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Capacity development : A key ingredient towards sustainable agricultural growth

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The United Nation Development Program (UNDP) defines the term capacity as ‘the ability of individuals, institutions and societies to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner’ (UNDP, 2007). Capacity building is a complex notion – it involves individual and organizational learning which builds social capital and trust, develops knowledge, skills and attitudes, and when successful, creates an organizational culture which enables organizations to set objectives, achieve results, solve problems and create adaptive procedures which enable it to survive in the long term (DFID, 2008).

The capacity development program gets decisive importance at the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) which is coordinated by the Learning System Unit (LSU), under the Knowledge Sharing and Innovations (KSI). It serves as a means for honing learner-participant skills for their productive engagements and development of self-confidence. LSU envisions towards the enhancement of learning through efficient knowledge management. The Unit provides the platform for Agricultural Research Institutes (ARIs) and National Agricultural Research and Extension Systems (NARES) partners for capacity strengthening and also as a venue for enriching learning experiences. The various learner-participants in ICRISAT are the Research Fellow, Research Scholars and Interns. Their research topics are linked with the research thrusts of the Institute and are therefore anticipated to contribute towards research for agricultural development in the dryland areas. Further, capacity development aims to keep the partners and stakeholders well-informed and updated of information and innovations, and upscaling of the latter. The activities take cognizance of quality learning and equal opportunity in terms of gender, regional location, and even subject (where it is within the scope of the Institute’s mandate). Partners, both national and international, play an important role in realizing a functional program, which explains the need for attention and investment to it.

Various capacity development initiatives like short courses, season-long trainings based on the mandate crops of the Institute are conducted on a timely basis for enhanced knowledge. Such activities contribute towards the development of the lives of the smallholder farmers. The Impact Assessment of Capacity Building through Tracing Learner Participants serves as a suitable case for articulating the impact of capacity development activities at ICRISAT on three levels (individual, institutional and societal). LSU has been a platform for an array of capacity development opportunities for agri-research and its allies since 1975.

Responses from 110 learner-participants comprising of Research Fellow, Research Scholars and Interns on a specific program – the Village Level Studies, indicated that the training, research opportunities and facilities helped in increasing learners’ own capacity to do high quality research; provided avenues to conduct research in the areas they considered relevant to the village economies; helped them secure a fulfilling and rewarding employment within a three-year window; and helped in gaining promotion within three years of training.

Hence, there is the immense role of capacity development in achieving set objectives of organizations and institutions. LSU of ICRISAT envisages that all its stakeholders in the agricultural innovation system should have access to various forms of skills build-up to achieve the desired impact which will directly benefit smallholder farmers.

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