

Overview **Stage 3: Capacity Needs Assessment**



IMPLEMENTING THE COMMON FRAMEWORK ON CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (CD) FOR AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION SYSTEMS (AIS)

This factsheet is one of several useful resources that can be used in the preparation and roll out of capacity development projects for agricultural innovation systems (AIS). The tools described in these pages are designed with a view to the practical implementation of the principles of the Common Framework of the Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP), a G20 initiative. They have been applied in the Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems (CDAIS) project, funded by the EU and jointly implemented by Agrinatura and FAO in collaboration with national partners in Angola, Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Honduras, Laos and Rwanda.

Background

Agriculture must produce more while protecting limited natural resources. Strengthening capacities for agricultural innovation is the key to meeting this challenge. To be relevant, capacity development (CD) interventions need to be based on participatory assessments of existing capacities and gaps.

From the agricultural innovation systems (AIS) perspective, the needs assessments must focus on the functional capacities that an AIS requires for optimal performance, which consist of the capacity to navigate complexity, the capacity to collaborate, the capacity to reflect and learn, and the capacity to engage in strategic planning and political processes. It should consider the three dimensions to capacity development: individuals, organizations, and the enabling environment.

Participatory capacity needs assessments are instrumental to:

- Achieving a shared understanding of the capacity strengths and weaknesses of individuals, organizations and the wider system;
- Identifying factors that might either promote or inhibit change;
- Determining capacity needs and drafting action plans to address them;
- Setting a baseline for evaluating the effectiveness of CD interventions.

Possible entry points for customizing CD interventions and rendering them more effective might include:

- Enhancing access to skills, resources and information;
- Creating a shared vision of where the stakeholders want to be in the future;
- Spotting major hurdles that might impede the realization of the shared vision;
- Offering incentives for increased cooperation among stakeholders;
- Encouraging reflection, joint learning and experimentation;
- Looking out for opportunities to influence decision makers.



Main Outputs

Baseline setting

The needs assessment sets a general baseline data that is used as a benchmark for determining the extent of the capacities, strengths and weaknesses of the stakeholders.

The baseline also serves to highlight the interlinked nature of the system, in which the strengthening of one actor will have a knock-on effect on the others.

Prioritizing CD needs

The CNA and validation workshops will determine the actionable priorities of the project. With the help of the facilitators, the needs assessment team produces a blueprint of action or action plan setting out the priorities for each innovation partnership.

The action plan needs to be reviewed at later meetings. It is at the next stage (CD strategy and action plan development) that the priorities and actions are more fully elaborated and precisely defined.





How the assessment is performed

Capacity needs assessments (CNA) usually consist of semi-structured discussions and workshops involving the participants in innovation partnerships, namely the organizations and networks that are part of a given process of innovation. The process itself should be country-focused and stakeholder-driven.

A well-structured assessment requires input from participants who have expressed a keen interest in strengthening their capacity to innovate. It should therefore involve the institutions that are responsible for shaping the enabling environment and are able to provide incentives to advance the agenda. Innovation facilitators have a prominent part to play in the assessment process, as it is they who enable diverse actors to connect and communicate effectively, which is a prerequisite to make innovation happen.



Who to involve

The starting point of a CNA is the prior identification, within the boundaries set during the visioning exercise, of the various project participants, namely: farmers, farmers' organizations and cooperatives, research and extension agencies, and private- and public-sector entities.

Ideally, the CNA starts with organizations that have expressed explicit interest in boosting their capacities. The later stages (validation and planning of CD interventions) might include a broader range of interested parties.



Assessing capacities using the five-step approach

A practical way of acquiring the techniques for carrying out capacity needs self-assessments is to follow the five-step approach and deploy a number of the related tools. The approach, however, is not structured as a one-size-fits-all procedure, and therefore needs to be tailored to the specific context.

The duration of the assessment varies from, ideally, two to three months to as little as two weeks if time and resources are scarce. The assessment looks both at the functional and at the technical capacities already in place. The **technical capacities** refer to matters such as food security, nutrition, post-harvest management and farming.

The functional capacities, on the other hand, refer to the **“soft” skill sets** that people need if they are to work together, reflect, learn, adapt, and ultimately achieve change.

For the detailed planning of the assessment process and the effective preparation of the innovation facilitators, it is advisable to have a thorough prior understanding of what the innovation partnership entails. This is best done before the start of the assessment, and will entail reviewing studies, reports and official documents, consulting key stakeholders, and completing innovation partnership profiles.

STEP 1



Strengthening commitment

Managers and/or innovation facilitators invite stakeholders to take part in an inception workshop. Stakeholders can be selected on the basis of consultations and/or a scoping study. During the CNA workshop, the project and its objectives are presented. Concepts such as innovation partnership and AIS are introduced and discussed.

Objectives:

- To raise awareness and enhance a collective understanding of the innovation process;
- To achieve a collective understanding of the history of the innovation partnership and of its stakeholders;
- To increase knowledge among stakeholders about the AIS architecture;
- To secure the commitment of the stakeholders.

Tools:

- Cards exercise on functional versus technical capacities;
- Timeline tool.

STEP 2



Understanding the innovation partnership

Key stakeholders participate in group work and plenary feedback sessions. These are organized and facilitated by project managers and innovation facilitators. The sessions can be part of the inception workshop or a separate event.

Objectives:

- To achieve a collective understanding of key problems (technical and functional), effects, causes and initial thoughts on solutions;
- To increase understanding of who the actors involved in the innovation partnership are, what their role and influence is, and how they exchange information;
- To raise awareness about the structure, governance and boundaries of the innovation partnership.

Tools:

- Capacity-focused problem tree/ solution tree (both need to be focused on functional capacities but should also consider technical issues);
- NetMap tool (using the findings of the problem/solution tree).

STEP 3



Reflection and facilitated self-assessment

Key stakeholders participate in an assessment workshop organized and facilitated by project managers and innovation facilitators. Stakeholders are engaged individually or in groups.

Objectives:

- To clarify which functional and other capacities the innovation partnership needs;
- To take note of existing capacities and pinpoint capacity gaps.

Tools:

- Simulations and role-playing games in which facilitators present challenges or opportunities; or
- A capacity-assessment questionnaire that assigns a score for the current level of capacity.

STEP 4



Examining the innovation partnership and identifying capacity needs

As part of the assessment workshop, stakeholders examine some elements of the innovation partnership, while project managers and innovation facilitators enter data from the capacity-assessment questionnaire. Feedback is provided to stakeholders, who engage in discussions and validate the results. This is followed by a desk analysis of the capacity needs that should be addressed.

Objectives:

- To deepen awareness of the innovation partnership;
- To identify the first actionable steps to improvement;
- To process and analyse data, and to support the process of reflecting on the findings.

Tools:

- A spreadsheet to build up a capacity profile.

STEP 5



Validation and planning

The stakeholders and other interested parties form workgroups, share proposals and provide reciprocal feedback. As the workshops continue, the stakeholders progressively refine the capacity-development plan.

Objectives:

- To validate the outcome of the needs assessment;
- To arrive at a shared vision of the stakeholders' desired future;
- To determine which additional capacities will be needed for the innovation partnership to turn the shared vision into a reality;
- To draw up concrete plans for the CD project that include a clear time frame, cost projections and a list of stakeholders.

Tools:

- Rich picture (used as a spur to reflection and discussion);
- Capacity-assessment report inclusive of maps, profiles and other findings;
- Action planning tool/formats.

For further information

Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP): <http://www.fao.org/in-action/tropical-agriculture-platform/en>

Email: Tropagplatform@fao.org

TAPipedia: <http://tapipedia.org> • **Email:** info@tapipedia.org

Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems Project (CDAIS): <http://cdais.net> • **Email:** info@cdais.net



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Common Framework products:



*Conceptual
Background*



*Guidance Note on
Operationalization*



*Synthesis
Document*

*The implementation of the TAP Action Plan is supported by the EU-funded project
Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems (CDAIS).*

*The Common Framework documents are also available in French and Spanish
on the Common Framework pages of TAPipedia.*



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