

Capacity Development in Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) By Brian Baldwin

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Context

The agriculture sector, with its potential for rural poverty alleviation, has particular characteristics which challenge the application of the Paris partnership commitments and require specific approaches to capacity development (CD). Generally, (i) agriculture, including the small holder sector, is private-sector-led with a wide variety of public/private sector operators; (ii) The role of the state in the sector is largely limited to regulation, provision of public goods and establishing market parameters; (iii) Agriculture and Rural Development (ARD) is cross-sectoral and institutionally complex, involving various ministries and institutions and includes (iv) a wide range of stakeholders (public sector, private sector, civil society and producers). (v) The challenges and needs of the sector are heterogeneous and location-specific.

This is why capacity has to be addressed at the (i) (small) farm or individual level with respect to knowledge and innovation (including through enhanced R&D and pluralistic agricultural advisory systems), at the (ii) institutional level including all stakeholders' institutions (public, private, CSO), and at the (iii) sectoral level with respect to governance and ownership.

What priority measures/initiatives for the coming years can help to make capacity development efforts more effective?

- The capacity to effectively lead sector processes in agriculture requires support to capacity development for all stakeholders at all levels; making special efforts for producers and rural communities – so far largely excluded from agricultural policy processes such as PRSPs, JASs or SWAPs– to allow for a constructive participation in policy making and implementation;
- Ensure the strengthening of in-country systems and the use of existing systems like NARS, Neuchatel, CGIAR etc. and the development of communities of practice for MfDR (through the existing Joint Venture) which offer opportunities to establish similar knowledge based systems for the agricultural sector where results monitoring & reporting is essential.
- Address capacity gaps in policy making and the managing the political economy of policies in the agriculture sector since a strong policy framework with clear policy priorities is a pre-condition for effective alignment. Focus on the embedding of agricultural sector governance and coordination in national policies and strategies.
- Define the role of state and non-state actors and inter-sector governance and coordination and the inter-sectoral coordination difficulties so that policies are broadly owned and consistent.

Why are these measures/initiatives promising?

Agricultural sector is the driver (particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa and south Asia) for pro-poor growth and is currently the focus of attention and support from partner governments and donors alike, hence the need to make increased aid levels more effective and increase 'alignment' as a key stepping stone for ownership, harmonisation and accountability-underpinned by delivery on results. This is shown by lessons learned (SWAPs, Neuchatel, WDR 2008) and has the strong support of regional initiatives like CAADP.

The Joint Assistance Strategies (JAS) evidence further potential to embed the agricultural sector into national governance and coordination.

How could Capacity Development initiatives be approached in the coming years?

- Support demand driven pluralistic agricultural advisory systems for support small holders;
- Strengthen ownership and provide finance where and when required, building on existing systems.

What are the recommendations for shaping the Accra Agenda for Action?

- A Key sector (for production and poverty alleviation) like agriculture needs to be better included into the Accra HLF process to attain MDGs;
- Lack of Capacity within agricultural sector currently constrains "MfDR" and "alignment" initiatives which are drivers for improvements in ownership and mutual accountability;
- AAA should promote capacity development as inclusive process (i.e. smallholders, producer organizations & CSOs, private agribusiness) for substantive participation in policy making and implementation (such as PRSPs, JASs and PBAs like SWAPs);
- AAA needs be more results-oriented, stating clear target supported outcomes.