

### Methods of Capacity Needs Assessment - A Discussion Note

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#### INTRODUCTION

Capacity strengthening programs often do not achieve their intended objectives due to poor targeting of the participants and mismatch between the capacity needs and the capacity development activities. In designing a capacity strengthening program, two types of assessments are needed.

1. The current capacity needs to be assessed and measured.
2. The optimal level of capacity needs to be determined within the context of the country.

The combination of the two assessments identifies the capacity gaps, their location, and their magnitude, which leads to the formulation of efficient, country-specific capacity strengthening strategies.

It is increasingly recognized that assessing capacity needs of individuals for their skill gaps alone is not enough to address the capacity challenges. Organizational and institutional capacity gaps need to be understood for effective use of human capacity. The case of Ghana is typical as exemplified by the recent institutional rationalization undertaken by the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MoFA) (Kumawuet al. 2010).

This self-evaluation of MoFA clearly indicates that lack of team effort, weak collaboration among line departments, poor communications, absence of annual performance assessment of individuals, and capacity development activities that are not based on clear understanding of the organizational needs are among the challenges for effective functioning of the Policy, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate (PPMED) of MoFA. In this brief we use this context to highlight key issues the public sector faces in assessing their capacity needs—the first and fundamental step in improving human and organizational performance.

#### APPROACHES TO CAPACITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Assessing capacity is a complex task. Its subjective nature has led to the development of a number of approaches:

- United Nations Development Program (UNDP) capacity assessment framework

- The European Centre for Development Policy Management's 5-C approach
- Managing for Development Results CAP-Scan diagnostic review

These three approaches have been developed to assess capacity needs, depending on their objectives and the context of the development projects and programs that require the capacity being assessed.

UNDP assesses capacity from three dimensions: points of entry, core issues, and cross-cutting functional capacities. Points of entry refer to the level (individual, organization, or enabling environment) from which to start an assessment. The core issues define the scope of the assessment and may include any of the following elements: leadership, policy and legal framework, mutual accountability mechanisms, public engagement, human resources, financial resources, physical resources, and environmental resources. Lastly, the UNDP approach prioritizes five functional capacities: engage in multistakeholder dialogue; analyze a situation and create a vision; formulate policy and strategy; budget, manage, and implement; and monitor and evaluate (UNDP 2007).

The 5-C approach describes capacity as the intersection of five core capabilities of organizations: capability to commit and engage, capability to carry out tasks, capability to relate and attract resources and support, capability to adapt and self-renew, and capability to balance diversity and coherence. It assesses individual and system-level capacities through the lens of the organization (Baser and Morgan 2008).

The CAP-Scan review scores governments in four capacity building stages—awareness, experimentation, transition, and sustainable implementation. This is done in the context of five pillars—planning and budgeting, monitoring and evaluation, statistics, leadership, and accountability and partnerships (MfDR 2009). In what follows, we describe an approach that has been developed by IFPRI over the years to assess capacity needs for food policy research, analysis, and implementation, which is built on

various elements from these approaches and our own trial and error.

## CAPACITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR FOOD POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

IFPRI's approach to capacity assessment begins with an assessment of both the supply of and the demand for capacity at three levels, individual, organization, and enabling environment. The demand for capacity is determined by the objectives of policy-making, which in turn is determined by country strategies, goals, and plans for development. These strategies identify the relevant sectors and ministries, and subsequently, the subsectors and departments, all of which are expected to contribute to the policy design and implementation process at some point. Thus the capacities that will enable them to fully and effectively contribute depend on the extent of their expected contribution, with whom they interact, and during which stages of the policy process.

The supply of capacity is measured through a three-stage capacity assessment process as illustrated in Figure 1. In all three stages, close consultations with the stakeholders and individuals responsible for, or representatives of, various organizations feed the information base on the demand and supply of capacity.

Stage 1 identifies the relevant players and organizations, enumerates their capacities, and assesses their efficiency. Stage 2 identifies the specific capacity needs of each player and organization at each level, and Stage 3 identifies how the individuals and organizations come together in the policymaking environment. The gap between the demand and supply is the capacity gap.

Stage 1 of the capacity needs assessment consists of three parts. The first part of Stage 1 is the enumeration of the capacities of the departments and subsectors identified in the demand assessment. For example, in the context of food and agricultural policymaking, this begins with a headcount of the researchers at the relevant ministries, agricultural economics departments at higher education institutions, agricultural policy organizations, and other relevant think tanks. Researchers are categorized by their education level (doctoral, masters, or bachelors) and areas of expertise. Researchers who work in multiple areas are scaled by the percentage of time spent on the relevant areas to determine the number of full-time equivalent researchers. The availability of financial and physical resources, such as research grants, salaries, and fellowships, office/laboratory space, computers and software, technology, electricity, and telephone and internet connection are also assessed.

The quality of the human resources can be measured through the quality of their outputs. The number of publications a researcher produces each year is a standard measure of productivity, and is IFPRI's metric for quality of policy research capacity.

Because local publications vary tremendously in quality, only internationally published articles will be counted to ensure a minimum level of quality has been met. Being able to publish internationally is also indicative of a number of different aspects of capacity – writing skills, analysis skills, availability of analytical software, reliability of data, funding, and up-to-date knowledge of recent international research and scientific methods.

The second part of Stage 1 involves an assessment of all core research and non-research organizations that are relevant to the policy research and policymaking process, including all ministries and departments, federal statistical agencies, research organizations, higher education institutes, civil society organizations (CSOs), and private sector firms. These organizations' structural and functional capacities to participate in the policy process are assessed through a number of channels. First, does the organization have a clear vision, mission, and strategy? Can it attract and maintain qualified staff to fulfill its mandate? Does it have the physical and financial resources to support its staff? Is the staff effectively managed? Does the staff produce its expected outputs in a timely fashion? Such questions are asked using scales to determine the extent to which each factor hinders an organization's contributions to the policy process.

The last part of Stage 1 identifies the existence of a national council, a parliamentary committee, or a taskforce with the relevant research focus. The members and their affiliations are studied for their roles in the policy process. These members are also assessed for their educational achievement, knowledge of the sector, and ability to access relevant information and constructively add to the policy dialogues.

Stage 2 is an enumeration of the specific capacity needs of each individual and organization. With regard to individual capacity, this stage explores how many more researchers are needed in each research discipline, and with what level of education. What are the resources required to be able to achieve an optimal level of capacity—training in statistical software, writing classes, modeling, econometric methods courses, proposal writing, consistent funding, research support, access to journals, faster internet connection? Organizations also have specific capacity needs that are surveyed at this stage. For example, they may highlight a need for support in devising annual strategies, preparing budgets, determining adequate pay scales, strengthening leadership of managerial staff, enhancing incentive structures for employees, increasing public awareness of their organization, or enhancing their communication strategies.

The third stage of the capacity assessment process is a comprehensive assessment of how the individuals, organizations, and policy committees come together to create effective, strategy-specific, evidence-based policies. This is highly context-specific; a

large number of factors affect the functioning of the policy system. The first element is the structure of the policy process itself, its conduciveness to multi-stakeholder consultations, and how transparent a process it is. Second are the institutional arrangements that govern how organizations and individuals interact, which includes the formal laws and regulations and informal arrangements, such as social norms and cultural practices. The third factor is the availability of local capacity to build capacity as needed. Lastly are the political institutions that influence the demand for and development of policies.

The capacity needs identified in Stages 2 and 3 are then reviewed for the extent to which they hinder the functioning of the policy process. The specificity of the identified capacity needs facilitates easy identification of appropriate capacity strengthening approaches. The prioritization of capacity development investments is done by identifying the weakest links and targeting them first. This ensures that at the very least the system is functioning. Issues that can be addressed immediately should be given priority, followed by short-term projects, and then long-term projects. As with the capacity assessment, capacity strengthening activities must be country-specific. Cultural, economic, social, historical, environmental, and geographical factors influence how a country operates, and care must be taken to ensure that capacity strengthening activities are country-specific. Below we provide a brief description of how such an assessment was implemented in Nigeria.

## KEY INSIGHTS FROM NIGERIA

IFPRI's approach to supporting the agricultural transformation process in Nigeria was to provide evidence-based research for policymaking in the various subsectors of agriculture (Babu et al. 2012). The main challenge was to understand how the supply of information transformed into a program of action as a result of demand for research at the federal, state, and local levels. Newman et al. (2012) describe this demand for research evidence as the combination of the "capacity to access, evaluate, and use research and the motivation to do so." IFPRI followed a similar approach to assess individual, organizational, and policy process capacity to demand research evidence for policymaking. At the

federal level, the capacity for using generated information was found to be in need of strengthening. We looked at the actors and players of the policy process to determine who will benefit from research information—ministries of agriculture, parliamentary committees or taskforces, parastatals, public and private sector decision-makers, or civil society organizations (including research-oriented and action-oriented organizations). In particular, we tried to understand what role it is that each organization wanted to play in the policy process and what was missing to do so effectively.

We asked what capacities were needed (or what capacities needed to be refined, rearranged, or strengthened) in order to transform them into effective participants in the policy process. This query generated a range of needs that once addressed, would make the policy process more functional. Three systematic areas were assessed:

- Policy/strategy design
- Monitoring and evaluation, accountability, and tracking
- Knowledge management

These systems were examined at the federal, state, and local levels in consultation with individual organizations. Within these organizations and policy process groups, individual skill levels were also assessed.

## CONCLUSION

Capacity assessment approaches are inherently country- and context-specific. It is increasingly realized that assessing and filling the skill gaps of individuals through short-term training programs is grossly inadequate to address the capacity challenges (Babu et al. 2007). Organizational capacity and the capacity of the policy process systems as a whole need to be studied. Self-assessments are powerful in generating action needed for internalizing capacity development processes (Kumawu et al. 2010). Capacity assessments need to be tailor-made to meet the strategic goals of the policymakers and must be aligned with the investment plans and timeframes for achieving such goals.

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