Why Capacity Development?[1]

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In the last three decades (1980s-2000s), our knowledge of how complex the world's contemporary problems are has forced us to rethink our approaches in ways that recognize unprecedented change, interconnectedness, and uncertainties inherent within our knowledge systems. Development institutions are faced with the challenge of having the capacity to adapt well to change. This 'new normal' compels institutions such as the United Nations Development Program to subscribe to the notion that 'Capacity is Development' (UNDP 2009).

Today, Capacity Development (CD) has gained an equal footing with other systems approaches used in local and international development. In fact, a number of development agencies, state departments, networks of organizations, and programs are created mainly to provide Capacity Development support services to a broader base of stakeholders. The *Collaborative Change Communication* (CCCOMDEV) is an exemplary model of CD in the area of communication for development (ComDev) and rural communication. As a community of practice, CCCOMDEV works in multiple levels using multi-pronged strategies to enhance capacities of individuals, teams/groups, and organizations in ComDev/Rural Communication and to ensure that these enhanced capacities will result in sustained and inclusive development in the rural areas.

One of these CD strategies that CCCOMDEV employs is the institutionalization of a partnership among six (6) academic institutions across the world with recognized track record in undertaking research programs on ComDev and rural communication. Started in 2014, the Global Research Initiative for Rural Communication (GRI-RC) is a dynamic, living platform for knowledge creation, synthesis, and exchange to support ComDev theorizing and mainstream good ComDev/rural communication practices within the larger society.

Among the six GRI-RC partner institutions is the University of Guelph in Canada. The University of Guelph is one of the very few academic institutions in the world that offer a graduate degree program in CD. The Master of Science in Capacity Development and Extension seeks to develop core competencies of future leaders in dealing with social and environmental change. This graduate program, offered by the School of Environmental Design and Rural Development of the Ontario Agricultural College, draws its strength from the University of Guelph's strong research tradition in agriculture and rural development.

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[1]This article is adopted from Helen Hambly-Odame's handout with the same title originally written for students of MSc in Capacity Development and Extension at the University of Guelph.

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What is Capacity Development?

Compared with other similar approaches to development, CD takes a systemic approach in designing dynamic and progressive interactions among individuals, organizations, and networks of actors that allow them to better adapt to change in a sustainable basis. Drawing from various academic disciplines, CD takes many forms in fields of practice, often complementing and reinforcing one another, such as:
  - Innovations development and brokering;
  - Learning and action;
  - Communication for social and environmental change;
  - Knowledge management; and
  - Partnership and networking

Because of its strong systemic, 'glocal,' and critical perspective in enhancing capacities for change, CD deviates from conventional notions on training, human resource/professional development, and even on formal education.

For instance, CD gives greater attention to the unfolding of intrinsic, highly tacit capacities of social-ecological systems—a perspective that challenges longheld beliefs on the nature of capacity (i.e., as solely cognitive and behavioural). These common notions on capacity are deeply ingrained in conventional technical assistance, training, and even strategic communication work (cf. Fowler and Ubels, 2010).

Which levels of change does CD operate?

For a very long time, the three levels of capacity development have been addressed in development policy and programming as individual "blocks" of investment and activity. In some contexts, especially initiatives under the sustainable livelihoods framework, it was apparent that change was successive – moving from one block to another – usually from the micro-level to the macro-level of change.

We may be familiar for instance, with the debates over "scaling up" rural innovation, or perhaps, the "decentralization" of national action plans and services. In either of these contexts, the work was successive. Outcomes and impact at one level ultimately need to inform change at another level. This creates a simultaneous process of communication, learning and action that is sought by many social and environmental change processes.

In summary, the logic of capacity development operates somewhat differently than other approaches to policy and management, including the earlier generations of training and capacity building. In this framework the essence of activity is across the three blocks of dynamic individual, collective and system level change (see Figure 1). Again, it is the case that change at one level operates with change at another level, and therein, lies the potential for innovation and opportunities to address the dynamic challenges of the 21st century.

System/Network Level

Organizational Level

Individual Level
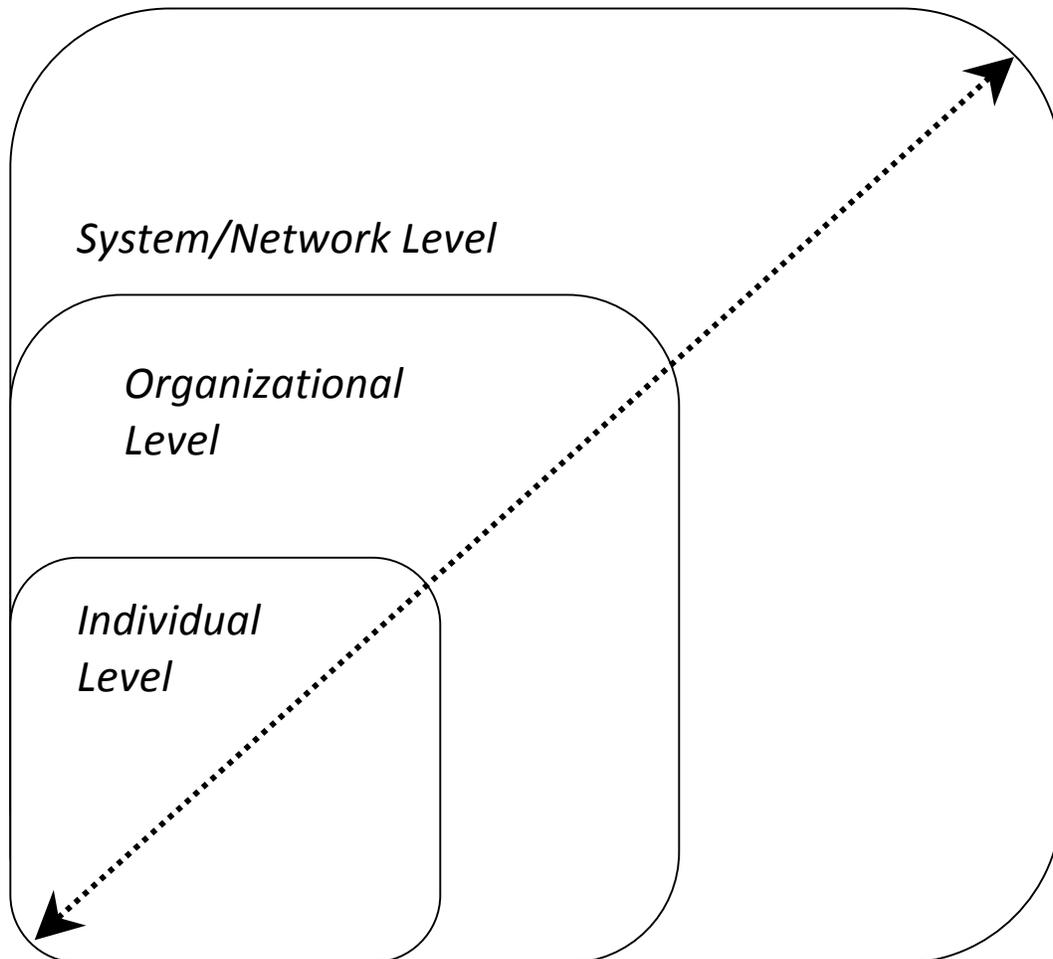
Source: Lavergene and Saxby (2001)

Fig. 1. Basic Capacity Development Schema

The following three ongoing cases of initiatives illustrate how CD works at a systems level, with a strong 'glocal' perspective, from Asia and Africa to North America.

Selected Case Stories on Capacity Development in Rural Communication and Development

Case Story 1: Piloting and Up-Scaling Effective Models of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development

Implementing Organization: SEAMEO Southeast Asian Regional Center for Graduate Study and Research in Agriculture (SEARCA)

Key Stakeholders: universities and research institutions, local governments, farmers groups, civil society, private sector in two municipalities in the Philippines

Project Period: 2015-present

Project Overview:

SEAMEO SEARCA's mission is to "strengthen institutional capacities toward inclusive and sustainable agricultural and rural development (ISARD) in Southeast Asia through graduate education, research and development, and knowledge management" (SEARCA website, 'About Us' page). As SEARCA enters its 10th Five Year Plan, the organization is set to distill the elements of an emerging ISARD model from its extensive experience of developing and implementing agricultural and rural development approaches in Southeast Asia.

Through a participatory, landscape, and systems approach to agricultural and rural development, SEARCA facilitates the initiative, *Piloting and Up-Scaling Effective Models of Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural and Rural Development,* where the emerging ISARD models can be tested and refined while contributing to the improvement of agricultural production and economy in the selected two agro-ecological sites in the Philippines.

SEARCA mobilized the higher education institutions located in the project sites to steer the project's research and development (R&D) activities and work closely with the local government units, agricultural R&D institutions, and other key stakeholders in the area. The first pilot project is located in Victoria, Oriental Mindoro, with focus on the improvement of the value chain of Calamansi, a major commodity in the province. The second pilot project aims to increase farm production, agricultural productivity, and household incomes of farmers in Inopacan, Leyte in the Visayas region.

The ISARD model, which is being implemented in the two project sites, has the following components: small grants for technical assistance, institutional development and capacity building, knowledge management, and linkaging and networking for support services. Development of innovations at the farm level is facilitated through field-based research and experimentation, series of learning workshops in-teams and across the two teams, mentoring and guided team reflections, as well as the use of participatory communication and knowledge sharing strategies to document,

synthesize, and share good practices and lessons that are transpiring from the action research.

Capacity Development in Action:

In SEARCA's Piloting and Up-Scaling Project, CD can be seen operating in multiple dimensions and levels. Individuals who directly participate in the project's research and learning activities enhance their competencies in key areas of their work; the small grants enable teams to explore new ways of improving local agriculture and economy while the collaborative and adaptive nature of action research provides an opportunity for participating teams and institutions to learn from one another and eventually, improve their institutional capacities. At the macro-, policy-making level, the Piloting and Up-Scaling Project allows SEARCA to develop its institutional capacity of undertaking its mandate by creating an added value out of its greatest asset, knowledge on agricultural and rural development in Southeast Asia, and use this value to further advance its mission in the region.

For further information: Visit SEARCA's webpage on Piloting and Up-Scaling ISARD on http://www.searca.org/index.php/research-and-development/pilot-testing-of-isard-models.

Women of Victoria Kalamansi Farmers' Federeation (VKFF) leading the processing of calamansi concentrate during the ISARD training on calamansi processing on October 4, 2016 (File photo: SEAMEO SEARCA)

Case Story 2: Jumpstarting Orange-Fleshed Sweet Potato in West Africa through Diversified Markets

Implementing Organization: International Potato Center under the auspices of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation

Key Stakeholders: Implementing partner institutions such as research and development organizations and nongovernment organizations; farmers groups; local governments; private sector; and schools in Ghana, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso

Project Period: April 2014-May 2017; second phase starts last quarter of 2017

Project Overview:

In April 2014, the International Potato Center (CIP), a research center of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural (CGIAR) based in Lima, Peru, started implementing its three-year project that aims to curb the micronutrient deficiency problem in Ghana, Nigeria, and Burkina Faso in West Africa. CIP sees the orange-fleshed sweetpotato (OFSP), a Vitamin A-rich food, as a source of innovation to address the health problem that affects vulnerable sectors of the community, particularly children and lactating mothers. While sweet potato is part of the diet of the communities in West Africa, the familiar varieties are white in color so there is a need to increase the demand for the higher-nutrient orange-flesh variety of sweet potato.

To respond to this problem, CIP designed an action research project that will utilize sustainable and inclusive market-driven approaches in the production and marketing of OFSP. The Jumpstarting OFSP Project primarily aims to enhance farmers' capacities to produce clean planting materials year round, establish formal and informal markets for fresh and processed OFSP products, and equip farmers with the capacity to participate in the value chain of OFSP.

CIP works with government agencies and NGOs in establishing the markets for OFSP and in organizing and linking the farmer groups to the markets. Learning sessions and 'demand-creation' campaigns were used to create the demand for OFSP both in formal and informal markets. School-based feeding programs were tapped as one of the formal market options. Linkages with the private sector, NGOs, and the government were also strengthened through partnerships and capacity development activities (e.g., use of participatory techniques in dialogues, community meetings, and learning workshops).

Capacity Development in Action

Addressing a complex health problem such as this requires a multi-stakeholder approach of understanding the gaps within each subsystem (i.e., technology, market, agricultural production, health, environment, public institutions) and bringing together

various stakeholders to analyze how these gaps are interrelated and collectively find a suitable solution in addressing the gaps. As clearly indicated in the project documents, developing capacities at the individual, group, and institutional levels are a key to achieving the goals of Jumpstarting OFSP Project in West Africa. This is accomplished through social learning approaches used in establishing the commercial sweet potato seed systems, innovation development to create new products that would cater to the market's demand, partnerships and alliance building, knowledge sharing, and advocacy communication. Beyond the level of the project, capacity development opportunities are also possible because the OFSP research is networked within the CGIAR Research Program on Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB). The RTB program connects individual research into clusters, and thematic clusters of "flagship projects". Opportunities open up by mobilizing local knowledge from Eastern and Southern Africa on the processing OFSP and exchanging it with partners in West Africa. There is also potential for transformative technology such as biofortification which, for example, breeds a new variety of cassava with higher levels of beta carotene, or the "orange" in OFSP.

For further information, contact Dr. Erna Abidin, Project Leader, Jumpstarting OFSP Project (p.abidin@cgiar.org) and Dr. Graham Theile, Program Director of the CGIAR Research Program for RTB (g.theile@cgiar.org).

Case Story 3: Eat Local, Taste Global: ECV (Ethno-Cultural Vegetables) Ontario

Implementing Organization: A team of researchers from the University of Guelph, Ontario, Canada in collaboration with non-profit organization FarmStart

Key Stakeholders: Farmers' organizations such as the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association; policy making bodies such as the Greater Toronto Area Agricultural Action Committee (GTAAAC), Toronto Food Policy Council, Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food and Ministry of Rural Affairs (OMAFRA); Ontario Food Terminal; research centres such as the Vineland Research and Innovation Centre; wholesalers and retailers; and consumer groups

Project Period: 2009-present

Project Overview:

In 2009, a team of researchers from the University of Guelph conducted research on the market demand for ethno-cultural vegetables in the Greater Toronto Area and in Guelph. Ethno-cultural vegetables are those vegetables that immigrants in the Greater Toronto Area used to eat in their countries of origin. The study covered a sample of 750 participants from Afro-Caribbean, South Asian, and Chinese ethno-cultural groups. By the end of the study, it was found that the demand (at $732 million per year) for ethno-cultural vegetables far exceeded Ontario's local supply of these vegetables.

To generate new economic opportunity for Ontario growers and maximize the environmental, health, and social benefits of producing ethno-cultural vegetables locally, the research project strengthened its engagement with various stakeholders through the Knowledge Translation and Transfer (KTT) Program of OMAFRA and the University of Guelph. Dubbed as ECV Ontario, this initiative aims to (a) create awareness about the demand for ethno-cultural vegetables, (b) contribute to the development of appropriate agricultural policy that will enable farmers to benefit from this niche market; (c) contribute to the development of a local food movement; and (d) promote awareness about the environmental and health benefits of eating locally-produced ethno-cultural vegetables.

By using various knowledge sharing and communication strategies such as workshops, stakeholders' meetings, video documentary, blogs, and social media, EVC Ontario is able to facilitate the translation of research results into more usable knowledge formats through "synthesis, exchange, dissemination, dialogue, collaboration, and brokering among researchers and research users" (OMAFRA – U of G Partnership, 2014). Moreover, EVC Ontario is able to develop the capacity of around 40 individual graduate students from diverse disciplines in various aspects of research and project development and management related to ethno-cultural vegetables.

Capacity Development in Action:

Ultimately, the goal of ECV Ontario is to improve the systemic capacity of a food system in producing ethno-cultural vegetables in a sustainable, equitable, and culturally-appropriate way. Unlike the linear way of doing agricultural communication and extension, ECV Ontario used a multi-pronged approach in sharing and maximizing the value of research outputs by strengthening the engagement between researchers and the primary users of knowledge and by creating awareness about ethno-cultural food in Ontario within a broad base of stakeholders using digital media platforms. By bringing the global to local food systems, it creates an innovative 'glocal' platform for knowledge-sharing and innovation that is attentive to diversity issues. Through this research, organizational and institutional capacities were developed including a strong network of research institutions within the University of Guelph and its surrounding areas, local food movement, policy making bodies, and organizations of growers, retailers, and sellers, that serves as a hub for continuous sharing of scientific and social innovations on ethno-cultural vegetables in Ontario.

For further information, visit ECV Ontario's blog site (http://evcontario2011.blogspot.ca); Youtube Channel (https://www.youtube.com/user/ECVOntario); or follow them on Facebook (https://www.facebook.com/ecv.ontario) or Twitter (@ECVOntario).

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