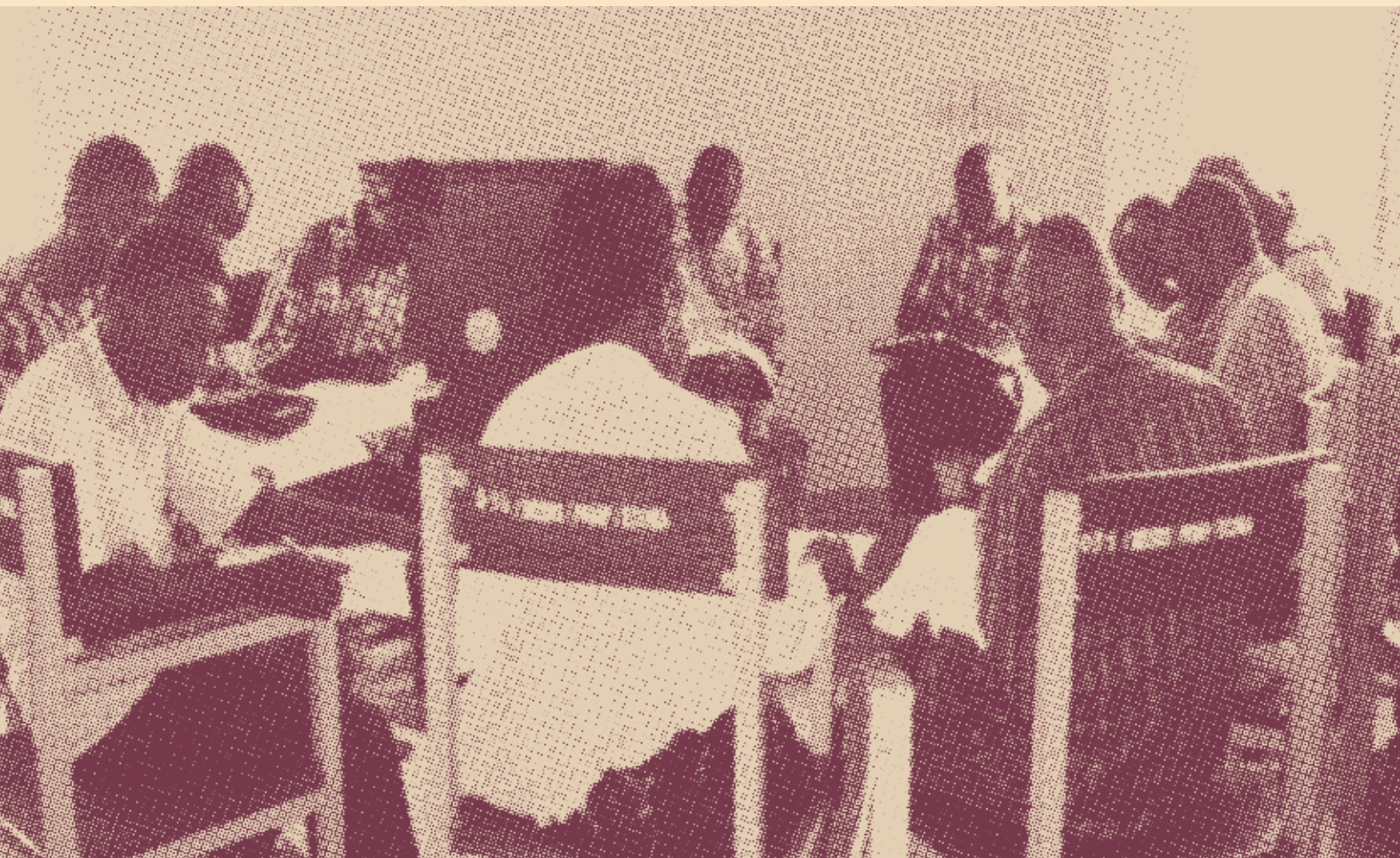

EXPERIENCE CAPITALIZATION – TRAINING, TEACHING AND PRACTISING IT IN BENIN

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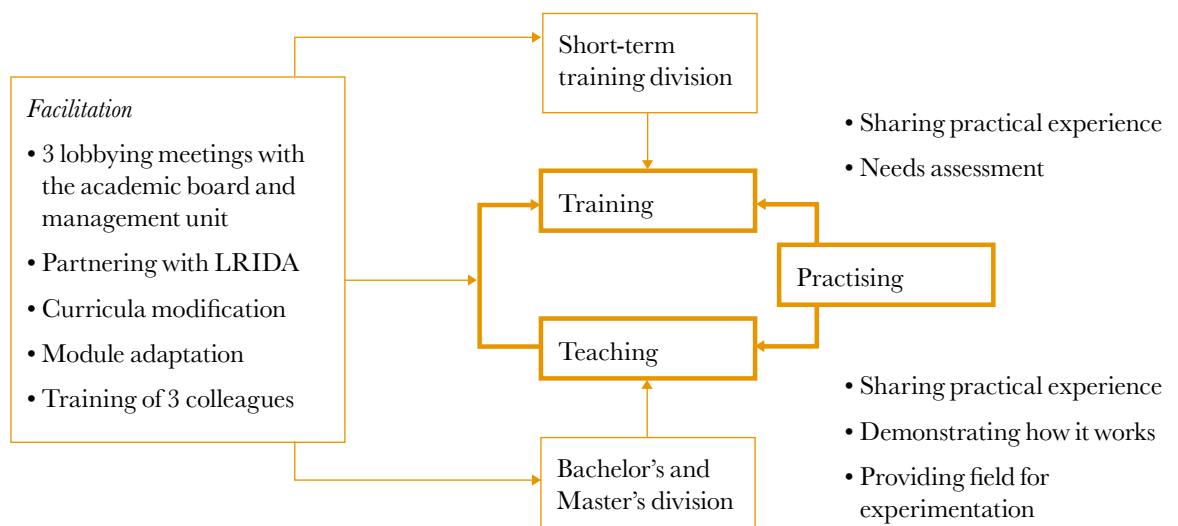


As an education and training institution, the experience capitalization institutionalization strategy of the Advanced Distance Training Centre for Agriculture (CePeSA) covers three aspects: including experience capitalization modules in the training curricula; including training on capitalization in our portfolio of fee-based short-term training services for agricultural development workers; and implementing processes to capitalise the relevant experiences of the centre. The capacity to adapt training modules and methods is crucial for meeting the needs of different target groups and client organisations.

*Cover “Learning by doing”:
staff members recording data
and evidence to show their
activities and performance*

The Advanced Distance Training Centre for Agriculture, CePeSA, based at the University of Parakou in Benin, was created in 2010 to provide training services to clients who live in remote areas for professional or social reasons. A small management unit was set up to lead operational activities, while a pedagogic council is responsible for the strategic decision related to the development of new training programmes, new partnerships, recruitments, etc.

The management unit includes one division for short-term courses (of 1 to 4 weeks), generally followed before a bachelor’s or a master’s degree. About 100 new students come to the centre each year to improve their competencies in various domains of agriculture and rural development, such as agricultural advisory services, animal breeding, crop production, or natural resources management. The demand for such a training centre is actually very high, also in other



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countries in West and Central Africa. Millions of people are missing out on the opportunity for advanced training. In Benin, such a training centre exists only in the agricultural sector. Our experience can inspire many other centres to develop appropriate programmes for various target groups.

Targeting the managers of education and training centres and also capitalization facilitators, this article reflects on how experience capitalization practices can be integrated into training organisations, showing the path we followed. We first describe how we started the process and brought other stakeholders on board, then we present our three key operating areas (Figure 1). The first one is based on the addition of capitalization modules in the training curricula so that all the master's students in our training centre become familiar with the experience capitalization approach. The second refers to its inclusion in our portfolio of fee-based short-term training services offered to agricultural development professionals. The third one is about capitalising the relevant experiences of the centre.

Creating alliances, sensitisation and advocacy

Getting decision-making staff members on board was crucial for the successful adoption of experience capitalization. Planned activities included the steps to sensitise colleagues, board members and professionals; providing development workers with training opportunities on experience capitalization; and supporting the centre so that it would adopt and set up its own experience capitalization framework. In implementing these activities, CePeSA worked together with other institutions. For example, the centre signed a partnership agreement with the Laboratory of Research on Innovation for Agricultural Development (LRIDA) to share expertise and experiences as LRIDA is specialised in knowledge management. Together, the

organisations planned two meetings to develop a common understanding on all training projects and to plan activities. To bring colleagues on board, academic board meetings were held to show the importance of experience capitalization and to discuss the feasibility of its adoption in detail.

Experience capitalization was known by some of the participants as a tool that development professionals use to document a whole project experience. Based on a well-prepared advocacy plan, we agreed with the training centre pedagogic council to include capitalization modules in the training portfolio and curricula. In addition, a decision was made to start a capitalization process focusing on the critical issues related to our professional distance training programme, such as the development of training materials, the distance training management process, the evaluation of students and the organisation of training sessions.

Doing, teaching and training

Looking back, our strategy can be seen as having had three “legs”:

(a) *Doing*

CePeSA and LRIDA jointly ran two experience capitalization workshops. As a result, staff members now systematically record data and evidence showing their activities and performance. At the meetings held at the end of each academic year, a session is dedicated to exploring, documenting and drafting capitalization outputs, and the head of the division in charge of capitalization issues finalises the writing and editing process. Articles will be published on LRIDA's website, which is also in charge of the quality control of all articles. For 2018, the training centre is about to publish its first capitalization article:

Le CePeSA : un dispositif durable de formation des techniciens agricoles en emploi pour la professionnalisation de l'agriculture.

(b) *Teaching*

In 2018, for the first time, 30 master's students got to know the concept, process and tools needed for an experience capitalization process. During one week, they went through the whole training module with an emphasis on the capitalization principles and on the conditions needed for it, as participants did not have a concrete capitalization project (yet). Arrangements are now in place for this module to be given each year to all master's students.

(c) *Training*

We organised four training sessions for different target groups, including master's students, projects managers from public and private organisations, the local district staff in charge of documentation and of archiving project information, and staff from other public/private agricultural training and education organisations.

Participants at the first training session were master's students and the 25 participants who attended the second training were development professionals. For the 5-day training course, they paid 40,000 FCFA (€60), an amount equivalent to the minimum guaranteed monthly salary in Benin. The third training session was the result of CePeSA being asked by DEDRAS, a national non-governmental

organisation, to support 15 local government staff members in identifying cases to be capitalised, and to write articles. The fourth training was part of the facilitation process the centre had been asked to run by a vocational education and training project supported by the German Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).

The objective of each one of these processes was to identify and share best practices in agricultural education and training at agricultural schools and universities. Best practices should address issues such as gender inequality, training, training evaluation and sustainability, and support for employment. The process of facilitating an experience capitalization process included a call for proposals, pre-selection of promising cases, a face-to-face training workshop, and the provision of technical support to all authors for improving and finalising their articles.

A selection committee, which includes representatives from academia, ministry departments in charge of agricultural planning and training, the national platform for vocational training and different training centres, was set up to assess the submitted articles. The selection committee selected five best practice articles out of those which were submitted for publication.

Right More than 100 persons joined the training courses; all of them with different professional profiles and representing various institutions



Except for the first workshop, the training sessions were very practical as participants were expected to produce capitalization articles that could be shared easily. The quality of these articles was better after the last session as training performance improved with time; we developed more practical tools for guiding the processes, and we also improved the way we coached participants between the meetings.

The four training sessions, all of which were held over the course of one year, were attended by more than 100 men and women with different professional profiles and representing various institutions.

The trainings were evaluated from the trainers' perspectives and also from the participants' perspectives. Two colleagues were continuously involved in the training and the capitalization processes, something that gave them the opportunity to learn more about the approach.

Success and limiting factors

We can say that we have been successful in institutionalising the experience capitalization approach in our training centre because we designed the process in such a way that we did not need to request any financial support. The specific skills that were needed included data analysis, article writing and publishing; these roles were assigned to those working at the existing structures (divisions). At the same time;

- The capacities and skills of facilitators to lobby decision-makers, build a team, coach colleagues, and adapt modules to clients' requirements were met;
- The capitalization training modules developed by CTA provided very useful materials that we adapted to meet the specific expectations of our clients;

- The openness of the management unit and the academic board of the centre to new ideas eased the adoption of the approach.. Without their support, it would not have been possible to bring changes to the curricula and to get the logistic support needed to provide training to development professionals;
- Colleagues' willingness and commitment made it possible to build human resources. Many people are now able to facilitate capitalization processes and to train students and colleagues.

Practising experience capitalization, and learning and sharing lessons, is a powerful way to demonstrate how it works. This shows practical experiences and generates lessons which can be shared with students and trainees. This is especially useful for young students who do not have a large experience in development work.

The capacity to adapt training modules and methods is crucial for meeting the needs of different target groups, in the same way as developing new learning materials. A capacity to adapt to different contexts is also required when it comes to addressing clients' requirements, regarding e.g. the duration of a training course or the availability of training equipment. This remark applies particularly to organisations such as NGOs and farmer organisations, which request training for their staff members. Because of the resources they have available, they may be willing to ask for short (3 days), medium (5 days) or long (more than 1 week) versions of the experience capitalization training process. In addition, there is always a need to adapt methods according to the training facilities that are available. (One of the limiting factors, as we saw, is the lack of comfortable training rooms and/or equipment.)

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Above The demand for training centres is very high, also in other countries in West and Central Africa

The way forward

Institutional settings and human resources are in place for CePeSA to continue teaching and training on experience capitalization. Each year, we plan to publish two capitalization articles. Two training sessions will now be systematically organised each year, one for master's students and the other for professionals. We are also open to the possibility of more training courses if requested. Our main challenge now is to support the Faculty of Agriculture and the University of Parakou develop and implement a capitalization plan. Our first needs assessment showed that this will be very useful for sharing experiences and knowledge with other institutes/faculties with regard to teaching and supervising large classes and groups of students.



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