

Concept note for a series of e-discussions to support strategies on Capacity Development for CGIAR and partners

I. Introduction

Capacity development (CD) has been at the core of CGIAR programs since the 1970s and 1980s. In the early days CGIAR's CD activities focused predominantly on training of national agricultural research and extension systems (NARES) which was considered the main channel for transferring knowledge obtained through research to end users. Over the years as the research focus widened from technologies for improving food production to addressing broader development challenges, the need arose to re-position capacity development in agriculture within the broader innovation systems. Beyond individual level training it was felt that the CD approaches needed to address capacity needs at the organizational and institutional levels. CGIAR's capacity development¹ repertoire evolved in different ways, at different paces, across different centres, projects and countries. The main features of this evolution included the following:

- In addition to training participatory research and learning, forming alliances became entry points for capacity development.
- The principle mode of knowledge exchange shifted from technology transfer through extension, to working in networks and multi-stakeholder platforms.
- Systems thinking as a way to understand CGIARs capacity, within a much wider context became more common. Increasingly CGIAR and its research programs and centres were conceptualized as subsystems within a global agricultural innovation system. The innovation system is *“made up of the individuals and organizations that demand and supply knowledge and technologies, as well as policies and mechanism that affect the way different agents interact to share, access and exchange knowledge”*.²

The innovation system constitutes a subsystem in the global food and agriculture system to which CGIAR and its partners are expected to deliver development outcomes.

¹ Lessons learned and ways forward on CGIAR capacity development: A discussion paper 2013

² Hall et al. Tools principles or policies? Capacity.org Issue 37, September 2009

II. CGIAR and Capacity Development

In 2013 the CGIAR Capacity Development Community of Practice (CapDev CoP) was established, which is composed of capacity development leaders representing 15 CGIAR Centres/ CGIAR Research Programs, and which aims to discuss ways, means and pathways for advancing CD within CGIAR. As a first step to developing the capacities of CGIAR and its boundary partners to become more effective in transforming research outputs into development outcomes, the CapDev CoP began developing guidelines to inform the design process of CGIAR Research Programs (CRP) for the second round of funding. This sets the strategic agenda for the consortium from 2015 to 2017. This document identified the following nine elements of CD to guide CRPs:

- Capacity needs assessment and intervention strategy design
- Design and delivery of innovative learning materials and approaches
- Develop CRPs and centres' capacity to partner
- Developing future research leaders through fellowships
- Gender-sensitive approaches throughout capacity development
- Institutional strengthening and
- Monitoring and evaluation of capacity development.
- Organizational development
- Research on capacity development

Each of the CRPs are currently reflecting upon and sharpening their respective theories of change (ToC) for the extension and second round phases of program development. These ToCs constitute the foundation for a CGIAR wide capacity development strategy. Therefore it is proposed that two e-discussions will generally focus on developing guidelines for the CRPs and their partners on how to validate their respective theories of change, development outcomes and impact pathways.

The rationale for developing these ToCs collectively is that CRPs have a lot in common and where they are different they tend to complement each other. CRPs share the same vision and they work with a shared results framework.³ Although in the lower (input-output) parts of the results chain CRPs work in different subsystems, their pathways towards achieving impact are similar. This provides for a fertile environment for inter-organizational learning towards ToCs and impact pathways. CG Centres involved in CRPs can distil elements of capacity development in which they need to strengthen their own capacities, as well as areas in which their assistance is required to develop capacities of other innovation system actors and boundary partners.

³. A strategy and results framework for CGIAR 2011

III. E-discussion series: Proposed themes

The purpose of these online discussions, which will take place between August 2014 – July 2015 is to engage experts, practitioners and policy makers in a global dialogue on conceptual perspectives of capacity development today. The first e-discussion will be launched on 1 August 2014 and take place over a period of three weeks, concluding with a final briefing note at the end of August 2014.

E-discussion 1: Developing capacities for sustainable change: Definitions, key terms and concepts.

First and foremost, the CapDev CoP observed during its inception meeting in 2013 that scientists within various CGIAR Centres and CRPs are using at least three concepts interchangeably (Capacity Building, Capacity Development, Capacity Strengthening)⁴ when referring to CD, without necessarily reflecting on the implications of the choice of the concept. Therefore, the CoP decided to frame the discussion around creating clarity about CD definitions.

Key objectives are: to discuss differences in meaning, substance and implications thus bringing more clarity;

- To orient CGIAR scientists about global development discourses of CapDev discussions held since the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness;
- To facilitate discussions and activities using different CD concepts within CGIAR;
- To contribute to further alignment of CD approaches in CGIAR to that of the broader development world.

E-discussion 2: Validating theories of change within operational agricultural innovation systems.

The next discussion, planned for October 2014, will focus on understanding the systems through which CRPs aim to generate results. This includes:

- Mapping the relevant actors and factors that influence the uptake of research results in agricultural policies and practices;
- Determining the boundaries between systems and subsystems within which these actors 'reside';
- Analysing the roles and inter-linkages between different actors of the innovation systems, understanding their perspective and examining the factors that influence the uptake of research results in agricultural policies and practices.

⁴ Though the meaning and implication of some of these concepts have been elaborated in literature, the CapDev CoP deems it necessary to discuss these for the benefit of CGIAR scientists, mostly biophysical scientists, who may not be updated on capacity development concepts in social science and development literature.

E-discussion 3: Outlining impact pathways

Based on a thorough understanding of the complexity of the systems in which CRPs operate and with a view to the development impacts laid down in CGIAR's strategy and results framework, CRPs will be better positioned to formulate inputs that are needed to influence the outcomes that they aim to realize. CRPs will also be in a position to determine what is within or beyond their spheres of influence and control.

Gradually the full range of interventions will emerge, as well as partnerships, capacities and resources required to implement these interventions. It is to be expected that many of these interventions are already part of the current CGIAR repertoire. As a result of this exercise the rationale of these interventions will from then on be firmly embedded to a broader theory of change. On the other hand the process may also highlight the need for some CRPs to adapt or find new/additional types of interventions.

IV. E-discussions: Format and approach

The first E-discussion will be held between 1 – 22 August and the key outputs captured in a briefing note to be shared with the CapDev CoP at the next face-to-face meeting in Montpellier in September 2014. Participants include staff of CGIAR Centre and CRP programs, boundary partners and other practitioners.

The discussion will be facilitated through the various email lists compiled by partner networks including Capacity.org, Capacity4Dev.eu, CapacityNet, LenCD, UNDP intranet and related M&E networks. The e-discussion communications will also be posted on these partner websites to encourage participation and also disseminated using social media such as Yammer, Facebook, Twitter, through accounts managed by the CGIAR participants and the e-discussion partners.

Each of the e-discussions will be launched with an invitation which consists of:

- A short introduction of the topic
- A number of very specific knowledge questions and/or provocative statements that can trigger debate and collective thinking.

The moderators will:

- Facilitate cross-fertilization of ideas between these different platforms. Based on experiences with multiple platforms it will be decided at a later stage whether a single platform is needed and whether this can be one of the existing platforms or a new tailor made one.
- Approach key experts and stakeholders directly/bilaterally encouraging them to participate in the e-discussion.
- Summarize main findings at intermediate stages and formulate more specific or additional knowledge questions in the course of the discussions.

The outcomes of each e-discussion will be synthesized in a briefing note which will contain guidelines and a list of annotated essential readings.

Co-convenors for the first e-discussion:

Mehmood Hassan, Head of Capacity Development Unit, World Agroforestry Centre, ICRAF

Heinz Greijn, Editor, Capacity.org

Wangu Mwangi, Web Editor Capacity.org

Organizers for the first e-discussion:

Iddo Dror, Head of Capacity Development, ILRI

Diana Brandes – van Dorresteijn, Global Capacity Development Specialist, ILRI

Sheila Ochugboju, Community of Practice Facilitator, ILRI

The lessons learnt during the first e-discussion will be reflected and incorporated into the design of the subsequent e-discussions, for which teams of co-moderators and organizers as well as partners will be discussed during the forthcoming meeting of CoP.

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