



**Trip Report: Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP) Capacity Development Expert Group,
Montpellier, France**

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Authors: Tom Hammett

Institutions: Virginia Tech

Purpose:

In 2013 the G-20 initiated the Tropical Agriculture Platform (TAP), designed as a multi-partner mechanism to close the gap for agricultural innovation in the tropics. I was invited to represent the TAP partner from North America (USAID) as a member of the Capacity Development Expert Group in a workshop to make TAP operational. The workshop was held at the headquarters of CIRAD - the French research center working with developing countries to tackle international agricultural and development issues - near the city of Montpellier, France. CIRAD has representative on the TAP steering committee. This seemed an appropriate place for us to meet. The meeting room and hotel were small meaning that the venue was a suitable place for discussion and building collaboration.

The group of experts was sequestered for a two-day workshop to set up a TAP framework for assessing the needs for and develop ways to meet needs for agriculture innovations systems capacity development (AIS CD). This group represented a cross section of donors, CIGIAR institutions, and key implementing agriculture development agencies from over 20 countries. The process started with a review of the TAP consultants' capacity development draft review report, which was completed earlier in March. This report will serve as the basis to formulate and finalize a TAP framework for implementing identifying capacity development needs in the agriculture sector worldwide.

I prepared for this workshop by reading the materials available on the TAP website, reviewing and submitting comments on the TAP concept paper (attached as Appendix 1), and setting up and conducting a conference call with USAID representatives of the Bureau of Food Security prior to participating in the workshop. In preparation for my participating I also placed a phone call to Dr. Paul McNamara who directs the MEAS project at the University of Illinois. It was helpful to review with him the agenda and our expectations for the workshop.

Description of Activities:

About 30 specialists were in attendance; four represented FAO (acting as the secretariat for TAP); several were from one of the key TAP funders in the UK (NRI); a few were from the CDAIS program which is NRI funded, and will carry out some of the initial TAP activities, and about 15 outside experts including Paul McNamara and myself. Others in the workshop represented donors (i.e., GIZ), regional agriculture research and training organizations (i.e., FARA), and CIRAD (our hosts for the workshop). The full agenda for the workshop is attached as Appendix 2. The list of attendees and their affiliations is attached as Appendix 3.

The workshop was organized to engage this group of outside experts to review the TAP synthesis document and make suggestions to the TAP steering committee. The workshop was led by the chairwomen of the Steering Committee. We also were charged with helping to draft a framework for TAP which will include conducting assessments. A third objective was to ground truth the idea of setting up a TAPedia – an online venue for AIS CD information collection, synthesis, and dissemination.

TAP hired three consultants and each conducted a regional study on agriculture innovation systems capacity development. Experience and reports from over 27 countries was reviewed. These reports and the recommendations of the consultants were included in a synthesis report published early in March 2015. During the workshop the consultants reviewed their recommendations based on their research and responded to comments and inputs from the experts.

At this stage the TAP Framework is only in preliminary draft form. The consultants drafted an outline of a framework for conducting TAP needs assessments for discussion at the expert group meeting. The TAP consultants were careful to note that they were not to design the framework, only to advise on the elements of framework.

The framework includes the elements listed below. These elements are a starting point for finalizing the framework, which based on the results of our workshop, will be finalized during the next month.

The elements of the draft TAP framework include:

1. Sensitizing and describing AIS
2. National perspective/vision of AIS
3. Capacity needs assessment
4. Capacity development strategy and Action Plan
5. Sub- activities (a) Implementation of the action plan, and (b) Prioritizing value chain(s)
6. Understanding the value chain

7. Learning and documentation
8. Monitoring and evaluation

During the two-day workshop the group of experts concentrated on three of the framework's elements: M & E, capacity development needs assessments, and determining what key elements are missing from draft the framework (reflecting on part of the list above). One of the key things missing is that the M & E program did not reflect on all pieces of the framework. Clearly this is a work in progress! But there is opportunity for us to give input during the coming months before the assessments in the pilot countries begin (pilot countries Angola, Ethiopia, Niger, Rwanda, Bangladesh, Laos, Guatemala, and Honduras). A copy of the draft framework is on page 35 of the draft synthesis document.

We also delved into the need for increased awareness (realization) of the importance of supporting agriculture development in general, and having a national policy (perspective and vision) for CD.

Suggestions and Recommendations:

The next steps for TAP will include:

1. Conducting CD needs assessments in 8 targeted countries (pilot countries selected are Angola, Ethiopia, Niger, Rwanda, Bangladesh, Laos, Guatemala, and Honduras). The countries were selected based in part on the recommendations of the consultants, the level of country government interest, and the level of interest and involvement of the local FAO country office in agriculture capacity development. Each country assessment will be conducted general over two weeks by an outside person (usually provided by the donor supporting ASI CD work in that country) and a local consultant. There seems to be little capacity for doing research upfront, and the team seems quite small considering the task. These will start late in the summer of 2015. Teams have been picked for these assessments.
2. FAO will be drafting a workshop report and circulating to the group soon. A fourth TAP consultant has been hired to help in the revisions of both this report and the three regional reports.
3. The synthesis report will be revised according to the comments received.
4. A web presence (like a community of practice) will be established. The TAP consultant (a fifth one) has just been hired for this work. Tentative name is the TAPedia.
5. There is also the concept for a market-based application. This concept is not fully developed but might be a great help to local players, and help them gain access to capacity development and planning resources.

Recommendations for USAID's (and InnovATE's) further engagement with TAP:

Key questions from our perspective that perhaps could be addressed included:

- What are the opportunities for the InnovATE program to synergize with TAP?
- What are the potential roles for InnovATE as TAP moves forward?
- How can TAP help us (InnovATE and the greater BFS group of projects) to meet some of our goals?

What follows are my recommendations based on my participation. This list is meant to serve as a starting point for our discussions, and I hope it leads to closer ties with TAP for USAID, and its partners (InnovATE, MEAS, et al).

1. USAID should keep engaged with TAP

We found that there was great appreciation by FAO and the other supporters of TAP for our participation in the TAP CD Expert Group meeting, and there is great interest by TAP for USAID to continue to be engaged. We should not miss this opportunity. USAID should stay engaged and participate in future meetings, especially at the other levels (steering committee, etc.).

It is clear that USAID and USDA have engaged earlier with TAP. Clara attended the early meeting in China. Continuing this association is important as it will keep USAID in touch with TAP and related efforts to increase capacity, and help raise awareness about USAID's deep experience in this work. USAID should keep TAP informed about its efforts to develop capacity in the agriculture sector. To date the TAP organization is Europe based and much of the work so far has been based on the experiences of the World, FAO, and CGIAR members. The TAP group is very interested in our experience, our case studies, and current or future programs USAID and its partners are conducting in this area. To accomplish this, USAID (with MEAS and InnovATE) need to inform TAP about this interest and request "a seat at the table" so to speak.

2. Possible roles for the InnovATE AET Community of Practice

TAP is just starting to design a platform for gathering and dissemination of information – they are calling it the "TAPapedia". There are some issues: will it serve local needs versus being global in focus in scope or both?

Our COP could be the platform to host the TAPapedia (or whatever they end up calling it!) or just help with part of what TAP wishes to do. To start with the TAPapedia will share information and gather input on implementation of the TAP Action Plan. We need to have discussions with the TAP Secretariat and the communications specialist.

The consultant that TAP has hired to lead TAP through the process of setting up the TAPedia seems very open to working with us. He was very receptive to learning more about our experience in setting up our community of practice. He also thought that TAP should consider working with or even hosting other functions on our CoP. This would be very beneficial us and help increase traffic on our CoP. We should explore this with him as he seemed very knowledgeable of the process of setting up such an online venue (picking a software, and hiring a web developer) and will be a great contact for us.

If TAP agreed, a good first step would be to post for discussion and input on our community of practice the TAP Synthesis Report, the Key Concepts and Definitions piece, and the consultants' CD Review Report (written in preparation for the framework).

3. Bridging gaps and gaining participation through the InnovATE Community of Practice

We will invite all the participants in this experts group to join the AET Community of Practice. This will raise their awareness within TAP about one example of an online forum. And this may lead to our community of practice to a role in building TAP. We would certainly enjoy increased participation in the CoP, greater visibility for InnovATE.

4. Scoping assessments for capacity development (CD)

These seems to be several opportunities in the near term for the InnovATE team to participate in the first round of capacity development assessments and subsequent project activities. We have conducted scoping assessments in at least two of the selected pilot countries. Sharing our experience in assessments, our tools, and the lessons learned from our past work in capacity development will all be helpful to TAP.

InnovATE on its own may:

- Share our scoping assessment methods and reports with TAP,
- Co-develop scoping methodologies with TAP, and
- Participate in joint scoping assessments with TAP

5. Sharing resources with TAP

Apparently, early in the formation of TAP, USAID did share some of its agriculture sector-based capacity development resources with TAP. But there is a wealth of information (research results, project documents, etc.) on hand that still can be shared. In addition, current projects such as InnovATE and MEAS, have resources it can contribute (reports, methodologies) that TAP needs - especially to help TAP form a baseline and to incorporate in the TAP data base. We can easily provide resources the

US partners did not shared to date with the TAP consultants (case studies, background and thematic reports).

6. The TAP marketplace

TAP wants to set up a TAP marketplace for capacity development. The concept seems to focus on obtaining capacity development support through a system/place to “market” CD services. For me, I am not sure how this would work, but it sounds like a good idea. This needs to be adequately defined. How could we be involved in the TAP marketplace? First it needs to be better defined.

7. Seek additional ways for USAID and InnovATE to be involved in building TAP

We need to have a representative participate in the upcoming TAP activities and continue to monitor TAP’s progress. Having membership on the TAP Steering Committee might be a first step.

It would be good for USAID and other players to continue to attend TAP meetings. An ongoing association with TAP will be helpful to not only the USAID BFS program, but also to MEAS and InnovATE, and our partner universities both here and abroad. Support from TAP for our program will help us spread our resources. TAP is interested in collaborating, and co-funding a conference or training might be such an opportunity. We should continue participation in the TAP discussions.

8. Reports on Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems

The three consultants each have drafted and submitted their reports (one each on Africa, Asia, and Latin America). Only work from 27 countries was reviewed. Each of the consultants in their review focused on countries with heavy FAO involvement, and did not delve into other countries or work conducted by many of the other organizations interested in CD. There are examples from other countries that warrant review.

The next draft of the consultants’ synthesis report (based in part on the feedback received at this meeting), will be sent to TAP by the end of June. It will be shared with the group of experts for their comments, and the final revision will be available in late July. This report of about 40 pages will be widely circulated.

I found some issue with the paper. For instance it based on a relatively narrow set of literature. It also has a very limited definition of capacity development. So narrow that it uses the term “capacity” to define “capacity development”!

9. Increased visibility for InnovATE Project programs within the AIS CD community

The meeting raised awareness about the experience InnovATE with several key AET players who to date had not known about our programs. All but a few did not know about our scoping assessments, the CoP, and our publications. The level of interest was very high among the participants, many picked up the handouts and CoP cards that I carried to the workshop. Several participants mentioned that they visited our web site after hearing during the workshop about InnovATE and our community of practice. We should add the participants to our email list for the InnovATE newsletter. We should also explore ways to collaborate with the other organizations represented (i.e., CIRAD, GTZ, and others).

10. Debriefing conference call

Tom Hammett and Keith Moore have offered to conduct a debriefing conference call with the Bureau of Food Security at USAID. I raised this idea with Paul McNamara of MEAS and he agreed to participate. Since he returns from this trip to the US much later he suggested April 2, or 3 as possible dates. (Paul went to India for 10 days right after the TAP workshop, so this was the earliest that he can participate in such a call.)

11. Collaboration with MEAS

The meeting provided a convenient venue for full discussions between InnovATE and MEAS which meant we are much more familiar with each other's programs. Paul and I agreed that we benefited from our meeting several times during the workshop and in side meetings. It was good to get to know him and MEAS a bit better. A nice benefit from our participation! We identified some new ways for MEAS and innovATE to work together. These will be further developed during the coming months.

Conclusions

I appreciated the opportunity to be part of this group of experts. I learned much about TAP and many of the stakeholders – especially those from Europe. I saw some good opportunities for InnovATE to gain support, and grow from an association with TAP and its partners. Those assembled represented a “who’s who” in agriculture capacity building from across the globe. It was very gratifying that the others looked to the two Americans in attendance for their input and suggestions. There was great interest in how best to develop TAP and how to engage us in this process.

Our participation in the workshop positioned the InnovATE Project for future collaboration with organizations outside TAP. Many of the participants since the workshop have emailed with suggestions and copies of their resources. One example is that we are now well recognized by

FAO and several European donors that we are important players, and that our experience may be valuable in helping to fill capacity development gaps.

There are several participants that would be interested in our newsletters, publications, and announcements for conferences and workshops. A few might be good candidates for our PAC. All the contact information from the business cards collected and the participant list will be incorporated into our mailing list.

There was a high level of cooperation between the participants during and after the workshop – each being considerate to the opinions of others. We can expect that we will be called on to help refine the TAP framework and its elements. I would not be surprised if we were asked to participate in one or more the TAP needs assessments in the near term, and in capacity building programs.

List of Contacts Made:

Name	Title/Organization	Contact Info (address, phone, email)
Pedro Arcuri	Embrapa Rome/Brazil	pedrobraga.arcuri@fao.org
Julian Bartual Martos	INIA/IVIA	jbartual@ivia.es
Delgermaa Chuluunbaatar	FAO	delgermaa.chuluunbaatar@fao.org
Claire Coote	Agrinatura/NRI UK	h.c.coote@gre.ac.uk
Hans Dobson	GCHERA/NRI UK	hans@dobsons.eu
Magali Dufour	Agrinatura/CIRAD	magali.dufour@cirad.fr
Javier Ekboir	CGIAR/BIODIVERSITY ARG ROME	j.ekboir@cgiar.org
Alexander Flor	GFRAS/SEARCA	alexander.flor@up.edu.ph
Birgit Habermann	Agrinatura/Boku Aust.	birgit.habermann@boku.ac.at
Tom Hammett	USAID/Virginia Tech	himal@vt.edu
Changshun Jiang	CATAS	changshunj@aliyun.com
Patrick Kalas	FAO	patrick.kalas@fao.org
Joerg Lohmann	GIZ Germany	Joerg.lohmann@giz.de
Bhag Mal	APAARI India	b.mal@apaari.org
Paul McNamara	USAID/Univ. Illinois	mcnamar1@illinois.edu
Luis Mira da Silva	Agrinatura/IICT	luismira@inovisa.pt
Nidhi Nagabhatla	YPARD/IWMI Canada	nidhi26@gmail.com
Nelson Ojijo	FARA Africa	nojjo@fara-africa.org
Adil Abdel Rahim	AARINENA/ARC Sudan	abdelrahimadil@yahoo.com
Dannie Romney	CABI Kenya	d.romney@cabi.org
Murat Sartas	EFARD/WUR	murat.sartas@wur.nl
Tomohide Sugino	JIRCAS Japan	tosugino@jircas.affrc.go.jp
Bernard Triomphe	Agrinatura/CIRAD	bernard.triomphe@cirad.fr
Mariana Wongtschowski	GFRAS/KIT, Author	m.wongtschowski@kit.nl
Athaharul Chowdhury	Junior CD Consultant/ Univ. of Guelph	chowdhua@uoguelph.ca

Julia Ekong	Senior CD Consultant/ICRA	julia.ekong@icra-edu.org
Maria Iskandarani	M&E Consultant, Freelance	m.m.iskandarani@gmail.com
Nikos Manouselis	Information Architect, Agro-Know	nikosm@agroknow.gr
Eduardo Trigo	Senior CD Consultant, Grupo CEO	ejtrigo@gmail.com
Christian Hoste	TAP Chair, Agreenium	christian.hoste@agreenium.org
Judith Francis	TAP Global Task Force Chair/EFARD & CTA	francis@cta.int
Karin Nichterlein	TAP Secretariat, Head/ FAO	karin.nichterlein@fao.org
Christian Grovermann	TAP Secretariat/FAO	christian.grovermann@fao.org
Myra Wopereis	CDAIS Coordinator/ICRA	myra.wopereis@ICRA.onmicrosoft.com
Richard Hawkins	CDAIS Coordinator/ICRA	richard.hawkins@icra-edu.org

Appendix:

Capacity Development for Agricultural Innovation Systems - [Key Concepts and Definitions](#)

Workshop of the Capacity Development Expert Group – [Agenda](#)