

Capacity Development in Ghana's PGR Centre: an evaluation

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Editor's note:

This paper was previously published in 2003 under the same title by ISNAR and CTA.

The full version of this Impact Assessment and Evaluation Discussion Paper can be found at www.ipgri.cgiar.org

Introduction

This study evaluated capacity development results and processes at the Plant Genetic Resources Centre (PGRC) in Ghana and examined the roles of various external agents in that development, particularly the International Plant Genetic Resources Institute (IPGRI) and the Genetic Resources Network for West and Central Africa (GRENEWECA). The study covered a period of approximately 20 years, from 1980 to 1999, but focused on recent evolution of the centre since 1994. PGRC is mandated to coordinate plant genetic resources related activities in Ghana and plays a vital role in improving Ghana's farming systems in an environmentally sustainable way.

Approach and conceptual framework

The study was carried out within the context of the Evaluating Capacity Development project coordinated by the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR). The evaluation used a case study approach, and incorporated the International Development Research Centre (IDRC)/Universalia conceptual framework for capacity development as its theoretical structure. This framework explains an organization's performance as a function of the interactions between its external environment, organizational motivation and organizational capacity dimensions. Data were collected from PGRC, IPGRI and GRENEWECA using self-assessment workshops, interviews and a review of archival records.

The results were analysed on a number of levels that relate directly to the expected impacts and theory of action. First, results were grouped into those that relate to performance and change at PGRC over time and those that relate to contributions of the Ghana Government, IPGRI and GRENEWECA. Results were then grouped according to the three areas that contribute to performance: external environment, motivation and capacity, and by the PGRC priority areas within each of the three. Within these areas, findings were grouped by activities undertaken, strengths, weaknesses, and future projections and needs. Conclusions were drawn by triangulating evidence from the various methods and sources to find where experiences converged and common themes emerged.

In general terms, responsibilities were divided between the team members so that each had primary responsibility for the components most closely associated with their own organization. An objective of the evaluation was to build evaluation capacity among the team members by learning from each other and from technical experts involved in the project.

The Global Plan of Action for the Conservation and Sustainable Utilization of Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture provided the framework against which performance was assessed.

Capacities developed at PGRC in key areas

Area of change	1994	1999
Number of germplasm accessions conserved	2987	6468
Membership in network	No subregional network in existence	PGRC head is steering committee chair
Autonomy	Unit within CSIR; no direct budget allocation	Semi-independent research center; direct budget allocation
Number of staff	116	129
Staff with PhD	1	3
Staff with Master's level degree	2	10
Staff with Bachelor degree	1	2
Fields of specialization represented within staff	5	16
Germplasm collected	1041 (1990–1994)	2354 (1995–1999)
Germplasm distributed	202 (1990–1994)	1322 (1995–1999)

Conclusions

The capacity of PGRC has grown appreciably over the 20-year period studied. The centre has developed its infrastructure, acquired key administrative personnel, employed more technical staff, improved its research methodologies and engaged more national and international stakeholders. PGRC has also diversified its services and products, which has increased the resources available to support its activities.

The Government of Ghana played a substantial role in the Centre's development through providing land, salaries and basic operating budgets, and granting the Centre 'semi-autonomous' status. This meant a direct funding allocation and greater control of budgetary resources.

Although other external parties contributed to the capacity building process, IPGRI provided the most support over the longest period of time. The contributions of IPGRI include:

- increasing technical expertise by sponsoring long-term and short-term training for PGRC staff
- strengthening infrastructure by providing basic conservation and research facilities
- providing technical assistance to facilitate the introduction of new methodologies
- providing publications that increase PGRC staff access to technical information
- sponsoring collaborative research in innovative methodologies and technologies
- promoting development of supportive plant genetic resources policy
- helping to promote improved management practices and increased public awareness
- promoting inter-regional collaboration by sponsoring the secretariat of the GRENEWECA network.

Although GRENEWECA has only recently become operational, it has contributed to the development of PGRC's capacity by:

- sponsoring collaborative research activities on germplasm collection and evaluation
- training staff in documentation, project proposal writing and plant genetic resources management
- raising awareness among PGRC stakeholders and decision makers of the importance of plant genetic resources for food, agriculture, health and economic development
- promoting collaboration within member countries by sponsoring national plant genetic resources committee meetings.

The study indicated that the capacity of PGRC could be better developed in the future if improvement is made within four key areas:

1. Better identification of, and targeting towards, PGRC's needs.
2. A holistic definition of capacity development to include more than technical training.
3. Monitoring and evaluation of capacity development.
4. A focus on building capacity within IPGRI and GRENEWECA as capacity development agents.

Overall, the capacity of PGRC has been developed in a number of key areas such as facilities, staffing (numbers and disciplines represented), network membership, budget, collections held, accessions distributed, number of vehicles and amount of equipment. The table summarizes some of the major areas of progress between 1994 and 1999.

The participatory approach to evaluation taken by this study built capacity for evaluation and an understanding about capacity development among the team members and their organizations and stakeholders. A participatory approach also helped ensure that results would be widely understood, which increases the likelihood that necessary changes will be embraced and implemented. This is likely to lead to a more capable and effective PGRC and more effective capacity development interventions in the future.

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