

Summary Report

Evaluation of Capacity Development Activities of CGIAR

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Independent
Evaluation
Arrangement

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Capacity development (CD) constitutes a cornerstone of CGIAR's research and development agenda. The forward-looking Strategy and Results Framework 2016-2030 introduces CD as one of four key crosscutting themes critical for attaining CGIAR's goals and targets. Further illustrating its importance is the requirement for all CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs) from 2017 onwards to allocate an explicit share of at least 10 percent of the total budget for CD.

About this evaluation

This evaluation, organized by the Independent Evaluation Arrangement, represents a first comprehensive assessment of CGIAR's engagement in capacity development activities. It focused on CD activities from 2011-2016 targeted at individuals, organizations and institutions outside CGIAR.

The evaluation purpose was to better understand the contribution CD has made, and can make in the future, to reaching CGIAR's aims and help CGIAR Centers, CRPs and the CGIAR system improve relevance, comparative advantage, and effectiveness of their CD activities and sustainability of results. The evaluation was designed to provide CGIAR partners and others with essential evaluative information, extract relevant insights, draw conclusions and produce useful recommendations.

Evaluation scope:

- › The evaluation focused on CD activities targeted at individuals, organizations and institutions outside CGIAR and did not evaluate activities aimed at strengthening capacities of CGIAR staff, its Centers and CRPs, or the CGIAR System.
- › Stand-alone provision of information, resources, hardware and financial assistance not associated with other CD activities were excluded from the evaluation.
- › The evaluation focused on the period 2011–2016, covering the first phase of CRPs.
- › The evaluation did not cover aspects of gender and partnerships in detail.

The evaluation took a theory-based approach, describing CD interventions and their immediate effects up to the point of strengthened capacities at the individual, organizational and institutional level. The evaluation team assessed CD in CGIAR as contributing to, influencing and enabling agricultural research and development processes, individuals, entities and institutions beyond their control. This was important to consider because CD should be seen a means to an end rather than an end in itself. A broader framework of analysis was used to assess how capacities were strengthened through CGIAR activities, projects and programs and enabled partners to contribute to CGIAR's development goals.

The main evaluation questions were:

- › How relevant has CGIAR CD been and what has been its comparative advantage?
- › What results has CGIAR CD contributed to (or is likely to contribute to)?
- › How can CGIAR improve its CD operationally and strategically?

Principal sources of information and evaluative evidence consisted of earlier evaluation documents, reports, and databases; a survey of individual CD participants (resulting in over 1,800); over 120 interviews with stakeholders within and outside of CGIAR; case studies; and meta-analysis of evaluative evidence .

Key findings, conclusions and recommendations

Strategic planning

Overall, CD by CGIAR has been identified as a strategic enabler of impact, and CGIAR's role has been described as catalytic and the needs basis for CD has been emphasized. However, the Evaluation concluded that CGIAR does not have a comparative advantage in all areas of CD and clear guidance has been lacking about where CGIAR's comparative advantage lies and how CD should be prioritized. There are two areas where CGIAR could be potentially moving beyond its comparative advantage: (1) developing or building capacity in countries where it is seriously lacking, and (2) providing training downstream.

There is no CGIAR-wide strategic framework reflecting the structure and capacity needs of national and regional agricultural research and development systems, the principal actors and agendas already in place to address these, and how CGIAR should address such needs, together with its partners. Through ASTI1, an IFPRI initiative to provide data on agricultural research systems across the developing world, CGIAR is considered a leader in the assessment of science and technology investments and in the provision of information and analysis of the National Agricultural Research System (NARS) capacity needs, however CGIAR does not apply this knowledge and information in a strategic manner to guide its own CD activities. There is also limited effort to adjust CD prioritization and activities to CGIAR's changing financial landscape where core funding has been diminishing rapidly, there are limitations as to how bilateral funding can be used, and innovative ways to finance CD are needed. To avoid a further atomization of CD efforts, CGIAR Centers and CRPs have to work more collectively.

◆ Recommendation 1.

Under the leadership of the System Management Board, CGIAR should develop and commit to a comprehensive CD agenda, in line with the needs and approaches of its research and development partners. The agenda should be based on an analysis of regional and national capacity needs for agricultural research and development. This agenda should:

- i. clarify CGIAR's mandate for CD, differentiating between development of partner capacities and support for technology adoption and use;
- ii. guide CGIAR's approach to CD and technology delivery under different scenarios depending on the strength of national research and extension systems required for scaling of outcomes and impact;
- iii. develop a typology for CD that would clarify elements of informal or synergistic CD through research collaboration, networking and other activities that are primarily geared towards research and delivery. Two Centers, CIFOR and ICRAF have already initiated a process to develop a CD typology and framework for Capacity Needs Assessment as part of the CRP on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry Phase II POWB-2017. This and similar initiatives could be used as a starting point.

◆ Recommendation 2.

Centers and CRPs should base their medium-term CD plans on clear CD strategies and incorporate CD more consistently into their theories of change. The strategic planning of CD should be based on CD needs assessments done jointly with research and development partners, especially with internal CGIAR partners. This should take into account alternative providers of CD and CGIAR's comparative advantage in different situations, particularly for developing capacities for research and strengthening sustainable capacity for scaling of results. Furthermore, Centers and CRPs should assess the relative cost-effectiveness of their CD activities vis-à-vis other CD providers to better determine in which areas their CD activities add most value.

1 Acronym for "Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators". For further information see: <https://www.asti.cgiar.org/about>

Capacity development at the individual level

CGIAR Centers and CRPs have engaged in a range of CD activities, individual CD being the largest area for which CD funding is allocated. CGIAR CD includes brief events, training courses and practical, on-the-job training, support for academic studies and learning through research collaboration, and also activities such as network development.

CGIAR's core areas of CD activity, namely providing training through short-term courses and events, and longer-term CD supporting graduate and post-graduate studies, continue. The feedback that the evaluation team received through survey and interviews, primarily targeting agricultural professionals, was overwhelmingly positive, and highlights included the quality of trainers, high quality of the training and field experience and the usefulness of the new knowledge and skills in their work.

The evaluation found that the reported number of individuals trained through short-term programs has increased from fewer than 10,000 per year to over 2.5 million in three years (2013-2015), mainly due to downstream training at the field level. This significant investment in downstream training at the farm level is of unknown effectiveness and sustainability, and clear strategic guidance would be helpful for CGIAR's approach to CD in circumstances where the enabling environment at national level is limited or lacking. CD programs that assume the role of national extension agencies, catering to the CD needs of primary producers and rural groups, do not represent CGIAR's comparative advantage. However, CGIAR's comparative advantage in this regard may depend on who the alternative capacity providers are and how seriously the lack of capacity hinders CGIAR's effectiveness and impact.

Scientific collaboration CD (through technical capacities, facilitation of platforms, networks and dialogues, exchange of information and knowledge management and sharing, and joint work in projects, including joint publishing, for example) was commonly considered as a two-way process between CGIAR scientists and their non-CGIAR counterparts. In professional collaboration, participants appreciated coaching and mentoring provided, roles and responsibilities between the collaborating institutions, and mutual understanding of each other's institutional settings, which all contributed to effectiveness. However, such activities are not consistently planned, documented or monitored for their longer-term CD effects.

◆ Recommendation 3.

In its CD activities, CGIAR should aim at taking full advantage of the experience and facilities of the Centers, particularly with regard to their scientific staff and amenities, and training of local end users and communities should be de-emphasized or channeled through more appropriate CD providers to ensure better relevance and focus and greater cost-effectiveness of CGIAR's efforts.

Capacity development at the organizational and institutional level

Organizational and institutional capacity development are interconnected with CD at the individual level, and capacities at any one level influence those at other levels. These types of CD commonly lack accepted typology, are not systematically reported, and are therefore difficult to characterize and quantify.

Since the closure of ISNAR², in 2004, CGIAR has not had a similar focus on or accountability for developing organizational and institutional capacity similar to ISNAR's institutional mandate to strengthen national agricultural research in developing countries. Several CGIAR Centers have forged strong and collaborative CD partnerships with specific NARS actors over several decades. CGIAR has provided analytical tools, and capacity to use them, to national governments, programs and communities,

2 Former CGIAR center called "International Service for National Agricultural Research", which was dedicated to long-term capacity development of national programs.

which has been an important form of enhancing organizational capacity. However, it was also noted that NARS have a limited role in policy development, which is the result of limited capacity to engage in policy dialogues. They have a weaker voice when it comes to negotiating and raising agricultural research funds. This is an area where CGIAR with its strong links with NARS could be more systematically engaged.

Institutional capacity has also been strengthened through policy advice and directly by establishing new entities and infrastructure. Examples examined by the evaluation team (PABRA, AMBIONET, GCP, and ILRI's BecA Hub) were found to be very relevant for enhancing capacity in genetic improvement, which remains a core competence of CGIAR. Innovation platforms represent the most widely applied approach to institutional CD in CGIAR. They are aimed at enabling diverse stakeholders to address common challenges and harness mutual benefits more effectively and efficiently than direct technology transfer, which typically involves only individual CD

Approaches to capacity development

Different approaches to understanding how CGIAR contributes to development have emerged over recent decades, ranging from focusing on international public goods and technology transfer models to integrated Agricultural Research for Development (AR4D) and Agricultural Innovation Systems. The choice of paradigm influences individual, organizational and institutional capacities important for effective and sustainable agricultural research and development systems. Substantial investments have been made in setting up innovation platforms by Centers/CRPs for driving innovation at the beneficiary level, but there is sparse information on their relative effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability regarding development of organizational and institutional capacities.

The evaluation team found good evidence of the effectiveness of individual CD interventions and programs, but very little evidence of cumulative effects to strengthen the organizational and institutional capacity in agricultural research and development.

CGIAR's often "projectized" approach to CD contrasts with principles for effective and sustainable CD that requires planning and implementation of CD as an engaging, recipient-owned process. CGIAR Centers do, however, engage in effective partnership approaches that include facilitating multi-partner networks, platforms and multilateral programs, but sustainability remains a challenge, especially when key donor support or CGIAR participation ends. Preparation for and management of transitions and exit is needed.

♦ Recommendation 4.

Centers and CRPs should build on successful partnership approaches, such as the facilitation of collaborative multi-stakeholder networks and multi-donor programs and platforms, to ensure that CD has the required long-term perspective and is relevant to and owned by the stakeholders and entities that strengthen their capacities. Careful preparation, management and transition support is required when CGIAR or key donors end their support to programs. The CGIARcountry coordination efforts provide an opportunity for CGIAR Centers and CRPs to work more collaboratively on needs and priority assessments in these countries where CGIAR is particularly active.

♦ Recommendation 5.

CGIAR should systematically review the existing experience on innovation platforms to establish how effective they are as a means for CGIAR to make CD interventions for enabling large-scale adoption of CGIAR's research products. From experience, CGIAR should assume an optimal role, on the basis of its comparative advantage and that of national/regional organizations and development agencies, in channeling capacity support to innovation platform participants.

Support for capacity development.

Several Centers have established research support units for CD, and have integrated CD into appraisal and project cycle management, but there is often lack of dedicated support functions for assisting research staff with planning, implementing and following-up on CD interventions.

Two principal challenges exist for ensuring good CD practice in Centers and CRPs. First, funding CD expert positions and CD support units – most CRPs do not have a dedicated CD staff position. Second, CGIAR's matrix structure of CRPs and Centers makes it difficult for Centers engaged in many CRPs (and for CRPs with many participating Centers), to plan and manage CD activities in a systematic way.

However, despite this, Centers continue to be in the best position to manage CD, including its quality, integrating CD with project management cycles.

The Community of Practice on Capacity Development (CapDev CoP) has been active in influencing visibility of CD and developing conceptual thinking and guidance documents. They developed a CapDev Framework which was used by the CRPs for drafting their CD strategies for Phase II as well as by ISPC in its appraisal of proposals. It is a good example of how a system wide-initiative can bear fruits with modest investment. The CapDev CoP has also made significant contributions to establishing a common understanding, synthesizing good practices, and enabling knowledge exchange and continues to be relevant. However, the CapDev CoP is under-resourced. CGIAR needs to find a modality for significant, dedicated support for CD, both at System and operating level.

◆ Recommendation 6.

CGIAR Centers should, in collaboration with CRP management and through facilitation by the CapDev CoP, integrate adequate CD support into their management systems and approaches for ensuring that their CD activities are planned, implemented and followed-up in accordance with good CD practices and in alignment with CGIAR's Capacity Development Framework.

Monitoring and reporting of CD

Data and information for CD have not been documented and archived sufficiently well. What is available is limited, quantitative and not informative of the strategic purpose of CD. Potentially useful information is not easily retrievable and in some cases appears not to have been recorded, and tracing CD activities at Centers and CRPs from planning to implementation is limited. Follow-up is weak and does not allow monitoring of CD results in terms of sustainably strengthened capacities and their effects on research productivity, making it difficult to assess whether targets are relevant and realistic and whether CD objectives are being reached. It is evident that monitoring and evaluation systems are frequently not in place for CD activities and the situation is sub-optimal.

There is little value in the current CD-related reporting in CGIAR for any of the purposes associated with results-based management: learning, improved decision-making, and accountability to donors, development partners and beneficiaries. The reporting of aggregate numbers and information in a few categories masks a wide range of activities for different purposes and tells little about relevance, realism or performance. Current input-level requirements for CRPs, in terms of allocating a portion of their budget for CD activities, is ambiguous in the absence of a CD typology and because of overlapping research and CD activities. Qualitative approaches to monitoring and reporting, such as long-term tracer studies targeting particular CD interventions, and outcome case studies, are better suited to report on CD.



◆ **Recommendation 7.**

The System Management Office should revise CD-related reporting requirements and put emphasis on reporting against strategic and annual planning in a manner that reflects intended purpose, type and modality of CD, specifying stakeholder groups targeted. Reporting and indicators should better serve management purposes. The challenge will be to define a reasonable and harmonized number of CD indicators that can work also at project level and that can be consolidated and meaningful. In their planning of CD activities Centers and CRPs should also plan for follow-up on the beneficiaries so as to provide information that will enable monitoring of progress and results, and improvement in implementation of CD activities. Alternative approaches to monitoring, such as long-term tracer studies targeting particular CD interventions and outcome case studies, should be explored by Centers and CRPs for management and reporting. Developing a CD typology (Recommendation 1.c) would help harmonize CD data and information collection and documentation across the CGIAR.



For more information, please visit: iea.cgiar.org