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Capacity building

Key facts

FAO's capacity building portal provides access to almost 600 learning resources, lists over 65 learning services offered by the Organization, and contains a database of funding sources for fellowships.

FAO's array of e-learning resources and programmes to date has reached more than 100 000 people.

Using specialized modules disseminated via the Web and on CD-ROM, individuals have been able to take advantage of more than 700 hours of self-paced learning.

In 2006-07 alone, FAO's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection ran 700 capacity building activities, teaching more than 100 000 people better ways to raise crops and livestock, conserve water, combat pests and diseases, and improve food quality.

Farmer Field Schools – an innovative concept pioneered by FAO in the 1980s, originally to aid in crop pest management – are now operating in 78 countries and on every continent, covering more than 20 topics from crops, livestock, forestry, and fisheries to income generation. More than 10 million farmers have graduated from the schools since their inception.

Helping others to help themselves

Capacity building – defined as the process of unleashing, strengthening and maintaining the ability of people, organizations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully – has been at the heart of FAO's mandate since its founding. Today, it is a core function highlighted in the Organization's new strategic framework, encouraging developing nations to design and implement national policies that will help reduce poverty and foster food security through agriculture and rural development.

Rethinking capacity building: a new approach

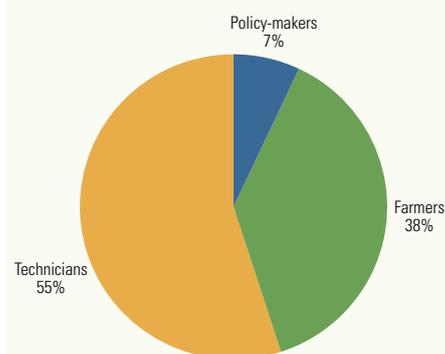
Capacity building has long been a prime component of nearly all FAO normative and operational activities in member countries. But recently, in line with a United Nations resolution and with growing international pressure to make aid more effective, FAO has taken a fresh look at the way it carries out its work.

The approach places national ownership at the core of capacity building and emphasizes mutual accountability of national and international actors, that is, of developing nations and international donors.

Participation and partnership are at the centre of FAO's new capacity building strategy. Changes are being made to support systems and processes, following these guidelines:

- The needs and priorities of developing countries will take central place in the customized design of capacity building activities and projects.
- Leadership by national actors and the use of national systems and of local expertise are essential.
- Further improvement of the awareness and skills of FAO staff will ensure that the right approaches and methodologies are used.
- To ensure the sustainability of capacity building activities, FAO will encourage member countries to embed such activities in national development plans and policies.
- By drawing on agricultural good practices gleaned from within the international development community, the Organization will be able to improve its service to member countries.

Target groups for training



Source: FAO



Villagers attend farmer training in Mindanao, Philippines.

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Action across three levels

As a pioneer in capacity building, FAO recognizes that helping people help themselves is more than about training people. Success depends on strong commitment by governments and the process must operate at three levels: policies, institutions and individuals.

1. Policies: Policies that place value on capacity building are an important first step. FAO works at national, regional and global levels to help agencies and countries develop such policies. This involves the sharing of knowledge and experience, provision of advice and technical support

in policy and strategy analysis, and help with the formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and management of policy processes (including conflict resolution, negotiation and facilitation).

2. Institutions: One of the most complex capacity building tasks involves institutions. Robust institutions can improve governance and influence the way people act. FAO works to strengthen institutions such as ministries of agriculture, fisheries and forestry, research and extension services, associations of private traders, bankers and microfinance

institutions, producer organizations and non-governmental organizations.

3. Individuals: Individuals constitute the third dimension of capacity building. FAO works to enhance the knowledge and skills of agricultural professionals and technicians, usually through national and local intermediaries. It collaborates with local technical and vocational training centres. And it works with educational institutions in member countries to create programmes that help develop the capacities of individuals.

How FAO helps build capacity

On a practical level there are many things FAO can do to facilitate capacity building.

To enable policy, FAO helps key actors in member countries to analyse the implications of new policies and the changing roles of public, private sector and civil society organizations. An example is the recent partnership with the Government of Belize, resulting in the passage of five biosecurity laws and the establishment of a new Belize Agricultural Health Authority.

On the institutional level, FAO contributes to improvements in the profitability of commercial producer organizations, enterprises, cooperatives, public and private service providers and rural organizations. FAO encourages producer organizations to consult and fairly represent all their members.

Efficient institutions can create opportunities for rural communities to influence policy and to benefit from emergency, rehabilitation, development and investment programmes. FAO provided assistance to producer organizations in 85 countries in 2008; similar institutions in another 69 countries are expected to receive assistance in 2009.

FAO collaborates with local learning institutions in member countries to encourage policies and programmes geared to the development of individuals' capacities. Practical measures include the development of curricula, resource materials and evaluation methodologies. Training is a key part of the FAO approach and is provided to more than 50 000 individuals per year, increasingly delivered through national partners.

FAO field programme expenditure
(US\$ millions)



Every year, over US\$350 million from FAO's core budget is applied to technical work that directly or indirectly supports capacity building. FAO has also been able to draw on its growing extrabudgetary resources – more than US\$700 million in 2008.

Source: FAO

Training and learning

Distance and computer-based learning is replacing the older face-to-face formats such as courses, workshops, and learning by doing. Specifically designed learning resource materials are made available through FAO's capacity building portal (www.fao.org/capacitybuilding). Fellowship and scholarship programmes are managed with collaborating governments and institutions, with FAO playing a facilitative role. For example, a scholarship programme established together with the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture will benefit 100 students from a range of countries over a period of five years, offering masters degrees in various agricultural disciplines.



Statisticians learn how to use a FAO database at a training workshop.



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