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Common Framework products:

Conceptual Background

Guidance Note on Operationalization

Synthesis Document

*These documents are also available in French and Spanish on the Common Framework pages of TAPipedia.
https://www.tapipedia.org/content/tap-framework*

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Overview **Stage 4:** Capacity Development Strategy

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IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON FRAMEWORK ON CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (CD) FOR AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION SYSTEMS (AIS)

This factsheet is part of a series outlining tools and approaches to promote capacity development projects for agricultural innovation systems (AIS). The tools described in these pages are designed with a view to the practical implementation of the principles of the Common Framework of the Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP), a G20 initiative. They have been applied in the Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems (CDAIS) project, funded by the EU and jointly implemented by Agrinatura and FAO in collaboration with national partners in Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Laos and Rwanda.

Background

The design of capacity development interventions is a crucial phase in the CD for AIS cycle. Intervention planning follows from and builds on the visioning exercises and needs assessments carried out beforehand. Project managers or ″innovation facilitators″ think strategically about innovative ways in which capacities of the actors in the system are developed in order to contribute to the success of the AIS.

The intervention planning phase should follow a capacity needs assessment (see Overview Stage 3), the purpose of which is to identify and highlight capacity strengths, gaps, opportunities and any factors that facilitate or inhibit change.

The project participants work with representatives of organizations and institutions that are keen to be involved in the CD for AIS process, as well as, where possible, with the other parties in the innovation partnerships. Together, they determine which combinations of activities are most likely to enhance the capacities of the key actors and the system. They set goals, objectives and priorities, and draw up an action plan.

A capacity development strategy:

- Identifies objectives, goals, priorities and options for capacity development initiatives;
- Frames an action plan;
- Validates the visioning exercise.

Essential ingredients of a successful CD project:

- A diverse mix of intervention modalities;
- The availability of support for policies and the securing of commitments from participants;
- A participatory approach and the adaptive implementation of actions;
- An evaluation of the outcomes and the learning process;
- Financial viability;
- A retrospective on completed activities.

Who drives the CD strategy?

The leadership team coordinates and guides the roll out of the strategy. As external CD experts and facilitators will be assisting in the process, the presence of representatives of institutions and organizations keen to be involved in the CD for AIS process is important. The representatives of the innovation partnerships and the innovation facilitators are key actors.

Approach

This factsheet sets out a practical approach to developing a CD strategy and an action plan for agricultural innovation. The approach outlines major outputs and proposes several tools, but because it does not seek a one-size-fits-all solution, it should be suitably tailored to a specific context. The time needed to frame a strategy depends on the peculiarities of the circumstances, and might stretch over several meetings. It is essential that the results of the needs assessment be validated by the actors involved before the CD interventions are decided upon. Facilitators experienced in strategic planning who know how to steer the group without taking sides should be hired for this stage of the process.

This stage is not meant to produce a mere wish-list of activities that have little to do with the actual capacity-development needs discovered in the previous assessment phase. Rather, this stage tries to build on existing opportunities and solicit commitments from the key actors and partners.

Sometimes it may be important to define quick-win/short-term activities to help shore up support while the foundations are being laid for longer-term capacity development. The design of a capacity development response should therefore contain a combination of quick-impact initiatives (less than one year) and short- to medium-term (one year or longer) initiatives (UNDP, 2009).

Step 1: Prioritizing organizations and CD interventions

Before this first step is taken, it is important to ensure that innovation partnerships have already been identified during the visioning exercise. The selection of the organizations and the nature of their relationship to the innovation partnerships depends on context. In some cases, the choice may be to strengthen key or catalytic organizations, or, by contrast, organizations that have been found to represent the "weakest link" in the chain. Another possible first-step initiative is cross-organizational learning, a process that may involve, for example, leadership programmes, the training of facilitators of multi-stakeholder projects, the formation of multi-stakeholder platforms that advise institutes of higher education about the needs of end users, policy dialogues, or the formation of parliamentary working groups.

Maintaining a realistic approach is important, and priority should be given to activities that can start at once so as not to squander momentum or enthusiasm.

Priorities need to be set according to three key criteria: (i) preference should be accorded to existing initiatives that can be adapted or expanded; (ii) the various actors should be committed to playing an active role and to implementing part of the strategy; (iii) funding must be available.

Step 2: A system-wide CDAIS strategy

The strategy should articulate the expected outputs (the immediate effects of the activities) and the expected outcomes (the behavioural changes determined by the outputs).

Given that the needs assessment refers to capacity deficits, and given that successful innovation is a complex goal that can be achieved only through multiple interactions, the outcomes are not always predictable. Accordingly, expected outcomes need to be articulated beforehand, and the process of tracking progress towards their realization needs to be accompanied and backed by a process of reflection and learning.

The factors that facilitate or, on the contrary, inhibit success need to be appraised, along with risks and challenges.

It is key to think how learning will happen in the various initiatives and to design systems to track the outcomes (see below step monitoring, evaluation and learning).

Step 3: Action plan

The leadership team, with the support of a facilitator, should develop an action plan that outlines the project activities, prescribes which organization or institution is responsible for carrying them out, sets a time frame, calculates the resources required and finds sources of funding. A "rolling" action plan can also be used if additional activities and new funding sources are expected to emerge at a later stage.

The Action Plan Matrix provides a useful means of formalizing commitments to action and charting a route to their implementation. The Action Plan Matrix should be as clear as possible, limited in scope, and precisely targeted. For this step of the process, we recommend the:
Action planning tool.

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Resource mobilization strategy

Developing a strategy for mobilizing resources from external partners and from donors in the target country is indispensable for the implementation of the action plan. The plan should include details about the partners to be engaged and indicate the nature of their engagement (e.g. through one-to-one meetings or group discussions).

It should also signal which characteristics of the partners are particularly pertinent to the CD action plan. It is also advisable to set up a "marketplace", a forum whose purpose is to match supply and demand, promote learning, and encourage the sharing and pooling of information, knowledge and practical experience.

In the specific context of the CDAIS project, the marketplace has been designed with a view to brokering partnerships that are conducive to effective capacity development for agricultural innovation. More generally, marketplaces seek to pair capacity development programmes for agricultural innovation systems (capacity-development supply) with real capacity-development needs (capacity-development demand).

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

A monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) system needs to be included from the very earliest design stage. The MEL system should encourage collective knowledge-building and adaptive learning, and take account of any changes in the five functional capacities.

This step entails calibrating the indicators used to measure outputs and outcomes. A successful MEL system will take a participatory approach to defining the objectives, outcomes and outputs of the CD intervention.

The CDAIS project has developed participatory monitoring evaluation and learning (PMEL) guidelines.

For more details on *Marketplace Concept Note* and tools and approaches, see www.tapipedia.org