Evaluating Capacity-building and Development Programmes

fact sheet | **11/2014**

Introduction

Capacity-building has been central to the international development agenda. Adequate capacity is a critical missing factor in current efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Development efforts in many poor countries will fail, if greater and more careful attention is not given to the enhancement of sustainable capacity[1]. Whether it is technical or hands-on training, lectures, workshops, group discussions or field visits, the objective should be to build knowledge and skills reflected in changed perceptions, attitudes and practices, leading to positive developmental changes.

However, the provision of learning and development opportunities alone does not mean that people or organizations will become more productive and effective. Such opportunities must be appropriate in terms of content and means of delivery so that they add value to people's learning and institutions. Training also needs to be delivered in such a way that practical benefits can be observed and trainees are able to transfer their new knowledge and skills to other key stakeholders[2].

Evaluation is an important component of determining the effectiveness and impact of any capacity development activity. But to what extent do such evaluations measure changes in behaviour and attitudes? To what extent do these evaluate the effectiveness of the resources invested in such activities? In the absence of a process providing evidence of how actual learning has been applied in practice, there is a risk of continued investment in areas that are irrelevant, supply driven and useless for end users.

Why evaluation of capacity-building and development programmes matters?

Evaluations are often done to improve performance and accountability. Firstly, gathering feedback on the participants' perceptions of the training can help identify ways to improve future training or to determine whether training should continue. Effective training evaluation enables data collection and analysis that lead to decisions for change and development of future training with added value. The feedback also helps determine whether the training is aligned with organizational objectives and equips participants with the right skills and knowledge to carry out their respective roles[3].

However, evaluations carried out to enhance performance might vary in the type of information collected, the methods used to collect it and the honesty and integrity with which information and analyses are presented. Competing demands on evaluations also exist within and across different organizations. For example, a donor might need information on the short-term results of capacity-building efforts to be accountable to governments or the public. A capacity-building provider might want to report results to donors, but may also want to learn in order to improve its services. Programme and project officers might simply need information for basic programme management[4]. In the context of these competing demands, how do we assess the value of capacity-building for end users while meeting the needs of these diverse stakeholders?

[1] OECD, 2006. The challenge of capacity development: Working towards good practice. OECD DAC Network on Governance. http://www.oecd.org/development/governance-development/36326495.pdf.

[2] HEFCE, 2010. The evaluation of learning and development in the workplace: A review of the literature. http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/static/5007/hrpdf/hefce/hefce_litreview.pdf.

[3] Richard Eason, Evaluation Focus. http://evaluationfocus.com/reasons-for-conducting-training-evaluation/

[4] Simister, N., Smith, R. 2010. Monitoring and Evaluating Capacity Building: Is it really that difficult? INTRAC, UK. http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/677/Praxis-Paper-23-Monitoring-and-Evaluating-Capacity-Building-is-it-really-that-difficult.pdf

Taking evaluation of capacity-building the extra mile – Knowledge, attitude and practice

Various methods are used for assessing the uptake and acceptability of newly instructed training subjects that provide necessary analysis to inform strategic decision-making. For example, the Ripple Model shows how capacity-building contributes both to changes at individual or organizational level as well as to wider changes in the lives of beneficiaries or civil society[5]. Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Model evaluates training effectiveness and impact in terms of reaction, learning, behaviour and results[6]. While these methods can help measure the effectiveness of training in an objective way, they can be time-consuming and expensive because of the data collection and staff needed to perform evaluation assessments. Knowledge, Attitude and Practice (KAP) survey, however, is a simple and practical alternative for assessing knowledge use and application. Introduced in Bangladesh in the 1990s to evaluate acceptance and adoption of newly introduced technologies and income-generating activities and delivered through training events[7], KAP focuses on three key learning areas:

- Knowledge: **Have participants memorized** the key points from the capacity-building event? **Do they know** what to do after the event?
- Attitude: Based on the newly acquired knowledge of the training subject and their own circumstances, **do they perceive the training topic as suitable and relevant?**
- Practice: **Are they planning to apply or have they applied new knowledge? What have they changed** in their work as a result?

If the findings are positive with the training subject understood and adopted, it is reasonable to presume that longer-term outcomes and impacts will follow accordingly. In case the findings are negative, KAP provides a warning that there are problems either with the training method or relevance of the training topic. Such findings should trigger a review of the training approach and/or subject matter.

Experience of the SATNET Asia project

Capacity development is a key component of the Network for Knowledge Transfer on Sustainable Agricultural Technologies and Improved Market Linkages in South and South-East Asia (SATNET Asia), a project funded by the European Union and implemented by the Centre for Alleviation of Poverty through Sustainable Agriculture (CAPSA) and partner institutions. Working with regional and national partners, such as local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), regional and national agricultural research centres (NARCs) and other United Nations agencies, the project delivers programmes on sustainable agriculture technologies and trade facilitation to a range of stakeholders in South and South-East Asia.

SATNET Asia has adopted the KAP approach as a means to assess the effectiveness and impact of its capacity development activities. KAP surveys target people who have attended the training events and complement training evaluations that aim to obtain general feedback. It involves two surveys, administered at two different points in time. The first KAP survey is conducted immediately after the event and collects participants' feedback on key learning, training relevance and changes planned to be adopted in their work as a result of the training. The second survey, conducted after 6 to 12 months, assesses any changes in knowledge, attitude and practice of the trainees over time. KAP surveys might be supplemented with results of pre-training surveys if available.

A KAP survey asks the following questions, which can be tailored to different kinds of training or workshops:

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[5] James, R. 2009. Just Do It: Dealing with the dilemmas in monitoring and evaluating capacity building. INTRAC, UK. http://www.intrac.org/data/files/resources/664/Praxis-Note-49-Dealing-with-the-Dilemmas-in-Monitoring-and-Evaluating-Capacity-Building.pdf

[6] Nickols, F. 2012. Evaluating Training: There is No "Cookbook" Approach. http://www.nickols.us/evaluating_training.htm

[7] IFAD, 2011. Initiative for Mainstreaming Innovation (IMI) –Innovative forms of training and capacity-building in IFAD supported projects and programmes.   http://www.ifad.org/gender/imi/study/bangladesh.pdf. P.17

Trainee information:	Name (optional), organization type, country and gender *Organization type could include categories such as government ministry, non-governmental organization/civil society, university/research institute, private sector, or other.*
Knowledge:	1. **X months after the training, how would you rate your knowledge and/or skills in the following areas…?** *Depending on the nature of training, this section should include key expected learning outcomes around which training sessions were organized. The question provides an indication of how the newly acquired knowledge has been retained by participants.* 2. **What are the key abilities that you acquired in this training that enable you to work more effectively? Please list a maximum of three.** *This question seeks to identify the most important abilities acquired in the training that helped participants improve their work performance.*
Attitude:	3. **Did the workshop/training equip you with the right knowledge to improve the way you work?** **Yes ☐　　No ☐** *If a respondent answers 'No', it is recommended to ask 'Why not' to find out why he/she perceived the training as irrelevant.* 4. **What did you change/improve after this workshop/training?** *This question seeks to identify any changes in attitudes and motivation to use learning from the training in practical life.*
Practice:	5. **How much of what you learned did you actually use in your work?** **All ☐　　Most of it ☐　About half ☐　　Little ☐　　Nothing ☐** *This question seeks to identify how much of newly acquired knowledge has been applied in practice. If someone answers 'a little' or 'nothing', it is recommended to ask the reasons 'why'.* 6. **What new practices and skills did you adopt/apply in your work?** *This question seeks to identify what concrete practices and skills have been applied in practice. The question is unnecessary for someone who answered 'nothing' in response to the previous question.* 7. **Did you train others in using any of the new knowledge and practices?** *In the context of increasing staff turnover and the need to retain and promote application of new knowledge, it is important for trainees to share newly acquired knowledge with their colleagues and stakeholders. If 'yes', the respondent can specify who he/she trained or shared the knowledge with, and on what subject matter. If 'no', why not?*
Comments:	8. **Do you have any comments on the usefulness of the training and its actual application?** *Here respondents have the opportunity to state any issues or experience with knowledge application related to this particular training.*

*Note: The examples used here are taken from KAP surveys implemented under SATNET Asia.

Because the questionnaire is short and simple, KAP data can be processed quickly and easily, using data and text analysis tools. Some information obtained is of a quantitative nature, e.g., % of trainees who applied all, most, half, little or nothing of the knowledge. Most results, however, are qualitative and provide examples of key abilities, behavioural changes and applied skills. The table below provides examples of feedback from SATNET-supported training.

Training event	How much of new knowledge and skills were actually used in practice				Key abilities and learning	Key behavioural changes	Key practices and skills applied	Knowledge shared with others
	All	Most	Half	Little				
Identifying sustainable agricultural technologies and translating research findings into information accessible to extension workers and farmers, Pakistan, July 2013 71% response rate	0%	53%	40%	7%	Conducting sustainability assessments of agricultural technologies. Organizing ideas and information to prepare technology factsheets.	Developed factsheet for farmers that was used in FAO Alumni Associations Network – National Farmers Share-*Mela* celebrated in Islamabad December 2013. Made calculations on sustainability before a project to get optimum long-term results from the technology.	Factsheet development by 47% participants.	40%
Climate-resilient smallholder agriculture farming systems in South Asia, June 2013 54% response rate	8%	54%	31%	8%	Using climate-friendly farming practices. IPM.	A participant was able to convince his partners in SNV-Bhutan to assist technically and financially to start climate-smart agriculture value-chains.	Climate-smart agriculture practices such as biofertilizers, biopesticides, biocomposting by 39% participants.	100%

Provided that at least half the trainees participate in the follow-up survey, 6 to 12 months after the training, both quantitative and qualitative data can confidently demonstrate the scale of changes brought about by the capacity-building activities. The KAP results also show how capacity-building contributes to changes at both individual and organizational level. It might show change in participants'

daily work as well as illustrate wider changes in the lives of ultimate beneficiaries through examples expressed in open-ended questions.

Challenges

It is also important to recognize challenges related to KAP surveys:

Language and limited Internet access: Poor knowledge of the language used in KAP surveys, as well as limited Internet access can complicate data collection. In such cases, it is possible to work through local partners, who can help translate the survey into local languages and facilitate responses where there is no Internet access. However, it can be a time-consuming process.

Follow-up: Lack of immediate response to a KAP survey may require intensive follow-up with individual trainees, hence placing a burden on the organization that carries out the survey. Time, effort and patience are needed to be invested to convince respective trainees about the importance of their feedback.

Timelines: The duration between capacity-building interventions and desired end results can be very long. For example, a training recipient might only see the fruits of a particular training after one year or even longer. This contrasts with approaches that focus on obtaining short-term results.

Attributions: Capacity is not a linear process, it is constantly fluctuating. Individuals, organizations and societies evolve and change over time and are heavily influenced by changes in the external environment. Change will happen anyway, so it is often difficult to attribute it to specific interventions. Some participants can acquire new knowledge from networking with other participants and not necessarily from the lectures alone.

Policy recommendations

Knowing 'why' or the purpose of capacity-building: To develop capacities that best meet the institutional needs, it is first necessary to identify the training goals and purpose. A barrier to learning effectiveness is giving people the 'what' before the 'why' is determined. More thought needs to be given to what the organization is trying to achieve and the strategy needed to accomplish it.

Knowing 'why' of M&E: Much literature emphasizes the importance of M&E being used to continually learn and improve. Yet, current practice is often aimed at ensuring accountability to donors. M&E carried out for this purpose can, at best, inhibit the process of learning. In the absence of any clear direction from the donor community, capacity-building providers and recipients will be left to make decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Determine 'what' training is needed: Technical capacity-building addresses a specific issue concerning an organization's activities and is often carried out in the context of a specific project or programme in which an organization is involved. It is also described as a means to an end. General capacity-building, on the other hand, helps organizations develop their own capacity to better fulfil their core functions and achieve their own mission – an end in itself. This type of capacity development can be slow, complex and continuous, and can require in-depth reflection on an organization's culture, values and vision. Such work is not limited to addressing immediate practical needs. Rather, it can improve the organization's overall performance and its ability to adapt itself within a changing context.

Deciding how far to measure: It is unlikely that training benefits will be confined to the project implemented by a capacity-building provider. The improved capacity may help performance in other projects or programmes run by partners. Alternatively, individuals may leave an organization and apply their new learning in different contexts. In such circumstances involving attribution challenge, the best that can be done is to record some of the changes that have occurred by highlighting specific examples.