

Learning About Capacity Development Through Evaluation



Perspectives and observations from a collaborative network of national and international organizations and donor agencies



About ISNAR

The International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) assists developing countries in improving the performance of their national agricultural research systems and organizations. It does this by promoting appropriate agricultural research policies, sustainable research institutions, and improved research management. ISNAR's services to national research are ultimately intended to benefit producers and consumers in developing countries and to safeguard the natural environment for future generations.

To maximize the impact of its work in developing countries, ISNAR focuses on three objectives:

- enhancing the capacity of agricultural research organizations to respond to their clients' needs and to emerging challenges
- expanding global knowledge on agricultural research policy, organization, and management
- improving developing countries' access to knowledge on agricultural research policy, organization, and management

ISNAR was established in 1979 by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) on the basis of recommendations from an international task force. It began operating from its headquarters in The Hague, The Netherlands on 1 September 1980.

ISNAR is a nonprofit autonomous institution, international in character and apolitical in its management, staffing, and operations. It is supported financially by a number of the members of the CGIAR, an informal group of donors that includes countries, development banks, international organizations, and foundations. Of the 16 centers in the CGIAR system of international centers, ISNAR is the only one that focuses specifically on institutional development within national agricultural research systems.

About CTA

The Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation (CTA) was established in 1983 under the Lomé Convention between the ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) Group of States and the European Union Member States. Since 2000 it has operated within the framework of the ACP-EC Cotonou Agreement.

CTA's tasks are to develop and provide services that improve access to information for agricultural and rural development, and to strengthen the capacity of ACP countries to produce, acquire, exchange and utilize information in this area. CTA's programs are organized around four principal themes: developing information management and partnership strategies needed for policy formulation and implementation; promoting contact and exchange of experience; providing ACP partners with information on demand; and strengthening their information and communication capacities.

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Edited by

Douglas Horton

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Further information about ISNAR's project on Evaluating Capacity Development can be found at www.cgiar.org/isnar/ecd/index.htm

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Foreword

The international aid community is placing growing emphasis on developing capacity as the key to alleviating poverty and hunger in the developing world. This “paradigm shift” stems from the fact that many development projects appear to lead to increasing dependence on aid rather than promoting sustainable growth and development. Through building capacity, local organizations can design, manage, and sustain their own development—a vital process given the current declining level of aid budgets. Only through a continual process of capacity building will individuals and organizations be able to compete and prosper in today’s global economy and society.

Ensuring the effectiveness of a capacity building effort requires the appropriate use of evaluation. Yet few organizations have implemented a system for monitoring or evaluating the changes taking place during organizational development. The complex process of capacity development does not produce easily identifiable outputs or services, so new and innovative evaluation methods are required. Although frameworks for organizational diagnosis and assessment have been published, they provide little in the way of practical advice or guidelines for managers in research and development organizations who need to evaluate their own capacity building efforts.

In January 2000, ISNAR began an ambitious project entitled *Evaluating Capacity Development in Research and Development Organizations: Towards More Effective Capacity Development Efforts*. The project seeks to contribute to the effectiveness of capacity development through the use of evaluation. In the project’s *Midterm Review and Synthesis Workshop* participants shared the knowledge they had acquired whilst conducting evaluation studies. The observations and experiences reported in this publication are therefore based on “learning by doing”—a highly practical approach.

I would like to thank the many people who have contributed to the success of the project. Our gratitude extends especially to those who carried out the evaluation studies and who shared their experiences so openly during the midterm workshop. The project has already provided many insights. I look forward to seeing further outputs and the contributions they will make towards improving the performance of research and development organizations around the world.

Stein W. Bie

Director General

International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR)

Executive Summary

Evaluating Capacity Development in Research and Development Organizations is a three-year project designed to contribute to capacity building in research and development organizations through better evaluation. The project, which began in January 2000, has the following objectives:

- To strengthen the ability of participants to evaluate capacity development efforts
- To prepare a set of evaluation studies on capacity development efforts
- To draw general conclusions and share learning among network members
- Based on the above, to compile and disseminate concepts, methods, and tools that can be broadly used to support the evaluation of capacity development

Five evaluation case studies have been completed, involving 11 organizations:

- **Strategic management of agricultural research in Cuba**
Cuba's Ministry of Agriculture and the ISNAR "New Paradigm" Project
- **Participatory agricultural research in the Philippines**
The Northern Philippine Root Crop Research and Training Center and the International Potato Center User's Perspective with Agricultural Research and Development
- **Conservation and use of plant genetic resources in Ghana**
The Plant Genetic Resources Centre, Ghana, the Genetic Resources Network for West and Central Africa, and the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
- **Strengthening rural NGOs in Bangladesh**
The Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service, Bangladesh and the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction
- **Community-based natural resource management in Vietnam**
The Mekong Delta Farming Systems R&D Institute, Vietnam and the International Development Research Centre, Canada

A *Midterm Review and Synthesis Workshop* was held during July 2001. Individuals who carried out the above evaluation studies met with specialists in capacity development and evaluation to review their studies, draw general conclusions concerning the capacity development process, and identify methodological lessons for improving future evaluations of capacity development programs. The five evaluation case studies highlighted similarities as well as differences between the approaches taken and the methods used. All participants agreed they had learned a great deal. Based on their personal experiences in evaluating their own capacity development efforts, the participants identified a number of emerging general lessons.

Emerging lessons for organizational capacity development

- *Capacity development is not just a technical activity*
- *Capacity development should not be viewed as a one-off, isolated undertaking*
- *Capacity development implies much more than the delivery or acquisition of human and other resources*
- *Capacity development efforts should be driven by the needs and demands of the recipient organization*
- *Prior to launching a capacity development effort, an organizational diagnosis should be carried out*
- *Capacity development efforts should be designed and implemented so as to enable organizations, groups, and individuals to achieve their own objectives*
- *Capacity development efforts require complementary mind-sets on the part of the organization and its external partners*
- *Capacity development efforts should be guided by common objectives, shared concepts, and a coherent theory of action that is agreed on by the key group involved in the process*
- *A capacity development effort should promote self-reliance and help the organization balance autonomy with partnership and collaboration*

Emerging lessons for evaluating organizational capacity development

- *Evaluating organizational capacity development is particularly sensitive because it focuses on people and makes judgements about their activities and accomplishments*
- *Participant-oriented approaches, especially self-assessments, are particularly useful for evaluating organizational capacity development*
- *A “case study” approach is a useful evaluation technique, but doing a good case study is often more complex than people realize*
- *Capacity development plans should highlight pertinent indicators that reflect the objectives*
- *Capacity development efforts should maintain up-to-date information systems*

Future project activities

During the workshop, each case study team planned how they would use the results of their study to promote capacity development and more effective evaluation in their own organizations. In addition, the teams' experiences will be compared and synthesized and made available to a wider audience through the following:

- A book entitled “**The case for evaluating capacity development**” will link theoretical issues with practical approaches and highlight the potential value of evaluation as a strategy for improving organizational performance.
- “**Evaluating capacity development**” is the working title of a sourcebook that is planned to be a user-friendly resource for people involved in conducting evaluation exercises.
- A **final workshop/conference** will be held to share the project's results with a wider audience, in particular with policy and decision makers in the development community.
- **The project web site** will be updated regularly and will feature the project outputs as they are produced.

Thus the project's results will be made available to a wide range of potential users in national, regional, and international organizations within the research and development community. By influencing thinking and practice in the evaluation of organizational capacity development, the project has the potential to achieve a wide impact.

Background

“The design of the project is quite innovative and effective. It provided huge opportunities for learning despite some limitations.”¹

Capacity development has become an important item on the agenda of development organizations. With rapid changes occurring in technology and institutions and declining aid budgets, the need to strengthen the capabilities of individuals and organizations in developing countries, and reduce their dependency on aid, has never been greater.

This report summarizes the activities and results to date of the project *Evaluating Capacity Development in Research and Development Organizations* (the ECD project). The report is based principally on the project’s *Midterm Review and Synthesis Workshop*, which was held during July 2001 in Wageningen, the Netherlands.

The ECD project

This project began in early 2000 and will be completed at the end of 2002.² It seeks to contribute to the effectiveness of capacity development efforts in research and development organizations through the use of evaluation.³ In pursuit of this objective, the project is designed to accomplish the following: (a) to strengthen participants’ capability to evaluate capacity development efforts; (b) to prepare a set of evaluation studies on capacity development efforts; (c) to draw general conclusions and share learning among network members; and (d) based on the above, to compile and disseminate concepts, methods, and tools that can be broadly used to assist in the evaluation of capacity development efforts.

The project has five defining characteristics:

- It focuses on the *development of capacity*, rather than on the delivery of inputs or the transfer of technology
- It focuses on capacity development at the *organizational level*, rather than at the “micro” level of individuals or the “macro” level of national institutions
- It recognizes the *multiple perspectives* of key actors involved in capacity development, rather than the single perspective of an externally funded and directed capacity development intervention

1 All quotations are taken from participants’ written and verbal contributions, unless otherwise cited.

2 See Annex 1 for the project schedule

3 The term “research and development organizations” refers to organizations that carry out research or use research results in development-related activities.

- It takes a *utilization-focused approach* to evaluation, to ensure the use of evaluation results
- It is implemented by a network of capacity development practitioners and evaluators based in different organizations, countries, and regions

The network of capacity development practitioners has members from national organizations working to develop their own capacity (often with external support), international organizations that support national and local capacity development efforts, and donor agencies that provide resources for organizational capacity development.

Problem definition, planning, and design of case studies

The project commenced by contacting a number of national and international organizations and donor agencies. Fifteen organizations expressed an interest in participating in the project and carrying out evaluations of their capacity development activities. Representatives of these organizations attended preparatory and planning workshops, agreed on project goals, and discussed relevant concepts and issues. Two organizations dropped out of the project when they were not able to send representatives to the planning workshop held in the Philippines in September 2000. At that meeting, representatives of 13 organizations planned six evaluation case studies. A project web site was set up to provide participants and other interested parties with key information on the project, the concepts being employed, and useful reference materials on capacity development and evaluation.

Project participants were encouraged to capture multiple perspectives, through involvement of at least two key stakeholders (e.g. the organization undertaking the capacity development effort and the external/assisting agency) in their studies. In addition to the evaluation questions pertinent to their own case, they were asked to address five “guiding questions”:

- What are the key abilities or capacities that need to be developed in research and development organizations?
- By what process(es) does organizational capacity development take place?
- How can external agents/agencies contribute to organizational capacity development?
- How should organizational capacity development efforts be evaluated?
- How can evaluation contribute to the effectiveness of capacity development efforts?

Participants were encouraged to use a set of common terms to facilitate communication and foster a common understanding. Several terms were introduced during the planning workshop and backed up with information on the project web site. Some key terms have been improved and amplified during the project.

In planning and conducting their evaluations, study leaders were encouraged to use the framework for organizational assessment published by IDRC-Universalia (Lusthaus *et al.*, 1995), which views an organization’s performance as a function of its operational environment, motivation, and capacity. It was also recommended that each case study should develop and test a “theory of action”.

“A negotiated and shared theory of action contributes to greater coherence and relevance of the capacity development process, increases commitment, and shares reference elements to guide thinking, decisions, and actions.”

“More budget and time would have been appreciated—we would have taken a different approach if it had been available and could have spent more time developing the theory of action; this probably should have been a different phase.”

Evaluation studies

Six evaluation case studies were started during Phase 2 of the project. They were supported by ISNAR staff members and other resource persons, who visited them, helped them to plan and review their activities, and provided information and reference materials. During this period, one of the study teams (involving the National Agrarian University in Nicaragua and the International Center for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT)) was unable to complete the proposed study of community management of natural resources. Instead, the University’s Faculty of Natural Resources assessed its own capacity development in the recent past and identified priorities to improve its own efforts.

The case studies attempted to evaluate the process of organizational capacity development with two perspectives in mind. Firstly, from the perspective of a national organization that is working to develop its own capacity with the support of one or more international organizations, and secondly, from the perspective of an international organization that is supporting capacity development in one or more national organizations. The evaluation teams contained members of both national and international organizations to capture and highlight these different perspectives. However, because the different organizations interact with many others, additional perspectives may also exist.



“The overall project design is excellent; this is the best anyone can do regarding a challenging issue that requires innovative solutions over time.”

Midterm review and synthesis workshop

The workshop (Phase 3 of the ECD project) was designed to achieve five objectives:

- Present and discuss each of the evaluation case studies and their results
- Draw substantial conclusions and methodological lessons from the evaluation studies
- Plan a set of methodological guidelines for evaluating capacity development
- Evaluate the ECD project’s activities and results to date and identify lessons for the future
- Plan future project activities

“Implementation of the project is good, although it could have been assigned to carry out the case studies with at least 2-3 follow-up missions. The conceptual and methodological dimensions of the efforts at field-level would have been improved, and additional contributions could have been made.”

The workshop was attended by representatives from national organizations engaged in capacity development, international organizations supporting capacity development, and international development agencies supporting the project, as well as specialists in capacity development and evaluation and the ISNAR project team. Five completed case studies were presented.⁴ Summaries of these evaluation reports are provided in the next section.



⁴ The Nicaragua-CIAT case was not presented.

Capacity development

Organizational capacity development

“The process by which people, groups and organizations create and strengthen their capabilities to perform over time as perceived by their stakeholders and/or beneficiaries/clients.” (adapted from Morgan, 1997)

Organizational capacity is the potential for engaging resources and skills in optimum combinations in order to perform relevant activities and tasks in line with the organization’s strategy. What distinguishes the capacity of one organization from another is the ability of its managers and personnel to secure advantages from the resources and skills available to them, and how they use these advantages to achieve superior performance. Organizational capacity explains how two organizations may perform very differently, even if they possess almost identical resources and skills. Resources are the source of an organization’s capacities, but it is the capacities and not the resources *per se* that drive the organization’s performance.

The term **organizational capacity development** refers to the systematic process of planned organizational change that is intended to enhance the efficiency, effectiveness, and sustainability with which the organization pursues its strategy, accomplishes its mission, achieves its goals, and delivers value to its stakeholders. Capacity development may include the acquisition of resources but it *must* also include learning how to deploy and integrate these resources to accomplish complex tasks.

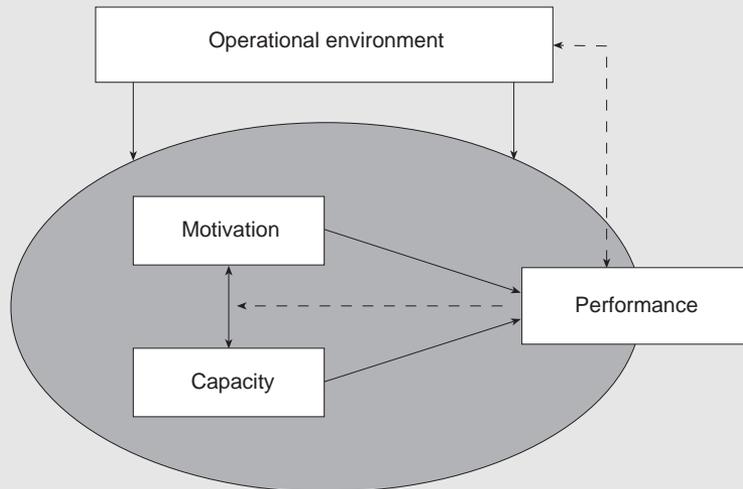
Resources, be they human, financial, systems, or infrastructure, are not usually productive on their own and so *organizational capacity development* cannot be reduced to the simple delivery or acquisition of resources. In order to achieve superior performance, an organization must learn to do more than merely identify its needs and acquire the missing resources; its managers and staff must learn how to nurture, integrate, and deploy their resources to create the capabilities needed to accomplish strategic goals. By this definition, the delivery of resources by a donor would be described as *resource provision* but would not acquire the status of *capacity development*. Similarly, receipt or purchase of resources by a research and development organization would be described as *resource acquisition*, not *capacity development*.

Theory of action

“A means-ends hierarchy that indicates the theoretical assumptions and models on which a capacity development effort is based. It makes explicit the means by which desired results are to be produced.” (Patton, 1997)

A **theory of action** indicates the relationships between the components and activities of a capacity development initiative and the expected results. It also identifies the key assumptions underlying the work. It may be expressed as inputs \Rightarrow outputs \Rightarrow outcomes \Rightarrow impacts in a logical framework, or as a more lengthy and complete sequence. Developing a theory of action helps to clarify the means by which the actions and components of a capacity development effort are assumed to bring about desired improvements in the organization. The theory contained in a program’s official proposal, or other documents, often differs from the actual “theories-in-use”, i.e. the bases on which people actually act. Hence, before conducting an evaluation it is important to review documents, discuss goals and assumptions with key stakeholders, and finally, to agree on an up-to-date theory of action for the current capacity development effort.

Framework for organizational assessment



Operational environment: the external environment in which the organization carries out its activities. Examples:

- ⇒ Administrative and legal systems in which the organization operates
- ⇒ Political environment
- ⇒ Technological options
- ⇒ Social and cultural environment
- ⇒ Economic trends
- ⇒ Stakeholders

Motivation: refers to internal factors that influence the direction of the organization's activities and the level of energy it displays in its activities. Examples:

- ⇒ The organizational culture
- ⇒ Incentive and rewards systems
- ⇒ The institutional "climate" in general
- ⇒ The history and traditions of the organization
- ⇒ Leadership and management style
- ⇒ A generally recognized and accepted mission statement
- ⇒ Performance-related incentive plans
- ⇒ Shared norms and values promoting teamwork towards organizational goals

Capacity: the resources, knowledge, and skills of the organization. Examples:

- ⇒ Strategic leadership
- ⇒ Organizational structure
- ⇒ Human resources
- ⇒ Financial resources
- ⇒ Physical infrastructure
- ⇒ Program process management
- ⇒ Inter-institutional linkages

Performance: the achievements of the organization in relation to its objectives. Four key indicators of organizational performance:

- ⇒ Effectiveness: the degree to which the organization achieves its objectives
- ⇒ Efficiency: the degree to which it generates its products using a minimum of inputs
- ⇒ Relevance: the degree to which the organizational objectives and activities reflect the necessities and priorities of key stakeholders
- ⇒ Financial sustainability: conditions that make an organization financially viable, including multiple sources of funding, positive cash flow, and financial surplus

Source: Horton, D. (2000). Adapted from Lusthaus *et al.* (1995) and Lusthaus *et al.* (1999).

Summaries of Evaluation Case Studies

“The fundamental premise underlying the ECD project is that the disciplined, analytical thinking demanded by evaluation will throw light on the strengths and weaknesses in the planning and execution of capacity development initiatives—thereby providing the insight necessary for capacity development improvement.”

The five completed case studies describe capacity development initiatives that were already under way when ISNAR launched the ECD project. Each organization had already defined its own development goals and the activities needed to achieve them. External partner(s) to facilitate the process had also been chosen. However, it is unlikely that a comprehensive evaluation of capacity development would have occurred without the impetus and support of the ECD project.

Evaluation case studies

- **Strategic management of agricultural research in Cuba**

Cuba's Ministry of Agriculture and ISNAR's "New Paradigm" Project

- **Participatory agricultural research in the Philippines**

The Northern Philippine Root Crop Research and Training Center and the International Potato Center User's Perspective with Agricultural Research and Development

- **Conservation and use of plant genetic resources in Ghana**

The Plant Genetic Resources Centre, Ghana, the Genetic Resources Network for West and Central Africa, and the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute

- **Strengthening rural NGOs in Bangladesh**

The Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service, Bangladesh and the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction

- **Community-based natural resource management in Vietnam**

The Mekong Delta Farming Systems R&D Institute, Vietnam and the International Development Research Centre, Canada



There are many differences between the participating organizations. The clarity and consciousness with which they initiated their capacity development effort and the nature of the collaboration with their external partner agencies also vary widely. Some organizations became explicitly aware of the capacities developed and the processes involved only as a result of the evaluative inquiry, and so their efforts represent historical reconstruction rather than evaluation of current initiatives. In all five cases, the discipline required to grapple with the demands of evaluation has resulted in significant insights into the nature of the capacity development initiative and so provided the opportunity for more effective efforts in the future.

While reading the following summaries, readers should bear in mind the distinction between efforts undertaken to develop targeted capacities within an organization (i.e. capacity development) and attempts to evaluate the results of such initiatives (i.e. evaluation of capacity development efforts). Organizations frequently engage in capacity development without evaluating the progress or the results of their efforts. Simply engaging in capacity development is often seen as a sufficiently demanding undertaking.

Strategic management of agricultural research in Cuba

Albina Maestrey, Maria Adriana Mato, Carmen Maria Mederos, Jose Antonio Gonzalez, Adriana Ballester, and Jorge Luis Piloto, SINCITA, Cuba; Juan Cheaz and Jose de Souza Silva, ISNAR “New Paradigm” Project

This study focuses on capacity development in the National System for Science and Agrarian Technological Innovation (SINCITA) in Cuba and involves prospecting technological demands in the Swine Research Institute (IIP). ISNAR’s “New Paradigm” project is the external partner.



The organization and its capacity development initiative

IIP is one of the 16 organizations that constitute SINCITA, a division of Cuba’s Ministry of Agriculture (MINAG). Its mission is to ensure a sound foundation for the pork-meat chain, from scientific research right through to consumption. IIP has been engaged in institutional capacity development, in collaboration with ISNAR, since 1995. The capacity development initiative being evaluated focuses on forecasting and better management of the entire pork-meat chain using the principle of prospective analysis (Lima *et al.*, 2001). The aim was to desegregate the different activities involved, promoting a sequential process and linking all the steps from research through production to distribution and consumption. Similar initiatives are being undertaken within other member organizations of SINCITA.

External partners

ISNAR's "New Paradigm" project supports the development of capacities for managing institutional innovation in agricultural science and technology organizations throughout Latin America. It is staffed by three ISNAR professionals and has a network of associates, drawing upon the expertise of a wide range of talents within the region. The project is funded by SDC.

The "New Paradigm" project has a well-founded theory of action based on principles drawn from critical constructivism. The principles relate to the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship of the knower to the known (epistemology), and the nature of inquiry (methodology).⁵ The project also employs a "triangle of institutional sustainability" framework (Gálvez *et al.*, 1995) which addresses the challenges faced by an organization in our increasingly complex, unstable, and global environment. The model suggests that, in order to attain sustainability, an organization must pursue congruence between its "institutional project" (mission, policies, priorities, and strategies), its "institutional capacity" (technical and organizational capabilities), and its "institutional credibility" (the recognition and support it gains from its political and financial advocates).

Framework, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

The study adopted an interpretative methodological strategy, within Stufflebeam's (1983) "context-inputs-processes-products" framework, which permits the full range of stakeholders to compare and contrast their divergent perspectives on the entire capacity development effort and to arrive at a "negotiated rationality". This type of hermeneutic dialectic⁶ resembles what the evaluation community calls "fourth generation evaluation" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1989) and is in line with the project's theory of action.

Negative connotations are often associated with the term "evaluation". This problem was avoided by using "systematization"—a concept similar to that of formative evaluation, where data are obtained and interpreted to help improve the quality of the capacity development intervention. All stakeholder groups, i.e. managers and researchers of IIP, the interdisciplinary and inter-institutional team who conducted the forecast study of the pork-meat chain, and representatives of IIP's clients, users, partners, and beneficiaries, were involved in each phase of the systematization.

The purposes of this systematization study were to identify and understand the following:

- The adequacy of the capacity development processes being employed to develop, acquire, and adapt appropriate technology for forecasting the evolution of the pork-meat chain
- Factors that have facilitated and constrained the capacity development effort

⁵ These ideas are explained further in organizational change and development literature by authors such as Kloppenburg (1991), Long and Long (1992), and Röling (2000).

⁶ A term used to describe the complex process of comparing and contrasting divergent views with the intention of exposing and clarifying them to allow an agenda for negotiation to be built and a higher level synthesis to be reached. A hermeneutic dialectic implies much more than "reaching a consensus" and is based on Hegelian philosophy.

- Results, for IIP and its stakeholders, of having acquired the forecast technology
- The value added by the specific systematization approach adopted
- The lessons that can be applied to improve future capacity development initiatives, both by IIP personnel and the “New Paradigm” project.

Data analysis, synthesis, and interpretation

Data to feed the process of negotiated rationality were generated through a series of workshops. External facilitators from the “New Paradigm” project, internal facilitators from SINCITA/MINAG, and the manager of the ISNAR ECD project initiated the process during a preparation workshop. Subsequent work sessions, interviews, and document analyses were conducted by a SINCITA/MINAG team and IIP personnel, most of whom had previous experience in participatory, self-assessment techniques and had refined their knowledge during the self-evaluation of a previous ISNAR project (Mato *et al.*, 1999).

Results and conclusions

This capacity development effort has had far-reaching effects within IIP as well as on the broader interpretation now given to agriculture in Cuba. Within IIP, the forecast technology has closed the gaps that previously existed between different activities along the pork-meat chain. What were once viewed as independent activities are now integrated within a coherent and commonly understood perspective on current and emerging demands. As a direct result of its capacity development effort, IIP is now able to practice collaborative teamwork at all points along the chain.

Political, managerial, and technical commitments have contributed to the success with which the forecast technology has been shared, adapted, and used. Inhibiting factors included an initially inadequate appreciation of (a) the time required for institutional capacity to develop and behavioral change to occur, (b) the need for stability within the change teams, and (c) the disciplinary diversity in their make-up.

Elements within each apex of the triangle of sustainability have been enhanced. Overall policies directing research in IIP are better informed and there is greater commitment to a more adequate institutional mission. Research is in greater alignment with forecast demand and interdisciplinary teamwork is practiced in projects. Institutional credibility has been enhanced by the nomination of IIP as Cuba’s outstanding center of science in 2000, and the institute has received a 10% increase in its financial allocations. In addition, MINAG has acknowledged IIP’s research into the pork-meat chain as the national benchmark for such forecast studies.

The systematization provided well-founded guiding frameworks and operational processes that protected overall coherence. Participation was motivated because power was shared. The study shows that successful capacity development in forecasting technology depends upon political sponsorship for the innovation, dedicated resources, methods that permit interaction and negotiation, and adaptation of the process and technology to the context of change.

The results validated the role played by the external agency and its theory of action, its insistence upon a national as opposed to a limited focus, and the value of regional

networks. They also highlighted several factors that promoted positive organizational change. These were the interpretative and synthetic systematization process, the value of self-evaluation to enhance critical reflection and promote its continued use, and the role of collaborative, negotiated reflection in the consideration and construction of individual value positions.

Participatory agricultural research in the Philippines

*Jocelyn Perez and Jovita Sim, NPRCRTC, Benguet State University, Philippines;
Dindo Campilan and Raul Boncodin, CIP-UPWARD*

This exercise in evaluating organizational capacity in participatory research was based on a case study of the Northern Philippine Root Crops Research and Training Center (NPRCRTC), partnered by the Users' Perspective With Agricultural Research and Development (UPWARD) network, an initiative sponsored by the International Potato Center (CIP).

The organization and its capacity development initiative

NPRCRTC is attached to Benguet State University.

It was founded in 1977 as a regional research organization with a mandate to develop root crop agriculture and improve food self-sufficiency and quality of life for subsistence farming households in northern Philippines. To meet this challenge, the Center initiates research, training and extension services, generating and disseminating appropriate technologies to root crop farmers in the area. The Center has worked on its own and with several external agencies to develop capacity



in participatory research. Building this capability is regarded as an essential step towards improving performance and achieving the Center's mission.

External partners

UPWARD (sponsored by CIP and funded by the Government of the Netherlands) is a Philippines-based Asian network of researchers and practitioners engaged in developing participatory research capacity with farmers and other user groups. Since it was founded in 1989, UPWARD has supported capacity building efforts at NPRCRTC as well as in some 40 other organizations in Asia, through collaborative projects, training, information services, and linking of expertise.

Framework, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

A post-hoc theory of action to account for the Center's efforts at organizational capacity development in participatory research was developed by adapting the IDRC-Universalia framework for the analysis of organizational performance. A conceptual framework was adapted from Grant's hierarchy of organizational capabilities (1995) and Prahalad and Hamel's ideas about core competencies (1990). This framework was developed to help identify and track the processes involved in molding the Center's resources and individual capabilities into the organizational capacity required to accomplish participatory research projects.

The study objectives were:

- To analyze the processes involved in developing organizational capacity in participatory research at NPRCRTC
- To discover how this capacity contributes to the Center's performance as a research and development organization
- To determine how UPWARD's interventions have contributed to the organizational development of the Center
- Based on these findings, to make recommendations for improving capacity development efforts at the Center as well as for the evaluation of similar efforts in the future

The study was conducted in a participatory manner, involving all Center scientists and two specialists from UPWARD. The five phases included:

1. Collection and analysis of archival data
2. Planning workshop involving Center scientists and UPWARD specialists to sensitize them to the purpose and scope of the study, to validate the results of the archival data analysis, to rank the role played by external agencies in the Center's capacity development efforts, and to identify gaps in the data
3. Follow-up data collection phase to address the gaps identified
4. Workshop involving Center scientists and UPWARD specialists to validate and refine results and prepare the report outline
5. Drafting and completion of the report.

An evaluation matrix was drawn up to provide coherence to the study by linking the evaluation questions to key concepts, data requirements, data sources, and the most appropriate instruments for data collection.

Data analysis, synthesis, and interpretation

Five sets of questions were formulated based on the ISNAR project "guiding questions":

1. What are the key characteristics of participatory research as practiced at the Center and how has that capacity contributed to the accomplishment of its research and development projects?
2. By what processes has organizational capacity development for participatory research occurred at the Center?
3. How have external agencies contributed to the development of this capacity?
4. What lessons for the evaluation of capacity development have been learned?
5. In what ways has the Center's involvement in this study contributed to its capacity development efforts?

Analytical methods applied to the data sets included historical categorization and documentation of structural change in the Center, rating (by the scientists) of the contributions made by external agencies to the Center's capacity development, and mapping of work routines within the Center. Data were interpreted by the authors and discussed and confirmed or modified by the Center scientists.

The four-person evaluation team consisted of two members from the Center and two from UPWARD. Secondary data collection was done separately at NPRCRTC and UPWARD, while the planning and synthesis workshops were jointly facilitated. Team members wrote separate sections of the report and agreed the final format.

Results and conclusions

Participatory research by definition is an organizational, not an individual, capacity. It has been practiced within NPRCRTC projects since the Center's foundation, albeit initially in modest ways. However, the evaluation data show that there has been a significant increase in participatory research, especially in sweetpotato projects, the most recent of which involve stakeholders in the entire research-production-processing-consumption agri-food chain. The Center is now expert at engaging in complex interdisciplinary projects and working effectively with producers, transporters, processors, nutritionists, local governments, wholesalers, and retailers in order to achieve successful outcomes related to food security, poverty reduction, and environmental protection.

The processes that have propelled the development of this organizational capacity include internal factors, such as the Center's relative autonomy, democratic structure, culture of collaboration and mentoring as opposed to personal competitiveness, and the sound leadership exhibited by successive Center directors. Facilitating external factors include the pressure exerted by stakeholders on the Center to produce relevant research and production technologies, competition from other regional and national organizations, more grants for field-based and user-responsive research, and the availability of capacity development support from external agencies.

Of the four external agencies that have helped build the Center's organizational capacity, only UPWARD was reported to have made a deliberate and persistent effort in this area. This partnership effort has included training, workshops, publications, projects, expert links, conference participation, direct facilitation, and the provision of scholarships and equipment.

Strengthened capacity in participatory research has enhanced the scientists' skills in communicating with stakeholders as well as their ability to recognize and exploit opportunities for networking and collaboration. It has also encouraged continuous professional development and contributed to the Center's recognition as a national R&D institute.

Participants from both NPRCRTC and UPWARD reported that they are now more aware of the complexity underlying the commonly used but little understood phrase "organizational capacity development", and the need to master the evaluation of capacity development by discussing it and engaging in it. They are also more aware of the value of personal integrity and transparency of action when collecting highly sensitive data, and when making judgements about progress in a given capacity development initiative.

Conservation and use of plant genetic resources in Ghana

Samuel Bennett-Lartey, PGRC, Ghana; Raymond Vodouhe, GRENEWECA; Jamie Watts, IPGRI

A study to evaluate development of the capacity of the Plant Genetic Resources Centre (PGRC) of Ghana to manage their country's plant genetic resources, and the contributions made by the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) and the Genetic Resources Network for West and Central Africa (GRENEWECA).

The organization and its capacity development initiative

PGRC is located at Bunso in Ghana, and has a mandate to manage Ghana's plant genetic resources. Established in 1964, it took its current name and role in 1994. Its objectives are to: (a) collect and conserve the germplasm of plant genetic resources in Ghana; (b) characterize, evaluate and document the collection; (c) encourage the use of plant genetic resources by breeders, researchers, and farmers; (d) serve as a national coordinating agency for the exchange of plant genetic resources; and (e) engage in relevant research. The Centre plays a vital part in enhancing and sustaining Ghana's farming systems and hence in improving lives and livelihoods.



External partners

Three main players have contributed to the Centre's development over the past 20 years: the Government of Ghana, IPGRI, and, more recently, GRENEWECA. The Government of Ghana provides the budget for the Centre's researchers and support staff and most of the necessary physical infrastructure.

IPGRI is an international center within the CGIAR. It promotes the conservation and use of plant genetic resources internationally by working closely with national programs and governments to help build their capacity for research on, and management of, these resources. IPGRI has worked closely with PGRC to develop its conservation and research facilities and its human capacity, offering technical and management training and information. IPGRI has also helped to create a supportive environment for the Centre by influencing national policy in favor of plant genetic resources and encouraging awareness and collaboration among stakeholders at the national level.

GRENEWECA, established in 1998 under the auspices of the West and Central African Agricultural Research Council for Development, contributes to sustainable agricultural development in its member countries through collaboration to promote the conservation and use of the diversity of local plant genetic resources. Ghana is an active member of

GRENEWECA and the Head of PGRC is also the vice-chair of the GRENEWECA steering committee.

Framework, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

A case study approach was adopted following Yin (1994), taking the rigorous steps he recommends to assure the quality of the data collected and their effective analysis and interpretation. The partners adopted the IDRC-Universalia conceptual framework to help structure the evaluation study. They also developed a theory of action to explain how the various capacity development efforts of the two external agencies (IPGRI and GRENEWECA) would be likely to affect PGRC.

The study was conducted, by representatives of the three organizations, to evaluate capacity development at PGRC over a period of some 20 years (1980 to 1999). This period was one of major growth and change at the Centre. It was also a period during which both IPGRI and GRENEWECA made major contributions. The evaluation of these contributions included a retrospective analysis of the support provided to the Centre over the period. It also sought to identify ways in which capacity development could be improved in the future. Because GRENEWECA's involvement has been more recent, the view taken of that organization's contribution is largely prospective.

Six key questions helped to direct the study:

1. How did PGRC develop the capabilities needed to achieve its goals and what were the contributions of IPGRI and GRENEWECA?
2. What processes did IPGRI and GRENEWECA use to make their contributions?
3. What weaknesses in organizational capacity still exist at PGRC?
4. How could IPGRI and GRENEWECA contribute more effectively in the future?
5. What lessons can the partners learn about how best to evaluate future organizational capacity development efforts?
6. How has participation in this evaluation strengthened the partners' capabilities to engage in successful organizational capacity development?

Data analysis, synthesis, and interpretation

The data were analyzed using the three contributory dimensions of the IDRC-Universalia performance analysis framework: operational environment, motivation, and capacity. In particular, the changes in capacity predicted by the theory of action were sought in the data. The contributions made to these changes by IPGRI and GRENEWECA were determined. Categorized data from interviews and surveys were entered into databases to facilitate analysis. Common themes emerging from the data were collected using different sources and methods, interpretations were tested by triangulation, and, where there was adequate verification, appropriate conclusions were drawn.

The evaluation team consisted of the Head of PGRC and one representative from each of the two external agencies—the coordinator of GRENEWECA and the evaluation specialist from IPGRI. The evaluation plan, the drafting of findings and recommendations, and the preparation of the final report were undertaken jointly by the team members. Each took principal responsibility for the evaluation components most closely associated

with their own organization and for ensuring that these components were evaluated using participatory strategies in which a wide range of colleagues were involved. Data were collected from multiple sources (scientists, managers, and administrative records) using multiple methods (self-assessment workshops, interviews, surveys, personal histories, and archival searches) in order to triangulate and confirm findings.

Results and conclusions

Ghana's PGRC has built its capacities in a number of ways including: (a) recognition of the importance of certain key administrative positions and the professionalization of these (e.g. financial management, librarian, computer services); (b) identification of its national and international stakeholders and satisfying their needs, thereby securing its client base and financial viability; and (c) diversification of its services and products (e.g. production and sale of seeds and other planting materials) in order to expand and secure its sources of income.

IPGRI, and to a lesser extent GRENEWECA, have assisted the Centre in these pursuits by providing technical resources and scientific expertise, technical and management training, technical information to support research and public awareness, networking, and linkage activities. The study's findings suggest that both GRENEWECA and IPGRI can enhance their future contributions to PGRC's capacity development if all three organizations analyze and better understand the Centre's needs. This will provide a basis for establishing future priorities and planning the Centre's growth. In this way, the role that all three organizations play in developing PGRC's technical and organizational capacity will be more focused and more closely aligned with its strategic goals. In recognition that management standards are required for all plant genetic resource centers, IPGRI is now collaborating with the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations to help finalize a set of indicators to guide management.

Strengthening rural NGOs in Bangladesh

Imrul Kayes Muniruzzaman and Snehalata Saha, RDRS, Bangladesh; Marissa Espineli and Victoria Bautista, IIRR

This study explores the process of capacity building in Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) through the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction's (IIRR) international training courses.

The organization and its capacity development initiative

RDRS has its headquarters in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Its 1500 staff are supported by some 1000 grassroots volunteers. Fieldwork is conducted in northwest Bangladesh where, based on principles of democracy, gender equality, and environmentally sustainable rural

development, RDRS works to empower the rural poor politically, socially, and economically. It does this through a variety of programs which focus on building people's organizations, social mobilization, creating equal opportunities for women, encouraging environmental sensitivity and disaster preparedness, improving agriculture and community health, and providing micro-finance.

Originally a field program of the Geneva-based Lutheran World Service (since 1972), RDRS is now a Bangladeshi non-government organization (NGO). Since its "localization" the Service has sought opportunities for staff capacity development from a wide range of training providers and has purchased a range of management training services from IIRR.



External partners

IIRR is based in the Philippines and practices a people-centered and sustainable approach to rural development. It pursues its mission through three programs: (a) the Learning Community Program, which works directly with the rural poor in agriculture and natural resource management and in community health; (b) the Publications Program, which documents and disseminates best participatory field practices in these sectors; and (c) the Education and Training Program, which creates and delivers courses to strengthen the capacities of rural practitioners in participatory approaches to the management and promotion of rural development.

Between 1996 and 2000, the Education and Training Program has provided a variety of training courses at its headquarters in Silang, the Philippines. Fifty-five RDRS middle managers from a range of projects have attended, representing 7% of all IIRR trainees during that period.

Framework, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

This study represents a self-evaluation led by the four authors. They adopted the approach recommended by Patton (1997) to make explicit the theories of action inherent in the capacity development efforts of each organization. An evaluation matrix was developed to structure the execution of the evaluation and ensure each phase was coherent, adequate, and complementary. The matrix links the five project "guiding questions" to the data required to answer each question, appropriate data sources, and methods of analysis.

This case addresses the capacity building efforts of RDRS between 1996 and 2000 and examines the role played by IIRR's Education and Training Program. The purpose of the study was to take a retrospective look at the contributions of both organizations with a view to improving understanding of the processes employed, separately and in collaboration, and the results achieved. The findings are intended to help managers in

both organizations to re-assess their respective approaches to capacity development and to make better-informed decisions about future initiatives and collaboration. It was hoped that this study might change and enrich the relationship between RDRS and IIRR—a relationship that has to date been simply that between purchaser and service provider.

Five questions were directed at each organization:

1. Based on a detailed retrospective reflection, what are their intentions, assumptions, and the degree of fit between their perspectives?
2. What processes have been employed in their capacity building efforts?
3. How might each organization improve the effectiveness of its capacity development strategy and what would it require to develop complementary strategies to enhance future collaboration?
4. What lessons have been learned about how best to evaluate organizational capacity development?
5. How has participation in this evaluation exercise contributed to the capacity of each organization?

Data analysis, synthesis, and interpretation

Each organization conducted a self-evaluation to determine and assess the effectiveness of the theory of action underpinning its capacity development and the administrative and cognitive processes employed. Information was gathered from RDRS managers who had received training from IIRR. Data were collected by means of document reviews, a survey, key informant interviews, vignettes prepared by trainees, small group workshops, and participant reflection. The IDRC-Universalia framework for organizational analysis was used to classify the capacities RDRS was developing over the study period. This framework, overlaid by well-defined behavioral categories associated with the training of individuals, was also used to analyze the efforts of IIRR's Education and Training Program. Analytical categories and the resulting interpretations and conclusions of the data sets were tested with the appropriate stakeholder group to establish credibility (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

All data were shared throughout the study and interpreted jointly. The final report was drafted and completed by the principal authors in each organization.

Results and conclusions

As a result of its capacity development efforts, RDRS has made a highly successful transition from being a branch of an international charity to being a strong, self-administered, national NGO, respected for a wide range of relevant work with the rural poor in northern Bangladesh.

Despite the basic purchaser-training provider relationship that existed between RDRS and IIRR between 1996 and 2000, a high degree of fit was found between the capacities required and the capacities delivered. This was due to similarities in the underlying philosophies and experiences of the two organizations. The administrative processes they had adopted to facilitate the development of capacity were also found to be complementary, despite the fact that there was no routine undertaking of gap analysis in RDRS or identification of the job-related skills delivered by the training courses in IIRR.

Both organizations acknowledged that taking action to improve performance in these areas would be to their separate and mutual advantage.

Evaluation of capacity development requires key personnel to have prior conceptual, substantive, technical, and management knowledge and expertise if the results are to be trusted and acted upon by stakeholders. This study provided a learning opportunity for both organizations and they now have a better understanding of the knowledge and skills required for an evaluation of this kind.

Participation in this study has provided RDRS with the confidence to engage in human resource-based strategic planning (Grant, 1995). Both organizations are now more capable of planning and resolving complex organizational capacity development issues, and appreciate the value of undertaking future evaluations. They have a better understanding of how to manage the relationship between the organization planning its own capacity development and the organization delivering training and support to help build this capacity.

Community-based natural resource management in Vietnam

Nguyen Quang Tuyen and Le Thanh Duong, Mekong Delta Farming Systems R&D Institute, University of Cantho, Vietnam; Ronnie Vernooy, Community-Based Natural Resources Management Program Initiative, IDRC, Canada

This study evaluates the Mekong Delta Farming Systems Research and Development Institute's capacity development efforts. The evaluation exercise was supported by the Evaluation Unit and the Community-Based Natural Resources Management Program Initiative of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada.

The organization and its capacity development initiative

The Mekong Delta Farming Systems R&D Institute was created in 1988 to promote sustainable agricultural and rural development in Vietnam. The Institute conducts farming systems research, provides academic and field-based training, and participates in development projects at national, provincial, and district level. The Institute functions as the nucleus for two national research networks: the Farming Systems Research and Extension Network and the Natural Resources Management Network.

Resources for the Institute's 66 staff and their R&D activities are derived from university funds (approximately 10%) and international cooperation projects (approximately 90%). The institute is characterized by its multidisciplinary approach to rural development problems and by the way in which it integrates research, training, and extension activities.

During the last ten years, the institute has aimed to develop capacity in strategic leadership, adoption, and dissemination of innovative research approaches, improved

management of human, financial, and other resources, program management, and international networking.

External partners

The Community-Based Natural Resource Management Program in Asia is supported by IDRC, a Canadian crown corporation involved in researching the social, economic, communication, and environmental challenges facing developing countries with a view to contributing to their resolution. IDRC has provided funding for the two national networks, supported research by the networks, and enabled the Institute's staff to participate in community-based natural resource management workshops.

Framework, objectives, and scope of the evaluation

The evaluation involved active participation of a wide range of stakeholders and informants and was conducted as a self-assessment led by the authors. It built on previous organizational assessment studies (Horton *et al.*, 2000) and capacity building methods (Gubbels and Koss, 2000). The IDRC-Universalia framework for the analysis of organizational performance was used to formulate the research questions and design the methods. A modified version of this framework was later developed to integrate and interpret the findings of the study. A theory of action was also developed to help explain the Institute's capacity development efforts and their relation to its organizational performance.

The study addressed the period 1990 to 2000, and aimed to reach a fuller understanding of how individual and organizational capacity development efforts are conducted and how to monitor and appraise the results.

The study was designed to respond to five questions:

1. What organizational capacities has the Institute developed in the past 10 years?
2. Have the Institute's capacities changed since its creation and, if so, how?
3. What have the staff of the Institute contributed to its development?
4. What capacity development challenges still face the Institute?
5. What have IDRC and its Community-Based Natural Resource Management Program contributed to the Institute's capacity development efforts?

The authors developed an evaluation matrix to link the evaluation questions with the instruments used and the multiple data sets collected in response to each question. The assessment was conducted by a small team of researchers from the Institute and a member of IDRC's Community-Based Natural Resource Management Program, supported by IDRC's Evaluation Unit.

Data analysis, synthesis, and interpretation

Data were collected through participatory workshops, work assessment questionnaires, focus groups, a case study, document review, and interviews with key



informants. Multiple sources provided data for each question, permitting triangulation. The data were grouped and analyzed for each evaluation question and their meanings discussed by the evaluation team and other stakeholders. Feedback was provided by a member of IDRC's Evaluation Unit. A synthesis of the main findings was developed in a participatory way by the authors and other stakeholders.

Results and conclusions

The Institute has developed the organizational capacities needed to set a relevant and competitive research agenda and to manage the processes needed to achieve results. It can effectively manage training and extension, build networks and mutually advantageous relationships with policy makers, donors, and other research organizations, manage and develop its human and other resources, structure and adjust itself to facilitate attainment of its goals, manage its finances, and exhibit sound leadership. Other achievements include acquiring the ability to share the task of building a national agenda with similar organizations, collaborating to promote the common interests of a wide range of stakeholders, practicing a more holistic approach to rural development research, and managing an increasingly complex infrastructure.

The strong leadership and vision generated by senior management have been a principal factor in the Institute's capacity development. This has stimulated the staff to pursue individual and organizational improvements with a high degree of energy and pride. They have also benefited from a "learning by doing" approach, and the ongoing satisfaction resulting from internal and external recognition for the success of their efforts. Freedom to experiment and innovate has also been permitted by the creative operating environment.

The evaluation showed that the Institute must continue to develop its human resources, improve its internal management policies, and promote a creative approach, if it is to have a viable future in a rapidly changing national policy environment.

IDRC and its Community-Based Natural Resource Management Program have contributed to the capacity development of the Institute in a number of ways. They have provided staff training, introduced new concepts and methods, provided access to new information and field experiences, facilitated the creation of networks for the sharing of experiences, and provided the Institute with a richer communication infrastructure.

Perspectives and Emerging Lessons

“Although not complete, the ECD project can already draw some conclusions based on the learning and experience of participating cases.”

The following perspectives on capacity development and its evaluation were presented at the *Midterm Review and Synthesis Workshop*. They were intended to stimulate and orient discussions. The exercise led to identification of several general and emerging lessons regarding capacity development and its evaluation in research and development organizations.

A perspective on organizational capacity development

Peter Morgan, Private Consultant, Washington D.C., USA

Capacity development issues can appear in quite different forms and sizes, depending on the perspective of the observer. One of the most widely used ways of looking at such issues emphasizes strategies, structures, and systems. The framework presented below can be helpful in ordering our thoughts and strategies. It builds on the IDRC-Universalia framework (Lusthaus *et al.*, 1995) that was used by the evaluation teams in the ECD project.

The nine main elements in the framework are listed in an order that is commonly used in organizational assessment, beginning with the general context and moving on to more specific aspects of capacity development. These steps are not to be used in a rigid sequential way. They represent facets of overall capacity development that participants need to keep in mind and connect together as needed.

When we talk about monitoring and evaluating capacity development, we may be talking about “micro” judgements about capacity development (step 7) or about making a more “macro” or aggregated judgement based on all the aspects. We need to keep evaluations as simple as possible, but to retain all the elements. Participants tend to lose interest in an evaluation if it becomes too complicated. On the other hand, if the evaluation

Framework for structuring thinking about capacity development

1. The general context

(how will the context or environment of the organization affect its work?)

- What are the factors that shape capacity development and organizational performance?
- Which factors will have to be accepted as they are?
- Which can be altered or controlled?

2. The organizational/institutional context

(what is the nature of the organizational/institutional system(s) of which this organization is a part?)

- What role does this organization play in the system(s) of which it is a part?
- Who are the main stakeholders and beneficiaries and how do they relate to the organization?
- How can improvements in the lives of the organization's beneficiaries be assessed?
- What role do other stakeholders play in shaping capacity development? In monitoring and evaluating the organization's performance?
- How does the system as a whole function and change? What are the main interrelationships?

3. Present state of the organization

(where is it now?)

- What is the evolution or history of this organization?
- What state has it reached?
- Why has it reached this state?
- What are its present strengths and weaknesses?
- What are its opportunities?
- To whom does it deliver services and how?

4. Mandate, niche, purposes, vision of the organization

(what is the contribution of this organization supposed to be?)

- What are the official purpose(s) and objectives of this organization?
- Are these the same as its real purpose(s) and objectives?
- What is its program?
- Which groups want it to do what?

5. Delivery strategy to support the mandate

(what delivery or implementation strategy will the organization use to fulfill its mandate?)

- Will it simply do more of what it already does?
- Will it offer new services and work with new stakeholders and clients?
- Will it privatize some of its services?
- Will it try to generate more technological or organizational innovation?
- Will it downsize and/or offer fewer services?
- Will it enter new partnerships and delivery contracts?

6. The design and intended capacity of the organization

(what capabilities will the organization need to implement its delivery strategy?)⁷

- What capabilities or competencies will be needed to make this organization perform and deliver value over time?⁸ In whose judgement?
- In what order should such capabilities be developed?
- In what depth? At what cost? By when? For how long?
- What are the implications of capability development for power and authority inside the organization?
- How should capabilities be combined for maximum performance?

7. Capability development by the organization

(how will the organization build these capabilities?)

- How will it select an approach to organizational change?⁹ There are many possibilities, including acquisition of skills, attitudinal change, altering incentives, organizational restructuring, etc.
- Who will supply the energy and leadership to push ahead with capability development?
- What external factors affecting change will the organization have to take into account?
- How will it assess its effectiveness in managing change?

8. Performance of the organization

(how well does it make its contribution?)

- What characteristics can be used to assess performance: effectiveness, efficiency, equity?
- Who assesses and decides the level of performance?
- When should performance be assessed?
- In assessing performance, what should be the balance between achievements in building capabilities and achievements in delivering impact?

9. Outside interventions

(what is or should be the role of outside groups and organizations that are helping to improve capacity and performance?)

- What intervention strategy can best help the organization improve its performance?
- What is the “theory of action” that is actually at work?
- On what grounds would such a strategy be selected and by whom?
- Using what criteria would its effectiveness be assessed and by whom?

7 The term “capacity” is used to refer to the whole organization. “Capabilities” refers to specific competencies within the organization.

8 If we see an organization as a bundle of capabilities, we need to think carefully about what kind of capabilities an organization needs. Most lists focus on operating capabilities such as planning and financial management. Others see the need for strategic skills such as leadership. Beneficiaries and other stakeholders are concerned about capabilities that deliver products or services outside the organization, such as advocacy, participatory research, or training courses. And finally, organizations need what might be called “sustaining” capabilities that keep the organization viable and productive over the long term—including managing conflict, building credibility and legitimacy, managing change, and learning.

9 There are many possibilities, including acquisition of skills, attitudinal change, altering incentives, organizational restructuring, etc.

is too simple, it fails to capture the complex reality that most efforts at capacity development have to deal with.

Many of the facets are interconnected. It is difficult to document the existence of certain capacities (step 6) or the effectiveness of efforts to develop them (step 7) without first measuring performance improvement (step 8). The gap between the initial state (step 3) and the subsequent level of performance (step 8) is also important.

Not surprisingly, the facets at the heart of this framework (steps 6 and 7, and the process as a whole) are the ones least likely to be well understood. We still have much to learn before we can confidently predict, plan, and implement the complex process of organizational change. This applies especially to the design of outside interventions in capacity development.

This framework is more helpful in ordering our thoughts and initial strategies than in explaining why so many efforts at capacity development fail to reach their objectives.¹⁰ It also throws little light on the issues relating to cost-effectiveness, incentives, and power and authority that are so vital to the outcome of capacity development efforts.

We need to be careful about assuming cause-and-effect relationships. Funding agencies anxious to demonstrate results in terms of long-term development goals often talk about tracking “chains” of results. However, in the ambiguous world of capacity development, the best we can hope for is to demonstrate probable contributions to development through building capacity, or plausible associations between increased capacity and increased impact.

A perspective on evaluating capacity development

Ronald Mackay, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

Evaluation methods used in the case studies

All the studies adopted what can be broadly termed “participant-oriented” approaches. These directly involve stakeholders in determining the questions to address, the data to be collected, the methods to be used, the criteria for making judgements, and the interpretation of results. A participant-oriented approach generally encompasses many aspects. For example, it looks at the context in which the organization resides, it provides both descriptions and judgements, it permits the evaluation plan to evolve, it draws on a wide range of information, and it aims to understand the results of the capacity development effort. However, this approach has some limitations, for example a lack of external objectivity, a tendency to be attracted by atypical processes and outcomes, a potential to be time-consuming, and a risk of failing to reach closure on critical issues.

¹⁰ This is true in all societies. One estimate is that well over 50% of all efforts at organizational change in North America do not achieve their objectives.

All five case study teams adopted forms of “self-evaluation” by which they tended to mean evaluation by insiders. This may eliminate the perceived threat posed by external evaluators and avoid any mistakes due to a lack of familiarity with the organization. But it leaves the evaluation team entirely dependent upon its own expertise and experience—which may be limited. The quality of participant-oriented evaluations can be improved by adding external evaluation expertise, and all five organizations did just this.



The studies employed a wide variety of data collection methods. These include document review, archival research, surveys, interviews, vignettes, personal and organizational histories, reflection, and others. Additional supporting information was not made available, but would have been interesting. For example, why was a particular data collection method selected to answer a particular question? What was the rationale for the sources drawn upon? What precautions were taken to ensure the reliability and quality of the information? How were the data managed? Which conceptual frameworks were used for data analysis and interpretation, and how were these interpretations verified?

One of the case studies (the Philippines) reported on the adequacy of the methods used in its evaluation. This is called “meta-evaluation” and is a way of reflecting critically on activities undertaken to identify weaknesses and either take steps to eliminate them or else report them, so that they become obvious to the reader. A sound evaluation—whether a “self-evaluation” conducted internally, an evaluation conducted by an external evaluator, or a combination of both—should be conducted and presented in a form that allows the adequacy of the approach, methods, and data, and the support for the findings and conclusions, to be judged.

Only one of the studies (Cuba) overtly drew the readers’ attention to the ideological stance adopted by those undertaking the evaluation. Indeed, a consciously chosen and eloquently defended ideological stance was reported to underpin and guide the entire capacity development effort of SINCITA and its external partner, ISNAR’s “New Paradigm” project. We were told that a subjectivist way of knowing and pluralist ways of assigning and negotiating values had been intentionally adopted as part of both the capacity development effort and its evaluation.

Selecting a particular ideology, evaluation approach, and methods of data collection, analysis, and interpretation implies either a conscious or an unconscious choice from a range of alternatives. In some cases, the use of certain approaches and methods was not guided by conscious choice but was a reflection of the limited state of knowledge of the evaluator. This points to opportunities for ISNAR to strengthen the evaluation expertise of research and development organizations through appropriate training, workshops, publications, or other means. Many of the case study authors acknowledge themselves to

be newcomers to the field of evaluation. Most have reported that their experience with these studies has encouraged them to explore further the vast and growing body of knowledge and practice available from the international evaluation community.

Standards used to judge evaluations

The best known and most widely applicable standards for judging an evaluation are those developed by the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994) in the USA. According to these standards, sound evaluations should have four basic attributes.

Evaluation standards¹¹

Utility: Seven utility standards to ensure that an evaluation will serve the information needs of intended users.

Feasibility: Three feasibility standards to ensure that an evaluation will be realistic, prudent, diplomatic and cost-effective.

Propriety: Eight propriety standards to ensure that an evaluation will be conducted legally, ethically and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results.

Accuracy: Twelve accuracy standards to ensure that an evaluation will provide sound information (e.g. defensible sources, valid and reliable information, justified conclusions, etc.) on the object of the evaluation.

The contribution of evaluation to capacity development

The reflection and analysis involved in carrying out an evaluation can help those involved to develop a much more profound understanding of their capacity development work and the factors influencing its success or failure. The success rate for capacity building and organizational change efforts is quite low; for example, Levine (2001) reports that approximately 70% of business process re-engineering efforts fail. Similar failure rates have been observed in the not-for-profit sector. One reason for the failure of capacity development efforts is that they are often undertaken without regard to previous experience. Direct involvement in designing and carrying out an evaluation has been found to be the best way to ensure use of the evaluation results (Patton, 1997).

The following questions should help participants in the ECD project to reflect on their capacity development efforts and on their evaluation studies:

1. What is the theory of action underpinning your capacity development effort? (i.e. how do you expect your activities to accomplish your intermediate and final objectives?)

11 Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (1994).

2. What capacities are you trying to develop, who should possess them and in what part(s) of the organization should they be found, if your capacity development effort is to be judged a success?
3. How is the development of these capacities expected to contribute to the performance of your organization?
4. What approach have you adopted to evaluate your capacity development effort *and why?*
5. What sources of data have you tapped, what data collection methods have you used *and why?*

Emerging lessons

“Although not complete, the ECD project can already draw some tentative conclusions about the participating organizations’ evaluation efforts and about the potential for evaluation to reflect the soundness of our capacity development efforts.”

The primary purpose of the ECD project is to stimulate organizations to use evaluation as a strategy for enhancing capacity development and organizational performance. To this end, the project seeks to help national organizations and their external partners to acquire and develop evaluation knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will help them to analyze their capacity development efforts with a view to improving them.

“This is not a project that deals with known solutions to known problems. It is clearly dealing with changing issues that require innovative solutions over time.”

Through conducting the case study evaluations, participants learned about the strengths and weaknesses of their work. The exercise also gave them the opportunity to stand back and review their organization, the context in which it operates, and their capacity development effort as a whole. The following key lessons were identified:

Emerging lessons on capacity development

Capacity development is not just a technical activity.

Capacity development is often viewed as an essentially technical matter involving training and provision of professional services. However, the evaluation studies highlighted the importance of political aspects. If the people with political power and authority do not support capacity development efforts, significant changes in an organization’s procedures and performance will not occur. The reports from Vietnam, Ghana, Cuba, and the Philippines illustrate the importance of gaining political support for capacity development.

Capacity development should not be viewed as a one-off, isolated undertaking.

Several organizations discovered that their capacity development had no clear rationale for a coherent accumulation of capacities. Only continuous development will provide an organization with the evolving capacities required in today's rapidly changing environment. Participating organizations have become aware that the development of certain capacities may depend upon complex processes of organizational learning, which may themselves be contingent upon prior stages and levels of learning, investment, and development. An example is the development of participatory research by NPRCRTC, which has taken place over many years and successively more complex projects.

Capacity development implies much more than the delivery or acquisition of human and other resources.

There is a clear difference between the delivery of resources (e.g. funds, buildings, laboratory equipment, computers, or training opportunities) and the development of organizational capacities. Resources are essential for all activities. However, organizational capacities permit the organization to employ its resources effectively in pursuing higher levels of performance. Participants agreed that capacity development involves individuals learning to work in teams to employ and complement their resources in a synergistic way.

Capacity development efforts should be driven by the needs and demands of the recipient organization.

The cases indicate that capacity development efforts often begin with well-meaning offers from external agencies, rather than a comprehensive needs assessment. Such offers typically reflect the resources and interests of the external agency rather than the requirements of the beneficiary. To be productive, capacity development efforts must address real needs and interests in the organization where development is to occur.

Prior to launching a capacity development effort, an organizational diagnosis should be carried out.

Identification of capacity needs requires a diagnosis of the gap between the current state of the organization and the capacities required for achieving its mission, strategic goals, and objectives. This highlights the importance of an institutional and organizational assessment as a first step. Participants reported that their capacity development efforts had seldom been designed on the basis of a systematic and detailed review of the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and capacity needs. Better diagnostic work should therefore be done prior to implementing a capacity development program. This will also provide baseline data against which to measure progress and results over time.

Capacity development efforts should be designed and implemented so as to enable organizations, groups, and individuals to achieve their own objectives.

Organizational capacity development should embrace a wide range and appropriate mix of learning and facilitating processes that lead to empowerment of individuals, groups, and units within the organization.

Capacity development efforts require complementary mind-sets on the part of the organization and its external partners.

The reports from Cuba and the Philippines present evidence to illustrate this lesson. It was also interesting to see how RDRS and IIRR came to realize that their respective “purchaser of services” and “supplier of training” roles had quite different mind-sets regarding the concept of capacity development. The “purchaser” had no program of support for managers to integrate the information and skills acquired into broader team efforts and capabilities. If a manager left shortly after returning from training, the capacity acquired was lost to the organization. The “supplier of training” assumed that the agenda it developed in collaboration with the trainee would be welcomed and implemented without question upon the manager’s return. The critical importance of mutually compatible perspectives on capacity development became clear to all organizations as a result of the evaluation exercise.

Capacity development efforts should be guided by common objectives, shared concepts, and a coherent theory of action that is agreed on by the key groups involved in the process.

Capacity development is a complex undertaking, so it is important that all those involved agree on the basic objectives, concepts, and terms. This will help to ensure good communication and minimize the risk of confusion and conflict. It is also important that a capacity development effort be guided by a coherent, shared theory of how discrete activities are expected to produce intermediate and longer term results and benefits. Participants acknowledged that without a theory of action, a capacity development effort could become a fragmented exercise in wishful thinking, rather than a coherent initiative with a high probability of success.

In the Cuba case, the participating organizations began their capacity development initiative with an explicit theory of action. This was based on the level of knowledge we have of organizational behavior and change, and was accepted by all relevant actors. Becoming involved in an evaluation exercise helped the other case study teams to become aware of the value of a theory of action that links the activities of capacity development to the expected results.

A capacity development effort should promote self-reliance and help the organization balance autonomy with partnership and collaboration.

Although organizations must work with external partners to develop certain capacities, it is important that they do not become dependent on them. For example, NPRCRTC engages in collaborative research involving multiple disciplines within the Center, as well as with farmers, processors, nutritionists, and local government enterprise units, among others. This allows the Center to conduct research spanning the entire agri-food chain. The evaluation drew attention to the fact that NPRCRTC has come to value its capacity to partner with a wide variety of organizations. The reports from Ghana, Vietnam, and Cuba also drew attention to this issue.



“The exercise widened our views towards how evaluation could be carried out more fruitfully. The in-depth analysis of what activities were done, why they were done, and what for, would indeed give a better insight into the performance of the organization.”

Emerging lessons on evaluating capacity development efforts

Evaluating organizational capacity development is particularly sensitive because it focuses on people and makes judgements about their activities and accomplishments.

The success or failure of an evaluation depends not only on technical aspects of data collection and analysis, but also on more personal issues. For example, obtaining permission to carry out the study and access sensitive information, and presenting results in a truthful, but acceptable format. The term “evaluation” often has negative connotations associated with it, so the Cuba team adopted the term “systematization” which emphasizes documentation, learning, and improvement over appraisal and judgement activities.

Participant-oriented approaches, especially self-assessments, are particularly useful for evaluating organizational capacity development.

All the cases opted for participant-oriented approaches to their evaluations. They also engaged more expert evaluators from inside or outside their organizations. Involving the organization’s members in the evaluations helped the study leaders gain support within their organizations and access to sensitive information. It also allowed stakeholders to learn about evaluation techniques and to keep abreast of the results. Direct involvement has been found to increase the likelihood that results are actually used (Patton, 1997).

A “case study” approach is a useful evaluation technique, but doing a good case study is often more complex than people realize.

The case study approach was well accepted by participants as an evaluation technique. It allowed them to focus in depth on the capacity development efforts of their own organizations. They also learned that the process requires considerable preparation and organization to ensure that valid and useful information is collected, analyzed, and presented in convincing ways. The Ghana report drew on the standards for case study research presented in the manual by Yin (1994).

Capacity development plans should highlight pertinent indicators that reflect the objectives.

Plans for capacity development efforts often do not include clear indicators to illustrate what success would look like, if it were achieved. Participants were faced with the challenge of constructing indicators in retrospect, and often in the absence of those who had planned and executed earlier capacity development activities.

Capacity development efforts should maintain up-to-date information systems.

Most participants felt that evaluations should be undertaken more frequently. This would require simple but appropriate information systems to be established and kept current; otherwise the time and effort needed to acquire organizational data would be too great to make regular evaluation a practical option.

Evaluation of the ECD Project

“The project has achieved more than I expected, given the short time of its existence.”

Participants in the Midterm Review and Synthesis Workshop evaluated the first three phases of the ECD project by completing a written survey. Six topics were covered:

- Design of the project as a whole
- Design of the evaluation case studies
- Implementation of the project as a whole
- Implementation of the individual case studies
- Achievement of project objectives
- Personal achievements

For each topic, progress was evaluated in relation to a number of indicators, using a scale ranging from 1 (low) to 7 (high). Individual comments were also recorded. Nineteen of the 26 workshop participants completed and returned the evaluation form. The main results are summarized below.¹²

Project design

Participants considered the project’s objectives to be relevant to their personal and organizational interests, and they found the “guiding questions” useful in orienting the evaluation studies. They generally appreciated the flexible design and action-learning approach of the project. However, some felt they would have benefited if greater clarity on the study questions and evaluation methods had been provided at the beginning of the project. The level of stakeholder involvement in planning the case studies was highly valued. They were less satisfied with the limited amount of time and resources available.

Project implementation

Participants gave high marks to the degree of implementation of planned activities. They were especially pleased with the management of project activities, and with the communication and support provided by ISNAR. They felt that communication among the case study teams had been limited, and the project’s electronic discussion group and web site were not of great use. Several participants did not have direct access to the Internet, and the web site was not frequently updated. Additionally, some participants did not feel comfortable participating in the electronic discussion group.

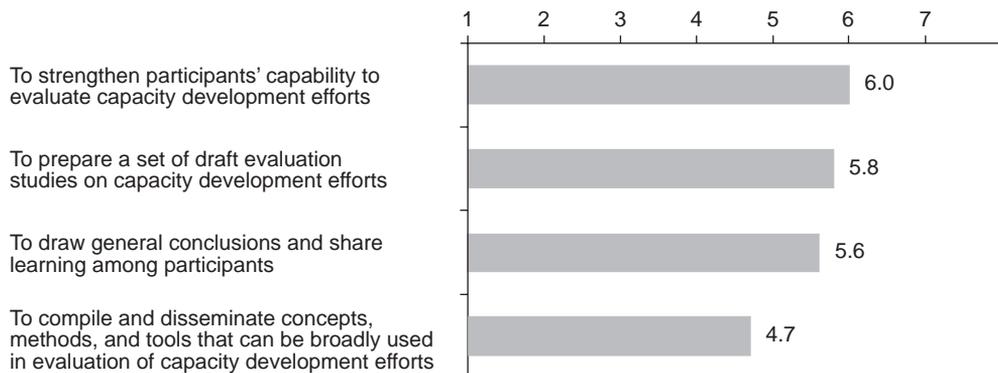
¹² A complete report on the midterm evaluation of the project is available from ISNAR upon request.

The support provided by the project’s consultants was appreciated, although greater involvement from ISNAR and the consultants may have been of benefit. The five “guiding questions” were very useful for the project as a whole. However, placing excessive emphasis on these questions diverted some of the evaluation work away from questions and issues of greater local importance.

Results and achievements

Participants were largely satisfied with the extent to which they had developed their own knowledge of capacity development and its evaluation. They gave a high score to the potential usefulness of their evaluation results in their organization. They felt that carrying out the evaluation studies had helped to improve collaboration with their partner organizations in undertaking capacity development efforts and in evaluating them. In planning their future activities, participants gave top priority to completing and disseminating their evaluation reports, and to interacting with local stakeholders. For the ECD project as a whole, they encouraged further synthesis of the case study results and wide dissemination of the general conclusions and lessons. Participants felt that lack of commitment to evaluation within their organizations might limit the local benefits and impacts of the ECD project. To ensure that local efforts are maintained and lasting benefits produced, they requested ISNAR to continue and expand the support it is providing for strengthening evaluation in research and development organizations.

Extent to which the ECD project has achieved its stated objectives



The evaluation results are being used to shape the subsequent phases of the ECD project. Future project activities (discussed in the next section) are being formulated in line with the participants’ needs and suggestions.

Future Project Activities

“During the workshop shared learning has been reached and concepts and terms have been clarified. The demand on publications from ISNAR shows the high level of interest from the teams and the need to share their results with their stakeholders. The teams are very motivated to work more on their reports and to use the results.”

Experiences gained during the case study evaluations helped the participants to identify major constraints to the greater use of evaluation, and to suggest future activities for the ECD project.

Constraints identified by the case study teams

- Evaluation, in particular self-assessment, is new to almost all the participating organizations
- The amount and frequency of interaction required between the national and international organizations to carry out the evaluation was generally underestimated
- Technical expertise in evaluation theory and practice is very limited in most of the organizations—both national and international
- There is no readily available set of validated tools for evaluating capacity development in R&D organizations
- Most organizations lack an evaluation culture, and the evaluation of capacity development is not perceived as a priority. Moral and political support and acknowledgement from top management are limited
- Participation of stakeholders (both internal and external) is often limited because they are unaware of the potential benefits of the evaluation
- There is insufficient common understanding of key evaluation concepts and terms
- In almost all cases, there is inadequate baseline data on individual and organizational capacity and performance
- Most organizations have a history of negative experiences with evaluations, and this discourages them from engaging in further evaluation exercises
- Many participants found their own time to be a severe constraint and felt that they allocated insufficient time to their studies
- It was sometimes difficult to reconcile the five “guiding questions” with the issues of greatest importance in individual organizations

The lack of motivation for evaluation was especially problematic. The process of creating motivation should begin by sensitizing a broad range of stakeholders to the potential contribution evaluation can make to an organization’s capacity and

performance. It is important to gain the commitment of senior management, to make the evaluation of capacity development an integral part of the organization's development strategy, and a regular management process. One practical way of fostering motivation and commitment for an evaluation study is to arrange a preparation workshop, at which the purpose and benefits of evaluation can be explained and discussed with stakeholders. Using appropriate terms will also help. "Capacity development" and "evaluation" mean different things to different groups. The evaluation process can be made more coherent and less threatening if simple, user-friendly terms are used and their meanings shared among all participants. Focusing the evaluation on recognized problems can be crucial to secure commitment and motivation.



Participants highlighted the importance of systematically recording key organizational data to provide a baseline against which progress can be measured. Improving systems of communication and adding technical expertise and capacity may enable the evaluators to experiment with, and validate, a range of different concepts and tools. Then better informed choices can be made and the evaluation methodology can be justified when challenged.

The participants agreed that many strategies for encouraging the use of monitoring and evaluation as tools to improve organizational performance are complimentary. For example, if monitoring becomes part of the organization's regular operations, then evaluation will be made easier. The fact that systematic monitoring is rarely found reflects the need for fundamental improvements in information management in many organizations.

How can the ECD project help?

"Evaluation case studies have been drafted and are better than expected, in light of the limited time, expertise and resources available. Now the ball is in the court of the project coordination team to synthesize results."

Participants asked ISNAR to continue to provide support and legitimacy to the evaluation of capacity development. Publishing the results of the project to a wider audience (for example in a peer-reviewed journal) would help to achieve this. Instruction manuals and guidelines presenting key concepts and methods are also needed.

Secondly, the provision of training at each critical phase or stage of evaluation (e.g. focusing the evaluation, designing, planning, data collection, analysis, interpretation, report writing, etc.) would help to create a "critical mass" of skilled evaluators within participating organizations.

Thirdly, ISNAR should continue to provide its expertise beyond the life of the ECD project. The institution should play a coordinating role and help to create a community

of interest in the evaluation of capacity development, with emphasis on promoting new and practical approaches. This should include creating opportunities for national evaluators to work with international experts, so as to gain greater knowledge, and also to disseminate that knowledge inside their own countries (by “training trainers”) and possibly organizing national evaluation associations.¹³

Next steps

“It is now very important that we share the products of this exercise. The final phase of the project (July 2001 to December 2002) is a crucial time to re-negotiate the terms of collaboration for the future and to discuss and share our results with stakeholders. The evaluation reports and conclusions drawn from them should be widely distributed.”

Evaluation reports

Each of the case study teams identified a set of activities to be performed in their own country and region to finalize and disseminate their results. Several teams agreed to revisit and revise their theory of action, to clarify their methodology, to add new data, and to analyze and validate their findings.

In Cuba it is proposed to hold training workshops to create a critical mass of evaluation facilitators. In Bangladesh, “training of trainers” workshops and reviews of post-training reports are planned. In Vietnam, the completed evaluation report will be discussed with Cantho University, with a view to producing written internal regulations concerning staff rights and responsibilities. In Ghana the stakeholders will be invited to a “wrap-up” workshop. The study will also be rewritten for submission to a peer-reviewed journal. It is hoped to extend this pilot evaluation study to other countries through GRENEWCA. In the Philippines, the evaluation will be presented to the annual conference of UPWARD, made available through a university web site, and submitted to a local journal.

“The results of our case study have been useful for the organization and its stakeholders. We have started to disseminate them, but this is not enough. We need to continue refining concepts, and to widen the scope of our evaluation exercises.”

“There is a high demand from other partner organizations to carry out similar studies. Technical and financial support to respond to such demands are needed.”

The case for evaluating capacity development: a motivational book

Participants felt that a stimulating and motivating book should be prepared that links theoretical issues associated with evaluating organizational capacity development to practical approaches. The book will highlight the potential of evaluation as a strategy for improving organizational performance. It will discuss the implications of a changing global environment, the role of capacity development in improving performance, and the importance of evaluating capacity development (including information on formative

¹³ Assistance would be available for this kind of initiative. For example, one of the goals of the Canadian Evaluation Society is to promote evaluation communities in the developing world.

and summative methods of evaluation and self-assessment as a tool). These topics will be linked to the experiences gained through conducting the case study evaluations. In conclusion, the book will invite the rising generation of managers to make more and better use of evaluation as a tool to improve organizational performance.

Evaluating capacity development: a sourcebook

This publication will be a user-friendly resource for people involved in conducting evaluation exercises. It will contain a framework for evaluating capacity development, the methods and tools used in the case studies, and other methods and tools of potential value. The book will also list sources of expertise that can be drawn upon when planning a capacity development effort or evaluation exercise.

Other outputs

Project results will be disseminated to diverse audiences in forms ranging from oral presentation, newsletter articles, and briefing papers to articles in professional journals. The project web site (www.cgiar.org/isnar/ecd/index.htm) will be kept up-to-date.

Network of practitioners

Before the *Midterm Review and Synthesis Workshop*, project participants were not working together as a network and there was little communication between the different country teams. As they were working in different technical areas, the general perception was that they had little in common. In some cases, additional difficulties in communication were caused by problems in accessing the Internet.

The group is now much more cohesive and it is hoped that the positive interaction that occurred during the workshop will develop further, with participants continuing to exchange their observations and ideas. Participating organizations now have the potential to create a more demand-driven project and relationship with ISNAR. The discussion forum available on the project web site may help to foster a functioning and more productive network.

“Continuing dialogue is necessary, as we don’t yet have answers to all the questions...”

Final workshop/conference

As the ECD project concludes in late 2002, a final conference will be held to disseminate the results to a wider audience, in particular to policy and decision makers within the development community. Results of the evaluation case studies will be presented, together with observations and lessons drawn from them. Wider publication of the results of the project may extend to papers being submitted to international conferences and peer-reviewed journals.

“There was insufficient time devoted to synthesis and consolidation so this remains to be done. There is still high potential for achievement of the broader objectives if time is devoted to them by ISNAR, donors, consultants, and the teams that have the time and interest to participate.”

Conclusions

“The case studies and their interpretation are just a starting point. There are potentially much wider benefits...there will be some interesting experiences gained in the next phase.”

Capacity development and its evaluation are complex undertakings requiring experience and technical expertise as well as a range of skills that are still poorly understood. Participants in the ECD project have gained a wide range of experiences by formulating their own evaluation plans, collecting and analyzing data, and writing up their evaluation reports. Their perspectives on evaluation have been broadened to include new philosophies, approaches, and tools. They now form a more cohesive group, as they have realized that many of their concerns and needs are common to all the different cases. There is a clear demand for the project to evolve, and for ISNAR to continue to support the evaluation of capacity development. Although much has been achieved, there is still much to learn.

The project’s results will be made available to potential users in national, regional, and international development organizations, particularly those that have influence in the international research and development community. By influencing thinking and practice in the evaluation of organizational capacity development, the project has the potential to achieve a wide impact. The ultimate aim is to help organizations in developing countries to reduce their dependency on the North and to make their own mark in the fight against poverty and hunger.

“Though we are happy with what has been achieved in such a short time, we are far from being satisfied. We are determined to pursue further this potential. If the project has a new opportunity—and we think it should have—our program is definitely willing to be associated with this effort.”



Annexes

1. ECD project phases and outputs

Phase	Dates	Outputs
1. Problem definition, planning and design of case studies	January to September 2000	Network of practitioners. Consensus on project objectives, issues, concepts, and methods. Adequate resources and commitment for Phases 2-5. Project documents, key references, and sources of expertise available on web site.
2. Evaluation studies	October 2000 to June 2001	Completed evaluations (draft reports). Enhanced knowledge, skill, and ability of those who carried out the studies.
3. Review and synthesis of results	July to December 2001	General conclusions in relation to the project objectives and five guiding questions.
4. Preparation of methodological outputs	January to June 2002	Manuscript for “The case for evaluating organizational capacity development” and a sourcebook of methods and tools.
5. Dissemination of results	July to December 2002	Project results disseminated via a final workshop/conference, newsletter articles, briefing papers, conference presentations, and sourcebook.

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3. Acronyms

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
CGIAR	Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CIAT	International Center for Tropical Agriculture
CIP	International Potato Center
CTA	Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation
ECD	Evaluating Capacity Development
GRENEWECA	Genetic Resources Network for Western and Central Africa
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
IIP	Instituto de Investigaciones Porcinas (Swine Research Institute) (Cuba)
IIRR	International Institute of Rural Reconstruction
IPGRI	International Plant Genetic Resources Institute
ISNAR	International Service for National Agricultural Research
MINAG	Ministerio de la Agricultura (Ministry of Agriculture) (Cuba)
NGO	Non-government organization
NPRCRTC	Northern Philippine Root Crop Research and Training Center
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGRC	Plant Genetic Resources Centre (Ghana)
RDRS	Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (Bangladesh)
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SINCITA	Sistema Nacional de Ciencia e Innovación Tecnológica Agraria (National System for Science and Agrarian Technological Innovation) (Cuba)
UPWARD	User's Perspective with Agricultural Research and Development

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