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Capacity Development in Systems - Practice Brief # 6

Capacity Needs Assessments

Effective Targeting of Interventions Based on Capacity Needs Assessments and Intervention Strategies

Rationale

The starting point of any capacity development (CapDev) planning process should be an assessment of existing capacities, and a comparison with the capacities needed to carry out the intended activities along a project's impact pathway. Currently, CGIAR Research Programs (CRP) rarely carry out such assessments, and instead assume that previous contacts with the partners provide sufficient context for framing and designing the work. However, there is a real risk that project design may be suboptimal, especially where CapDev investments are concerned, unless the project has clear and reliable information on basic questions such as: Whose capacities?



Contributing to the achievement of the following sub-Intermediate Development Outcome (IDO)

Enhanced institutional capacity of partner research organizations

Capacity to do what? Who will deliver the interventions? What medium / technology is likely to maximize effect? Having a systematic methodology for assessing capacity needs, and applying this consistently across the CRP Phase 2 portfolio has many benefits both at an individual project level, as



well as at the portfolio-wide level. For one, projects can have a reliable process for obtaining the required information about the demand-side in countries, ground truth this against NARS priorities, and align this with other activities in country or instance of other projects as part of a site-integration plan: At the

CRP and CRP2 portfolio level, using similar tools and approaches will facilitate aggregation and a picture of capacity needs across CGIAR's partner landscape can emerge, providing insights that are currently difficult (or impossible) to collect. This can be instrumental in leveraging CGIAR 'supply' in countries, matching it with a systematic mapping of the 'demand', and making it easier to plug critical gaps where identified.

Description

There are many Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) frameworks, with most developed by donor and UN agencies (e.g. UNDP, EuropeAid, FAO, ILO, SIDA etc.). Most provide guidance on the steps to follow when conducting a CNA, which can include various elements as outlined in Box 3 1.

While there are many CNA frameworks available, most tend to focus on general principles and be applied broadly to the entire range of development activities. Given the CGIAR's unique research for development (R4D) context and partnership ecosystems (focus on national agricultural research systems), it may be useful to adapt some of the existing frameworks into a base version that all CGIAR CRPs and projects can use (and modify as needed within agreed parameters).

The preparation of such a 'master CNA template/tool' for CGIAR entities, along with a set of training materials of how to use the tools will be a first concrete output of this work.

Bespoke training and support on conducting CNAs for specific projects/CRPs will also be available on demand for CRPs. It is important to note that at times training would not be the optimal solution, and sourcing missing skill-sets (through direct hires, consultants, partners etc.) may be a more effective way to address identified capacity needs.

1. Identify key actors and stakeholders and how to engage them in the assessment and analysis.
2. Frame the assessment in terms of:
 - The definition of capacity and any CapDev framework that is being applied in the particular context being assessed.

¹ Adapted from <http://www.lencd.org/learning/how-assess-existing-capacity-define-capacity-needs>

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- The purpose of the assessment.
- The mandate of the entity to be assessed.
- Readiness to implement change and stakeholder agreement about the need for the assessment.

3. Decide what to assess and how to analyze data.

For example, think about the:

- Levels of capacity: whatever the starting point, going on to 'zoom in and zoom out' will lead to a holistic understanding of all of the factors enabling or inhibiting performance and capacity change, (see below for an example).
- Types of capacity: remember to assess both hard and soft capacities, including power distribution, incentives and sanctions, leadership, and values and beliefs.
- Themes for application: the CapDev framework will help to prioritize the areas for assessment.
- In addition, understanding gender and other cross-cutting issues can be essential to gaining a comprehensive assessment.

4. Choose the overall approach and specific tools:

- a) An incremental approach starting with identification of existing capacity as the foundation for identifying realistic steps forward, or
- b) A gap analysis starting with definition of how things 'should be', then looking at how they are and defining the difference between the two as what is missing, i.e. 'the gap'
- There are many tools available for different aspects of assessment. They can and should be adapted to the local context.
- The specific data needed and questions to ask will be determined by all of the above factors

When planning a CNA, think about:

- Levels of capacity: wherever you start, don't forget to 'zoom in and zoom out' to get a holistic understanding of all the factors enabling or inhibiting performance and capacity change. Zooming out to understand the enabling environment is especially important. For example, if you are assessing the provincial education department, you will need to zoom out to the legislative



- Types of capacity: it is important to go beyond assessing hard capacities such as technical skills, knowledge, attitudes, structures, financial systems, work processes and so on to look at soft capacities. This includes power distribution, incentives and sanctions, leadership, and values and beliefs.
- Themes for application: the capacity development framework will help to prioritize the areas for assessment.
- Cross cutting issues: gender and youth aspects especially can be essential to gaining a comprehensive assessment.

Source: <http://www.lencd.org/learning/how-assess-existing-capacity-define-capacity-needs>

Requirements

There are two components described above, namely

1. Preparing a set of materials adapted to the context of CRPs that can be used across the system (allowing easy refinement to specific contexts as needed). The materials will be accompanied by online, self-paced training modules on how to use the materials. Total cost of producing this work (including the online courses) is US\$50,000.
2. Support in carrying out such capacity needs assessments can be provided as a service to CRPs on demand, at a cost of US\$8,000-17,000 (depending on the provider used, how extensive the scope of the CNA is, travel required etc.). For projects that had already conducted CNAs, a quick 're-visiting' in the future to validate and tweak the CNA as needed would roughly cost US\$3,000-5,000.

Acknowledgments:

Capacity development (CapDev) has been identified in CGIAR's Strategy and Results Framework (SRF) as a strategic enabler of impact for CGIAR and its partners. It goes far beyond the transfer of knowledge and skills through training, and cuts across multiple levels.

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References and resources to draw from:

- How to Assess Existing Capacity and Define Capacity Needs: <http://bit.ly/2eDgLA8>
- <https://portals.iucn.org/library/efiles/edocs/2009-028.pdf>
- UNDP Capacity Assessment Methodology User's Guide: <http://bit.ly/2eiEMcN>
- FAO Capacity Development: <http://bit.ly/2dToeH0>
- Analysis of Needs for Capacity Development: <http://bit.ly/2eMCB1D>



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