

**CAPACITY STRENGTHENING AND LEARNING FOR AGENDA 21 AND  
WORLD STANDARDS FOR  
ECOLOGICALLY-SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE  
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT:**

**How Should we Address Policy (in)Coherence, Content and  
Quality Problems?**

**by**

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## A. Capacity Building/Strengthening Concepts/Themes

- **Varied Definitions, Concepts, Models, or Principles** in Capacity Development or Strengthening literatures (academic and policy documents) - Framing sometimes complementary, but also very different, competing, and conflicting objectives or goals. E.g.

“Capacity development is the process by which individuals, organisations, institutions and societies develop abilities (individually and collectively) to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives...UNDP’s definition of capacity development... has three cornerstones. It is **a continuing learning and changing process**. It emphasizes **better use and empowerment** of individuals and organizations. And it requires that **systematic approaches** be considered in devising **capacity development strategies and programmes**.” (my emphasis, UNDP 1997, p.3, *Technical Advisory Paper 2*)

“Capacity development refers to the approaches, strategies and methodologies used by developing country, and/or external stakeholders, to improve performance at the individual, organizational, network/sector or broader system level.....**Capacity Development Principles:** CD is based on:

- broad-based participation and a locally driven agenda; building on local capacities;
- long term investments;
- integration of activities at various levels to address complex problems.

(Bolger, Joe. (May 2000). “Capacity Development: What, Why and How” *Capacity Development Occasional Series*, CIDA, Policy Branch, Vol. 1, No. 1.)

## B. Targeting, Tracking and Measuring Capacity Development

- **Varied Target Groups or “Recipients” or “Partners”**(Who is being Empowered and Why? What are the implications of supporting one over another?)

Personal/Human, Institutional, National or International Community

Private Sector (business)

Public Sector (government)

Civil Society/NGOs

Academics/Research Institutes

- Many attempts to define Capacity Building or Strengthening in “neutral” development language
- But “**Lack of common understanding on how to define, measure, and track capacity development** means that discussions on the subject are often vague and open to interpretation.” From “*A Revolution in Capacity Development? Africans ask Tough Questions* (Missika-Wierzba, OECD, & Nelson, WBI, 2006)
- Also **Capacity Building/Strengthening remains a (problematically) political (i.e. “empowerment”) process**, often defined by donor-driven political and/or economic objectives (and less by critical analysis of global/agricultural development, poverty reduction or ecological sustainability issues)
- Capacity building/strengthening **is often a policy driven change process** which can generate uncertain development “results” or impacts, as well as unintended consequences or destructive conflict (social, political, physical, economic, agriculture sector, etc.) **requiring conflict mitigation/resolution** processes

**C. Capacity Building/Strengthening  
For (Global) Sustainable Human Development?  
(Agenda 21 and related follow-up, including Agriculture Themes)**

- United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED, 1992) - Landmark agreements (Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and Conventions) are important (but quite ignored) milestones and guideposts for capacity strengthening policies/investments (for sustainable agriculture and other sectors)
- Capacity Building (and Education, Sciences, Training) are cross-cutting themes and implementation/support mechanisms of Rio Declaration, Agenda 21 and follow-up world conferences with reinforcing international agreements/action plans

**RIO DECLARATION**

- **Principle 15 - “PRECAUTIONARY PRINCIPLE” -:**
- “In order to protect the environment, the precautionary approach shall be widely applied by States according to their capabilities. Where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty shall not be used as a reason for postponing cost-effective measures to prevent environmental degradation.”
- (MANY IMPLICATIONS - Especially now for defining and operationalizing (ecologically) sustainable agriculture, more open/multi-stakeholder stakeholder dialogue, as well as technical/bio-safety training if capacity strengthening for biotechnology, “crop improvement” training/research support continues)

## **AGENDA 21**

### **(A Capacity Strengthening Guide for Agriculture?)**

#### **SECTION II. CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT OF RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT**

- Chapter 14 PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND RURAL/DEVELOPMENT

#### **SECTION III. STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF MAJOR GROUPS**

- Chapter 27 STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS:  
PARTNERS FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
- Chapter 32 STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF FARMERS
- Chapter 31 SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL COMMUNITY

#### **SECTION IV. MEANS OF IMPLEMENTATION**

- Chapter 34 TRANSFER OF ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND TECHNOLOGY, COOPERATION  
AND CAPACITY-BUILDING
- Chapter 35 SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
- Chapter 36 PROMOTING EDUCATION, PUBLIC AWARENESS AND TRAINING

## D. From “CAPACITY 21” to MDG’s and CAPACITY 2015 to DESD

- UNCED 1992 launched Capacity 21, led by UNDP
- UNDP (and partners) worked with developing (and transition) countries to find best ways to define/achieve sustainable development (SD) and meet Agenda 21 goals
- More specific and strategic **inclusion of SD in national and local action plans**
- Since 1993, Capacity 21 worked to support adoption of innovative capacity-building approaches to address environmental degradation, social inequity and economic decline
- Capacity 21 had **a strong partnership orientation toward capacity development**
- **Capacity 21 Principles** (for an Agenda 21 support process) encouraged:
- **Participation** of all stakeholders in programme development, implementation, monitoring & Learning.
- **Integration** of economic, social and environmental priorities within national and local policies, plans and programmes.
- **Information** about sustainable development to help people make better decisions.

## Capacity 21 phased out – Replaced by Capacity 2015

- Capacity 2015 (replacing Capacity 21) still led by UNDP works to realize Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) <http://www.undp.org/mdg/> through partnerships as well as continuing its support for UNCED's Agenda 21, and follow-up world conferences/agreements such as the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) <http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/agreed.htm> . MDGs most relevant for an integrated agriculture development and environment approach are:

**Goal 1:** Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger

**Goal 7:** Ensure environmental sustainability

- Capacity 2015 Information and Learning Network (ILN)
- Capacity 2015 ILN is a “network of networks, with heavy emphasis on local level implementation, but with adaptability for cross-learning between regional and global entities”
- Among its 4 focus areas #3 is “**Learning and capacity development**” through knowledge management with a focus on application/adaptation; continued learning from good practices and experience exchange; “**learning partnerships**,” work with academic institutions, NGOs, etc; and participatory monitoring and evaluation. (UNDP [www.undp.org/capacity2015](http://www.undp.org/capacity2015) )
- United Nations **Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014, DESD)** – UNESCO as lead agency: ( [www.unesco.org/education/desd](http://www.unesco.org/education/desd) )  
  
“The goal... is to **integrate the principles, values, and practices of sustainable development into all aspects of education and learning**. This educational effort will encourage changes in behaviour that will create a more sustainable future in terms of environmental integrity, economic viability, and a just society for present and future generations.” (UNESCO)

## **E. Key (or aspiring) Stakeholders/Actors/Investors, Resources & Programs for Capacity Building or Strengthening (all mostly post Cold War, post UNCED)**

- UNDP, <http://www.capacity.undp.org/>
- World Bank, Capacity Development Resource Center, [www.worldbank.org/capacity](http://www.worldbank.org/capacity)
- OECD-DAC; <http://www.oecd.org/> (general, aid policy/regime analysis and trade-related support)
- WTO Capacity Building Group (WCBG) for APEC (disbanded), supporting agricultural free trade in Asia-Pacific region & capacity strengthening for agriculture sector biotech, etc. <http://www.apec.org>
- FAO Capacity building Portal <http://www.fao.org/capacitybuilding/>
- UNEP [http://www.unep.org/DEPI/programmes/capacity\\_building.html](http://www.unep.org/DEPI/programmes/capacity_building.html)
- UNESCO (broad and cross-cutting, -- education, learning, knowledge, etc. specific to ESD)
- IDRC [www.idrc.org](http://www.idrc.org) Community Based Natural Resource Management Program (CIP-UPWARD & others)
- Bilateral Donors (many with different agendas)
- Private sector companies/foundations such as Bill and Melinda Gates (especially capacity-building for biotech in agriculture, health and open learning objectives with technical approaches)
- CGIAR? [www.cgiar.org](http://www.cgiar.org) (training history, but lacks clear CS vision, policy framework or coordination)
- Others (Many NGOs, Education Institutions, Research Institutes, etc.)

## **F. Global Development Trends/Debates/Tensions**

### **Implicating Capacity Strengthening/Learning (Processes and Content)**

- **1<sup>st</sup> Green Revolution** – Initially increased productive agriculture capacity but serious problems for environment, biodiversity, and health (effects on soil depletion, water, land degradation, etc.)
- Rapid globalization with increased industrial agriculture concentrating private sector power and national or corporate development actors driving capacity debates or investments which are strengthening government institutions (agri-business, trade ministries, and biotech research centers)
- **2<sup>nd</sup> Green Revolution** (Biotech/private sector driven) underway linked to globalization with lack of serious or sufficient debate among governments (or CGIAR) about effects on local economies, ecosystems, or agricultural biodiversity as well as sustainable development capacity, learning or training implications.
- Increasing biodiversity destruction and climate change threats (enabled by government/business capacity)
- Weak government commitments to empower civil society/NGOs/local farmers' indigenous knowledge for analyzing environment-agriculture relationships or alternative economic/organic agriculture models
- Open learning resources/approaches have increased but privatized education models have dominated with a decline in analytical/science capacity (social sciences/agro-ecology) especially in poor/southern countries
- Some new (public) education and research institutes (post-secondary, adult, extension, etc. with strengthened capacities for better understanding sustainable development concepts, tools and applications as well as marginalized innovations in agro-ecology, integrated pest management, organic production, etc.

## **G. Policy Coherence and Partnerships (More Capacity Building/Strengthening Implications)**

- Goals of key stakeholders/actors still differ for **Capacity Development/Strengthening specifically for “Sustainable Development”/Agenda 21 goals** - (integrating environment, social and economic development objectives – issue of negotiated compromises, trade-offs, funding emphases, donor driven agendas).
- “Balancing the diverse interests of business, the environment, and community development **requires partnerships**...(but) The process of building partnership must be facilitated by some institution that is seen by diverse community interests to be legitimate (Note IDRC, *Local Agenda 21 Planning Guide*, 1996 [http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-84819-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-84819-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html) )
- Despite many (Global) commitments Sustainable Human Development in principle to **THERE IS NO AGREEMENT in practice**. And there is “**NO POLICY COHERENCE**” in the International Community, still working at cross purposes
- If there are serious differences or policy conflicts (affecting agriculture sector or others) what are/will be the effects on capacity-building efforts, and how (or should) different objectives be reconciled?
- Many conflicts/competing agendas remain unresolved/ignored (**power overshadows partnerships**)
- Some recognition of the policy coherence issue (generally but not necessarily for Agenda 21 sustainable development capacity) in OECD-DAC ( [www.oecd.org/development/policycoherence](http://www.oecd.org/development/policycoherence)) and elsewhere.
- The policy coherence focus is especially on “Aid Effectiveness,” improved development cooperation, (accountability, transparency, etc.) and UN Reform.

## H. UN Reform, International System Coordination and Donor Aid Effectiveness (New Capacity Development Imperatives?)

- UN Reform - Better coordination/more impacts/effectiveness sought on the ground/in the field:  
*“Delivering as One: Report of the High-level Panel on United Nations System-wide Coherence in areas of development, humanitarian assistance and the environment (2006)*
  - Implications for UN capacity, coordination and effectiveness
  - Implications for broader development and research cooperation (including agriculture sector)
- *“Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability”* (2005):

**“Partner countries strengthen development capacity with support from donors**

22. **The capacity to plan, manage, implement, and account for results of policies and programmes**, is critical for achieving development objectives — from analysis and dialogue through implementation, monitoring and evaluation. Capacity development is the responsibility of partner countries with donors playing a support role. It needs not only to be based on sound technical analysis, but also to be responsive to the broader social, political and economic environment, including the need to strengthen human resources.

23. **Partner countries commit to: Integrate specific capacity strengthening objectives** in national development strategies and pursue their implementation through country-led capacity development strategies where needed.

24. **Donors commit to:** Align their analytic and financial support with partners’ capacity development objectives and strategies make effective use of existing capacities and **harmonise support for capacity development** accordingly”

## I. Questions Arising about Quality/Content of new Agricultural Knowledge/Sciences/Pedagogies and Continuous/Lifelong/Open learning?

- How should (public) International Agricultural Research Organizations (IAROs) insure coherence, effectiveness, **authentic partnerships**, and greater (sustainable development) achievements or impacts?
- What kind of new learning is needed for National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS)?
- What resources for what purposes should IAROs or NARS invest in capacity strengthening and learning?
- What do IAROs and NARS need to learn more of and better?
- Does content matter? (e.g. linked to Agenda 21 related conceptual/knowledge and policy frameworks)
- Are more reforms needed for (public) higher education curricula, research institutes, sciences?
- Is more critical thinking and teaching on controversial issues, alternative development paths, and new research methods, as well as agro-ecology, social science, etc., needed? Are curriculum reforms possible?
- Can we better facilitate more authentic stakeholder dialogues/open learning opportunities on controversial (and interrelated) agriculture, environment and development issues (**Education, not just “training”**)?
- If so how will/should such study, education processes, learning events and dialogue be supported? Through traditional education systems as well as open/online distance mechanisms?
- Who should pay for quality and content assessments or learning system improvements?

## **J. CGIAR Training and Capacity Development: What to Do/How for Standards & Impact Effectiveness?**

- Are such issues relevant topics for the CGIAR-Wide Debate (and called-for reforms) on Training and Capacity Development? E.g. from The CGIAR Science Council (SC) study (July 2006): ***Evaluation and Impact of Training in the CGIAR***. Key observations noted there were:
  - 1) a decline in unrestricted resources available for training with more unstable, short-term project funding;
  - 2) uncertainty about the present quality, effectiveness or impacts of training;
  - 3) future training demands expected from National Agricultural Research Systems (NARS) in order to increase/improve research capacities; and
  - 4) the need for better coordination and sharing of training work while enhancing the pedagogical expertise of the CGIAR system.
- How do we agree on and insure global quality education training standards on agricultural education (and research capacity strengthening especially in higher education institutions)  
(e.g.. **Quality education is a UNESCO-led DESD objective**)
- What methodologies?
- What types of Monitoring and Evaluation Systems (ISO and others, specific to education standards)?
- Is institutional accreditation (peer-reviewed) for IAROs /CGIAR system possible/desireable?
- Discussion at recent CGIAR-Wide ICT-KM, Open Learning Resources (OLR) Project (and Dialogue about Quality Standards for Digital Learning at upcoming meeting at UNCSD New York, May 2008)

## **K. Testing New Capacity Strengthening or Training Approaches/Applications**

e.g. through The International Potato Center (CIP) [www.cipotato.org](http://www.cipotato.org) and CGIAR

- New Capacity Strengthening Department (CSD) replaces former Training Department
- Planned Capacity Strengthening and Needs Assessments (based on regional and field based consultations)
- New research on effectiveness/impacts of capacity strengthening/learning activities
- A partnership approach to capacity strengthening and better inter-institutional collaboration
- Encouraging capacity strengthening for potato sector sustainable agricultural development research while also targeting support for MDGs and improving sustainable livelihoods
- Planned Capacity Strengthening Strategy to better support implementation
- More strategic cooperation, particularly among other CGIAR centers, international organizations, the UN, donors and others , especially those analyzing and implementing capacity development initiatives
- Encouraging educational dialogues on sustainability issues with better integration of world sustainable development standards, benchmarks or goals (Agenda 21 and other global agreements, including MDGs) into quality agriculture research and training programs with focused learning objectives.