Building Capacity for the Strategic Management of Institutional Change in Agricultural Science and Technology Organizations in Latin America

The ISNAR “New Paradigm” Project

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A. SUMMARY

1. Title: Building Capacity for the Strategic Management of Institutional Change in Agricultural Science and Technology Organizations in Latin America (known as the ISNAR “New Paradigm” Project).


3. Objectives: The goal of the Project is to strengthen the institutional sustainability of agricultural science and technology organizations in Latin America. Its purpose is to build conceptual, methodological and technical capacities in the management of institutional change and innovation.

4. Activities:
   A. Training of trainers/facilitators and development of training materials
   B. Facilitation of institutional change processes
   C. Participatory research in the management of institutional innovation
   D. Systematization and dissemination of experiences and lessons

5. Main innovations of the Project:

   Strategic approach to building institutional sustainability. This approach involves building “meta-capacity” around five dimensions—future-context-participation-strategy-management—, and two transversal themes—training/facilitation and research in the management of institutional innovation.

   Guiding hypothesis and assumptions. The Project hypothesis: the rise and fall of development organizations are strongly associated with the rise and fall of development models; its assumptions: (i) humanity is experiencing a change of epoch, not an epoch of changes; (ii) there will be no sustainable development without sustainable development organizations; and (iii) in a change of epoch, institutional innovation should precede technological innovation within development organizations.

   Guiding frameworks. The Project has negotiated and developed its guiding philosophical, conceptual, methodological, and operational frameworks. For instance, since the Project proposes building institutional capacity, it (i) practices the principle of development of instead of development in organizations, (ii) under the rationale of the process for collective construction and appropriation, and (iii) through the generation of knowledge in the context of its application and implications. As a result, its collaboration model is designed under the metaphor of (a) “sharing the art of hook-making”, instead of (b) delivering the fish or (c) providing the hook.

   Exchange network of talents for institutional innovation. The Project operates through an informal regional network of talents (RED-ITI, Red de Intercambio de Talentos para la Innovación Institucional), involving 35 high-level professionals from different countries in Latin America.

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External “intellectual focal points”. The Project RED-ITI is intellectually strengthened through the exchange with some “external professional talents” based in Latin America (University of Campinas—UNICAMP, Brazil; FAO Forest, Trees, and People Program in Central America (FAO/FTPP, Costa Rica) and outside the region (ISNAR and University of Wageningen and Research Centre, The Netherlands; Sociology Department of Michigan State University, USA).

Holistic Worldview. The Project adopts a holistic worldview, instead of embracing the old-long mechanic worldview or the emerging economic worldview. Under the mechanic worldview, the world is a machine and humans are seen as “resources” (“things”) to be manipulated within organizations also perceived as machines. Under the emerging economic worldview, the world is a single market without societies. Humans are seen as “capital” (a “thing”), in a world populated only by producers, sellers, buyers, consumers, competitors, etc., where commercial transactions are more important than social relations. Under the holistic worldview, the world is perceived as an open, complex system and humans are seen as “human talents” able to think and create beyond their past knowledge and experience, where development organizations are just facilitators of change and development.

Generation of organizational knowledge and theory building. Designed as a social experiment, the Project develops its research dimension aiming at supporting both the generation of organizational knowledge and the building of grounded theories about collaboration in capacity building projects, management of institutional change, and institutional vulnerability/sustainability.

6. Areas: Policy management and institutional development focusing on management of institutional change and innovation.

7. Region: Latin America

B. STAKEHOLDERS

The main targeted beneficiaries of the ISNAR “New Paradigm” Project are managers at all levels, as well as other leading professionals, from public, private and non-governmental agricultural science and technology organizations from Latin America.

Currently the Project collaborates with four pilot case organizations: 1) SINCITA, Cuba (National System of Science and Agrarian Technological Innovation); 2) Proyecto DFC, Ecuador (Project to Support Community Forestry Development in the Ecuadorian Andes); 3) FONAIAP, Venezuela (National Fund for Agricultural Research); and 4) Fundación CIARA, Venezuela (Foundation for Training and Applied Research in Agrarian Reform). The pilot cases allow the Project to apply, validate and/or reconfigure the knowledge generated in terms of the conceptual, methodological and instrumental proposals associated with its strategic approach to institutional sustainability. They are the main source of experiences and lessons that, after the systematization efforts of the Project, will be shared with other organizations in other countries of the region, countries outside the region, and the international development community.

Specific and concrete demands associated to the Project mandate, from other organizations, are being attended on a regular basis. These organizations include: Centro de Desarrollo Agropecuario y Forestal (CEDAF, República Dominicana), Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (EMBRAPA, Brasil), Fundación para la Promoción e Investigación de Productos Andinos (PROINPA, Bolivia), Instituto de Investigación Agropecuaria de Panamá (IDIAP, Panamá), Instituto Interamericano para la Cooperación para la Agricultura (IICA), Instituto Nacional Autónomo de Investigaciones Agropecuarias (INIAF, Ecuador), Instituto Nacional de Tecnología Agropecuaria (INTA, Argentina), Instituto Nicaragüense de Tecnología Agropecuaria (INTA, Nicaragua), La Universidad del Zulia (LUZ, Venezuela), Proyecto Agroforestal Ngöbe (ANAM-GTZ, Panamá), Sistema Hemisférico para el Desarrollo de la Educación Agrícola Superior (SIHDEA, Panama), Universidad Central de Ecuador (UCE, Ecuador), Universidad
Central de Venezuela (UCV, Venezuela), Universidad Nacional de Bucaramanga (UNAB, Colombia), Universidad Nacional (UNA, Costa Rica), Universidad de Costa Rica (UCR, Costa Rica).

All the direct costs—national and international—associated with the collaboration of the Project are covered by each demanding organization. The regional activities of the Project are funded through grants from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), The Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs—DGIS, and through contributions for international operational expenses by national partner organizations to the Project. The Project budget amounts to USD3.67 million. SDC has already contributed USD1.10 million for the first three years, and has earmarked a corresponding amount for the last two years, contingent on performance and contributions by other donors. DGIS has contributed USD 0.24 million for 1 year, and pilot case organizations’ contribution for international direct costs are estimated at USD 36,000 per year. Finally, all agricultural science and technology organizations in the region continue paying salaries and benefits to their professional talents as they support the Project activities throughout the region.

C. PROJECT BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Background
As part of its mandate, the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) started in 1992 an applied research and training project aiming at strengthening planning, monitoring and evaluation in the management of agricultural science and technology (S&T) organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. During its two phases (1992-1994; 1995-1997), the ISNAR PM&E Project developed conceptual and methodological tools for designing and implementing integrated PM&E (IPM&E) systems and supporting institutional change processes in pilot case organizations, where IPM&E systems have been designed and are being institutionalized in Cuba, Panama, and Venezuela.

During 1998, ISNAR maintained the Project office and team operating with its own resources, while searching for funds to the Project third phase (1999-2003). SDC is now the first major donor supporting the now known ISNAR “New Paradigm” Project; and DGIS has recently joined the effort as co-donor. The recommendations from the Project external evaluation in 1997 and the growing demands expressed by managers from Latin American agricultural S&T organizations throughout 1998, pointed out to a single major focus for the Project third phase: the strategic management of institutional change and innovation.

Applying the rival theory technique for qualitative research, the Project management team carried out in 1998 a survey of a select part of the international literature on global changes to answer the following research question: Epoch of changes or Change of Epoch? Building upon the Project previous phases, and drawing upon its prospective study findings, the Project team has reconfigured its rationale and guiding frameworks in a joint effort with the professionals from the Project regional network.

Rationale

Humanity experiences a change of epoch, as simultaneous and qualitative changes are occurring in the relations of production, power relations, human experience and culture. Thus, on-going global changes do not belong to this epoch, they are changing it. In a change of epoch, on-going changes generate turbulence. This turbulence provokes the rupture of values, concepts, approaches, models and paradigms that used to guide most social, economic, political, and institutional actors of society. The rupture of these guiding elements produces uncertainty, discontinuity, disorientation, insecurity, instability and, therefore, generalized vulnerability. In order to reverse their vulnerability, most organizations are struggling to build a new basis for their institutional sustainability. However, to build their sustainability, these organizations need to innovate and, therefore, they have to change. As all organizations are under pressure to undergo varying degrees of institutional change, so the management of institutional change becomes the most needed
managerial capacity. The ISNAR “New Paradigm” Project aims at contributing to this generalized search for institutional sustainability by focusing its collaboration towards building institutional capacity in the strategic management of institutional change.

D. EXPECTED RESULTS AND IMPACTS

Development of training materials and training of trainers/facilitators of institutional change

- Training modules in the dimensions of the strategic approach in the management of institutional change: future-context-participation-strategy-management. And two transversal themes: training/facilitation in the strategic management of institutional change, and research in the management of institutional innovation.
- A regional team of at least 20 specialists trained in the above subjects.
- National teams of at least 5 professionals from each pilot case trained in the above subjects
- Management cadres from each pilot case organization sensitized/trained in the above subjects

Participatory research

- Guiding frameworks for the design, application, and validation of practical elements associated to the dimensions of the strategic approach to institutional sustainability – future, context, participation, strategy and management.
- Guiding framework for the “Institutionalization of capacities in capacity development projects.”
- Guiding framework for the “Systematization of experiences/lessons of capacity development projects.”
- Guiding framework for theory building to generate understanding beyond systematization.

Technical support to pilot cases

- Organizations (pilot cases of the Project) will have carried out institutional change processes applying inputs shared by the project. These organizations will be using the conceptual and practical elements associated to the strategic approach to institutional sustainability – future-context-participation-strategy-management. As a result, they will have institutionalized as a minimum:
  - An institutional strategic plan
  - An integrated system for planning, monitoring and evaluating research projects
  - An institutional management model that articulates three interdependent frameworks: for thinking, deciding and acting
  - Training as an institutional function under the project approach to training

Systematization and dissemination of experiences and lessons

- National Reports on the experiences and lessons of each pilot case prepared.
- Impact assessment of the collaboration effort.
- Book on experiences and lessons of the project prepared.
- 20 articles published in refereed journals on the themes developed by the project.
- Project Newsletter developed and distributed.
- An electronic network for the exchange of information and experiences among participating organizations established.
- At least 600 professionals from the region “directly” sensitized/trained in the project’s philosophical, conceptual and methodological reference elements, as well as its approaches, models, experiences, and lessons learnt. This does not include those managers and professionals sensitized/trained by the national teams of trainers trained by the Project (in Cuba alone they have already trained over 2,000).

In addition to the previous tangible outputs, the Project will generate two very highly relevant outcomes for the region: (i) an articulated set of guiding elements for the building of a new approach to collaboration in
international capacity development projects; and (ii) the philosophical and conceptual basis for the building of a new paradigm for the management of institutional change.

The Project generates knowledge in the context of its application/implications and under the rationale of the process for collective construction and appropriation. This means that, at least in pilot case organizations, it is not necessary to develop formal or ad hoc mechanisms for the transfer of results. Knowledge generated under the Project approach is socially appropriated by all those who participate in the process, for they simultaneously generate, validate, reconfigure and broadly disseminate the conceptual, methodological and instrumental proposals generated by them with the technical support and facilitation of the Project. In the case of non-pilot case organizations of the Project, a series of training and sensitization workshops, conferences, technical support, publications, electronic media and reports are being used or developed to disseminate the Project results, experiences, and lessons. Regarding the impact assessment methodology, the Project will draw on its previous experiences on assessment of institutional performance and is currently teaming up with another ISNAR project that is developing a methodology, with the participation of stakeholders, for the assessment of capacity development efforts. This methodology builds on previous efforts carry out by the International Development Research Centre and the Universalia Group in Canada.

E. PARTNERSHIP

The Project works in close collaboration with professionals from its pilot cases and other “associated organizations” in and outside the region. The design of the Project was a participatory process that involved many professionals from several organizations in the region and drew from the experiences of the Project in its previous phases. During its implementation, the Project works in close partnership with several types of organizations: 1) pilot cases, organizations in and outside the region that provide technical backstopping to the Project, and ISNAR. The backbone of the partnership is its exchange network of professional talents for institutional innovation (RED-ITI).

In the pilot cases, mechanisms for appropriating the Project collaboration and for decentralizing capacity building in the organizations have been created. These mechanisms consist of strategic management of institutional change teams composed of 5 to 8 members, including a “technical focal point”, a core team of professionals, and the highest political authorities of the pilot case. These teams have been sensitized/trained in the philosophical, conceptual, and methodological frameworks of the Project, which they have contributed to develop, and thus practice and promote them within their own and other organizations.

The Project counts on the experience and technical support of some organizations in the region that release, based on suitable negotiations, their professional talents to participate in Project activities at the regional level and/or in pilot cases (e.g. INTA, Argentina; EMBRAPA, Brazil; FONAIAP, Venezuela; IDIAP, Panama; CEDAF, Dominican Republic; INIFAP, Mexico). Also a mechanism for sharing expertise with professionals from centers of excellence in and outside the region is established. In the region the Project exchanges with professionals from the Group for the Study of Science and Technology Organizations—GEOPI (University of Campinas, Brazil) and the FAO Forest, Trees, and People Program of Central America (FTPP/FAO, Costa Rica). Outside the region, the Project exchanges with staff from ISNAR; Wageningen University and Research Centre in The Netherlands; and, the Institute for Food and Agricultural Standards/Sociology Department of Michigan State University (MSU, USA).

All these professionals are articulated through the Project RED-ITI. The drive to participate in this network is not of a financial nature since the Project does not use consultant fees to pay its collaborators. The Project philosophy has gone beyond rational reasons to be part of it. Without emotion there is no passion, and without passion there is no commitment. Those who share the Project worldview are happy to
participate in it without being paid as formal consultants. The partnership established within the framework of the ISNAR “New Paradigm” Project is built around shared guiding principles for the collaboration and negotiated values, interests, needs, and aspirations of the stakeholders participating in the effort. It is based on negotiation; it is supported by a marriage between political and technical mechanisms for the appropriation of the Project collaboration; it depends on trust, respect, and political and technical autonomy of the stakeholders to decide what is and what is not pertinent to their contexts; most of all, the partnership is based on an alternative shared view on the causes, consequences and implications of the generalized vulnerability experienced by humanity, which is leading to alternative theories associate with (a) collaboration in capacity development projects, (b) management of institutional change and innovation, and (c) institutional vulnerability/sustainability of (mainly) agricultural science and technology organizations.

F. CONCLUSIONS

In Latin America, more important than the Project products are its regionally negotiated guiding frameworks that influence thinking and action regarding its collaboration for capacity development as well as the processes through which all Project participants develop, validate, reconfigure and appropriate such products. This has implied a great networking effort from the Project management team, who function as the central node of a regional exchange network of professionals for institutional innovation. Influenced by its “associated professionals and organizations”, the Project is going beyond the systematization of its experiences and lessons in order to support the generation of organizational knowledge and the development of grounded theories. For, in a change of epoch, the eclipse of various paradigms may lead to the obsolescence of an important part of the existing knowledge and theories, as Thomas Khun explains in his The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.

Exercising their power to influence the Project contents, processes activities, and guiding frameworks, the Project stakeholders are contributing to the Project development and sustainability. This can be inferred from their willingness to pay for the direct national and international costs of the Project collaboration.

Finally, it is worth sharing that the Project is being legitimated and well accepted by organizations where most managers and leading professionals spouse a more holistic worldview; while it is being rejected by those organizations whose managers and leading professionals have either maintained the old-long mechanic worldview or adopted the emerging economic worldview. However, the Project willingly maintains its negotiated holistic worldview, for this is the one that enables its commitment to sustainable development. The consequences of operating under the mechanic worldview or the economic worldview are already known: human and social development are undermined, and means—economic growth and technological development—become ends, neglecting the very end of sustainable development: improving human life conditions and quality under a permanent sustained basis. Until when? At what cost?