



Capacity Development for Hunger Solutions: Policy and Operational Frameworks

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Recent upheavals in the global food system have exposed tens of millions more people across the world to hunger. They have also laid bare the pressing need for investment in the policy, institutional, organizational, and individual capacities needed to address the root causes of hunger and food insecurity, and thereby achieve Millennium Development Goal 1 on ending extreme poverty and hunger. Such capacities will be crucial to the success of current and prospective country-led efforts to promote food security and overall economic development.¹

There is a pressing need for clarity on how to strengthen capacity for design and implementation of sustainable solutions to hunger. Consensus exists on generic concepts, definitions, and best practice recommendations for capacity development. Absent, however, is such consensus on capacity development for food and nutrition security, largely due to the lack of unified frameworks for policy and action. This paper helps to fill that gap. In the next section, current thinking on capacity development is outlined. Comprehensive policy and operational frameworks for capacity development for food and nutrition security (or “hunger

solutions”) developed by the UN World Food Programme are then presented. A discussion of strategic priorities for governments and development partners rounds out the analysis.

Capacity Development: Concepts, Definitions, and Good Practice Recommendations²

“*Capacity*” is the ability of people, organizations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully. “*Capacity development*” is the process whereby people, organizations and society as a whole unleash, strengthen, create, adapt and maintain that ability over time. Capacity development thus involves much more than enhancing the knowledge and skills of individuals. At the individual level, capacity development depends crucially on the organizations in which people work. The functional effectiveness of particular organizations reflects the broader (enabling) environment in which they are embedded, including the institutional framework and the structures of power and influence. True capacity development thus entails support aimed at individuals (training), institutions (organizational

¹ For instance, the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) under the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), the “Latin America and the Caribbean Without Hunger 2025” initiative, the “ASEAN Integrated Food Security Framework,” the “Riyadh Declaration to Enhance Arab Cooperation to Face World Food Crises,” and the L’Aquila Joint Statement on Global Food Security.

² The literature on capacity development concepts, definitions, and good practices is vast. A synthesis of that literature is beyond the scope of this paper. Rather, this section highlights the main conclusions of that literature, drawing heavily from two seminal publications: (1) *Triennial comprehensive policy review of operational activities of the United Nations development system*. Economic and Social Council Substantive session of 2007 Geneva, 2-27 July 2007. Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda Operational activities of the United Nations for international development cooperation segment: follow-up to policy recommendations of the General Assembly and the Council. A/62/73–E/2007/52; (2) *The Challenge of Capacity Development: Working Toward Good Practice*. DAC Guidelines and Reference Series (2006).

development) and the enabling environment (policies and strategies). The comparative efficacy of given capacity development investments and interventions thus varies, on one hand, with “macro features” of policy and institutional environments, and, on the other, with “micro features” describing the attributes and behavior of actors and organisationsorganizations. Conditions and changes in the macro environment define and shift the scope and effectiveness of given institutions, influencing behavior and outcomes at the micro level.

Capacity development is the responsibility of national governments, with development partners playing supportive roles. External actors should strive to:

- Assess the level of national and local capacity assets and respond to the identified capacity needs;
- Ensure a collective approach;
- Situate their work within national policy and development plans;
- Base support not only on sound technical analysis but also on nuanced understanding of broader social, political, and economic contexts;
- Aim for “best fit” rather than “best practice,” since local contexts are the primary determinants of impact and sustainability.

A Policy Framework for Capacity Development for Hunger Solutions

These concepts and principles apply fully in the field of food and nutrition security. The following vision, objective, outcomes, outputs, and activities define a framework for design and implementation of policies for capacity development toward sustainable hunger solutions.

Vision

Capacity development for hunger solutions encompasses steady improvement in the design and implementation of nationally owned initiatives based on conducive food policies and institutions, effective national food assistance organizations and competent individual practitioners.

Objective

The objective of capacity development for hunger solutions is therefore to achieve nationally owned sustainable hunger solutions based on increased capacity for efficient and effective design, management and implementation of tools, policies and programmes to predict and reduce hunger.

Outcomes

Outcomes to achieve this objective must be generated in the enabling environment, in institutions, and for individuals.

Outcomes at the level of the *enabling environment* include the following:

- Laws, policies and strategies that prioritize the reduction of hunger and food and nutrition insecurity are adopted and implemented.
- Laws, policies and strategies to foster the role of civil society in sustainable hunger solutions are developed and implemented.
- Ministries and agencies with responsibility for hunger reduction and food and nutrition security are adequately and sustainably resourced.

Outcomes at the *institutional* level include the following:

- Financially viable and well-managed national food assistance agencies are operating effectively.
- Viable multi-sectoral partnerships to address the causes of hunger and food

and nutrition insecurity are functioning.

Outcomes at the *individual* level include the following:

- Sustained emergence of empowered individuals and communities capable of designing and implementing efficient and effective food and nutrition security programmes and policies.

These outcomes should be generated at distinct scales and over different timeframes: *individual* level outcomes can be expected in the short term of one to three years; *organizational* *institutional* level outcomes can be anticipated in the medium term of three to seven years; policy and institutional outcomes in the *enabling environment* can be projected for the long term of seven years or more.³

Outputs

The set of outcomes rests on outputs – the actual mechanisms which bring about the outcome – with similarly defined levels and timeframes.

Outputs at the level of the *enabling environment* include the following:

- United Nations Development Assistance Frameworks (UNDAFs), Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRS) and national plans of action that prioritize the reduction of hunger and food and nutrition insecurity are developed.
- Legislation and policy and strategy documents that prioritize the role of civil society in sustainable hunger solutions are developed.
- The resource needs of ministries and agencies with responsibility for

hunger reduction and food and nutrition security are prioritized and budgeted in national development plans and PRS.

Outputs at the *institutional* level include the following:

- Business and operational plans for financially viable and well managed national food and nutrition security agencies are developed.
- Formal and informal networks and platforms for multi-sectoral debate, consensus building and partnership in food systems are developed and supported.

Outputs at the *individual* level include the following:

- A sustained emergence of individuals and communities trained in the design and implementation of efficient and effective food and nutrition security programmes and policies, including in gender-disaggregated needs assessment, targeting, food quality and quantity management, market analysis, information management and local tendering.

Activities

These outcomes and outputs require action at each of the three levels. At the level of the enabling environment, activities include technical advice and facilitation of high-level consultations and informed advocacy and outreach. At the institutional level, activities include the development of business plans and guidelines for implementing food assistance, secondment of staff, support for stakeholder organizations and networks, and provision of equipment and capital services. At the individual

³ It is important to stress that this chronological sequence of outcomes does not imply a similar sequence of action at each level. Some countries may require support at the policy level from the start; others may need assistance in ways that follow a sequence such as that indicated above. In many cases, the three levels will be interrelated and will require simultaneous action. The main point is that the outcomes at each level are likely to appear over different timescales.

level, activities include the design and implementation of training workshops, exchange visits and targeted hosting of partner staff.

Given the nature of most food and nutrition security activities, most capacity development in this area starts with support for food assistance programmes. This is often a pragmatic approach to overcoming impediments to effective implementation. But the framework outlined above implies much more than such supporting investments: the aim must be the development of local capacities to address acute and chronic hunger.

An Operational Framework for Capacity Development for Hunger Solutions

Figure 1 details the building blocks of an operational framework for capacity development for hunger solutions, and the key elements within each block. Successful (high-impact) food and nutrition security policies, programs, and interventions entail five basic functions, all of which must be strengthened: (1) context analysis; (2) design; (3) implementation; (4) evaluation; and (5) policy and advocacy.

Context analysis includes assessments of countries' capacity to own hunger solutions. Such information is usually generated by tools such as Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Assessments (CFSVAs) or Emergency Food Security Assessments (EFSAs), where factors driving vulnerability at different levels (household, community, region, national) are identified and, where

possible, quantified.⁴ Key elements include market analysis, gender analysis, political economy analysis, assessments of key national capacities (especially disaster preparedness and safety nets). Assessment of administrative and logistical capacities at the national, regional, and local levels is especially important for gaining a full picture of countries' real capacities to design and implement effective and efficient hunger reduction measures. This set of assessments provides a basis for identifying the central needs to be met, and the associated capacity gaps to be filled.

Design revolves around definition of program or intervention objectives, targeting criteria and methods, selection of instruments, and procurement and delivery mechanisms (including any conditionalities on transfers). Also included are surveys of baseline conditions and contingency plans.

Implementation concerns delivery of goods and services to targeted populations, in line with design elements, based on context analysis. The range of options include in-kind transfers of food and other commodities, vouchers for food and other commodities, cash transfers, credit and banking services, weather risk insurance, and transport and logistics services.

Evaluation of capacity development recognizes that it is a multi-level, multi-year process which, to achieve impact, raises challenges to track and report the contributions of its interventions to sustainable hunger solutions. It entails measuring the achievement of the stated outputs at the level of the enabling environment, the institutional level

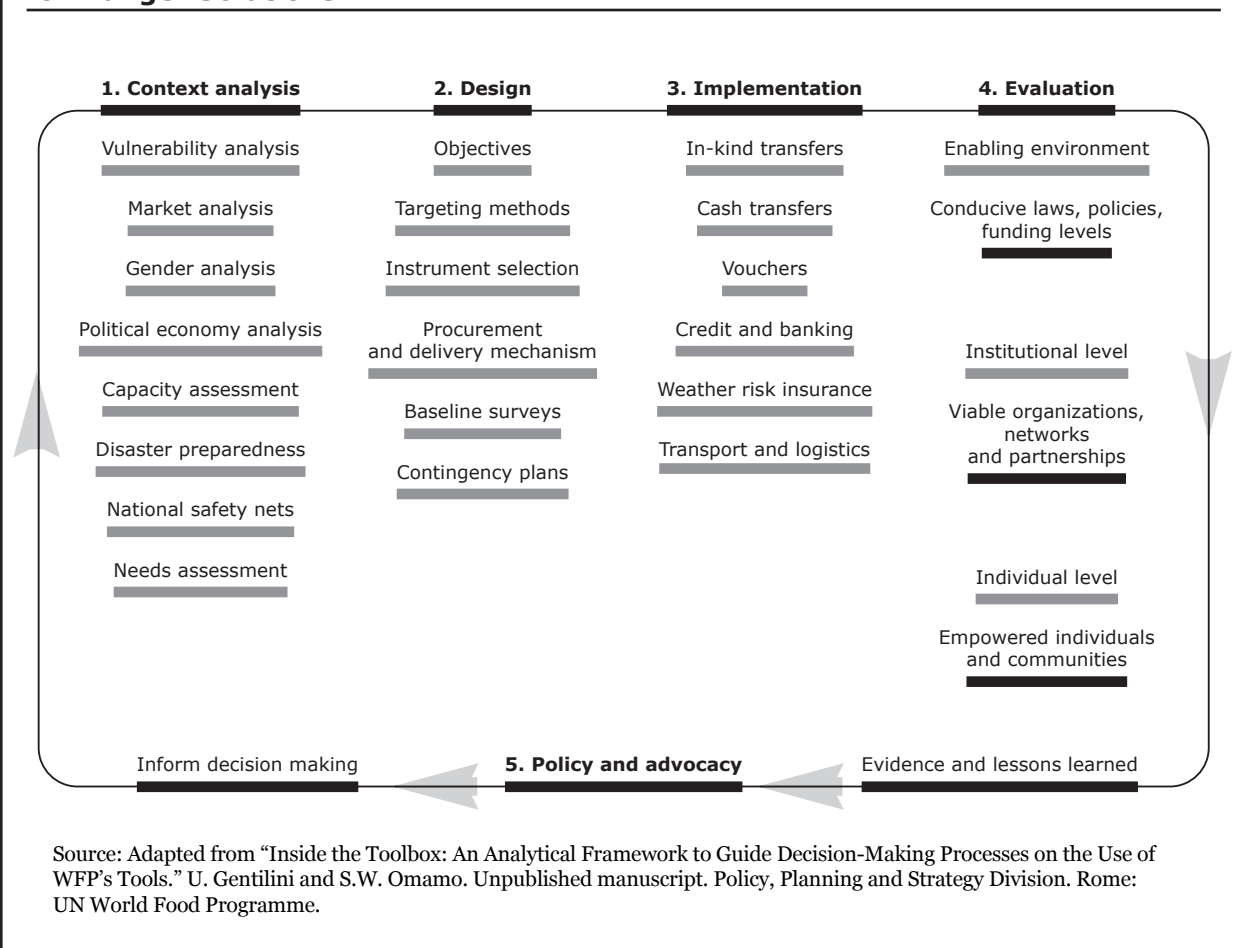
⁴ See *Comprehensive Food Security and Vulnerability Analysis Guidelines (CFSVA)*, Chapters 2-6, First Edition 2009. See also *Emergency Food Security Assessment Handbook (EFSVA)*, Parts II-IV, Second Edition January 2009, World Food Programme.

and the individual level.⁵ This problem is complex and highly context-specific. It is necessary to develop rigorous, transparent and flexible indicators for monitoring and evaluating capacity-development interventions that are applicable in the contexts in which organisations and individuals operate.

The *policy and advocacy function* cuts across and underpins these four core functions. This function entails conveying

and coordinating national, regional and global food and nutrition development policy processes. It ensures that there is a nuanced understanding among decision makers about the causes and effects of hunger; that interventions are well nested into broader efforts to address hunger; that consensus building and decision-making are dynamic processes based on documented evidence and lessons; and that hunger reduction is a top priority at the international and national levels.

Figure 1: An Operational Framework for Capacity Development for Hunger Solutions



The central message of Figure 1 is that while the implementation (“delivery”) phase of food and nutrition security interventions is the most visible, capacity development for hunger solutions begins well in advance of such delivery and

continues long afterwards. Just as relevant and sustainable food and nutrition security programs must be constantly on guard against congealing, so, too, must be associated capacity development efforts.

⁵ Indicators for tracking capacity development are crucial but the specific nature of the indicators required for each context is beyond the scope of the current paper.

Box 1: Comprehensive Capacity Development Support by the WFP

The UN World Food Programme (WFP) has been working closely with national and regional partners to strengthen capacity related to food and nutrition security, spanning the three levels of policy engagement and the four functional areas of operation.

In 1984 WFP introduced the School Meals Programme in El Salvador; in 1997 this initiative was integrated into the broader *Escuela Saludable* Programme, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education (MINED), marking the start of the hand-over process from WFP to the Government. Over this period, WFP was involved in both the development of a nutritional surveillance and early warning system, allowing the national government to assess their capacities to handle nutrition challenges, and helped develop a regional nutritional knowledge management network, which raised awareness, shared knowledge, experience and best practices throughout Latin America and the Caribbean in the fight against hunger and under-nutrition. The hand-over process was completed in 2007. Since then, the School Meals Programme (SMP) has evolved into one of the largest and most successful social programmes in the country and is entirely under the responsibility of the Government. The programme currently benefits 870,000 children in 4,200 schools across El Salvador.^{a 1/}

The government of Egypt recently requested WFP to assess the food subsidy system and its targeting mechanisms through a national survey funded by a Department for International Development grant and aimed at improving the understanding of the livelihoods and food security situation. This capitalized on WFP's vulnerability assessment expertise and strong targeting and food management experience, and is helping the government's reformed food subsidy programme to target poor households currently not included. Such efforts are contributing to a smooth phase-out of WFP assistance. Follow-up activities include WFP support to the establishment of an advisory body to improve government operations and inform pro-poor policy decision-making and the drawing up of an action plan for reforming the food subsidy system as part of the National Poverty Reduction Strategy and to complement other reform efforts.^{2/b}

WFP coordinates supports the Latin America and Caribbean Emergency Response Network (LACERN) of governments, United Nations agencies and NGOs. WFP's regional bureau in Panama City also coordinates the regional initiative "Towards the Eradication of Child Undernutrition", which supports governments in formulating, implementing, monitoring and evaluating hunger and undernutrition policies and strategies. WFP supports the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) initiative on strengthening vulnerability analysis. Both of these initiatives build on strong country-level investments and are thus fundamentally capacity-enhancing. These initiatives aim to institutionalize information sharing, build local and regional technical capacities and advocate for investments in hunger and nutrition programmes at the policy level. The evolving approach is based on capacity-enhancing activities such as high-level advocacy, participatory technical studies, information-sharing mechanisms, stakeholder consultations and workshops, joint assessments and inter-agency coordination. Partnerships with national and regional stakeholders help to ensure that ownership of these initiatives is in the hands of institutional partners, especially governments. The result is enhanced engagement with local and regional partners and increased knowledge among partners of the needs of food-insecure populations, which increase the likelihood that food assistance interventions will lead to positive development outcomes.^{3/ca}

1/ See *Experiences in Partnership for Capacity Development between WFP and the Government of El Salvador*, Cooperation and Partnership Programme (OMXC). Rome: UN World Food Programme Cooperation and Partnership Programme., November 2009, p.2.

2/ b See *Egypt Country Programme - - Egypt 1045.0 (2007-2011)*. Rome: UN World Food Programme.). WFP/EB.2/2006/8/4. 24 July 2006.

3/ c See *Development Project – Latin America and Caribbean Region Capacity-Building Project 10411.0*. WFP/EB.A/2005/9-A/1. 19 April 2005. Rome: UN World Food Programme.

Strategic Priorities

Impact in capacity development for food and nutrition security depends on the extent to which capacity development is prioritized as food and nutrition security strategies are formulated and implemented. Several strategic pressure points emerge related to national capacity assessments, partnerships, learning, monitoring and evaluation, reporting, awareness and incentives, and funding.

National Capacity Assessments

Realistic design and implementation of food and nutrition security capacity development initiatives requires systematic assessment of current and foreseeable capacity needs. Assessments are required at many levels (Figure 1). Such work is already underway in many countries.⁶ These efforts must be enhanced and strengthened.

⁶ See footnote 1 above.

Partnerships

Strong partnerships are required at all levels of operation and policy engagement, led by relevant national agencies. Partnerships are required among organizations with expertise in each of the areas identified in Figure 1. Effective partnerships are vital for developing clear hand-over strategies to enhance nationally-owned hunger solutions.

Learning

To be effective partners for capacity development in food and nutrition security, organizations must develop their own capacities to develop capacity. Targeted training of professionals remains a central element of such efforts. Skills requiring enhancement cover the core functions set out in Figure 1: context analysis, design, implementation, evaluation, and policy and advocacy. In addition to these relatively traditional areas of need, skills must be enhanced in such areas as leadership in complex environments, business planning, team-building, management, gender awareness, networking, and partnership development. Opportunities to facilitate South-South cooperation and sharing of best practices among countries facing similar challenges and at similar levels of overall social and economic development must be prioritized and seized.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

The multi-level, multi-year process for strengthening capacity the design and implementation of design and implementation of food and nutrition security policies and programs raises challenges in terms of tracking and reporting the contributions of given

interventions to sustainable hunger solutions. This problem is complex and highly context-specific. Agencies must continue to develop rigorous, transparent and flexible indicators for monitoring and evaluating capacity-development interventions that are applicable in the contexts in which the country offices work. This is a major challenge, but it must be addressed. Guidance material on monitoring, evaluation and reporting of capacity development must be developed and available, and staff trained accordingly.

Awareness-Raising and Incentives

The impact of capacity-development investments will be largely defined by the degree to which individuals perceive the importance of capacity development in their work, and by the degree to which capacity development is mainstreamed and funded in programme activities. Agencies must invest in a process of communication and awareness-raising regarding the capacity development visions and objectives, stressing the links with overall strategic directions and the need to focus on facilitating national empowerment.

Funding

Capacity development requires dependable medium-term funding to ensure that it can be developed systematically. Capacity development activities for food and nutrition security are typically funded indirectly through support for the analytical and operational capacities of counterpart agencies. Sustained targeted targeted investments are rare. The search for more sustainable funding mechanisms for capacity development initiatives must be prioritized.

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