



FEED THE FUTURE

The U.S. Government's Global Hunger & Food Security Initiative



FEED THE FUTURE HUMAN AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY REVIEW



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

FEED THE FUTURE HUMAN AND INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT (HICD) STRATEGY REVIEW

Too top down, Too much, Too fast

["Isomimicry, Overzealous Load Transfer, and Capability Traps"]

"...isomimicry ... refers to the tendency to transplant Western institutional models as "best practices" without adequate consideration to differences in context...[overzealous load transfer] refers to the tendency to place unrealistic expectations on new, struggling and under-resourced institutions. Each of these problems is widely manifested in current food security institutional analyses and plans" ¹ ["Capability Traps," a term used by Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, refers to compromises that result from the expectation of donor financing on the part of those institutions donors want to strengthen. See p.10.]

May 8, 2015

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This report is made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

¹ "Building Institutional Capacity to increase Food Security in Africa," The FS Collaborative (MSI, UC/Davis, Crown Agents and ACDI/VOCA), April, 2012, p.3.

Preface

This review of Feed the Future (FTF) Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) strategy is based on a wide reading of documents provided by the Bureau for Food Security (BFS), and many from the broad literature on capacity development. It is also based on interviews with 34 people, many of whom are/were involved in the portfolio of HICD projects, either for USAID or as implementers. Interviews were confidential one-on-one interactions and interviewees were asked to express frankly what was foremost on their minds with respect to their work. While our mandate was to focus on BFS and the HICD portfolio, it was apparent that we needed to look at the HICD work in the context of both the FTF initiative as a whole and of USAID's current mission. And while we have specific recommendations aimed at increasing the quality of HICD program implementation, we speak also to some issues that have to do with the culture and structure of USAID as an agency.

We emphasize that this review, prepared as a forerunner of a major evaluation of FTF in 2016, can only skim the surface of the current situation in training provision and institutional development. It is not an evaluation, but an attempt to address what we see as fundamental issues of strategy, concept and structure, and to recommend responses to those issues. While we all have experience working in and with USAID, we were brought in as outsiders to render our professional judgments. Those judgments were shaped by what interviewees said to us, by our readings, and by our awareness of the broad landscape of changing trends and contexts in development assistance as well as HICD investments by other funders including foundations, multinational, and other bilateral agencies. Significant among these changes are greater market orientation, increasing demand for new skills, the growing global force of information technologies, an expansion in research and capacity development networks, increasing regional integration (especially in Africa) and especially greater awareness on the part of developing country actors of the need for donors to embrace more genuinely the principle of country ownership.

Executive Summary

We noted a lot of concern among staff involved in HICD about how to improve the programs, especially those facing the challenges of institutional strengthening. On the human capacity development front there is evidence of impact. And we believe that scholarship programs, structured properly and streamlined, are of great importance for the future of agricultural improvement at all levels, and should probably be expanded. We also became aware of how small the HICD division is, four people at the time of the review. They are being asked to handle a great deal of work, and their work is not always seen as central to the FTF initiative. Our concern here is to redress that relative marginalization. We believe that HICD is central to two core principles of development that USAID has embraced in the last five years – Local Solutions and the underlying intention of greater country ownership that informs it.

The keys to success in HICD are well known and reflected in scores of papers on the subject: focus, building towards a critical mass of qualified people in the relevant institutional partners, solid up-front analysis of institutional structures and their cultural and political economy context, developing long-term relationships, being iterative in implementation so changes can be made as learning grows, finding and supporting, rather than creating leaders, and above all moving carefully and deliberately. Virtually everyone with solid knowledge of the subject, every review and every report notes that to be effective in HICD, and especially in institutional strengthening, support must be built over a long time and on a relationship of

trust.² It is telling that while virtually all those with whom we spoke agree with these principles, many acknowledge that the nature of demands made within USAID result in compromising many of them.

Overall, we conclude that the bulk of the HICD portfolio today is less effective than it could be. Undue speed, short project time-frames, spreading things too thinly, working with overly large and complex consortia, setting out multiple and often incompatible objectives, focusing on metrics that are often inputs rather than outcomes, side-stepping the consequences (low motivation to buy-in, low demand) of the many pressures on missions, and the lack of a clear and widely shared view of institutional capacity development, are at the root of the problem. The implicit model for institutional capacity development (ICD) at USAID (and BFS) is an idealized social engineering model, rather than a less linear, more inductive view of ICD challenges, one which begins with a careful examination of complex contextual constraints and pitfalls. As a result of all these things, quality has suffered, as have impact, sustainability, and country ownership. We believe ICD objectives would be better addressed by an iterative and continuous experiment in fostering realistic change.

We highlight below both key deficiencies and our recommendations to address these.

Key Deficiencies:

- **Lack of clarity** about the objectives of higher education investments in people and whether a cost-benefit calculus should apply with regard to participant training.
- **A preference for working with the private sector and civil society**, with government seen as a less than fruitful partner (too slow, too intransigent) and thus an underlying belief among those at mission level (who need to produce results), that one has to “work around” government in order to get those results.
- **Pressures for results** that limit the time for staff to deepen a) their understanding of HICD, including the difference between the “H” and the “I”, b) their understanding of how much of best practice today goes beyond training, and c) of how HICD should thus fit more integrally into the larger FTF program.
- **Limited time at the mission level** to undertake deep analysis of local institutional contexts and other external constraints.
- **The tacking on of HICD and especially the “ICD” part** as “*a package of activities with no strategy or coherence*” resulting in the view that HICD is a discreet set of activities rather than integral to USAID’s avowed commitment to country ownership.
- **Little nuanced understanding of ICD as a complex, iterative process**; the emphasis on training reflects a standard “fill in the gaps” approach to ICD.
- **Americanization of objectives and program design**, despite consultation with local governments, often leading to top-down approaches and compromising the principle of country ownership.
- **A tendency to pile things on**, with many BFS HICD projects having relatively small amounts of money and short time frames but multiple objectives that do not always fit well together.
- **Lack of coordination, communication and integration across** 231 projects to date under BFS’s wing in 19 countries, involving at a minimum 109 partner organizations in those countries and scores of US and CGIAR consortia members.
- **Inadequate mission demand**, mission ownership, and enduring mission commitment to HICD.
- **New USAID emphases on (and faith in) technology tending to get in the way** of a deeper understanding of capacity development (and development itself).
- **Mission underestimation of extant local capacity.**
- **A tendency to misuse the Agricultural Innovation System (AIS) model** as a template for action rather than a starting guideline for analysis.

² “*Institutional partnerships should be at the core of USAID’s efforts in HICD in higher education and these partnerships should be long-term, comprehensive and focused on making a transformational difference.*” From APLU, “African Higher Education-Opportunities for Transformative Change for Sustainable Development”, February 2014, p. viii.

- **Inadequate attention to the messy reality of culture, social structure, politics, and political economy** stemming in large part from pressures for quick results that affect USAID staff and also the US intermediaries with whom they work.
- **A conceptual blurring of the important difference** between the term capacity “building” and capacity “development.”

Major Recommendations

1. *Sort out conceptual issues:*

- **Broaden staff understanding of HICD**, and of ICD in particular.
- **Do more up-front analysis** of how contextual issues and their complex interactions affect an institution’s capacity and performance.
- **With regard to supporting institutional capacity, expect less** in the short term, but more lasting results over a longer period of time.
- **Find and support real entrepreneurs and leaders** rather than trying to create them.
- **Begin a gradual shift from project-based outsourcing** to different, less directive, more collaborative roles – like that of broker, facilitator, convener, and turning plate for ideas and networks.

2. *Improve knowledge management:*

- **Consider a 6 month to 12 month hiatus** to enable greater internal capacity development in HICD and re-structuring.
- **Increase knowledge of contextual analysis and USAID’s own history of CD efforts** and seek opportunities for synergy.
- **Examine new horizontal capacity development approaches** that have an organic problem-driven quality.
- **Map all FTF related projects** and programs by country, by institution, by foci, by contractor or grantee, and by existing and potential funding partners.
- **Undertake a major review of the current agricultural policy and institutional context**, taking note of new opportunities, not for new projects but to harness new platforms for development on which to build strong national agricultural research systems, strong universities, and the most competitive firms in the private sector.
- **Create a searchable database** of all reviews of projects related to HICD in order to indicate overlap, potential for collaboration/integration, and funding gaps.
- **Develop and use a system to follow-up on Scholarship/Fellowship recipients** after they complete their program.
- **Support strong (or potentially strong) local institutions in both education and research**, as well as high performing national agricultural systems, and competitive firms in the private sector, and enable spillovers to others from good practice.
- **Change the term “capacity building” to “capacity development”** to move in a more supportive direction in recognition of the considerable capacity already present.

3. *New structures and re-structuring aimed at better focus and greater simplification:*

- **Consolidate** all BFS-funded scholarships, internships, and individual training programs in one program, coordinated by one U.S. organization in partnership with one national or regional educational institution in each geographic region.
- **Think more systematically in terms of “clusters.”**
- **Consider redirecting** InnovATE project resources and efforts to directly support the Innovation Labs.

- **Identify one agriculture/food security educational institution per region** or (in Africa) sub-region that seems to have the promise to become a regional “anchor” and prepare a long-term (15 to 20 year) plan for financing and supporting such institutions in conjunction with other donors.
- **Create a small but effective international steering committee or advisory panel** to keep the BFS’s focus on HICD and country ownership.

4. *New functions and people:*

- **Engage a senior ICD specialist for BFS for one year.**
- **In those missions where there is/will be regular engagement with key local institutions, ensure that the relevant USAID staff person has senior status.**

5. *Agree on some key operational principles:*

- **Local solutions (country ownership)** is the direction in which BFS/FTF efforts must head.
- **Shift more responsibility and accountability to “them,”** (local people and institutions) and begin moving away from the dominant role of U.S. firms and universities.
- **ICD should be central to everything BFS/FTF does.**
- **Instead of a multitude of scattered small projects, move towards wholesale (leveraging) roles** as broker, turning plate, convener, facilitator - aka “wise support.”
- **Solid homework** means expending more time and effort to understand the institutional landscape – going beyond the usual suspects.
- **If short time frames remain the norm in the medium term, accept limits on the results that can be achieved** – thus fewer, clearer objectives (be guided by realism).
- **Become more experimental and iterative** especially in terms of establishing and maintaining relationships with local institutions.
- **Limit the number of partners** in any consortium to three or four.

6. *Practice political engagement to loosen apparent constraints:*

- **Ease the tension around working with the private vs. the public sector.**
- **Shift some funding from bilateral missions to regional missions** to enable regional approaches, especially in Africa.
- **In thinking about becoming more of a turning plate for ICD,** try seeding institutions that can play a role in sustaining entire professional fields, such as continent-wide or regional journals, associations, conventions, job fairs, etc.

7. *Engage procedural changes:*

- **Consider cash on delivery (COD)** for benchmarked accomplishments, and greater use of the Fixed Obligation Grant (FOG).
- **Experiment with more genuine shared risk incentives** for local partners (where they have to “pay to play”) and upon their reaching certain agreed on benchmarks, making larger and different types of funding available (including endowment contributions).
- **Move to more regional approaches,** especially involvement in and support to networks; consider 5 to 7 year compacts with network institutions/regional institutions, in conjunction with other donors.
- **Cultivate new funding partners** including governments, regional economic communities, continental policy bodies, universities and alumni, diaspora associations, private enterprises and NGOs.
- **Consider revisions** that would simplify/clarify the “Leader With Associates” mechanism.
- **Do a careful demand analysis of programs** that are meant to provide services to missions.

8. *Focus more on qualitative approaches to measurement:*

- **Rethink quantifiable measurement indicators for ICD achievements;** be more thoughtful about qualitative approaches to determine outcomes, and limit the use of templates and standardized tools.
- **Undertake aggressive efforts to convince constituencies in and outside the agency that the pressure for fast and easily quantifiable results may be counterproductive** to the development objectives they themselves espouse.

Our core message to the Bureau for Food Security (BFS) is one which may cause some understandable concern: Slow down in order to: 1) deepen and broaden the staff's understanding of HICD and ICD in particular, 2) do more careful up-front contextual analysis, 3) undertake fewer HICD interventions but do them with more focus and more attention to critical mass. And with respect to institutional capacity development (ICD) itself: 1) lower the sights and lengthen the view, that is, expect less in the short term, but more lasting results, however imperfect, over a longer period of time,³ 2) begin a gradual shift from project-based outsourcing to different, less directive, more collaborative roles – like that of broker, facilitator, convener, and turning plate for ideas and networks, 3) undertake aggressive efforts to convince constituencies in and outside the agency that the pressure for fast and easily quantifiable results may be counterproductive to the development objectives they themselves espouse, and 4) support programs that recognize there is considerable capacity in developing countries at all levels, and of all kinds.

I. Introduction

We are sympathetic to the challenge BFS has faced in putting together a large new initiative involving a significant surge in available money and shifts in emphases. We know it has not been easy and that the process has suffered from many pressures outside its control. As noted above, there is an opportunity now for changes in BFS/FTF HICD program and strategy. This strategy review is meant to inform that opportunity. We stress again that what we have done here is not an evaluation, but a broad overview of current HICD efforts. Several major themes regarding strategy and performance have become evident to us and we discuss these below.

2. BFS' (and USAID's) own capacity to undertake HICD

We begin by turning inward, to the BFS itself and what it has been attempting in its HICD efforts. Here are a number of key issues that emerged from our interviews and reading.

2.1. Lack of clarity about the objectives of higher education investments in people. There seems to be ambivalence about whether a cost-benefit calculus ought to be applied to the investments in higher education. The prevailing view seems to be that such investments should contribute measurably to sustainable and equitable agricultural development via both the private sector and stronger public sector institutions that can deliver public goods. When these investments in MS and PhD degrees and other fellowships do not appear to result in visible change in the institutions to which people are supposed to return, the investments tend to be seen as expensive or otherwise questioned. In contrast, when USAID's

³ See the work of Merilee S. Grindle of Harvard: "Governance Reform: The New Analytics of Next Steps," *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, Vol. 24, No. 3, July, 2011 (pp. 415-418), and Grindle, "Good Enough Governance, Poverty Reduction and Reform in Developing Countries," in *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, Vol. 17, Issue 4, pp. 525-548, October, 2004.

investments in “participant training” in the past were larger, there was a view that investing in people is a good unto itself and a faith that there would be long-term returns on those investments, whether immediately traceable or not.

2.2. An ambivalence about working with governments and other public sector institutions.

Although the HICD portfolio involves many direct agreements with public partners, we have noted a preference for working with the private sector and civil society, with government seen as a less fruitful partner (too slow, too intransigent) and thus there is an underlying belief among those at mission level (who need to produce results), that one has to “work around” government in order to get those results.

2.3. Pressures for results limit the time for staff to deepen their understanding of HICD, including the difference between the “H” and the “T”, their understanding of how much of best practice today goes beyond training, and of how HICD would thus fit more integrally into the larger FTF program. There has been little time to read through, think about, and learn from the literature on HICD, including many reports and reviews done by and for USAID. We found for example that there have been at least 8 reviews of various aspects of HICD relevant to Food Security - a total of over 500 pages since 2003, five of which are in the last 4 years.⁴ Not surprisingly there is some repetition in these multiple reviews and in their scores of recommendations, some quite similar to what we will be recommending here.

2.4. There has been limited time at the mission level to undertake deep analysis of local institutional contexts and other external constraints. The most common words we heard used to describe missions are “overworked” and “overwhelmed.” In these circumstances, it is difficult to take the time to get to know the local institutional landscape and the nuances of the political economy in which FTF related institutions are embedded.

2.5. HICD, especially the “ICD” part, was essentially tacked on. The view of several people interviewed was that at the beginning of the FTF initiative little attention was paid to HICD, that it was added on later, becoming, as one interviewee put it, “*a package of activities with no strategy or coherence.*” Some decisions about its structural fit within the BFS were ad hoc, apparently meant to be temporary, but changes were later not made. And once HICD was added, many admit it has not been thought about consistently. A few we spoke with are in fact opposed to HICD efforts altogether on the grounds that they get in the way of their focus on research or on promotion of new technologies. As one person put it: “*The research people want to do good research, and the policy people want to work on policy- it’s easier to do what you’ve always done.*”

Emblematic of the problem is the fact that the Feed the Future Research Strategy of May 2011, a 50 page document, devotes 75 words to HICD. And in those few words, the word “institution” is not used at all. Likewise, the BIFAD review of HICD issues of March, 2014, notes the absence of HICD targets among FTF strategies: “*Creating a lasting impact in food security for the FTF countries, improving U.S. government business*

⁴ The BIFAD review of strategic HICD issues and the role of USAID and Title XII under FTF programs, March, 2014; BIFAD review of the CRSP Model, August, 2012; APLU, African Higher Ed – Opportunities for Transformative Change for Sustainable Development, February, 2014; APLU, Good practices in leveraging longer term training for institutional capacity strengthening, February, 2014; HICD Handbook, August, 2011; U.S. higher Education partnerships in Africa 1997-2007, Spring, 2008; Implementation of Title XII report to BIFAD, June, 2003; BIFAD Review USAID Investment in Local Long term training and capacity building in Agriculture and Rural Development, June, 2006.

*procedures, catalyzing U.S. government leadership and innovation, and improving U.S. government accountability are key targets of the FTF initiative. Currently no targets exist for Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD).*⁵

In the BFS, HICD is merely one of several units (e.g., Research, Policy, MPI, SPPM, CSI). It tends to be viewed (and this is reflected in the agency as a whole) more as a discreet set of activities rather than integral to USAID's avowed commitment to country ownership. Given the centrality of capacity (and especially institutional capacity) in a considered view of country ownership, HICD ought to cut across all units within the BFS, but that is not the case. Further, at the level of the agency as a whole, it seems likely that HICD's relative marginalization has been due to lack of commitment by agency leadership.⁶ People in organizations respond to incentives. At the mission level especially, it is understandable that people will do what they are asked to do and will be less committed to what they are given little credit for doing.

2.6. What is known and done about ICD is standard-issue. During the Innovation Labs Meeting in Washington, D.C., September 17, 2014, participants were asked to “Name three activities that convey ‘institutional capacity building’ to you.” The top 3 responses were Training (98% of total respondents cited it), Empowerment and Networking (64% of total respondents cited it) and Infrastructure (51%). These responses suggest little nuanced understanding of ICD as a complex, iterative process. Instead the emphasis on training reflects a standard “fill in the gaps” approach to ICD. Indeed, much of the agency remains at what we would call the Capacity Development “1.0.” level, while many ICD practitioners and theorists have been working on promising alternative models at the “2.0” or “3.0” level for some time.⁷

When specific attention is paid to institutional capacity per se, recommendations tend not only to be standard-issue but take little account of **how** they might be undertaken effectively. For example in a USAID review of institutional architecture in Mozambique, noting the weaknesses in the M&E area, the recommendations were drawn from a generic (one-size-fits-all) menu: to conduct a needs assessment; to create a common set of performance indicators; to hire committed staff with technical skills; to invest in a nationally driven platform/network for knowledge-sharing in agriculture and food security; and to improve data collection systems.⁸ Such approaches, which are widespread, again reflect an idealized, template kind of thinking and tend to ignore context and realism. The problem, as we have noted, is a conceptual one, a tendency to think deductively and prescriptively (what should be done) and not inductively (starting with what is going on in reality, and asking in light of that what can realistically be accomplished?)

2.7. Much of what is done in FTF-related ICD is conceptualized in American terms and is thus too top down. The principle of country ownership to which USAID is committed is consequently compromised, and this is despite the fact that missions **do** consult with governments and other stakeholders in FTF countries. Indeed, the very language used to describe FTF is revealing in that it reminds us that it is “U.S. efforts” that must be sustained and to do this, “we” need to “build host country

⁵ “BIFAD, “Review of Strategic Human and Institutional Capacity Development (HICD) - Issues and the Role of USAID and TITLE XII Under the Feed the Future Programs,” “A Report Commissioned by BIFAD At the Request of USAID,” March, 2014.

⁶ One person we interviewed noted that HICD was a “non-starter” in the eyes of leadership because it was seen as something the agency did not really understand well, and also because the institutional strengthening part of HICD does not lend itself to easy metrics.

⁷ See, for example, the discussion of vertical vs. horizontal styles of learning in the reports of the Learning Agenda on Local Organization Capacity Development; www.developmentiscapacity.org.

⁸ “Institutional Architecture for Food Security Policy Change, Mozambique, Africa Leadership Training and Capacity Building Program,” USAID, September, 2013.

capacity” and “include” host country governments and other stakeholders.”⁹ And while heads of state and government commissions usually agree to external donor agendas, these agreements come on top of commitments made to other donors and to myriad international declarations and fora, to the point where, as one person put it: “*we’ve overwhelmed them.*” The irony here is that because of the speed with which donors demand quick results, as well as an idealized view of what things “should” look like, many governments cannot take on as much as donors would like them to, nor as quickly (see “overzealous load transfer,” in the opening quote of this review). Especially at the service delivery level, many government units (as one person in Malawi put it) are “*overstressed and underfunded.*” As a result, the **opposite** of country ownership often takes place. Because donors are under the gun for quick results, there is a tendency for the donor to see local institutions - especially government units - not as real partners, but rather as entities that get in the way of what the donor wants them to do either because they resist change or are too slow in adapting to change. Then, as often happens, either the donors (via their field missions) work around them or they begin to do things for them rather than with them. Dependency and its associated perverse incentives - issues that have been discussed for years - continue to be at the heart of the dilemma of country ownership, which after all is (or should be) the over-arching goal of all development assistance today. The present administration in Washington is committed to aid as a process aimed at reducing the need for development aid (“working ourselves out of a job”). Thus, country ownership linked to country capacity (HICD) is **the** challenge. All other challenges - agricultural productivity, agricultural research, nutrition, indeed poverty reduction itself - depend upon human, and especially institutional, capacity development. This primacy of capacity is not as widely accepted in USAID as it should be, and this lack of centrality is also reflected in the BFS. Nor is there enough subtle understanding of the complexities involved in supporting capacity development – especially at the institutional level. Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock warn of daunting “capability traps” that get in the way of real changes in approach.

*“As a result of ... donor-driven incentives, organizations often wind up mimicking reform, but not genuinely pursuing reform. They do so because it enhances the organization’s perceived legitimacy and therefore ensures support for the organization, even when the so called best-practices do not demonstrably improve performance (as measured by end results, not quality or efficiency of process). ...these “capability traps” [result in] a dynamic in which organizations frequently promote and adopt reforms to ensure continued donor financing, yet never actually achieve the expected results of reform efforts. As a result, externally-funded development projects can, if set up in certain ways, in fact undermine the capacity of developing country institutions.”*¹⁰

2.8. There has been a tendency to pile things on. So much is expected of many of the BFS HICD projects with relatively small amounts of money and short time frames, that many objectives get attached to them in “Christmas list” fashion (see below). Often these multiple objectives do not fit well together and/or ignore the real world context. The effort for example to get agricultural extension agents to become health communicators as well, via special trainings and workshops, adds to the already challenging burdens not only of these agents but of their institutions.

2.9. Lack of coordination, communication and integration. There are 231 projects to date under BFS’s wing in 19 countries, involving at a minimum 109 partner organizations in those countries and scores of US and CGIAR consortia members. The Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services (MEAS) project alone has 13 members in its consortium. It is not surprising that there is less coordination than there might be, and that missions note the management burden of these efforts. Moreover, reporting requirements for

⁹ See GAO-13-809, September, 2013 report on FTF: which refers to “a country-led approach to build country capacity to sustain U.S. efforts by including the host government and other stakeholders in planning and implementation.”

¹⁰ Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett, Michael Woolcock, “Escaping Capability Traps through Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation” (PDIA), Center for International Development at Harvard University, Working Paper No. 240, 6/2012.

many of the projects appear not to have been streamlined or adjusted to this burden. Why, for example, are quarterly reports and work plans necessary instead of cutting down on the paperwork and providing bi-annual or annual ones? One other result of the management burden is the natural tendency on the part of missions to look only towards those local institutions with which they have worked in the past (the “usual suspect” phenomenon.) Within the BFS in Washington there is also some evident territoriality; for example, the FSIC Program for Markets and Policy Research is undertaking ICD work with little communication with the HICD group, and one of the larger HICD programs we reviewed The African Women in Agricultural Research and Development program (AWARD) is not administered by the HICD team. MEAS is also under Country Strategy Implementation and not managed in the HICD division.

2.10. Mission demand and mission ownership. The problem of “top down, too much, too fast” applies also to the interaction between BFS in Washington and the overseas missions. While the buy-in mechanism is supposed to be a way for missions to “own” the HICD programs, in fact demand in many of these (e.g., InnovATE – Innovation for Agricultural Training and Education, and MEAS, for example) seems to have been less than expected. Much like governments trying to respond to a myriad of donor demands, missions too feel overwhelmed. In theory, they like the programs, in practice, there is more push than pull. In our interviews with U.S. partners and a sampling of missions we heard comments like: *“So we kept doing this vague dance, we’d go to a mission and they’d say ‘So why are you here again? We’d say well, BFS sent us....’ There is /was a huge mismatch between the Missions and DC. BFS was – basically all over the place and there was no real demand from the Missions.”*

“You have to understand that to them we [one of the HICD projects] are a small potato; they have lots to do and the larger the mission, the more they are bogged down.”

“Missions were totally unprepared for the FTF huge money drop –they focus on moving the money... – they’re running flat out to deal with that, so no time for much else.”

When missions do sign on, and of course many have, the degree to which they commit to the work appears to depend on the personality and inclination of particular individuals, thus when that person leaves, continuity often suffers and commitment can be lost. In some missions there appears to be a tendency to believe that besides implementation, the up-front work of getting to know local institutions, their weaknesses and strengths, indeed local contexts in general is not their job but that of the outside contractor or grantee. We were told by one implementing organization: *“Virtually every time we come to a country and ask the mission personnel to come along with us, this is the first time they’ve visited the institution in question. They don’t know the territory and sometimes cannot even tell us where these institutions are located, much less who is who. Anyway their response is ‘this is what we hire you for.’”*

And many people at mission level, like many in Washington, recognize that speed and inadequate time on the ground compromise genuine results and effectiveness. As one mission staffer told us, *“...if DC wants it, then they need to put someone in there. You can’t parachute in two times a year for a couple of weeks and expect to do ICD. A ‘development tourism’ approach is not going to do it.”*

2.11. The new USAID emphases on technology have tended to get in the way of a deeper understanding of capacity development (and development itself). The two dozen Innovation Labs, for example, have hired scores of people with high tech skills but less experience with development and little awareness of similar efforts in the past (e.g., the Appropriate Technology movement in the 1980s), efforts that did not solve as many problems as intended. Though there are courses for new staff, less attention than in the past appears to be paid to orienting new lab staff to development. In earlier days

USAID had more robust programs for staff to learn about and keep up with development.¹¹ Of course, if capacity development is to be the key to country ownership, sustainability and the FTF goals, then technological innovation should be subsumed under CD, not the other way round. As a Ghanaian scientist put it: “...if all that you do is depend on technology transfer, it sets you up on a path of dependency. Technology transfer can only be helpful to the national development process if it is tied to local capacity generation to complement through research, the generation of useful innovations”¹²

2.12. Mission underestimation of extant local capacity. While there is little doubt that institutional capacity gaps exist and are widespread in many countries, there has been enormous positive change in the last few decades, as a thorough re-examination of the institutional landscape would reveal. Sixteen Sub-Saharan African countries have 10 or more think tanks (Kenya alone has 53); 19 LAC countries have 10 or more. Three African think tanks are ranked in the top 100 worldwide, including the AERC in Kenya and African Technology Policy Studies Network (ATPS) in Kenya.¹³ In Brazil alone there are over 100 faculties or schools of agricultural science, four of which are ranked in the top 100 in the world, according to US News and World Report. In Mexico there are at least 125 faculties or university units involved in agricultural R&D. In Ecuador, Honduras, Peru and Argentina there are others. In Sub Saharan Africa, there are over 50 agricultural colleges and universities. In India alone there are over 60, and in the rest of South Asia (Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Pakistan), another 45.

2.13. There seems to be a tendency to misuse the Agricultural Innovation System (AIS) model as a basis for innovation investment and capacity development work in the agricultural sector. As a guideline for emphasizing the systemic nature of agricultural development the AIS is highly important; systems thinking is being embraced across the board at USAID as it should be. However because of its comprehensiveness, the AIS can lead to a belief in its value as a template for action, rather than a starting point for analysis. This tendency ought to be consciously avoided, since as elaborate as the AIS is, it posits a system in an ideal world, more or less devoid of the messy reality of culture, social structure, politics, and political economy, realities that get in the way of a perfectly functioning system, few of which exist anywhere. This issue of the ideal vs. the real is endemic in much capacity development work undertaken by many donors, including USAID, at the institutional level – the attempt to tell organizations and institutions what they are missing, how they should be, what systems they need to have (administrative, HR, M&E, etc.), what skills they need (e.g., proposal writing), how to interact with other institutions, what good governance and good management mean, etc. This idealized view leads naturally to a conclusion that training or mentoring in these systems and skills are the keys. In many ways these are important systems and skills, and indeed many organizations and institutions need to develop them. But there are often reasons why interventions like training and mentoring do not always “take” and this is where contextual reality comes in. The challenge is therefore to begin the donor intervention in ICD not by first overlaying an idealized template, or trying to achieve an ideal agricultural innovation system, but by coming to a deep understanding of how contextual issues and their complex interactions affect an institution’s (indeed a whole system’s) capacity and performance. Few agencies however are prepared to undertake the investment in such deep homework before deciding what role to play. Secondly, donors like USAID should place emphasis on the importance for innovation of connections between institutions nationally, regionally and internationally, on the importance of relationships, and especially on the time to build them. The HICD Portfolio (and again this is reflective of HICD within USAID as a whole) is not as well positioned to embrace these principles, again because of the imperative for quick and measurable results.

¹¹ E.g., the 3 month long development studies program; the 30 day cross-cultural training program, plus courses in “social soundness analysis” etc.

¹² Haruna Yakubu, “Higher Education for Innovation and Development,” University for Development Studies, Tamale, Ghana, 10/29/2013.

¹³ James G. McGann, “2012 Global Go To Think Tanks Index Report,” University of Pennsylvania.

2.14. Finally, we note that many people at BFS (and USAID in general) use the term capacity “building” and capacity “development” interchangeably, as if they were the same thing. To point this out may seem quibbling, but it is important – “building” suggests a more substantial and more basic role for the implementer than “developing,” which suggests more of a support role. And “building” can also convey the sense that there is nothing there; that one has to start from scratch, and that “we” have to do the work, while “developing,” more accurately reflects the fact that there is considerable capacity in developing countries at all levels, and of all kinds.

3. Recommendations

The recommendations put forth here are at two levels. We begin with five conceptual issues that we believe need to be taken on board more than they are at present. Section 3.2 contains specific recommended changes.

3.1. SORTING OUT SOME CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

3.1.1. The need for a broader understanding of capacity and capacity development. In the literature the concept of human capacity is broadening beyond technical skills to include and embrace management and related analytical capacities: the capacity to develop, hone and implement a vision and a strategy, as well as “softer” capacities like the capacity to reflect, to adapt, to continue learning, and to inspire. Thus we are seeing a movement that goes beyond learning new “skill sets,” to doing, accomplishing, and growing, and even to aspects of capacity that might be considered elements of character, such as integrity, commitment and a growth mind set. Likewise, the ways in which capacity is **developed** have moved beyond “CD 1.0” which tends to emphasize vertical forms of transfer (we teach you, we train you) to “CD 2.0” and above, which tend to be more organic, horizontal forms of learning (learning by doing, learning by experimentation, learning by exchanging ideas with others, etc.). And while many who are involved in HICD work are aware of this broader view of capacity, many are not.

3.1.2. There is a difference between the “H” and the “I” in HICD. There is wide agreement that the need for sheer human resources in agricultural science, research and extension (and related business and social science areas) is great. Therefore the human (“H”) part of HICD - investing in people, in and of itself will have positive pay-offs for development over the long term. And recent research has shown that investing in higher education does have a high economic return. Indeed, the literature on returns to education goes back at least 50 years and has clearly shown a correlation with economic growth.¹⁴ But what is interesting is the assumption, among some in the BFS, that getting more people with MS and PhD degrees, and awarding funds to scientists to pursue further work will, once these people return to their countries and their originating institutions, have a positive effect on institutional capacity development (ICD). There is no evidence that this happens routinely, though in some ways and in some cases there may be such multiplier effects over time. What is clear, however, is that if the institution to which they return is beset with the kinds of problems commonly agreed as widespread both in the NARIs, and many institutions of scientific education (see Annex 3) there is little or no spillover and that is so even if these newly returned people stay with the originating institution, which is not always the case. This issue too has been reported previously, as in the 2012 BIFAD CRSP review: “...we believe the CRSPs have given insufficient attention to broader institution building. Training does not assure that returning young scientists will necessarily build institutional strengths.”¹⁵ In short, how well-trained people actually perform (and consequently how their

¹⁴ See, e.g., Harbison and Myers, *Education, Manpower, and Economic Growth*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 1964.

¹⁵ BIFAD-CRSP Review, August, 2012.

institutions perform) is affected by opportunities for meaningful work and collaboration with others, shared professional values, incentives to expand skills, and so on.

ICD should, therefore, be seen as a separate kind of intervention, one that demands its own approaches. The first of these is an investment in contextual analysis, the subject of the next point (below).

3.1.3. The problems of most institutions go beyond their four walls. Though many in BFS and at the missions understand this, much of what is done in the ICD arena continues to proceed from seeing an institution as if it were an entity bounded by its four walls. And within that framework there are some fairly straightforward factors that seem to correlate with successful change. As a recent Harvard Business Review article put it, the difference between success and failure in institutional change often comes down to: “...a team of insiders and outsiders to come up with new ideas, a clear external motivation to do something, and strong leaders who believe in the ideas and push the bureaucracy to implement them consistently over a number of years.”¹⁶

And because the motivation (read incentive) for change is critical, this leads us to context, and here things are more complex. If we expand the definition of institution to embrace the implicit and explicit rules of the game (read habits, conventions, customs, practices), then it is clear that institutions exist as part of a system of values in a context that includes politics, identity, power dynamics, tensions among classes, etc.¹⁷ Jamil Salmi of the World Bank, speaking about higher education institutions, refers to context as “ecosystem”: “...analyzing what happens in the institutions alone is not sufficient to understand and appreciate the full dynamics of their relative success or failure. The analysis cannot be complete unless it also takes into consideration key forces at play at the level of what could be called the ecosystem, within which tertiary education institutions evolve. These forces can have a facilitating or constraining effect, depending on the circumstances.”¹⁸

And three decades ago agricultural economist Vernon Ruttan, in thinking about institutional change referred to such forces: “How costly a form of institutional change is to be accepted in a society depends on the power structure among vested interest groups. It also depends critically on cultural tradition and ideology, such as nationalism, that make certain institutional arrangements more easily accepted than others.”¹⁹

In short, all ICD efforts should begin with an investment by USAID missions in a deeper up-front analysis and understanding of institutional arrangements, and the influence on those arrangements of the political, economic, social structural and cultural context in which that institution is embedded. In fact, in some instances such an analysis will show that **what looks at first like a capacity problem is really a political context problem.** An example is where civil service rules distort or undermine merit-based personnel changes or career paths. A recent report on Kenya is a case in point: “The initiatives taken in Kenya, introducing performance based contracts and relocating personnel across districts are commendable, but do not go far enough to address the underlying systemic and structural sources of inefficiencies that have impeded improved performance. These relate in particular to the procedures for hiring, promoting and firing staff that are deeply embedded in the way the national civil service

¹⁶ Brad Power, “Innovating Around a Bureaucracy,” Harvard Business Review, March 8, 2013.

¹⁷ Thorstein Veblen defined institutions as “prevalent habits of thought with respect to particular relations and particular functions of the individual and of the community” (Theory of the Leisure Class).

¹⁸ Jamil Salmi, “The Road to Academic Excellence: Lessons of Experience,” in Altbach and Salmi, “The Road to Academic Excellence: The Making of World Class Research Universities,” World Bank, 2011, p. 335.

¹⁹ Vernon Ruttan and Yujiro Hayami, “Towards a Theory of Induced Institutional Innovation,” Discussion Paper #200, Center for Economic Research, University of Minnesota, February, 1984, p.5.

operates.”²⁰ No amount of training inside the institution will change these underlying and often externally imposed conditions.

3.1.4. Move from the ideal to the real; from “myopic pragmatic optimism” (see Geertz below) to context-based expectations. Much of what has been tried in ICD and recommended in many reviews is aimed at filling in the gaps between how things are (based on standardized performance and needs assessments) and how they ought to be.²¹ There seems to be an unquestioned assumption in the way ICD efforts are designed that institutions can be fixed by “inputting” (lab equipment goes missing, therefore institute an inventory management system and train people to use it; lack of good leaders, therefore begin a program in “leadership training”). This is essentially a social engineering model and is incompatible with the real world.

In the HICD arena the missions (and USAID as a whole) need to move from the heights of how things ought ideally to work, down to the messy realities of local context. By first understanding local contexts (no small task), and only then seeing where there are possible levers to foster change, ICD is likely to be more effective in the long run. As this year’s World Bank World Development Report puts it: *“Every policy relies on explicit or implicit assumptions about how people make choices. Those assumptions typically rest on an idealized model of how people think, rather than an understanding of how everyday thinking actually works. This year’s World Development Report argues that a more realistic account of decision-making and behavior will make development policy more effective.”*²²

A recent ODI Brief concurs: *“Programmes continue to be based on where donors think the country ought to be, not on serious analysis of where the country is, where it is coming from or where it is heading.”*²³ And fifty years ago anthropologist Clifford Geertz pointed out that this tendency is not only misguided, but is counter-productive: *“...a myopic pragmatic optimism which allows short-run gains to obscure the general trend of events, which isolates purely technical improvements from the historically created cultural, social and psychological context in which they are set, and which, because of these failings, exacerbates the ailments it sets out to cure.”*²⁴

Related to “myopic pragmatic optimism” is what MIT political economist Judith Tendler has called the “Christmas-list” syndrome,²⁵ wanting to include every intervention possible in a program on the grounds that all are important things to do. In one of the FSIC centers for example, there are at least ten major objectives, any two of which would be challenging for even a high budget long-term involvement.²⁶

In short, re-align expectations based on a deeper understanding of the context (the mantra should be “history and culture matter”) and on what is realistic to expect in a given time-frame.

²⁰ “Democratic Politics and State Capacity Building: Ministries of Agriculture in Malawi and Kenya,” The Future-Agricultures Consortium (UK), October, 2009.

²¹ Anne-Claire Hervy and A. Gilboy, “Good Practices in Leveraging Long-term training for Institutional Capacity Strengthening, APLU for USAID, February 2014.

²² “Mind, Society and Behavior,” World Development Report 2015, World Bank.

²³ CDD/ODI Policy Brief #1 “What are the Drivers of Change in Ghana?” November, 2005, p.2.

²⁴ Clifford Geertz, *Agricultural Involution*, University of California Press, 1966, p. 147.

²⁵ Judith Tendler, “Comments on Partnership for Capacity Building in Africa” for PREM Public Sector Group, The World Bank, March 8, 1998.

²⁶ E.g., “Improve market function and small holder access to inputs; Improve policy systems; Encourage trade and private sector investments; Build the capacity of host countries to improve their policy environment; Increase access to agricultural inputs; Facilitate technology adoption at scale; Advance land and natural resource tenure and rights; Develop regulatory systems for agricultural biotechnology; Improve resilience and risk management approaches; Improve nutritional outcomes and promote nutrition and agricultural linkages.”

Such a conceptual re-alignment also implies a significant shift in donor approaches to ICD and in donor roles. As D. Horton put it in 1999: “...*capacity strengthening is more a process of social experimentation than of social engineering. Management systems cannot be imported, but need to be developed within organizations. Development agencies should play catalytic, facilitating roles, rather than take responsibility for organizational change.*”²⁷

Likewise, there seems to be an unquestioned faith among some in the HICD arena in the power of training. Especially in the areas of entrepreneurship and leadership, this faith is worth questioning. With few exceptions real entrepreneurs and real leaders tend to be born rather than “made.” The challenge then is not to train or create leaders and entrepreneurs, but to find them and support their evolution and integration into the institutional realm. Finding leaders and entrepreneurs would mean spending more time in the field meeting and listening to people, following leads, and developing relationships over time so that one can go beyond first impressions. Supporting their evolution as entrepreneurs or leaders could mean, among other things, more of a brokering role on the part of mission personnel involved in HICD, for example, facilitating connections with others and other institutions.

3.1.5. The critical difference between Facilitating and Doing. One of our interviewees pointed out that USAID sometimes supplies fuel vouchers or motorcycles to extension agents. He recognized that this was not a sustainable solution, but, he said: “*A lot of what we do with our national partners is find ways to work around their weaknesses, and that’s no help, but still we have to meet our targets.*” While to some, supplying fuel vouchers may seem like “facilitation” it is in fact “doing.” When donors instigate change by using money or things as the incentive, the record often shows a lack of sustainability. In fact the expectation that donors will provide the missing pieces in poorly functioning systems has often demotivated local actors. Moreover, the line between facilitating and doing can be blurry; for example, one can begin as a facilitator, but end up being a “doer” because of the need to show results. In Malawi and elsewhere in some ICD initiatives “embedded advisors” have been put in institutions in order to mentor or coach or to “model” new behaviors. But this kind of facilitation work often requires time and subtlety, and with the pressure for quick results one can easily succumb to the temptation to take over and “do” instead of “teach/mentor/facilitate.”

3.2. RECOMMENDED CHANGES

3.2.1. Slow Down and take a breath. Consider a 6 to 12 month hiatus to enable greater internal learning about capacity development and re-structuring. This may mean that, with the possible exception of the Innovation Labs, active projects should not be extended during this period. Instead during this period intensive work could be done on:

a) Knowledge management

a.1. Move towards agreement on dropping the word “building” from the capacity related terminology. “Capacity Building” suggests starting from scratch, as if there is little there. The term “Capacity Development” (CD) moves in a better, more supportive direction.

a.2. Increase knowledge of contextual analysis. At USAID and other development agencies there have been numerous efforts to make contextual analysis more central to the work of development, such as USAID’s prior coursework on social soundness analysis, and the World Bank’s work in the early 2000s on social analysis.

²⁷ Helena Posthumus, Adrienne Martin, Timothy Chancellor, “A systematic review on the impacts of capacity strengthening of agricultural research systems for development and the conditions of success.” London: EPPI-Centre, Social Science Research Unit, Institute of Education, University of London, January, 2013, p.40.

a.3. Increase knowledge of CD 2.0 and 3.0. The capacity development field is evolving beyond training, taking into account a growing “training fatigue” in many countries, a reaction in part to the standardization of training approaches, as well as a recognition that while much is learned in the course of a training, less of it gets applied than has been hoped. There is today greater interest and experimentation with “horizontal” approaches to both individual and institutional CD, approaches based on exchanges of experience, often with “real time” problems as the basis for learning. Thus peer to peer interactions (which can also refer to interactions between peer institutions), coaching, twinning, cross visits, and especially medium length secondments of personnel between institutions are coming to the fore. Since these horizontal approaches have in common an organic problem-driven quality, what people learn takes hold more deeply. Such approaches require more donor brokering and facilitation than direct investment, and can therefore be longer term, and at the same time less costly. There are scores of examples both in the development and the corporate sectors. For example, the experiences of private sector peer to peer efforts like the Michigan Manufacturing Tech Center (MMTC, which is part of the National Manufacturing Extension Partnership Centers) and the “20 group peer collaboration process,”²⁸ or USAID’s own PEER grants program (PEER - Partnerships for Enhanced Engagement in Research - a 4 year old USAID international grants program that funds developing country scientists who partner with USG-funded researchers to address problems together), or the “sandpit” activity approach from the IDEAS factory (the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council in the U.K.).²⁹

a.4. Increase knowledge of USAID’s own history of CD efforts and seek opportunities for synergy. In Latin America (especially in Central America) review the status of institutions established or strengthened in the past by USAID, to determine what roles they could play in partnership with USAID and with U.S. institutions to provide relevant training to future professionals from other countries in the region. (Specifically, look at EARTH and CATIE in Costa Rica, and EAP/Zamorano in Honduras.)

a.5. Map all FTF related projects and programs by country, by institution, by foci, by contractor or grantee, and by existing and potential funding partners (including other donors) working on similar or same issues. Such a mapping ought also to look at the alignment of existing institutional partners with national development goals. We realize some of this is already in progress, but a concerted mapping effort across the board, while a big task, will result in better coordination, greater efficiency in resource allocation, and ultimately greater impact.

a.6. Undertake a major review of the current agricultural policy and institutional context in the three regions to take note of new opportunities, not for new projects but to harness new platforms for development on which to build strong national agricultural research systems, strong universities, and the most competitive firms in the private sector.

a.7. Create a searchable database of all reviews of HED, ICD, Participant Training as well as of all projects related to HICD in order to indicate overlap, potential for collaboration/integration, and funding gaps.

a.8. Create and use a system to follow-up on scholarship/fellowship recipients after they complete their program. Opportunities to learn more about the dynamics of HICD change are missed if such follow-up is not done systematically.

²⁸ See www.ncm20.com

²⁹ See <http://nsf.gov/pubs/2009/nsf09012/nsf09012.jsp>

a.9. At the mission level more effort is needed to identify strong (or potentially strong) institutions in both education and research, as well as high performing national agricultural systems, and competitive firms in the private sector. Just as one cannot create entrepreneurs, but can find and support them, the same is true for viable institutions. To do this however requires more concerted time in the field to really get to know these potentially strong entities; to delve more deeply into their character and that of their leaders and personnel. In conjunction with implementing partners, support efforts by these entities to mutually elucidate their challenges, and in the course of the relationship, facilitate connections with sister institutions nationally and regionally to create greater learning and perhaps economies of scale and scope.

b) New structures and re-structuring aimed at better focus and greater simplification

b.1. Consolidate all BFS-funded scholarships, internships, and individual training programs in one program, coordinated by one U.S. organization in partnership with one national or regional educational institution in each geographic region. The Ford Foundation International Fellowship program, for example, with a secretariat at its New York headquarters, chose one institution in each country to bear primary responsibility for recruitment, selection, preparation, placement and monitoring of fellows throughout the fellowship period.³⁰

b.2. Think more systematically in terms of “clusters.” There is evidence that scholarships/fellowships have a bigger pay off, both for the individual and their institutions, when the fellows are “clustered” together during training and afterwards. This creates a “cohort effect,” in essence an informal and organic support network. Alumni as well can be clustered with similar effects. The basic idea here is the concept of critical mass. But clustering does not always imply a cohort drawn from the same institution. It can also mean drawing from different types of institutions (a national agricultural research center, university, agricultural ministry) in a given country, and/or similar institutions within sub-regions with similar technical issues, but forming these participants into a deliberate, even formal, cohort. Such modes of capacity development with subsequent institutional placement can attract political support at the national level and/or leverage sub-regional attention by other funders. Drawing fellows from multiple institutions in the same country could improve the potential impact of the program by 1) providing opportunities for the fellows post-training to support one another in multiple ways, 2) enabling mutual reinforcement of research and policy interventions, 3) enhancing engagement of country institutions through specific technologies and innovations, and 4) increasing cost effectiveness by collaboration among various FTF programs within a given country or sub-region. A coherent cluster training program would align with perhaps one of the key challenges in agricultural development - weak linkages across training, research and extension.

b.3. Consider redirecting InnovATE project resources and efforts to directly support Innovation Labs, recognizing the scarcity of field demand for InnovATE services and the paucity of institutional strengthening content in the Innovation Lab programs.

b.4. Identify one agriculture/food security educational institution per region or (in Africa) sub-region that seems to have the promise to become a regional “anchor”- a credible first class educational and research institution/network - and prepare a long-term (15 to 20 year) plan for financing and supporting such institutions in conjunction with other donors.

³⁰ “Linking Higher Education and Social Change - Ford Foundation International Fellowship Program,” May, 2013.

b.5. Create a small but effective international steering committee or advisory panel whose job it would be to keep the BFS/FTF's focus on HICD and country ownership. This big picture view of the centrality of institutional and human capital investment to the larger FTF goals would help move FTF (and the agency) beyond its standard mode of devolving projects via U.S. grantees or contractors as the prime implementing agents. It would be useful to appoint one or two BIFAD people to this committee in order to strengthen a message to BIFAD member institutions about what country ownership implies in terms of changes in the traditional international role of those institutions.

c) New functions and people

c.1. Engage a senior ICD specialist for BFS for one year. Many of those who work in HICD currently, however much they have learned and done, are specialists in realms other than HICD. We recommend hiring a senior person of demonstrated HICD expertise, experience and creativity; someone with sufficient status to guide aspects of the above knowledge management efforts, help amplify and make more coherent the agency's ICD philosophy, and convene all those in other bureaus (such as Policy Planning and Learning - PPL, Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance - DCHA, Economic Growth, Education and Environment –E3, and the Global Development Lab - GDL) who are involved in CD into an HICD “task force.”

c.2. In those missions where there is/will be regular engagement with key local institutions, ensure that the USAID staff person has senior status. A finding from our interviews is that unless the USAID staff person at mission level has this kind of credibility, he or she is easily dismissed by counterparts in selected local institutions.

3.3 SOME KEY OPERATIONAL PRINCIPLES AROUND WHICH GREATER CONSENSUS IS NEEDED AMONG ALL INVOLVED IN FTF (AND OF COURSE HICD)

3.3.1. Local solutions (country ownership) is the direction in which FTF efforts must head – this implies a gradual shift to building relationships of mutual trust with elements in each country's agricultural education, research and outreach system.

3.3.2. Shift responsibility and accountability to “them” (local organizations, people and institutions) and begin moving away from the dominant role of U.S. firms and universities. Clearly, HICD program accomplishment will be highly dependent on attracting superior expertise, some of which will come from U.S. firms and universities. However, there is no need as in the past to rely so heavily on U.S. and other foreign institutions to carry the burden for developing the human and institutional resources of developing countries. Some advanced technical assistance is no doubt highly valuable and valued. But it is important to recognize three functions that seem to endure in external technical assistance: 1) engagement in joint projects, beginning with genuinely collaborative project design, 2) assistance in going to scale, and 3) external evaluation (co-designed with a partner institution). The precise nature of the U.S. firm's or university's involvement will need to be based on a combination of the experience of U.S. scientists or experts, the demands of the local institution, and the ability of that institution to put in place a defined work plan that will form the basis of collaboration.

3.3.3. ICD is central to everything FTF does.

3.3.4. Instead of a multitude of scattered small projects, move eventually towards wholesale (leveraging) roles as broker, turning plate, convener, facilitator - aka “wise support.”

3.3.5. Solid homework means spending more time and effort to understand the institutional landscape – going beyond the usual suspects.

3.3.6. If short time frames remain the norm in the medium term, accept limits on the results that can be achieved – thus fewer, clearer objectives (guided by realism).

3.3.7. Become more experimental and iterative. This is especially important in terms of relationships with local institutions. Because of the history of dependency that can be one of the results of past foreign aid, local entities often have a tendency to present a rosy picture to donors in order to ensure funding. Besides the homework needed to get to really know these potential partners, different approaches to testing their “character” (the genuineness of their commitment) might be tried, either within the same mission portfolio (if it covers a number of institutions) or from one mission to another in different countries. Such approaches might have a “skin in the game” component (see 3.5.2. below) where different time frames and different thresholds of commitment are tried.³¹ Obviously such experimentation involves different levels of risk, and could imply a longer time frame for the project.

3.3.8. Limit the number of partners in any consortium to three or four.

3.3.9. Think about becoming more of a turning plate. Consider coordinating/seeding institutions that can play a role in sustaining entire professional fields, such as continent wide or regional professional journals, associations, conventions, job fairs, etc. Think about more indirect enabling roles in support to both national and regional think tanks that deal with policy constraints (e.g., KIPPRA - Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis).

3.4 POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT TO LOOSEN APPARENT CONSTRAINTS

This implies a concerted (and perhaps even aggressive) effort to educate USAID’s domestic constituencies about constraints imposed on FTF that compromise its goals.

3.4.1. Ease the tension between public and private. To the extent USAID avoids working with, or expecting much, of governments it compromises the prospects of country ownership. At the end of the day if certain public sector institutions are not strengthened with respect to policies that affect agricultural research and education, a lot of what is done in FTF will not be sustained. For example instead of USAID bringing together private and NGO partners to ensure coordination, the national government should be incentivized and enabled to take on that role.

3.4.2. Shift some funding from bilateral missions to regional missions to enable regional approaches, especially in Africa. While continuing to build depth in agriculture at national level, USAID through its regional missions should engage in initiatives for regional collaboration and integration, such as supporting (and learning from) networks that focus on valued service to their members.

3.5 PROCEDURAL CHANGES

3.5.1. Consider cash on delivery (COD) for benchmarked accomplishments, and greater use of the Fixed Obligation Grant (FOG).

³¹ The term “skin in the game,” is used in the American business world to describe situations where people (or organizations) take on monetary risk, and are thus more invested in achieving a goal.

3.5.2. Experiment with more genuine incentives for local partners to take more ownership of ICD interventions (including taking on a degree of present or future financial risk) and upon their reaching certain agreed on benchmarks, making larger and different types of funding available (including endowment contributions).

3.5.3. Move to more regional approaches, especially involvement in and support to networks. Consider 5 to 7 year long compacts with network institutions/ regional institutions, in conjunction with other donors.

3.5.4. Cultivate new funding partners including governments, regional economic communities, continental policy bodies, universities and alumni, diaspora associations, private enterprises and NGOs.

3.5.5. Consider revisions that would simplify/clarify the Leader With Associates (LWA) mechanism. It might also be useful to ask whether the LWA mechanism itself is the right mechanism to use for mission engagement in HICD work. Some of the reasons for the use of the LWA (among them to speed up the award process) may not be sufficient to warrant the LWA in HICD work.

3.5.6. Programs that are meant to provide services to missions should not be competed and awarded without first doing a careful study of demand.

3.6 MEASUREMENT

3.6.1. Rethink measurement indicators – move to more qualitative approaches to measurement; be more thoughtful about outcomes and limit the use of templates and tools. Standard metrics for institutional improvement such as number of students trained, number of faculty holding advanced degrees, enrollment growth, research output by number of journal articles published etc.,³² while sometimes useful proxies for positive change, do not get at what may be more important factors like quality, cross-disciplinary communication and learning, or originality.

Conclusion

Again, our main message to the Bureau for Food Security is: Slow down in order to 1) deepen and broaden the staff's understanding of HICD and ICD in particular, 2) do more careful up-front contextual analysis, 3) undertake fewer HICD interventions but do them with more focus and more attention to critical mass. And with respect to institutional capacity development (ICD) itself: 1) lower the sights and lengthen the view, that is, expect less in the short term, but more lasting results, however imperfect, over a longer period of time, 2) begin a gradual shift from project-based outsourcing to different, less directive, more collaborative roles – like that of broker, facilitator, convener, and turning plate for ideas and networks, 3) undertake aggressive efforts to convince constituencies in and outside the agency that the pressure for fast and easily quantifiable results may be counterproductive to the development objectives they themselves espouse, and 4) support programs that recognize there is considerable capacity in developing countries at all levels, and of all kinds.

³² See Eleanor Turner, “The Impact of Institutional Capacity Building on Agricultural Universities: A Review of the USAID Evaluation Literature,” Michigan State University, 2012.

Annex I: Institutional Twinning: UC Davis and Chile, one historical example

The long term relationship between the University of California-Davis (UC Davis) and educational and research institutions in Chile is an example of the potential benefits of long-term institutional “twinning.” This collaboration, initially supported by resources from **all** involved parties, was also supported by political leaders (national in the Case of Chile, and the State of California in the case of UC Davis), and involved the private sector. The relationship was neither one-sided nor paternalistic. Moreover, this type of model, once initial funding ends, has the potential of continuing/evolving in organic ways, **without additional donor funding**.

The history of these close research and educational relationships with Chile goes back more than 150 years. The elements of agro-ecology and economy that California and Chile have in common led to sharing in the development of scientific information, both through university and industry research. Academic connections between Chilean universities and UC Davis received an important stimulus in the mid-1960s while Eduardo Frei was President of Chile. He initiated a number of reforms, backed strongly by President Kennedy’s Alliance for Progress. The Ford Foundation provided \$10 million to finance a 10 year agreement between the University of Chile and the University of California that would support graduate education on UC campuses for many Chilean students and extensive research and educational exchange visits by UC faculty to Chile. The relationship remains and continues to facilitate research and educational exchanges between the two institutions although no major outside financing has been provided since 1975.

During the 60s and 70s, a significant number of Chileans obtained graduate degrees in the agricultural sciences at UC Davis and other UC campuses. These graduates returned to Chile and became scientific leaders, renowned professors in Chilean universities, heads of Chilean government research and development agencies, and leaders in private industry. During the same period, many UC professors traveled to Chile and worked with their colleagues at the University of Chile and the Catholic University to develop curricula, collaborate on research, and to plan fruit sector development. Close friendships and academic ties resulted.

This “twinning” has been credited with awakening an agricultural sector that was several decades behind that of its international competitors. Today, Chilean fruit exports are valued at \$1.8 billion annually. Moreover, the scientific advances that increased efficiency and technological development in fruit spread rapidly, to wine, other crops, and forestry. There have been reverse benefits as well - there is some evidence that the increased availability of Chilean grapes in the US market during winter months helped develop consumer habits in the US that led to increased consumption of California-produced grapes. Thus, both countries benefited economically as well as academically from the collaboration.

In the 1980s, USAID discontinued programs that twinned universities in the U.S. with developing countries. However, USAID later funded Higher Education for Development (HED) Partnerships.

Annex 2: HICD Portfolio

Project	Lead Institution	Countries
Borlaug Higher Education for Agricultural Research and Development (BHEARD)	Michigan State University	Uganda, Mozambique, Malawi, Mali, Ghana, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Liberia, Rwanda, South Sudan, Kenya
Modernizing Extension and Advisory Services (MEAS)	U. of Illinois	Global
Innovation for Agricultural Training and Education (innovATE)	Virginia Tech	Global
Borlaug Leadership Enhancement in Agriculture Program (LEAP)	U of California, Davis	Sub-Saharan Africa
U.S. Global Food Security Fellows	Purdue University	Global
African Women in Agricultural Research and Development (AWARD)	CGIAR	Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Malawi, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia

**There are also three ICT programs currently in the HICD division, but they entered the portfolio in late 2014, were not designed with an HICD focus, and, thus, were not included in the HICD strategic review.

Annex 3: Summary of the Literature on Institutional Capacity Development

I. The analysis of the problem set

The literature on HICD and the many reviews and studies done by and for USAID, DFID etc. seem to agree remarkably consistently on the following broad problem set:

- A tendency to equate training and education of individuals with institutional impact without evidence of same
- Quality – lacunae on the quality of research, the people doing it, the institutions involved in it, the extension systems
- Lack of linkages with private sector, with practical applications, with policy makers

More specifically, the literature seems to agree that (national agricultural research institutes (NARIs), higher education, and other agriculture-related institutions in many developing countries suffer from:

- Shortage of quality faculty/researchers
- Too many empty positions in administration and faculty (“hollow shell” syndrome)
- Aging of faculty/researchers
- Inadequate funding
- Lack of diverse funding sources
- Poor incentives
- Poor governance
- Poor leadership and management
- Low numbers of women in the field
- Relatively low status of agriculture as a field of study, research
- Poor and deteriorating infrastructure (labs, libraries, classrooms, electrical power shortages, internet connectivity problems, etc.)
- Lack of relevance to realities of farmers and agribusiness, local and multi-national (many faculty/researchers have little or no farm experience)
- Limited research capacity
- Limited capacity to scale-up research findings
- Lack of equitable access to these institutions
- Brain drain
- Poor curriculum design and teaching methods – too little emphasis on problem-solving and other “soft” skills

2. General agreement on what is needed to strengthen institutions

- Sustained and long-term support (financial or other)
- Changes in funding flows (and percentages) from public sector sources and others
- Partnerships (whether regional, international) built on trust, mutual respect, cultural sensitivity
- Comprehensive effort targeting multiple levels in the system
- Being country specific and context specific (especially the political economy)
- Getting high level administrative support for change in an institution
- Getting even higher level political support

- The collegiality of the capacity development planning process – give and take, degree of mutual decision-making
- Clarity and realism of objectives
- Flexibility
- Good M&E systems
- Good knowledge management (KM) systems and information openness
- Having access to one another especially during the planning phase of a partnership (via internet and teleconferencing)
- Fostering soft skills (which many seem to agree comes from longer term exposure and immersion in another country or type of institution)
- Changes in curriculum and classroom teaching styles

A (very) short list of some specific interventions:

- Use of farmer score cards to feedback to institutions/policy makers
- Establishing/focusing on critical mass clusters, such as alumni associations
- Diaspora involvement
- Supporting the establishment of professional associations
- Supporting the establishment of networks
- Emphasizing agricultural careers in secondary schools (via 4H type clubs)
- Promoting private sector demand for agriculture graduates as consultants

3. A short note on approaching “best practice” in ICD

Institutional Strengthening often means Institutional Change. Many of the answers proposed tend to be linear, in “fill-in-the-gap” mode. But the core problems in many of the institutions that are cited as weak by outside observers often go beyond the institution itself. Those problems and the barriers to dealing with them often lie in the political economy or historical realms – the historical evolution of a dependency on outside aid, internally evolved structures of hierarchy, bureaucracy, habits and other arrangements etc. What is needed is solid homework, careful analytics of why things are not the way they should be. This is NOT always a matter of applying a set of assessment tools, or metrics in a matrix – that is yet another way of looking at the matter one dimensionally, in a fill-in-the-gap mode. If the barriers to change are between the lines so to speak; if they are more fundamentally about power, territoriality, particular (and often hidden) gatekeepers, seniority, nepotism, politics, tribe, ethnicity, dominant symbols, lack of confidence, dependency, expectations etc. these “cultural” and structural barriers in the system in which the institution is embedded are often the reasons why goals the institution is set up to advance are not being achieved.

The following box on p. 40 of the U.K. January 2013 review by Posthumus, Martin and Chancellor is a pretty good beginning towards thinking about ICD issues as lying beyond the institution itself:

“Nine lessons on management of a capacity strengthening programme...” (Horton 1999)

1. *Project design is much more than a technical process; it is essentially one of negotiation.*
2. *In capacity-building projects, design activities cannot end when implementation begins.*
3. *Capacity-building efforts should prepare managers to deal with complexity, uncertainty and change.*
4. *In capacity-building efforts, it is essential to collaborate rather than patronise.*
5. *Organisational assessment is a complex social process, intertwined with organisational politics.*

6. *In designing capacity-building projects, it is essential to involve managers and staff members in assessing needs and opportunities.*
7. *Action-learning strategies offer great potential for capacity building.*
8. *In the context of strategic management and organisational learning, PM&E take on new meanings.*
9. *Training is most effective when it is designed to serve a purpose within an organisational change process.*

Annex 4: Methodology

160 documents read

34 people interviewed (including 20 at USAID of which 4 in the field; 7 project people; 7 others)

Annex 5: Bibliography

[*Note: This is a selection of recommended readings. This list does not include the materials provided by USAID for the strategic review.*]

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