

WHAT IS CAPACITY BUILDING?

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Abstract. Depending on the organisation and objectives, for capacity exist several definitions: the ability of people, organisations and society as a whole to manage their affairs successfully; the ability of people, organisations and society to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner; capacity building encompasses a country human, scientific, technological, organisational, and institutional resources and capabilities. A fundamental goal of capacity building (CB) is to enhance the abilities of stakeholders to evaluate and address crucial questions related to policy choices and modes of implementation among different options for development. These choices would be based on an understanding of environmental potential and limits and of the needs perceived by the people of the country concerned. Capacity building approach can be based on three complementary and needed elements: infrastructure CB: hardware and software and other technology required to develop, access and use of scientific knowledge, experience and observation techniques; individual (human) CB: education and training of individuals to be aware of, access, use and develop of scientific knowledge, research, experience and hereto-related techniques and data observation; institutional CB: building policies, programs and organisational structures in governments and organisations to enhance the understanding of the value of environmental sciences, experiences, research and hereto-related data and products.

Keywords: capacity building, objectives organisation.

AIMS AND BACKGROUND

What is ‘capacity’? Several organisations have defined the meaning of ‘capacity’¹⁻³:

Organisation for economic cooperation and development (OECD): Capacity is the ability of people (P), organisations (O) and society (S) as a whole to manage their affairs successfully such as research, decision-making, policy development, obtaining the Ph. D degree, but also the woman who is running the housekeeping, raising the children, etc.

United Nations Development Program (UNDP): Capacity is the ability of P, O and S to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve objectives in a sustainable manner.

United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED): Capacity building includes country human, scientific, technological and institutional resources and capabilities. The goal of capacity building is to enlarge abilities of (environmental and socio-economic) stakeholders to evaluate and address crucial

questions related to policy choices. These choices should be based on understanding of environmental and socio-economic potential and limits and needs of the country.

ELEMENTS OF CAPACITY BUILDING

The elements of capacity building are based on an integrated approach:

1. Infrastructure capacity building: Access to knowledge, expertise and data and information (for example the 6th and 7th European projects Black Sea Scientific Network Black Sea SCENE and Caspian Sea Scientific Network CASPINFO). But also the periodical B.EN.A conferences might be considered as infrastructural capacity building by creating scientific network for exchange of knowledge, expertise and experience.

2. Individual (human) capacity building: Education and training (for example the training workshops and summer schools organised by BENA).

3. Institutional capacity building: Development of policies, programs and organisational infrastructures of research institutes, governmental organisations (governmental agencies, departments, municipalities, administrative authorities, etc.). BENA is a very good example of institutional capacity building.

OBJECTIVES OF CAPACITY BUILDING IN GENERAL

- Bring together experts and stakeholders in the fields of environmental, medicinal, industrial and socio-economic sciences from for example the Balkan, Black Sea and Caspian region (like BENA): Universities, NGOs (non-governmental organisations), governmental structures, administrative authorities, local stakeholders and private business in order to increase mutual knowledge of their communities and to explore the mechanisms of synergy.

- Identify and analyse the gaps in capacity and technical and non-technical obstacles to the access and exploitation of knowledge, know-how, experience, data and information and products.

- Build capacity at infrastructure (such as B.EN.A), individual (training) and institutional (community of practices) level and to develop user test cases with reference to problems common to regions in Europe, like the Balkans and the Black Sea.

- Promote and increase the general awareness of the benefits of exchange of knowledge and expertise, data and information, especially among present and future users, beneficiaries and sponsors of relevant national and regional systems.

- Build the observational capacity and infrastructure through establishment of National and Transnational Networks of scientists, scientific and governmental organisations, private industries, NGOs and universities.

- Carry out comprehensive review of existing and planned local, national and regional initiatives aimed at capacity building goals.

- Identify and analyse the gaps in societal benefit areas and awareness in the European environmental threatened regions and recommend solutions for their filling.

- Build human capacity through specifically designed training programmes.

- Build institutional capacity through establishment of National committees, and elaboration of national strategies and action plans relevant to strengthening the sustainable development of specific regions.

- Build necessary regional technical infrastructure upon existing tools (software, hardware and observation and laboratory equipment) developed through previous efforts within national and international projects with strong regional impact.

- Enable capacity building, creation of knowledge base, dissemination and exploitation of (observation) data and products through the sophisticated web portals.

‘Qualified specialists produce relevant results by using good-quality data with adequate tools, however, in general focused on the scientific value. Therefore, the capacity building strategy for people (scientists, managers, policy makers, decision-makers) should be:

- Scientists should provide ‘management’ information to decision-makers and not ‘scientific’ data and information. Management information is in general (geographic) processed comprehensive information!

- Provide curriculum for educational programs focused at societal benefit areas;

- Identify existing programs and promote improvements in their work;

- Promote open source software and e-learning initiatives.

Project strategies for infrastructure should include:

- Promote open source software;

- Identify gaps in ICT and earth observation applications and fund open source software project in these areas;

- Leverage national initiatives by promoting their visibility at a global level;

- Promote funding for creating new learning centres and improve existing ones;

- Adopt guidelines that will allow EO data exchange in their quality of a ‘public good’;

- Promote ‘good practice’ initiatives that allow free access to data and information. Scientists must make available and accessible their data & information obtained within researches and not ‘sitting’ on their data (not ‘science for science’ but ‘science for general use and benefit of the society’).

- Inquire the possibility regional states to make their data archives more easily accessible.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, capacity building is matter of all stakeholders – scientists, governments, municipalities, agencies, administrative authorities, institutions, NGOs, universities, public awareness organisations, national and transnational committees, national and international organisations involved in the sustainable development of a specific region. Hereby the ‘magic’ words are: coordination and tuning (NOT re-inventing the wheel), respect and the willingness to cooperation, exchange of knowledge, expertise, experience, data and information.

The Balkan Environment Association BENA can be considered as an excellent example of capacity building including all 3 elements (infrastructure, individual and institutional).

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