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INTERNATIONAL
FOOD
POLICY RESEARCH
INSTITUTE

BEST PRACTICES

Strengthening Policy Research
Capacity around the World



WHY

CAPACITY STRENGTHENING FOR DEVELOPMENT MATTERS

To overcome poverty and food insecurity, developing countries must design and put in place policies based on sound research and analysis. Policy research requires strong analytical skills, extensive experience, and a comprehensive knowledge of the local policy environment. But many poor countries have a shortage of people and institutions with the capacity to conduct policy research.

Much of the research on food policy is currently organized on an international level to generate information useful to a range of developing countries. Because this research often involves collaboration between developed- and developing-country researchers, it can over time help increase developing countries' capacity for policy research. In the long run, strengthening the capacity of developing countries to conduct their own policy research and analysis will ultimately help them to solve their own policy problems and reduce their dependence on external policy advice.

IFPRI and other research institutions in developed countries have worked for the past several decades to help developing countries increase their capacity to conduct policy research. Here is a review of the options for capacity strengthening for policy research, an overview of IFPRI's work in this area, and a summary of the best practices in capacity strengthening, as shown by experience.



OPTIONS

FOR STRENGTHENING INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY

Strengthening policy institutions can attract and retain people with a capacity for policy education, research, and analysis. Four successful approaches have been used to strengthen developing-country institutions in policy research and analysis.

Long-term training for institutional capacity.

This approach involves posting developed-country staff in developing countries and training local staffs through postgraduate programs at developed-country universities. Such a program typically takes 10–15 years to show results, but its effects can eventually multiply as participants pass on their training to others. Whether local institutional programs are sustainable depends on how well they retain staff and continue to develop local capacity.

Regional networks. Regional networks involve pooling regional and donor resources to develop institutional capacity in developing-country organizations and to coordinate their activities. This approach can bring countries together to address regional topics and capacity problems.

Regional institutional strengthening. In some cases donors provide grants to developing-country institutions to establish economic policy research centers with the aim of targeting the best local talent with links to local policy-makers. Through this approach, developing countries can avoid depending on external policy analysis and research and can promote the capacity and credibility of their own national institutions in policy research.

Regional centers for postgraduate training. Donors may identify an existing, potentially capable academic institution and strengthen it with outside technical experts to create a strong regional center for research and training. Long-term sustainability can be created with a local focus and little dependence on outside assistance.



OPTIONS

FOR STRENGTHENING INDIVIDUALS' CAPACITY

Several approaches focus directly on strengthening the capacity of policy researchers and analysts within existing institutions.

Collaborative research and advisory services

to developing-country governments. Developed-country institutions may place staff in developing-country ministries for 1–2 years to conduct collaborative research and establish systems for generating and analyzing information. In return, a

number of their developing-country counterparts visit developed-country institutions for training programs of several months. This approach tends to make policy analysts more confident about recommending policy changes and policymakers more willing to accept research results.

Contract research. Contract research provides grants to developing-country organizations to conduct research on a topic of regional interest. It generates a body of knowledge while building policy research and analysis capacity with minimal supervisory support.

Visiting research. As part of joint research programs, collaborators visit developed-country organizations and work with researchers there on analyzing data and preparing reports on topics relevant to solving policy problems of their countries. This approach may involve short-term visits to developed-country institutions or long-term interaction and exchange of high-level policy advisory staff from developing countries under the supervision of recognized experts in the field.

Joint product approach. Innovative capacity-strengthening programs can achieve more than one objective. This approach offers support to developing-country students in master's and Ph.D. programs through collaborative research programs in developing countries. Students' dissertation research is conducted on a topic of significant policy relevance to the home-country policymakers. Outputs include both the degree and the policy-relevant dissertation.

Short-term training workshops. Workshops on policy analysis for civil servants and policymakers in developing countries typically last 2–4 weeks and include lectures, seminars, group discussions, and hands-on exercises. These workshops develop narrow but highly relevant skills and can increase the demand for research outputs.

IFPRI'S TRAINING AND CAPACITY-STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES

IFPRI's training and capacity-strengthening activities have imparted policy research and analytical skills to almost 1,300 professionals from more than 50 developing countries over the past 15 years. The scale and focus of IFPRI's training have varied widely, from one-on-one training with policy researchers, to small groups of key policy analysts, to large groups of enumerators. Capacity-strengthening activities have been integral to IFPRI's research projects throughout their life cycle, from training for strategic planning and data collection techniques before research begins, to policy communication training after research ends. Topics have been in line with IFPRI's broad research areas: food consumption and nutrition, production technology and environmental management, markets and structural studies, and macroeconomics and trade policies.

IFPRI's training and capacity-strengthening activities yield two major benefits: first, they empower participants by exposing them to key emerging food policy issues and helping them become informed discussants in their countries. Second, they give participants techniques and methods for analyzing food policy options in their countries.



Suresh Babu/IFPRI

FIVE LESSONS ON CAPACITY STRENGTHENING

IFPRI's training and capacity-strengthening experience yields five main lessons that point the way to best practices.

Choose institutions carefully

Long-term research collaboration builds institutional capacity, which in turn helps support and maintain human capacity but does not guarantee it. Choosing the right institution is crucial to the success of capacity-strengthening efforts. Academic institutions, for example, are better suited than other types of institutions to strengthening capacity for policy research and policy analysis training.

Use demand-driven approaches

When the developing-country governments and institutions take the lead on assessing the need for policy analysis capacity and linking it to policy decisionmaking, the benefits of capacity-strengthening efforts can be manifold. How well developing

countries can make such an assessment, however, depends on their existing capacity for identifying gaps. Short-term technical assistance can help in this effort.

Match the approach with the capacity needs

Increasing the impact of policy research can involve strengthening two types of capacity: policy research and analysis and policy training. Organizing a variety of courses, ranging from data collection methods to specialized policy courses, helps to meet the capacity-strengthening needs of various groups of participants and to generate capacity in various spheres.



Organize training locally

Locally organized training has proven to be cost-effective in creating an overall capacity for understanding policy issues and for generating information from the field on specific policy problems. Supplementing local training with overseas training for selected policy analysts can help create a core group of trainers. Postgraduate training should ideally take place at home or in a neighboring country to prevent brain drain. Regional cooperation in training and policy research can help.

Promote sustainability

Whether a newly developed capacity for policy analysis continues to be used depends on the motivation and commitment of participants and on the continued demand

for policy information. Sustainability must be built into training and capacity-strengthening activities.



IFPRI

FUTURE CHALLENGES

Despite the efforts of several organizations in the past four decades, success in strengthening policy research and analysis capacity has been limited. Resources to support capacity-strengthening activities are on the decline, and long-term support is almost nonexistent. Trained personnel have been lost through death and disease, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa.

New digital technologies are creating new opportunities for sharing research methods and results with developing-country partners and institutions. Distance learning and other new knowledge networks may prove to be cost-effective in the long run. Although information technologies can bring developing countries closer to learning resources, access to these technologies remains a challenge.

Globalization exposes developing-country policymakers and policy advisers to new opportunities, but taking advantage of these opportunities requires strong in-country capacity for policy research and formulation. The recent trend toward

decentralized planning and policymaking in many developing countries will require rethinking the approaches to policy analysis capacity strengthening.

To meet changing needs, capacity-strengthening efforts must be an integral part of policy research projects and programs for a long time to come. It can not be overemphasized that strengthening the ability of local institutions to generate and receive policy information can result in better policies and effective action that will not only save resources but also improve the well-being of millions of poor and malnourished in the developing world.

For More Information

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Established 1975

EXAMPLES

OF IFPRI'S IMPACT ON POLICY RESEARCH CAPACITY AROUND THE WORLD

OCTOBER 2000

These examples of IFPRI's capacity-strengthening activities and their impact in selected countries reflect approaches IFPRI has learned from its own experiences and those of other organizations.

MALAWI 1992–2000

Combining postgraduate education with collaborative policy research was cost-effective in developing original data sets for thesis research and for use by government agencies.

IFPRI helped Malawi's Bunda College of Agriculture establish a reputation as a regional policy research institution. By working with both policymakers and local academics, this approach increased the confidence and credibility of Bunda College and made policymakers more receptive to research conducted there.

During 1992–1996, IFPRI was instrumental in establishing the M.Sc. program in agricultural economics in the Rural Development Department (RDD) of Bunda College. In 1994, IFPRI and Bunda College, with support from the World Bank, created an Agricultural Policy Analysis Training Unit (APATU), which conducts short-term training courses for planners, agricultural economists, and others in the university and various government ministries. Today, these courses are conducted solely by the staff of Bunda College.

MOZAMBIQUE 1996–2000

To address the needs of Mozambique and other Portuguese-speaking countries, the approach in Mozambique combined features of regional and national institutional strengthening.

IFPRI trained more than 200 students at the Faculty of Agriculture and Forest Engineering (FAEF) of Eduardo Mondlane University in Mozambique and collaborated with and trained more than 40 technical staff members of the various ministries.

IFPRI researchers, outpost to the FAEF and the Poverty Alleviation Unit of the Ministry of Finance, developed a com-

plete set of teaching notes (in Portuguese), taught three subjects in the Rural Extension and Agricultural Economics program, and supervised senior thesis work for college seniors in the areas of food security, nutrition, and agricultural economics. A major food policy textbook translated into Portuguese through this effort is widely used in Brazil.

IFPRI was also involved in short-term training courses, and in-service training activities. One short-term course was attended by Angolan policy analysts, and it continues to be offered by Mozambicans for other Portuguese-speaking countries.

PAKISTAN Mid-1980s to the mid-1990s

IFPRI collaborative research helped to build policy research capacity and to abolish the government's wheat ration shops in 1987.

IFPRI was instrumental in mobilizing policy research capacity in the universities and government ministries of Pakistan. More than 100 candidates were trained in postgraduate education in economics and agricultural economics. Along with the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE), IFPRI helped to strengthen that organization's policy research capacity. The IFPRI-PIDE team was influential in generating policy dialog on several food and agriculture issues.

Together with researchers from PIDE and the Education Management Institute, IFPRI researchers conducted policy research that provided information for the Ministry of Education and other government agencies. More than 60 people, half of them women, were trained in data collection, data processing, and policy analysis.

Data collected through the collaborative research studies continues to be used by local and international researchers and by students in their theses and dissertations.

SELECTED

TRAINING AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING BY IFPRI AND THEIR IMPACTS, 1985–1999

| Location/ time period | Institutional linkages | Methods employed | Impacts |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Pakistan, 1985–1994 | Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Ministry of Food and Agriculture | Collaborative research, visiting research | Policy research leading to major policy changes |
| Bangladesh, 1988–2000 | Ministry of Food, Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Dhaka University | Short-term training, visiting research, contract research, collaborative research/advice | Major policy changes, local capacity for policy research |
| Malawi, 1992–2000 | Ministry of Agriculture, Bunda College of Agriculture at the University of Malawi | Long-term training, short-term training, visiting research, collaborative research | University emerged as regional center for policy analysis training |
| Ghana, 1994–1997 | National Development Planning Commission (NDPC), University of Development Studies | Collaborative research, personalized training, multidisciplinary training, decentralized training | Decentralized capacity for food and nutrition monitoring systems |
| Viet Nam, 1995–2000 | Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development | Visiting research, short- term training | Acceptance of major policy change/policy analysis capacity for continuation |
| Mozambique, 1996–2000 | Ministry of Finance, Eduardo Mondlane University | Personalized training, visiting research, collaborative multidisciplinary training | Regional capacity for food and nutrition policy analysis |
| East Africa 2020 Vision Network (Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Uganda), 1998–2002 | National policymakers, researchers, and NGO members | Consultative national policy dialogue, technical support of in-country research, training and exchange programs | Still in progress; signs of improved national and regional capacity to generate and use food policy analysis |

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