



Strengthening Capacity for Research and Policymaking

Reducing hunger and poverty depends on the capacity of researchers and policymakers to understand and use food policy analysis. IFPRI's approach to capacity strengthening has evolved and expanded to better meet developing country needs through collaborative research, training, and institutional development.

Developing effective policies to reduce poverty and hunger requires strong analytical skills, data, and knowledge. To address limited capacities in many developing countries, the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) has made capacity strengthening for research and food policy analysis an integral part of its agenda. Providing the training, knowledge, and experience that individuals and institutions require for evidence-based analysis of food policies is critical to ensuring that countries can improve the design and implementation of food policies.

Since its establishment 40 years ago, collaboration with local researchers has been a central component of IFPRI's work. IFPRI expanded its activities to include formal training, support to education, and institutional development. A Capacity Strengthening Unit was established in 1994, and capacity strengthening has been designated as one of IFPRI's core activities for more than 10 years. Today, capacity strengthening activities are consistently built into much of IFPRI's work, including research programs, country programs, and regional networks.

Strengthening Capacity

Collaborative research directly involves developing-country researchers in IFPRI's work, providing valuable on-the-job training. In the Institute's first years, staff members were based at headquarters but worked with local researchers and enumerators to carry out work in developing countries. For example, IFPRI's support for the long-term Ethiopia Rural Household Survey (ERHS), a dataset of household characteristics collected over 20 years, has entailed substantial training of survey staff, along with collaboration with senior national researchers that led to numerous publications. Developing-country researchers have also worked as visiting and postdoctoral fellows. A Visiting Fellows program with China, for example, has brought young researchers to IFPRI's headquarters for extended stays. As IFPRI launched several regional networks and began opening project offices in the early 2000s, greater opportunities were created for local researchers to work more closely with IFPRI researchers.

Formal training activities have complemented research collaboration. Mechanisms range from academic courses to workshops, seminars, and field trips. Going beyond training activities, IFPRI initiated innovative programs for thesis supervision and master's degree programs in several developing countries. Support for thesis research in China, Ethiopia, and Ghana has contributed to development of new skills and to improving thesis quality. In China, IFPRI staff have served as thesis advisors for MSc and PhD students, in cooperation with the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) and Chinese universities. This program gives students access to a wealth of expertise. Graduates have gone on to senior positions in China, and cooperation with CAAS and universities has likewise increased the influence of policy research.

In Africa, IFPRI played a catalyzing role in the establishment of a regional collaborative master's degree program in agriculture and applied economics. Heads of agricultural economics departments from 16 universities in 12 countries were actively involved in the program's design. IFPRI facilitated a pilot and program start-up, developed course materials, and secured international funding. The program accepted its first students in 2005 and had enrolled more than 600 students by 2015. It has now been successfully

transferred to African institutions and is thriving; students and educators alike have recognized its rigorous standards and good design.

Development of country-level and local datasets through research and survey work creates a strong basis for policy analysis. Socioeconomic datasets collected for IFPRI projects, such as the ERHS, are made available to the public; currently 135 datasets are available online. These are downloaded thousands of times a year by students, researchers, policymakers, and media and have been cited in over 900 publications.

Training and on-the-job experience with modeling and analytic tools create the long-term capacity needed to put the datasets to use. IFPRI's expertise in modeling, for example, has provided the backbone of the African Growth and Development Policy (AGRODEP) Modeling Consortium. This consortium provides support for African experts to take on leadership roles in strategic development issues, equipping them to undertake and understand science-based research needed to formulate sound policies. Currently, AGRODEP has about 200 members from all across Africa, 30 percent of whom are women. Members benefit not only from training courses, workshops, and research grants but also from access to more than 300 databases and 21 economic modeling tools.

Institutional Development

Education and training of individuals who will staff national institutions—from universities to research institutes to government ministries—is central to institutional development. However, building effective institutions also requires investments in organizational effectiveness and sustainability. IFPRI's institutional development work has focused on filling capacity gaps in national research programs, developing university curricula, and strengthening analytical capacities in policy departments. A range of institutions from ministries to universities to research organizations have benefited.

Among IFPRI's first institutional development efforts was a program of support to the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the Ministry of Food in Bangladesh, beginning in the 1980s. This support is credited with improving the country's ability to cope with natural

disasters. Capacity-strengthening activities benefited from broad collaboration that included the Ministry of Agriculture, the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, and Dhaka University. A three-pronged approach included training courses in data-gathering and analysis for the research institute; collaborative research; and overseas study tours for policymakers. An independent assessment reported that improved capacity for data collection has been long lasting and that training and collaboration developed a team of policy analysts who continue to do high-quality research and provide policy advice.

In Malawi, institutional development focused on creating a cadre of well-trained agricultural experts. In cooperation with the University of Malawi, the National Statistical Office, and the Ministry of Agriculture, the IFPRI program focused on collaborative research, training, access to tools for modeling and analysis, demand-driven courses, and institutional support. Work with the Bunda College of Agriculture of the University of Malawi developed a post-graduate program to train agricultural economists—the college is now considered a center of excellence for graduate training. Parallel work with the statistical office and the agriculture ministry to identify capacity needs and train local staff amplified the impact of the university program and increased capacity to understand policy research.

In the early 2000s, IFPRI initiated a program of decentralization to better meet country needs, including expanded capacity building. Country Strategy Support Programs (CSSPs) have been established in 11 countries and about a third of IFPRI researchers are now posted in developing countries. With IFPRI staff working closely with local institutions, CSSPs have been able to respond to local conditions that affect institutional capacity and work with a range of institutions. In Ghana, IFPRI's capacity-strengthening investments began in the 1990s with a policy outreach project that posted a research fellow to the government's planning commission and offered courses, workshops, and short overseas training for commission staff. When IFPRI launched the Ghana Strategy Support Program (GSSP) in 2005, investment in capacity strengthening expanded substantially. The GSSP posted staff to the Ministry of Food and Agriculture in Accra to support the program's goals of improving agricultural development strategy and building the data- and knowledge-base for applied policy research. As the

GSSP evolved, its in-country presence allowed for a shift in the mix of activities to meet changing needs and to expand successful activities. Evaluations of IFPRI's experience in Ghana found that capacity-strengthening investments not only built up a cadre of trained staff but also increased government interest in using data and analytic work as the basis for policymaking.

Regional Approaches

In South Asia and East Africa, IFPRI launched regional policy networks as a means to address weak and uneven local capacity to conduct food and agricultural policy research. The Policy Analysis and Advisory Network for South Asia (PAANSA), launched in 2002, brought together about 50 individual members from six South Asian countries under IFPRI management. PAANSA sponsored local and collaborative research, as well as a wide range of other capacity-strengthening events—workshops, brainstorming sessions, policy dialogues, and publication projects. PAANSA members participated in an exchange program with IFPRI's headquarters, often using the visit to collaborate with staff on analysis and write-up of their research projects.

The 2020 Vision East Africa Network, initiated in 1999 and also made up of six countries, facilitated country- and regional-level research through a competitive grants program. Country teams, assembled by leading national policymakers and researchers, were instrumental in identifying important policy and research gaps, which were addressed through a competitive grants program that ran for several years. IFPRI provided critical support through training in proposal writing, analytic methods, and communication strategies and held forums for dissemination of results.

As Africa began to build a continental structure for policy analysis through the New Partnership for Africa's Development, IFPRI posted a senior research advisor to this new local organization. Since then, IFPRI has played a critical supporting role in the institutional development of the region's Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program and a related regional network, the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support Systems (ReSAKSS).

ReSAKSS, established in West, East and Central, and Southern Africa, function as an information network for strategic analysis and knowledge management. Capacity strengthening to support development policy analysis is achieved through knowledge sharing, workshops on requested topics, and course offerings. Training has covered data collection, management, and analysis; geographic information systems; monitoring and evaluation; and methodologies. In addition to targeting specific capacity gaps, these activities benefit from the network delivery system, which allows for the pooling of resources and knowledge across regions.

In the newly established countries of Central Asia, IFPRI worked with the CGIAR Consortium to build an informal regional network for food policy and poverty reduction during the transition from centrally planned economies to market economies, beginning in 1997. In addition to workshops and presentations, collaborative research plays a key role in the development of analytical capacity and has led to peer-reviewed publications. In appreciation of the challenging work carried out by IFPRI in the region, the Uzbekistan government recognized a former director general as a distinguished professor.

Learning from Experience

Decades of capacity strengthening have paid valuable dividends to both IFPRI and its partners. An extensive 2013 impact evaluation pointed to four areas where IFPRI's capacity-strengthening work has had a notably positive impact. These were collaborative research; innovative training programs, such as PhD support schemes; support to institutions for building data systems, survey work, and analysis activities; and capacity strengthening that was embedded in broad regional programs.

Equally important, the evaluation pointed to the factors that underlie successful capacity-strengthening programs.

Local presence of IFPRI staff has proven to be one of the most important factors in successful capacity strengthening because it allows for better understanding of local needs and context and the identification of suitable partner organizations. CSSPs have improved delivery of capacity strengthening by posting staff locally, allowing for multifaceted programs with the flexibility to meet changing needs. The value-added of regional networks lies in the opportunities created for researchers, stakeholders, and policymakers from different countries to share lessons and experiences. Going forward, IFPRI will continue to give a central place to capacity strengthening, building on its experience with collaborative research, innovative approaches, country-based knowledge, and regional networks to make a sustainable impact on food policy.

Resources

For IFPRI's capacity-strengthening research, see <http://www.ifpri.org/program/capacity-strengthening-program>.

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