

Reforming the Management of In-Service Training/Learning

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SYNOPSIS

In public agencies or projects, the benefits of in-service training include enhanced capability to contribute to growth in the agricultural sector and operate in the AIS; in private enterprises, benefits of in-service training include more productive workers and higher profits. Opportunities for improving human resource development (HRD) and human resource management (HRM) through training arise when countries develop national, agricultural, or rural development strategies or their poverty reduction strategies; when new projects are planned; or in discussions about adjustments or extensions of current projects. Similar opportunities arise when the private sector is creating demand for skilled human resources. The three main investments in HRD and HRM include building capacity in public agencies, developing specific capacities in development project personnel, and building capacity in private enterprises. Elements in improving in-service training in the public sector include a clear policy articulating responsibilities for HRD; training personnel to implement the HRD approach; linking with learning providers; and supporting specific, short-term programs as well as life-long learning programs. Investments in project-related training begin when projects are being developed and include (1) assessing capacity needs, (2) evaluating capacity-building activities in every component of project-related training, and (3) supporting training in communications and problem-solving skills in every component for effective participation in the AIS. Large private enterprises with a long-term need for personnel will build capacity in human resources through joint ventures with the public sector; smaller entities may be more comfortable purchasing training packages from the AET system. Major recommendations include: provide training for faculty and staff managing in-service training; include training/learning specialists in project design and implementation; keep capacity-building objectives realistic

in projects; consider investing in higher degrees for qualified HRM candidates; and identify potential partnerships between public and private entities to add to in-service training capacity.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE FOR INVESTMENT

Investments to improve how capacity building is designed, implemented, and managed—especially in public agricultural organizations and development projects undertaken in the public sector—add knowledge and skills that make public organizations and projects more effective and enable the public sector to participate more effectively and actively in the AIS. People who interact with the rural population on behalf of public or private agencies and projects are working exactly where some of the most important possibilities for knowledge sharing, innovation dialogue, observation, assessment, and adoption occur. They are a critical vector in the innovation system. Investing in, adding to, and sharpening their skills should be a priority. Investments can also be considered in building human and institutional capacity in private agricultural enterprises, especially where there is scope for joint activities through public-private partnerships. It is also important to distinguish between building capacity to implement projects and broader institutional capacity-building. The former is undertaken to ensure that each individual has the knowledge and skills to perform project-related responsibilities effectively, whereas the latter is concerned with the capability of the organization (ministry, department, unit, private business) to implement its terms of reference. While individuals collectively contribute to the capacity of an organization, factors such as policy frameworks, organizational structures, links, management, financing, and interface with clients or stakeholders also influence this capacity.

INVESTMENT NEEDED

Three main types of investments can be considered to build capacity in the staff of public agricultural agencies and development projects and those in the private sector who provide a variety of agriculture-related services and supplies to farmers, processors, marketers, and civil society. The first type builds capacity in public agencies; the second builds private sector capacity; and the third develops specific capacities in development project personnel.

Managing and improving in-service training in ministries of agriculture

In-service training in ministries of agriculture is generally poorly managed. Managers exert weak oversight of training programs and impacts. Ordinarily, personnel appointed to plan and implement training/learning programs are not selected from a pool of professionally qualified or practicing human resources development specialists. Nor are ministry and other public sector staff systematically identified for specific training and learning experiences that prepare them for future responsibilities. Seniority in the civil service is often the criterion that decides who is selected and promoted in the system; competence is not always a deciding factor. Shrinking budgets in the public sector have left smaller cadres of professional research, technical, and extension staff to deal with additional responsibilities that require enhanced knowledge and skills. Under these circumstances, government agencies must make their capacity-building efforts a priority and ensure that they are as effective as possible. Key elements in bringing about change include:

- **Policies.** Following high-level management commitment to adopting change, a policy directive is issued describing responsibilities for human resource development (HRD).
- **Capacity to implement the policy.** Personnel to implement the new HRD approach are selected and enrolled in appropriate training programs.
- **Review of training/learning programs.** HRD and human resource management (HRM) rules, needs assessments, training/learning responses, selection criteria, and monitoring and evaluation of training/learning impacts are reviewed in detail and adjusted, based on the new approach to HRM.
- **Links to learning resources:** Establish links with learning providers such as the research system, universities, TVET entities, private sector leaders in agriculture and rural

development, and regional and international training agencies.

- **Build AIS-ready skills capacity.** Provide selective support for specific, short-term programs for in-service training using public funding or with public-private-partnership resources. Specific responses may include: study visits; short-term overseas training; attachments to research, community, or private enterprises; or acquiring urgent adaptation strategies for dealing with the impact of natural phenomena, such as insect or disease outbreaks or climate change.
- **Create capacity for life-long learning.** Support may be given for the development of seminars and short learning activities at universities. These options would be available to public sector decision makers, senior technical managers, private sector managerial and technical personnel, and CSOs. This investment category serves to increase knowledge and skills as well as to exchange experiences and ideas among influential actors in the AIS.

Investments in building private sector capacity

These investments include support for mutually beneficial joint ventures in which, for example, the public sector supplies in-service or life-long-learning opportunities for private workers and the private sector supplies skilled operatives as teachers, facilitators, demonstrators. The private sector may also offer practical training internship spaces for public employees or students from the AET system (IAPs 3, 8, and 9). See also module 5 on private sector development.

Investing in project management and implementation personnel

Almost all development projects for the agricultural sector seek to strengthen the capacity of the people who implement them.¹ A variety of training and learning activities are often funded for these staff through the project's larger capacity-building components. The range of capacity-building activities for project personnel and beneficiaries is wide. Although there are generic lists of activities that can meet basic needs, each situation and its particular needs will determine the shape, content, duration, and participants in the capacity-building intervention.

These activities may be labeled capacity-building components or training components and typically are funded at about two or three percent of project costs. Such components are project specific. They operate alongside in-service training programs provided by public agencies for agricultural sector staff. A project's capacity-building components

are usually managed by a unit subsidiary to the project management unit. Not surprisingly, the quality of management varies from project to project.

As noted, investments in project-related training need to begin when projects are being developed. The team preparing the project should include expertise in capacity building at every stage. Managers from the beneficiary entity should be briefed on the importance of the project's capacity-building component and advised to appoint suitably qualified staff to manage the component. Managers from the beneficiary entity should provide a profile of each appointee (qualifications, experience, and training history). They should receive technical assistance to be able to undertake needs assessments, propose corresponding learning programs or activities, create (with the help of resource persons in the network) training/learning content, and plan and implement training/learning activities for carefully selected project staff. They should learn techniques to measure the impact of training and learning, to inform managers of the results, and to maintain clear, up-to-date records of all capacity-building activities.

Capacity-building specialists should be included in project preparation teams (in the case of World Bank projects, during the time from identification to appraisal) to ensure that training for project personnel is relevant, clearly defined, and can be implemented in time for the project to operate smoothly and achieve its objectives. Project funds will need to be allocated specifically to train staff assigned to project management to ensure that they understand the project's overall objectives and can manage its components. Resources will also be needed to (1) assess capacity needs, (2) evaluate capacity-building activities in every component of project-related training, and (3) provide support in each capacity-building component of the project for training in communications and problem-solving skills (for effective participation in the AIS).

FACTORS DETERMINING THE TYPE AND DURATION OF INVESTMENT IN ENHANCED IN-SERVICE TRAINING

The most powerful factor guiding in-service training investments (as in higher and technical education investments) is the realization among stakeholders and within the organization that change is needed. Investors should initiate a dialogue that highlights the benefits of changing the way that human resources are managed and details the steps that need to be taken. The short implementation span of projects and programs enables decision makers and project management to

observe relatively quickly how a capacity-building component benefits implementation and sustainability. Success at the project level can convince management of the benefits of adopting a more comprehensive HRD approach at the ministry or department level. With respect to the duration of the investment, it is important to note that installing quality management of human resources in a ministry or department is a process dictated by organizational and civil service rules, the pace of learning, satisfaction with progress and results on the part of senior management, and on the commitment of donors to see the process through to the end. The source of demand for enhanced in-service training influences the most appropriate investment response. In the case of short-term investments in specific courses, study visits, or attachments, requests may originate from government or from project implementers through government channels. Responses from investors may be made bilaterally or through existing project channels. The duration of such investments can range from weeks to one year. Support for the development and implementation of seminars or short learning activities at universities would most likely cover an agreed time period measured in years (or in numbers of events without time constraints). Underwriting the strengthening of advanced degree programs at regional or hub universities would fit in a medium- to long-term framework of support. Scholarship support for candidates would take into account the normal cycle for completing advanced degrees, so an initial commitment might be for ten years, dictated by successful completion of programs.

In the case of public-private partnerships, much depends on the type and size of the private enterprise. When the private enterprise is, for example, involved in production, processing, and marketing nationally and internationally, it will have a long-term need for personnel and will be keen to invest in building capacity in human resources. It can benefit from technology training from academic and research institutions and from offering internships to students that it can assess and possibly hire. Smaller private entities may be more comfortable purchasing training packages from the AET system and offering a small number of internship or attachment places for which the AET system would pay. A minimum commitment of five years would give both partners time to adjust the program in light of experience and to evaluate the impact of the partnership.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS

Benefits of interventions to improve how HRD is managed in public agencies or projects can include: enhanced capability of a ministry, department, project management unit, and

individuals to contribute to growth in the agricultural sector; heightened capability of individuals and service units to operate effectively in the AIS; greater clarity of purpose in capacity-building goals and activities; heightened morale of better-educated, better-trained, and more confident public sector staff; greater respect for public service providers among farming and rural communities; and more successfully implemented projects. Private enterprises can benefit from more productive workers and increased margins of profit.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES IN MINISTRIES AND DEPARTMENTS

In a practically oriented government ministry such as agriculture, it is often difficult to gain support for in-service training and learning, especially for reviewing and reforming the content and management of that training. The application of technology developed through agricultural research dominates the service activities that support growth in agriculture. Compared to these practical pursuits, capacity building and HRM can be perceived in the public sector as less important, “soft” areas that do not justify funding when other ministry tasks are so urgent. (In the private sector, capacity building and HRM are connected clearly to profit and loss and get much more attention from managers.) Yet capacity building in public entities is usually a small fraction of total project costs or ministry operations. Few truly qualified persons are assigned to capacity building. Even at higher ministry levels, this phenomenon holds true.

LESSONS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Opportunities for discussing the effectiveness of in-service training and project-related training can arise when countries are developing their national, agricultural, or rural development strategies or their poverty reduction strategies; when new projects are planned; or in discussions about adjustments or extensions of current projects. Similar opportunities arise when the agricultural private sector is creating demand for skilled human resources.

Several points are critical in taking action to improve in-service training and learning. Perhaps the most important point is to be certain that decision makers are committed to reforming in-service and project-related training and that civil service rules and regulations allow organizational change in HRM. Keep decision makers informed of design and implementation progress and problems. Consider investing in scholarships for qualified HRM candidates to earn higher degrees, and provide training for faculty and staff with responsibility for managing in-service training. Include training/learning specialists in project design and implementation. Given project timeframes and the capabilities of implementation staff, keep capacity-building objectives realistic. Be prepared to invest in short-term support for in-service training and capacity building. Identify potential partnerships between public and private entities to add to in-service training capacity, and discuss these partnerships at decision maker and AET management levels.