STRENGTHENING CAPACITY FOR AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION (SCAIN)

CAPACITY ASSESSMENT IN MULTI-STAKEHOLDER AGRICULTURAL INNOVATION PLATFORMS

A Guidance Note

Definition of Capacity Assessment: "An analysis of desired capacities against existing capacities that offers a systematic way of gathering critical data & information on capacity assets and needs and serves as input for the formulation of a capacity development response." (**UNDP, 2009)**

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Contents

Acronyms

AIS	Agricultural Innovation System
CIAT	Centro Internacional de Agricultura Tropical
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
EU	European Union
FARA	Forum for Agricultural Research in Africa
GATES	Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
IAR4D	Integrated agricultural research for development
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
NAADS	National Agricultural Advisory Services
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRI	Natural Resources Institute
PAEPARD	Platform for African–European Partnerships for Agricultural Research and Development
RIU	Research Into Use
SCAIN	Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Research for Innovation
SCARDA	Strengthening Capacity for Agricultural Research for Development in Africa
SSA-CP	Sub-Saharan Africa Challenge Programme
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TOR	Terms of Reference
UNDG	United Nations Development Group
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

Guidance Note on Assessing the Capacity in Agricultural Innovation Platforms

1. Background

1.1 Aim of the guidance note

This document aims to guide a small team tasked to assess the capacity for agricultural innovation in a multi-stakeholder context. The context might be an actual or potential "innovation platform[1]" such as the three commodity-based platforms selected for the piloting capacity assessment methods (Sutherland *et al.*, 2011c), or it might be a project or programme that is more generally focused on strengthening of innovation within a sub-sector of agriculture within a country, such as livestock or horticulture. The guidance note is not intended as a blueprint, but offers pointers and a framework for undertaking a capacity assessment.

1.2 Basis for guidance provided

The guidance is based on a review of capacity assessment methods and processes used in other contexts and some experiences of undertaking capacity assessments with agricultural innovation platforms (Sutherland, 2011a). The guidance is provisional as it has not been extensively tested in a range of agricultural innovation contexts. It is planned to develop it further in response to learning that results from its application.

1.3 Starting assumptions

The guidance note is framed with the following assumptions in mind:-

- There is an interest from a donor or funder in the particular context being assessed and the donor is funding the assessment.
- The agricultural initiative being considered may be:
  - a project or programme that is already funded and requires strengthening
  - a promising idea or major challenge that is being explored with a view to funding
  - a generic effort to strengthen the capacity of the national "agricultural innovation system"
- The assessment will be undertaken by a team which will typically include a combination of "local" and "external" expertise.
- The assessment will be led or facilitated by a consultant/expert/donor representative.
- The team will not all be "experts" in capacity assessment methods, but will include individuals with skills and experience in facilitating a participatory process of enquiry in a development context, and individuals with specific technical competence (e.g.

[1] The term "innovation platform" is used in this guide to refer to a coordinated and supported initiative involving a range of stakeholders who have committed to a process of collaboration, including taking risks and committing resources, in order to achieve an objective (e.g. solve a problem, improve a process, develop an opportunity) which involves application of new knowledge through a social learning process to effect changes resulting in improved outcomes. Outcomes may include more effective and efficient processes, improved capacity, more sustainable enterprises, improvements in income, health, well-being, environmental sustainability. While collaboration may be enhanced through the application of advanced information and communication technology, such as an interactive website, an innovation platform is not built around such an application.

expertise of a commodity, a sub-sector, market analysis) in the agricultural innovation context being assessed.

- The assessment will provide information to inform investment decisions in the area of interest.
- The assessment will be undertaken with the cooperation of key stakeholders involved in the context. Some stakeholders will derive value from participation in the assessment process and findings, even if no external investment follows the assessment.
- The process will involve a significant amount of face-to-face interaction and relationship exploration. It will not be based solely on the completion and analysis of questionnaires and/or email dialogue.

2. Capacity Assessment – definitions & challenges

2.1 Defining Innovation capacity

Capacity for innovation in agriculture (as in other sectors), will reside at different levels; individual, organisational and societal/institutional. Individuals acting in their own "capacity" are more "agile" than an organisation. Individuals can champion an innovative idea which they feel passionate about. Organisations, while less "agile", once committed to a new idea or opportunity have the resources and legitimacy to make large contributions to the innovation process. The societal and institutional setting provides a wider context for re-negotiating the rules and building the kind of relationships and understandings between organisations and stakeholders which are required for successful innovation. Some key areas of requisite capacity for agricultural innovation at the different levels are indicated below.

	Some Key Areas of Capacity Relating To Innovation
Individual	Willing and able to take risks Able to assess risks and identify opportunities Possess specific knowledge/skill that is needed by others Able to build up social capital and trusting relationships Able to champion ideas.
OrganisationalLevel	Able to commit, relate and engage with other organisations over an extended period of time Able to deliver key function/s to an adequate standard Able to mobilise resources and support and build legitimacy Able to adapt and self-renew (via learning, strategizing, managing change) Able to achieve coherence, manage complexity and balance capability mix.
Societal/Institutional Level	Policies, values and attitudes which support innovation and the agricultural sector, including; working in partnership, open and effective communication, a longer-term perspective, incentives for risk-taking and innovation, dis-incentives for resistance to positive and needed change.

While some actors may be involved in their individual capacity, a significant agricultural innovation process requires a number of organisations to collaborate. This implies the ability to provide an effective mechanism for coordinating and/or managing the innovation process. This can be seen as an institutional level capacity issue, relating to governance.

2.2 Defining capacity assessment

Capacity assessment is usually a specific activity at a point in time. Assessment of capacity can also be a repeated activity, in which case it might be called a "reassessment" or "review" of capacity.

A working definition of a capacity assessment is *"An analysis of desired capacities against existing capacities that offers a systematic way of gathering critical data & information on capacity assets and needs and serves as input for the formulation of a capacity development response." (**UNDP, 2009c, slide 3)***

A capacity assessment can be a "self-assessment", an assessment that is commissioned and undertaken by a third party, or a combination of the two, which is usually better. In the context of agricultural innovation, it is most likely that a potential funder (e.g. a national government or donor), who is not directly involved, might agree to commission an assessment of capacity in relation to a specific opportunity or issue, with the collaboration of the key stakeholders.

2.3 Principles of capacity development: Implications for capacity assessment

Because capacity assessment aims to inform investment, general principles of capacity strengthening/development also apply to how the assessment of an agricultural innovation platform is undertaken (Box 1).

Box 1
General Principles of Capacity Development
– implications for Capacity Assessment (in italics)

1. **Don't rush; capacity development is a long-term process:** not amenable to short-term results seeking. *– a capacity assessment should not be rushed.*

2. **Respect the value systems and foster self-esteem:** The imposition of alien values can undermine confidence. Self-esteem is at the root of capacity and empowerment – *the capacity assessment process should incorporate local values and aim to build confidence of local actors*.

3. **There are no blueprints**. Capacity development means learning, a voluntary process requiring commitment and interest. *Make the capacity assessment process interesting for local team members, for example by involving them in the design of the assessment process.*

4. **Challenge mindsets and power differentials:** Capacity development is not power neutral and frank dialogue is essential. *The capacity assessment should be facilitated in a way that is transparent, encourages existing points of view to be challenged and recognises power differences – between stakeholders and within key organisations.*

5. **Think and act in terms of sustainable capacity outcomes:** *the capacity assessment process should inform and encourage influential actors to consider how core capabilities can be sustained and handed on to new entrants.*

6. **Establish positive incentives:** *the capacity assessment process should examine, with decision-makers, how the incentive structure fosters or hinders innovation behaviour and how the incentive system might need to be changed.*

7. **Integrate external inputs into national priorities, processes and systems:** *the capacity assessment process should examine how the wider institutional processes and systems function and identify existing strengths and weaknesses relating to agricultural innovation and promising opportunities/entry points for new initiatives.*

8. **Build on existing capacities rather than creating new ones:** *the capacity assessment process should discuss how existing institutions relating to agricultural innovation can be strengthened and key expertise retained and valued (unless in a post-conflict country requiring building and development of new capacities).*

9. **Stay engaged under difficult circumstances:** *when the capacity assessment is not going well, <u>pause</u> to ask why and what might be done differently – this relates to point 1 – <u>don't rush</u>.*

10. **Remain accountable to ultimate beneficiaries:** *Even when senior decision makers seem not to support the types of change or reform implied by agricultural innovation, continue to engage with local actors who are potential beneficiaries of agricultural innovation and/or who understand and are supportive of AIS concepts.*

Elaborated from UNDP Capacity Assessment Training Guide 2008, Box 2 p 22 *(parts in italics added by author*)

Some General Tips for Undertaking Capacity Assessment

(derived from UNDP, 2009- lessons on capacity assessment)

Use existing data & information. A considerable amount of data & information may be readily available, for example in the form of project reports and evaluations, previous assessments of capacity in the target organistaions. There is no need to duplicate what others have already done.

There is also some general advice on capacity assessment which applies to the assessment of an agricultural innovation platform (Box 2).

2.4 General advice for capacity assessment

Box 2 Some General Advice for Capacity Assessment

Collect the optimal amount of data and information. There is little point in collecting a wealth of information if the team has insufficient capacity to analyse and interpret the findings.

Use multiple information sources. Collecting information from different sources and triangulating the results strengthens the validity and objectivity of capacity assessment results. *Talk to a range of stakeholders, if possible including employees at different levels within an organisation.*

Develop the capacity assessment tools collaboratively. *For example, an interview checklist, a self-assessment questionnaire or workshop exercise, should be developed with the assessment team and be relevant to the interests of various stakeholders. This should be in a form of words which is easily understandable by the people using the tool.*

Manage group discussions carefully. Group discussions are a useful way to collect inputs for an assessment but their effectiveness depends on group composition; *for example, avoid putting managers and employees or individuals with big differences in level of education in the same group.*

Pay attention to cultural norms, values and traditions. Cultural norms can influence the process and the results. *Direct criticism, making jokes, or bringing together men and women in the same room may be seen as inappropriate.*

Seek different perspectives & explore conflicting views. Although multiple sources of information increase the validity of the assessment results, they often produce conflicting views. *Different viewpoints can be explored in follow up interviews or workshops.*

Organize an end of assessment workshop. Once the initial results of the assessment are available, the assessment team can organize a workshop. *This may be done to seek feedback from a broad group of relevant stakeholders, refine and deepen the assessment and build consensus on the issues and the way forward.*

Wait until the end to prioritize capacity development responses and follow-up actions. Capacity development is an inherently complex and often political process. Identifying priority areas for capacity investments is therefore best left to the end to reduce the risk of the process from being skewed by stakeholder interests.

Use capacity assessments to galvanize interest for change and to promote organisational learning and empowerment – *For example, encourage participants at the end of assessment workshop to hold a seminar in their workplace to feed back and discuss the assessment findings.*

Adapted from "UNDP Lessons Learned on Capacity Assessment June 2009." http://www.beta.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/undp-lessons-learned-on-capacity-assessment-june-2009.html

2.5 Additional Suggestions for Capacity Assessment of Agricultural Innovation Platforms

There are some other principles and suggestions which are important during capacity assessment.

Effective leadership, facilitation and support of the assessment process; good leadership and effective facilitation are essential. The most important thing is to ensure that a capable local contact person and a capable external resource person are selected and given the resources, time and support required for a capacity assessment.

Managing expectations and interests: effective facilitation includes strategies to manage the expectations raised among stakeholders and the various interests manifested during the assessment process. It may be useful to nominate a member of the assessment team to make notes and give feedback to the team regarding any obvious interests manifested during the interactions and any comments from the team which might raise expectations unnecessarily.

Time for reflection: as noted earlier, during analysis of information it is very important for there to be planned periods of reflection during the capacity assessment process. This can often be done informally in the spaces between meetings or interviews. If not planned, the risk is that it will not be done, and the balance between information gathering and information sharing and discussion will be too much on the side of the former.

Include hard to reach stakeholders: in any context there will be some actors that are important but not easy to reach or engage with for various reasons. The team will need to review the inclusiveness of their assessment process periodically. If they have not managed to reach key stakeholders for interviews, they may invite them to a meeting or workshop. However, they may not come, or may send a representative who is not well informed. If this is the case alternative strategies will be needed. This will depend on the type of actor. If it is corporate agri-business then another follow up visit after the workshop, or cold calling a person and inviting them for a drink or a meal might be an option. If it is a private commodity trader then going to agricultural markets early in the morning may be effective.

Keep the "higher powers on board/in the loop": developing capacity for agricultural innovation will require support from decision makers, funders and policy influencers in the various key organisations. It is advisable to visit as many as possible of these people at the start of the assessment and also at the end to brief them on the findings. They could be invited to a 1-hour or 30-minute de-briefing session, as they are unlikely to be able to spare the time to attend a workshop event.

Work with existing platforms and supportive organisations – For example, the SCARDA project was led by FARA and took the approach of working with programme leaders with a mandate to address capacity issues in sub-Saharan Africa in sub-regional agricultural research organisations. As a follow up the SCAIN project worked with programme leaders who supported the idea of undertaking capacity assessments of existing innovation platforms.

Where possible use personal knowledge and connections – because "assessment" has connotations of "evaluation", and because a grasp of the context is so important to the design of the assessment, if a member of the assessment team or the overseer has existing personal

connections with and/or knowledge about an initiative or country this is an advantage to use. It can help to get things moving and get the assessment off on the right foot.

Focus more on opportunities and challenges than focusing on capacity gaps – while some form of capacity gap analysis is important within the assessment process, it is also helpful to look at gaps in the context of specific agricultural innovation challenges or opportunities identified. If the starting point is capacity gaps, on what is lacking or needed, the risk is an energy consuming and potentially unfruitful process of generating, refining and prioritising a "shopping list" of capacity needs and intervention plans which are not realistic.

2.6 Challenges of assessing innovation capacity in the agricultural of a developing country

Agricultural innovation is long-term, complex and unpredictable process. Many of the key organisations, both public (research, extension, training) and private (e.g. seed companies, agro-chemical companies, agro-vet service providers) have cultures that are not very open to change and with vested interests to defend. NGOs involved in agriculture often have pressure to demonstrate developmental impact and limited resources to invest in developing the technical capacity of their employees. Added to this, many of the "enterprise domain" actors (e.g. smaller scale primary producers, processors, traders, transporters) and also the final beneficiaries (e.g. rural and urban households) are diverse categories of actors with multiple needs and capabilities, who are often hard to reach and systematically engage in the capacity assessment process.

In this context it will be a challenge to meet the expectations of investors, whether governments, international donors or charitable foundations. Often they expect quick results from their investments, may have limited budgets for capacity assessments, and may require detailed plans with budgets for capacity strengthening that will bring "quick-wins" and target "low-hanging fruit". In this context it might be useful to include a member of the donor organisation in the assessment team, and use every opportunity to communicate what is involved in capacity development and to work with their expectations.

2.7 Challenges of assessing capacity in multi-stakeholder context

There are challenges in undertaking any capacity assessment. However, some of these are more pronounced in assessing a multi-stakeholder context, particularly when the focus is on innovation capacity. Most of the challenges arise due to three features of multi-stakeholder contexts.

A diversity of actors (actually or potentially involved in an initiative) means that:

- It will be difficult to involve all relevant players in the assessment particularly when the available time and budget are limited.
- There will be diversity of organisational cultures and areas of specialism and so the assessment team will need sufficient experience and communication skills to engage effectively across this diversity.
- There will be a wide array of expectations and interests to be managed during the assessment.

- There is a potentially very wide range of capacity weaknesses relating to agricultural innovation that could be strengthened, and the challenge is likely to be selecting which ones to address.

Lack of a unified coordinating or governance structure for agricultural innovation (unless the assessment is carried out as part of an existing project) means that:

- Gaining support and legitimacy for the capacity assessment may be problematic.
- More effort will be needed to put in place the logistics for an assessment and to arrange interviews, meetings and workshops.
- Achieving participation in the assessment process and ownership of the results may be more difficult.
- Obtaining co-funding for the assessment and support for any follow-up assessment activities is a more complex process.

Innovation is an unpredictable process, which means that:

- It is difficult to predict in advance who all the key players might be and hence who to include in the assessment.
- Some key skill or capacity areas may be difficult to anticipate; no single organisation or person has a full understanding of all the possibilities for innovation in a particular context.

3. Engaging and Negotiating

Engaging and negotiating is an important activity in the early stages of a capacity assessment, and will usually fall to whoever is leading or coordinating the assessment.

3.1 Establishing key facts

The person or people leading the capacity assessment will need to establish the following points to inform their subsequent actions:

- Who is funding and who is overseeing the capacity assessment; their policy and track record on capacity development.
- What resources (financial, human, accessible secondary information) will be available for the assessment, and related to this what level of resources might be available to support capacity strengthening measures identified by the assessment.
- The funder or overseer's understanding of why the capacity assessment is needed and their expectations regarding its scope. In the context of multi-stakeholder agricultural innovation, there are a number of possible reasons why a capacity assessment might be needed, and more than one of the following may apply:

    - To provide a starting point for formulating a capacity development strategy to promote innovation within a country's agricultural sector, sub-sector or commodity.
    - To confirm or refine a capacity development strategy that has already been identified to support a particular initiative, such as an innovation platform.

- To build support from key stakeholders within a planned or actual initiative for a capacity development, and/or provide a mechanism for dialogue among stakeholders in this initiative.
- To provide insight into operational challenges in order to progress the implementation of agricultural programme or project that is faltering.

- It is important that the person leading the assessment is not only familiar with the funder's expectations, but also is able to see how these might be met within the time and resources available. If the funder's expectations are not clear, or seem unrealistic, then further discussion and agreement will be useful before engaging with the local contact person. If there are no terms of reference for the assessment, it will be useful to draw up a one page outline of why the assessment is needed, who it will be used by, what it **must** cover, and what it **might** cover (time and resources allowing).
- Who are the main contact persons or leaders? What has been their involvement to date and where do they stand with regard to supporting and participating in a capacity assessment?
- Other key context issues may include: what is the official language? What are the funder's expectations regarding links to ongoing programmes or projects? What is the deadline for the assessment report?

3.2 Agreeing scope of the assessment

After the assessment leader has established communication with the local contact person or organisation, the following points regarding the capacity assessment will need to be agreed, through discussion and negotiation:

The scope of the capacity assessment. The local contact person, if not involved in drawing up the original TOR for the assessment, can be requested to comment on them and propose any revisions. This will most probably result in modifications to the scope. It is a good idea to discuss any significant changes in scope with the funder.

Who and what will be consulted. A list of key people and organisations will need to be developed. Once agreed, an itinerary of appointments will need to be made so that the assessment team can visit and undertake interviews. A list of key documents and official information sources will also need to be drawn up. Access to these will need to be arranged. Both lists will be guided by the nature of the agricultural innovation platform being considered for investment.

End product. The team leader should already have a clear idea of what the funder of the assessment expects in terms of a report, but it is important that this is discussed with the local coordinator who may also have other expectations and requirements to meet. This includes expectations about the content, authorship and language of the final report.

3.3 Assessment team

The assessment team's composition. The size of the assessment team will depend, among other things, on the resources available for the capacity assessment.

A team of four gives flexibility as it enables undertaking interviews in parallel. It also allows for a mix of expertise and experience, and is small enough for rapidly developing

mutual understanding and effective communication during the assessment. A larger team will allow more ground to be covered, but requires more coordination effort, more time for sharing of information and a leader with strong coordination skills. In terms of the balance between local and external expertise, there should always be more local team members. In terms of the expertise required for a capacity assessment, UNDP guidance (UNDP, 2010) proposes three key areas of generic expertise:

a) **context** (local knowledge of the stakeholders, language, culture, policies etc.).

b) **content** (areas of technical expertise required for the type of agricultural innovation being considered – e.g. marketing and agribusiness, commodity/sub-sector knowledge, institutional development).

c) **process** (experience and ability to facilitate the assessment process including designing scale and scope, tools for information collection and analysis – external facilitation should improve the objectivity of the assessment).

It is also advisable to have a person with good local connections and standing, who can easily arrange meetings, secure access to decision makers and promote the ideas agreed. If possible, such a person may take on a "champion" or "broker" role during the implementation of an agricultural innovation platform, as one of the actions agreed.

Defining responsibilities within the team. This will usually be agreed on the basis of the expertise in the key areas outlined above. The assessment preparation will usually be undertaken jointly by the local contact person and the external facilitator, who would normally be the "team leader". The local contact person will usually make the local logistical arrangements, set the itinerary based on the agreed process, identify suitable local team members, and ensure they are clear about what is expected and what resources will be needed for the assessment. The assessment method facilitator will make clear the proposed process, the tools to be used and the specific areas of expertise required on the team, the types of stakeholders to be consulted and the type of secondary information required. Budget holders may also need to be involved in cases there are financial implications of what has been agreed.

3.4 Assessment Process

Agreeing the duration and time frame for the capacity assessment. This is likely to require negotiation. Both parties may have busy schedules and some key players may be particularly busy at certain times of the year or month due to the relevant agricultural or activity calendar. Depending on the resources available and the nature of the initiative being considered the option of a staged assessment over a period of months may be considered. For example, it may involve a first stage comprising a scoping visit and initial assessment, followed by a process of further information gathering and consultation, and then a concerted effort involving analysis of the information and discussion of the implications with stakeholders. More limited resources and time frames may only permit a single continuous exercise undertaken within a one or two week period. If this is the case the implications are that the results will definitely need to be revisited, and most likely refined further prior to decisions being made regarding funding of capacity strengthening activities.

4 Selecting Assessment "Tools"

It is noted above that there are no blueprints for effective capacity development. This includes the task of capacity assessment for a multi-stakeholder agricultural innovation platform. Nevertheless, there are tools that can be very helpful when used appropriately in a managed capacity assessment exercise.

4.1 Factors to consider in selection of tools

The following factors should influence which tools are selected for a particular capacity assessment:-

- **The scope and objectives of the assessment –** If the assessment aims to be more exploratory in a situation where there is no specific multi-stakeholder agricultural initiative planned or currently on the ground, then key informant interviews and analysis of secondary data will probably be the most useful tools. This may be supplemented by group discussions and a workshop at the end of the process, if resources and time allow. If there is an initiative already on the ground, then some key informant interviews combined with a stakeholder workshop might be a more appropriate approach. If there is already a multi-stakeholder initiative that has planned meetings, it might be possible to start the assessment at such a meeting, which may be a useful venue to consult with stakeholders on their availability and their views on how the assessment can be undertaken.

- **The experience and capability of the team members** – The most important "tool" will be the assessment team itself. This tool will be sharper when there is a depth and breadth of experience in the team with using qualitative assessment methods. It is unwise to ask team members to use a particular tool, unless at least one of the team has experience and is confident to coach others in its use, or take the lead in using the tool (e.g. in a group or workshop setting).

- **The time available for the assessment** – If time is limiting then tools which enable more rapid collection of information will be favoured.

- **The number, range and location of stakeholders to be consulted** – If there are very many geographically scattered key stakeholders, tools that enable cost-effective communication are better (if the assessment team spends very long periods travelling between interviews this approach will not be not cost-effective).

- **The language used to guide and undertake the assessment**. Most of the literature on agricultural innovation and capacity assessment tools is in technical English. If the assessment is to be undertaken in a different language, it is advisable to avoid questionnaires and use tools that allow for discussion and clarification of terms during the use of the tool.

4.2 Generic assessment tools

Some of the more commonly used tools for capacity assessment, their relative strengths and limitations, and the factors to be considered when deciding which tools to use are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Tools commonly used capacity assessment; strengths, limitations and factors to consider

Commonly used tools	**Strengths & *Limitations***	**Factors to consider**
Conceptual framework for capacity assessment (see specific frame works in Table 2)	Very useful to structure the collection and analysis of information. Core concepts the assessment team can use to communicate with each other and with key stakeholders. *May contain "jargon" and terms not easily accessible to key stakeholders.*	What concepts relating to capacity the assessment team are familiar and comfortable with. What concepts and words the various stakeholders are likely to be familiar with. Conceptual frameworks informing the funder's policies on capacity development.
Key informant interviews guided by a checklist	Time-efficient and information rich. Enables in-depth probing, exploration and analysis during the interview. *Bias, blinkered views on some issues.*	Accessibility of key informants. Interview skills available in team. "Agenda/s" of the key informant. Confidentiality – considering how much and what kind of information can be shared more widely.
Secondary data collection and analysis	Time-efficient information source. Useful for framing relevant and specific questions and identifying relevant platforms (past or present) and issues relating to capacity. Supplements information from other sources. *Often presents the "official" and positive view, rather than on the ground.*	Ease of access to relevant secondary information. How much relevant information is potentially available (e.g. policies, strategic and operational plans, consultancy reports, project documents. proposals, progress reports, and reviews)? How current is the secondary information?
Group discussion/ meeting with a group	Time-efficient for the team, range of views captured, scope to explore differences of viewpoint. *Domination by one individual.*	Group needs to be comfortable to share views in presence of each other. Team has skill to facilitate and record the discussion.

Commonly used tools	**Strengths & *Limitations***	**Factors to consider**
	Most knowledgeable may not attend. Risk of exclusion of some individuals.	If the topic is sensitive then group may not be forthcoming. If discussion is in a language not known by the team effective facilitation and recording is more difficult.
Workshop	Time efficient for team and flexible A range of other more sophisticated tools can be used within a workshop setting. Scope to explore differences of viewpoint. Space to build consensus on capacity issues and way forward. *Some key players may not attend.*	Resources available to hold workshop. Workshop design, facilitation and documentation skills required. Availability of key people to attend. Selecting a venue and designing a schedule and a process that are inclusive and encourage participation from those "hard to get on board key players" e.g. private sector and senior decision makers.
Self-assessment questionnaire	Cost-efficient, particularly where stakeholders are geographically dispersed. Responses can be standardised and analysed to compare responses. Results can be used to stimulate discussion - in a follow-up visit or workshop. *People will misunderstand the questions, will not complete the assessment. Poor translation into another language.*	Skills in developing a "smart" questionnaire and in analysis of results. Will key players respond? Survey fatigue. Time required to follow up, enter and analyse data.

Some other tools, including specific conceptual frameworks, and notes on their use are discussed in the following sections.

4.3 Specific Conceptual frameworks/tools

Table 2. Specific Conceptual Frameworks assessing Agricultural Innovation Capacity

SPECIFIC CAPACITY ASSESSMENT TOOL	Notes on its use
UNDP Capacity Assessment. Framework Definition of 3 Levels of capacity and components of each level of capacity	This is a useful generic framework to support the process of agreeing the objectives of the capacity assessment exercise, framing questions to those providing information and structuring the analysis and report of information gathered.
Agricultural Innovation Systems conceptual framework	An array of concepts helpful in designing an assessment of innovation capacity. Core concepts will need explaining to some team members new to the "AIS" approach. Very useful to guide identification of key stakeholders, construct checklists, analyse results, and set out the next steps.Also useful when strengthening existing agricultural up-scaling platforms to challenge and broaden thinking about options available and the focus of investment.In a workshop, elements can be used in conjunction with a SWOT or Force-field analysis as a form of self-assessment.
IAR4D – Integrated agricultural research for Development concept	Useful framework for assessing the functional capabilities of the main actors within an agricultural innovation platform, proposed or in operation. Can be used for self-assessment by the main actors.
Value chain conceptual framework, value chain mapping and analysis	Comments above also apply. Particularly useful for identifying capacity issues in contexts where agricultural market access and value adding activities are seen as a key challenge and/or area of potential innovation.

Table 3. More Specific Tools for Assessing Agricultural Innovation Capacity and Developing a Response

Stakeholder mapping	Helps select who to interview or invite to a meeting or workshop, and identify who was not available for interview or did not attend. Can also be done in a workshop to identify who is missing and spark discussion about inclusion strategies.
Stakeholder analysis	Helps interpret responses, support analysis and identify incentives for participation in innovation. Best done by the team outside of a workshop.
SWOT analysis	Useful for focused group work or perhaps in a plenary discussion in a workshop – for example in self-assessment of current capabilities against those required for agricultural innovation.
Force-field analysis	As above, can also be used for developing a goal/s for capacity strengthening in relation to agricultural innovation and identifying

	strengths and strategies that will enable the weaknesses or "gaps" to be addressed to enable progress in reaching the stated goal. The usefulness of the method will depend on agreeing a clear goal in relation to agricultural innovation capacity. In a multi-stakeholder context it might be difficult during a capacity assessment to agree a single goal relating to agricultural innovation capacity – in this case each type of stakeholder may be able to define a goal for their group. Use of this tool assumes the actors have a reasonable grasp of agricultural innovation and an agricultural innovation system.
Gap analysis, or capacity gap analysis	List in relation to rights-based capacity interventions (e.g. UNICEF) and specific tool of the UNDP capacity assessment methodology. Rests on the premise that the "desired" capacity can be clearly defined and the existing capacity can be somehow "measured". The AIS framework, and capabilities related with agricultural innovation referred to in section 2 of this report, provide a basis for thinking about "desired" capacity in a multi-stakeholder context. Undertaking any form of gap analysis, particularly in a participatory way will raise stakeholder expectations that will need to be well managed.
Capacity Needs Prioritisation tools (e.g. UNDP excel based supporting tool for defining a capacity development response)	Gap analysis or a similar approach is very likely to generate a long list of capacity needs requiring some form of intervention. The excel based UNDP capacity assessment tools for "rating" and for defining a response could be modified for use in an agricultural innovation context. However it may be more useful to have a plenary session in a workshop setting to discuss priorities and categories capacity needs into "high", "medium" and "low". At this stage of the assessment it is very important to have clarity on what types of intervention might be considered by the funder of the capacity assessment. It will also be helpful to establish what types of intervention might be supported by the existing mechanisms and might be undertaken without reliance on "external" funding. A participatory process of prioritisation of capacity needs, while raising stakeholder expectations, can nevertheless be extremely useful for deepening the analysis of capacity issues and thinking strategically about how these can be addressed. If enough time is allowed in the workshop programme useful progress can be made to support the key actors thinking collectively about how they might design, resource and implement a specific intervention that will address a key capacity issue. This exercise will help participants to transition from thinking in terms of "wish-lists" of what could be done to identifying implementable measures that will make a difference. This will be easier in cases where an initiative is already established, but requires some strategic direction in terms of developing its capacity.

5. Shaping the tools with the team

Once the team membership is agreed, a meeting is the best way of agreeing the finer details of what will be done, and who will do what during the assessment process. The main aim of the first team meeting is for the team to meet each other, agree the ground

rules and processes to be observed during the assessment, and refine the tools to be used and process to be followed.

Before meeting it might have been agreed that some members undertake preparation tasks, such as gathering secondary information and summarising the main points for the benefit of the team. Ideally this meeting should have been discussed in advance by the local contact person and the methods facilitator, who should jointly run the meeting. Ground rules will include commitment to standard working hours and working days of the week, mutual respect for each other's views and experience and engaging in honest dialogue. In terms of process, the team will need to agree their respective roles when undertaking and documenting interviews and meetings, times and mechanism for sharing information and assessing how the process is going, how the analysis will be done, and responsibilities for documentation of the assessment. If the team is to split at various points then it will be agreed how this will work so that each smaller team has complementary skills. The team should also take time to discuss together and, if any translation is necessary for interviews, agree who will do this.

Just as there are no proven blueprints for capacity assessment the tools used cannot simply be "taken off the shelf" ready for immediate use. Each of the "tools" selected will need to be shaped for the local context in which the capacity assessment is being undertaken. The team may be familiar and confident to use the selected tools, or they may require coaching and preparation for using some of the tools. This means allowing for a time-slot in the assessment programme for this task.

The capacity assessment methods facilitator should take the lead in working with the rest of the team to shape the tools that will be used in the assessment. Shaping tools will be easier when there is a person with local experience in using qualitative assessment methods on the team. This person/s will be able to suggest what might work better in a particular situation. Working together the two should also be able to demonstrate or coach other team members on use of the tools.

5.1 Clarifying the conceptual framework

Prior to the first team meeting the main concepts underpinning the capacity assessment will have been agreed with the funder and local coordinator. Team members may have been provided with some key reading on these concepts, or already be familiar with them. The first team meeting is an opportunity to check with team members that they have a basic understanding of the main concepts, and are comfortable to work with them.

5.2 Reviewing secondary information

If possible, collection and analysis of secondary data should start before the interviews of key informants. One or more members of the assessment team can be assigned to read through and summarise key points from available documents and compile a list of these documents. A checklist will be useful to guide the reading and summarising. This could be an early version of the checklist to be used for key informant interviews. The findings from the literature review can then be used to further refine the checklist. Further secondary data will be collected during visits to key informants and it is important that someone is able to read these quickly and share key information in the documents as part of the information analysis process.

5.3 Stakeholder mapping

The AIS and value chain conceptual frameworks are useful for mapping the stakeholders who might need to be visited and interviewed as part of the capacity assessment. Using one of these frameworks, the local team members should be able to map out the main organisations and actors and also identify some key individuals to interview. The framework used will partly define the main function of each organisation/actor, but it might be useful also to list known functions alongside each organisation or type of actor identified. This list can inform the content of interviews with representatives of the organisation or actor category and the further development of the interview checklist (see below). Stakeholder mapping can be further developed using information gathered during interviews or during a stakeholder workshop. A stakeholder map can be further developed as part of the analysis, for example, of organisation and institutional capacity for agricultural innovation. For example, current linkages between stakeholders can be mapped and defined in terms of their strengths, qualities (e.g. informal and formal) and functionality. This map can provide a basis for further discussion of why linkages might be strong or weak, formal or informal, what makes a linkage "effective" and what actions might be needed to improve the capacity of actors/organisations to make and sustain more effective linkages.

5.4 Developing a checklist

The semi-structured interview is likely to be the most widely used, and the most useful tool, in a capacity assessment. For this reason it is worth spending quality time in developing a checklist (of topics, possible lines of questioning, sample questions) for use by the interview team. Usually the method facilitator will have developed a draft checklist and this can be re-visited and refined during the first meeting of the assessment team, prior to undertaking any interviews. This is a good time to discuss and agree some "sample questions" so that the form of words used connects with the current terms used in the sector or sub-sector. If different languages will be used in the interviews, then it is important to ask the local language expert present how they would translate a sample question. The checklist should be reviewed in a team meeting at the end of the first day of interviews and further refined based on the experience of the day. This review can be undertaken again on the second or third day, by which time the team should be comfortable with the topics and how best to ask the important questions.

The first team meeting, when refining the checklist, is a good opportunity to take stock of the level of experience in the team in undertaking semi-structured interviews. It may be necessary to make some of the ground rules clear – for example, it is not a questionnaire; someone should keep a record of the question asked and the response; not all questions have to be asked; there is no strict order for asking questions; any questions can be asked but they should usually be open-ended; probing and clarification questions are important; the questions should flow (so the interview is more like a conversation and actual questions will be guided by the context and the responses and line of enquiry); team members should be mindful that they allow each other to end a line of enquiry before asking a question that would take the conversation in a different direction; but they may also support the person asking the question when it becomes clear that the person being interviewed has not understood the question.

In developing the checklist the AIS framework can be used to identify the types of questions that can be asked that relate to capacity. For example questions that probe the capabilities of an organisation in relation to the core capabilities for innovation listed in Section 2.

While it is usually easier to have a single generic checklist to guide the general scope of the interview, the team may decide to develop specific checklists for different categories of stakeholders, based on the main functions of each stakeholder category. For example there could be a list of standard topics for all types of stakeholder, and some specific topics and sample questions for particular stakeholder categories.

While an itinerary and list of who to interview will have been drawn up at the start, this should be open to change because new information might come to light indicating other people and organisations to be consulted.

5.5 Group discussion

The checklist agreed for interviewing individuals will also be useful for guiding a group discussion. However, because the advantage of a group discussion is to capture a diversity of views and also get consensus on issues if possible, fewer sample questions and topics will usually be needed. The team will need to agree who will lead the discussion, and how other team members will support the person leading. Strategies for getting contributions from the whole group will need to be discussed. This should be informed by an understanding of what is culturally acceptable locally. Using "meta-cards" asking individuals to write ideas or short answers to a question on a card can often be a quick method for getting contributions in a short time. If this is used a member of the team will need to be equipped to facilitate a discussion of what the responses mean. Another tool might be to draw up a SWOT matrix, or columns with "strengths" and "weaknesses" headers on a flipchart or board, and then ask a question about the organisation's capabilities in relation to a particular aspect of agricultural innovation.

5.6 Stakeholder workshop

If a workshop is to be part of the assessment process, then the planning for this should start prior to the meetings of the assessment team with stakeholders. When considering the pros and cons of having a workshop, and the workshop design, the following factors have a bearing:

- The value that might be added to the assessment by having a workshop which can be assessed in relation to the scope and aims of the capacity assessment (e.g. deepening of analysis, fostering ownership of the results, building relations between key stakeholders, and building consensus on the way forward).
- The resources available, including the skills and knowledge within the assessment team, to effectively facilitate a workshop relating to capacity assessment.
- How well the stakeholders already know each other and the implications for what might be achieved in a workshop setting.
- How workshops are viewed within the country and sector where the assessment is being undertaken (e.g. if there is "workshop fatigue" then another phrase could be used – e.g. discussion forum, feedback meeting).
- What format, duration and venue will encourage participation from stakeholders who do not usually attend workshops.

- How to frame and make the invitation to ensure the most appropriate people attend (for example a verbal invitation can be made at the end of an interview, followed up by a written invitation and/or a phone call).
- How much time will be needed to achieve the workshop objectives and if the key people will be likely to attend throughout (e.g. if key people are likely to be very busy then an alternative strategy could be to have two or three short meetings within a 1-2 week period as the assessment progresses).
- Field visits (in the broad sense of the term to include for example a visit to an industrial processing plant or a busy market) should also be considered depending on the time available, logistics and the dynamics already in place within the platform. This or other more informal activities provide a good opportunity to develop relations between stakeholders and also for the capacity assessment team to gather further information.

6 . Analysis, documentation and discussion of assessment findings

6.1 Analysis process

The assessment of agricultural innovation capacity is largely a process of qualitative enquiry undertaken with stakeholder participation. It should not be neatly divided into a "data collection" phase followed by an "analysis phase" prior to a "dissemination of results phase". Instead, analysis and discussion of the information should be an ongoing and iterative process.

It is important that the assessment team's time is structured in a way that facilitates ongoing sharing and analysis of information. For example, the assessment team might spend the earlier part of the day meeting and interviewing stakeholders and key informants and the latter part meeting as a team to share and discuss the day's findings and plan for the following day or two days. As the assessment progresses, it will be important to set aside a longer period, 1-2 full days for more intensive discussion and analysis of the findings by the assessment team.

As indicated in the discussion above of using the stakeholder mapping tool, during a capacity assessment information analysis is a facilitated process and not the specialist domain of an "expert" within the capacity assessment team. Discussions and reflections during interviews, discussions within the team, and discussions and exercises during workshops, are all important parts of the analysis process.

Analysis of the information can be focused through careful framing of questions that the assessment is aiming to answer. Framing of these questions will be guided by the interview checklist and the conceptual framework/s used in the capacity assessment.
For example, if the capacity of an existing commodity based agricultural innovation platform is being assessed, key questions guiding the analysis might include the following:

- What capacity needs were identified during project design and what has been done to address these so far?
- What has been the experience and usefulness of capacity strengthening inputs to date?
- Which areas of capacity are currently most constraining the platform from being more effective?
- Which interventions to strengthen capacity will be most useful to help the innovation platform to make progress?

- Which of these can be undertaken within the next year within the budget available?

These questions can be addressed not only by the assessment team, but more importantly by the core players in the innovation platform. In the process of being supported to address such questions the innovation platform is not only a key player in the analysis process, but its capacity to solve problems, think strategically and assess its own capacity needs is being strengthened.

In cases where there is no multi-stakeholder agricultural innovation platform in place, a different set of questions would usually structure the analysis. Nevertheless a similar process for engaging the team and the key stakeholders in the analysis process can be followed, although it will probably be more difficult to foster stakeholder engagement and ownership because they will have less to draw on in terms of experience and may be less assured that any action will follow the assessment exercise.

6.2 Documentation

The approach to documentation of the assessment will depend to some extent on the tools used, and the type of report needed. It should be clear who will document what during the process, and who will write which parts of the report. At a minimum, all interviews and focused group discussions will be documented in a notebook, and the main points summarised and shared within the team. Whenever there is a group discussion or workshop, it is good practice to visualise the results of the discussion so that this can be seen and agreed by the people present. In an assessment report, findings can be summarised under the headings of the checklist/s used, indicating different points of view and areas of consensus. The assessment process followed should be described. Capacity issues and opportunities identified for promoting innovation through capacity strengthening should be highlighted, and put into context.

6.3 Feedback and discussion of findings

A stakeholder workshop held towards the end of an assessment is useful space for further deepening the analysis of information and some of the core questions to structure the analysis can be modified for use, for example in group work, or brain-storming during plenary sessions.

7. Agreeing the next steps

The challenge **and** importance of agreeing next steps

In a multi-stakeholder context, unless there is already a project or programme in place, there will not be a clear governance structure which can endorse or follow up on next steps proposed in a meeting or workshop held at the end of a capacity assessment. The assessment team may, or may not, have the mandate from the funder of the assessment to discuss and agree significant follow up activities in a meeting with stakeholders. Nevertheless, if anything meaningful is to follow on from the assessment, identification of next steps will help to galvanise interest and hopefully commitment to working together to addressing some of the capacity issues identified.

An approach that can be tried in cases where the level of interest and commitment is very high from a critical mass of participating organisations/actors, is to take time to identify a core group, or task force, that will draw up a modest action plan which they believe can be implemented over the coming 6 months with their own resources.

Alternatively, if this critical mass does not appear, then the local and external assessment leaders might together commit to some modest actions that will progress the direction of the assessment. For example to send a copy of the final report to all the stakeholders for comments and feedback, to convene a meeting in three months time and discuss the results and implications of the capacity assessment.

7.1 Scope for agreeing indicators and targets

The UNDP capacity assessment methodology includes a tool for the development of indicators and targets relating to identified capacity development needs or gaps. This approach is mainly designed to support governments in monitoring their performance with regard to international targets (such as the MDGs) and related national targets. In such cases there will be monitoring and evaluation experts employed by the government to do this. Such an approach will be difficult if the initiative being assessed does not have the capacity or the incentives in place to monitor progress in addressing any targets agreed. If there is a project or programme agreed as a follow up to the capacity assessment, then the process of developing indicators and targets would be a very useful exercise as part of project design. The exercise can be very useful in terms of a "results-based approach", such as using elements of "outcome mapping", for the identification of potential capacity strengthening interventions, and helping stakeholders to "think outside the box".

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