

World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) and capacity building/strengthening

Introduction

Capacity building and strengthening is seen as a major responsibility of the Centre and is dealt with by Global Project 9 – *Strengthening Agroforestry Institutions and Tolls for Linking Knowledge to Action* and the Centre’s Global Training Unit. Put simple, the global project can be seen as dealing with the broader issues of translating knowledge into action through national and regional institutions and the training unit focuses more on the implementation of specific learning projects and activities supporting this. In addition to this, most of our other global projects and regions/countries also contribute to the Centre’s training mandate, mostly through specific learning activities that are an integral part of specific projects and activities.

Courses, content development and distance learning

Each year, the Centre plans, organizes and implements a series of short, in-service group training courses on specialist topics based on achievements and results as obtained through its collaborative research and development activities in the areas of agroforestry and natural resources management. Such courses are normally preceded by short (2 to 3 days) ‘curriculum development workshops’ that tackle all aspects related to training, learning and content as well as the logistic implications for this. Such workshops bring together Centre scientific and training staff. At the end of these workshops, a clear training plan and course curriculum is available and this specifies learning event justification, overall purpose, course objectives, target audience, resource persons, learning content, instructional methods, monitoring and evaluation as well as logistics support. Content development is guided by the Centre’s scientific and technical staff since the aim of the training is to convey state-of-the-art knowledge and skills in specialist areas based on advances made through the Centre’s collaborative research and development agenda. As such, the Centre now has a series of curricula and supporting learning resources for a series of short, in-service courses on topics such as; research methods, tree domestication, agroforestry marketing development, agroforestry policy, ecoagriculture leadership, introduction to agroforestry, global climate change mitigation, etc.

In terms of ‘distance or e-learning’, the Centre recently implemented a first blended learning event on ‘*Research Methods – Thinking Scientifically*’ for students and young researchers conducting their MSc/PhD thesis research in collaboration with a CGIAR Centre. A one-week problem solving workshop was preceded by a six week facilitated on-line discussion focusing on issues related to conducting agriculture and natural resource management research through the CGIAR system. Resource persons and participants were very enthusiastic about this blended learning event but it must be noted that the time and effort needed to implement this was seriously underestimated by the learning event organizers. Future events will of course be easier to implement once a successful pilot version has taken place but still it must be noted that such on-line learning can be considered demanding both from a learners and facilitators perspective. The difference with ‘academic’ learning events such as the ones the GOFAU is interested in is that students are obliged to take such courses in

order to get a degree whereas for short, in-service courses it is mostly the motivation of an individual participant that will determine its success since this leads not to a formal degree or other form of recognition. Facilitation for the latter can be a lot more intensive than for academic courses in a degree programme. We are currently in the process of writing up this first distance or e-learning event.

Regional capacity development programmes

ICRAF closely collaborates with various regional programmes in the context of all of its activities including capacity building and strengthening (ASARECA, CORAF, SADEC, FARA,...). The Centre plays an active role in a number of specific learning networks such as ANAFE, SEANAFE, RUFORUM,...

Contributions to GO-FAU

The Centre can avail a number of relevant learning activities (see courses higher up) to GO-FAU as far as their curriculum and supporting learning resources are concerned since these can be considered International Public Goods (exceptions made for some cases were non-ICRAF resources and resource persons contributed to such activities). The easiest and cheapest way of doing this would be through the Open Educational Resources (OER) approach taken by institutions such as Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The way this is done is simply to avail the course syllabus, calendar, readings, lecture notes and assignments on-line in an organized way. This however is not 'facilitated' learning using a Learning Management System (LMS) and even though this approach offers a lot of information to learners and teachers it is up to the individual to assess its value and usefulness in the absence of the resource persons behind this. For example, the Spring 2007 course on *Climate Change: Economics, Science and Politics* provides a wealth of information on the subject but that can hardly be properly interpreted without attending the classes on the subject. Lecture notes consist of the 'slides' used by resource persons when developing their topic. Many CGIAR Centres should be able to avail their courseware as such but then it will be up to the GO-FAU to make sense of this and interpret their value for its own learning activities based on the needs of its audiences.

To take this a step further, these courses can be offered with more participation on behalf of the originating Centres through their hands-on facilitation using a Learning Management System such as Moodle. This however would require substantial adaptation and delivery effort that will come at a cost.

New activities and courses

Whereas most of the existing 'face-to-face' short courses organized by the Centre can be adapted for blended learning events involving an on-line part and a short problem solving workshop, there are some ongoing or planned learning events that have the potential to address the needs and opportunities offered through the GO-FAU. Pending negotiations with the resource persons involved, these could be:

- ‘*Research Methods – Thinking Scientifically*’ as a training-of-trainers learning event for university faculty.
- ‘*Eco-agriculture Leadership*’ as a short blended learning event for the benefit of policy makers and development oriented audiences.
- ‘*Tree Domestication*’ covering a broad range of academic and practical subjects related to tree growing and environmental issues.
- ‘*Biodiversity*’ being an ideal topic to involve several CGIAR Centres.
- ‘*Rewarding Upland Poor for Environmental Services*’ a popular course focusing on natural resources management at the landscape level.
- Pending the needs of the GO-FAU audiences, it should further be possible to identify additional topics where a Centre such as ICRAF feels that it has a comparative advantage either on its own or in collaboration with other Centres.

Other distance learning activities

ICRAF, in collaboration first with IRRI (Knowledge Banks approach) and later on with CIP and the United Nations University, is spearheading and coordinating the CGIAR ICT-KM Programme project on ‘On-line Learning Resources’ (OLR). The dual objectives of this project are to a) create a virtual CGIAR training community of practice, and b) using advances in ICT-KM, develop some tools in areas that are of interest to most Centres (sharing learning resources, e-learning management systems). In order to achieve the latter, it was decided to enter into a ‘strategic’ partnership with ARIADNE – the European Knowledge Pool – since it was felt that within the CGIAR training community, little expertise or experience exists in this area. ICRAF and CIP developed the CGIAR Learning Objects Metadata (LOM Core) and Application Profile and several training staff of a number of CGIAR Centres were trained in the methodology of entering reusable learning objects in the CGIAR Knowledge Pool. This tool is linked to Moodle as a Learning Management System (LMS) and a number of Centres also experimented with its use as a means to develop on-line learning activities.

The use of reusable learning objects however is not yet easily accepted by most CG Centres since resource persons contributing learning materials to a Centre’s learning events still tend to be highly contextualized and quite often in formats (e.g. PowerPoint slides) that are not always easy to interpret as a ‘stand-alone’ resource. Since the use of RLOs based on international standards and conventions is increasingly becoming more widely accepted, the OLR project can be seen as an attempt to start using such advances in ICT-KM in order to share learning resources as a community. To date, about 500 learning materials have been uploaded to the repository but most of them are not RLOs as such but rather complete and contextualized resources that do not lend themselves very well to their reuse.

In order to further promote the use of the tools developed under the OLR project and promote inter-Centre training collaboration, ICRAF-ILRI developed a first ‘blended learning event’ entitled ‘Research Methods – Thinking Scientifically’ for the benefit of students and young scientists conducting their research on agriculture or natural resources management in collaboration with CGIAR scientists. A total of 38 learners from 9 Centres participated in a six-week on-line discussion and e-learning event and later on attended a one-week face-to-face problem solving workshop in Nairobi,

Kenya. All involved proved very enthusiastic about this blended learning event and a paper capturing this first CGIAR e-learning event is being written.

The Phase II ICT-KM Programme OLR project has been accepted for funding and will be implemented between June 2007-July 2008 and is entitled *Quality assurance for agricultural training service delivery*. This phase too will bring together a number of CGIAR Centres as to discuss and implement quality standards for training and learning resources.

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