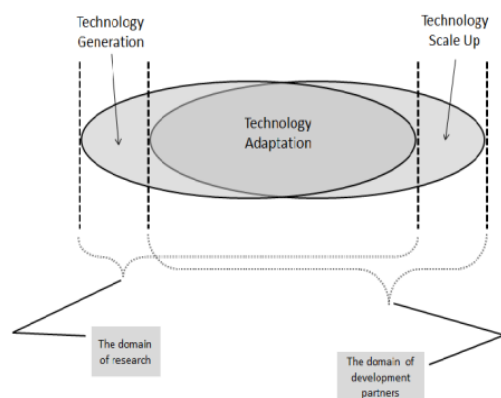


What Big Data for Organizational Development ?

[A World That Counts](#), the report by the UN Secretary General's Data Revolution Group, was released last week. The report contains much that is important to global development. But what, I have been thinking, might the data revolution mean for organizational and human capability development?

Three ideas occur immediately. But let me first take you a few steps back.



Conducting Research *for* Development is at the heart and soul of CGIAR's [Global Research Program on Livestock and Fish](#) (CRP) value chain approach. We research the hypothesis that increased access to animal source foods by the poor, especially women and children, can be achieved at scale by strengthening carefully selected meat, milk and fish value chains in which the poor can capture a significant share of the benefits. This hypothesis examines a trajectory between the generation of technology, its adaptation to various contexts, its adoption and ultimate scaling. This is termed agricultural research *for* development (AR4D) and encompasses the complex set of relationships between

technology and its engagement in social and economic systems. Here, the traditional domains of researchers and development actors overlap considerably. The approach is to integrate research efforts with development actors in an iterative process that enables both to combine efforts to identify the right issues for research, to adapt technologies so that they become fit-for-purpose in specific value chain sites, and work to take successful innovations to scale in ways that transform value chain systems.

This integrated and focused approach aims to harness, among other things, the growth of the private sector with the main objectives to:

- Increasing productivity in small scale production systems;
- Increasing quantity and improving quality supplied from small scale production and marketing systems;
- Increasing employment and income for low-income actors in targeted value chains, with an increased share of employment for and income controlled by low-income women;
- Increasing consumption of animal source produce to fill a larger share of the nutrient gap for the poor, particularly for nutritionally vulnerable populations (women of reproductive age and young children);
- Lowering environment impacts per unit of commodity produced in the target value chains; and

- Enabling policies (including investments) and development actors to recognize and support the development of small-scale production and marketing systems, and to seek to increase the participation of women within these value chains.

Firstly, and I have written about this before in [Capacity Development: People and Local Organizations Matter](#), our program is well aware that for a “World to Count” strong organizations are required.

So, which data do we need to convince resource organisations, investors, incubator funds and the likes to expand financial investment for organizational development of our partners? Still, development resources are mainly invested through channels that are reserved for specific organization types. NGOs and UN organizations are resourced through contracts, grants and mandate agreements. Government agencies are resourced through their parliaments. Profit making development contractors are resourced through competitive bidding. Private sector companies are resourced through profit making business activities. Research organizations are resourced through national and international scientific investment instruments. The confluence between CGIAR research and development may bring you two potential resourcing possibilities:

1. By aligning existing work towards mutually desired goals, development partners can exploit the benefits of directing research funding – to value chain specific issues – to local organizations for specific and targeted capacity strengthening purposes and; 2) Research actors can likewise exploit the benefits of allocating development funding to partners [based on assessed needs/demands](#) (read more about how we are supporting (gender) capacity assessment work here: [piecing together the \(gender\) research for \(capacity\) development puzzle](#)).

By promoting system wide engagement across value chains, our program facilitates structured engagement across many actors and projects to form multi-stranded movement that make collective sense, and we will inform “investors and governments” soon about our capacity assessment findings (and oh yes, for sure we see this as “Big Data”) so to help [push and pull for whole system change](#) across the three regions we work in.

Secondly, in a more data rich world one could mount a strong argument for the UN index also to include so much more that is important to people: measures of voice, job security, social protection, equality, sustainability, rights and dignity would all help paint a much richer picture. Although data is somewhat available in countries where we work (e.g. we do know what the Uganda small holder pig value chain sector can contribute to [reduce poverty](#) and we initiated work to strengthen [individual and organizational capacities](#), we have assessed market opportunities in the aquaculture sector in [Bangladesh](#) and women enterprise investment prospects in [Egypt](#), and in the dairy in [Tanzania](#), our contribution to the “Big Data Revolution” has, seemingly, not yet reached policy makers and/or investors to enable – large scale - local rural transformations.

But I am optimistic, we will speed up our conversations about what data we have and we will do that firmly, like we will do coming week for example [in Johannesburg at the FARA event](#). We will engage in

dialogues how data can be used so that investment decisions will be directed to scale local level development. The data revolution, our [CGIAR policy on open access](#), and our (organizational) capacity assessment reports have the potential to enrich such conversations enormously.

Thirdly, and most pressingly, the data revolution already has a direct impact on human capability development. Remember that [human development](#) has been defined as “expanding the choices of people to lead lives they value”. Access to good information is vital to expand choices. Not only does it enable rural communities to better hold their (village) leaders accountable, but it can help all of us to take better decisions in our day to day lives. But, just as with any valuable resource, access to information is not equally distributed around the world. And even when good data are available, many people lack the basic skills to access or understand it. This has to change.

And that is why our program will continue to seek investments for design and delivery of innovative learning materials and approaches to identify innovations and breakthroughs in (e-)learning approaches (gaming, mobile/ICT etc.). We will do so through adult learning theory, instructional design, content development and delivery of high-quality training packages and collaborations that are aimed specifically for organizational strengthening purposes and which harness technology for capacity development initiatives that are tailored to the cultural, organizational and institutional contexts in which the new agricultural knowledge is to be applied, and to make research outputs more suitable, accessible and appealing to a wider range of users.

And so what is important now, is that the coming revolution (which will be led more and more by youth) leads to the world having (quick) access to the “right” information so to improve rural lives.

Development programs often position themselves to pilot new approaches and take these to scale. But often, pilot interventions do not reach scale and are not sustainable. In part, this is because the contexts within which pilots operate change in ways that are not understood. Innovations fail to adapt to become fit-for-purpose, and do not take hold and persist.

Not understanding how change is happening emanates from the way in which evidence is handled and examined at various stages of intervention evolution. For sure, failure to locally “hit-the-mark” precludes natural growth in scale. Equally, locally successful interventions do not translocate for reasons of contextual difference between locations. Achieving sustainable scale has become elusive and this threatens to compromise confidence in development investment. Engagement with (our) research centres brings a critically important analytical and documenting resource to development programs that seek to enable effect at scale.

We will keep bringing in research capability and approaches, and capacity development services to enable development partners to participate in our work, are you committed to do the same?

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