



## LESSONS NOTE

*November 2008*

### **STRENGTHENING POLICY RESEARCH CAPACITY IN AFRICA - LESSONS FROM THE PAST TWENTY YEARS**

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Lessons Notes report on best and replicable or avoidable practices in capacity building and development management by the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF), its grantees and partner institutions that undertake capacity building activities. The Notes are contributed by operations staff of the Foundation, its Technical Advisory Panels and Networks, beneficiaries of its support and partner institutions, and published periodically by the Knowledge Management and Program Support Department. Lessons Notes are essentially the views of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Foundation.

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# STRENGTHENING POLICY RESEARCH CAPACITY IN AFRICA - LESSONS FROM THE PAST TWENTY YEARS

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

To enhance economic growth, research-based policies and programs must be developed and implemented effectively. Designing and implementing appropriate policies and programs requires research, analytical, and governance capacity. The capacity for conducting policy research and managing research and policy institutions varies among countries in Africa.

Among the challenges to capacity strengthening faced by developing countries are inadequate in-country capacity, lack of access to high-quality education, institutional weaknesses, lack of multidisciplinary approaches to problem solving, limited in-country experience, lack of good governance, inadequate knowledge management, and failure to encourage innovation in future generations.

The capacity to design and implement successful policies and development programs is weaker in some nations than in others. Access to higher education is restricted because of costs and location. In addition, teaching resources are outdated and short-term training faces challenges in transferring knowledge in a sustainable manner. External technical assistance aimed at strengthening human and institutional capacity for policy research and analysis has had varying impact. And even when adequate educational capacity exists within a country, expatriates are often hired to do the job. But expatriates often lack the in-country experience needed to understand local problems and find appropriate solutions, in addition to being ipso facto unsustainable. For these reasons, policies and programs designed and implemented solely by foreign technical assistants have not been highly successful (Kanbur, 1995).

For policies and programs to be sustainable, the next generation of policy researchers, managers, program designers, and implementers must be trained in the latest analytical methods and must have access to current information. Unless adequate attention is paid to the quality and quantity of policy and program capacity at various levels, countries may continue to depend on external technical assistance despite the latter's unmitigated failure to build sustainable capacity for growth and poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa since the onset of independence in the 1960s.

The primary and immediate objective of policy research and analysis is to identify and analyze the static and dynamic welfare effects as well as the political economy of alternative policies; to enhance economic growth and reduce poverty in developing countries; and to effectively communicate the findings of the policy analysis and research to policymakers and other stakeholders in policy design and implementation, in the process targeting regular policy processes such as the trade policy process, the budget process and the poverty reduction

process. However, policy research is currently coordinated and implemented at the international level in an effort to generate 'public goods' that could be useful for several developing countries, notwithstanding the typically locale-specificity of in-country policy analysis and research. This is mostly the result of inadequate capacity for policy research and analysis in many developing countries. Albert et al. (2000) stress the need to strengthen the capacity at the individual and group levels, the institutional and organizational levels, and the overall institutional system level (legal, political, economical, and administrative frameworks). A long-term objective of policy research capacity strengthening is to share research methods and analytical skills with developing country collaborators, who would in turn apply them to inform domestic policy formulation and management. In the medium term, this approach could lead to a more effective capacity for policy analysis through collaborative research.

Given the high cost of policy research and analysis and the declining donor support for international development, how can indigenous capacity for conducting policy research and analysis be developed in Africa, in a sustainable manner? When will developing countries in Africa make the transition from being the recipients to being generators of policy research and independently address the development challenges facing them? What contribution can international research organizations make to enable national institutions in developing countries to design, implement and disseminate policy research and analysis? How can capacity for policy research and analysis be built cost-effectively in Africa? How do we meaningfully measure the performance of institutions and programs that build policy research and analytical capacity? What lessons could be learned from the existing approaches to capacity strengthening for policy research and analysis? To answer these questions, this paper presents a review of past experiences in strengthening policy research and analysis capacity through various projects and programs implemented in the last twenty years and draws lessons.

This review shows that strengthening policy research capacity through collaborative research can be an effective way of increasing and sustaining the impact of policy research. It also demonstrates that such enhanced capacity can lead to a multiplier effect, when a core group of country-level policy researchers and analysts emerge, who are able to identify, analyze, and solve policy challenges that the African countries face.

In the next section, a brief review of various capacity strengthening approaches for policy research and analysis is presented. Then, the impact of these approaches to capacity strengthening for policy research and analysis is evaluated using selected case studies. This is followed by several lessons learned, including good and avoidable practices. The paper ends with some concluding remarks.

## **2. A BRIEF REVIEW OF APPROACHES TO CAPACITY STRENGTHENING FOR POLICY RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS**

Policy research organizations, both international and regional, have been interested in strengthening in-country policy analysis and research capacity for several decades, and there is much to be learned from the various approaches that they have employed. The strategic approaches adopted by these organizations have generally been a function of three major factors: the mission of the organization, the financial resources available, and the contractual

arrangements reached between the donors and the partner organizations in developing countries.

As a point of departure, this section presents a brief review of recently documented approaches to capacity building for policy analysis and research, drawing on the concrete experience of various organizations. The best practices that can be gleaned from these approaches will be discussed in relation to specific cases of capacity strengthening activities implemented for the past 20 years. Table 1 (see Appendix) presents a typology of these approaches, which can be broadly divided into two categories: institutional capacity strengthening and individual human capacity strengthening. A detailed documentation of various approaches to capacity building for policy analysis and research in developing countries, and the best practices based on these approaches can be found in Babu (2000).

### *Institutional Capacity Strengthening*

Strong policy research institutions provide a foundation for attracting and retaining capacity for policy education, research, and analysis. It is now fully accepted that strong, competent and independent institutions, staffed by professionals with a high level of technical skills, offer the best hope for sustained improvements in public policy formulation and management. Furthermore, international development programs can achieve efficient outcomes only with improved capacity of the local institutions to absorb the programs (ODI, 2005). Several approaches have been pursued in the past to strengthen developing country institutions to undertake policy research and analysis. A select few are reviewed below.

*The long-term institutional strengthening approach* aims to build institutional capacity by outposting expatriate staff to developing countries while the local staff is trained through post-graduate education at developed country universities. A number of US universities followed this approach in the 1970s and 1980s, including the Harvard Institute of International Development in Kenya, Michigan State University in Zimbabwe, and Iowa State University in Zambia. However, such programs may not bear fruit in the short term, often doing so in ten to fifteen years following the exchange. While this approach has been successful, when the capacity needs to be built from scratch – given the growing number of educational and research institutions – such externally driven capacity development is not adequate to meet training needs. In addition, continuing such efforts may substitute for and cause the training capacity already present in many developing countries to go underutilized (Clark, 2000).

The sustainability of local institutional programs depends on their ability to retain staff and the future development of local capacity. Notwithstanding problems associated with the exchange efforts such as potential brain drain, these exchange programs have led to comparatively large capacity improvements, through multiplier effects as the beneficiaries of this approach pass on their skills to others. The brain-drain could be mitigated through limiting these exchanges to short-term programs such as Master's level programs, arrangements of periodic swaps of staff/sabbaticals/visiting fellows between developed and developing country institutions (ibid). Another approach being used to minimizing brain drain utilizes temporary and even virtual repatriation of individuals in cases where permanent repatriation is difficult or unlikely. This approach is being applied in the UNDP's Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) program and the International Organization for Migration's Return of

Qualified Nationals program (Lopes and Theisohn, 2003). For long-term and permanent repatriation approaches to be successful they will have to address both the supply and demand side of the local country's labor market (ibid).

*The regional network approach* allows for the pooling of regional and donor resources for developing institutional capacity in policy research and training at developing country organizations and enables the systematic coordination of research and training activities. Organizations practicing such an approach include the FANRPAN in Southern Africa, the regional program for East Southern and Central Africa, the Sustainable Food Security Foundation in Central West Africa (SADAOC), the Eastern and Central Africa Policy Analysis Network (ECAPAPA), and the 2020 East Africa Network for Policy Research and Analysis. Such efforts bring together countries to address regional topics and capacity problems. However, due to a heavy dependence on external funding, these organizations frequently face uncertainty and are not always sustainable. In addition, experience shows that ownership at the country level is still lacking.

*Regional institutional strengthening* aims to provide grants to regional institutions to initiate economic policy research centers with the aim of targeting the best local talent with links to local, in-country policy-makers. Examples of this approach include the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) efforts to strengthen a network of national policy research institutions, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research (CODESRIA), and the African Economic Research Consortium (AERC) (Ndulu, 1997). Regional institutional strengthening can avoid dependence on external technical assistance for policy analysis and research. In addition, it generates in-country capacity and promotes the credibility of national institutions involved in policy research. For example, there are regional networks such as the African Economic Research Consortium Network (AERC) that have been successful and made much progress in training activities. The network has grown from the initial 40 participants to 150 participants and the countries have retained this new capacity. In addition, the research generated within this network has been widely accepted in international and regional journals (Ndulu, 1997).

*Regional centers of excellence for postgraduate training* require that an existing, potentially capable academic institution be strengthened with outside technical experts to create a regional center of excellence for research and training. An example of this is GTZ's efforts to develop the University of Zimbabwe as an institution that offers high quality education in agricultural economics. Long-term sustainability can be created with a focus that is relevant to local needs and with little reliance on outside assistance; however, success depends on the appropriateness of the chosen institution. The recent approach to developing centers of excellence by the collaborative masters program on agricultural and applied economics in eastern and southern Africa (CMAAE) is illustrative. It brings together the combined strength of faculties in the region to develop future policy and analysis capacity ([www.agricultraleconomics.net](http://www.agricultraleconomics.net)).

### ***Human capacity strengthening approaches***

Several approaches have focused directly on strengthening the capacity of the policy researchers and policy analysts within existing institutions. These efforts can be grouped into five categories, namely:

### Contract Research

A range of organizations and networks are into the business of strengthening policy analysis and research capacity through contract research at the individual level. The African Capacity Building Foundation, the African Economic Research Consortium, the African Rural Policy Analysis Network, and other regional networks provide competitive grants for conducting policy research. This approach provides grants to in-country organizations and individuals to conduct research on common regional topics in order to generate a body of knowledge. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Michigan State University (MSU) program on food security gave research grants to SADC member countries in order to generate momentum within the existing capacity, to bring policy researchers together to facilitate information exchange and to influence policymaking in these countries. With minimal supervision, the research grants were useful to utilize local capacity and strengthen it. The International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) and International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT) used a similar approach in their attempt to strengthen economic and policy analysis capacity among the southern African National Agricultural Research Systems. While this approach helps to keep the existing capacity in place by encouraging continuing their research interest, a major challenge is the quality of research and improvement of skills by the participants. With limited supervision, high level of quality control is critical .

### Collaborative Research/Advisory Services to Developing Country Governments

Collaborative research programs conducted by universities in the North and international organizations continue to form a major source of policy capacity building. In the early 1990s, the Cornell Food and Nutrition Policy Program placed staff in several African country ministries for periods of 1-2 years to conduct collaborative research and to establish systems of information generation and analysis. In return, a number of their developing country counterparts visited Cornell University for training programs. In a similar vein, the Harvard Institute for International Development (HIID) has placed macroeconomic and food security advisors in the Ministries of Agriculture, Planning, and Finance. This approach continues to be applied in several countries either through direct placement of staff in the governments and the universities or through strategic support programs as the ones implemented by IFPRI in Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana, and Nigeria. These programs do result in action-oriented policy research, personalized training and enhanced capacity for policy analysis. Unfortunately, the sustainability of this approach continues to be poor due to frequent transfer of staff within the national systems. The retention of local capacity is higher when the staff of academic institutions is involved.

### Short-term Training Workshops

Despite the decline in funding, short-term training courses continue to be a popular approach both for organizers and recipients. A typical workshop would be a 2-4 week training course on policy analysis for civil servants and policy-makers in developing countries. The training would include lectures, seminars, group discussion, and hands-on exercises. Numerous organizations have offered policy analysis workshops including the World Bank Institute (WBI), UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Overseas Development Institute (ODI), and others. Short-term workshops develop narrow but

highly relevant skills and can increase the demand for research outputs. However, the direct use of this capacity for solving policy problems has been minimal and candidates are chosen often for political reasons, instead of their strategic positioning within the public-private-civil society policy nexus. Workshops are generally more successful in creating sustainable capacity if the participants chosen are already involved in policy analysis, thus manifesting the importance of initial conditions for policy analysis and research capacity across developing countries.

### Visiting Research

Short-term visits to developed country institutions through staff exchange programs have proved to be beneficial. As part of a joint research program, collaborators visit developed country organizations and work with resident researchers. They analyze data and prepare reports on topics relevant to policy problems of their countries. This approach enhances the capacity of the selected institutions and develops a core group of policy researchers and analysts who would be available for long-term collaboration. It also provides a forum for the mutual exchange of ideas. For instance, in the early 1990s, the Kellogg Foundation's staff exchange program consisted of long-term interaction of high-level policy advisory staff from developing countries with experts in the field. This approach has focused less on specific problems and more on generating capacity for dialogue and building the credibility of local partners. Furthermore, it has been useful for generating long-term vision for their countries.

### Joint Product Approach

This approach involves long-term training enabling students to earn a Masters or PhD degree. Lippincott (1997) strongly supports graduate training to strengthen capacity because most of the external advisors who provide advice to these countries possess advanced degrees. Innovative capacity strengthening programs such as these can achieve more than one objective. For example, Michigan State University offers support to developing country students in Masters and PhD programs through its collaborative research programs in Africa. Similar sandwich approaches are gaining momentum for building long-term research capacity. The dissertation research is conducted on a topic of significant policy relevance to the home country policy-makers under a collaborative agreement. Outputs include the degree and the policy-relevant dissertation. Experience has shown that for both local research and policy analysis capacity to improve, researchers must participate in a structured program that provides opportunities to develop skills in data collection, research management, analysis, and policy communication.

Each of these human resource approaches described above involves a selection process for participants. Lippincott (ibid) describes five different methods for this process. The first approach is called "*targeted, narrowly focused approach*" where an institution or ministry determines future needs for the next 3-5 years. Once these needs are assessed, individuals are selected for training in relevant advanced degrees. This approach is a success if the needs determined hold true at least in the near future. The second method is the *pooled-resources approach*. This approach gathers individuals with similar degree trainings from related organizations. A disadvantage to this approach is the possibility of uneven distribution of academic experiences. The *hit-or-miss approach* sends a few key individuals from an organization

to a university, with which the institution has developed a formal or informal affiliation. Although this method creates opportunities for networking, there is always the risk of these individuals preferring to remain in the countries they are visiting. Similarly, the *key individual approach* selects “rising stars.” Again, the problem lies in retaining the researchers in the developing countries. Finally, *saturation training approach* entails “flooding a particular organization with a pool of new knowledge”, providing “relevant academic training that is planned to enhance the future performance” as well as disciplines (ibid).

Given the limited resources for capacity development at all levels, there is increasing demand on the investors to show the impact of capacity strengthening program. While most of the approaches to measuring performance in capacity development limit themselves to output indicators, it is important to go beyond to identify the indicators of outcomes, influences, and impact. Institutional and individual impacts of capacity strengthening needs to be captured along with how such impact influence the enabling environment for better policy making and in turn influenced by the system level indicators of capacity development. Some of the case studies described below reflect this challenge.

### 3. CASE STUDIES

In this section we identify specific case studies based on the experience of one international research organization, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). IFPRI’s training and capacity strengthening activities have imparted policy research and analytical skills to almost 2,300 professionals from more than 50 developing countries over the past twenty years. The range of training methods has varied from one-on-one training with policy researchers to training small groups of key policy analysts and even large groups of enumerators. Training activities have included all of the integral parts of a research project, ranging from pre-research training for data collection to post-research policy communication. Other subjects involved data processing, data analysis, policy analysis, and report writing. A wide range of topics has been covered by IFPRI training in line with its broad research areas –including food consumption and nutrition, production technology and environmental management, market and trade policies, national strategy development, and development of national agricultural research systems.

A set of policy research and analysis capacity strengthening activities carried out by IFPRI between 1985 and 2005 in Africa are given below. In addition, several specific lessons have been derived from an impact assessment of IFPRI’s training and capacity strengthening activities. This assessment indicated that IFPRI’s policy research capacity strengthening activities yield two major benefits. First, they expose participants to key emerging food policy issues, which allows them to become informed discussants in their countries. Second, they equip participants with the techniques necessary for analyzing various food policy alternatives. The tools also help key players to formulate and implement food policies. Since its inception, IFPRI’s approach to capacity strengthening for policy research and analysis has evolved, adopting lessons from its own experiences and the experience of other organizations. This section broadly reviews IFPRI’s training and capacity strengthening activities and the impact of these interventions in select SSA countries, with a keen eye on harvesting lessons learnt, and best- and avoidable practices.

### 3.1 MALAWI – INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY FOR POLICY RESEARCH

In Malawi, policy outreach activities provided an entry point for policy research activities. Following the initial phase that focused on food and nutrition monitoring, the program shifted to formal and informal training in policy analysis and associated research. During 1992-1996, the institute was instrumental in establishing the Masters of Science agricultural economics program in the Rural Development Department (RDD) of the Bunda College of Agriculture (BCA). UNICEF supported this work, which included curriculum development, teaching, and supervision of students during the thesis phase of the two-year degree program. There have been more than 40 Masters of Science graduates from the Agricultural Economics program at BCA since it began in 1993/94. UNICEF funded nine students, Rockefeller Foundation funded three students, DFID (ODA) funded two students, and the British Council and IDRC each funded one student (Zeller et al, 1997).

In addition to the Master of Science program, the Agricultural Policy Analysis Training Unit (APATU) was established in 1994 with the support of the World Bank. The APATU involves short-term training courses in quantitative analysis, food security and nutrition policy, environmental and natural resources policy, monitoring and evaluation, regional trade and microeconomic policy, gender in development, and participatory rural appraisal. These courses were intended for planners, agricultural economists, and others in Universities and various Ministries of the Government of Malawi (GOM). Subsequent courses were conducted solely by the staff of BCA in the following years.

By organizing a policy research priority-setting workshop for national and international agencies in 1993, the stage was set for research and capacity building activities. This workshop was followed by a capacity needs assessment with Government of Malawi Ministries to identify the training gaps for policy analysis among their staff. In general, capacity needs assessments help answer the important questions: capacity for what, and for whom? These proved very useful in subsequent years.

#### *Perceptions of the impact of policy research training in Malawi*

By far the most favorable aspect of the entire IFPRI-Malawi program (including the research) was its contribution to the Masters Degree and short course training programs. The enumerators who were trained in food security and nutrition monitoring (FSNM) techniques in the early 1990s by the IFPRI team have been used extensively since to conduct similar surveys. For example, APRU used 30 of the enumerators in a recent survey of the food security and nutrition situation in the estate sector. Of the 320 enumerators who were trained originally, 138 remained in the National Statistics Office undertaking similar activities for various Ministries as a common service. Recently all 138 enumerators have been transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation.

In 1996 and 1997, short-term policy analysis training courses were conducted in Washington, DC for 10 BCA and MOALD staff. These courses were well regarded by the participants. The training course under the auspices of APATU at BCA was appreciated by most. The natural resources component served two trainees well, positioning one for a subsequent project with CIFOR, and the other for a role in the Department of Environmental Affairs, where he is the

only economist. Participants from the MOALD found the courses especially valuable in designing food security and nutrition policies in times of disasters such as drought.

The role of IFPRI in helping to establish the new Masters Degree program in Agricultural Economics at BCA with the initial support of UNICEF was clearly pivotal and widely acknowledged. Staff developed the curriculum, taught courses, and supervised students. By requiring both coursework and a research thesis for the attainment of the degree, synergies between the FSNM primary data generation activities and the conduct of the students' research programs were generated. In all, nine of the 16 Masters graduates to date were supervised by collaborating staff members.

Most of the courses that were designed for the Master's program are still being taught, a testimony to their continuing relevance. Indeed, when these courses were first taught, many of the Faculty of the RDD sat in on the courses to enhance their own skills. No doubt, this participation has helped the Faculty to assume responsibility for these courses since the original course instructors are no longer there to teach the courses.

Many people interviewed spoke highly of the 1993 Workshop on setting priorities for food, agricultural, and nutrition policy research agendas (Ryan, 1999). The RDD used the workshop as a basis for establishing its research program and improving the Master's curriculum. The International Agricultural Research Centres who also attended the workshop used the outcome to guide their own agendas. Currently Malawi has the local capacity to produce the policy research and analytical capacity it needs for its economic policy management. Yet, continued support will be needed for some time to the local academic institutions to keep their capacity at the frontier of policy research and analysis.

### **3.2 GHANA – CAPACITY STRENGTHENING FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY PLANNING**

The policy outreach project implemented in Ghana was a variation of the Malawi model. An outposted research fellow was stationed in the National Development Planning Commission (NDPC) in Accra over a period of three years. The major focus of the project was the training and capacity strengthening of the staff of NDPC in policy analysis.

Training activities included several different types of courses: 1 to 3 month overseas training courses for NDPC staff, 2-4 week national training courses for district and regional planners, and 1 to 2 day workshops and seminars held at NDPC in Accra. In addition, the outposted research fellow worked closely with a Master of Science student from the University of Ghana's Department of Agricultural Economics.

#### ***Training Courses for NDPC Staff***

In 1995, an NDPC staff member participated in a short-course on poverty assessment while another staff member attended a training course focusing on the role of science and technology in increasing food crop production in Ghana. Additionally, a training workshop on 'Triple A Conceptual Framework for Understanding the Causes of Malnutrition' was held for all UNICEF

staff responsible for implementing food and nutrition interventions. In 1996, NDPC staff members attended a course on Food, Agricultural, and Natural Resource Policy Analysis in Washington, D.C.

### *National Training Courses*

A four-week course entitled 'Food and Nutrition Security for Health and Development' was offered at the University of Development Studies (UDS) in Tamale, Ghana. This course was a joint effort between the Department of Human Nutrition, Wageningen Agricultural University (WAU), The Netherlands, NDPC, and IFPRI with support from UNICEF-Ghana and DANIDA-Ghana. In 1996, the course was offered for a second time.

For the first course, participants were selected through an application process that was targeting the three northern regions and the Brong-Ahafo Region. For the second course, participants were selected from Ghana's three central regions: Brong-Ahafo, Ashanti, and Volta. Participants of both courses were required to hold a Bachelors of Science in a subject related to agriculture or nutrition or to have five years working experience in the area of nutrition. The composition of participants was a balanced mix of health, education, agriculture, nutrition, community/rural development planners and development planners from regional and district-level government positions. Some participants came from non-governmental organizations that worked closely with local governments and communities.

A major impact of these national training courses was the preparation of district level food security monitoring systems by the participants. This was valuable to the decentralized district-level planning approach that was implemented by the Government of Ghana. IFPRI continued to work with the Ghanaian ministry of food and agriculture to strengthen its policy analysis capacity. A major lesson from Ghana is that it is not enough to build the human capacity for policy research and analysis, without a stable enabling environment for use of policy research skills in the government directorates and at the district level offices (Levin, 1999).

### **3.3 MOZAMBIQUE – TRAINING AND CAPACITY STRENGTHENING FOR POVERTY REDUCTION POLICY MANAGEMENT**

The policy outreach approach in Mozambique combined the features of both the Malawi and Ghana models. Two research fellows were outposted to local institutions, namely, the Faculty of Agronomy and Forest Engineering (FAEF) and the Poverty Alleviation Unit of the Ministry of Finance.

#### *Support to Undergraduate Training and Curriculum Development in Agricultural Economics*

During three years at the FAEF, materials were developed and three subjects taught in the Rural Extension and Agricultural Economics program. These courses were: Introduction to Economics, Microeconomic Theory, and Rural Credit and Savings. For the first time, a Rural Credit and Savings course was taught in the Faculty. The contents of the other two courses were revised to reflect modern approaches and thinking in the field. Furthermore, sections

dedicated to food security were developed. In all three courses, a complete set of teaching notes (in Portuguese) and readings have been prepared for future use by the faculty.

### *Short Courses and Training Programs*

Two major short-term policy courses were conducted during the project's implementation as well as several other shorter in-service training activities. The two short-term courses were 'Analysis and Interpretation of Data for Policy Formulation,' which included participants from various government ministries (Agriculture, Health, Commerce, GAPVU, DPCCN, INDER), and 'Technical Training Workshop on Food Security and Nutrition Policy Analysis,' a SADC-sponsored regional workshop for Portuguese countries.

### *Senior Thesis 'Licenciatura' Supervision*

In order to strengthen research and analytical skills of undergraduates at FAEF, project implementers were actively involved in supervising senior thesis work for 13 college seniors with topics in the areas of food security, nutrition, and agricultural economics.

### *Overseas Training and Institutional Cooperation*

Overseas training and collaboration was restricted to in-service training of local counterparts at IFPRI headquarters in Washington D.C. During the life of the project, three local counterparts spent one month each at IFPRI, working with and receiving training from staff in the Food Consumption and Nutrition Division.

### *Impact, and Future Collaboration*

In a short three years, over 200 students at FAEF were trained and the project collaborated with and trained over 40 technical staff members of the various ministries. At FAEF, capacity has been created through three young researchers who worked extensively with outposted staff and who will continue to be employed by the University. At the MPF, two IFPRI-trained researchers are now employed as full-time staff members. Finally, the newly created Policy Analysis Unit of the Ministry of Agriculture has three IFPRI-trained staff members among its cadre of recent recruits.

The Mozambican approach showed that it is important to build policy capacity both in the academic system and in the public sector. They complement each other. The continued use of policy analysts in identifying the poor, their needs, and the solutions to address the problem has been one of the key factors towards to the poverty reduction success that Mozambique attained in the last ten years (Handa,1999).

### **3.4 2020 VISION INITIATIVE FOR FOOD, AGRICULTURE, AND NATURAL RESOURCE POLICIES**

The 2020 Vision Initiative was launched in 1993 to create awareness on the policy challenges facing the global food system. This was a time of growing global complacency regarding international food security problems. The goal of the initiative's first phase was to refocus attention of world policy-makers on the current and future challenges related to food security, agricultural development, rural poverty, and environmental degradation. It was also intended to catalyze a new consensus on these issues and to encourage policy leaders to commit more energy and resources to resolve food security problems (Paarlberg, 1999).

In line with these broad objectives, a number of initial activities were focused on improving the capacity of developing countries to strategically plan and prioritize their needs related to food security, etc. These capacity strengthening activities followed three main modalities. The first modality was the hosting of regional consultations. The objective of these consultations was to increase the capacity for policy dialogue at the regional level. During 1994 and 1995, regional consultations were held in Africa, South Asia, and Latin America. These workshops, which included researchers, technical experts, and government policy-makers, produced regional vision documents describing regional growth strategies and priorities for the next 25 years.

The second approach was the initiation of regional networks for East and West Africa with the objective of strengthening the capacity at the country level for policy dialogue. This approach requires several steps such as the creation of small country teams consisting of local researchers and policy technicians, the identification of country-specific priorities and drafting of sub-regional proposals, and holding in-country seminars to communicate national and sub-regional priorities to national policymakers and donors.

The third approach began in 2000. This approach involved contracting regional and country-level research projects to researchers who work for a local organization within a developing country. The implementing institute's role is to select relevant research projects from a set of proposals, and then guide research teams in the development of sound research methodology. This technique is quite similar to the contract research approach described earlier carried out by MSU. Lessons from the regional network approach shows that it is important to transfer the responsibilities of continuous investment in capacity strengthening to local entities for sustainability. Choosing the right set of organizations is important to cost-effectively build the capacity for policy research and implementation.

### **3.5 CAPACITY STRENGTHENING FOR NATIONAL STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT**

Capacity strengthening for policy research is a prerequisite for providing international policy knowledge as a global public good; that is, provision of knowledge relevant to decision-makers both inside and outside the countries where research is undertaken. New knowledge on how to improve the conditions of low-income people in developing countries is expected to result in large social benefits, but in most instances the private sector is unlikely to carry out research to generate such knowledge.

### *Capacity for Developing National Strategies to Eliminate Hunger*

A more recent example of IFPRI's approach to capacity strengthening for developing national strategies for rural development is SAKKS -- Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System for Rural Development Strategies in Sub-Saharan Africa. The intended users of SAKSS include not only African governments and donors but also local and international research institutes and universities, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations. As such, SAKSS is being established as a network among, and for building the capacity of, state and non-state actors (private sector, civil society) for evidence-based policymaking and advocacy (SAKSS, 2005).

SAKSS is a source of information and knowledge on rural development issues. Its objective is to provide an open platform for bringing objective research, analysis, and information to bear on the planning, monitoring, and evaluation of rural development strategies. We can also see SAKKS as a conceptual framework that seeks to organize information and evaluate investment and policy options for generating rapid and sustained increases in the productivity and commercialization of the rural economy, especially for smallholder agriculture. The core of this framework builds on economic and geographic data and analysis to guide the setting of investment and policy priorities at local levels, and on monitoring and evaluation to improve decisions and strategy formulation over time. SAKKS also brings together people and institutions who supply and use data and information. As an information tool, it contributes to building and strengthening local capacity for policy analysis, monitoring and evaluation, and strategy formulation.

### *Country Strategies*

At the country level, SAKSS addresses a full range of strategic issues related to rural-based economic activities and national food security. Specifically, a country SAKSS includes information and analysis that help identify investment priorities for growth by examining the effects of macro-level policies and sector-wide investments on rural economies and the options for increasing the productivity and commercialization of smallholder agriculture. Through spatial analysis, SAKSS can integrate other important aspects of rural development, such as the potential for growth in non-farm economic activities, the quality of rural healthcare and sanitation, access to education, and the extent of environmental degradation.

### *Regional Strategies*

A regionally focused SAKSS informs decision-makers about the region-wide benefits (or losses) stemming from strategies, investments, and policy reforms implemented within and between countries. A regional SAKSS enables analysis of development alternatives that aim at generating growth spillovers through shared public good investments in R&D and infrastructure, and through greater economic integration and harmonization. In cooperation with NEPAD and the continent's many regional economic communities, SAKSS regional nodes and networks are now being launched in East, Southern, and West Africa, led by four CGIAR (Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research) partner centers. At the national

level, country SAKSS are currently being piloted in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Ghana. Through these networks and institutions, SAKSS nodes will:

- generate, compile, and share first-hand analysis and data,
- perform strategic investment analysis and devise a common framework for data collection and analysis,
- produce knowledge products for dissemination and outreach (through multimedia and stakeholder forums),
- contribute to fostering constructive policy debates on future development alternatives, and
- strengthen local and regional capacity to conduct objective, timely, and relevant research and analysis through short- and long-term training courses.

### *Policy Strategies for Agriculture Sector Growth*

We believe that scaling up agricultural growth in the smallholder sector is a key priority in achieving the MDGs. In addition to engaging in capacity development in Sub-Saharan Africa, SAKKS supports the major actors in the agricultural sector through helping with strategy development.

Very few economies around the world have achieved broad-based economic growth without agricultural and rural growth preceding or accompanying it. It is therefore troubling indeed that per capita agricultural production has remained stagnant or even declined in many African countries during the past three decades. However, international food policy research has shown systematic and sustained technological successes in African agriculture; they must be scaled up. International research has also shown large gains for the rural poor in some parts of Africa from opening up on internal and international markets.

Building strategies for assuring food and nutrition security requires sound, knowledge-based decision-making. To make this happen, Africa will need to greatly increase its investments in research and capacity building. One of the key conclusions from the 2020 Africa Conference is that improvements in Africa's food and nutrition security and the underlying problems in agriculture and health will be driven by strong science and technology systems and policies (von Braun and Pandya-Lorch, 2004).

A new set of food security and hunger reduction strategies are converging as a consequence of the agenda setting by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), the African Union, and the strategy-forming discussions at the 2020 Africa Conference. As a result, food policy research priorities in Africa should be expanded to include:

- Investigating state and market failures related to agriculture,
- Identifying strategies to make trade liberalization work for the poor and improve their access to well-functioning markets,
- Examining how to establish and strengthen social safety nets, and
- Designing information and knowledge systems that support strategies and implementation of road maps for food and agricultural policy change.

The SAKSS and its variant approaches are currently implemented in Ethiopia, Uganda, Ghana, and Nigeria.

## 4. KEY LESSONS

Several specific lessons could be derived from assessing the impact of IFPRI's program to strengthen capacity for policy analysis and research in Africa:

### *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. Among others, one key measure of performance is the ability to measurably influence the policymaking process while retaining intellectual independence. 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 decision-making, the benefits of capacity strengthening efforts can be manifold. As emphasized by the 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness, demand-driven approaches are increasingly considered to be integral to the success of capacity development (OECD, 2006). How well developing countries can make such an assessment, however, depends on their existing capacity for identifying capacity 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 analysis and research on one hand, and policy training on the other. Capacity needs assessments conducted in target institutions identify training gaps among their staff as well as identify for whom capacity needs to be augmented. The Berlin Statement on International Development Training (2008) further emphasized the importance of matching the capacity needs to specific contexts and the learning outcomes. 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 mitigate brain drain. Regional cooperation in training and policy research can help.

### *Consistent and Continuous Interactions between Researchers*

A capacity gap exists between the North and the South, and between researchers and beneficiaries (such as farmer or consumer). Constant interaction with the collaborating researchers over the period of the research projects also helps to transfer skills in organizing and implementing projects. In addition, it better exposes local researchers to policy issues, methods, and results from other countries. Conducting joint research studies in collaboration with local research institutions assists in generating local research capacity. High quality research output from such collaborations can lead to increases in the demand for local researchers, which helps to further improve the quality of their work.

### *Integration with Policy Communication Strategies*

Capacity strengthening activities designed as part of the policy communication strategy are most effective in transferring specific policy analysis skills as well as increasing the use of research results for policymaking. In addition to traditional capacity strengthening approaches, recent developments in information and communication technologies could be effectively used through distance learning to develop a wide range of capacity to address the existing capacity gaps.

### *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. Long term sustainability will require strengthening the human and institutional capacities for policy research and analysis both in the public sector and in the academic and research institutions, as well as measures to checkmate the brain drain.

### *Measuring the Impact of Policy Research and Analytical Capacity*

Several efforts have been made to capture the impact of policy research and analytical capacity development on policy making process and the outcomes. Yet much of the monitoring and performance measurement approaches continue to rely heavily on the output indicators such as to number of people trained and number of workshops conducted. There is a serious need to go beyond the output indicators of performance measurement to monitor, evaluate, and assess the outcomes, influence and impact of the capacity development programs at the individual, organizational, and at the systems levels.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS**

Strengthening capacity for policy research and analysis not only helps in increasing the impact of collaborative research programs but leaves necessary capacity behind for meeting future policy challenges. IFPRI's capacity strengthening activities, as shown by the case studies presented here, result in two major benefits in the collaborating developing countries: first, they provide a general empowerment through the exposure of policy researchers and analysts to key

emerging food policy issues, methods and results, which helps them to become informed discussants in their countries and second, they provide techniques and skills necessary for analyzing various food policy alternatives thereby enabling them to be key players in information generation for policy formulation and implementation.

A true indicator of adequate policy research capacity in a developing country is the graduation of the country from a status of receiver to generator of policy information. Capacity strengthening will have to be continued as an integral part of policy research projects and programs until this transition occurs. Nevertheless, increasing policy research capacity by strategic strengthening of the local institutions for generating and receiving policy information can result in better policies and effective action that will lead not only to saving resources but also to improved well being of millions of poor and malnourished in the developing world.

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**Table 1. A Typology of Policy Research Capacity Strengthening Approaches.**

	ACBF	AERC	FANRPAN	SADAOC	Cornell	GTZ	MSU	WBI	ODI	USDA	IDS	FAO	IFPRI
<b>Institutional capacity strengthening approaches</b>													
Long-term postgraduate Training	x				x		x				x		x
Regional networks			x	x									x
Regional institutional Strengthening	x	x											
Regional centers for postgraduate Training		x				x							x
<b>Human capacity strengthening approaches</b>													
Contract research	x						x						x
Collaborative research/advisory services					x								x
Short-term training workshops	x	x					x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Visiting research							x				x		x
Joint product approach							x						x

## CONTRIBUTIONS TO LESSONS NOTES

As part of its knowledge management program, the African Capacity Building Foundation encourages contribution of Lessons Notes by its professional staff members of its Technical Advisory Panels and Networks, beneficiaries of its interventions and partner institutions. Issues and questions relating to this Lessons Note should be addressed to the contributor:

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## LESSONS NOTES

As part of its knowledge management program, the African Capacity Building Foundation (ACBF) produces Lessons Notes on recent experiences in capacity building and development management in the Foundation's six core competency areas:

- *Economic Policy Analysis and Management*
- *Financial Management and Accountability*
- *Strengthening and Monitoring National Statistics and Statistical Systems*
- *Public Administration and Management*
- *Strengthening of Policy Analysis Capacity of National Parliaments*
- *Professionalization of the Voices of the Private Sector and Civil Society*

The Lessons Notes are widely circulated among development partners in the public sector, private sector, civil society as well as in the academic, development management and the donor communities with the aim of raising awareness of best practices and potential pitfalls in interventions in capacity building and development policies and programs in Africa and strengthening dialogue, exchanges and collaboration amongst partner institutions in the field of capacity building. Essentially, Lessons Notes document and maintain a valuable database on lessons learned in capacity building in Africa.

ACBF welcomes contributions from all development partners, policy analysts and practitioners as well as capacity building institutions, which should be addressed to:

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