

IFPRI Learning and Capacity Strengthening Program and its Contribution to GO-FAU Program

Background paper for the
Stakeholder Consultation meeting with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
Nov 1-2, 2007

Introduction

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) is one of the 15 future harvest centers, whose mission is to provide policy solutions that reduce poverty and end hunger and malnutrition. The mission emanates from the mission of the CGIAR: “To achieve sustainable food security and reduce poverty in developing countries through scientific research and research-related activities in the fields of agriculture, livestock, forestry, fisheries, policy, and natural resources management.”

IFPRI’s mission focuses on:

- Identifying and analyzing alternative international, national, and local policies in support of improved food security and nutrition, emphasizing low-income countries and poor people and the sound management of the natural resource base that supports agriculture;
- Contributing to capacity strengthening of people and institutions in developing countries that conduct research on food, agriculture, and nutrition policies; and
- Actively engaging in policy communications, making research results available to all those in a position to apply or use them, and carrying out dialogues with those users to link research and policy action.

IFPRI places priority on activities that benefit the greatest number of poor people in greatest need in the developing world. In carrying out its activities, IFPRI seeks to focus on vulnerable groups, as influenced by class, religion, ethnicity, agroecological location, and gender.

IFPRI is committed to providing global food policy knowledge as an international public good; that is, it provides knowledge relevant to decision makers both inside and outside the countries in which it undertakes research. IFPRI views both public organizations and the private sector in food systems as objects of study and as partners.

Given the large body of national and international food policy research, IFPRI’s added-value derives from its own cutting-edge research linked with academic excellence in other institutions, such as other CGIAR centers, universities, and other research institutes in the South and the North, and from its application of this knowledge to national and international food policy problems.

This document outlines the current capacity strengthening activities of IFPRI, the activities of the Learning & Capacity Strengthening Program (L&CS) as it relates to IFPRI's objectives and its linkages with other CG Centers, its strategic goals and directions for the next five years, the activities it will pursue in enriching existing learning programs and developing new innovative courses, and the thematic areas it could develop based on IFPRI's content.

Current Capacity Strengthening Activities at IFPRI

IFPRI's research portfolio consists of three focus areas (with 9 research themes)¹ along with policy communications and capacity strengthening:

- Efficient and fair functioning of global and national food and agriculture systems
- Effective strategies and governance at the global, regional, and national levels
- Enhancing pro-poor food and agriculture system innovations
- Policy communications
- Capacity strengthening

Efficient and fair functioning of global and national food and agriculture systems focuses on policies that address constraints to achieving food and nutrition security and that support more efficient functioning of global and national food, nutrition, and agriculture systems, including policies that improve the food and nutrition security of poor people.

Effective strategies and governance focuses on policies that improve global, regional, and national governance and enhance political participation in, and institutions for, pro-poor food, nutrition, and agricultural policies and related services.

Enhancing pro-poor food and agriculture system innovations is concerned with policies that foster scientific and institutional innovation and technology use for the benefit of poor people in developing countries and related comprehensive food, nutrition, agriculture, and development strategies.

IFPRI's approach to food policy communications includes reaching key stakeholders as well as listening to them. IFPRI undertakes its strategic communications activities through a Communications Division that works closely with the research and outreach divisions and IFPRI's 2020 Vision Initiative. The purpose of this activity is to ensure that IFPRI's research and outreach programs focus on the needs of poor people in developing countries, so that research findings advance the Institute's mission to provide policy solutions that reduce poverty, hunger, and malnutrition.

¹ The nine themes are as follows: Global food and agricultural outlooks and options for policies; Globalization, trade, and markets; Natural resource policies; Risks and emergencies; Governance and policy processes; Development strategies; Poverty, nutrition, and social protection; Diet, health, and food safety; and Science and technology.

In light of the above learning opportunities offered within these broad research themes, IFPRI's capacity strengthening comprises of the following components:

- Capacity strengthening of NARS in developing countries, with special emphasis on Africa
- Cooperation with all IFPRI research and outreach divisions and the 2020 Vision Initiative to provide an institutional focal point for learning, training, and capacity strengthening activities
- Capacity strengthening research
- Linkages to other CGIAR centers' capacity-strengthening activities
- Support for University cooperation

Learning and Capacity Strengthening Program (L&CS) at IFPRI

The L&CS Program at IFPRI undertakes above capacity strengthening activities. Its aim is to develop the capacity of the next generation of policymakers, university professors, agriculture, food, and natural resource researchers and analysts, and civil society leaders with high quality postgraduate education and relevant skills for alleviating poverty and food insecurity through sustainable use of natural resources.

The specific components of IFPRI's capacity strengthening are elaborated below.

A. Collaborative Activities

Capacity strengthening takes place in collaboration with IFPRI's research and outreach divisions and external organizations. Learning subjects are identified together with partners and through the research findings of IFPRI's five research divisions and the relevant CGIAR programs. IFPRI is expanding its activities to collaborate with the other 14 CGIAR centers in delivering capacity-strengthening activities and to learn from their experiences in capacity strengthening. In general, IFPRI's actions should not only strengthen the capacity of its local partners, but also strengthen IFPRI's capacity to meet the needs of its partners.

IFPRI implements its activities through networks at the international, regional, and national levels. Since men and women may articulate different needs and priorities, IFPRI strives for a balanced gender composition among these networks. One of the goals of the capacity-strengthening strategy is to deliver most learning programs and material through partner organizations.

B. Strategic Goals and Linkages with CGIAR Centers

- The establishment of GO-FAU² program has enabled IFPRI to develop linkages with other CGIAR centers on capacity strengthening activities. L&CS program will have a

² The information can be accessed at the following website: www.openaguniversity.cgiar.org

full-time staff of five individuals engaged in developing partnerships; managing the activities of GO-FAU program; providing administrative support; coordinating the development and delivery of new course materials suitable for delivery by distance education; improvement of existing distance education modules, and conversion of existing course materials for distance education. These core staff will interact in virtual mode with course content providers, course quality reviewers, and partner universities around the world.

C. Support for University Cooperation

The L&CS Program seeks to work with universities in developing and developed countries to enrich existing graduate-level degree programs in Agricultural Economics/Agribusiness (both traditional or distance education programs) and to develop new programs to be delivered through distance education. In so doing, it will enhance and enrich the course content and research base of graduate-level programs in Agricultural Economics/Agribusiness. The program will operate according to a number of principles that aim to maximize the potential positive impacts and exploit the identified strengths and opportunities, while managing and/or offsetting associated weaknesses and threats:

- Complement and not substitute for or compete with the graduate-level education programs in Agricultural Economics/Agribusiness in developing and developed countries by addressing identified technical and theoretical knowledge gaps.
- Help regional-level organizations to determine capacity strengthening needs and implement graduate-level degree programs in the above areas.
- Partner with traditional and open universities at the national and regional level in graduate-level program and instructional material development and delivery of courses.
- Support the offering of graduate-level courses by developing and developed country institutions in various languages using distance education technologies so that all developing countries might benefit.
- Focus on strengthening existing open universities and other universities in the developing world rather than envisaging the granting of graduate-level degrees.
- Foster the use of appropriate media and technology for the development and delivery of graduate-level instructional materials for maximum pedagogical effectiveness.
- Capitalize on, harmonize, and integrate the wide array of existing instructional materials and programs that many CGIAR Centers have been administering independently in the developing world and make them available to developing country educational institutions.
- Produce high-quality courses and course materials utilizing CGIAR center staff and outside experts through a transparent quality review process and make these available as widely as possible through partner universities. The primary beneficiaries of the programs of GO-FAU will be the partner universities who will collaborate in developing high-quality graduate-level content for existing and/or new courses in their universities. In turn, secondary beneficiaries are the graduate students at the partner universities.

- Promote the participation of women in the delivery of graduate-level programs and as graduate students in collaboration with the partner universities.
- Expand the reach of high-quality graduate-level programs, with GO-FAU program structured as an enabling institution for the development and production of an “open access” environment.

These program goals will be pursued through a strategic approach that focuses on graduate-level education related to agriculture, food, and natural resources in developing countries and on nontraditional modes of delivery, namely distance education. In so doing, instructional human and material resources will be harnessed.

Activities of L&CS Program in support of GO-FAU Program Goals

Enrichment and Development of Contents for the Master’s program in Agricultural Economics/Agribusiness

In support of the GO-FAU program activities, the L&CS Program of IFPRI will enrich and develop its core activity around a M.Sc. Program in Agricultural Economics/Agribusiness and executive short courses. This program is an applied economics program that deals with the economic analysis and applications of agriculture, natural resources, environment, rural development, agribusiness, trade, and international agricultural and resource issues. Agricultural economists trained through this program could work in a wide range of activities, including agricultural production and marketing, business management, natural resource management, environmental assessment, energy economics, international trade, and economic development.

The course contents of the above areas will be designed for students interested in attaining postgraduate education in economic analysis of agriculture, resource economics, and agribusiness topics. The contents emphasize both economic theory and quantitative analysis of a broad set of agricultural, resource and business management problems. The contents will be developed for six specializations: Agricultural Policy and Trade, International Development, Environmental and Resource Economics, Agribusiness Management, Food and Agriculture Industrial Organization and Markets, and Applied Production Economics.

Activities to Date

During 2005, the L&CS program reviewed the leading Master of Science programs in Agricultural Economics, and Agribusiness at North American, European, and selected developing-country universities; conducted needs assessments of key partners in Africa and South Asia and identified key contacts at partner universities; catalogued CGIAR teaching and learning materials, as well as distance-education materials from other institutions; drafted business and implementation plans; established a content-peer review committees for Agricultural Economics.

The staff met with several universities in South Asia and Africa, as well as the University of London, regarding partnership agreements, and MOUs were signed with the Indira Gandhi National Open University, Tamil Nadu Agriculture University, and Yashwantrao Chavan Maharashtra Open University. The team also produced a CD-ROM containing the curriculum, course content, and reading and lecture materials for Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness. There were several program outcomes in 2006. MOUs were signed with the Open University of Sri Lanka, Alemaya University, African Agricultural Economics Education Network, and the University of Nairobi.

The Agricultural Economics CD-ROM, developed in 2005, was disseminated to 65 partner institutions in 2006, and viewed by 441 other interested parties through the GO-FAU website. Feedback on the curriculum has been received through formal meetings and informal letters from users. In August 2006, as part of the International Association of Agricultural Economists' Conference, a symposium was held to share the agricultural economics curriculum with selected leaders in the field. Formal commentaries were presented from different regions of the world.

In 2007, the L&CS Program initiated consultations with several CGIAR centers on the existing course contents that could be used for GO-FAU supported executive programs. Discussions with partner universities continued and so has an expansion of partnerships.

We believe IFPRI can develop materials on policy research and analysis skills related to agriculture, food security, nutrition, governance, trade, organization and management of institutions, science and technology policy, institutional innovations, marketing and natural resource management. IFPRI's L&CS program will collaborate with partners to generate new knowledge and strengthen individual and institutional capacity in agricultural economics/agribusiness. Apart from the GO-FAU initiative, which will strengthen existing Master of Science programs, short-term executive courses, and other agricultural education programs of developing country universities in selected African and Asian partner universities that will take the lead in delivering courses, supporting students, providing accreditation, and awarding degrees, the L&CS program will also offer e-learning opportunities.

IFPRI's Virtual Learning Room provides opportunities for electronic distance learning by creating an interactive community that helps students communicate with other virtual-class colleagues, as well as the mentor. An online tutor is assigned to each e-learning course and will provide practical advice and help.

Other Activities

In order to help developing country institutions and individuals in updating their policy research skills and keep abreast of new developments in the field, the L&CS Program publishes a monthly electronic newsletter. This monthly mailing is a source of information on capacity strengthening in food, agriculture, nutrition, and natural resource policy, as well as on poverty monitoring and evaluation in both developed and developing countries. Through this newsletter, duplication of work is avoided and a network of food policy trainers and experts are formed.