

Capacity development

Critical success factors emerging from FAO case studies

Capacity development is not a simple process which can be just described as a result of imparting knowledge or experience. It is definitely the result of interconnected factors which optimise synergies in the three dimensions of the country capacity system: policy/enabling environment, institutions, and individuals.

The review of FAO good practices in capacity building¹ attempted to contribute to understanding this process in different contexts and in the broad areas of FAO's expertise.

Throughout the cases, the emerging pattern is that capacity development has been the result of the combination of (a) willingness and readiness of national/sub-national institution(s) or actor(s) and (b) the technical competency of an organisation such as FAO operating through a mix of capacity development modalities that are normally cross-sectoral and multi-dimensional.

In the three stages outlined herein, reflecting a natural sequencing of CB interventions, critical factors are described which have shown to potentially lead to good capacity development practices.

1. Early stage: identification of CB intervention. The following factors were found to help in the identification and conception of suitable CB interventions and to support the emergence of the conditions to stimulate change and national ownership. FAO could leverage them by:

- a. Identifying opportunities in which international and/or global initiatives derive from countries having signed or adhered to international or global commitments (e.g. treaties, conventions, protocols). This facilitates the emergence of accountability obligations that are most likely to generate internal processes of transformation. For instance, in the case of Belize, commitments taken at international level in the area of biosecurity, convinced the country to reform its public sector through the creation of a semi –autonomous institution mandated to maintain agricultural health control in compliance with the major international conventions on that topic.
- b. Encouraging an early involvement of national actors in the identification of CB needs, the definition of methodologies and approaches. This contributes to a joint appreciation of the dimensions and the processes involved in capacity building, as well as of the possible implementation options. It creates also the conditions for a strengthened national leadership. The example of FAO intervention in Kosovo to develop a strategy on Education of Rural People demonstrates this. In fact, the early involvement of government officials in the design of the methodology, in the elaboration of work plans and assessment of needs was key to establishing ownership of a common vision and common goals.
- c. Progress in capacity development depends on the level of ownership and commitment of country actors - at central and local level- to engage in change processes. It can derive from new policies or processes of reform initiated in countries, or from the motivation of

¹ The terms “*capacity development*” and “*capacity building*” have been used interchangeably, though globally there has been a shift in terminology towards capacity development, given the different connotations of the two terms.

an institution or an individual to enhance the quality of work and performance. For example, the government of Mozambique was so interested in regulating access and use of the country's natural resources that it formulated and approved a series of laws governing land, forests and the environment. Thus, the commitments taken at policy level motivated the government to engage actively with FAO in long-term activities to support a correct implementation of those policies.

- d. The identification of a local or national champion is a key element for successful capacity development. A national institution, or a civil society or community based organisation that has the skills, motivation or resources should be deeply involved in the capacity development initiative or ideally be in charge of it: planning the approach and driving its implementation. For instance, the work carried out by FAO in Gambia on participatory forestry and enterprise development, required a multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional approach that was possible only through the active involvement of a local NGO specialised in forestry extension services and training which could create the conditions at local level to catalyze village development activities.
- e. Needs Assessments emerge as a common feature of capacity building good practices. Different types of needs assessments are undertaken by FAO: from formalised assessments based on the collection of qualitative and quantitative data to less formal approaches based on consultative and participatory processes. The former approach used by FAO in Kosovo enabled to build an Education for Rural People strategy based on the existing levels of capacities and on real needs; the latter was used in Central and Eastern Europe to obtain views of the concerned stakeholders on the needs and on the prioritisation of CB activities.

2. Formulation and implementation. The following factors were found to contribute towards appropriate shaping of the CB effort. FAO could ensure uptake of such factors into the Organization's CB interventions by:

- f. Improving attention to national, regional and sub-regional context. This contributes to find solutions that are customized to local situations and needs. Every country has its own history, culture, political, economic and social processes which influence its development. For example the broad societal changes of the last twenty years in Central and Eastern Europe are critical factors. The end of socialism and the subsequent land reform programmes offered the opportunity to reorganise the results of privatisations through FAO land consolidation strategies. Hence, it is important for an organisation like FAO to have a deep understanding of these processes to shape powerful capacity development interventions.
- g. Multi- dimensional approach. It is generally recognised that capacity development involves three dimensions- individuals, institutions and the policy/enabling environment- as capacities are not developed in isolation but through the interaction of these dimensions in the larger systems of which they are part of. For instance, in order to support Tongan authorities in reviewing and updating the fisheries legislation, FAO's intervention focused on a participatory review of the existing legislation, through extensive consultations with national institutions, fishing communities and the private sector. It also provided on-the-job training of a young national lawyer of the Crown Law Office. The results of the initiative demonstrated the effectiveness of an intervention working at both an individual and institutional level having positive impacts at the policy

level. Draft legislations on fisheries and aquaculture were developed and adopted by the National Assembly in 2002 and 2003, respectively.

- h. Capacity development should include a combination of modalities of intervention if it is to be effective and produce results in the three-dimension capacity framework. Ensuring that a good mix of *CB modalities* is selected strategically on the basis of goals, feedback from prior experience and sector relevance. For instance, in order to support the government of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's to fight Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), FAO's combined different modalities of intervention. The direct intervention, at the policy level, through the development of legal and policy documentation on one hand, and the implementation of study tours on the other, along with important communication initiatives, created crucial cooperation among governmental institutions at different level. The combination of practical training, study tours and conferences/workshops for state-employed veterinaries and experts from key laboratories, encouraged an exchange of information, which expanded to private veterinary practitioners. In addition, theoretical training was facilitated by equipping laboratories with efficient analysis, and diagnosis tools, which were used for field operations.
- i. Advocating the use of training methodologies with an appropriate pedagogy. A well designed training component can become an asset for a successful capacity building intervention. Training should have an adequate duration, focused content, practical experience, and a mix of techniques for knowledge transfer. In addition, some FAO's training methodologies appear to give special attention to approaches and methods based on adult learning principles where direct experience provides the basis for the learning activities. For example, the pedagogic approach of Farmer Field Schools shows itself to be particularly effective as it puts the learner at the centre of the learning process ensuring adequate matching of course length to content and to individual learning goals. Farmers and extension agents are actively engaged in direct observation and experimentation in the fields for a full crop season. Another important aspect is related to the customization of training materials to local situations and languages through the active involvement of national actors. This can lead to ownership and institutionalisation of tools and methodologies. In Gambia, FAO worked closely with the staff of the Forestry Department and with a local NGO to adapt manuals, field guidelines, and information sheets to national /local contexts. The result was that FAO approaches were incorporated into the government Community Forestry Implementation Guidelines for national implementation and into the Curriculum of the Forestry School.
- j. Facilitating the emergence of formal or informal linkages and networks among national/ regional/ global institutions *as part of* the CB intervention, enhances cross-fertilisation of ideas, sharing of information, best practices and lessons learned among various actors. It builds "channels" for dialogue and for know-how exchange enhancing south –to-south cooperation and helps to generate new endogenous knowledge in the relevant sectors.
- k. Capacity development takes considerable time, particularly at institutional and policy level, and happens gradually. Ensuring a medium to long-term horizon for CB interventions, allowing them to span several years albeit under different forms, scales or funding mechanisms can foster deep-level capacity changes which are naturally complex and non-linear. FAO has obtained the most successful results though consistent efforts in countries over an extended period of time. For instance, a ten –year partnership between

the Government of India and FAO allowed the introduction of the Farmer Field School (FFS) approach, first on a pilot base, and then scaled up. In one State of India, FFS has now become the official approach to train farmers in sustainable practices in agriculture.

3. Finalization and sustainability. The following factors were found to contribute towards increased sustainability of the CB effort. FAO could leverage them by:

- l.* Supporting national actors to internalize changes – for instance by facilitating the adoption of new policies and providing for their implementation as a national priority; supporting the incorporation of new knowledge into national curricula and the implementation of new procedures in the functioning of institutions; encouraging internal changes that put staff in a position to utilize new competencies in daily tasks.
- m.* Stable resources are a central element and determinant of sustainability for capacity building. Thus, advocating for national stable/strategic allocations of resources beyond the duration of FAO-supported projects, can signal national appropriation of CB outputs and represents a concrete step towards sustainability. For example in India, three years after the closure of the FAO programme, the government scheme, still includes a budget provision for the organisation of Farmer Field Schools in different States.
- n.* Supporting institutional learning and use of incremental approaches by using phased approaches and ensuring that each phase feeds into the next. For instance, FAO's intervention on land consolidation in Central and Eastern Europe adopted an incremental approach, i.e. the initial regional workshops provided information and assessed the needs of countries, and guidance was given on how to design and implement pilot projects. The subsequent regional workshops were an occasion to share information with neighbouring countries and to discuss issues with specialists. Thus, governments started an internal process of analysis to prepare the ground for developing the necessary policy, legislative and programme instruments for land consolidation as well as beginning pilot projects for developing and testing techniques before engaging in long-term programmes.
- o.* Capacity development is important not only for government officials at all levels, but also for members of communities and for community institutions. Examples from FAO's experiences show that targeted interventions at community level can change community capacities, lead to a more active role at local level and to empowerment. For instance, the community approach of Farmer Field Schools supported group formation and generated a positive impact on public goods management. Various farmers' clubs generated income through membership fees which were then used for the benefit of the village.
- p.* Monitoring the impact. The complexity of measuring changes in capacity is widely recognised. The nature of the CD process makes it difficult to attribute impacts to particular activities. However, it is a crucial effort to monitor the progress of CD interventions. In the documented good practices, this aspect has not been detailed as it seems that there is not yet a systematic use of such type of indicators within FAO. Future FAO work should try to develop these methods.