and suppliers of the assistance which could possibly adapt, change or add to the knowledge pool and the success of the project does not take place, because the knowledge supplied from the North is seen as fit for purpose for all situations and contexts. The notion of knowledge being independent from context and histories led to the adoption of Northern knowledge as a universal objective knowledge, whereas it is in fact, as noted by Connell (2014) and Chakrabarty (2000), provincial (see literature review). It assumes that the North has the expertise to provide technical assistance to Africa because it has already reached a state of development and therefore has the

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<sup>22</sup> There were four interviewees that mentioned cases where technical assistance support was largely African. Two of these cases commenced with Northern technical assistance but decided to switch to local support.

experience to share. However, it is debatable whether the developed status of Northern countries arose from effort and knowledge; it is more likely that the hegemony of the North arose from conquest and exploitation. The North can therefore not speak from a position of expertise because it does not know how to develop in a low carbon manner. The development of the North was fossil fuel intensive and exploited the labour and resources of other countries for its own growth. *'Put bluntly, if building capacity in the South succeeds in making the South more like the North, it is difficult to see how this will make the South "sustainable"'* (Sagar & VanDeveer, 2005:19).

This view of knowledge (in the form of technical assistance) from the North being useful, appropriate and desired for all countries was countered in this study. Some interviewees mentioned the need to source additional local experts because the knowledge that was being provided was not relevant or of a sufficient level. Others advocated strongly for the use and importance of local knowledge, as the knowledge that was being transferred was not seen as being appropriate for the situation, or failed to support the needs within the local context. Local knowledge was praised because of the importance of taking local contexts and culture into consideration, and adapting and creating knowledge that is suited to very particular circumstances. It was recognised by certain interviewees that knowledge is not separate from its location and a strong call for location-specific knowledge emerged that would be more appropriate for specific times, places and situations. This emphasis on the need for local knowledge in social, economic and institutional conditions despite the global nature of climate change has been raised by Sagar (2000:401) and further supported by Virji, Padgham and Seipt (2012:116), who call for context-specific and adaptable approaches to the different capacities that can be found across countries. Sterner et al. (2012:71) further substantiate this point by stating that it is a priority for low-income countries *'to develop local knowledge and understanding concerning climate change in order to better prepare for both the costs and challenges posed by climate change, as well as to defend their national interests and participate in international negotiations'*.

Interviewees also mentioned the importance of local knowledge in contributing towards the sustainability and longevity of low carbon development projects because those who had implemented the project were at hand should issues arise or further work be needed. This factor has also been brought up in literature on capacity building: *'Relevance, ownership, and sustainability are critical to ensuring success of capacity building activities in the medium and longer term'* (Virji, Padgham & Seipt, 2012:116). When technical assistance is provided by outside experts who depart back to their countries of origin, national team members are unable to find the information or knowledge that they need in order to continue the project work should revisions be necessary. A further point brought up by an interviewee using the case of a technology transfer project, was the need to adapt knowledge and technology to local conditions.

Under the blanket of neutrality and objectivity and usefulness, the transfer of knowledge via technical assistance from the North to Africa becomes as, or more, useful to the North as, unwittingly or wittingly, its own agenda is pushed forward and certain hegemonic practices are perpetuated. Specifically, the study found that in some instances priority focus areas of donors were pushed forward in projects and that consultants from the country of origin were often used as technical assistants. Respondents also mentioned that in some cases it appeared as if the external expert developed more capacity than the intended recipients. However, it must also be noted that the interviews revealed cases where local experts were brought into the technical assistance programmes. This occurred due to African government members requesting participation in the expert selection process and also where there were policies in place

to ensure the inclusion of local expertise within project teams, as was the case in three of the countries. In these cases the relevance and appropriateness of local knowledge was valued and brought to the fore.

### **5.3 THE NORTH KNOWS WHAT AFRICAN COUNTRIES NEED (AND HOW TO SUPPLY IT)**

A third assumption underlying technical assistance practice is that Northern donors and development programmes know what is needed in African countries in order for them to develop in a low carbon manner, and furthermore, that they know the best way in which to supply this knowledge and expertise. Within the projects and programmes discussed in the study it was noted that technical assistance was focused towards policy and planning processes in Africa. However, interviewees requested a move away from planning processes, or a move that took existing policy and planning work further, for instance with assistance being given in accessing finance to implement those policies. Interview participants also drew attention to the manner in which technical assistance is given, and called for a deeper level of engagement. They requested technical assistance that goes beyond only one stage of the task at hand, and looks at the longer chain of activities needed in order to progress along a low carbon development pathway.

*'You see, if they go the extra mile then, technical assistance becomes useful to the people who are at the end of the day being targeted. Other than that, writing all of them in the paper form and leaving them, handing them over to the departments to be honest with you, it is not worth it'* (West African TA Recipient A, personal interview, 2018 April 12).

The assumption that Northern experts know what is needed for African governments could derive from a conception that countries of the North and those of Africa are working towards the same or similar goals, that they have the same priorities. However, what to Northern eyes may appear as a lack of capacity in a certain area, could be the prioritisation of a different focus area resulting in existing capacities being moved to that area of priority. For instance, a prioritisation on activities related to adaptation over mitigation amongst African countries is mentioned in the literature review (Adenle, Manning & Arbiol, 2017:124). Hence whilst within the climate change mitigation community there are calls for increased ambition on mitigation, this may not be the most appropriate action for African countries to take given the challenges they are facing in poverty alleviation or the pressing need for adaptation measures. These differing priorities are not always acknowledged within technical assistance projects in low carbon development, as can be seen in the interviewee response below from a Northern technical assistance support provider where increased ambition within a developing country is called for:

*'I think some of the countries we worked with were acknowledged internationally as climate champions, and well resourced by development partners and so advanced in climate policy, ... I really felt like they could have targeted a lot more ambition and they could have felt confident to do so and that would have been a great leadership position for them to take'* (Northern TA Provider B, personal interview, 2018 June 06).

Indeed, the technical support interventions that were seen as successful by interviewees were those that were aligned with the existing policy and priorities of the country. This misconception of what African countries want and need persists despite the call for more country-led processes as recommended in the Paris Declaration for Aid

Effectiveness (2005), the Accra Agenda for Action (2008) and the Paris Agreement (2015). Certainly, as early as the Brundtland Commission Report in 1987 the importance of both developed and developing country priorities was noted with a call to *'bridge the gap between developing countries seeking economic development, and developed countries increasingly concerned about the deterioration of the environment'* (Bluemling & Yun, 2016:116). However it must be noted that findings from the interviews showed that the concepts of 'country demand' and 'country-led' are not straightforward and that the best way to align technical assistance objectives to country priorities may not always be direct. In some projects discussed in the interviews, direct formal demand came from countries; however, in other cases the priorities of the country were discovered whilst technical experts were embedded within a government office and responded to needs as they arose. In other instances the demand was not put forward by the government per se but by technical experts outside of government (but within the country and broader African region) who saw the opportunity and had a high-level understanding of some of the priorities of the government through being familiar with their strategies and policy papers.

The process by which technical assistance support was given was also brought to the fore and critiqued by interviewees, as well as praised in certain instances. There was a clear call for a move for deeper capacity building that went beyond a once-off workshop to where true and deep capacity was built, relinquishing dependence upon Northern experts and institutions. Interviewees advocated for a focus on getting things done, whether or not it was a perfect process, and despite the lack of expertise and qualifications on paper. In these situations the experience of implementation being done in-house was praised over greater expertise and external experts doing something from the outside. Instances of technical assistance from the North being praised occurred when deep and long-term assistance was given, such as the secondment of northern experts over the long-term in local offices and departments.

#### **5.4 AFRICA DOES NOT HAVE EXPERTISE ON LOW CARBON DEVELOPMENT**

Responses from interviewees showed that in many cases external experts were used for technical assistance support to African governments and that in so doing local expertise was overlooked. The dominance of Northern expertise tended to engender dominance. Recipients of technical assistance developed relationships with Northern suppliers that then facilitated the continued use of those suppliers:

*'We still rely on some international experts and these individuals we have worked with [before] because the chemistry was there, and the understanding [of] the national context. So it becomes easier to work with them [rather] than new people. So the relationship has continued'* (East African Government B, personal interview, 2018 May 11).

Another way in which the dominance of Northern expertise is perpetuated is via the attendance of Northern technical consultants at workshops and conferences. Technical experts are recruited in numerous ways by Northern technical assistance programmes, and networking at conferences is one such way. At these events consultants are able to communicate their services and market themselves within the climate change community of practice. In these instances, in comparison with their Northern compatriots, experts from Africa can be overlooked as they often don't have the necessary funds to attend workshops and conferences. For whilst African participants are often funded by multilateral and other organisations and programmes to attend conferences, this funding is frequently provided for government representatives and not expert consultants within the African private sector.

A technical assistance provider based in the North explains where technical experts used in their particular programme are based, and two ways in which they get to be involved in their programme, namely programmatic regional work and conferences. To be noted is the awareness of the importance of local expertise to provide contextual knowledge, and the ways in which efforts are made to be responsive to these contextual issues through regional programmes:

*'[The experts] are literally based all over. [The programme] works in regions ... and that is a critical way, I think to remain connected with the priorities and the contextual needs of that particular region. ... it sort of builds on itself because it is a network. We meet someone at a conference or something and they [say:] "I have all this expertise" and then they get connected on a project. So currently I'd say we have several experts in Colombia and in the South and we are actively trying to grow that expert base. So that is the idea, to have that local expertise ... we are constantly trying to grow that .... There are experts all over the world with potentially more contextual knowledge but it is an organic process, we don't solicit experts in that sense'* (TA Provider, personal interview, 2018 May 23).

African interviewees mentioned how expertise within the region can arise from practitioners who may not have the traditional qualifications to be found with Northern experts but do a sound, or even better, job. On the other hand, cases were mentioned in the interviews where Africans technical experts that did have the required qualifications were employed as technical experts by Northern institutions. This was the case in two of the projects mentioned in the interviews. However, the predominant focus on Northern expertise by Northern agencies and Northern donors continues to serve the financial interests of the North and the perception of Africans as not possessing the necessary skills and expertise to provide technical assistance.

Countering the perception of a skills gap within Africa, Mkandawire (2001) asserts that *'low morale and poor pay'* are most likely the biggest challenges within African governments, and not necessarily low technical expertise. He states that the focus of Northern countries, rather than on capacity building, should be on using existing capacities and reversing the brain drain, as well as repairing national training institutions (Mkandawire, 2001:307). This assumed lack of technical expertise and capacity sets up a unidirectional flow of knowledge from the North to Africa: from those that are assumed to have the expertise and knowledge that is valid for all occasions, to those that are assumed to be lacking in expertise and knowledge and situated on a lower rung of development. It reveals an assumption that Africa has nothing to offer and denies the agency, influence and dynamism of African actors. Indeed, the very nature of the terms used in technical assistance demonstrates the hegemonic nature of Northern knowledge and the direction in which knowledge flows. The term *'recipient'* (sometime beneficiaries), implies that there is no expectation for information to be returned or for an exchange to take place. It portrays the passive acceptance of what is being supplied and it occludes the expertise and capacity that *'recipient'* countries can contribute. Similarly, *'technical assistance'* and *'capacity building'* evoke states of low capacity within Africa and are terms that cause discomfort among some African recipients of support:

*'This issue of technical assistance and capacity building, ... I am not comfortable with the use of these terms. Because to build capacity means that you are starting from literally, near ground zero, but I don't think that there is*

*zero capacity in most of the countries especially in the area of low emission development strategies. I think that at least I would prefer to say we are **enhancing capacity**' (West African TA Recipient B, personal interview, 2018 May 15).*

A blanket assumption that the level of knowledge and expertise within the recipient African countries is very low underplays the many instances where substantial capacity and agency exist within Africa. An example of the capacity and agency that exist in Africa is the “learning by doing” approach that emerged strongly from the study interviews. Despite there not being ideal conditions or perfect knowledge, low carbon development projects were being implemented by African governments with their own institutions, their own expertise, and in their own manner. An African interviewee writes of his experience in working with national government on a project that successfully accessed climate finance:

*'When we came to their office, they were a bit sceptical because the big shots were here before us and they did nothing. [They said:] "You are the little guys, let's see what you can do." That was how it started. We pulled on lots of documents; we tried to find people who were interested to work with us. Ah really it was a bit of a mess when it started, but when we first submitted the first accreditation application that was when we got the attention of them all. That was when I think it got traction. After that we took it and ran, we took it and ran away with it' (East African TA Provider A, personal interview, 2018 April 10).*

Another example of the ways in which Africans utilise the existing capacity within the continent is through the use of country-to-country exchanges where country visits are arranged between African countries in order to exchange knowledge. In these exchanges knowledge is shared in areas where each party has experience. This contributes to building capacity for governments in areas where they would value additional support. In this way knowledge is exchanged in a balanced way and among peers:

*'So the team travelled from [African country A] to [African country B] as a guest of the Ministry of Energy. They went back and started implementing quickly what they came to learn. If you look at the Government of [African country A] policies towards mini-grid, it's not that different from that of [African country B] because they came and learnt exactly how [African country B] has been able to achieve 80% energy access and then how the remaining 20% is being advanced' (West African TA Recipient A, personal interview, 2018 April 12).*

Considering the one-way flow of knowledge transfer between the North and the South because of an assumed deficiency in the South, Ambuj Sagar (2000:417) wrote about a *'lack of reflexivity on the part of the "developers"'*, and a need for the North to be educated on how the policies and institutional operations of the North affect the South's capacity to develop, and develop sustainably. He reiterates this a few years later, writing with VanDeveer (2005:20): *'Incapacity also exists in the North. Turning the lens around can help refocus CDE [Capacity Development in the Environment] efforts on the need to make progress in both the North and South, rather than merely taking existing Northern policies and approaches (with minor modifications) and then "training" Southern countries to implement them'*. Goldberg and Bryant (2012:3) bring up the need for **true** partnerships in order for projects to be successful: *'Successful country-owned capacity building projects echo the importance of inclusiveness in the planning process and excellent working relationships between partner/donor organisations that produce*

*true partnerships*'. These true partnerships should include the exchange of knowledge from Africa to the North over and above contextual or regional knowledge, which is how it was often framed by interviewees (both African and Northern):

*'If you are from a different culture, and you come into this new culture, you are technically good but there are certain things you learn from the nationals in terms of how you conduct business within that community. So it was more like how do they adapt to the existing environment, country context basically that is what they learnt from the nationals'* (East African Government B, personal interview, 2018 May 11).

*'I had some technical knowledge of climate compatible development, my technical expertise and my other skills that I have that I was taking to them but they taught me about [African country] and how things work in [African country] and some of the very practical challenges doing it as opposed to you know writing nice reports on paper about it'* (Northern TA Provider C, personal interview, 2018 May 11).

This tendency to see Africa and the developing world in terms of context is reminiscent of the inclusion of African and Southern theorists in 'indigenous studies' as opposed to mainstream theory. Just as knowledge from the North is assumed universal and appropriate, knowledge from Africa or other developing regions is deemed ethnic and not appropriate or useful to others. A more holistic view is being called for: a call for capacity building for the countries of the North **and** South and partnerships implying exchange of information, ideas and knowledge and a bi-directional flow of knowledge between partners. *'Such joint initiatives offer exciting prospects for both teachers and students in sharing resources, ideas, and presenting opportunities for collaboration between North and South where top-down approaches have failed us'* (Sterner et al., 2012:73).

## **5.5 THE RELEVANCE FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE ACTIVITIES MOVING FORWARD?**

The four assumptions underlying technical assistance in low carbon development: that Africa needs assistance, that Northern knowledge is relevant, that Northern experts and institutions know what is needed and how to supply it, and that there is low expertise within Africa, all reveal an asymmetrical flow of knowledge where hegemonic positions are continued and more recent critical thought concerning development studies is not included. Amongst some African interviewees there appeared to be a resignation to the way in which things are being done within the field, and an acceptance that at least some knowledge was better than nothing:

*'Technical assistance is somehow beneficial because at least it has given some information to the country that you need to do this or you need to do that and this is the way you have to do it and other things. But it doesn't change a lot in the countries. That one we have to be very frank with it'* (West African TA Recipient A, Personal Interview, 2018 April 12).

However, another interviewee called for a complete change in the manner in which technical assistance is being implemented:

*'Should we continue to do these things? Or do we need to redefine the narrative, redefine the model of these things?'* (West African TA Recipient B, personal interview, 2018 May 15).

African practitioners and government members in Africa are not blind to the inequality within the system and to the many assumptions that are being made regarding their capacity, expertise, and need for assistance. Given the value that was given to good relationships by participants in the study, it could be argued that when trust is lost, or those relationships are not built, poor outcomes could occur as a result of technical assistance interventions. An example of a situation where there was significant mistrust of Northern expertise comes from a study by Biermann (2002) on the 1990 IPCC report. He found that:

*'The knowledge synthesized and assessed by scientific advisory institutions tends to be to the disadvantage of or oblivious to the interests of developing countries. This runs counter to a publicly held belief that science and scientific assessments are neutral endeavors'* (Biermann, 2002: 213).

As a result of the mistrust Indian experts produced '*counterassessments*' that '*advise[d] their government in a way that contradict[ed] themes advanced by "Northern science" and international scientific advisory institutions*' within the report (Biermann, 2002:207). This example reveals that scepticism about results or information coming from the North could result in unintended outcomes. Northern experts and institutions need to be aware of this in order to make the necessary changes to their practice. In the case of the IPCC, recommendations arising from the concerns regarding the 1990 report included increasing the participation of Southern researchers in the IPCC reports in order to be responsive to Southern priorities and views. This did result in more representation by developed countries in the panel and with reference to the case of India, appeared to result in an improvement to the IPCC's reception within the country (Biermann, 2002:206).

This scepticism about the efficacy of work arising from Northern experts was also evident in a response from an African interviewee:

*'So, when you are doing it remotely the way of doing technical assistance would be that of doing a report. So you report to the donor and the fund, and tell them: "Look, we produced a very spectacular document about the situation in Malawi, or eh whichever country!" But has the situation changed in that country?'* (East African TA Provider B, personal interview, 2018 April 11).

This has implications for the success of low carbon development projects and ultimately for the outcome of actual lowered carbon emissions and positive development impacts on the ground.

## 6 FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

*'Once the various groups within a given community have asserted themselves to the point that mutual respect has to be shown then you have the ingredients for a true and meaningful integration' (Biko, 2017: 22).*

The introduction to this study raised the need to investigate the normalised practice of technical assistance between the North and Africa that occurs within low carbon development practice. With this in mind the study set out to answer the question: **What do the perceptions of African climate change mitigation practitioners reveal about the implicit assumptions contained within low carbon development technical assistance originating in the global North and directed at Africa?** The study is situated in the literatures of decolonial theory and development assistance and used the work of African scholars and theorists to reflect on tacit power structures and knowledge flows within climate change mitigation practice, particularly that of technical assistance in low carbon development. It sought to address the research question with primary data gathered from 12 interviewees that are active within the climate change mitigation community. The majority of interviewees were from Africa in order to bring prominence to African voices and their experiences of technical assistance practice.

The assertion at the start of the study was that in the race to mitigate global warming, the climate change mitigation community may be perpetuating power practices set out during colonialism and that low carbon development may continue patterns established under early development assistance. In addition to being inequitable, it could be making efforts in mitigation ineffective in the African context and even detrimental in a number of ways. The study revealed that within climate change mitigation technical assistance practice, Northern knowledge and expertise holds a hegemonic position and that local knowledge and expertise is overlooked. This hegemony has legitimated many of the unequal knowledge practices that occur between the North and Africa. It betrays an underlying tacit assumption within technical assistance practice, one that existed during colonial times and was further entrenched during the 1950s concerning Africa: that Africa needs to be helped by the North and that knowledge and expertise from Africa does not exist. As there is no expectation of a two-way conversation between Northern technical experts and African experts and practitioners, the knowledge flow from the North to Africa remains largely unidirectional.

Because knowledge from the North is not perceived to be arising from a particular place and time it is seen as universal and thus relevant for Africa. This leads to an assumption that knowledge from the North is appropriate, useful and wanted. However, the priorities pertaining to low carbon development differ between the North and Africa. With knowledge flowing from the North to Africa, the priorities of Northern countries are advanced, whereas priorities of African countries - notably eliminating poverty and socio-economic development - are overlooked, and the knowledges and practices disseminated by the North often favour the Northern countries involved, either through financial means or through the perpetuation and emphasis of the priorities of the North over those of Africa. The Northern origin of the technical assistance knowledge means that it is not targeted closely at the context in which it is being received. What emerged from the interviews and was backed up by literature on capacity building within development, is that local expertise and knowledge is needed in order for technical assistance to be valid for the context in which it is being received.

The responses from Africans interviewees to this study regarding these assumptions was that in contrast to the perception of low capacity within Africa, a host of capacities and abilities was to be found within the continent. This expertise and capacity may not be represented through qualifications that are highly regarded within the North, but it is nonetheless valued, wanted and effective for the design and implementation of low carbon development work in the region by Africans. Africans advocated strongly for the use of local experts and the need for local contexts to be included within technical assistance practice. They also requested direct financial support and assistance in the access of funds for low carbon development from Northern technical assistance support, rather than reports, policy and planning advice, and technical expert support. There was a strong call for action and a need to get things done and to develop the skills and expertise along the way: a 'learning by doing' approach. The action did not need to be perfect; it could be messy and emergent. There was, furthermore, a demand for technical support activities to be based on a longer-term deep engagement model rather than short-term training workshops and for institutional capacity to be built, with specific reference being made to institutions accessing climate finance. Longer, embedded processes allowed for deeper engagement and for collegial relationships to develop between team members. Collegial partnership appeared to be key to projects that were seen as successful by recipients, as well as when there was strong direction and involvement from the government through policy or interaction in the design or setup phase.

What is encouraging is that the study revealed areas of change in the ways in which technical assistance programmes are implemented. There is burgeoning recognition by Northern project implementers together with African project implementers and African governments of the value of local experts and local knowledge. Additionally, policy measures in some African countries have set clear institutional structures in place to prioritise the use of national or regional experts, and there are moves to address the manner in which technical assistance takes place, favouring deep engagement over short-term training.

This study was exploratory in nature, focusing on the perceptions of African climate change mitigation practitioners and it did not delve deeply into any of the technical assistance projects that were discussed. What was noted, however, was that these cases contain rich experiences, and deeper study into these projects, determining in what ways they were successful, what African practices were foregrounded, and how they were designed, will give insight into how best to design knowledge exchange and collaborations in the future. Further value would be gained by investigating how national policies promote national expertise to better understand how these practices could be further institutionalised across the region. Investigation into the assumptions of Africans regarding low capacity within Africa is also needed. Such studies will help bring a deeper understanding of the various issues that emerged in this study. Lastly, and importantly, more critical research needs to be done on capacity building within climate change mitigation within the North, as called for by Ambuj Sagar and others. 'Turning the lens around' can provide the opportunity for capacity building initiatives to develop an awareness of how historical contexts and hegemonic structures currently influence low carbon development initiatives and other climate change mitigation actions, and how Africa and the other regions of the South can contribute to a low carbon future.

There is a need to recognise that the North and Africa are different. Steve Biko asserts that there are different cultural attitudes towards problems between the West and Africa, with the West having a problem-solving approach that follows very 'trenchant'

analyses and Africa having an approach that allows for the rational and the non-rational: an acceptance of experiencing a situation rather than facing a problem. He states:

*'They allow for both the rational and non-rational elements to make an impact upon them, and any action they may take could be described as a response of the total personality to the situation than the result of some mental exercise'* (Biko, 2017: 48).

Whilst it is debatable whether one can generalise for the entire continent (and there may indeed be differences in the approaches between countries within Africa), the inclusion of varied approaches to low carbon development is important. This acceptance could lead to greater respect between Northern and African practitioners. As the quote from Biko at the start of the chapter states, local knowledge needs to be foregrounded and raised to the same level of import before there can be equal exchange between the global North and Africa. This means that there should probably be a greater emphasis on African approaches and ways of doing before such equality can be reached. Furthermore, what has been made apparent is the value in hearing from African practitioners and the need to elicit these experiences to add to and counter the prevailing narratives from the North in order to move away from the hegemonic position Northern knowledge currently holds. It is only in hearing from all participants that we stand a chance to effectively lower carbon emissions and for countries from the South to develop in ways that benefit all of their societies. Additionally, to counter the imbalance of power in authorial voices as stated by Cooper and Morrell at the start of the study, we need to foreground the voices from Africa, even if this means that progress appears to be slower. In the effort to slow down and ensure we are progressing together, we may in fact be more effective and swifter in finding solutions and ways of dealing with the challenge.

*'Instead we are prepared to have a much slower progress in an effort to make sure that all of us are marching to the same tune'* (Biko, 2017: 46).

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## ANNEX 1: LIST OF INTERVIEWEES

*Listed according to order of occurrence within study*

<b>Reference</b>	<b>Role/ Institution</b>	<b>Origin</b>
East African TA Provider A	Technical assistance provider, project manager, climate change professional	East Africa
East African Government A	Ministry of Energy	East Africa
West African TA Recipient A	Technical expert, project manager, climate change professional, recipient and provider of technical assistance	West Africa
Central African Government	Ministry of Environment	Central Africa
West African TA Recipient B	Technical expert, project manager, climate change professional, recipient and provider of technical assistance	West Africa
TA Provider	Technical assistance provider working for an institution based in the global North	Developing country
East African TA Provider B	Technical assistance provider, project manager, climate change professional	East Africa
East African Government B	Ministry of Finance	East Africa
Southern African TA Provider	Technical assistance provider, project manager, climate change professional	Southern Africa
Northern TA Provider A	Technical assistance provider working for a UK consultancy	Developed country
Northern TA Provider B	Technical assistance provider, consultant based in United Kingdom	Developed country
West African TA Provider	Technical assistance provider	West Africa